

# WESTERN TYPE EDUCATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICA

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## Summary

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Development is defined as man's continuous attempts to create a congenial environment for his survival; African development is a process whereby Africans discuss and define their needs, and plan and work together to satisfy them. The function of education is to make people understand this and channel their efforts thereby.

The two systems of education operating in Africa are compared: indigenous and western type.

Western type education introduced by colonialism and missionaries imposed western values on the African. It has had the effect of estranging him from himself and other Africans, and disarming him for the tasks necessary for real development.

The report describes a vicious circle in which Africans perpetuate their own under-development, and points out the need for a dynamic educational system serving national interests, African identity and development.

## Report

### Western-Type Education and the Development of Africa

In modern categorisation, Africa, apart from South Africa, is labelled "developing", "underdeveloped", "backward", etc. European and African countries have been spending men and money to develop Africa. Yet, Africa has remained underdeveloped. The purpose of the study<sup>1</sup> upon which this article is based was to account for the perennial backwardness of Africa. Today, there is so much talk about development that one needs to be certain of the type of development referred to here.

As it concerns human society, development is man's continuous attempt to create a congenial environment for his survival. It involves the utilization, to the fullest extent, of all the material and human resources of any society with the result that there is steady and significant improvement

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1. This article is based on "Educational Values and African Development", a Ph.D. thesis (London, 1971) by Uga Onwuka.

in the standards of living of the members of the community. The purpose of development is the betterment of man. African development, then, is a process whereby Africans discuss and define their needs and, depending upon their ability and potentialities, plan and work together to satisfy them. This kind of development has no boundaries separating economic from social or political development. They are all component parts of man's struggle for survival.

Social, economic and political development is intimately connected with education which is the acquisition and utilization of knowledge for a complete living. It is a process by which the community<sup>1</sup> seeks to open its life to all the individuals within it and enable them to play their part in it. Real education encourages the spirit of adventure and man's natural curiosity which enables him to exploit his abilities to the full. As development hardly takes place where there is a multiplicity of subnational loyalties and where people do not understand their purpose in life, it is the place of education to make people understand it and to channel their efforts towards it.

Real education nurtures and promotes citizenship, the spirit of common belonging and common destiny. It produces the manpower which is the primary factor of development. Such an education cannot be cheap. Yet, unless a community is developed, it cannot afford to provide the type of education that in turn generates real development.<sup>2</sup> The inter-relationship of education and development helps us to draw two conclusions from the statement that "colonialism put a break on development"<sup>3</sup> in colonial territories of which Africa is part. First, there had been some development in Africa before the arrival of Europeans there. Secondly, that development was the product of some form of education. This demolishes the notion often entertained by some people that it was Europeans who brought education to Africa. Indeed, Africans had their own indigenous educational system before the introduction of western-type education.

Indigenous African societies had both formal and informal ways of imparting knowledge and skills to their young and succeeding generations. It was a natural form of education which took place in real and concrete situations. Its content was relevant to life. In many respects it had parallels with western-type education. But it had its shortcomings. The absence of literacy meant that no branch of learning could be pursued in great details. The multiplicity of localized languages rendered many ideas immutable. Nevertheless, Africans prepared their succeeding generations to take their place and play well their part in the community. In the field of human qualities, which are vital for development, indigenous African education scored a considerable measure of success. Even then, its methods of inculcating manliness were brutal.<sup>4</sup> But considerations of the survival of each community as a whole

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1. "The modern nation is not a community if the people lack any enduring singleness of purpose, or if they lack the necessary spirit and power to integrate their endeavours for a common weal". [See F. Watts, *Education for Self-Realization and Social Service*, (London, 1920), p.5.
  2. See Uga Onwuka, "Educational Values and African Development", unpublished Ph.D. (London, 1971) thesis, p.151.
  3. A. Curle, *Educational Strategy for Developing Societies*, (London, 1963), p.46.
  4. Uga Onwuka, *op.cit.*, p.199.

justified every measure adopted to eliminate what, by their norm, was unacceptable. Indigenous political units were too small to be able to secure the type of development that modern societies desire and to resist the intrusion of the western type. Technologically, too, it was very limited. Hence, when Europeans arrived they found nothing that they could refer to as education in existence in Africa. They introduced their type of education comprising primary, secondary and a variety of higher education.

In spite of this, the nature of western-type education in African has not, so far, sufficiently equipped the African to tackle and solve his problems. Africa, even those parts that have had western-type education for well over a century, still heavily rely on Europe and America for their educational programmes and general development. The explanation often given by many a critic is that the education was too religious, too bookish, too literacy and principally concerned with the acquisition of undigested facts for examination purposes.<sup>1</sup> Admittedly, the content of the education was unrelated to the Africans' needs and experiences. It did not encourage initiative, original thinking, experimentation and creativity. In general, it conditioned its recipients to accept thoughts thought out for them. To question certain statements was a sign of insubordination.

These criticisms were not peculiar to western-type education in Africa. Education in Britain, for instance, once came under similar heavy fire. But developments in other directions as well as the effective activities of reformers who understood what they were doing for their country and people changed the situation in Britain.

Those who introduced western-type education in Africa taught what they were used to. The knowledge of western ways and ideas they taught brought Africans and Africa into the stream of world affairs. Examinations are necessary in every aspect of life; but the nature and function of examinations may make a lot of difference in people's outlook. Western-type education in Africa was not really literacy. It would have been in Africa's interest if it were so, for literary studies provide a means of inculcating humanism, an aspect of learning and dealing with the world of people and human interests in general.<sup>2</sup> That much of the educational work in Africa is in the hands of Christian missions does not ipso facto qualify it as religious. In fact, a good deal of what goes on even in Christian institutions is irreligious.

Furthermore, it is incorrect to assert that education in Africa had no provision for industrial, technical or scientific training or studies. Many missionary institutions included practical and industrial training in their educational programme. Science subjects were found even in primary schools. But lack of funds, equipment and capable teachers necessitated the adoption of teaching methods which rendered science and technical subjects as "literary" as subjects definitely known as such. The fault, therefore, lies not so much in the content but in the methods of teaching, the organisation and in the expectations of both the recipients and the propagators. Additionally,

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1. See Uga Onwuka, "Educational Values and African Development", unpublished Ph.D. (London, 1971) thesis, p.308.

2. *Ibid.*, p.275. See also A.V. Murray, *The School In the Bush*, (London, 1929), p.195.

most of the early propagators of western-type education in Africa were not professionally trained educators. They had narrow and limited views of the meaning and purpose of education.

British educational policy in the colonies was intimately related to the central purpose of her colonial interests. These interests varied from when, in order to clear her conscience for her part in the inhuman traffic, Britain was mainly concerned with the abolition of the slave trade, repatriating and resettling of the ex-slaves to when the British Government assumed the role of trustees and protectors of their colonial possessions. The implications of this role were not clear to all those on the developmental stage. However, Britain pledged herself to guide colonial peoples along the path to self-government within the framework of the British Empire or Commonwealth. She also undertook to build up their social and economic institutions and to develop their natural resources.<sup>1</sup> These demanded the education of the people in order to rouse their interests in matters affecting their general development. It was hoped that the education provided would enable Africans to choose and develop those of their indigenous institutions and practices worth preserving instead of blindly imitating Europeans. Hence, it was stated that British educational policy in Africa should be adapted to the mentality, aptitude or aspirations of the various peoples.<sup>2</sup> These were the officially stated aims of the British Government. All the European groups in Africa did not wholeheartedly accept them; hence, they did not co-operate in working toward achieving them.

Western-type education in Africa was introduced by Christian missionaries whose primary aim was proselytization. To them Africa was in danger of eternal damnation. Therefore, they desired to save the soul of Africa. It was essential that Africans should be able to read the Bible. Hence, they taught reading. European nations were interested in economic expansion. They needed sources of raw materials for their growing industries as well as markets for their manufactured goods. Representatives of commercial interests and missionaries needed the protection of their home governments who necessarily had local representatives. These required African assistants in their colonial administration. The education provided had to include the 3 R's. Generally, Europeans sought to "civilize" Africa. The meaning attached to "civilization" varied according as the interest-groups saw it. Some who identified Christianity with western civilization saw their educational aim as that of fitting the African to be "a more useful person to the European"<sup>3</sup>. Education should make the African more desirous of European products and services. To others the educational aim was to enable the African to improve his standards of living and to develop his "personality on all sides and to the fullest extent to which it is capable"<sup>4</sup>. Some Europeans wanted Africans to remain mere labourers on their land and in their mines.

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1. Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, Speech by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Colonel Rt. Hon. Oliver Frederick George Stanley, 13th July, 1943, col. 48.
  2. Cmd. 2374, Education Policy in British Tropical Africa, H.M.S.O., (London, 1925, reprint 1939), p.4.
  3. E.W. Smith, The Golden Stool, (London, 1930), p.294.
  4. Ibid., p.295.

These were opposed to any form of education that would actually enable Africans to be masters of their own affairs in their land. But how did Africans themselves embrace western-type education?

Initially this new type of education was unpopular in Africa. For a long time it did not spread beyond the inhabitants of coastal areas and the communities of emancipated African slaves. In its early days some parents demanded payment for letting their children go to school.<sup>1</sup> In time, however, the initial apathy and suspicion that greeted the introduction of western-type education were dispelled by a number of attractions. It became a passport to employment in the modern sector. This offered material benefits not only to the individual recipients but also to their parents, families and dependants. Thus, the new type of education came to be seen as a direct investment. It provided a means of escape from the toilsome uneconomic subsistence agriculture and also a means of enhancing personal and group status. For a variety of reasons individuals, parents and local communities came to realize the importance of western-type education. On gaining independence African countries readily accepted all forms of western-type education as an indispensable factor of their expected development.

Again, these expectations are not peculiar to Africa. Individuals in other parts of the world are interested in securing employment in order to earn money. Likewise, the possibilities of getting into comfortable and well-paid positions induce many young people to pursue a variety of higher education. Parents interested in their children's future desire for them such education that would make substantial difference to their future.<sup>2</sup> All the advanced countries of the world had long realized that a high level of national productivity can only be sustained by brains and skill.<sup>3</sup> To this end their institutions of learning have national responsibilities to fulfil. For instance, they aim at raising healthy and worthy citizens. Nevertheless, attractions of education vary from time to time, place to place and group to group. While the attractions of education to Africans are common in other parts of the world the fact remains that education in Africa has not done what it did in those parts of the world that introduced it to Africa. Unquestionably, Africa still remains underdeveloped. To account for this continued underdevelopment, one must consider some peculiar attitudes to, and practices of, western-type education in Africa.

The nature of western-type education in Africa has been such that estranged Africans from their environment. The new education did not foster self-respect and self-confidence. Unintentionally, the new type of education

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1. See R. Laws, "The Co-ordination of Technical and Literary Training in the Education of Natives", Report of the Native Education Conference, Nyasaland Protectorate, (Government Printer, Zomba, 1927), p.20. See also J.F.A. Ajayi, "The Development of Secondary Grammar School Education in Nigeria", Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, Vol.2, No.4, December, 1963, p.521.
  2. J.E. Floud, ed., Social Class and Educational Opportunity, (London, 1965), p.76.
  3. A.H. Halsey, J. Floud, and C.A. Anderson, Education, Economy and Society, (New York, 1961), p.24.

encouraged autophobia.<sup>1</sup> It made Africans turn their backs, as it were, to things African: their own culture, their indigenous system of education and their own people. It encouraged slavish imitation, ostentation and excessive reliance on others. What went on in the name of education was not related to the needs, problems and experiences of the people. The system did not nurture true citizenship. It produced a situation in which people lay more emphasis on material gains than on service. Generally, it has not sufficiently roused Africans to become interested in matters affecting their development.

At this stage it is possible to state two primary obstacles to real development in Africa. One is the absence of any unity of purpose amongst those involved in the task. The majority of the early educationalists in Africa had no definite conception of the meaning and function of education. The European groups, missionaries, administrators and commercial representatives of European investors often had conflicting objectives. Where their interests coincided, they were opposed to those of Africans who, on their part, had varying personal and sectional interests. Indeed, "most Europeans are interested in the African, not for his sake but for their own ..."<sup>2</sup>

The other is that the developmental stage is a scene of contradictions. Rather than emphasizing common bonds uniting different African peoples grouped into any one colonial possession, the educational system emphasized their differences. Thus, in place of unity and co-operation, one finds disharmony and mutual conflict. Official statements indicate that the education provided should enable Africans to stand on their feet and manage their own affairs. Yet, very few officials seriously entertained the possibility of Africans relying upon their own resources to satisfy their needs and solve their problems in their own ways. There are suggestions that Africans should, in the light of their experiences through exposure to the practices in other parts of the world, devise their educational system. The system produces people who dismiss such an idea as a means of fobbing Africans off with something inferior and denying them the opportunity of "rubbing shoulders" with the outside world. In public African politicians talk of "Africanisation". In private and in practice they express their preference for external services giving rise to a phenomenon termed "intellectual centrifugalism".<sup>3</sup> Africa yearns for educated people to serve and save Africa; yet the system turns out thousands of literate but uneducated people.

Real development demands occasional stock-taking by which people appraise the part they play. There is abundant evidence of self-criticism on the part of Europeans. This essential aspect of development is lacking on the part of the Africans. Asked who is responsible for the continued backwardness of Africa, the African readily blames it on the colonial masters. Undoubtedly, the colonial masters have their share of the blame. Although it

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1. Autophobia is a psychological complex of self-dislike or self-hatred. The African exemplifies this by slavish eulogy and admiration of foreign people and their ways, and the disparagement of people of his kind and his indigenous ways of life.
  2. D. Westermann, The African Today and Tomorrow, (London, 1949), p.3.
  3. Intellectual centrifugalism, like brain drain, results in loss of manpower. It is a situation in which the attitudes of privileged people force educated and a variety of qualified indigenous persons out.

has been stated that "Africa will be what Europe and America make of it",<sup>1</sup> they have overtly indicated that the African's salvation rests with him. The part Europeans have played, and still continue to play, serve as an object lesson that man, ultimately, is responsible for his own survival. Africa is abundantly rich in material and men capable of being utilized in creating a congenial environment for his happiness. By their unwillingness and unpreparedness to undertake the task necessary for real development Africans perpetuate their underdevelopment. They often do not know that education and development are not importable commodities. However, the African is not naturally indolent. He merely appears to be so when he does not identify himself with what he does and what goes on around him.

The African needs a dynamic educational system that will foster self-realization, self-confidence and promote co-operation and productivity. It should be a system in which all educational institutions positively serve national interests and thus offer the African the identity that he now lacks. Rational regrouping will serve to make the African aware of the purpose of his existence and struggles. Without this awareness there can be no real development in Africa.

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1. D. Westermann, The African Today and Tomorrow, (London, 1949), p.1.