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Education for self and national reliance: The challenge of Access, Equity and Quality in Private Higher Education institutions in Tanzania

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1. Introduction

Quality education is an important factor for a nation to make a leap forward in globalization. For sometimes in Tanzania, education has been a right of every citizen, but now is a commodity to be bought by those who can afford it. The introduction of Private Higher Education (PHE) institutions has brought back what the Arusha Declaration tried to avoid in Tanzania; the challenge of access, quality and equity. PHE institutions in the era of liberalization have made education a product for sale without care for access, equity and quality. Owing to the poverty of the general population, though PHE institutions in Tanzania outnumber public ones by far, they enrol only 21.5 % of the total number of students in a year.

This paper looks at the history of education in Tanzania from colonial time, independence time (with Arusha declaration as a landmark) which introduced education for self and national reliance to the present time of quasi-capitalism. The paper discusses the strengths and weaknesses of higher education during the time of Ujamaa vis a vis present time of mushrooming of PHE institutions focusing on access, quality and equity. The paper uses different documents, books, journal papers and conference papers to analyse higher education in Tanzania.

This paper is organised into five major sections: section one is introduction, section two is background to the general problem of education in Tanzania, section three is on the problem of access, equity and quality of education in PHE Institutions in Tanzania, section four is on the response to the challenges and last section is on recommendations and conclusion which include the pseudo-market oriented PAYE type of collecting loans from indebted individuals.

1.1. Background to the general problem of education system in Tanzania

Tanzanian education system as it is today has its origin in the colonial education which had its own aims and objectives, not necessarily with Tanzanians in mind. The education was given to some few who were to help



the colonizers in their quest to colonize and brainwash Tanzanians to worship the Western and despise their own culture and traditions. In a nutshell, the education alienated those who were given it and it named them civilized and educated. The Colonial education made those who acquired it to perceive themselves as superior to their own society members who did not have the same. They in fact knew more about colonial master's history, politics and geography than they knew about their own countries.

Soon after independence a U-turn on education system was deliberately attempted by Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere, the then president of Tanzania, in a landmark decision in 1967 in what was termed as Arusha Declaration. Already in 1963, Tanzania abolished all discrimination that hindered access to education by all. The government nationalized all schools and education was made free to everyone, streamlined the school curriculum and Kiswahili was adopted as a language of learning in primary schools (URT, 2000). Nyerere nationalized all the missionary schools in order to make sure that there is equal opportunity for everyone in accessing education. In 1967 education was then adopted as a way to build Ujamaa, a system that Nyerere believed would help Tanzania achieve sustainable development, thus Education for Self-Reliance (ESR) philosophy was adopted to guide the planning and practice of education. This being a parcel of Arusha declaration, fundamental reforms were done in the school curriculum (URT, 2000). Education was reformed so as to integrate theory with practical skills; it was to integrate those who acquired it into the societies where they come from. In 1972 the government diversified secondary education into vocational biases (commercial, agriculture, technical and home economics), while at the same time established post-primary vocational centres to be attached to each primary school (URT, 2000).

Nyerere devised a way for those who acquired education to give back to the society that helped them achieve it by sacrificing in terms of taxes. In his own words, Nyerere said that those who acquire education are like a man who has been given all the food available in a starving village in order that he might have strength to bring supplies back from a distant place. If he takes this food and does not bring help to his brothers and sisters, he is a traitor.



After worsening condition of poverty, unemployment and food shortage in the country in 1970s, Tanzania was forced to adopt the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). One of the major criticisms of SAP is the glaring marginalisation and negative impact on the majority of people who live under poverty line. With adoption of liberalization in 1980s, a number of private schools mushroomed from kindergarten, primary, secondary, colleges to universities. Education since then has been brought into the market for sell; a commodity with qualities; depending on funds you have, you can buy one of high quality or of poor quality (URT, 2000).

Since then, discussion on declining quality and access to education in the parliament is common. Tanzania with a population of 48 million by 2015 (NBS, 2015) has around half of it living in massive poverty. About 36 % of the population cannot afford their basic daily needs (URT, 2000). The income divide has continued to widen with women, minority ethnic groups and people living with disabilities being on the marginalized side.

1.2. Situation of Tanzania education in general

Some argue that Universal Primary Education (UPE) that Nyerere adopted in Azimio la Musoma (Musoma resolution) in 1967 was the starting point for deterioration of education in Tanzania. Personally, I tend to disagree with this supposition. The deterioration of our education in Tanzania started with commercialization of education and carried the UPE into thus putting new wine in an old skin. Tanzania carried UPE into the new era of commercialization of education without knowing why it was adopted in the first place and the socio-economic environment of the time. We became like a Guru who had a cat which was disturbing during prayer time. So he resorted to tie it to a post each time he went for prayers with his disciples. His disciples thought that this was part of the prayer ritual. Thus long after the Guru died, the practice went on. When the cat died they stopped praying until another cat was bought, and when the cat was not there, prayers would not start until they chased, caught it and tie on that special post. In Tanzania UPE was carried to liberalization system, ignoring the fact that there is a big difference between Ujamaa and the education environment and behaviour under liberalism.



During Nyerere's Ujamaa few students were selected to secondary schools because Tanzania had few secondary schools and the same for HLI, thus those who were not selected were not necessarily poor academically. UPE selected some of those who were not taken for secondary schools and HLI to train them as teachers. Liberalization developed the other extreme, with mushrooming of poor qualified ward secondary schools (some with one or two unqualified teachers), Tanzania is taking in to secondary level even students who do not know how to read and write. Yet these are the one who are taken in to be trained as teachers for secondary schools after being fast trained for three months as teachers (famously known as Voda fasta). Those who did not have good passes they apply to study education at HLIs as it is the discipline that offers loans to all who are selected and in addition, it is the discipline that takes low grades in comparison to other disciplines such as law. It is clear that UPE was carried into a liberalism system, a system that was never meant for it!

Liberalization of education has made education so expensive, yet close to being useless. In Ujamaa time education was awarded to "good students", but under commercialization of education, it is awarded to a rich individuals who can buy it even if they cannot accommodate it. This affects the poor mostly as they are side-lined in terms of access to quality education and it affects the country as a whole as those who get education and ultimately placed in offices should have been elsewhere. There is a change of roles in the societies, to the detrimental of the country as one who would have been a messenger is now toying around as the boss and the one who were to be a boss is moving one room after the other as a messenger. The rich and the influential buy education and get offices while the poor even if intellectual are left to serve the rich.

2.PHE Institutions in Tanzania: the problem of access, equity and quality

The number of higher education institutions has grown from primary school to higher learning institutions. In the lower level another level which did not exist was added, that of kindergarten. Now most of the primary schools have kindergarten classes before starting of class one. Higher learning institutions have grown from one institution to more than 200 in 2006, with PHE institutions being more than public higher learning institutions (Msola,



2006). Despite the increase, it is approximately only 1% of Tanzanians of relevant age are enrolled in higher education and literacy among people aged 15–24 is 77% (Common Wealth Network, 2015).

Higher education in Tanzania is guided by Higher Education Policy, which addresses issues such as access, equity, quality, cost-sharing, etc. Education in Tanzania runs the risks of increased dependence and marginalisation, therefore, human resource development needs to play a central role to redress the situation. The greatest challenge of education in Tanzania is that of access and equity, inclusive/special needs education and institutional capacity building.

Higher education institutions are under Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) formed in 2005 from what was Higher Accreditation Council (HEAC) established in 1998 (URT, 2000). The regulatory role of TCU is Conducting periodic evaluation of universities, their systems and programs so as to oversee quality assurance systems at the universities and in the process leading to new institutions to be registered to operate in Tanzania, and the existing the institutions to be accredited, and validation of university qualifications attained from local and foreign institutions for use in Tanzania (TCU, 2015).

The key policy thrust of the Higher Education Policy (1998) is “dramatic expansion of enrolments” and “encouragement of the establishment of private institutions”. The Higher Education Policy goal is to increase higher education enrolment of students. The key strategies related to higher education enrolment are encouraging private companies; parastatal, and individuals to invest in areas near institutions of higher learning in order to develop linkages; increasing the budgetary allocation to higher education by 3% by late 1999; and decentralizing decision making and grant full autonomy to higher education (URT, 2000).

The number of PHE institution has increased in terms of quantity to 67 in 2015, and out of those only 28 are public (TCU, 2015). However, the large number of PHE institutions has also registered poor planning and poor growth in terms of enrolment (only 21.5 % a year of the total number of those who enter HLIs). There are a number of unprofessional institutions that are registered to offer one award but go ahead and offer other



unregistered courses which has seen students suffering after finishing their courses only to realise the institution cannot offer award in the field the student studied. The increased number of students without increase in the manpower and infrastructure has seen the quality of education offered go down. One of the area that Tanzania has failed to meet is the qualified university lectures. Nearly all the universities in Tanzania suffer from lack of qualified teaching staff (Tetty, 2010), deficiency that has seen one staff teaching in a number of universities thus lowering quality of teaching and research capacity.

The economic difficulties among the society in Tanzania makes higher education too costly for majority of the Tanzanians who are poor thus raising the problem of access and equity. It is this reality that made the government to offer loans to students in Higher Learning Institutions (HLI) through the Higher Education Students' Loans Board (HESLB) and the Tanzania Education Authority (TEA). The offering of loans to HLI started with students studying in public universities and latter extended to students in PHE institutions as well. However, to date the loan board cannot offer 100 % of what is needed for the students at HLIs thus majority get only some %age of the required fee, accommodation and living allowances. This forces students from poor families to either take money given for living allowance to pay fees or skip lecture or find time after lecture time to sell second hand clothes, shoes, etc which affects their quality in class. The problem of PHE institutions is in knowledge inequities, which includes notions of the unevenness of quality, relevance of education, and attainment of learning (URT, 2000).

3. Response of the government to the challenges brought by PHE in Tanzania

The issue of equity raises larger questions about the interface of the institution with the society around it. In addition greater and inclusive participation in higher education goes far beyond the issue of social justice. Economic success in globalization depends on the ability to manage vast amounts of knowledge and technology, thus preparation of human capital (Altbach, 2015). As a response to the challenge of access and equity brought by PHE, the government responded by extending the university loan to students studying in PHE institutions. This was to try to help students'



access to education in PHE institutions and create equity. Ishengoma (2008) argues that this loan system of financing public higher education in Tanzania is in dire need of being revisited to avoid further looming crises in the higher education sector.

In addition, Tanzania Development Vision 2025 claims to target a high quality livelihood for all Tanzanians through the realisation of, among others, attainment of a level of tertiary education and training commensurate with a critical mass of high quality human resources required to effectively respond to the developmental challenges at all levels (URT, 2000). While this is presented in Vision 2025 nothing much is being done to attain this vision and the quality of education is still going down steadily. TCU has also come up with quality assurance handbook in an attempt to make sure quality of higher learning institutions is not compromised, however the result has not been promising.

4. Recommendations and Conclusion

Ishengoma (2005) argues that it is almost impossible to propose a viable framework for financing higher education system because of intense and deliberate politicization of financing of higher education and entrenched mindset of “free higher education” among the majority of Tanzanians, including the educated, which can be traced back to the time of Ujamaa. Ishengoma is convinced that the present system is unsustainable, therefore, he proposes a market model similar to the one being used in Kenya and Uganda. He goes further to introduce the idea of Higher Education Bank (HEDUBANK) which he argued has worked well in Nigeria.

While agreeing with Ishengoma, I see the unsustainability of the present system embedded in the poor method of collection of debts. There are many former students who are still indebted and yet have worked to near retiring or have retired. This is because there is poor mechanism to collect the debts. The market model might work well elsewhere but with the already problem of access and equity, the model might not help much. Solution in financing higher education in both public and private institutions in Tanzania lies in collection of the debts from those who paid their fees through the loan board. This can work if the loan is paid according to the income one earns and a bit of interest (those who earn more to pay more) which in turn covers the market model of Ishengoma. If clear mechanism in collection of loans are



put into place, just like the one that exists for pay as you earn (PAYE), the present financing mechanism could still be sustainable.

In today's education system in Tanzania, PHE institutions are fighting to attract customers, it is the buyer then who has the last say. Buyers have voices in even what marks (grade) they can get, it is called customer care. The customers determine their grades and it is called customer satisfaction. In this scenario the seller is left with no or little choice but to bow to the demands of the customer, thus lowering the quality of education.

“To educate” is an action verb. To educate is an action that anybody can do, it is to create by training and teaching; it is to refine to be discriminative in taste or judgment. The real problem is in putting the -ion to turn the verb into a noun; changing the action to a person; a person who would walk the talk and not a person who cares for a certificate and the salary tag pinched to it. During the time of Ujamaa, education was about its relevance to the society and it was a right and basic need, but with privatization and introduction of PHE institutions, education is a commodity to buy for those can afford and it is more on a certificate and what is jotted on it. This trend neglects the fact that, education should result to a good upbringing, correct social behaviour and practical ability to bring solutions to societal problems.

Tanzania might not be so much in shortage of PHE institutions, it is instead in shortage of PHE institutions offering good, quality education that the poor can access. Tanzania needs PHE institutions but in addition to knowledge they offers, they should also offer ethics and critical thinking to make graduates responsible citizens. Knowing that the economic prosperity of most countries depends on an increasingly well-educated workforce, the access to higher education must be a national priority (Altbach, 2015).

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