

# **The Human Factor Approach to Development in Africa**



**Edited by**  
**Samuel G. Chivaura and Claude G. Mararike**

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## The Human Factor and Structural Adjustment Programmes

Anders Närman

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### Introduction

In the middle of the 1970s, a decision was taken by the United Nations (UN) to strive for a New International Economic Order (NIEO). This was at a time when the school of dependency was reaching its peak in influencing development strategies in Third World countries. The economic deterioration in developing countries could easily be traced back to dependency structures imposed by the west. Even so, there was still a strong belief in the Third World about the goodwill of Western economic programmes in assisting poor countries to develop. Western development programmes for Africa and the Third World were far from being altruistic.

A couple of years after the agreement on a NIEO, the North and South came to a collision. At the Nairobi UNCTAD IV Conference, they disagreed on the West's proposal to fund stabilization of the prices of a number of raw materials from developing countries. Twenty years after the Nairobi UNCTAD Conference, there was no doubt that the west wielded the power to determine development strategies for Africa and the Third World. While the dependency school itself might have died, dependency per se, as a syndrome, has not. In fact, it has gained even greater momentum. The neo-liberal ideology in developing countries today reigns supreme. There is faith in the virtues of a free market economy, as the only viable agent of development for the Third World. The road towards greener pastures is believed to be through increased exports. Pacific Asia is often given as an example. Key component factors in this proposed development strategy are the trade liberalization, monetary reforms and privatization. The general rule of a free market economy is to limit the role of the state to a minimum in order to cut costs and obviate government distortions and control of national economies.

The intention of structural adjustment programmes, therefore, is to dominate the economic policies of developing nations as well as their social sectors. There is, therefore, strong Western influence of the education systems and health services of developing countries, although these may not be explicitly expressed in the SAP policies. One important factor is the scaling down of the state and severe limiting of the allocation of funds to the social sectors.

### Education and SAP

With the emergence of independence in Africa, which has been a gradual process over the continent starting off almost forty years ago, education was a key element in

the nation building projects. No African government could accept anything short of at least a free primary education for all, as an initial policy. This was also stated in a blueprint for African education, as an objective to be achieved in 1980 (UNESCO, 1961). Even if it was not possible to attain this goal, quantitative primary school expansion during the first decades after independence was impressive (World Bank, 1988, 1993a)

The quantitative success has often been accompanied by a subsequent decline in quality. Furthermore, the gross figures given have been exaggerated by a high incidence of repetition, drop out and sporadic attendance. In fact, in the early 1990s, net enrolment was less than 50 percent (World Bank, 1995:217).

Since the early 1980s, the previously positive trend was turned into its opposite. This can be correlated to the introduction of SAPS in one country after the other in Africa, starting roughly at the same time. With this followed the creation of a kind of artificial boundary between economic growth and educational advancement, as stated in these two examples:

Without rapid economic growth, the provision of even the most basic needs will be in jeopardy (Republic of Kenya, 1986:2).

and;

Although education represents a long-term investment in human resources, its provision needs to be balanced with investment in immediately productive areas, if the economy is to sustain the costs implied. The trend has been for social sectors such as education to grow at the expense of productive sectors (Republic of Zimbabwe, 1990:0).

This kind of dichotomy seems a bit awkward, as education has been regarded a key factor behind the Asian Pacific success story. In the so-called miracle report on the HPAEs (High Production Asian Economies), education is referred to as a main determinant to explain differences between East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. It was estimated that two-thirds of the exceptional growth figures in the HPAEs can be explained by 'unusually rapid growth in physical and human capital' (World Bank, 1993b:48). Against conventional wisdom, this can be contrasted to the conclusion that it was difficult to find a similar correlation in growth rates, which could be explained by "conventional economic variables" (Ibid:54). Similar sentiments are echoed in a policy paper from the World Bank on primary education:

Education is a cornerstone of economic growth and social development and a principal means of improving the welfare of individuals. It increases the productive capacity of societies and their political, economic, and scientific institutions. It also helps reduce poverty ... poor and ... mitigating the population, health, and nutritional consequences of poverty. As economies worldwide are transformed by technological advances and new production methods that depend on a well-trained and intellectually flexible labor force, education becomes even more significant (World Bank, 1990:8).

From this statement the two interlinked features of education are clearly spelt out. Education is a necessary tool to enhance productivity in the society and it has significance as a social service to the population. Still, in the policy implications, there is introduction of increased reliance on cost-sharing in education. It has been recommended that funding for education should be diversified 'including the mobilizing of local and community resources' (Ibid:53). This should be combined with contributions from private and voluntary organizations. Even if these directives do not explicitly mention primary school fees, this has been the option resorted to in many African countries, especially when faced with overall drastic cuts in public expenses. As an overall rule:

pushing a higher proportion of costs on to the user, the poor within each country tend to be even more marginalized within the system, for they cannot afford the extra expenses (Gould, 1993:57).

Cost-sharing can be seen as a strong contributing factor in the reduction of primary enrolment in many African countries. This was clearly indicated from field work still to be published in Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia. It is also the conclusion drawn from a study carried out in eleven countries throughout Africa:

clearly the adjustment measures themselves contributed significantly to the decline. Now that the importance of protecting social services and living standards is more widely recognized, one might hope that economic reform in Africa will be designed to ease human suffering, not contribute to it (Adepoju, 1993:6).

In spite of the perceived need to put priorities on education as part of the development approach, this is not adhered to in practical policies. This makes a mockery of the declaration of education as a basic human right that was established by the UN almost fifty years ago and thereafter reiterated in numerous conferences. It lends a serious blow to the enhancement of the productive sector assumed to be a key element in export promotion. Educational neglect will consequently put serious doubts on the commitment declared in connection to SAPs. These fears are accentuated by the declared policy directives on vocational education and training.

According to neo-liberal philosophies promoted by the World Bank, education has been reduced to something of an investment choice 'between alternative opportunities with respect to costs and benefits, costs and effectiveness and equity implications' (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985:26). From rates of return calculations, primary education has shown to be a profitable venture, as a development investment, even if this is not adequately reflected in the actual policies. The same cannot be claimed for diversification of education, to give it a more (pre-) vocational bias. At one time, such education has been referred to as a 'costly mismatch[es]' (World Bank, 1981:83). Even if the individual could be said to gain personally from vocationalizations, 'such training is rarely cost-efficient when provided in the school system' (World Bank, 1993:200). Instead it is argued that training is better offered by the industries themselves or private institutions, as this 'can be the most efficient way to develop the skills of the work force' (World Bank, 1991a:7).

Based on the quote from the World Bank, 1991a, the policy directives formulated are; (i) to replace pre-vocational programmes with a quantitative and qualitative improvement of academic secondary schools, and (ii) to stimulate and improve private sector training. However, it is doubtful if the envisaged export driven economy can ever be repeated in Africa if the urgent requirement for a substantial cadre of highly skilled and semi-skilled manpower is not catered for. How this can be achieved, if we are to rely on short-term rate of return calculations to determine educational policies, is difficult to grasp. Investment strategies in this sector must be taken on a much longer time horizon, with a view to interfere into complex economic structures, both national and global. After all, when the African nations are advised to take up the long and laborious path of SAP, this must be aimed at the establishment of self-sustaining export economies, with an indigenous control of the manufacturing sector.

From this follows that, without a more thorough attention given to both primary education and (pre-) vocational education and training there is a serious risk that the country will not develop in a positive direction. Any analysis of SAPs in relation to educational policies will lead to the notion that these strategies are not built on a systematic elaboration of relevant facts. Policies are rather an answer to certain trends following directly upon a set of neo-liberal philosophy. Apart from neglecting the productive value of education, a large section of the poor will not get their claims to education as a basic human right, fulfilled. This leads us to explore how SAPs can be correlated to equity.

### **SAP and equity**

One effect of the SAPs is the accentuation of the North-South gap and the prevailing social stratification in nationality. The World Economic Order today is in no way more equal than it was in the middle of the 1970s. It is possible for the North to give some marginal concession on debt, while raw capitalism can be at liberty to rule trade and activities of MNC/TNC. From the North, rules can be said to determine economic conditions down to the poor African peasant or the urban slum dweller. There is nothing to say that farmers in Europe and the US are to be restricted in a similar way. With economic power, follows the 'right' to extend decision making into a domain that rightly should belong to the poor nations themselves. Aid donor countries allow themselves to dictate to the recipient parties. However, as the concept of aid has been exchanged for development co-operation, this also implies the right among the recipients to refuse to co-operate with regimes in the North, if they are exercising inhumane political and economic practices.

Within the African nations, the benefits of SAPs are unequally shared among the population. Calling for legitimate rule is turning into the search for reliable partners for co-operation in Africa. An emerging élite, trained in the North and with a modern outlook, fits in well as political, economic and administrative operators in the competitive free market structures created by the SAP policies. They are even trusted by the World Bank to produce so called indigenous home-brewed SAPs. A budding middle class is therefore coming up to play its role in the continuous economic development. They are presented as role models for the poor to emulate. Through the



privatized educational system, an entry ticket can be bought into favourable positions for the children born into the advantaged strata of society.

Privileges enjoyed by the élite and middle classes overshadow the existence of a severe poverty problem. Still, SAPs have been a major factor in the ongoing socio-economic deprivation of the African majority. For them a system of poverty alleviation programmes, such as social funds have been engineered. Often, these are claimed to give SAPs a human face; but are in principle nothing but enormous welfare apparatuses. Pre-packaged social services containing assistance against starvation, ill-health and illiteracy, are donated to targeted groups. It seems that the ulterior *raison d'être* for these programmes has very little ground in altruistic humanism. The poor and vulnerable can be assisted without causing major distortions that 'might threaten macro-economic discipline' (World Bank, 1991b:121).

With this last quote in mind, are we supposed to continue using our energies to find out how to reform capitalism or are we to open our minds to discovering totally new dimensions of development? A more humane process of change involves a redefinition of basic concepts in the development debate. Certain essential catch-words emerge but end up losing their original meaning as they are adapted into the mainstream development discourses. Donor agencies are all too willing to accept terminologies such as participation and empowerment if they are allowed to give their own meanings to them. To bring back humanism into the discussion we have to regain the language so far distorted by the proponents of neoliberalism.

### **Alternatives to development**

A strong opposing force to the neo-liberal development thinking has been found in the notion of alternative development, which is supposed to consider ecological factors, cultural diversities, egalitarian idealism and 'bottom up' approaches. In all of them, an underlying feeling has been to lend some kind of normatively positive pre-fix to development. This in itself has invalidated the concept of development so that each one of us can have our own individual meaning of the word. The dilemma here is, of course, that it is difficult to make a debate sensible if all participants choose how to use the terminology to suit their own ideals and norms.

One effect of this has been that 'everyone, it seems, knows what development is except the experts' (Stöhr and Taylor, 1981:453). A critical voice, Sachs gave his views thus:

The last 40 years can be called the age of development. This epoch is coming to an end. The time is ripe to write its obituary. The idea of development stands like a ruin in the intellectual landscape (1992:1).

As an alternative to the writing of an obituary, another suggestion would be to give the meaning of development back to the prophets of economic growth and modernization. The humane alternative, then, would be to try and find the potentially inhumane features of such development.

In 'conventional' alternative development approaches, these have often been viewed as nothing but other ways to achieve modernization. On that basis, it has been

easy to reject them as failed development strategies. However, if we take these alternatives not as a means to achieve a goal, but as goals in themselves the whole assessment changes radically. A concrete example of this could be how self-reliance has been used in Tanzania. For those who thought that self-reliance could bring modernization to Tanzanians, this meant a serious flaw. What we don't know is by which means Tanzania can establish a process where self-reliance is to be one of the main objectives. It is in this context that research on alternatives to development can possibly give some contributions.

Building a new understanding on what alternatives are open for the future could be achieved in a frank dialogue between cultures from the North and the South. If we use westernized definitions of democracy, they are essentially defences of individual rights decided by the majority. Participation in a development process will, therefore, mean taking part in activities suggested externally. If, on the other hand, we are to use the collective sense of culture and development, it is not enough to involve mere individuals. The essence of the whole collective philosophy has to be infused into the participatory approach. The free market competition, the back-bone of SAPs, is totally incompatible with a society based on a collective philosophy.

Researchers and development workers from the North complain bitterly that they are not able to empower individual members of collective communities. Implied in this is the feeling that the North has some kind of power given to them, that can be distributed to others. However, power can only be claimed from inside the community through the process of mobilization. Distribution of power can only take place from an act of reciprocity, in which the participants do have real mutual respect for what the other party can offer materially and mentally.

In such a context, the notion of education can also be reconsidered to attain a new meaning. Many of the projects rejected on account of neo-liberal development ideologies can thus seek a new lease of life.

### **Alternatives and education**

Just like in the transformation of society towards neoliberal models, education is a key factor in humanistic processes of change. In the effort to make Tanzania self-reliant, education was to prepare the ground. According to Nyerere (1967), education was not a vehicle for individual promotion, but a factor towards collective welfare. Schooling was integrated into the transformation towards socialism, one of whose pillars was self-reliance. Inherent in education was the attempt to elaborate norms and knowledge, central to socialist ambitions (Nyerere, 1967). Among the norms was the sense of the collective as the core of building socialism:

This is what our educational system has to encourage. It has to foster the social goals of living together, and working together, for the common good. It has to prepare our young people to play a dynamic and constructive part in the development of a society in which all members share fairly in the good or bad fortune of the group, and in which progress is measured in terms of human well-being, not prestige, buildings, cars, or other such things, whether privately or publicly owned. Our education must therefore inculcate a sense of

commitment to the total community, and help the pupils to accept the values appropriate to our kind of future, not those appropriate to our colonial past (Ibid.: 273).

The difficulty might have been the inability to instigate dialogue with the people, to make them participate in the process of change. Reading through the speeches and writings of Nyerere gives one the impression of a deep understanding of the fundamental contradictions in colonial education inherited by Tanzania. Included in this is the need to (i) change subservience to self-confidence, (ii) replace foreign cultures and history with African culture and history, (iii) do away with school as promoter of individualistic aspiration and encourage co-operation, virtues of self-reliance and how to achieve the objectives expressed in the Arusha Declaration. Nyerere, named Mwalimu-teacher in reverence, was more of a teacher than an implementer of the programmes he proposed.

Another example of educational reform which resembles the Tanzanian model, is the concept of 'Education with Production' (EwP). In its original meaning EwP was a way to combine the pedagogical value and cost-sharing benefits from a mixture of theoretical knowledge and work. In Botswana, the brigades were to be developed according to the principle where production was supposed to give positive attitudes towards manual labour. Pupils who found themselves out of school and jobless would be enrolled in selling and doing other types of manual work instead of roaming the streets. Like Nyerere, van Rensburg argues against the élitist school structure inherited from colonialism:

Schooling not only selects and prepares the ruling class; it also rejects the great majority on the way. Its pedagogy is designed to serve this dual process of selection and rejection, and so we find it highly verbalized, theoretical and abstract so that only the best and brightest can succeed. It is as fiercely resistant to change as the social order it serves (1984:24).

This quote proposes a new pedagogy which combines theory with practice. It strongly opposes the interest of the élite to preserve their position in society, legitimized by the colonial school structures.

The dilemma was that external assistance pouring into the brigade system had totally changed the proposed agendas. Training was to a large extent formalized to offer wage earning skills demanded in the urban economies. 'Unnecessary' subjects such as development studies, were soon replaced by more 'useful' options such as commerce and business studies. The transformation can be regarded as a direct response to prevailing élite interests.

The EwP experiences in Zimbabwe, partly based on the Botswana brigades, was set up as a natural response to the civil war situation, even if the original philosophy, once again, was transformed into a more institutionalized setting. Still, as a fertile ground for many of the pedagogic innovations, we do find the war of liberation or the struggle for a revolutionary change. Nicaragua (Hirshon and Butler, 1983), Grenada (Bishop and Searle, 1979) and Guinea Bissau (Cabral, 1969), are just a few examples

on this. Fanon invokes a perspective on popular mobilization from which latter-day research into the concept of empowerment would draw inspiration:

During the colonial period the people are called upon to fight oppression; after national liberation, they are called upon to fight against poverty, illiteracy and underdevelopment (1963:74).

Fanon was, to a large extent, aware of the dangers working against his ideals such as the élite pressure for modernization and economic growth for the benefit of a few exerted on Africa by external forces.

The need to divorce education from institutionalized schooling has been strongly emphasized by Illich (1971a). For too long, school has been a sacred cow offering an education, 'that refuses to educate without requiring that its students submit simultaneously to custodial care, sterile competition, and indoctrination' (Illich, 1971b:133). An alternative to this has been offered by Freire (1972) in his *Education for the Oppressed*, with its stress on dialogue. To him the key element is the word conscientization, which in short contain 'the process by which human beings participate critically in a transformation act'. (Freire, 1985:106). Through an ongoing process of dialogue human beings gain new understanding as new realities unveil. Political actions should lead to the organization for transformation of reality. Coming back to the concept of empowerment, we could say that greater awareness would be necessary, but not sufficient for mobilization.

To Freire (1985:17) the critical process of conscientization, which could result in self-empowerment 'is no task for the dominant classes.' It might seem positive when a regime, as in the case of Tanzania, demands a 'political education on a massive scale and the raising of people's level of political consciousness generally' (Kassam, 1978:7). However, a top-down approach of telling people what to do, rather than deciding together with them, will not go much beyond mere rhetoric. Government response to popular attempts to raise people's awareness has often been harsh. A case in point is the experiment to integrate community development with education and culture which took place in Kamirithu (outside Nairobi), which was brutally crushed by the Kenyan authorities (Ngugi wa Mirii, 1979:19).

What is opening up is a wide scope of educational experiments in Third World countries which we have only hinted at here. It would be worthwhile to revisit the alternative education methods suggested and place them in their original context. Valuable knowledge can then be gathered on how to position education in the development process. This kind of openness has been urged by Åsberg:

An assessment of the quality of education in the normative sense is not possible if the desirable direction of the development process of the society as a whole is not determined. Just as the concept of development is interpreted differently by different scholars, so is the quality of education examined differently (1973:73).

It is interesting to find out that even in World Bank evaluation, it is possible to detect the need to put project outcome in the perspective of national policies. As Psacharopoulos and Loxely observe:

Difficulties in implementation may mean that diversification is not initially cost-effective, but it may still be considered worthwhile if the political objectives for which it was adopted are being realized. Thus, its value should be judged by the extent to which it advances realization of the national objectives of socialism and self-reliance and the extent to which individuals themselves profit from their educational experiences (1985:209).

In spite of this, strategies for development have been products of some kind of universal culture concocted by the neo-liberal perspectives. Development has been a matter of quantitative improvement on the horizontal level. What has been more difficult to comprehend is to what extent it is possible to find a model of equity in the vertical relations, which are qualitative in character, including factors such as power, cultural "supremacy" and imperialism. It is from the understanding of the complex interrelationship between how the hard economic data horizontally interacts with the soft aspects on the vertical line that the potential for more humane alternatives to development could be found.

So far, it has been the global agendas that have dominated national attempts on alternatives. Education for Self-Reliance and Education with Production — two systems of education challenging the prevailing élite system of education — were taken as new agendas suitable for national modernization informed by global neo-liberal philosophies. Norgaard has the following to say:

The global penetration and dominance of this modern conception of people, things, and social systems has increased individualist values, selecting against the social values associated with nonechange relations. Liberal individualism, excessive emphasis on exchange relations, and globalization have led progress astray.

The crux of the matter is how to establish alternatives and make them sustainable in relation to transformation and the global agenda for all.

## Conclusion

It is of great concern to see how fast the concepts of neo-liberalism are ingrained in our minds. In the early 1980s Ngugi wa Thiong'o described the late president Kenyatta saying:

Kenyatta was a twentieth-century tragic figure: he could have been a Lenin, a Mao Tse-Tung or a Ho Chi Minh; but he ended being a Chiang Kai-Shek, a Park Chung Hee, or a Pinochet (1981:162).

Today that sentence is utterly meaningless. To the neo-liberals Chiang Kai-shek, Park Chung Hee and Pinochet initiated economic success stories of the Third World, to be followed by the rest. The mobilizers of the people such as Lenin, Mao Tse-Tung and Ho Chi Minh, are the failures and tragic figures.

To overcome this, it is a must to get deeper into the many alternative solutions for survival and decent life for local communities in the North and the South. We have to get to grips with local sciences, forms of organizations, social relations and educational

alternatives. To do this, we have to find ways of dialogue between local communities in different parts of the World and create a structure of new alliances. If the North is to take part in this dialogue, it has to learn how to reconstruct the minds of its people through the process of conscientization. We have to be vigilant against various trends of populism which have frequently been nothing but academic imperialism given a 'progressive' veil. If we fail in this then what seems to be 'radical' humanism will turn into mere rhetoric with no real meaning, like the many attempts of capitalist SAPs. We will be strengthening the forces of dependency even further. The basis for new North-South alliances should be the reciprocal exchange of material commodities and non-material value systems. It should also be to create humane alternatives to development against the inhumane forces of present day imperialism such as the SAP agendas.

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