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Literacy and Education in Kenya

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Abstract
Modern Kenya has been steadily evolving since 1963 when the country attained independence. It has made remarkable progress in all spheres of national growth and development. It is, however, in the area of literacy and education that the growth is most noticeable. Contemporary educational developments have built on the legacies of the past – refining traditional values and incorporating them in the goals and objectives of Kenya's modern system of education.

Background of education in Kenya
Traditional education in Kenya, as in most other sub-Saharan African countries, was not isolated from the family or community. Children were taught moral values as they listened to folktales, legends, myths and riddles as told by the elders. Practical skills for girls such as farming, cooking, fetching firewood and water were taught by example under the tutelage of their grandmothers, mothers, aunts and elder sisters. Traditionally women were brought up to value three main roles – that of wife, mother and cultivator. The more children a woman had, the more hands to help in the fields and at home. Boys learned to farm, hunt, herd, or fish depending on what life skills were necessary for survival in the Rift Valley, along the shores of Lake Victoria, on the Serengeti Plains, or on the slopes of Mt. Kenya. Education was integrated into the life experiences of the family and community. African traditional education conserved and transmitted knowledge and wisdom from one generation to another through the instrumentality of folklore and apprenticeship (Mungai, 2002).

Christian missionaries introduced western education in the mid-nineteenth century, first at the coast near Mombasa and then inland as the railroad from Mombasa to Kisumu was completed in 1901. The original goal for establishing schools was for proselytising. Later the white settlers and colonial administrators exploited these "village schools" making them instruments for training skilled labour especially for the large farms in the Rift Valley where the land was fertile and had attracted British settlers. Only a few men were needed as clerks in the government administrative offices in Nairobi or the eight provincial headquarters.

In pre-independent Kenya, education was racially stratified. There were separate schools for Europeans, Asians (Indians who had been brought in to build the railroad), Africans, and later Arabs (Swahili). European

schools enjoyed superior resources and government support. White students in 1930 received more than five times the funds that indigenous Kenyans did.

Table 1: Education Department Expenditure by Race, 1930

	Pupils in state/state-aided schools	Total Expenditure in US$	Expenditure per Pupil in US$
African	6948	232,293	33.4
Asian	1900	70,329	37.0
European	776	140,04	180.5
Total	9,624	442,663	46.0

Source: Kenya, Education Department Annual Report, quoted in Sheffield, 1973, quoted in Alwy and Schech, 2003

Mission schools were built, managed, and supervised by the missionaries with a small subsidy in the form of grants from the government. The first secondary school for Africans, Alliance High School, was founded in 1926. European and Asian high schools had reached matriculation level by 1924 when African education was still at the primary level. Schools for Indians were opened in Machakos (1901) and in Nairobi, Fort Hall, Kisumu, and Thika in the 1920s. There was great disparity along ethnic, gender, and provincial lines throughout this period that carried over to the post-independence period both in terms of quantity and quality of education.

The first policy statement on education in Kenya by the colonial power was published in 1909 and was known as the Fraser Report that proposed that separate education systems be maintained. The recommendations concerning Africans concentrated on technical and vocational skills. Any other policy statements issued in the period before the Second World War (the 1919 Education Commission Report and the Phelps-Stokes Report, which established separate advisory committees for the racial groups) reiterated the agenda of the missionaries including the 1949 Review Commission.

Kenyans speak over 40 different languages and dialects. In order to achieve unity in such a multiplicity of cultures and ethnicities, English was accepted as the medium of instruction in primary and secondary schools at independence in 1963. That year marked the time for restructuring education to coincide with the needs and aspirations of the people and to enable those left out during the colonial period to acquire education. Four objectives were identified initially. Education according to the Ministry of Education should be a means to:

- Train more human resources to enhance economic development;
- Distribute national income;
- Create national unity;

- Reduce national disparities.

These were later refined and amplified by the Ministry of Education in 1994 and said education must:

- Serve to foster national unity.
- Serve the needs of national development.
- Foster, develop, and communicate the rich and varied cultures of Kenya.
- Prepare and equip the youth of Kenya with the Knowledge, skills, and expertise necessary to enable them to collectively play an effective role in the life of the nation while ensuring that opportunities are provided for the full development of individual talents and personality.
- Promote social justice and morality by instilling the attitudes necessary for successful training in social obligations and responsibilities.
- Foster positive attitudes toward other nations (Mungai, 2002).

In 1970 when school fees for primary pupils were eliminated for the first 4 years (and for all 7 years in semi-arid areas), it triggered a growth spurt that peaked in 1974 (Table 2).

Free education was extended to primary 7 in 1980 and primary 8 in 1985 when the 8:4:4 system was implemented. Primary education, though free, cost parents more by then because of the higher costs of textbooks, school uniforms, and contributions to the building fund.

At the time of independence, Kenya had a four-tier system that mirrored the British pattern of 7 years of primary school, 3 years of secondary school (O-level), 2 years of higher secondary level (A-level), and 3 years of university (7:3:2:3). While maintaining this infrastructure, Kenya sought to indigenise the school curriculum that was also heavily influenced by the British content and system of examinations.

In order to make subjects more relevant to the needs of Kenyan students, British Kenyan or African history, government, and geography replaced history, government, and geography. African literature, though not **a** separate subject, was integrated into the English class.

Table 2: Number of Primary Schools in Kenya, 1963-1990

Year	Number of Schools
1963	6,058
1964	5,150
1965	5,078
1966	5,699
1967	5,959
1968	6,135
1969	6,111
1970	6,123
1971	6,372
1972	6,657
1973	6,932
1974	7,706
1975	8,161
1976	8,544
1977	8,896
1978	9,349
1979	9,622
1980	10,255
1981	10,817
1982	11,497
1983	11966
1984	12,539
1985	12,936
1986	13,932
1987	13,849
1988	14,288
1989	14,691
1990	14,864

Source: Economic Survey: Government of Kenya, Statistical Abstracts, 1963-1990, quoted in Mungai, 2002

For example, Ngugi wa Thiongo's novels *Weep Not Child* (1964) and *The River Between* (1965) set in Kenya and written for Kenyans were placed alongside H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and other foreign works. Barbara Kimenye and other East African writers were published by the East African Publishing House in Nairobi making their works accessible and affordable for classroom use. Wole Soyinka's play *The Lion and the Jewel* (1964) was part of the Advanced level syllabus by 1966.

All these African authors wrote in English that remained the language of instruction, but by 1971 Kiswahili was declared the national language of Kenya (Kiswahili is the national language of Tanzania and has been used as the language of instruction in her primary and secondary schools since her independence in 1964). The Mackay Commission in 1984 further elevated Kiswahili by making it a compulsory and examinable subject in all public

primary and secondary schools. With an estimated 80% of the population of Kenya speaking and understanding Kiswahili, in 1999 the Koech Commission proposed that Kiswahili should be one of the 5 compulsory subjects to be examined at the end of secondary school (Momanyi, 2004). The result of these policy changes as regards the position of Kiswahili in the primary and secondary curriculum has been positive for colleges and universities as well. Kiswahili language and literary courses continue to be offered at undergraduate and graduate levels in the public universities though not in all private ones.

The mid-eighties also saw additional changes in the structure of the education system as Kenya moved to a three-tier plan: 8 years of primary education, 4 years of secondary, and 4 years of university (8:4:4) – more similar to the United States' system. Students progressed through the system by passing exit examinations that determined entry to the next level. For primary students it is the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education or KCPE; the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education or KCSE for secondary students. Originally students took 12 subjects, but now they are expected to be examined in 8. The table below lists the five groups of subjects students must select from. Group 1 subjects are compulsory while Group 2 subjects require a selection of at least two. Students select one subject from each of the remaining three groups. The goal, according to the Ministry of Education, is to offer a curriculum that is broad based with a technical bias in order to produce school leavers "who are useful to themselves, their societies, and the nation of Kenya…the system is geared towards developing skills of self-reliance, self-employment and salaried employment." (Kenya High Commission).

Table 3: Subjects to be offered for Secondary Examination (KCSE)

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
English French Kiswahili Math	Biology Physics Chemistry Physical Sciences Biological Sciences	History & Gov Geography Christian Religious Education Islamic Religious Education Hindu Religious Education Social Education and Ethics	Home Science Art & Design Agriculture Woodwork Metal Work Building Construction Power Mechanics Electricity Drawing & Design Aviation Technology	French German Arabic Music Accounting Commerce Economics Typing with Office Practice

Candidates are now graded on a 12-point scale where 12 points is the highest and 1 point is the lowest. This is an expansion of the former Ordinary Level's four divisions (I, II, III, and IV) with grades ranging from 1 to 9. The 12-point scale expanded the grades to include plus and minus categories: A (12), A- (11), B+ (10) and so on ending with D- (1). Candidates' points for their best eight subjects on the examination are totalled and then averaged. A mean average of C+ qualifies a candidate to do a degree course in the university. However, because admission to Kenya's public universities is competitive, only a few cases of B- are actually taken with the majority B or better. Private universities or middle colleges may accept candidates whose average is C+ but who have scored well in the sciences, for example. (Kenya High Commission)

Access to education in Kenya has increased dramatically since 1963. Allocations to all levels of schools rose from 10 percent in 1964-65 to about 38 percent in 1990-91. Today there are over 14,690 primary schools with a population of slightly over 5 million children with nearly 200,000 trained teachers. Of this number of students, nearly 50 percent are female. Pre-primary education (those between 1 and 6 years of age) was entirely a non-governmental responsibility until 1980. Since then eighteen District Centres for Early Childhood Education (DICECE) have trained about 20,000 pre-school teachers whose pupils number more than 800,000. The primary school graduates feed into nearly 3000 secondary schools with a total enrolment of 620,000 students (slightly more than 40% are female). This compares to 151 secondary schools in 1963 with a total enrollment of 30,120 students (Table 4).

Kenya's expansion of post-secondary education is equally impressive as there has been a virtual explosion of public and private universities and

institutions of higher learning in both the public and private sectors. For a decade after independence, the University of Nairobi (the former Royal College under the auspices of London University and then part of the University of East Africa) had remained the only university in the country. Now Kenya has five public universities and twelve private universities, 29 teacher-training colleges, three polytechnics and one institute of special education.

Table 4: Percentage Distribution of Gross Enrolment for 1997

Province	Primary	Secondary	Post-school
Central	100.0	33.7	2.8
Rift Valley	93.4	29.6	2.3
Eastern	93.7	20.4	3.7
Western	108.5	22.1	5.7
Nyanza	90.0	38.7	0.5
Coast	87.6	14.2	0.7

Source: Ministry of Education, 1995, quoted in Alwy and Schech, 2003

Perceived problems with the education system

Critics have attacked the 8:4:4 system of education in Kenya on the grounds that it is inefficient and costly. As Davy Koech, Chairman of the Koech Committee (Mulamba, 2003), observed:

> [The Committee] confirmed that there was too much overloading (of) students, which was responsible for a mass dropout of pupils in classes one and eight. Half a million pupils dropped out since the inception of the 8:4:4 (in 1985) until the formation of the commission. …The system was also found to be costly because parents had to buy materials since the government could not provide [them]. As a result, many children whose parents could not afford [these things] were locked out of school.

Parents would agree as they see their children carrying many books to class, do homework in five subjects, and revise for extra hours at home. "Really, there is no time left for children to be children," stated Imelda Atido, mother of a class four pupil in a Nairobi primary school. (Mulamba, 2003). Teachers have commented on the stress to students as well.

Gender discrepancies

Although great strides had been made in bridging the gender gap at both the primary and secondary school levels up until the mid-nineties, there are still some barriers for girls' attendance at school. The first reason is that, as Kenya's economy has worsened along with many other countries affected by the worldwide downturn, and as the value of real wages has dropped

while the cost of living has risen, families that cannot afford to send all their children to school will send their sons before sending their daughters. Girls will marry and leave their maiden homes, these parents reason. Better to send the male child who will remain in the family and look after his parents in their old age.

The second reason is also a financial one. Girls help to care for their younger siblings when both parents are working even when they are only five or six years old themselves. They also perform more of the household chores of cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, fetching wood and water that are essential for the well being of the home. So if there is no grandmother to perform these duties and no money to hire an *aya* (house girl), then it falls on the shoulders of the female child to take on these responsibilities. As good farmland becomes scarce and workers seek jobs in the cities and on the tea and coffee plantations, the extended family system breaks down and the first victims of the change seem to be the girls although there are negative consequences for boys as well.

The third economic factor for the falling numbers of girls in school (and many boys for that matter) is the rising cost of materials parents are expected to provide even if there is no tuition. Parents and communities have traditionally borne the burden of expenses for the physical facilities and equipment of their community schools (*Harambee*). These include classrooms, workshops, home science rooms, libraries, textbooks, tools, chalk, exercise books, and uniforms. Household education expenditure would also include fees for registration and admission, examinations, parent/teacher associations, provision of furniture (desks, chairs or stools), and sometimes transport and boarding (Mungai, 2002).

The fact is that for even those who start primary school, there is a greater than ever chance they will not reach grade four. Recent figures (*Daily Nation,* Feb. 10, 2001) show that only 68% of those enrolled in grade one will complete grade four. And for those who complete grade eight, only 24% will continue to secondary school. Attendance figures do not give the complete picture especially in terms of the dropout rates.

In addition to financial factors, girls are disadvantaged because some traditional beliefs, biases (myths), and customs keep them down. Social customs like bride price, early marriage, and initiation rites affect the schooling of girls in negative ways especially in poorer rural communities (Prouty, 1991). In Kenya though initiation rites are held during school holidays, the process begins earlier and causes absenteeism (Njau and Wamahiu, 1994; Wamahiu, 1994). Once initiated (into womanhood) girls may find it difficult to focus on studies as their parents may expect them to marry.

Stereotypes and misconceptions of female education have spread among parents that illiterate or strongly connected to the traditional community. Associating education with Western culture and, therefore,

foreign beliefs and customs, an educated daughter would often be seen by her community as likely to forget her past, roots, and culture to embrace the new ways. There is a fear that the economically independent woman (the educated female) is more likely to dissolve an unhappy marriage, be unfaithful, or even prostitute herself in her attempt to climb the ladder of success in a male dominated corporate world. There are also the usual expectations that females are suited for limited careers – teaching and nursing – and these may not necessitate lofty academic goals.

Social beliefs extend to the classroom where girls are not meant to be assertive. After all, they are not as smart as boys, are they? Teachers, whether male or female, are more likely to question their male students who they perceive as more willing and ready to answer their questions. Teacher expectations are also grounded in the culture and traditions of the community of the school. So if the community has high expectations for its sons, but much lower expectations for its daughters, it is likely to be reflected in the attitudes and biases of the teachers.

Additional factors that influence female enrollment figures have to do with the domestic labour market. Not only are girls needed to work at home, but are also pushed into jobs which can supplement family income as soon as they are of school age. As the population shifts from the farm to the factory with the rapid growth of cities in Kenya, girls are employed as housemaids and nannies. In rural areas where there are coffee and tea plantations, it is common for girls to be working as well doing household chores. Absenteeism and fatigue or illness for working girls have led to poor performance which in turn leads to dropping out.

UNDP figures for 1990 show a mean period of schooling for girls to be 1.3 years as compared to boys' 3.2. A 1995 data (Forum for African Women Educationalists) had female enrollment at 50% for grade one, but only 34% completed grade 8 as opposed to the 70% for boys.

As Mungai (2002) has stated, it is a variety of issues that contribute to the disadvantages girls face not only in getting into schools, but in staying in. Perhaps the solution to the prejudice against girls' education is to have educated women disprove the lie by supporting both their husbands and parents' households. This was what prompted many Igbo families in eastern Nigeria to reverse their attitudes toward female education. Their sons disappeared from the village to set up well cared for nuclear families in the urban areas and were not able to fully support their parents in the village. Girls, on the other hand, came home to build permanent homes of cement blocks and zinc roofs to shelter and care for their fathers and mothers who had sacrificed so much to send them to school.

Pedagogy and classroom climate

In Kenya there are government and *Harambee* schools. The former have the better-qualified teachers and a larger enrollment of girls. The latter are

community based, have smaller female populations and less qualified teachers. These two factors alone can have a real impact on a girl's self-esteem, aspirations, and achievement because teachers have an overwhelming influence on any student's academic accomplishments, and where there are more girls attending, there are fewer drop-outs (Ministry of Health/Division of Family Health-GTZ Support Unit, 1988)

Then there are the other environmental factors having to do with gender bias or stereotyping in textbooks. Whether invisible or portrayed as housewives, female presence in at least one Longman text (*Kenya and Her Neighbours*) for social studies does little to create a powerful perception of self for girls. Even some female African authors such as Barbara Kimenye have written only about male students in an all male boarding schools in her popular series about Moses Kibaya in *Moses in a Mess* (1991) and in *The Smugglers* (1964). There is a need for publishers to be more vigilant about sex role stereotyping and to provide a balanced selection of novels with female protagonists as well as male, rural settings as well as urban where possible.

The orientation of education to national examinations has adversely affected teaching practices in most Kenyan schools. As is the case in the NCLB (No Child Left Behind) era in the United States, schools are judged by the performance of their students. Likewise, admission into the national and provincial boarding secondary schools in Kenya is highly competitive. A high score on the KCPE assures a student success, while a low score relegates the student to the local *Harambee* secondary school, which may not be a boarding school or have good libraries, laboratories, and other physical structures. The difference is not just one of prestige. For students from rural settings or urban slums, the boarding environment allows them to concentrate on their reading. They can study without the distractions of an over-crowded house where demands on their time for household chores or poor physical surroundings – candle light or lantern because of no electricity –can make studying after school hours virtually impossible.

Standardized national examinations have encouraged teachers to drill students, often in chorus response, over factual information that they are expected to parrot back on the exam. Instead of teaching students to critically think about real problems facing their community and nation and how to solve them, teachers lecture more with students copying notes and memorizing information expected to be on the form four final tests.

Case study

In Ann Mungai's *Growing Up in Kenya: Rural schooling and girls*, the story of Wambui forms an important part of her research. Born in a rural setting, the first girl in a family of eight children, she describes her upbringing and educational opportunities:

> Like many girls in the rural areas at the time, I was regarded as a helper at home who would need few educational opportunities…a mother rejoiced when she bore a daughter because the daughter became a companion in the mother's never-ending chores at home and on the farm… (5)

When Wambui did enter primary school, her teacher, Mrs. Beth Mwaura, had a profound influence on her. Her teacher carried herself with dignity and dressed well. Having completed junior high school and teacher training college, she was the most educated person Wambui had encountered. Mrs. Mwaura often used Wambui's neatly written assignments as models for the rest of the class that motivated her to aim for the highest possible level of achievement. (6-7).

Her mother also encouraged Wambui:

> My mother told me many stories about her experiences as a woman and also how her aspirations remained unmet because she had failed her grade-four exams. She encouraged me not to slacken in my schoolwork and to aim at the highest possible education. That was the only way I was guaranteed a better life, she often told me. She cited the example of her cousin who now lived and worked in the city with her family…Their water was available right in the kitchen, flowing from a tap; they used charcoal for cooking in the house; milk was delivered to their doorstep; they had electric light in the house; and their children rode a bus to school. (8)

Wambui passed the KCPE with a very high score because of the support of her teacher who gave her past question papers to practice at home. She was accepted into a prestigious national public senior high school. But her problems were not over. It took her mother two weeks to convince her father to get the money for her fees and tuition by selling two of his cows. Once in boarding school, she had this to say:

> The boarding school was a very conducive environment for learning and we had a lot of time to study and do homework…The teachers treated us with respect; they seemed very keen to see us succeed and they took a personal interest in the clubs of which they were patrons. I became involved in the Debating Club, the Girl Guides, and the Christian Union. These clubs afforded me many opportunities to travel to other schools for competitions and meetings. On two

> occasions, the Debating Club arranged for us to visit the Kenyan Parliament during its regular session. The exposure we received and the interaction between students of different schools gave me a sense of leadership potential. The school also organised motivational speakers from various professional disciplines once a month. (91)

As Wambui prepared to take her KCSE examinations, she could appreciate the advantages she had over her primary school days– good lighting, time to study without the demands of chores, and after-school help from qualified teachers. Her educational success began to change attitudes toward education in her community. Even her father became supportive.

> Traditions and societal expectations, if allowed, can stifle one's aspirations. However, when the victory and the break through came, one becomes the talk of the village and people can no longer hold on to their outmoded stereotypes. (93)

Wambui's success story was an inspiration to her family and her village. Her younger siblings following her example and went to good high schools. Three other girls from her district were admitted to national high schools while several others attended provincial schools by the time Wambui graduated from high school.

Policies

In 1988 the Ministry of Education introduced a cost-sharing policy that shifted the burden of financing education to parents. The policy ensured that teachers' salaries, representing over 90% of the recurrent educational budget, would be paid. Only 1% and 1.5% of the educational budget was allocated to textbooks and the school feeding and milk program (Abagi, 1997). About 4.2 million primary pupils were in need of textbooks (Ksh. 3,960.6 million) while only about 3% of the amount needed for textbooks are government provided.

The cost sharing policy was a big burden on parents because of the rising poverty level. Fortunately in 2002 with the election of Mwai Kibaki and his National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) party, a number of changes were set in motion. As promised, free and compulsory primary education was immediately instituted. The Minister of Education announced, "We will not be content until every child of primary school age is enrolled. By educating the children we are investing in the future of this country. In the long term, educating the children is one way to eradicate poverty."

(deVreede, 2003). For the majority of parents, this was an overwhelming burden due to rising poverty levels.

The result of this action is overcrowded classrooms across the country. Ratios of teacher to student that had previously been 1:50, rose to 1:70, while classroom facilities remain unchanged. An estimated 1.5 million previously out-of-school children have eagerly turned up for classes in the countryside and the cities. For example, in Kisumu District, Western Kenya, this translated into a 25-40% increase compared to the previous year's enrollment. Individual school populations increased by 100-125 pupils. (deVreede, 2003).

Politics has played an important part in education policy decisions. In a recent paper on ethnic inequalities in education in Kenya, Alwy and Schech (2004) contend that ethnic affiliation to the ruling elite has either favoured or disadvantaged the student population in the various regions of the country whose boundaries are drawn along ethnic lines. Regional disparities have persisted and often been acknowledged (Abagi, 1997; Bakari and Yohya, 1995; Ogot and Ochieng, 1995; Oucho, 2002). While voicing concern for such disparities and seeking donor help to overcome such gaps in educational opportunities on the one hand (Oxfam, 2003), allocation of government resources in post-colonial Kenya "has followed an ethnic pattern, in which important political and administrative individuals have favoured [sic] the home region, own tribe or clan." (Alwy and Schech, 2004) The Kikuyu were the favoured community for 15 years (1963-78) when President Kenyatta was in power. The Kalenjin ethnic group benefited under the 24-year period of President Arap Moi rule. The resulting inequities in both quantity and quality of primary education were concentrated in the North Eastern region and the Coast Province where the Somali and Kiswahili are the largest ethnic groups. Those benefiting the most and with the largest school enrolments are Nairobi, Central Province and the Rift Valley Province (Tables 5 and 6). The disadvantaged regions are also the most likely to have "poor parents, poor road network, and poorly qualified teachers." (2004).

One other measure of equality is the number of national schools in any province. Coast and North-eastern Provinces have none, whereas Central and Rift Valley have seven (2 Alliances, Mangu, Starehe, Moi Forces Academy, Kabarak, and Maseno).

Table 5: Primary Schools Pupil-Teacher Ratio by Province in 1977

Province	Pupil: Teacher ratio
Central	33.50
Coast	40.18
Eastern	28.03
Nyanza	30.57
R/Valley	27.93
Western	35.43
Total	30.90

Source: Ministry of Education, 1995, quoted in Alwy and Schech, 2004

Table 6: Professionally Qualified Teachers in Primary Schools by Province, 1979 (as a percentage of all teachers)

Province	Percentage
Nairobi	99.1
Central	90.2
R/Valley	70.0
Eastern	69.9
Nyanza	67.8
N/Eastern	66.1
Coast	64.8

Source: Republic of Kenya, 1982, cited in Uitto, 1989, quoted in Alwy and Schech, 2004

If government has failed to close the gap in access to education along ethnic lines, outside donors have stepped in to assist in this effort. According to Oxfam's 2004 Programme Impact Report, school enrolment has increased by 26% between 2002 and 2004 in the pastoralist areas supported by their program. Not only has Oxfam addressed the issue of quantity, but quality has been a concern, too. Newly trained teachers have been hired, new classrooms built, and 30 inspectors of education have been hired, trained in new methods and practices. Nomadic and street children's obstacles have begun to be addressed. These include: (1) the need for birth certificates, (2) age restrictions in government schools, (3) a standardized curriculum, and (4) negative attitudes of officials toward these marginalized groups. The exciting aspect of the Oxfam program is that those being helped are learning to help themselves and seek unique solutions to their specific problems. By organising themselves, the communities have been able to petition and lobby the Ministry of Education to create new examination centres to serve their schools or to relax regulations that create hardships for their students – school uniform requirements and identity cards for street children. The Ministry has responded by setting up a Non-Formal Education desk. In addition, a Coalition for Pastoralists' Children's Education is being hosted

within the office of the President. Stereotypes are gradually fading as Masai and Somali show a commitment to education for their children.

The other disadvantaged group – females – is also organizing itself to redress past inequities. In November 2000, the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) and the Ministry of Education organised a regional conference on girls' education that not only reviewed existing obstacles to female education in Kenya, and highlighted successful interventions. (*Daily Nation*, 2001)

One policy that has been overturned is that of banning pregnant girls who deliver from returning to school after giving birth. Unfortunately, policies are only as good as their implementation, which, according to Dr. Nyambura Mpesha of Kenyatta University, has not happened yet (Mulamba, 2003).

UNICEF has also supported government efforts to ensure the smooth transition to free primary education. Their interest is in female education in particular. In 2003 it supported the development of a national girls' education policy. Another accomplishments are the rehabilitation and revival of boarding schools in the arid and semi-arid North-eastern Province. This was done in collaboration with the Kenyan government, the Embassy of Japan, WFP, and local communities. UNICEF has also supported the Kenyan government in the provision of textbooks, pupils and teachers' education and recreation kits; the dissemination of the Children's Act Bill 2001; the provision of in-service training to about 5,000 primary school teachers, Non-Formal Education and Early Childhood teachers in 9 districts on child-centred, interactive and participatory methods are a few of the ways (UNICEF, 2003).

Lessons for the "developed world"

To dwell on the litany of problems and obstacles to universal free primary education in Kenya would mean to miss the significant lessons developed nations such as the United States might learn from third world examples like Kenya.

The Kiswahili word *harambee* translates into English as "pull together". Right from independence, many rural communities in Kenya saw literacy and education as laudable goals worth investing in. The self-help or *harambee* schools were visible symbols of the communities' efforts to develop facilities that would capture those dreams for their children. Grounded in a philosophy of hope and progress, *harambee* schools have been an important factor in tackling the illiteracy of rural populations in Kenya. The shared efforts of parents who had little to contribute monetarily, but could bring labour and materials necessary to erect the rudimentary physical structure of the school building is an appropriate role model for failing inner city schools in the United States. The involvement of the community as exemplified in the African proverb "It takes a village

to raise a child" needs to be recaptured in the poorest communities where decades of neglect and failing test scores have stifled hope and expectations of excellence for many minority students in urban slums or rural backwaters in the United States.

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