

Effective Public Education as an Impetus of Improving Democracy in Selected African Countries

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ABSTRACT The aim of the paper, through a desk review of literature, debates, critics, reviews, reflects and discusses the various strategies to expedite and stimulate the awareness of the public to the democratisation process. Findings indicate the following measures to bolster/strengthen the levels of democracy: Raising the levels of public education on the masses; strengthening public awareness on democracy through adult education; and strengthening voter education. The paper has also considered the following as the desirable characteristics of effective education that can stimulate awareness of democratisation: education that holds the government accountable to the citizens; education that strengthens the societal cohesive. The paper has made the following recommendations: countries to embed the content of human rights in all kinds of social education; all social institutions to be encouraged to teach the public all their rights and responsibilities pertaining to governance of their countries; the government of the day to ensure the voices of the masses is held supreme; the citizens of the country to ensure they oblige their responsibilities to the state such as paying taxes and again pressurize the government to uphold their rights.

INTRODUCTION

Indubitably and consensually, public education is one of the impetus that can move a nation forward (Hunter 1999; Gornitzka and Maassen 2000). This is because an educated public sharpens their productive capacities for the betterment of their resource development as well as the country's development (Ranis et al. 2000; Wright et al. 2000; Sawyerr 2004). This is why some practitioners view education as a panacea to unlock and harness several environments of development. It is an avenue or a platform to achieve various facts of economic growth and development in any country. Indubitably, public education enlightens the public. It improves people's capacity and quality of discharging their duties as civil servants (Jennings et al. 1987; Dibie 2003). Perhaps why the colonial masters were able to hoodwink and control the resources of the Africans is because most had a modest

education while most Africans did not have. Therefore, education is also an eye opener, and those who are educated can apparently be able to see far, engage their minds more productively, and be able to forecast and predict what the future may hold for them and those around them. Indeed, education is a vehicle of effectuating various kinds of development. This is why perhaps some developmental benchmarks take education as a key parameter of assessing levels of development. This is also why the attainment of universal primary education constitutes the second goal among the eight international developmental benchmarks called the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (Clemens et al. 2007; Nsamenang 2009; Ssewamala et al. 2011; Ziai 2011).

Since it is undeniable that an effective public education is an impetus of improving democracy in African countries, there is therefore a need to find ways in which education has been useful as a vehicle of development; and possibly suggest ways in which it could be improved in order for it to be more effective to drive more productivity. Because of the poverty that most African countries have sunk into, then all plausible and pragmatic ways of ensuring all are educated is key and welcome (United Nations De-

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velopment Programme (UNDP) 2004). Although many other practitioners such as Freire (1972) may have emphasized the importance of education, the words of the late first post-apartheid South African President, Nelson Mandela have been very popular. Mandela indicated that education is the strongest weapon to change the world. The following verbatim quotes of Mandela forms a true litmus paper for the panacea of education. He indicated it is an asset to overcome the future "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." "A good head and good heart are always a formidable combination. But when you add to that a literate tongue or pen, then you have something very special" (Mandela 1995).

Problem Statement

The contentious fact that ample public education could be an impetus for advancing democracy in many African countries has not been adequately discussed critically by many scholars. But undeniably, education is known to lock people's potential, expedites their thinking and therefore capacities to engage in many and different productive domains, as well as influence the niche in which they find themselves in (Mandela 1995). It is critical, therefore, that ways and methodologies of enhancing or advancing people's education are investigated. Because of poor state of governance in many African countries, these researchers hypothesize that education can be a formidable key to enhance and improve their state of democracy. This, it is hoped is because of their capacities to understand policies and governmental guidelines, their capacity to comprehend issues, and their capacities to engage different organs of the government as pertains their rights. This further indicates their possible involvement in advocacy and lobbying for the rights that the government may have subjugated to some groups in the society.

METHODOLOGY

The paper has used a desk review methodology to debate, reflect, critic, and discuss the strategies of addressing effective public education in African countries. The paper has reviewed different documentary sources to shed some light and draw insights pertaining to the role of

public education in enhancing countries' state of democracy. The paper has immensely used government oriented journals and books; and also these researchers' intuitive experience and knowledge in public Administration and social science generally.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Strategies to Bolster the States of Public Education to Improve Democracy in Some African Countries

Raise the Levels of Public Education to the Masses

Incontrovertibly, although public education is a critical tool of achieving various levels of development, whether private or public, unfortunately many countries have not expedited adequate public awareness education and are therefore still moving at a snail's pace as far as achieving universal education is concerned (UNDP 2004). This is also believed to have a negative impact in issues pertaining to democratization. This is because the process of democratization is believed to hinge on people's level of understanding government policies, procedures and the capacity to question why the government does thing the way it does. The level of public education and awareness, therefore, is a strong tool of enhancing levels of democracy (Mandela 1995). With this contention, the government needs to expedite the process of bringing information closer to the people at the grassroots level. However, and contrastingly, many studies or surveys conducted by different scholars show that some countries have been spending a lot of money in order to provide qualitative education and improve public awareness of government projects. This is to make the public better partners of socio-economic development (Helmsing 2003). Some of the reasons why governments have been spending a lot of money in advocating for public education in African countries includes but not restricted to: opening peoples' mindset; waking them up from economic slumber; to make them better serve themselves and optimize their capacities to tap and harness the local resources; make people better drivers of economic growth and development; and enlarging their scope to understand issues of democracy in their coun-

tries; and to open people's initiatives and make them better agents of socio-economic development. Therefore, these and other reasons constitute some of the viable reasons for the government to invest heavily in education. Indubitably, the goal of public education has been considered a panacea in the process of socio-economic development, and democratization. This is because, to borrow from the wisdom of Nelson Mandela education is the asset to change the world (Mandela 1995).

Strengthening Public Awareness on Democracy through Adult Education

Evidently, many African countries operating under this current democratic or political dispensation are still lagging behind in raising the levels of adult education. This can also explain their low levels of understanding and experiencing democracy. However, countries such as Botswana and South Africa are in the right direction because the adults are being motivated through bursaries to go back to school or further their education. This undoubtedly has the potential to raise the understanding of democracy and possibly give them leverage to raise their personal or workplace productive capacities (UNDP 2004). This also opens the doors for more understanding of the political environment and governance terrain. This means that adult education to some extent enhances the adults' capacity to democratize (Mandela 1995). Perhaps, this is to underscore the role of the African government to invest heavily in adult education. This is to shed more light on various domains of their lives including the public sphere, make them more informed and more aware of some government operations and functions in the communities. This calls for the government to adequately invest in an infrastructure to facilitate the learning of the adults. Since such learning is likely to take place after the normal working hours, it is pertinent that there are ample arrangements to facilitate their learning.

Strengthening Voter Education

It is unfortunate that most governments especially from Africa have not had ample goodwill to educate the public on issues pertaining to voting. Perhaps this largely explains the huge phenomenon of voter apathy. This could also

largely explain the fact that those who fail to participate in voting may not adequately understand that their vote is a determinant of the quality of leadership in a country. It is pathetic that those who find it pertinent to complain about poor service delivery could be the first people to suffer state of apathy. This is a scenario that hinges on lack of adequate civic education that demonstrates and holds everybody accountable to the government he/she wants through the ballot (Burroughs et al. 2010). Therefore public education remains a panacea in equipping the electorates with motivation and knowledge of why they should wholeheartedly engage in voting those they believe will effectuate their requisite service delivery (Chodorov 2007). Therefore, if public education is effective, then, many people would know their rights.; they would know that they should support government campaign in the country; and advocate and agitate for their rights from the government, for example agitating for increase in salaries and better living and working conditions (Minault and Lelyveld 1974; Manwill 2014). Public education enlightens the masses to know and understand their role in removing a bad government through voting and also ushering in a good cadre of leaders into the office. It is unfortunate that most corrupt governments do not even want the public to have adequate civic education. They would rather have ignorant and people with low awareness pertaining to what is a good or bad government. In countries where the leaders are believed to be rigging the elections, either directly or indirectly, such as those of Cameron, Zimbabwe, the governments would not like people especially those in the rural areas that largely vote for the governments blindly to have voter education (Bond and Manyanya 2003). This has an impact of lowering the pace of democracy (Sirowy and Inkeles 1990; Karp Banducci and Bowler 2003).

Characteristics of Effective Public Education to Stimulate Democracy

Human Rights Compliance Education

An effective public education should espouse to the public all their human rights. The public should understand their democratic rights to be served by the government. They should also know their right to qualitative service. Hu-

man rights education embedded in public education should make the public to seek for redress whenever their rights have been violated. It is an eye-opener for the public to know what is due for them or expected from them. In other words, if the public were mal-treated about what is due for them, then public education offers a platform to inform people on how they could lodge their complaint/s.

Education on Government Accountability to the Citizens

Indubitably, effective public education is a tool of the public understanding better the governance structures and therefore strengthens their capacities to engage governments for their rights. This means that people adequately makes the government of the day accountable. Perhaps why there are public protests in many countries of the world, for example in this month (May 2015) in Burundi is that people's levels of democratization is high enough to know that their president and their courts are violating the rights of the public to vote other leaders of their choice. Therefore, the massive protests that have killed a dozens of people is a manifestation of the public outcry for the government and other structures to be accountable and stop the president from vying for a third term. Importantly, countries education should inhere democratic ideals so that all the citizens can easily understand their human rights and their violations thereof.

Education that Strengthens the Cohesiveness of the Society

Optimistically, effective public education should be a platform of inculcating good morals and ethical behaviour among the citizens (Althof and Berkowitz 2006; Cooley 2008). The scenario, therefore, can encourage unity, peace and tranquility which are desirable virtues. This is more relevant in countries such as South Africa that have since 2008 umpteenth been engulfed by xenophobic episodes that has left a score of foreign national dead and their properties either looted or destroyed (Kang'ethe and Duma 2013). Since most of the public education revolves about increasing social capital in societies, it therefore become a platform for people of different backgrounds and calibers to cement a relationship of working together, participate effec-

tively and efficiently in government activities, and engage in dialogues in order to discuss their differences and chart out a productive co-existence. People will also understand their obligations and responsibilities to the state. This will make them strengthen their relationship with their government. Effective education, therefore, is likely to bring people closer to the government; as well as bring the government closer to the grassroots populations.

CONCLUSION

Indubitably, effective public education is a panacea because it is likely to change people's mindset and make them realize and demand their democratic rights, make them understand government structures, and discover the rights that the government structures have denied them. It is especially critical to educate the voters so that they can understand the importance of engaging in voting for the leaders they consider ideal to govern them. This is also critical considering the rate of voter apathy in many African countries. It is important, therefore, that the government of the day invest heavily in public education to all the demographic segments in the country. It is a huge step to advancing citizen's democratization process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ♦ Countries to embed the content of human rights in all kinds of social education
- ♦ All social institutions to be encouraged to teach the public all their rights and responsibilities pertaining to governance of their countries
- ♦ The government of the day to ensure the voices of the masses is held supreme
- ♦ The citizens of the country to ensure they oblige their responsibilities to the state such as paying taxes and again pressurize the government to uphold their rights.

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