

## **PARTNERSHIPS IN EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE TO AFRICAN COUNTRIES: RHETORIC OR REALITY?**

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### **Introduction**

In the 1960s when most African countries achieved their independence, the world was assumed to be divided between rich and poor countries, or developed and undeveloped countries. The development of the poor countries was an internationally recognised objective of the developed countries for which they had a special responsibility. Such development in economic terms, was to reduce the gap between the rich and poor through economic growth by investment financing, especially the transfer of expertise from developed to developing countries. Although social development was not explicitly stated, it was assumed that inequalities would eventually be reduced either as the benefits of growth trickled down to the poorest groups of society or through some kind of public appropriation of the means of production. In education in particular, driven by the human capital and modernisation theories, emphasis was on human resource development ( Foster, 1999 ).

By the beginning of the 1970s, however, there was growing awareness that the gap between rich and poor countries, continued to widen both internationally and at the national level in many of the developing countries in general, and African countries in particular. For the northern economies, it also marked a period which ended the post-World War 'golden age' of low unemployment and low inflation. The dependent southern nations' fragile economic structures were seriously undermined by the effects of economic contraction in the North and the double explosion of oil prices.

With their apparently weakened economies, the Northern countries began to raise more critical questions about the development assistance. The new and viable development policy was perceived to be structural adjustment with its promises of revitalized markets, and increased exports ( World Bank, 1993 ). This discourse was not just confined to economic structures, but also focused on state provision of basic services which included health and education.

With the apparent continued lack of visible impact in technical assistance on development, recent years have witnessed an increased emphasis by funding and technical-assistance agencies in particular, on the importance of stakeholder involvement in the development of new programmes. Greater importance has also been given to the better coordination of activities through such tools as sectoral development plans. The change is expressed in the desire to develop more symmetrical interrelations or partnerships between the North and South.

As it is rightly pointed out, the sources of these changes are not to be found in a single text on cooperation or in the proposals of a single agency. It is a new thinking about North-South relations which can be identified in the various technical assistance agencies ( King, 1999 ). For example in 1998, a study on *Partnership Africa* was commissioned by the Government of Sweden to analyse and make recommendations on Swedish overall policy towards Africa ( Wohlgemuth, 1999 ). There is the U.K. Department of International Development ( DFID ) White Paper, *Eliminating World Poverty* of 1997 ( Harrison, 1999 ), *Japan's Official Development Assistance Summary* ( Yokozeki and Sawamura, 1999 ) and several others.

Factors behind the shift in policy, which largely started in the early 1990s, cannot also be attributed to single major events of the time. Perhaps among the key ones is the World Conference on Education for All and both its *World Declaration on Education for All and the Framework for Action to Meet the Basic Learning Needs* (World Conference on Education for All, 1990 ) in which it was stated that partnership in education must include all actors as the national governments in the South, international funding and technical-assistance agencies, administrators and other educational personnel, non-governmental organisations, religious and other civil organisations, the business community and other private communities and parents, students, teachers and their corresponding associations ( World Conference on Education for All , 1990 ).

The South itself could have contributed to the new discourse with the emergence of a generation of young leaders that have for example called for a 'New Africa' 'the African Renaissance' with a perception that their regions should participate in world affairs on equal terms. Their vision is that they meaningfully engage in negotiations in which both parties are in a give and take basis and where no one dictates the conditions for the other as has hitherto been the practice.

This paper focuses on technical assistance to education in the African countries in the so-called era of optimism, and identifies some current practices in educational cooperation to illustrate the point that partnership strategies hardly go far enough to bridge the significant gap between rhetoric and reality. It cites such examples as the marginalisation of UNESCO as a key multilateral education agency and the emergence of the World Bank to assume its role, lack of seriousness in handling issues relating to World Conference on Education for All, coordination of technical assistance and educational policy formulation and institutional capacity.

## **The Era of Optimism**

The era of optimism in most African countries were the 1960s and part of the 1970s and coincided with the United Nations First and Second Development Decades. The main driving force in technical assistance was the human capital and modernisation theories which were largely advocated by leading Western economists. On the basis of these theories, it was assumed that African countries emerging out of colonialism were poor because they lacked the necessary qualified human resource, by then referred to as 'highly qualified manpower', for both development and modernisation.

The education systems were therefore expected to fulfil some key objectives. First, was the technical objective of furnishing future human resource with requisite skills and knowledge and second, the social objective of inculcating values which would enrich peoples lives and maintain cohesive productivity ( Piper, 1969 ). This approach treated economic growth as the principal goal of development and therefore stressed the potential of education in fostering the knowledge, values and skills necessary for productive activity as had been the case with Western industrialised nations. In more recent years the causal link between education and development was cited to have occurred in the U.S.A., Japan, and South Korea. Schools could therefore be used in accelerating a movement towards industrialisation by developing the knowledge and skills that have proved useful in these countries.

Politically, the independent governments had pledged to Africanise the civil service and the economies. A number of arguments in some countries were advanced in support of this commitment. In the past, only Europeans and to a lesser extent other migrant groups could occupy positions of power and wealth in the modern sector of national life. Their virtual monopoly was made possible because of the type of education they received during the colonial era, to which Africans were denied access. These benefits were to be made available to Africans, because if they were to exercise real power in their societies, they had to acquire an education similar to that of Europeans and other migrant groups ( Sifuna, 1990 ). Human resource needs were therefore also used to underwrite public demand for the expansion of tertiary education.

To assist newly independent African countries work out their educational strategies, UNESCO and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), jointly sponsored a conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in May 1961 as a forum for African states to decide on their priority educational needs in order to promote economic and social development on the continent ( UNESCO/ECA, 1961 ). During the conference, in line with the modernisation and human resource theories, greater urgency was assigned to secondary and post-secondary education rather than to universal primary education. To achieve this objective, there was need for massive financial commitment, and in order to meet their needs, African nations were expected to allocate increasing percentages of their national income to education. Massive amounts of external aid would also be required as supplements, and the Conference called on UNESCO, developed countries and non-governmental organisations to support and share in the implementation of the proposed plans.

As demonstrated in the first development plans of countries like Ghana, Nigeria and Tanzania, considerable capital investments; over 10 percent of the national expenditures went to education, especially in the expansion of secondary and tertiary education. A quick bird's view, for example, shows that in Sierra Leone, the old University College at Fourah Bay was expanded, and a new university college opened at the agricultural institute at Njala; in Senegal, the University of Dakar, the largest French based institution in West Africa expanded. In Ghana, there was expansion at the University of Ghana at Legon, the opening of two new universities, University of Science and Technology at Kumasi and the University of Cape Coast. The expansion of university education was even more spectacular in Nigeria, which apart from the colonial

University of Ibadan, new universities opened at Nsukka, Lagos, Ife, Benin, Ahmadu Bello, Jos, Port Harcourt, Ilorin, Bayero and others. The trend was similar in all the independent African countries. Most of these institutions expanded with massive national resources as well as technical assistance. At the moment, practically every African country has at least a national university with perhaps the exception of the Gambia.

Although accurate figures of students in tertiary education in general and university education in particular in the African setting are difficult to come by, numbers of university students have steadily grown since the sixties. By the mid-1960s universities in Sub-Saharan Africa enrolled no more than 10,000 students. By the mid 1970s, the number had shot up close to half a million while in 1985, UNESCO estimated them to be around 700,000, and in 1995 the figure was said to be 1.4 million ( UNESCO, 1998 ). As it will be discussed later, in terms of institutional capacity, the African situation should not be as pathetic as has often been portrayed in a wide range of Western based publications.

The 1960s and early 1970s were therefore recognised as an era of optimism. All the indications were that for the newly independent countries in Africa, there was no limit to their expectations and plans for reaching the set targets. Indeed, the optimism and aspirations were summarised in the statement of the late Julius Nyerere, the then president of Tanzania, when he said ‘we must run while they walk’. There were massive resources by both the national governments and donor agencies invested in the so-called human resource development with much of it gone to secondary and tertiary education.

The era of optimism ended with the oil shocks of the mid-1970s and the end of the golden age of low unemployment and low inflation in the Northern economies which in turn led to continued crisis throughout the 1980s. The origin of this crisis to African countries was therefore largely external, but exacerbated by their weak and dependent internal economies. Many countries responded by trying to borrow themselves out of the crisis thereby digging themselves deeper and deeper into debt. The consequence was an unhealthy dependence on creditors and external agencies.

By the mid-1980s structural adjustment programmes were fully established as a recipe for the economic crises and macro-economic conditions for support, and had become the rule within the international donor community. Fundamental restructuring then became the dominant discourse for both education and development and has remained so for more than two decades. It has become a source of considerable debate although the general conclusions are that there is currently a lack of convincing theory for it as a model for development. Despite the logical elegance and power enshrined in structural adjustment programmes, they have failed to deliver on their promises for most of the African countries. Across the continent, the SAPs reforms have frequently either failed to recognise political realities or have had such serious short-term costs that they have adjusted economies downwards rather upwards ( Leys, 1995; Castells, 1996; McGrath, 1999). In practically all the SAPs countries, support for the social sector especially health, education and related areas has sharply declined as poverty has continued to grow.

It also needs to be emphasised that as the economic crisis of the 1970s worsened the then two superpowers, the United States of America and the Soviet Union, selectively intensified their assistance to the so-called allies to maintain influence among these client states. In so doing the United States in particular, financed some of the worst dictatorial, corrupt and extravagant African regimes like that of Mobutu Seseko and Idd Amin which literally impoverished their countries by looting from the state coffers. In such situations, democratisation, accountability and related jargons that are being drummed by the donor agencies, were never an issue. In fact there are numerous examples, when super powers subverted democracy by spearheading the overthrow of democratically elected governments, only to replace them with dictatorships, which were perceived to be more ideologically acceptable.

As Africa moved into the 1990s, a period of thirty years or so of independence, African countries had still not achieved the promised economic social and political self-sufficiency that pioneers of decolonisation had anticipated. The developed countries with their ‘massive investment’ through aid, there was very little to show. In many parts of the continent, the initial gains made following decolonisation had disappeared, resulting in economic and social stagnation and in some cases even disintegration though civil strife. As reported by the World Bank, countries of Sub-Saharan Africa experienced an annual decline of 2.9 percent in the per capita income from 1980 to 1987 ( World Bank, 1988 ). Constant tragedies which form frequent readings of the Western popular press, famine, outbreak of diseases, *coup d’etats*, dictatorships, are said to contribute to what has come to be known as the ‘donor fatigue’. The sensitivity of the rich has become numb to the television-portrayed tragedies in Africa ( Elu and Banya, 1999 ). What is often inadequately addressed, are the economic benefits that accrue to industrialised countries through current technical assistance arrangements with trade imbalances and unstable commodity prices that hardly favour less industrialised countries.

## Resistance to Third World Demand for ‘Partnership’ and the Marginalisation of UNESCO

Literature on partnership in technical assistance is not new. It now sounds new because of where it seems to emanate from, which supports the famous English saying that ‘he who pays the piper calls the tune’. Following the economic crisis of the early 1970s, Third World bloc of countries, under the umbrella of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77, encouraged by the broad ideals of the United Nation’s Charter, demanded alternatives to the existing patterns of economic and political relations, including new mechanisms of international economic regulation to ensure stable commodity prices and access to developing- country trade to First World Markets, the direct redistribution of global wealth from North to South and the transfer of global economic decision-making to the more democratic United Nations institutions. Their challenge culminated in the United Nations General Assembly resolution for a ‘New International Economic Order’ (NIEO) in 1974 ( Cox, 1979; Mundy, 1999 ). The United Nations therefore became the locus for increasingly vocal demands of transnational social movements as well as non-governmental organisations that were helping to open up economic and political avenues.

The new trend also affected most UN agencies especially UNESCO. UNESCO had been created in 1945 and became a UN Specialised Agency for promoting education which had emerged as an important component of the post-War development. UNESCO during its founding was to be financed through weighted subscriptions and autonomously governed by a General Conference in which member nations had equal voting rights. Its mandate included the promotion of the common welfare of mankind to universal right to education. This was in line with the post-World War 2 widespread consensus that compulsory mass primary education was a basic right and responsibility of the modern state. Western governmental and non-governmental organisations had converged around the notion of an international organisation with the responsibility for promoting international educational cooperation. The organisation was therefore given the task of acting as an international clearing house for educational information, a venue for non-governmental linkages and exchange as well as debate, and a provider of services and programmes to Member States( Mundy, 1999; Courtney, 1999 ).

Developing countries in particular perceived UNESCO as an agency which should play a key role in international equalisation of educational opportunities, a position supported by the Soviet Union. Although Western countries in principle supported the ideals of UNESCO, they remained skeptical about committing the resources needed for a broader programme of ‘educational equalisation’ especially to an organisation increasingly marked by East-West tensions. They particularly resented the apparent support given to Third World countries’ issues by the Soviet bloc countries. By the mid-1960s, they had already started channelling resources for educational development bilaterally rather than through the multilateral bodies created under the United Nations ( Mundy, 1999 ).

The newly poverty oriented approaches of the 1970s pushed by the Third World were taken up in a variety of ways in the educational work of UN multilateral organisations. UNESCO, the most universal and democratic of most of UN organisations, struggled in vain to translate majority support for a ‘New International Economic Order’ into a common educational vision, and that became its undoing. Consequently, UNESCO experienced a serious decline in support and funding for the later part of the 1970s and during the 1980s, culminating into the decision by the USA to withdraw from UNESCO in 1984, followed by the UK and Singapore in 1985 (Marchand, 1994 ). It is not lost to any serious thinking African that the three countries withdrew from UNESCO when its Director-General, M. M’bow was an African from Senegal and his appointment had heavily been opposed by the USA and UK. Ironically at the time of their withdrawal, most of the staff at UNESCO headquarters were Americans and Britons, therefore supported by financial contributions from other countries. This did not seem to be a key issue to the USA and the United Kingdom.

Third World countries’ use of the UN as a forum to call for a ‘New International Economic Order’ from the early 1970s shifted the focus of international decision- making. Since then, the central decision- making about the world economy became more firmly entrenched in institutions in which neither developing countries nor popular non-state actors were represented. These included the G7, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Within these predominantly Northern institutions, a new vision of ‘World Order’ was born and steadily spread among OECD countries. It argued for limited state intervention and saw an unhampered global market as the most efficient arbiter of resources and guarantor of growth, an ideology pushed by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. This ideology was further strengthened by the collapse of the Soviet Union, which marked both the end of viable

alternatives to Western, capitalist development and the erosion of a central argument for development assistance ( Griffin, 1991; Gill, 1994; Mundy, 1999 ).

The OECD, in particular became a very prominent forum for the discussion of adjustment and reform in the North during the 1980s. In education, it displaced UNESCO as the central forum for educational policy coordination for advanced capitalist countries of and is now the main provider of cross-national statistics and research in the North. Its central focus has been on how to adjust education to changing economic requirements in the context of stagnating budgets, and in recent years its work has been profoundly shaped by the emphasis of the US on privatisation, choice, standards and cross-national testing, issues which reflect the main broad educational agenda in that country and which through the World Bank and related agencies has become a worldwide agenda for educational development ( Carnoy, 1995 ).

The World Bank took advantage of the neo-liberal discourse on education support, to create a strong and centralised mechanism for setting and implementing international education policies especially in Third World countries. Unlike UNESCO, its interventions were offered through loans and not grants. It took upon itself as the champion of the neo-liberal discourse on behalf of the wider development community. By the late 1980s, it had articulated a convincing rationale for expanding educational lending, supported by what it claimed was a decade of research showing strong links between basic education and agricultural productivity, wages, health and child welfare, and a coherent framework for financing improvements in educational quality and efficiency in line with the neo-liberal approach to public sector reform( World Bank, 1986 ).

The World Bank strategies are remarkably close to the defensive and disciplinary approaches to educational reform discourse among the advanced capitalist countries, which emphasise the more efficient use of educational inputs such as teachers, textbooks etc. the introduction of privatisation and choice to increase efficiency, the greater reliance on cost-recovery through parent and community participation and a shift of resources from higher to primary education ( Carnoy, 1995 ). This emphasis in a great measure ended the displacement of grant-based forms of development cooperation delivered through a multilateral organisation, democratically accountable to sovereign member states like UNESCO. It also raised the World Bank from not only being the largest financier of educational development, but to also being its most powerful ideologue and regulator ( Wendy, 1999 ).

As the chief ideologue and regulator of the neo-liberal reorganisation of educational and other forms of aid, the World Bank has been elevated to an unassailable position from which it does not only pose a threat to sovereign states, but even to individuals as well. As it has been pointed out, 'it is the World Bank-donor analyses and prescriptions that dominate the ideological realm. They have so much human and financial resources at their command that challenging them is an uphill struggle' ( Tandon, 1996 ). The following quotation from a recent study perhaps illustrates the power the Bank can hold on an individual:

This reminds me of a day in my years...when a colleague came into my office with a fax in his hand. He had been invited as a resource person to a seminar in Washington D.C. by the World Bank. They even wrote what his daily honorarium would be and what his per diems would be. He would be travelling club class, staying over-night in London with hotel paid for and he would get per diems even when he was on the plane. He showed me this and said: How can I possibly refuse such an offer? Just the per diems for these five days are more than I can earn in half a year as a professor at the university...And how can I behave in such a way that I am not invited back and still come with some of my criticism? ( Brock-Utne, 2000 ).

This is a situation that faces many Africans both in policy making and the academics. They are unable to live on regular wages as to be able to take decisions and write from the African perspective. Their salaries are generally meagre, therefore putting them in temptations of being bought by donor organisations. To survive, they more often exercise a type of self-censorship and write what the donor would like to hear. They are socialised in particular jargons that donors have identified ( Brock-Utne, 2000 ). It is therefore not surprising that African consultants have unquestioningly imbibed such jargons as 'accountability' 'transparency' and the like to make their reports acceptable to the donor community. In this particular regard, the World Bank is notorious in ascertaining that its own sources that support a given viewpoint are availed and cited by its contracted consultants. Such viewpoints are generally not in the interest of African development. As will be illustrated in the next section, the dictatorial and undemocratic manner in which the World Bank executes its policies especially with regard to less industrialised countries is hardly questioned by its consultants.

### **Partnerships Without Change: The 1990s**

Having successfully resisted Third World demand for partnerships since the 1970s, the beginning of the 1990s witnessed a donors' own initiative advocating for partnerships. This as already pointed out is mainly due to the fact that in a majority of cases, technical assistance over many decades has generally failed to meet the expectations of recipient countries of the Third World. On the basis of a number of examples, this section attempts to demonstrate that such a policy shift has not gone beyond the rhetorical level. The general trend in the behaviour of many of the donor agencies continues to illustrate the predominant autocratic approaches that have been in vogue ever since the era of technical assistance. The so-called partners play little or no role at all in decision-making as has been the practice in the past.

### **Education for All**

As already indicted in this paper, the call for partnerships significantly featured in the Jomtien Conference on Education for All. Sponsored by the World Bank, UNDP, UNICEF and UNESCO, it attracted many interest groups in education, and came at a time, when there was increasing evidence showing a steady deterioration in the education sector in the developing countries. For Africa in particular, both the gross and net enrolment ratios had on the whole fallen considerably during the 1980s. This was largely because educational expenditures per head were sharply cut in real terms. For example, between 1981 and 1989, real expenditures per head on education fell by 67 percent in Nigeria and Zambia, and 60 percent in Tanzania and many other African countries demonstrate a similar trend. The decline in enrolment was an effect of the general economic recession that hit the African countries in the 1980s. The economic recession was mostly caused by worsening terms of trade which again gave rise to mounting debts. The introduction of structural adjustment programmes had a further negative impact on this social sector in most of the countries ( Stewart, 1996 ).

The overall aim of the conference organisers was therefore to get developing countries and donors to turn round the downward trend of falling enrolments, falling completion rates and poor learning outcomes within primary education in the developing countries. The aim was targetted to be reached by the beginning of the new millennium, namely, by the year 2000 ( McGrath, 1999 ).

The Conference deliberations clearly demonstrated the futile nature of 'partnerships' as shown by the behaviour of the donor agencies regarding proposals to increase participation in basic education. A number of the Southern countries including African ones, were signatory to a recommendation that targetted debt as the main problem preventing poor countries from meeting their citizens' basic needs including education, and placed responsibility on the North to take the initiative. A much stronger proposal on the same issue is said to have been made by the African Association for Literacy and Adult Education (AALAE) and the Association for Participatory Research in Asia ( PRIA) supported by a number of other NGOs. These too, placed the responsibility squarely on the North for the conditions that constrain the South leading to economic recession whose consequence has been sharp declines in educational expenditure, and hence school participation rates ( Brock-Utne, 2000 ).

The general consensus by many of the Southern countries and NGOs who were supposedly partners with the North in increasing primary school participation and completion, was that the debt crisis has had a major impact on the quality and quantity of education in the South. The World Bank and other aid agencies, however, maintained that structural adjustment, was in the large measure not responsible for the general deterioration of the education sector in the South during the 1980s, suggesting that Southern delegates were 'confused' about the cause of their problem. Structural adjustment was said to be the medicine and not the cause of the disease, and that Africa's economy was poised to improve during the 1990s as a result of the SAPs. African and Latin American delegates repeatedly expressed doubts about these kinds of predictions and were emphatic that charging school fees caused parents to pull out their children from school, bringing down the enrolment rate and that increasing class size and introducing double shifts affected the quality of teaching, causing a drop in the literacy rate (Brock-Utne, 2000).

As a result of the intransigence by the donor community, the debt burden, which was at the centre of the economic crisis in the South was not given much attention in the final conference text let alone an acknowledgement of the responsibility of the North for the sad state of the social sector in the South. This meant that despite the many noises on the need for partnerships in promoting increased participation in primary education it was going to be 'business as usual' with donor agencies determining what was to constitute basic 'Education for All'. The hypocrisy of the North about the need for symmetrical relationships in technical assistance, was therefore clearly demonstrated during this august conference hosted by them in a very fashionable jamboree.

Consequently, even accomplishing some of the minimum conference recommendations has proved extremely difficult. Among the most telling indicators of the failure to deliver on the Jomtien goals, is the

fact that the development community was by 1995 revising its pledge to the goal of universal primary education to be achieved by the year 2015 and of gender disparities in primary and secondary education by the year 2005. The conference proposed goal of the year 2000 for which the two would have been realised, has remained a big joke as shown by the donor agencies unwillingness to initiate meaningful strategies towards it (MacGrath, 1999).

The impact of the SAPs on education in most African countries was well known to the World Bank long before Jomtien. For instance, in its publication, *Improving Primary Education in Developing Countries* by M. Lockheed and A. Verspoor ( 1991) attributed the decline in net enrolment in primary schools in 15 out of the 25 adjusting countries during the 1980s to the reduction in public expenditure on education arising from structural adjustment. It for example, showed that in Nigeria, the impact of adjustment on education had contributed to a decline in primary school enrolments from 14.7 million in 1983 to 12.5 million in 1986. Furthermore, relations between the Ministry of Education and teachers had also soured, the result of which some teachers had left the job while others were fired. The budget categories for educational materials, buildings and facilities had virtually disappeared.

Despite the rhetoric at Jomtien and thereafter, studies which have recently been completed about funding, seem to indicate that in real terms, total aid for the education sector from bilateral agencies was lower in the mid-1990s than before the World Conference on Education for All. It is noted that while the overall proportion of lending for education may have increased, its relative share by Africa has generally declined from 11.2 percent in 1990 to 4.8 in 1996 ( Bennell and Furlong, 1997 ). Furthermore, data from the World Bank indicates that its funding has shifted away from Africa, where enrolment rates in a number of countries at the primary school level are still below 50 percent ( Habte, 1999 ).

The reasons for low commitment to primary education, especially in Africa are not difficult to find. To a great extent, technical assistance and most financial institutions have a bias against primary education, which is generally 'less visible' on the donor landscape than other levels of the education sector. Other levels, especially tertiary education, is important in terms of investments through the purchase of equipment and the deployment of foreign personnel. Consequently as it is rightly pointed out, technical assistance to African nations constitutes between a quarter and one third of all external economic assistance ( Habte, 1999 ). A recent good example of a strong tilt towards tertiary education was the launching of the African Virtual University (AVU) in 1996 by the World Bank, with very expensive communications equipment. Although the project is on the whole useful, its costs pose doubtful sustainability prospects. There has also been the supply of computers to a number of African universities, and above all the provision of fleets of vehicles including brand new mercedes benzes to vice-chancellors. It was most puzzling how the provision of such vehicles was meant to assist these cash strapped institutions, lacking in basic learning and teaching facilities and resources such as equipment, textbooks, journals and others. Vehicles were therefore not a priority in their current state.

It is, however, important to point out that in a recent analysis of trends in aid to the education sector, found out that agencies that have traditionally supported higher education or vocational education like the German Development Agency GTZ, the Finnish International Aid ( FINNIDA ) and the British Overseas Development Administration ( ODA ) have begun to switch to basic education ( Buchert, 1999 ). In this category also falls Japan International Cooperation Agency ( JICA ) which in 1996, the Japanese Foreign Minister announced a Japanese initiative on assistance to Africa, which stressed the importance of primary education and pledged support efforts towards primary schooling for all children. A sum of \$ 100 million was promised for expenditure on basic education during 1996-99 and was to include training of African participants in Japan. Much of these funds have been utilised for primary school classrooms construction as well as cooperation in mathematics and science education in a number of African countries ( Yokozeki and Sawamura, 1999 ). Although this trend is laudable, the World Bank's current strategy of placing emphasis on basic education at the expense of other levels of education should be rejected, and push for a balance between the levels as each has a specific role to play in development.

### **Cooperation in Technical Assistance**

In conjunction with partnerships, among the major recommendations at the Jomtien conference was encouraging coordination and fostering ownerships. As a matter of fact equal partnerships demand coordination in terms of articulation of aid flows with a particular country's development programme. Logically aid coordination should be the responsibility of the recipient government. It concerns coordination of the support provided by the various international funding and technical-assistance agencies in order to avoid overlaps between different agencies and be in line with national policies and priorities, and that

projects and programmes are sustainable. In essence, what this means is that aid providers are willing to articulate their aid efforts with the development plans and priorities of recipient countries, and second, that development plans have been formulated and priorities set by the recipient countries, and third that recipients have the capacity to manage aid flows, coordinate their providers and deliberately pursue their own goals of development ( Buchert, 1999 ).

In practice, however, despite the much talked about aid-coordination has rarely been the responsibility of the recipient countries, but rather the aid agencies themselves. As it has been pointed out, aid coordination appears to mean coordination among the agencies themselves. What is often left to the recipient governments has been aid administration and reporting ( Kann, 1999 ). Examples of this kind of situation are rampant in most African countries whose weak economic and political leadership finds itself incapable of articulating the countries interests and priorities.

As for the African countries in particular, the Association for the Development of Education in Africa ( ADEA ) was launched in 1988, originally as Donors to African Education ( DAE ). It aims to provide a forum for policy dialogue, consultation and joint planning between Ministries of Education and Training in Sub-Saharan Africa and agencies as well as among international funding and technical assistance agencies themselves. It has among the following specific objectives:

- Reinforce African ministers' leadership capacities with funding agencies.
- To develop these agencies awareness that their own practices should be adopted to the needs of nationally driven policies, programmes and projects.
- To develop a consensus between ministries and agencies on approaches to the major issues facing education ( ADEA 1999 ).

ADEA drew its mandate from the World Bank's study on Education in Sub-Saharan Africa of 1998. ADEA since its formation is said to have served as a forum for exchange of views and information sharing. What is, however, not clear is whether ADEA's creation has brought African countries greater control over aid procurement and development or has enabled them to engage much more effectively in collective bargaining about amounts and conditions of education aid. The overall impression is that coordination efforts have not served to increase African countries influence on agency policies and practices ( Kaluba and Williams, 1999).

The manner in which donor agencies, especially the World Bank has continually shifted its policies in response to changing circumstances and to the realities encountered in programme and project implementation have not reflected much of formal collective consultation process with the so-called partners. A major problem for African countries' ability to strengthen their negotiating position is the difficulty of access to information. The texts of assistance agreements, with the terms and conditions they contain and the background documentation underlying them, are not generally public documents. The content of agreements with donors are generally concealed from most nationals of the recipient country.

The call for transparency and accountability in public affairs, for which so many of the more affluent countries are hard on advocating for the developing countries, does not seem to apply to themselves, by requiring them to practise the same and publish the full details of the terms and conditions of assistance agreements made to the recipient countries. There have been some very alarming cases in which the World Bank in particular has made secret agreements with individual African universities without the knowledge of their governments ( Kaluba and Williams, 1999 ). The African political leaders on their part, publicly complain of the harsh conditions and terms of the World Bank/IMF loans without disclosing the details of such conditionalities. Consequently, in most countries, the general public perceive the two institutions rather negatively as having contributed to their current state of poverty, but are unclear as to the kind of impositions placed on their governments and why the Bank holds such immense power and authority.

The confidential status of many reports, documents and agreements in technical assistance generally weaken the bargaining positions of recipient countries and limit the possibilities of transfer of similar experience to other countries. In addition, international agencies have more advantages in terms of negotiations as they have access to the latest information. They also have access to the top level administrators in the recipient countries, some of whom are amenable to bribery, i.e. ministers, principal secretaries, and quite often the president of the country. Furthermore, they organise their internal meetings both at the country and international levels and are generally better equipped with the necessary data than the recipient country ( Kann, 1999 ). To describe an arrangement as a partnership, is in the least an intolerable mockery.

In other words, accountability and transparency in the donor jargons means different things when applied to recipient countries. They do not mean that recipient governments are accountable to their people for the



aid they receive, or loans they take which these same people will have to pay anyway. A lot is talked about furthering democracy in Africa by the donor community, but donor agencies led by the World Bank/IMF treat African countries in the most undemocratic manner. How will such countries practise democratic behaviour they have not witnessed in practice? It is this dichotomy between rhetoric and reality that has in recent years began to put the Bank under critical scrutiny as reflected in increased organised protests against its meetings in many parts of the world.

### **Educational Policy Formulation and Institutional Capacity**

By accepting the World/IMF structural adjustment policies, developing countries surrendered their independence to formulate their own policies for development. In many African countries under SAPs arrangements, the World Bank has appointed its own management staff in key ministries and departments of government under the pretext of revitalisation. These include finance, the treasury, planning and others. If this is not a form of colonisation, then what is it? In many cases, such staff do not only provide advice on matters of policy, but go to the extent of exerting pressure on host countries to strictly adhere to the Bank's conditions. In Kenya for example, in addition to the Bank's own staff in the various ministries and departments, the Bank recommended, the appointment of some key persons to a number of ministries as permanent secretaries, to steer the so-called economic recovery. They are generally known as the 'dream team' and are paid a salary which is ten times higher than that of other permanent secretaries. The team has been in government for a period of about two years, but there are no indications of a turn in the country's economy, little wonder the public cynicism about their continued 'dreaming.'

In Sub-Saharan Africa, in education as well as other sectors the World Bank is the most powerful institution that decides and formulates educational policies, but strongly backed by bilateral agencies ( Brock-Utne, 2000 ). Some studies which have recently documented policy trends in the education sector, have found a considerable degree of agreement between the national documents and the donor agenda as presented in World Bank publications and in the Jomtien Education for All conference ( Takala, 1998 ).

The close relationship between World Bank as well as bilateral influence with national policies is demonstrated by a recent study on educational policy formulation in Tanzania. It is pointed out that the formulation of the social sector policy has been heavily influenced by the World Bank and builds on the Tanzania Social Sector Review by the Bank. While the *Primary Education, Master Plan* and the *Education and Training Policy*, although bearing a clear imprint of the United Republic of Tanzania, were heavily influenced by DANIDA ( Buchert, 1999 ). The most tantalising revelation, however, is how in meetings convened by the Tanzania Government to discuss its economic policy, *Policy Framework Paper*, arrived at the last minute from the World Bank's headquarters in Washington D.C., printed on its stationery and written in a language which conveyed the impression that the policy to be embarked upon had already been chosen by the government. It left little doubt that it was a *fait accompli* and there was nothing really left for discussion ( Brock-Utne, 2000 ). This particular situation is by no means unique to the United Republic of Tanzania. Education Sector Papers, Master Plans, and many other documents which bear the imprint of African governments, but actually originate from the World Bank litter many offices on the African continent. Since such policies have been embraced at the highest levels of government, senior civil servants in the ministries are either resigned to letting things take their course or have to mimic what the World Bank and other donor agencies would like to hear for the security of their jobs.

The most common explanation for this state of affairs is that recipient countries, especially those in Africa, do not have the capacity to provide qualified personnel who can participate or carry out the sector analysis. A substantial number of technical assistance staff are therefore recruited as consultants to perform this function ( Kann, 1999). Consequently, most of the plans and reports on African education have been prepared by external consultants. It is estimated that between 1990 and 1994 well over 350 sector funded studies by the World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF were undertaken by expatriate led teams with only minimal representation or inclusion of local researchers who never served as senior consultants or document authors ( Brock-Utne, 2000). Such sector studies in Africa, as it is rightly asserted seem to have been written more to be accountable to parliamentarians and decision makers of Europe and North America rather than Africa ( Habte, 1999 ).

In the general perceptions of the donor community and researchers from the North, institutional capacity in the South to develop sound projects, assess and evaluate as well as disseminate them is quite weak. The following assertions, among others, perhaps succinctly capture the nature of the argument:

- In many of the poorer countries of the world, the local capacity confidently to analyse their own educational priorities, and to pursue coherent programmes of research is not stronger than it was in the 1970s.
- This local analytical capacity is inseparable from the existence of strong research centres based in universities ( or in private institutions ) and from strong education planning cells in central and local government. There is unfortunately little evidence for many of the poorer countries of the world that essential skills for the evaluation and management of increasingly complex education systems is in place. Indeed for many countries it could be maintained that with instability at the national level, and low morale and flight of talent in many centres of higher education, this critical capacity is actually less apparent now than before. Very few developing countries have the critical mass of expertise available to pursue the range of research tasks necessary in education ( King, 1991 ).

At the beginning of this paper, it was pointed out that human resource development was the main focus of educational strategies in many African countries at the achievement of independence in the 1960s. It was also made clear that skills development in tertiary institutions has considerably increased over the time. The key question therefore is, how come at the turn of the century, we are raising similar, if not identical issues and worries on capacity development, our main area of concentration, as we did in the 1960s ( Habte,1999 ). There must be something terribly wrong with Africa's human resource development, or there is a conspiracy somewhere!

It is true that there has been a state of instability in capacity building in some African countries coupled with serious economic recession and structural adjustment problems that have undermined some support to institutions of higher learning. But, these problems do not fully explain poor participation by African expertise in policy formulation, wherever it exists. It is common knowledge that thousands of African professionals from the civil service, technical institutions and institutions of higher learning have been retired or dismissed, quite often using the World Bank/IMF structural adjustments, and in some cases voluntarily left their institutions due to the same conditionalities ( Habte, 1999 ).

What is also evident from some of the available studies is that most African countries are rarely given the opportunity to recruit their own technical assistance staff or choose between candidates. As it has been pointed out already, a recent World Bank study indicates that technical assistance, particularly, in terms of personnel, represents between one-quarter and one third of all external economic assistance to African countries, and absorbs a large chunk of the resources available for development ( World Bank, 1996 ) and this figure is much higher than earlier estimates on the subject. The recruitment of expatriate staff in technical assistance, apart from the well known fact that a club/syndicate of consultants exists in most donor agency offices, is captured by the following:

...it has become almost standard to invite universities and other institutions or private companies to bid for projects even in the field of education. These projects often include technical-assistance staff who are difficult to negotiate. The group of staff comes as a package. The recipient country can accept or reject the whole package, but not replace anyone of the proposed members...

A major concern is the 'fly in, fly out' consultants. They have little time and/or little interest in developing local capacity in research and general analysis. Their Terms of Reference rarely include capacity-building. This ensures that they will continue to have contracts to do these kinds of jobs, paid for by international funding and technical assistance agencies ( Kann, 1999).

## Conclusion

This paper attempted to trace African development with a particular focus on relations with the North since the 1960s. It showed how strategies of the era optimism failed to produce the desired results despite the massive investment in human resource development. The economic crisis of the mid-1970s, which was basically a crisis in the economies of the North was felt in the South with its weak and dependent economies whose result was the introduction of the structural adjustment programmes. Such programmes have adversely affected the provision of essential social services, among them education, in which many of the African countries have witnessed a reversal of the achievements made in the 1960s and 1970s.

With the pressure of the economic crisis, countries of the South through UN agencies demanded partnership in economic relations with the North through an introduction of the New Economic Order. UNESCO which undertook to champion this demand in educational funding was decisively marginalised by the North in preference for organisations in which Third World countries were not represented. It is in this context that the World Bank took the centre stage in spearheading the neo-liberal educational discourse in

technical assistance that has deepened the educational crisis now prevailing in most African countries with low enrolments and high dropout rates.

Since the Jomtien conference on Education for All of 1990, with a further deepening educational crisis in the South, there has been an increased emphasis by technical assistance agencies, on the importance of stakeholder involvement in the development of new policies and programmes. Through a number of examples in African education, the paper tries to demonstrate the fact that despite this rhetoric nothing much has changed in the development arena. The envisaged partnership is far from being realised. Considering the massive economic benefits that countries of the North derive in the present state of relations with Africa, no amount of well-intentioned dialogue can change the asymmetric relationship of power.

In this regard there is need for African countries to urgently review their long economic dependence on the North. Any meaningful partnership and dialogue should first start among themselves, drawing up their immediate economic and educational needs and priorities. They should resist the temptation of being divided into 'good and bad countries,' a relationship that has been characteristic since the cold war era and is being perpetuated through the extent to which particular countries are able to meet the demands of the structural adjustment programmes. Knowledge and skills acquired in schools and universities should be made to relate to the African countries immediate needs and problems and not those of industrialised countries of the North.

To push the continent forward, there is also a very major internal problem that the African leadership needs to address and do so rather urgently, namely, prudent management of their resources. It is a very serious matter of regret which amounts to national calamities in which many kleptocratic African leaders misappropriate national resources for their benefit and that of close associates. It is now estimated that a majority of the current crop of leaders have billions of dollars in foreign accounts which amount to the size of their countries' external debt ( Adekele, 1997 ). Perhaps, the most honourable thing the World Bank could do for Africa is to compel these leaders to return this money to their countries and enforce its accountable and transparent use in the development of their respective countries before they are entitled to new loans.

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