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**CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION AND SKILLS IN
EASTERN AFRICA AT BASIC AND POST-BASIC LEVELS**

Editor

Kenneth King

Editorial Address:

**Kenneth King, Centre of African Studies, 21 George Square,
University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh EH8 9LD, Scotland UK
Telephone (44) 0131 650 3878; Fax: (44) 0131 650 6535
Emails: Kenneth.King@ed.ac.uk or P.King@ed.ac.uk**

Co-ordination Address:

**Michel Carton, Institut Universitaire d'Etudes du Développement (IUED), Post
Box 136, Rue Rothschild 24, 1211 Geneva 21, Switzerland.
Telephone: (41) 22 906 5901/43; Fax: (41) 22 906 5947
Email: Michel.Carton@iued.unige.ch**

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**ARE THERE SOME ECONOMISTS AND POLITICAL SCIENTISTS
ABOARD THE EFA-UPE-PPE-TVET-SD PLANE? ?**

Michel Carton, Graduate Institute of Development Studies, Geneva
Email: Michel.Carton@iued.unige.ch

After having carefully read many of the papers produced for the AKF-NORRAG Seminar on Critical Perspectives on Education and Skills in Eastern Africa, one can wonder whether some lessons have been drawn over the last decade based on the increasing problems stemming from the conceptual and strategical dichotomy between Education and Training. It is for example impressive to note that only one participant has produced two papers covering these two worlds in Uganda: the quantity-quality trade-off in Universal Primary Education (UPE) and the consequences of the low transition rates to post primary education (PPE) for TVET.

This could be explained by the fact that the organisers of the meeting had chosen to split the UPE and Skills Development (SD) issues over the two days of the meeting. We might also hypothesise that the papers for the meeting would have been quite different if the first session had been devoted to the issue which has been dealt with during the last meeting of the Working Group for International Co-operation in Skills Development (Bonn, April 2003, <http://www.vetnet.ch/wg>), Life Skills a Bridge Between Education and Training? and during the SDC Conference in Interlaken (2001) on Linking Work, Skills and Knowledge (www.workandskills.ch)

Unfortunately, this hypothesis is not very credible, as the papers reflect the globalised common belief of the participants (and ours?) that education can largely be covered by schooling and that SD is mostly dealt with by TVET institutions. As Roy Carr Hill says very clearly in his contribution, such a "Western" educational project is not problematised, which is a problem for the people directly concerned as well as for the international co-operation agencies which are both complaining of the drawbacks of this project but are short of conceptual and strategical alternatives. Where does this come from?

As plainly expressed by Kilemi Mwiria in *Norrag News* No 28 (July 2001), "it is now common knowledge that many of the "blueprints" emanating from organisations such as the World Bank are not subjected to any serious scrutiny by the governments for whom they are written or targeted.....Even where there are research-coordinating committees in ministries of education, these are rarely consulted by donors and often dismissed as incompetent, even in cases where the locals manning these committees may have been recipients of advanced degrees from the donor countries" (p.53,54). Furthermore, we could add that the "ready to think" curricula which are, often expensively, delivered by many faculties of education in the world do not encourage to think in some alternative ways as far as education and training are concerned- especially in Africa. This could be why the papers produced for the AKF-NORRAG meeting as well as the UNESCO and World Bank reports under review are quite homogeneous. As Jeremy Greenland writes in this same issue "in both reports - UNESCO and the World Bank - life skills are conceived of in terms which are utilitarian and economic on the one hand, and individualistic rather than collective on the other. The key assumption is that a child should want to lead a "successful life"". Only a very few papers for the seminar have tried to question what can be today a successful life in Eastern Africa. Most of them have dealt with numbers, structures and the last motto, quality.

If it is understood that a successful life means living in a modernised (according to the 60s theories on modernisation), industrialised, urbanised, well governed, democratic society, one can wonder why the data and considerations which can be found in the papers are so conspicuously lacking in terms of economic and socio-political analysis. The first explanation lies in the above mentioned considerations about the influence of the globalised "blueprints" which circulate in most aid and co-operation agencies as well as faculties of education, on the thinking of the "educationists". These models all tend to look at Education (or rather Schooling) and Training as sectors in the same way as in the 60s when, as still mentioned in the Executive Summary of the WB study to day, there was a faith that "investing in the productivity and skills of people is essential to raise the incomes of economically vulnerable groups and reduce poverty". Sectors are much easier to "aid" (thanks to the SWAPs!), but one can wonder whether it is still realistic to keep such a perspective today when the EFA Monitoring Report indicates that one-third of the world's population lives in countries (mostly in Africa) where the EFA goals (understood as UPE plus some significant developments of post-basic education/schooling) remain a dream rather than a realistic proposition unless a strong and concerted effort is made.

Looking at the economic and socio-political data for the region, which, as we have said, are lacking in most of the papers under review, allows us to say that unfortunately, neither the national nor the international means will ever make this dream become reality and that, perhaps, UPE + Post Basic Education is not the right objective to aim at. Why?

- Developing further school-based education is a real social demand which will allow the "donors" to support it in the traditional way (buildings, teacher training, text books etc.). But this must be put into context, since a more realistic assessment of the pros and cons of schooling in terms of income generation is growing in the population. Indeed, there is an "implicit knowledge" in the population that the modern socio-economic development referred to above is out of reach for many people - for a long time or ever.
- Expecting that the governments become the regulating, facilitating, standard setting institutions in the field of skills development (which they have some difficulty to do even in the so-called developed countries), reflects a poor knowledge of the socio-political context of many countries. As C.De Moura Castro says in his comments about the first draft of the WB Report: "It may be an overgeneralization, but it seems that bad World Bank loans are elegant projects that do not understand what could and could not be done in that particular moment, country and ministry. Donors need intimate knowledge of local power and politics and need to know how to deal with them". (Paper No 7, WGICSD) (The difficulties encountered on the national side to transform the functioning of the State are well analysed by Bangura in his study for UNRISD Public Sector Restructuring (Geneva, 2000)).

In other words, even without referring to some alternative ways of thinking, the sectoral vision of Education/Schooling and Training has impeded UNESCO, the World Bank and most of the Eastern African authors from tapping on the knowledge of the economists and social scientists in order to ground their reflections in the local contexts: what are, for instance, the realistic economic and social development perspectives for East Africa, if a NEPAD type competitiveness is the main objective?

In a way, the World Bank Study is exploring some more interesting perspectives than the other documents, even though some important incoherence remains. Putting an emphasis on the informal sector needs and potentials could implicitly mean that the international competitiveness approach is considered unrealistic (The incoherence of the Report appears when the emphasis on the informal sector is paralleled with the over-optimistic chapter Recognising formal-sector enterprises training). In a sense the WB Study reflects what UNESCO has not (yet, ever?) succeeded to achieve, i.e. to look at education in both a sectorial AND a vectorial way, which the WB does by balancing in a different manner the demand and supply approaches to training and learning. This progress could have been even greater if the content of one of the background papers to the World Bank Study, «Skills and Literacy Training for Better Livelihoods» (by Oxenham et al.), had been more exploited (This document is much more original than the recently published WB report, *Lifelong Learning in the Global Knowledge Economy: Challenges for the Developing Countries*, October 2002).

In conclusion, we can wonder whether we have made progress since the 60s when Philip .Coombs wrote in *The World Educational Crisis* : "The poorer countries now face a priority task of non formal education which years ago confronted today's industrialised countries. It is to bring to the vast numbers of farmers, workers, small entrepreneurs who have never seen the inside of a formal classroom - and perhaps never will - a spate of useful skills and knowledge which they can promptly apply to their own and the nation's development.... Industrialised and developing countries need to bring about a more effective relationship between formal and non formal education, to break down the walls between them and to

achieve a more efficient division of labour between the two" (1968, p142, 144). Will the rediscovery of indigenous knowledge and non formal education by the donors, because it is less expensive than schooling, be powerful enough to convince the Kenyan parents and government to reintroduce school fees to limit the public expenditures but also, above all, to show them that a "successful life" can be achieved without spending 10 years at school? As C.de Moura Castro says: "Do the countries want to do what is proposed?" And one can wonder what is going to be the position of the universities and NGOs which Kilemi Mwiria is referring to in his above mentioned piece where he says: "Regrettably, universities and smaller NGOs do not themselves do enough to get their research efforts and capacities known to potential users including governments". The Kenyan situation is absolutely fascinating as it is going to change the power game between the donors and the whole of the society in this country. The next AKF-NORRAG seminar could review this evolution in two years' time!

Reference.

WGICSD: Working Group for International Cooperation in Skills Development publishes a series of working papers. See www.vetnet.ch/wg

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EDUCATION FOR ALL (EFA) COMMITMENT

Juliana Nzomo, Aga Khan Foundation, Nairobi
Email: Juliana.nzomo@akfea.automail.com

Preamble

The objective of assessing the extent to which the benefits associated with basic education are being extended to all (children, youth and adults) was first articulated at the first World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien (1990), which set out to achieve the EFA goals by 2000. The World Education Forum in Dakar reaffirmed the same commitment, declaring that by 2015 all children of primary-school age would participate in free schooling of acceptable quality and that gender disparities in schooling would be eliminated, adult illiteracy halved, early-childhood education programmes increased, and all aspects of education quality improved.

The EFA Global Monitoring Report observes that the limitation of the coverage and reliability of data was a significant problem. This is an indication that monitoring processes were not well thought out from the onset in 1990. Hence, the report has sought to initiate a sense of accountability towards commitments made at the World Education Forum, and recognizes that more weight will need to be given to the achievements and the progress of individual countries and the evidence of national monitoring processes as well as international analyses.

The data provided in the annex presents the situation as it was in 1990 and 2000, which should give an indication as to whether or not the world is on track. This paper will look into some of the indicators for which data is available for Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. In doing so, it is important to point out that as the Technical Introduction to the Statistical Annex makes clear, there were revisions to classification systems in education statistics, and data collection methods changed between the mid- and late-1990s, making time trends for a large number of variables very difficult. As a consequence, the coverage of the data