

Review

The value of education in community development in Zimbabwe

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The paper examined the efficacy of all levels of education (primary, secondary, tertiary and higher) in enhancing community development with particular reference to the Zimbabwean experience. Primary education was perceived as the most important stage of development. It forms the foundation for all further education. It is the gateway to social cohesion, peace, harmony and development. Quality primary education is let down by long walking distances to school by rural pupils and under-funding of primary education. Secondary education refines the value of primary school education in the pursuit of community development. Investing in the secondary education of all people including females is a vital tool for poverty alleviation and reduction as well as economic development and promotion of women's rights. Secondary education however appears to expose learners to more theory than practice. Higher and tertiary education prepares communities for coping for future disasters. Its graduates produce research to generate new ways of solving community problems. Higher and tertiary education tends to emphasise private benefits at the expense of public benefits. It also suffers from brain drain. The paper concludes that key is so central to all community development. It through education that long lasting community programmes will be realised.

Key words: Education, primary education, secondary education, higher education, tertiary education, and community development.

INTRODUCTION

World over, education and community development are mutually exclusive to each other. The present paper focuses on the efficacy of education in enhancing community development in developing countries like Zimbabwe. It starts by briefly defining the concepts: efficacy, education, primary education, secondary education, tertiary education, higher education, and community development. The paper goes on to cite pros and cons of the afore-mentioned sectors of education in a bid to underline the efficacy of education in community development. It ends by suggesting a way forward.

Conceptual Reflections

Efficacy, as perceived by Folsom (2006) refers to the degree of adequacy, effectiveness and efficiency of something in producing or enhancing another thing. The

author views efficacy in the context of this paper as the utility or usefulness of education in promoting community development. The paper adopts Moyo's (2003) definition of education that it is a continuous process of imparting values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge to a people living together for the purposes of improving their quality of life. Primary education, according to Abdi (2006) refers to elementary schooling which starts from Grades 1 to 6. In Zimbabwe, it denotes basic education that begins from Grades 1 to 7. Secondary education in the context of Zimbabwe is post primary school education provided by a high school or college (Nziramasa, 1999). It ranges from Forms I to IV or VI depending on the size of the school. Tertiary education in Zvobgo's (2000) opinion is post secondary education that is offered at colleges to prepare school leavers for the world of work. Higher education as viewed by Nziramasa (1999) and Folsom (2006) is highest form of education offered by

universities. Lastly, community development (CD) is a broad term applied to the practices and academic disciplines of civic leaders, activists, involved citizens and professionals to improve various aspects of local communities. I view CD as a process of empowering individuals and groups of people in society with skills they need to effect change in their communities through education be it primary, secondary, tertiary or university. CD manifests itself through quality of life of citizens, improved living standards of people, informed decision making, informed choices by the electorate, good environmental management practices, high agricultural and work productivity and valuing unity, peace and harmony among other characteristics of CD. Above all, CD exhibits itself through virtues such as integrity, honesty, straightforwardness, accountability, responsibility, reliability, punctuality and dependability that could be possessed by members of the community.

The efficacy of primary education in community development

The degree of efficacy of education in community education is seen through primary education in a number of ways. To begin with, Nziramasanga (1999:287) contends that, "Primary education is universally acknowledged as the most important stage of education, for it is primary level that the foundation, concepts and skills in such core subjects as languages, mathematics and sciences are developed." The preceding citation indicates that through primary education, members of a community tend to benefit because children undergo an intensive experience of socialization in which relationships are formed and positive behaviours based on models of integrity and the capacity to work together, and to share are encouraged and developed (Nziramasanga, 1999; Klassen, 1999; UNICEF, 1997). Primary education is the gateway to social cohesion, peace and harmony. It is common cause that where peace, unity and harmony thrive community development is present to a large measure.

At primary school level, Nziramasanga (1999) and World Bank (2002) note that creative thought is encouraged and pupils begin to learn through problem-solving and discovering. It is through primary education that community is realized as children are encouraged to respect each other's beliefs and become involved in many physical activities and games which encourage participation and team work. It is common knowledge that when community members value one another they tend to promote the development of their community. Through teamwork, primary school leavers may pool their ideas together to try and solve community problems, thereby, enhancing community development.

Also an exposure of the community to primary helps achievement of community development through the

relationship between basic education and agricultural productivity in three ways (UNICEF, 1997). First, UNICEF (1997) found out that the first four to six years of primary school education is the minimum threshold of increasing agricultural productivity. Second, literacy and numeracy were found to permit farmers to adopt new agricultural productivity to cope with risks and respond to new market signals. Third, literacy was observed to help farmers to mix and apply chemicals (such as fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides) according to manufacturers' directions, thereby, reducing to the environment, humans and animals' health. Overlooking the role of basic education in agricultural productivity is a passport to lack of development in communities of third world countries like Zimbabwe.

Finally, UNICEF (1997) urges that effects of basic education are at their peak when the proportions of females are educated to threshold levels that equal those of males. This observation confirms earlier findings by Psacharopoulos and Woodhall (1986) who found out that educated female Kenyan farmers were more productive than counterparts who had had no access to formal basic education. The author is quick to point out that primary education is the starting point for the promotion of gender equality and equity. A community that values equality and fairness is bound to be more developed than the converse. In that regard, after seven years of primary school education the community might develop as its people can read and write letters, read and interpret instructions, direct others and accept the need to live and work together.

While primary education has been viewed to promote community development in a number of ways, it has three setbacks in the context of Zimbabwe. First, Nziramasanga (1999) argues that in some rural primary schools children walk long distances of over ten kilometer return journeys. They get to their schools tired and hungry. Their performance in school work is likely to be compromised much to the detriment of community development to a certain extent.

Double sessioning is one other drawback to quality primary education in mega schools in urban areas (Zvobgo, 2000; Nziramasanga, 1999). Children are not actively engaged in their learning as their day is cut by half because of the practice of double sessioning. In the long run community development is likely to be watered down by double sessioning as learners do not adequately master their curriculum requirements.

Last, Zvobgo (2000), Huggins and Randell (2007) and Klassen (1999) indicate that quality primary education is also let down by lack of trained teachers, learning materials, finances and absence of effective supervision. In the absence of trained teachers, learners are not properly guided to learn. Where there is lack of learning materials, learners learn to read the word rather than to learn to read the world. Underfunding of primary education is shooting the community both in the head

and foot because learners will be deprived of quality education. Absence of effective supervision in the primary education is a curse to community development as shortage of teachers may negatively impact on quality of education in terms of instruction and discipline.

The Efficacy of Secondary Education in Community Development

Secondary education refines the benefits of primary school education in the pursuit of community development. According to World Bank (2002), secondary school education creates pathways for opportunities and benefits of economic, social and economic political development. It has the capacity to produce better and informed citizens than what primary schools do. According to World Bank (1998) globalisation and the increasing demand for more sophisticated labour force combined with the growth of knowledge based economies give a sense of urgency to the demand for secondary education.

Secondary education is a blessing to a community development as it is meant to contribute the process of poverty alleviation. Summers (1994) carried out a study on investing in all people and found out that educating women in developing countries and established that investing in women's secondary education is one of the most highly regarded tools for dealing with poverty. Echoing similar sentiments with Summers (1994), Huggins and Randell (2007) point out that educating women to secondary level is key to economic development and poverty alleviation and reduction, promoting women's rights, and is inextricably linked to improving other development indicators such as reducing child mortality, reducing death rates, and reducing illiteracy. Underscoring the preceding two views, Sweetman (2001:11):

When a gender fair approach to education is employed lives can be saved and protected with a greater degree of proportionately because of achievements in fewer people dying, falling sick, or suffering deprivation will benefit women and men in better proportion to their relatives suffering.

In view of the above observations, an exposure of community to secondary education will develop the community because people will become aware of improved living standards. People may possess more information about HIV and AIDS, health hygiene, sanitary health and other health related issues. Secondary school leavers may also be in greater control of their environments. They may also possess a better understanding of more advanced agricultural practices than the primary school leavers. Agriculture is the mainstay of the Zimbabwean economy. It is against this background that secondary education is viewed as

one of the vehicles to community development.

Despite the afore-mentioned benefits of secondary education to community development, there are also costs of it to community development. Nziramasanga (1999:307) writes, "The commission was informed that the country was still giving to all secondary school students an old British type education." This is an irrelevant Eurocentric education which fails to meet the needs of the community, commerce and industry. In that regard, secondary education ceases to promote community development. Much more specifically, Moyo (2003) and Todaro and Smith (2005) concur that secondary school education in developing countries is too academic and academic driven. It tends to ignore other forms of useful education such as character, morality, ethics, and job application technique and project management, hence, non-achievement of community development. Under such circumstances, this kind of education is divorced from lifelong education which is one of the hallmarks of community development.

Zvobgo (2000) and Nziramasanga (1999) also indicated that lack of funds, absence of school inspectors, lack of trained teachers and learning materials as teething challenges to the quality of education in Zimbabwe. Absence of school inspectors undermines the quality of supervision of teachers. Lack of trained teachers usually leads to diluted and lukewarm interpretation of syllabus. Again learners appear to be exposed to more bookish knowledge at the expense of lifelong practical education. Under such a scenario, community development is hard to realize.

The Efficacy of Tertiary and Higher Education in Community Development

This paper also contends that tertiary and higher education is a pre-requisite for community development. Authorities (Abdi, 2006; Folsom, 2006; Mortenson, 1999; UNICEF, 1997; Sweetman, 2001) put forward a number of benefits accrued by the community as a result their exposure to secondary education. Chief among such benefits of tertiary and higher education include: communities are prepared for and to cope with future disasters, tertiary education graduates are more likely to volunteer to work, they are less likely to smoke because they are aware of health hazards posed by smoking, they are more likely to use internet and computers so that they are empowered with the ability to access more information about health, social life, economy and politics and communicate with other people at global world, production of informed electorate who are politically

conscious and are to put the right political leaders into office, and research to produce knowledge that may contribute to the solutions to community problems.

The above benefits of tertiary and higher education show that commodity development is enhanced as a result of education. Graduates contribute to community development through informed decision-making, research skills, political consciousness and participation in economic activities. Graduates usually become more polished in terms of reclaiming their forests, land, problem solving abilities and taking appropriate measures and actions during times of outbreaks of epidemics such as cholera, dysentery and malaria. They are more trainable and gainfully employable. They are endowed with diagnostic, human, conceptual and technical skills that that presumably make them the most productive labourforce. Some may start their own business projects and employment creators rather than employment seekers, thereby, reducing levels of unemployment in the community. Those who are gainfully employed contribute to the treasury through taxation which will be used to carry out national development projects.

While tertiary and higher education contribute to higher education in a big way, they have some weaknesses. Both tertiary and higher education emphasise private benefits of education at the expense of public benefits (Todaro, 1997). Tertiary and higher education could be expensive and inaccessible to the majority (Zvobgo, 2000). During harsh economic times the girl child may be sacrificed for the boy child due to cultural reasons. Higher and tertiary education also may produce book nourished shrimps that lack practical skills and abilities to solve real life situation problems. Also higher and tertiary education may subject the country to negative effects of brain drain or human capital flight at the expense of a country that would have invested a lot of community resources to train the local workers, only to benefit other communities in other countries.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the efficacy of education in community development is by no means a small measure. Education empowers people regardless of gender. Education is a human right. Education produces the human capital that promotes development of communities. Education is the gateway to community development. It is a cornerstone to community development. It is a torch of the community. It enables the community to hop the ladder of progress. It promotes upward social mobility of the community members. It is a vehicle for enhancing literacy, social cohesion, peace and numeracy among other community development indicators. Primary education tries to expose pupils to the teachings of morality, attitudes and values through the subjects such as Social Studies and Religious and Moral Education.

Secondary education prepares children for further education in colleges and universities and the world of work (Sweetman, 2001). Tertiary and higher education refine and advance basic learning skills that learners will have been introduced to in primary and secondary levels of education. In the light of the preceding views, I feel that ignorance is a disease that stalls community development and education is a curative process. I therefore make four proposals. First, all members of the community need to be educated regardless of one's gender, race, religion, status and ethnic background. Second, the state and the private sector should fund primary education so that basic education could be free, compulsory and accessible to all. Third, secondary education should be affordable to all people who will be in need of it as it prepares people for the world of work. Investment in education is the surest way to escape from poverty and backwardness. It is a deliberate move towards community development. Last, tertiary and university education should never be elitist in outlook because it produces human capital (an enviable wealth of a community destined for development). It is my conviction that education and community development are two sides of the same coin.

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