

# The Role of Development Partners in Creating a Knowledge-based Society: The Panacea to the Youth Challenges in Education in Kenya

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**Abstract:** The education policy in the Kenya Vision 2030 emphasizes on providing globally competitive quality education, training and research to her citizens for national development and enhanced individual wellbeing. There is a mismatch between the skills possessed by the job seekers and those required by industry, which leads to under-utilization of the existing human resources capacity and poor state of infrastructure and equipment for research and higher education and training. The country's training institutions are also either inadequate or lack the essential facilities and technology to prepare students for the challenging market demands. The stakeholders in the education sector called for the introduction of a curriculum that would provide flexible education pathways for identifying and nurturing the talents and interests of learners early enough to prepare them for the world of work, career progression and sustainable development. It is interesting to note that there are so many programmes being initiated and funded in the country by foreign Governments, but very few are in the education sector. Kenya has however, had various actors who have come forward to help address the education challenges in attempts to build a knowledge society. This paper is about some of the partners that have been instrumental in this front. It addresses the main challenges affecting the youth in the education sector in attempt to build a knowledge society; and it appreciates the role of the international partners in moving in to address the issues critical to the development of the knowledge society.

**Key Words:** Education; Youth Employment; Knowledge Society; Innovation; Sustainable Development.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Education is the surest most powerful way to promote economic and social progress and to produce responsible and productive citizens (UNICEF, 2001). Kenya recognizes that education, training, science and technology is fundamental to achievement of the country's Vision 2030. Education, training, science and technology sector is charged with the responsibility of creating a knowledge-based society that upholds justice, democracy, accountability and encourages issue-based and results-oriented political engagements (Republic of Kenya, 2013).

According to Mackatiani, *et al.*, (2016), education is key in any Nation's developmental process. For it to be effective, it should be clearly defined, legislatively protected, owned by stakeholders, financed and reviewed to ensure that it is in harmony with both local and global needs. The education

policy in the Kenya vision 2030 emphasizes on providing globally competitive quality education, training and research to her citizens for national development and enhanced individual wellbeing. Therefore, education is viewed as a vessel to achieve the overall goal of the vision 2030 that aims to transform Kenya into a middle income rapidly industrializing country that offers a high-quality life to all its citizens in a safe and secure environment (Lawrence & Orodho, 2014; Republic of Kenya, 2007, 2012).

The Government of Kenya also recognizes that an Information and Communications Technology (ICT) literate workforce is the foundation on which Kenya can acquire the status of a knowledge society by the 2030. Against this background, the Government shall make education the natural platform for equipping the nation with ICT skills in order to create dynamic and knowledge-based economy. According to Ponge (2019), there is need to build the local capacity in creating a knowledge economy. This means the building and strengthening of the abilities of people to solve their own problems, initiate actions for their own benefit and take control over their own destinies.

## II. BACKGROUND TO KENYA'S EDUCATION CONTEXT

The 8-4-4<sup>1</sup> system of education was introduced in 1985 based on a guiding philosophy of "education for self-reliance". However, Evaluations of the 8-4-4 system have revealed an overloaded curriculum, poorly equipped workshops to facilitate learning of practical skills, and poorly trained teachers (Wandabi, 2019) as well as questions of the sustainability of the system have been raised (Oketch & Rolleston, 2007), it is no wonder then that a new curriculum is being introduced in the country in the name of the Competency Based Curriculum.

The foregoing are among the critical and driving factors that led stakeholders in the education sector to call for the introduction of a curriculum that would provide flexible education pathways for identifying and nurturing the talents

<sup>1</sup> The 8-4-4 System of education meant a learner would spend 8 years at the Primary level of education, 4 years at the secondary level and 4 years at the University level. It was introduced in response to the demands of the Kenyans to have an education system that was responsive to community needs.

and interests of learners early enough to prepare them for the world of work, career progression and sustainable development (Wandabi, 2019). In a bid to address illiteracy, low quality education, low completion rates at the secondary level, high cost of education and poor community participation the government of Kenya launched Free Tuition Secondary Education (FTSE) in January 2008. The FSE was also established to increase transition from primary to secondary by 70% percent in all districts (Ohba, 2009).

Primary Enrolment increased from 8.7 million in 2008 to 10.0 million in 2012 with 4.9 million and 5.0 million girls and boys respectively. The gross enrolment ration (GER) increased from 109.8 percent in 2008 to 115.3 per cent in 2012. Completion rate increased marginally from 79.8 percent in 2008 to 80.3 percent in 2012, whereas transition rate from primary to secondary increased from 64.1 percent in 2008 to 76.6 percent in 2012 (Republic of Kenya, 2013).

The number of secondary schools increased from 6,566 in 2008 to 8197 in 2012 which has helped increase transition rates from primary to secondary education. During the previous strategic planning period the ministry introduced the Free Day Secondary Education Programme to cater for secondary tuition towards making secondary education affordable to Kenyans. The student enrolment grew from 1,335,907 students in 2008 to 2,023,334 in 2013. The gross enrolment ration (GER) increased from 42.5 percent in 2008 to 49.3 percent in 2012, whereas the net enrolment ration (NER) increased from 28.9 percent in 2008 to 33.1 percent in 2012 (Republic of Kenya, 2013).

In Kenya, the cost of education is met by the government and household members. The public spending on education by the Government of Kenya is driven by the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 on a Policy Framework for Education and Research and the Second Kenya Education Sector Support Programme (KESSP II) as well as by the Basic Education Act, 2013 (Mutegi., Muriithi & Wanjala, 2017). Kenya's education sector plan for 2018-2022 (Republic of Kenya, 2018) is a sector-wide plan that outlines the policy priorities along with programs and strategies for the education sector over the next five years. The plan builds on the successes and challenges of the 2013-2018 plans.

Ogutu (2017) observes that reflections on the education system in Kenya take on the nature of the wider system: Policy and legislative reforms, curriculum reforms, education innovations, skill-based approaches, industry and classroom linkages, acquisition of employable skills, lifelong learning, and the provision of education for the 21st century learner. It is the demand for change that propels education systems to produce a country's innovators, inventors, creators, problem solvers, entrepreneurs, global citizens, changemakers, and critical thinkers. It is these that can propel a country into a knowledge economy.

#### *Challenges Facing the Youth in the Education Sector*

Nationally, some of the challenges facing the education sector in the context of Kenya's transformation to Vision 2030 include meeting the human resource requirements for a rapidly changing and more diverse economy; ensuring that the education system meets high quality standards and that its contents are relevant to the needs of the economy and society; raising the standards of the regions that lag behind in school enrolment to bring them at par with other leading areas (Republic of Kenya, 2013).

According to Ponge (2013), the graduate labour market has changed considerably. There are more and more university graduates experiencing difficulties in entering the graduate labour market. In Kenya, an environment of radical uncertainty and complexity in the job market has arisen, that both brings about changes and calls for changes. The greatest challenge for graduates in this new era will be to develop themselves to become employable.

There is a mismatch between the skills possessed by the job seekers and those required by industry, which leads to under-utilization of the existing human resources capacity and poor state of infrastructure and equipment for research and higher education and training (Ponge, 2013; Republic of Kenya, 2013).

With 500,000 to 800,000 young Kenyans entering the job market each year, its economy has not been able to provide the necessary amount of employment opportunities – formal and informal alike (British Council, 2017). Kenya is currently experiencing a 'youth bulge', with over 20 per cent of its population falling into that category. Kenya predominantly has a young population that has been experiencing demographic changes. The absolute number of youth in Kenya is steadily increasing, and it is projected that the country will transition from a child rich to youthful population structure in the next 10-15 years (Kitonga, Njonjo & Ponge, 2011), which is what we are experiencing at the moment.

According to Omollo (2012), even though the Kenyan economy may have realised net employment creation (after taking into account the new jobs and job churning) over time, the rate at which the net jobs were created was almost the same as the rate of labour force growth. This effectively meant that more job seekers, both the new labour market entrants and those out of employment through the various labour separation mechanisms, ordinarily remained out of employment for a longer period hence swelling the ranks of the discouraged job seekers.

The country's training institutions are also either inadequate or lack the essential facilities and technology to prepare students for the challenging market demands. Recently, sub-standard training institutions have come up to take advantage of shortage of training opportunities to exploit desperate youth. In most cases, there is no linkage between the training institutions and either the formal or informal (jua kali) sector. The youth trained in these institutions cannot, therefore, be immediately absorbed into the job market (Thu, 2020).

The educational dimension of unemployment in Kenya shows that, relative to the attainment of only primary education, the proportion of those unemployed generally decreases with the level of education. However, individuals with secondary education exhibit a higher chance of being openly unemployed which could be interpreted as a reflection of preference for wage employment among the more educated individuals in an environment characterized by restricted expansion of formal sector jobs (KIPPRA, 2010).

Graduate unemployment is not a problem unique to Kenya. It is a global phenomenon, however, in Kenya, it is a tragedy (Ponge, 2013). It is a tragedy that is denying a genuinely trained youth from accessing employment opportunities, not because of the making of the students, but because of the curriculum design, which presents a mismatch between the skills and the market demand. In the present-day knowledge-based economies that have emerged following globalization and information technology revolution, universities are expected to play a pivotal role by generating, harnessing and transmitting knowledge for sustainable development (Ponge, 2013). According to a Policy Brief by the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP, 2015), policy interventions in Kenya should focus on entrepreneurship, financing and capability development while giving cognizance to the existing youth employment policies, employment implications of devolution of government activities to the counties; and sectors which have greatest potential for employment creation.

#### *Early Education Reforms in Kenya*

In this paper, we talk only of the early education reforms in Kenya as it impacts on the youth and employability. We do not address the present reforms that entail the Competency Based Curriculum as this is still in the pilot stages and may be subject of a later study. In the past few years, many reforms in the education sector have been undertaken in order to address the overall goals of the National Economic Strategy Paper (ESP) as well as international development commitments including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education For All (EFA) and delivery of policies set out in the sectional paper No. 1 of 2005 on policy framework for education, training and research (Limukii & Mualuko, 2012).

The introduction of the Free Primary Education policy in Kenya was a step in the right direction. This is despite its political origin. The implementation of the programme brought a lot of relief to most poor parents who hitherto had found it difficult to sustain their children in primary school (Limukii & Mualuko, 2012). Although the introduction of this reform had led to increase in enrolment, this in effect led to overcrowding of pupils in the few classrooms which in turn led to difficulties in teaching and adequate attention being given to individual learners. This therefore compromised the quality of learning. In spite of free education, poor families always find it difficult to meet out of pocket expenses, uniform, transport, books and earnings foregone and many

other indirect costs for their children (Koech, Ayodo & Ngare, 2017). Huge part of the burden is borne by the parents because they pay for books, uniform, development funds, furniture only to mention a few. It has been established that the social cost of education is increased by wastage and repetition which happens without corresponding benefits.

#### *Role of the Development Partners in addressing the Youth Challenges in Education in Kenya*

It is interesting to note that there are so many programmes being initiated and funded in the country by foreign Governments, but very few are in the education sector. Most foreign countries fund Civil Society Organization, humanitarian assistance, regional cooperation, market assistance programs, reducing maternal and child deaths, and the new in-vogue programming on human rights and key populations. Kenya has however, had various actors who have come forward to help address the education challenges in attempts to build a knowledge society. Some of the partners that have been instrumental in this front include DFID, USAID and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) based in Washington, DC.

#### *Wasichana Wote Wasome Program*

According to Education Development Trust (2018), the UK government Department for International Development (DFID) Girls' Education Challenge, has been identified as one of the most effective GEC Step Change projects in the world. This was implemented in Kenya under the program, "Wasichana Wote Wasome", Kiswahili for 'let all girls learn', and known locally as WWW – to improve the life chances of some particularly disadvantaged girls. The programme was implemented in two distinct and very different contexts: largely rural arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL) and urban slums in the major cities of Nairobi and Mombasa.

The DFID conducted an independent impact evaluation of the program, which identified WWW as one of the most effective GEC projects in the world; not only did many girls re-engage in education but the academic achievements of the girls in school were particularly impressive. The independent evaluation confirmed that 88,921 specific girls had been direct beneficiaries of the intervention. In terms of literacy gains, girls supported through WWW did better than girls supported through any other GEC Step Change intervention; they performed at a statistically significantly higher level than girls in the control group. Based on their theory of change and program design, several of the evidence-informed elements proved to be particularly successful: In-School Coaching; School Child-To-Child Clubs; the Role of Community Health Workers and Community conversations (Education Development Trust, 2018).

### III. THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR EDUCATION (GPE)

Between 2005 and 2008, The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) supported Kenya's efforts to plan and imple-

ment measures that increased primary school enrollment from 72 percent in 2003, when Kenya made primary education free, to 88 percent in 2012. Over that period, the gap between girls and boys reached near parity. The following are some of Kenya's education priorities supported by partnership (The Global Partnership for Education, 2019) that are making a difference:

- *Innovative technologies that improve planning and accountability:* GPE is supporting Kenya's efforts to adopt new technologies to strengthen the collection of data for its education planning and decision making.
- *The National Education Management Information System (NEMIS):* This is another technology tool that is improving planning and accountability by providing valuable data for the government to analyze student's learning successes and challenges.
- *High-quality textbooks for more children:* The Ministry of Education used the GPE funding to procure and distribute 7.6 million math textbooks as part of a government initiative to strengthen numeracy in early grades.
- *More qualified math teachers:* GPE support has helped to train 117,000 teachers and provide them with early grade math teaching guides. To ensure these guides are used correctly, curriculum
- *Support officers* observed nearly 20,000 classroom lessons and helped teachers to follow consistent, high-quality lesson plans.
- *Grants to schools for planning, teaching and girls:* GPE funding supports small grants to 4,000 low-performing public primary schools and gives them autonomy to use these grants to help meet needs that are specific to their communities.

#### *USAID Educational Initiatives in Kenya*

USAID is providing state-of-the-art education to millions of Kenyan children, expanding educational and employment opportunities for young adults, and preparing a new generation of young African leaders with the skills and mindset to transform the region and the continent.

#### *Tusome Early Grade Reading*

*Tusome* ("Let's Read" in Kiswahili) is a flagship partnership between USAID and the Government of Kenya's Ministry of Education (MOE). USAID partners with the Ministry of Education to implement the *Tusome* Early Grade Reading program in every public primary school and over 1,500 low-cost private schools across Kenya. *Tusome* has trained 70,000 teachers and dramatically improved the reading skills of over six million learners throughout the country. The *Tusome* technical approach employs research-driven learning materials, proven teaching methodologies, and a cutting-edge tablet-based feedback and monitoring system to improve the literacy outcomes of 6.7 million pupils by 2020 (USAID, 2020b).

*Tusome* trains teachers, administrators, instructional coaches, and curriculum support officers based on practical classroom-based experiences. The trainings develop teachers' pedagogical skills in critical areas of reading instruction; empower head teachers (principals) to provide instructional leadership for their schools; and enable education officials to upload real-time learner performance data to a cloud-based network that fosters greater accountability throughout the education system (USAID, 2020b). The early grade reading skills lay a fundamental foundation for the future development of the skills necessary for the Kenyan youth to compete in the global knowledge society.

#### *Kenya Youth Employment and Skills (K-YES) Program*

USAID's K-YES program provides motivated but disenfranchised youth the skills and support needed to be competitive and successful in gaining employment. Through the program, participants are connected to labour market information, financial institutions, and 21st century employability skills, enabling them to make informed decisions about their careers (USAID, 2020a).

One of the key achievements of the program is that it has established Youth Employment Compacts between the public and private sectors in nine counties to align skills training and workforce development with county-level economic growth strategies as part of Kenya's journey to self-reliance (USAID, 2020a). The Kenya Youth Employment and Skills (K-YES) program brings together public and private sector leaders to solve Kenya's youth employment challenges, spur economic growth, and embed results at the county level. K-YES connects young people with market-relevant training that translates into jobs.

#### *The Global Give Back Circle and Access to Education*

The Global Give Back Circle (GGBC) helps at-risk girls dream big and rise as leaders, through the course of the program, to become mentors to the next generation of young women. The program empowers high achieving yet impoverished students to continue their education and realize their potential through scholarships, training, and mentoring (USAID, 2020d).

The program provides life skills workshops, tertiary education scholarships, strong community support, and an innovative mentoring model which creates sustainability through support from Kenyan and American private and public sector mentors. To date, GGBC has provided college and university scholarships to 1,000 young women and 28 young men who all commit to giving back to their communities. Some of the achievements of the GGBC include: empowering 1,200 adolescent girls from across Kenya to impact their local communities through give back initiatives; and providing more than 300 beneficiaries with internships and job placement opportunities with various private sector partners (USAID, 2020d).

#### *Generation Kenya Youth Employment Program*

Lack of access to education and job skills are barriers for youth. USAID's youth programs target key growth sectors and develop skills that boost competitiveness for the job market. Generation Kenya, a youth workforce development program, teams up with employers to identify skills gaps in target industries and customize job training programs for young people. (USAID, 2020c). The program motivates young people with targeted opportunities to acquire skills for meaningful employment through training developed with employers looking to build their workforce. Generation Kenya uses a demand-driven model in cooperation with the Government of Kenya, development partners, the private sector, and public and private training institutions to close the recruitment gap between unemployed youth and employers.

Based on internal impact assessment, (USAID, 2020c), to date, nearly every Generation graduate has secured employment in their target industry, thus meeting the needs of both unemployed youth and the emerging job market. Since 2015, 83% of 18,000 Generation Kenya graduates were hired immediately upon completion of the program. Generation Kenya has since launched five training programs in financial services, distributed sales, customer service agents, retail and restaurant services, and sewing machine operators. Gender is also a critical component of the program, and to this end, 56% of Generation Kenya graduates are women, way above the national average for women, which is 29% in the formal sector.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This paper has addressed the main challenges affecting the youth in the education sector in attempt to build a knowledge society. It appreciates that knowledge and innovations are key in driving the modern economy, and that the youth must adjust with the times. Formal education alone is not sufficient to address the challenges of the youth, given the mismatch between the curriculum and the market demands that has been evident in development practice. The paper appreciates the role of the international partners in moving in to address the issues critical to the development of the knowledge society. We should design an education system that not only emphasises on literacy and numeracy, but one with practical applicability and the ability to translate the knowledge into practice – this is the essence and foundation of a knowledge based society.

Going forward, it is important that the Government of Kenya harness partnerships and especially the crucial role the private sector will play in ensuring access to education for all children. The Government should come up with policies and legal frameworks by strengthening the role of the Public Private Sector (PPPs) Initiatives in developing the education sector for market-driven demands. It is important to appreciate the role of soft-skills, even as we acknowledge the necessity of a highly-skilled human capital to facilitate carrying out of the planned policies, strategies and programmes. It is equally important to have a skills inventory that would indicate the

distribution of skills and industry trends necessary for planning the country's future training programmes in the drive to building a knowledge society that is both responsive to local demands and competitive enough to compete in the global labour force.

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