Empowering out of school youth through non-formal education in Kenya

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Non-formal education, defined as any organized educational activity outside the established formal system whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity that is intended to serve identifiable learning clienteles and learning objective is of great importance to society. It emerged out of the feeling that formal systems were failing in some aspects like irrelevant curriculum and other socio-economic problems. Owing to the dynamics of education in society today and the need to develop new approaches to non-formal education within the context of life long learning, development of non-formal education programmes for the out of school youth in Kenya is necessary. This paper discusses the need for a renewed approach to non-formal education for out of school youth. In the paper the definition and development of non-formal education is discussed highlighting the challenges and gaps in its development in Kenya. The problems and challenges facing the Kenyan out of school youth are highlighted. Recommendations are made on how best to design and implement non-formal education programmes to benefit a wider clientele of the out of school youth and adults.

Key words: non-formal education, formal education, empowerment, youth, curriculum,

INTRODUCTION

Out of the feeling that formal education was failing because of some aspects like unsuitable and irrelevant curriculum, disparity in educational growth and economic growth, unemployment and other socio-economic problems, non-formal education emerged (Sheffield and Diejomaoh, 1974; Bishop, 1985; Roger, 2004; Smith, 2005).

Today, there is a renewed interest and thinking in non-formal education in the world. This is conceived from the feeling that formal educational systems alone can not respond to the challenges of modern society. Some of the challenges include: Democratization, Globalization, Decentralization of systems of governments, Development, Progress, new knowledge, intelligence and wisdom and HIV/AIDS among others. Due to these challenges, the council of Europe in the year 2000 recommended that non-formal education be recognized as a de facto partner in the life long learning process and make it accessible to all (Rongers, 2004).

Definition and development

From 1968 when Coombs first defined non-formal education until 1986, non-formal education was seen as the panacea for all the ills of education in the world. Many educationists saw non-formal educations as the ‘ideal’ form of education. Others however saw it as a sub-system of education considerably inferior to formal schooling.

As society kept on changing, it was realized that to adapt to change, the change need not necessarily come from formal schooling but also it could come from the wider society and other sectors within the society. Since then non-formal education gained recognition and economists and planners in the World Bank began to make a distinction between informal, non-formal and formal education (Fordham, 1993).

There is no clear-cut definition of non-formal education and indeed some educational activities stride formal and non-formal modes of delivery. It is very diverse in its substantive and pedagogical dimensions, its organizational arrangements and locations. Coombs and Ahmed (1974) define non-formal education as an organized systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular sub-groups in the population.
adults as well as children. According to Smith (2005), non-formal education is any organized educational activity outside the established formal system, whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity, that is intended to serve identifiable learning clients and objectives.

With the imprecise definition of non-formal education, every country interpreted non-formal education in its own way. To some it meant adult literacy classes, to other schooling provided by NGOs and CBOs, training and educational activities of other ministries other than the main stream Ministry of Education. According to the above definitions, non-formal education embraces programs designed both for the broader national goals and individual learners’ development objectives as well as academic ones. According to (Fordham, 1993) non-formal education has the following characteristics: its purpose is short term and specific, with short cycle timing. Its content is output centered and practical with community based or environment based delivery systems which are flexible. Its control system is self governing, democratic and contextual.

In Kenya, it is estimated that 1.7 million children and youth for various socio-economic reasons have been unable to access education through formal delivery channels (Republic of Kenya 2005). This problem is particularly acute in poverty stricken informal urban settlements and arid and semi arid areas in the rural districts. The most affected persons include the vulnerable groups like child workers, orphans, nomadic children, street children/youth, and adolescent parents. This is the reason why it has been acknowledged that non-formal education is not a substitute for formal education but rather it is meant to compliment formal education (Republic of Kenya, 2004).

According to Rogers (2004) from 1980s to date, the debate and articulation of non-formal education declined. This was so partly because education in the 1980s was generally affected by economic recession and growing debt burdens (Siaciwena, 2000). In Kenya, the same was experienced. The enthusiasm of adult literacy classes of the 1970s and extension education and other forms of non-formal education declined. In 1998 however a policy document to guide non-formal education was developed by the ministry of education science and technology. The guidelines provided for the basis for coordinated government outreach to the children and youth outside the formal school system bringing together key players. The ministry of education science and technology and the department of adult education were to play the coordinating role. Currently the policy guidelines are being revised (Republic of Kenya, 2005).

The renewed strength to revitalize non-formal education in Kenya came with the education for all debate which began prior to the Jomtien conference in 1990. This conference still forms much educational policy and planning in developing countries. Article 5 of the world declaration on education for all, which calls for broadening the means and scope of basic education, states: “The diversity, complexity and changing nature of basic learning needs of children, youth and adult necessitates broadening and constantly refining the scope of basic education” (Inter-Agency Commission, WCEFA, 1990)

Further, Kenya’s commitment to the Dakar Declaration of Education for all (2000) and the Millennium Development Goals along with the Kenya children Act (2001) attest to the commitment to achieving education for all by the year 2015.

The Dakar forum acknowledges that education for all can not be achieved through formal education delivery channels alone, rather other approaches like informal and non-formal education should be embraced. Since then, non-formal education in Kenya tends to subscribe to addressing children’s alternative schooling. It is concentrated on those younger persons who were too old to go to school. It is common to find large programmes of schooling for school aged children run under the title of non-formal education. Non-formal education should not
target such children alone but a variety of groups as follows:

1. School aged children not reached by the formal school system due to their involvement in child labour, armed conflict, juvenile delinquency, child abuse, neglect and effects of HIV and AIDS pandemic.
2. Children and youth who desire to have a second chance in education to learn as they work or learn through work.
3. Children, youth and adults who wish to acquire literacy, vocational and technical skills on part time or full-time basis.

Currently the proportion of target persons vis-à-vis the actual persons attending non-formal education is not balanced. The non-formal centers and schools mostly cater for children, youth and adults who require basic literacy skills. There is need to target those youth and adults who may no require basic literacy skills but also those who require vocational and technical skills.

Table 1 indicates the proportions of persons attending non-formal education per province per level of education. In the table those attending primary education are the majority. The other levels have few students. Though the data in the table reflects the estimates by the government (Republic of Kenya, 2005), where the proportion of children attending non-formal schooling at primary level is higher than the other levels, there is need to popularize non-formal schooling at the higher levels to attract the many out of school youth and adults who may not have been accounted for due to various reasons. For example there are some youth and adults who do not wish to be known to be attending school because they have advanced in age yet they are illiterate.

Table 2 summarizes enrolment by curriculum. In the table the enrolment at primary level is very high (80.37%) leaving only about 20% to be shared by secondary, adult education, basic literacy and technical education. Thus non-formal education is very active at primary school level. There is need to popularize non-formal education at the higher levels to take care of the many primary school graduates who may not be able to attend formal secondary schools and attract the many out of school youth and adults who are shy to be seen to be attending school at advanced ages.

When the youth and adult are mostly left out in non-formal education, it will be difficult to achieve the basic aims of education of helping economic growth and promoting active citizenship (Aspin et al., 2001; Field and Leicerfer, 2000) in Rogers (2004). Further, it will be difficult to achieve some of the objectives of non-formal education in Kenya, such as:

1. To acquire suitable basic foundation for the world of work in the context of economic and human resource needs of the nation.
2. To develop awareness and appreciation of the role of technology in national development (Republic of Kenya 2004).

**Target group**

Currently, modern trends in non-formal education view it in a wider sense than the non-formal schools for children. The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) subscribes to this view (Rogers, 2004). The group has identified all parts of the non-formal world of: Agriculture, health, extension, women programmes, income-generation training, environmental enhancement activities among others. The association seeks to integrate these activities into non-formal education system and have them co-opted by the government to help aid development within a country.

Within this paradigm non-formal education should seek to empower the out of school youth in Kenya especially among the rural and urban poor and enable them improve their personal, social and work life so as to make practical changes in their daily life and personal development. This is because the youth form a substantive majority of the Kenyan population. Secondly, the wastage rate in the school system is high. For instance the internal efficiency of the education system over the last one decade shows that the cumulative drop out rate in the primary sub-sector has been as high as 37% with repetition rate averaging 14% between standards 1 - 7. The survival rate at primary school level has also been low at about 48%. Though at secondary school level the completion rate has been estimated at 84%, the overall performance remains low considering the gross enrollment rate of 22% and the fact that up to 2.8 million children aged between 14 and 17 years who should be in school are not enrolled (Census report 1999).

Further, due to limited space in technical industrial and vocational institutes, only a small proportion of eligible primary school graduates are absorbed in the technical industrial and vocational institutions as they face competition from secondary school graduates and those who drop out of the secondary school cycle. This problem has been worsened by the collapse of many youth polytechnics which flourished in the 1970s and 1980s. The poly-

### Table 2. Enrolment by curriculum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum followed</th>
<th>Enrolment</th>
<th>Enrolment (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>83283</td>
<td>80.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>6706</td>
<td>6.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult education</td>
<td>3649</td>
<td>3.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic literacy</td>
<td>7079</td>
<td>6.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>2911</td>
<td>2.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total enrolment</td>
<td>103628</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

technics used to absorb a good number of the primary school graduates who were not able to access secondary education due to various reasons such as; poverty, unavailability of secondary school places and low grades in the final primary school examinations.

Within the modern thinking about non-formal education internationally, therefore, there is need to give an alternative form of education to the out of school youth who are faced with many challenges such as:

1. Lack of complete basic education.
2. Unemployment.
3. Dependence on their parents and relatives.
4. Lacks of meaningful skills to enable them get employed 5.or self-employed.
6. Vulnerability to HIV and AIDS.
7. Poverty.
8. Insecurity.
11. Bad governance.
12. Environmental degradation.
15. Negative attitudes towards education.

Non-formal education, which has the capacity to adapt to demand and to shape innovations from the communities provides the solutions to some of the above challenges. Skills, knowledge and attitudes in agriculture, basic health, gender issues, entrepreneurship, environmental management, disaster management among others should be provided to the out of school youth and adults.

Non-formal education policy

The Ministry of Education in Kenya plans to put an institutional framework and systems in place to facilitate mainstreaming of quality complementary formal education in non-formal schools and non-formal education by;

1. Developing and implementing non-formal curriculum and the proposed alternative non-science curriculum for secondary schools.
2. Approving and disseminating the national non-formal education guidelines.
3. Strengthening the capacity of the ministry of education for coordination, monitoring, evaluation, and assessment of non-formal schools and centers.
4. Mainstreaming support, including free primary education, teachers, teacher training, curriculum development, supervision and assessment, quality assurance and standards.
5. Updating and expanding the national non-formal schools and centers.
6. Database and linking it with the mainstream educational management information system (Republic of Kenya, 2005)

These are good ideas which are welcome and highly supported. However, owing to the dynamics of education in society, there is need to embrace the discourse of life long learning. Life long learning sees learning as taking place not simply in schools and colleges but through out the whole life in many different locations and times (Rogers, 2004). For the out of school youth, when the formal school gate is locked, the non-formal schooling gate should be opened immediately irrespective of the level where one has left formal schooling. Non-formal education providers are therefore challenged to develop a wide range of educational programmes to cater for the varied educational needs and interests of the out of school youth. When developing the programmes it is important to take care of the interests of the learners. The curriculum planning and organization should preferably be undertaken by actively involving the learners themselves. The learning groups for instance can be allowed to determine the time and location of meetings, the dates of holidays as the providing agency is left to determine the curriculum and teaching, learning mate-rials, the length of the learning programmes, the form and the timing of the evaluation process.

According to Hoppers (2005) and Rogers (2004) the flexibility with which the programmes is developed and managed will largely depend on the nature of the group. The education providers should therefore understand group dynamics and organizational theory. Such knowledge should also guide the education providers to increase enrolment of the out of school youth in non-formal education programmes.

Mobilization of out of school youth

Renewed efforts in popularizing the non-formal programmes should be made. This is because the out of school youth have not been sensitized on the need for non-formal education. Most of the youth have developed negative attitudes towards non-formal education. Social psychologists best explain this. Kahneman and Miller (1986), cited Abadzi (2004) relate the norm theory that people are accustomed to the presence of certain factors in their lives which they regard as normal. Such may include illiteracy, poverty among others among the out of school youth. This familiarity may have contributed to their diminished desire to improve their conditions in life through education. For example, some of the youth may not enroll in classes because they believe that they are too old to learn. In other cases specific beliefs about undesirable behavior about literate people may prevent some youth from enrolling in adult education classes.

To mobilize the youth to join the programmes, therefore, deliberate moves should be made to change the attitudes and beliefs of such youth. Where for example some youth, out of poverty, have learnt that they can do nothing to improve their lives, it is important to ameliorate by raising the consciousness of the poor regarding their
predicaments and by teaching them that they are able and capable of learning.

Equally, out of school youth can be mobilized to participate in non-formal schooling by proving the utility of the education acquired. According to Abadzi (2004), the dictum of cognitive psychology has that, unless something makes sense to a learner, it will not be remembered or used when the need arises. The youth can be shown how the acquisition of new knowledge, skills and attitudes can be used to solve their problems in life.

It is also important to reinforce the changed attitudes and beliefs of the youth who may join non-formal schooling. Rewards, recognition budge and other incentives may be used to encourage youth to be more active and encourage others to join.

Efforts to sustain the youth in the programmes should include: preparation of good and attractive learning materials. The learners should be encouraged to come up with their own out of school activities. This will motivate them to own the activities and participate as they will feel the activities are of benefit to them. To motivate the learners it will also be prudent to treat them as adults, that is, treat them with respect rather than treating them like children or ignorant poor.

Conclusion

From the foregoing characteristic dynamic development and potential of non-formal education in society and in Kenya, there is need for renewed efforts in provision of non-formal education for out of school youth and adults in Kenya. Non-formal education is worthy looking at. It needs to be protected, promoted and nurtured in its diversity of forms and responses. This will propel the educational needs in Kenya to enable the country achieve the education for all goal by the year 2015.

REFERENCE

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