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## EDUCATION: A PATHWAY TO AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT (THE SCRUTINY)

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### ABSTRACT

There have been many theories given on how Africa should develop, regardless, this paper argues on why it is important to focus on education as one of the major tools to move Africa forward. It scrutinises the current education systems in African countries and how they are not tailored to equip the African child with the mindset and skills required for leadership. Instead of waiting for aid and relief, this paper champions the need for Africans to arise and offer solutions to Africa's problems. The challenge calls for stock-taking of the “state” of the different African countries so that the proper education system can be targeted to them. For Africa's education system to respond to the needs of poor children and to contribute to wealth creation in communities and society at large, it needs to take poverty into special consideration when planning education services.

### EDUCATION: A PATHWAY TO AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT

Africa is the world's second-largest and second-most-populous continent with 1.1 billion people as of 2013 accounting for about 15% of the world's human population. The continent hosts a large diversity of ethnicities, cultures and languages, with its history dating back to the late 19th century when European countries colonised most of its territories. Colonisation of Africa is still a topic of contest to this day as many, like Prof Walter Rodney, believe it to have destroyed Africa. In his book “How Europe Underdeveloped Africa”, Prof Rodney explains how colonialism enriched Europe and reduced Africa to abject poverty. He argues that the riches of Africa and her raw materials fuelled the economies of imperialist countries.

Decade after decade, politicians and international organisations are failing to reduce poverty in Africa, nor are they able to help generate growth or build basic infrastructure. Worse still between 1975 and 2000 Africa was the only place on earth where poverty intensified. It's only recently that the situation has improved (Causes of Poverty in Africa, 2011).

Like Dr Martin Luther, I have a dream. A dream for Africa, like World Bank's mission carved in stone at Washington headquarters, the dream is “an Africa free of poverty”. This is Africa with improved living standards and access to all basic needs. Africa where every person has enough food, water, shelter, health and education. Africa where all nations are democratic and citizens have a say in their own future. Africa that is independent of foreign aid, able to manage and handle herself without struggle. Africa that will not depend on imports but will rather be a net exporter of goods and services to other countries. Yes! Africa that has achieved gender equality with empowered women and girls, having its own resilient infrastructure, able to promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation.

Is it possible or just one of those dreams that a beggar would ride if wishes were horses? Let

us ask countries that have experienced economic growth like China. Once among the poorest countries in the world, today China's poverty rate has fallen from 85% to 15.9% accounting for nearly all the world's reduction in poverty. The answer I get from them is, it is possible.

But where do we begin? There have been so many theories on how Africa should develop, stretching from economics to technology. Regardless, I concur with Nelson Mandela's saying that *"education is the most powerful weapon which can be used to change the world"*. Developing structures and increasing Africa's GDP is necessary, but that is not where it begins. The Genesis is you and me, just as the United Nations states: *"people are the real wealth of any nation"*. Development according to United Nations is thus about expanding the choices people have to lead the lives they value. It is much more than economic growth, a very important means of enlarging people's choices.

Africa's vicious cycle of poverty must be broken and human development should be the focus. The best form of human development that cannot be ignored is education. No country has succeeded if it has not educated its people. Education is important in not only reducing poverty but as a key to wealth creation. Education is pivotal in breaking the vicious cycle and this is why it is ranked number 4 in the sustainable development goals: *"Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"*.

But why should education matter to Africa? The United Nations argues that education provides a direct path towards food security and out of poverty, citing that educated parents can earn an income, produce more food through agricultural initiatives, and feed their children. Children who complete primary education are more likely to achieve food security as adults and end the cycle of poverty in their generation. Education increases people's confidence, enabling them to become self-sufficient and better able to contribute to their communities.

Education is thus an area of focus worth brooding over by developing countries because it further allows for gender equity, a huge struggle in many African communities. According to the United Nations girls and women who achieve higher levels of education are greater contributors to the overall economic development and to children's welfare within communities. Achieving educational equity for girls – including educating communities on the value of girls' education – is an essential factor in sustainable poverty alleviation (CFC, 2016).

As we focus on education, what is required under this umbrella is the quality of education by all African communities. According to Motsoko Pheko, *"quality education is the key to creating, owning and controlling Africa's wealth and mentally decolonizing her people's captured minds. Africa needs a diverse education tailored to the economic needs of her people. That education must be free for the poor. No African child must be without education, merely because of his or her condition of poverty. African children must be taught the true history of Africa, not the colonial history of Africa's invaders that is full of perfidy to protect their colonial interests"* (Motsoko, 2012).

Instead of waiting for aid, and a way out from our dire situations from developed countries, I believe it is time Africa owned its educational systems and curriculums. Obama hits the nail on the head when he said *"Change will not come if we rely on another person or another time to come and make those changes. We have to be that change, we are those people we've been waiting for, and we can achieve those changes we have been longing for"* (Obama, 2016). This

somewhat motivational speech can inspire Africa to take action and try more than it has.

The challenge calls for stock-taking of the “state” of the different African countries so that the appropriate educational system can be targeted to its people. For the education system to respond to the needs of poor children and to contribute to wealth creation in communities and society at large, there is need to take poverty into special consideration in the planning of education services.

In their paper, Mark J. Epstein & Kristi Yuthas highlight how educational programs adopt traditional Western models of education, with an emphasis on math, science, language, and social studies. These programs allocate scarce resources to topics like Greek mythology, prime numbers, or tectonic plate movement—topics that may provide intellectual stimulation, but have little relevance in the lives of impoverished children (Mark J. Epstein & Kristi Yuthas, 2012).

Poor children have many disadvantages compared to their better-off counterparts. They are less healthy, their language skills less developed, and they are less well equipped- socially, emotionally and physically to undertake school programs. If their disadvantaged position and different day-to-day experience are not taken into account by school education, it is no wonder they do not benefit from the school system.

For too long, governments and organisations investing in education in developing countries have operated under the unquestioned assumption that improved test scores were clear evidence that their investments have paid off. But if, as we argue here, according to Mark J. Epstein & Kristi Yuthas mastery of the basic primary school curriculum is not the best means for improving life's chances and reducing poverty in developing countries, that model is broken. Investing in interventions that produce the highest test scores is no longer a valid approach for allocating scarce educational dollars or the scarce time available to develop young minds. It is time to seek the interventions that lead to the greatest social and economic impact for the poor.

It is a necessity for the educational systems in Africa to prioritise preparing all children, rich or poor, to achieve at school, and empower them by heightening their awareness of their rights and responsibilities. Show them their abilities and enhance their self-confidence to enable them to improve their lives.

Mark J. Epstein & Kristi Yuthas further propose that what students in impoverished regions need is not more academic skills, but rather life skills that enable them to improve their financial prospects and well-being. These include financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills; health maintenance and management skills; and administrative capabilities, such as teamwork, problem solving, and project management. It is vital that education systems heed the lessons of successful and less successful initiatives implemented by NGOs, private individuals, religious bodies and government themselves and translate these initiatives into policies, strategies and specific action that can be taken to scale. We will never eradicate poverty without quality education.

The continent will have the potential to develop with little or no help from the developed countries if it has a skilled human resource, well equipped with the ability and knowledge of harnessing Africa's natural and human resources. Africa is not a poor continent, it has great potential that requires the right skill to cultivate it. That cultivation lies in its people, therefore developing them in knowledge and skill should be of vital necessity.

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