

Education and language: A human right for sustainable development in Africa

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Abstract Pre-colonial Africa was neither an educationally nor a technologically unsophisticated continent. While education was an integral part of the culture, issues of language identification and standardisation which are subject to contentious debate today were insignificant. Children learned community knowledge and history by asking questions instead of being taught in a hegemonic alien language. This article argues that education and development should take place in a broader context of human rights, and explores the links between three areas often dealt with separately, namely: language, education and development. The authors of this paper demonstrate that changing the face of the multi-dimensionalities of poverty within societies is possible only when education is constructed in a rights perspective over the favoured colonial languages, which are not an integral part of the culture and resources of a community. The authors make a distinction between the *right to education* and *rights in education*, the latter of which are found to be more significant for the challenges Africa faces. It is argued here that the elements of

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Amartya Sen's "threshold" conditions for inclusion in human rights and self-development in education are essential, and that a more promising architecture of education would include what the authors term meta-narrative frameworks, i.e. interrelated policies. The authors contend that the neoliberal commodification of the knowledge sector has only exacerbated human rights and capabilities deprivation – which encompasses both human and income poverty.

Keywords Human rights · Capabilities deprivation · Indigenous language and knowledge in education · Language of Instruction · Localised curriculum · Human dignity · Rights in education · Right to development · Africa

Résumé Éducation et langage : un droit fondamental en vue du développement durable en Afrique – L'Afrique précoloniale était un continent sophistiqué tant sur le plan éducatif que technologique. Si l'enseignement faisait partie intégrante de la culture, les questions d'identification et de standardisation linguistiques, aujourd'hui sujettes à des débats controversés, n'étaient pas significatives. Les enfants acquéraient le savoir et l'histoire de la communauté en posant des questions, et non pas en étant instruits dans une langue étrangère et hégémonique. Les auteurs avancent que l'éducation et le développement devraient avoir lieu dans le contexte élargi des droits fondamentaux, et examinent les liens entre trois domaines fréquemment traités isolément, à savoir : langage, éducation et développement. Ils démontrent qu'il n'est possible de changer la face multidimensionnelle de la pauvreté au sein des sociétés que si l'éducation est élaborée dans une perspective de droits fondamentaux primant sur les langues coloniales privilégiées, qui ne font pas partie intégrante de la culture et des richesses d'une communauté. Les auteurs font une distinction entre *le droit à l'éducation* et *les droits dans l'éducation*, ces derniers étant jugés plus importants pour répondre aux défis auxquels l'Afrique est confrontée. Les auteurs argumentent que les conditions « minimales » d'Amartya Sen devant être incluses dans les droits fondamentaux ainsi que le développement personnel dans l'éducation sont des éléments essentiels; en outre qu'une architecture de l'éducation plus prometteuse contiendrait ce que les auteurs appellent des cadres « méta-narratifs », c'est-à-dire des politiques étroitement liées. Ils affirment que la marchandisation néo-libérale du secteur des connaissances n'a fait qu'aggraver la privation des droits fondamentaux et des capacités – se traduisant par la pauvreté tant humaine que monétaire.

Zusammenfassung Bildung und Sprache: Ein Menschenrecht für nachhaltige Entwicklung in Afrika – Weder technologisch noch im Hinblick auf Bildung war das präkoloniale Afrika primitiv. Bildung war ein integraler Bestandteil der Kultur, und Fragen nach sprachlicher Identität und Standardisierung, die heute zänkisch debattiert werden, waren schlicht bedeutungslos. Kinder erlernten das Wissen und die Geschichte der Gemeinschaft durch Erfragen, anstatt in einer hegemonialen, fremden Sprache unterrichtet zu werden. Die Autoren dieses Beitrags treten dafür ein, Bildung und Entwicklung in einem größeren Zusammenhang der

Menschenrechte zu verorten. Sie erkunden dazu die Verbindungen zwischen drei Bereichen, die oft separat behandelt werden: Sprache, Bildung und Entwicklung. Der Beitrag zeigt, dass die vieldimensionalen Erscheinungsformen von Armut innerhalb von Gesellschaften nur dann im Kern verändert werden können, wenn Bildung aus einer Rechtsperspektive über die bevorzugten Kolonialsprachen gestellt wird, denn diese Sprachen sind kein integraler Bestandteil der Kultur und der Mittel einer Gemeinschaft. Die Autoren unterscheiden zwischen dem *Recht auf Bildung* und *Rechten in der Bildung*, wobei sie Letztere im Hinblick auf die drängenden Probleme Afrikas für bedeutungsvoller halten. Grundlegend sind aus ihrer Sicht die von Amartya Sen formulierten „Schwellenbedingungen“ für den Einschluss in die Menschenrechte und die Persönlichkeitsentwicklung in der Bildung. Ein aussichtsreicherer Ansatz für Bildung müsse untereinander verwobene politische Prozesse beinhalten, für die die Autoren den Begriff „meta-narrative Strukturen“ vorschlagen. Die Autoren vertreten die These, dass die neoliberale Kommodifizierung des Wissenssektors den Entzug von Menschenrechten und Fähigkeiten beschleunigt und somit menschliche wie auch wirtschaftliche Armut verursacht.

Resumen Educación y lengua: un derecho humano para el desarrollo sostenible en África – África nunca ha sido un continente con bajos niveles de exigencia en educación y tecnología durante su época precolonial. Dado que la educación era una parte integral de la cultura, no tenían relevancia los problemas de identificación y estandarización de la lengua que hoy provocan grandes controversias. Los niños adquirían conocimientos sobre la comunidad y la historia formulando preguntas, en lugar de ser instruidos en una lengua extranjera hegemónica. En este artículo se plantea que la educación y el desarrollo deberían tener lugar en un contexto amplificado de derechos humanos y se explora cómo están enlazadas tres áreas que frecuentemente se tratan por separado, a saber: lengua, educación y desarrollo. Los autores de este trabajo demuestran que cambiar la cara de las multidimensionalidades de la pobreza dentro de las sociedades solamente es posible cuando la educación se construye dentro de una perspectiva de derechos, por encima de las favorecidas lenguas coloniales que no son parte integrante de la cultura ni de la riqueza de una comunidad. Los autores establecen una distinción entre *el derecho a la educación* y *los derechos en la educación*, considerando que estos últimos tiene mayor relevancia para los retos que África está enfrentando. Argumentan que las “condiciones umbral” de Amartya Sen para la inclusión en derechos humanos y autodesarrollo en la educación son esenciales, y que una arquitectura de la educación más prometedora podría incluir lo que los autores denominan marcos “metanarrativos”; por ejemplo, políticas interrelacionadas. Los autores afirman que la mercantilización neoliberal del sector del conocimiento solamente ha empeorado la privación de derechos humanos y de capacidades, abarcando tanto la pobreza humana como la pobreza en función de los ingresos.

Резюме Образование и язык: Права человека на устойчивое развитие в Африке – Преколониальная Африка не представляла собой образовательно или технологически неразвитый континент. В то время как образование являлось неотъемлемой частью культуры, проблемы языковой идентификации и стандартизации, которые являются сегодня предметом непрекращающихся дебатов, были незначительными. Дети постигали общественное знание и историю, задавая вопросы, вместо того, чтобы обучаться на господствующем чуждом языке. В данной статье приводятся аргументы в пользу того, что обучение и развитие должно происходить в более широком контексте прав человека. В ней исследуются взаимосвязи между тремя сферами, часто рассматриваемыми по отдельности, а именно, между языком, образованием и развитием. Авторы демонстрируют, что изменение многостороннего лица бедности в обществах возможно только при условии, что концепции обучения разрабатываются с позиций прав человека, а не привилегированных колониальных языков, которые не являются составной частью культуры и ресурсов сообществ. Авторы проводят различие между *правом на обучение* и *правами в обучении*, последние из которых являются более значимыми с точки зрения стоящих перед Африкой проблем. В статье обосновывается, что элементы пороговых условий Амартии Сена по приобщению к правам человека и саморазвитию в образовании являются обязательными, и что более благоприятная архитектура образования должна включать то, что авторы называют «метанарративными» структурами, то есть взаимосвязанные политики. Авторы заявляют, что неолиберальная коммодификация сектора знаний привела лишь к усугублению процесса утраты прав и возможностей человека – что включает как личностное, так и финансовое обеднение.

Language is central to any discussion of development in Africa and the promotion of African languages at all levels of education is fundamental to this.

(Davids 2010, p. 1).

Introduction

This paper presents a formidable set of conceptual, practical and political challenges for consideration by practitioners in the field of education and development and raises questions about the false expectations of target-setters. It further questions the denial of local context and local language in education reforms, and asks why countries sustain structural adjustment conditionalities imposed on them by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which have only minimal reference to local needs. Based on this state of affairs, this paper, which is not comprehensive, draws on experiences made from Tanzania (Zanzibar) and Nigeria,

in an attempt to mark out the factors entailed in the complex phenomenon of “capability deprivation” and educational poverty that are inherent in Africa.

It was the Indian economist Amartya Sen (1999) who suggested considering poverty (lack of basic health, education, shelter, nutrition, clean water, etc.) as capability deprivation in the sense that these poverty indicators *deprive* poor people not only of achieving prosperity but of being able to make choices and thus being *capable* of leading a life of dignity and good quality. The above indicators as articulated by Sen illustrate that there are influences on capability deprivation other than lowness of income or lowness of resources. It should be further noted that while income-based measures are of instrumental importance for development, capability deprivation is of intrinsic importance. Sen (*ibid.*) points out that the instrumental relation between poverty and income may vary within nation states, communities, families and individuals. This ambiguous thinking is dignified in neoliberal frameworks, as its design is not congruent with achieving constitutive elements of well-being. Thus, it follows that the view of poverty as a deprivation of valuable freedoms evaluates multidimensional poverty according to capabilities. This article also examines the economic, cultural, social and political factors that are under assault by forces of globalisation but interact to maintain disparities in opportunities and influence Africa’s development. The heterogeneity of the available resources discussed above is also consistent with the contextual heterogeneity of culture, language and heritage. Human societies across the African continent have developed rich sets of experiences relating to their historical antecedents and the environment in which they live.

The main part of this paper starts by looking generally at the colonial origins of today’s educational situation in Africa, reviewing approaches to education which deepened disparities of opportunity through language polarisation. While this has led to dehumanisation, with elements of cultural and language identity rooted in a colonial past, it has also pushed African communities into economic crisis within a rapidly globalised economy. Paulo Freire’s (1978) seminal works on pedagogy remain illustrative for exploring dehumanisation. Calling for a radical transformation of educational systems invented under colonialism, he states that the power of education for consciousness-raising lies in resistance to dehumanisation (Freire and Macedo 1998, pp. 45, 70). Since colonialists and now post-colonialists have set out to destroy indigenous languages and peoples, efforts to reclaim dignity and humanisation range from returning to building indigenous communities to revitalising indigenous languages, which centre on traditional teachings regarding the significance of interconnectedness across generations (Jacob 2010). An acclaimed linguist, Haig Bosmajian (1983), stated that language can be used to dehumanise human beings and to “justify” their oppression and even their extermination. Such use of dehumanising language is exemplified by the subjugation and extermination of Africans during colonialism, and also of a significant population of American Indians and African Americans during the era of slavery. As scholars, we feel deeply committed to thinking creatively about how to do our work in a way that will facilitate dismantling the *negatives* that underlie the legacy of human rights abuses that indigenous people face.

The next two sections deal with human rights in education, providing first-hand analysis of the Washington Consensus”¹ which follows an ideology known as market fundamentalism and neoliberalism, spearheaded by the World Bank, IMF and the US Treasury Department. Though not the original intent of economist John Williamson who coined the term in 1989, the Washington Consensus required developing countries to cut back public spending on high priority social programmes, including basic education and development (Williamson 2000, p. 251). In this vein, social and economic rights of citizens are not only denied but remain unprotected around the globe as this strategy justifies the balancing of national budgets at the expense of quality of life. In a nutshell, the Washington Consensus is an orthodox framework that actively promotes principles of liberalisation, privatisation, deconcentration and deregulation, espousing free-market capitalism as its core tenet.

The fourth section discusses the challenge of education reform; in the fifth section, we demonstrate how education has intensified disparities in capability. Other limitations of this non-people-centred strategy, which foisted upon Africa a universal science of neoliberalism and facilitated economic growth, have worsened the situation of rights in education and are virtually non-inclusive of educational self-determination. In the sixth section, we look at the nature and quality of education. This section introduces conceptual frameworks in education, particularly a human rights-driven approach to education that embodies three interlinked and independent dimensions. It contends that education’s role to mitigate poverty and underdevelopment in Africa cannot be realised unless and until local language reclamation and linguistic human rights are addressed. In the remainder of this section, we briefly review the role of language reclamation in communities and larger societal educative goals.

The seventh section criticises the approach of markets in education, and points towards a different approach, and we wrap up the paper with a conclusion and recommendations. With the exclusive use of languages of colonialism – English, French, Portuguese and Spanish – coupled with the prohibition of African languages across the continent, the concluding section discusses the implications for other languages within the education systems and the larger struggles for social justice and self-determination.

¹ The term “Washington Consensus” refers to a set of ten policies formulated in 1989 by the US government and the international financial institutions based in Washington DC, taking a neoliberal view of globalisation. Despite some controversy, the policies, which were designed to increase economic growth, were implemented, albeit conditionally, under the guidance of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). They have since been replaced by a post-Washington Consensus which focuses on sustainable, egalitarian and democratic development with a more poverty-focused approach, protecting and supporting the poor and prioritising social spending on education and health. More information is available at <http://www.who.int/trade/glossary/story094/en/index.html>.

The educational construct of post-Berlin Africa

Prior to the Berlin Conference of 1884,² most African countries had control over their own education systems. The concept of internationalisation or privatisation was foreign to policy-makers in existing welfare states. In many African countries, education was an integral part of the culture: issues of language identification and standardisation which have come to be problematic today in African countries were insignificant. Knowledge and history of communities were stored and transmitted orally. Children learned by asking questions instead of being taught in confusing and dehumanising alien languages.

Colonialised Africa lacked rhyme or reason. Coherent groups of people were divided and disparate groups, who really did not speak the same language, were merged. Catherine Odora Hoppers (2002) has argued that in contrast to the Global North which relies on scientific traditions for universal truth, indigenous children were taught from traditional epistemology narratively passed on from their ancestors. Learning in these ways formed the basis for transformations of economic, cultural and social systems, and of indigenous sustainable development (see UN 1986). Sophisticated fiscal and governance arrangements were in place to develop capacities necessary to exercise rights throughout life and enable the performance of a multiplicity of community functions. Contrary to popular understanding among scholars in the Global North, Africa was neither an educationally nor a technologically unsophisticated continent prior to the Berlin Conference. The general view of African education neglects local context and local people's rights to their own indigenous histories. Africa's "good" pre-colonial education and governance systems were adequate and appropriate as socialising agents and supportive of creativity and innovation. But the long-term consequence of the colonial educational system is an absence of a feeling of responsibility to protect access to local languages, which are irreplaceable intellectual and cultural resources to societies (Brock-Utne 2000; Prah 2003; Qorro 2003; Rwantabagu 2011), so that today much African education is of abysmal quality.

How can we recapture local knowledge in another form of schooling which will recognise the integration of local and global knowledge in the education system? Indeed it is asserted that there is a need to learn from local communities to enrich the development process, as local languages are an integral part of the culture and resources of a community. According to Sheila Aikman (1995), the use of local languages and a culturally sensitive approach play an important role in the maintenance and regeneration of indigenous innovation. We observe that language abstraction as an instrument of domination or cultural dehumanisation was effected either by the process of assimilation or acculturation (Bhola 1990, p. 17). Assimilation (movement towards the dominant culture) in Africa had to do with the French colonial power turning natives into model French citizens. This was

² The Berlin Conference (sometimes also referred to as the Congo Conference) took place in Berlin and lasted from November 1884 to February 1885. Organised by the then German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck to draft regulations concerning European colonisation and trade in Africa, it resulted in the *General Act of the Berlin Conference*. It also triggered a rush among European powers to divide the remaining uncolonised areas of Africa up between them.

achieved for example by teaching French language at schools and churches, along with French history and culture.

Acculturation, a derivative of African contact with European colonisers, is manifested in assimilation or marginalisation (alienation from both the local and the dominant cultures). Both processes of polarising give rise to social challenges based on a presumption of the superiority of Western culture and “civilisation”. In this sense, in addition to advocating for retaining human rights, we agree with such elder statesmen as Frantz Fanon (1961), Julius Kambarage Nyerere (1967) and Ayo Bamgbose (1976) that the detrimental and insidious effects of market mechanisms on language constitute a basis for replacing local language as the pedagogy of choice (see Ouane 1990; Bhola 1981). This is why African development and the imperative of vested language interest in the curriculum are still shaping and further compounding the obstacles (or roadblocks) for linguistic rights for social-development and integration.

Mastery of language affords remarkable power (Fanon 1961). This belief of leading scholars in language studies is one of the underlying factors for colonial education to have been driven by the needs of the Global North, as curricula delivered in a language not mastered very well by students produced manpower supportive of exploiting Africa’s resources – both human and nonhuman. In fact colonial activities and education that defined national education policies short-circuited the functional development of African societies (Brock-Utne 2001; Mazrui 2003). In essence, educational development was not a genuinely mutual-benefit endeavour between the locals and the external stakeholders, nor did it encourage a continuous interaction/dialogism with internal stakeholders. Furthermore, it did not recognise the universality of human rights or the right to development. It assumed, from the start, co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between Westerners and Africans. With this in mind, Martha Qorro uses the expression of “unlocking language forts” (Qorro 2003). We interpret this as being a metaphor for retrieving knowledge by using local languages that are currently devalued. As we suggest later on in this article, education initiatives with instrumental/utilitarian preoccupations deprive education of its “wider human purposes”. Our contention is that considering *the instrumental* as more important than *the intrinsic* in effect short-circuits sustainable human development and seriously threatens the heterogeneity of learners’ welfare and agency rights in education. So what is this “right” and who bears responsibility for its implementation?

The goal of universal education across the world is consistent with the definition of the *right to education*, while that of achieving universal quality education is consistent with *rights in education*.³ The task of ensuring rights in education is the end rather than the means of schooling, with its multiple learning outcomes – linguistic, cultural and educational self-determination rights. The affirmation of education as a human right has gained increasing acceptance, first as an element in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UN 1948) and subsequently as a

³ The *right to education*, as mentioned later in this article, concerns availability and accessibility of education, whereas *rights in education* concern the protection of and respect for learners’ cultures, their needs and their languages.

legally binding instrument enshrined in the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* of 1966 (UN CESCR 1999). Nevertheless there is still contention and ambiguity regarding the fundamental distinction between the *rights in education* and the *right to education*.

In this paper, *rights in education* are associated with the capacity to attain quality education. Rights in education expand people's capabilities, including educational capabilities – such as local language reclamation that will challenge social norms and Europeanisation (see Robeyns 2006, p. 82). Schooling is required to meet the needs of learners and, to that extent, learners and their needs are framed in the context of human rights and justice equality. Hence, education is not only expected to enhance employability or livelihoods at the individual level and economic development at the national level but also to give credibility to people, incorporate knowledge of the ecosystem, and inform a distinctive understanding of community interests and the world (see Nyerere 1967). While commitment to a universal entitlement to the right to education is highly desirable, some concerted efforts are also necessary to ensure that education as currently constituted and implemented is not diametrically opposed to universal quality education (Filmer et al. 2006). In contrast, with the *right to education* not being conscious of people's right to quality education or linguistic rights, we object that basic provision in schools is of too questionable a quality to enable students to take advantage of the opportunities of effective learning. A right to education might be optimal regarding accessibility, but less than optimal in protecting rights in terms of factors that must matter intrinsically. The questions that are significant to guide schooling today are:

- What is needed to get children to school?
- What is needed to get children to learn?
- How do we as stakeholders arrest the process of epistemological rupturing within the school system, particularly within the classroom?

These are important supply- and demand-side issues, since getting children to school does not guarantee that they learn anything there.

This view of history of how schooling ignored the African peoples and communities, which they are to serve, renders histories of indigenous peoples completely invisible. In this light, we find that expanding schooling to increase access to education around the world has not in fact expanded quality Education for All (EFA),⁴ particularly in African communities which are still facing the colonial legacy of “linguicide”.⁵ Its current context has only collapsed into “Schooling for All” (SFA). The needs of Africa, especially in those isolated areas where people require local knowledge and skills, have rarely been considered. Even the bleakest descriptions fail to reveal the full extent of the inadequacy of African schools. Indeed, colonialist education which was used more as a social reproductive tool did

⁴ Education for All (EFA) is an international initiative which was launched at a world conference of the same title in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 with the aim of facilitating universal primary education and combating illiteracy worldwide until the end of the decade. In a joint effort, national governments, civil society groups and development agencies such as UNESCO and the World Bank drafted a framework for action and committed to six specific education goals (UNESCO 1990).

⁵ The term *linguicide* refers to the destruction of a minority language by a “dominant” language.

not do much to use language – the “tool of tools” – as a vehicle to negate capability deprivation in Africa. The pre-eminent colonially-structured education that alienates citizens and stifles self-development in using colonial languages and installing economic and political institutions is more problematic, as it undervalues indigenous languages, undermines any co-existence of rights, and short-circuits all ideational processes. The lesson to be learned is simply that with little exposure to the language of instruction outside school, and if teaching the language of instruction is ineffective in school, the resulting low-quality learning, which is not consistent with local agenda-setting, amounts to a denial of rights in education. Crucially, then, it is *rights in education* that facilitate the acquisition of values rooted in the principles of rights and social justice.

Robert Serpell (1993, p. 4) notes that as for the decolonisation of the personality, “schooling can only vindicate its deeper education objectives by articulating a concrete relevance to the socio-cultural and politico-economic opportunities existing within the communities it aspires to serve.” The policy of “progressiveness” or “assimilation” in Africa – past and present – has targeted only a small proportion of the population. Serpell (*ibid.*) further asserts that if schooling is to be a source of empowerment or a crucial factor in human development rather than an instrument of cultural and linguistic oppression, its intellectual content must attract the creative imagination of the growing child, as well as reflecting what people feel they can do and be. Research shows that children can learn best in their local language and that if they start in the local language, the material gains in local functionality are greater. Ali Al’amin Mazrui writes that

First language enhances learning and the development of certain basic cognitive skills, but instruction in a less familiar, second or foreign language is actually detrimental to the educational progress of the child ... not speaking the language of instruction can make the difference between succeeding and failing in school, between remaining in school and dropping out (Mazrui 1997, p. 38).

For Africans, respectful relationships – and this includes respect for people’s own language and culture – are foundational to a positive educational experience.

From what we now know of how local language promotes quality education and the functionality of economies and societies, the question is whether schooling can reverse the process of education that has been used as an instrument for the unconscious destruction of indigenous knowledge, preventing Africans from learning locally and participating globally in ways other than as subordinates. Traditional schooling from the point of view of its broader cultural context or language reclamation (since to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture) is an excellent response to linguisticicide and to reversing the core belief that education is associated with a Western curriculum (for more detail see Fanon 1961). Evidence shows that these kinds of obstacles are thwarting the successful outcome of education all over Africa. The failure of many African nations to achieve EFA targets date back to the colonial era as most African states continue to rely on English, Portuguese and French for educational purposes or as the language of instruction (Brock-Utne 2000). Should EFA (Lievesley and Sauvageot 2000) not

pay less attention to the number of students passing through the school system and focus more on the imperative of education enhancing employability and livelihoods, as well as working towards economic development and the achievement of stable and peaceful communities? Robert F. Arnove (2003) notes that rethinking the uses of English, a language introduced by colonialism and imperialism, is vital in Africa where information can be communicated orally, through stories or songs, in a world where the use of new technology – and hence “development” – is unevenly distributed (see Makalela 2005, p. 159). It is necessary to recognise that education is more than schooling, and should be part of the struggle against the legacy of colonialism in order that countries might learn to use their own languages, which have been proven to be more conducive to teaching and to fostering cultural integrity.

The authors of this article continue to refrain from looking critically at, or challenging, cultural exploitation. The conspiracy of silence in the architecture of education instruments working against platitudes of rights in education is the wrong premise of dialogism and strategies to advance many development goals. In the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, attention has been drawn to the danger of non-recognition of indigenous language in schooling (Geo-JaJa and Azaiki 2010).

This leads to these crucial guiding questions:

- Why are policy-makers not concerned with ensuring rights in education?
- Why trust market mechanisms/the commodification of education, rather than the African voice in education? Should states not acknowledge that a right in education is more than an entitlement as enshrined in Conventions?
- How can we contribute to an educational system that holds the potential for decolonisation or liberation?

One important element that emerges from these questions is the affirmation of the indivisible nature of rights expressed in relation to education (see Spreen and Vally 2006; Tomasevski 2006). There is the need for a *right to education* (relating to availability and accessibility), as well as *rights in education* (protection of and respect for learners’ cultures, needs and languages). But today the gap between home, society and school is widening, and classrooms in Africa do not acknowledge the immense learning opportunities available at home, as students are being de-skilled with a one-language-fits-all approach (Samoff 1999; Geo-JaJa 2006). Joel Samoff (1999) and Macleans A. Geo-JaJa (2006) further suggest that African curricula should be indigenously grounded and oriented. Sunil Loona (1996, p. 6), advocating for creative interconnectivity, argues that “differences in experiences in homes and in their daily lives can lead to some children having lesser or greater amounts of knowledge in some knowledge-domains than other children”. Indeed, what is needed is a comprehensive synergistic initiative that brings together all knowledge systems to form a more holistic learning system that can better serve all learners.

In effect, today’s curricula are being subjected to the commercialisation of education as a human capital investment, which creates tension with the key principles of the *right to education*. However, these concerns are almost completely

non-existent on the *rights in education* roadmap. Babs A. Fafunwa, the former Education Minister of Nigeria, points out that:

Colonialism made it possible for linguist domination to take root, to the extent that very few countries encourage education in African languages, and Africa is often divided into foreign linguistic blocks of Francophone (French-speaking), Anglophone (English-speaking), and Lusophone (Portuguese-speaking). Very few countries in Africa, except Somalia, Tanzania and Kenya, have yet to demonstrate the principle and practice that literacy, even at primary school level, does not necessarily mean knowing how to read and write in a Western Language (Fafunwa 1989, p 29).

It has become clear that the outright rejection of indigenous education inhibits the development of the critical faculties necessary for effective schooling as well as the plausibility of reversing the mystification of modern knowledge in post-colonial education. In post-colonial Africa a semblance of colonial curricula is still in use today which do not recognise local knowledge and networks of local languages. Not only do children struggle to learn in a challenging language, but schooling is also unable to transmit the values and the knowledge of African societies from one generation to the next. As Nyerere wrote, “it has been part of a deliberate process to change these values and to replace traditional knowledge with knowledge from a different society” (Nyerere 1967, p. 47) – in other words there is an ideological subjugation of individuals and societies.

In sum, whatever the limitations of indigenous knowledge systems, they do not “alienate” citizens from life in the local community. Unlike the neoliberal notion of education, the authors of this article view indigenous education and language not as commodities, and not just as human resources to be developed, exploited and then cast aside, but as treasures to be cultivated for improving the quality of life of all citizens. To recreate such an environment, educational endeavour should be directed not at human resource development but at the development of resourceful people in the service of their communities. The success that traditional forms of education – cultural and religious, traditional social systems, agricultural practices and other subtle arrangements – so effortlessly achieved in this regard has eluded modern African educational constructs. At the end of this section, we are left with this important question: Why does the Global North not help Africa use indigenous languages and knowledge to improve the well-being of its people? In contrast to education system trends elsewhere, several authors have noted that the Global North’s education roadmap for Africa is silent on positive rights, such as the right to have one’s own culture reflected in the curriculum and to learn in local languages (see August and Hakuta 1998; Bamgbose 1991; Prah 2003; Bunyi 1999; and Fafunwa 1990).

Human rights in education systems

Education is a primary vehicle by which all people can be lifted out of poverty, as well as being an instrument for the achievement and enjoyment of many other

human rights. African governments need to offer education that promotes participation and social and cultural development that will reduce the currency of “world” languages and interests of the Global North in Africa. Participation and development are elusive basic human rights and social justice concerns in Africa. As indicated earlier, the current education system is mismatched to what matters most for success in local contexts. Policy-makers and the international community need to work towards restoring the confidence of Africans in themselves, their linguistic human rights and their lifestyles. This means not rejecting that which is African – indigenous traditional education systems that prevent citizens from being separated from their self-development. The notion of rights in education is powerful as it is intricately connected to the social, occupational, political, cultural, religious and artistic life of the people. Language as part of culture is part of what Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) terms “language as human rights” in the education sector. Article 26 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, in affirming the right to education as a human right, states that:

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free ... Education shall be directed to ... the development of human personality and to the strengthening of human rights and fundamental freedom (UN 1948).

African states have so far failed to address this, let alone the question of rights in education, in a concerted way. We can cite the ineffectiveness of the curriculum (focusing mainly on basic literacy), and negative attitudes to Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) which create a bottleneck for much-needed human capabilities, as examples of failed education. Indeed, African countries ought to indulge in the deconstruction of curriculum and begin the process of reconstructing it to serve Africa’s 21st-century needs. The content and implementation of current curricula and their relevance to the needs of society are questionable. These are serious challenges that Africa has to contend with. It is important to clarify that curriculum content and relevance should address the revitalisation of indigenous knowledge and the multi-dimensionality of poverty, as well as ensuring protection of language and culture. Strategies should be made consistent with provisions of quality education.

The right to education is recognised as a human right, yet millions of children and adults remain deprived of educational opportunities, many as a result of poverty. Indeed, what this means is that education, which is not just an “investment in people”, but should also be a protector of peoples’ inherent dignity, a means to develop greater awareness of rights, and a transmitter of cultural norms and values, is not working for these people. From our perspective, what education delivers and promotes does not make it a static commodity to be considered in isolation from its greater context. In the report *A human rights-based approach to education for all: A framework for the realization of children’s right to education and rights within education* it is observed that “Not only do people have the right to receive quality education now, they also have the right to be equipped with the skills and knowledge that will ensure long-term recognition of and respect for all human rights” (UNICEF 2007, p. xii). However, the reality is that progress in rights in education, a powerful tool by which the people can lift themselves out of poverty

and participate fully as citizens, has not received the desired attention in African curricula. An education agenda is still conceived as involving just formal schooling, rather than requiring the development of an education that is child-centred and empowering, enabling positive development and learning.

Why education? Why rights in education?

Emerging issues that are central to the rethinking of the education system show that current approaches to education, in violating various aspects of rights in education, curtail the development of capabilities and perpetuate deprivation. It is important that access to local knowledge and use of languages are considered as rights in education. Therefore, language and culture have to be protected and respected, just as people have to protect national heritage against Eurocentric orientations. Consequently, this means that schooling in Africa must reflect local and indigenous knowledge systems, and local traditions must be taught with pride. The obstacles to integrating language and culture in educational programmes give further credence to the view that indigenous thought and knowledge are not only critical factors for inclusiveness but are also preconditions in the quest to achieve universality, self-determination and social integration. In 1993, the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Peoples (1993) produced a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples which includes their right to language: "... to revitalise, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures..." (Part III, Article 14). To further understand the sensitive handling of rights in education, it is imperative to reflect on the context that led to this demand. Article 30 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNHCR 1989) called for the right of children to enjoy their own culture and to be schooled in their own language. This is instrumental in changing the way in which development educationalists should operate.

Education, in reinforcing the image of Europeanisation or in re-ordering the world's socio-political and cultural relationships, militates against state legitimacy, against the (re)production of "traditional culture", and against the formation of knowledge to being or doing that which is desired. As Hermenegilde Rwantabagu has noted,

the marginal function of African languages within the school system only helps to perpetuate the traditional rift between the school and the community, thus estranging the young generation from the cultural heritage and the productive processes of their environment (Rwantabagu 2011, p. 461).

David Ebbutt (1998, p. 416) writes that reforms and development projects should be conducted with a detailed understanding of language, political process, attitudes and culture. This seems to indicate that any growth conceived from a neoliberal perspective has not only minimised education promises, but has also failed to advance the right to self-determination. The latter is affirmed in numerous treaties and recognised by governments as being pivotal in the pursuit of social transformation. Indeed, market-driven reforms have battered, impoverished and

diminished lives in many different ways, as the capacity of societies to focus and provide inclusive education is critically bastardised (ADEA 2003, p. 14). This section shows that the present practices of educating in the European languages are completely contrary to *rights in education*, which include but are not limited to equal respect for every child, opportunities for meaningful participation, freedom from all forms of violence, and respect for language, culture and religion. There is no quick fix in finding solutions to Africa's challenges. Nevertheless, what we do know is that integrating the notion of rights in education and empowering the enterprise of people as the means to achieve their own valued well-being is a more practical, humanitarian approach than neoliberalism.

Whose education approach for Africa? The challenge

The mixed results and the lack of protection of rights in education have raised the question of the role of the state in education reform. What reforms will work best for Africa and why have African countries not taken their destiny into their own hands? In most circumstances, development challenges are related to educational reforms instituted by states. For example, in the name of improving the quality and accessibility of basic education, Nigeria and the Central African Republic of Congo were forced by the World Bank and the IMF in the late 1990s to accept a structural adjustment programme with conditions that required the importation of textbooks with no local or cultural relevance (Geo-JaJa 2006). The danger of such a policy is the disappearance of a national publishing infrastructure and the reinvigoration of cultural imperialism which does not support positive attitudes towards the self. Accordingly what this means is that the use of a "Euro-local language"⁶ is not the only issue that is significant: curriculum content must be relevant to the local. Is it always the case that what a child learns in "European languages" is relevant for a child in Africa? Or might this have some strong consequences for the quality of education or for learning outcomes? In order to question the undesirable effects of modern education for psychological liberation from a repressive pedagogy, as well as to advocate for a rights-based education approach, a consideration of local knowledge and the use of local language is particularly important. This we consider an essential first step in highlighting the disproportionate emphasis on "getting the prices right" – who gets education and whose content? – rather than on the underlying structural and institutional causes of education poverty and the necessary challenges to rights in education. This approach posits that education should be understood not as an increase in quantity or access to schooling, but as the enhancement of people's freedom to do and be what they have reason to value.

What can be termed a culturally-exclusive education, the instrument used to reorganise and reconstruct identities in relation to the new forms of imperialism (commitments to Europeanisation, privatisation, liberalisation etc.), has had a particularly negative effect on people's rights, because of the linguistic and

⁶ By the term "Euro-local language" we mean a language in which the children are not fully proficient and which has vestiges of the project of assimilation.

pedagogical constraints it constitutes. This could also be interpreted as just an extension of the transition from the dependence caused by conquest to dependence on foreign aid. For example, current schooling is a complex integrated process in which problems connected with all aspects of learning are conceptualised, established and resolved through individualism, languages and resources within an organisational framework that is alien to African society. It has failed to stop the commodification of education, and has not contributed to the realisation of moral and social justice. In our view, the missing fundamentals of self-styled reforms and/or social interventions must be the point of departure for any alternative education development approach in Africa. We consider a “home-grown” approach to education that respects indigenous language and knowledge to be the key to extending cultural justice and protecting linguistic rights in Africa. Respecting all citizens’ rights is only possible when a government chooses an approach which focuses on basic rights, social justice and dignity.

Education has intensified disparities in capability

Education in recent times has failed to reach the most economically marginalised – especially the vulnerable inhabitants on the periphery of African society. When it reaches them, either in low quality or as they are already trapped in poverty, it results in low capabilities. Understandably, poverty that is capability deprivation further restricts choice in consuming education. Indeed, *in contrast to* colonial language schooling, moving towards “localisation” of the education system or to promoting a theoretical foundation of participatory and active learning previously practised in Africa underscores the centrality of education in tackling the phenomenon of deprivation. Underlying the term “localisation” is the creation of a model of education that ensures meaningful functionality by providing citizens with sets of human capabilities necessary for participation and cultural appropriateness. Education that guarantees human capabilities, rather than curtailing them and depriving students of the choices that are associated with the necessary capabilities, needs to be people-centred and relevant, it needs to embrace a broad curriculum and be appropriately resourced and brought into a reform agenda as active ingredient and basic priority above macro-economic goals. This approach that focuses on promoting rights in education ties together three core principles: namely, a focus on people, a holistic approach to the revitalisation of knowledge, and an emphasis on the universality and inalienability of the entitlement to education. This is an important point, since education is now unconditional and valued independently of whether or not it proves to be productive in the economy.

Because of the contextual conditions of education, the majority of school-aged Africans today, especially the poor on the periphery of society, are denied basic rights in education. In most African countries, the commodification of education or commercialisation of knowledge underscores the uncoupling of the relationships between schooling and communities and the deterioration of schooling quality, and fosters educational poverty. Strengthening these weak links and the constraints imposed by neo-conservative ideologies ought to be an overriding driver for

reforming education in Africa. What is known for sure is that schooling that is respectful of human rights – both in words and in action, in textbooks and with a transformational curriculum, can combat aggressive ethnocentrism. The latter we define as the forcible Europeanisation of education, language and development, which pervades the preservation of indigenous cultures and linguistic rights. Neoliberal pathways weaken the state and force markets into areas where the state has traditionally been responsible. They undermine schooling that displays greater integration of linguistic minorities and enhances human capabilities necessary for choices in addressing poverty or exclusion.

The current world reality of quantification is that in cases where the local language is only oral it will take time and money for government to put into place a system to develop its written form. But this might be the cost societies have to pay as it is the only way to preserve language for cultural identity and development on the people's own terms. To sum up, the presumptive belief that getting children into schools is the end rather than the means of education, and an even more dangerous assumption that any schooling is good for children, is diametrically the opposite of *rights in education*. With globalisation, English is the language most often used, but in Africa, like in many other formerly colonised parts of the world. Gupta (2003) argues that English is more than a language which one communicates with; English “serves as a tool for isolationist feelings”, in order to “announce that we have arrived” – meaning that one is “educated” and “civilised”.

It is not surprising that countries of the Global North have adapted aligned structures and culturally sensitive curricula to meet their own needs. Nonetheless, there are certain commonalities in their approach. As a general principle it seems that values such as national tradition and national characteristics are the order of the day in their education systems. In multilingual environments, such as in Nigeria and in a number of other African countries, the basic curriculum prioritises the learning of reading, writing and counting in the dominant language at the cost of the local knowledge and local language (Heugh 2006; Babaci-Wilhite 2012a). The degree to which the mother tongue has been ignored in favour of international languages is an obstacle to social organisation. We note that human rights are interdependent and indivisible; thus, human rights can serve as the pillar on which nations build their curriculum in the name of holistic justice and interwoven capabilities. We further observe that thrusting Africa's traditional education to the forefront is vital to re-creating its own development. We then can feel confident of benefiting from the significant outcomes of such education in addressing capability deprivations and combating eurocentrism.

Local empowerment: is the world on track?

Learning to read, write and count in a local language improves students' abilities to think critically about their own conditions and about the world (Babaci-Wilhite 2012b). The indispensable responsibility of the education sector to ensure the teaching of these skills is consistent as interpreted in the *World Declaration on Education for All* (UNESCO 2002, p. 14). Indeed, in reinforcing the importance of

local languages, one reinforces interest in local knowledge and exercise of other human rights. But the current schooling process gives the impression that African languages are inferior to ex-colonial European languages and that they are somehow inadequate for engaging with complex concepts (Prah 2003). This reinforces the sense of the inferiority of local culture and at the same time is disadvantageous for children of the lowest socio-economic strata who have had little exposure to European languages at home (Babaci-Wilhite 2010). In support of a distinctly African voice, the curriculum must promote a localised pedagogy for inclusive participation, local content to expand the desire to learn, and the eagerness of students to acquire manual skills and to appreciate local language. It must also move from just transferring practical skills to cultivating creative populations with the potential for the social solidarity that African societies enjoyed in the past and continue to need today. The question for developmental educationists in Africa should be how we can rethink education to equip citizens with indigenous knowledge as their main asset to gain control of their own lives.

While education is seen as the key which unlocks capability deprivation, it also enlarges opportunities. As mentioned earlier, capability deprivation is the multi-dimensional measure of human deprivation that focuses on human capabilities. It is also understood that sometimes the key does not fit the lock, or has not fitted the lock particularly in Africa. From this assertion, education is not just literacy, nor is it only about employability – it is about being able to lead a desirable life and about making new persons of citizens. The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UN CESCR) notes that states parties are required to ensure that education conforms with the aims and objectives as identified by General Comment No. 13 on the right to education:

Education is both a human right in itself and an indispensable means of realizing other human rights. As an empowerment right, education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities ... [E]ducation in all its forms and at all levels shall exhibit the following interrelated and essential features: (a) Availability ...; (b) Accessibility ...; (c) Acceptability ...; [and] (d) Adaptability (UN CESCR 1999).

The acknowledgment of *the right to education* as a basic human right and of *rights in education* as a driver for indigenous knowledge as an integral part of the culture and linguistic rights of communities is important because language serves as a unique tool to expand other communal rights. Education systems should be inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs and circumstances of learners and give appropriate weight to the abilities, knowledge and skills which they bring to the learning and teaching process. Learning through African languages facilitates creativity and new knowledge in education that is indispensable for community-level decision-making for vital economic and social inclusion. The use of indigenous languages will also improve the learning process, as cognitive concepts in local languages improve understanding and confirm for children that their identity is worth learning about and developing. Therefore, indigenous education should

have the same status and respect as conventional knowledge. In this vein, not only does the use of the mother tongue as the medium of primary instruction guarantee basic rights, but it can also increase economic productivity and human capabilities as skills and knowledge are matched to local settings.

According to Martha Nussbaum (2006, p. 322), “education should be construed not merely as a provider of useful skills, but also, and more centrally, as a general empowerment of the person through information, critical thinking, and imagination.” Similarly, Ingrid Robeyns (2006, p. 73) alludes to the inadequacy of marketised education by concluding that the “human capital approach is problematic because it is economistic, fragmented and exclusively instrumentalist. Therefore, in ignoring rights and capabilities it has limited ability in principle to account for the intrinsic and non-economic roles that education plays”. In his book *Development as Freedom*, Amartya Sen demonstrates education’s strong role in stopping intergenerational poverty by arguing that educational success must be evaluated in the context of individual freedoms – opportunity freedom or process freedom (Sen 1999, pp. 14–15).⁷ What Sen suggests is a standard measure of well-being that falls short of welfarism and yet is opportunity-based in a way that overcomes inequalities in the ability to convert resources for education (Alkire 2002). While governments cannot be not expected to deliver all capabilities, Nussbaum argues that “... in the political arena ... certain human capabilities exert a moral claim that they should be developed” (Nussbaum 2000, p. 83), and where resources are sufficient, failure to develop central capabilities is a problem of social justice. Clearly, the mandate to extend to all learners the human right to education and the right to choose and pursue what they value in life (Nussbaum 2000; Alkire 2002) remains unrealised.

The goal of African states should be to re-engineer education from focusing on delivering productive agents – an overly narrow standard measure of the value of education – to a task of bringing value into the human condition. This idea of localised curriculum and inclusive education provides a useful means for overcoming the barriers to participation in education. Clearly, this process extends to all learners the human right to education and the right to participation in an inclusive polity.

In line with Nussbaum’s (2000) and Sen’s (1999) account of the conditions for human capabilities, our argument for linguistic rights and self-development suggests that capacity for control over one’s life is crucial to the achievement of self-determination. In this sense, without educational inclusion citizens are deprived of opportunities for developing capabilities essential to achieving social justice. We question the logic that all countries can “catch up” with the Global North if they follow the neo-conservative strategies which constitute the operational ideology of World Bank and IMF top-down imposition. This development framework is radically delinked from the contextualisation of things that matter most in rights in education for self-development. This is a crucial difference, as a neoliberal

⁷ *Opportunity freedom* or *process freedom* refers to a perspective of positive freedom concerned with “enhancing the lives we lead and the freedom we enjoy”, or in other words, “expanding the freedom we have reason to value” (Sen 1999).

modernisation approach makes education much less bottom-up and delinks education from capabilities deprivation. This describes schooling which still has some vestiges of the historical project of assimilation, with the absence of culture and language of the local within the school serving to reinforce capabilities deprivation or exclusion.

Education policy in Africa: what are the drivers?

Social justice and equity, equality and the rule of law ought to be among the fundamental drivers of education in Africa. These elements ensure that Africans have the knowledge, values, skills, creativity and critical thinking required to build democracy, and to ensure development, equity, cultural rights and social justice. While a “utilitarian” mode of education sees its role as being confined to making people literate and equipping them with job-oriented skills, we see education as empowering people to lead a happy and meaningful life; it is a basic human right that needs protection; it is fundamental for inclusive development and for enabling citizens to make meaningful contributions to their community (Babaci-Wilhite and Geo-JaJa 2011).

Unfortunately for Africa, the ethics of the market, in overshadowing the ethics of humanity, leave learners ill-prepared for the complexities of the world. But achievements have been impressive in the realm of legislation and policy formulation, and in not dismantling surviving structures that maintain and police privileged inclusions and mass exclusions. The lesson here is that of a desire to encourage internal and external sovereignty, and simultaneously to invest heavily in the social sector. From a rights-based perspective, such budget orientation that focuses on social development best serves the interest of children and is gender- and poverty-sensitive. Its advantage is rapid achievement of the mandates of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNHCHR 1989) and the Millennium Development Goals,⁸ so that people can exercise choice in new opportunities. The need for sustainability and respect for everyone’s rights informs a rethink of the neoliberal framework, which epitomises a state of social injustice where structural inequalities severely limit opportunities to develop capabilities for the majority of the people. Indeed, there can be no true social transformation towards self-development without quality education. Neither can there be self-determination without a populace prepared and able to enjoy linguistic rights and leave behind the practices of the colonial orthodoxy which is the source of much of Africa’s current

⁸ The eight United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were formulated at the United Nations Millennium Summit in New York in 2000. All 192 United Nations Member States and at least 23 international organisations agreed to make efforts to achieve them by the year 2015. They include (1) eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; (2) achieving universal primary education; (3) promoting gender equality and empowering women; (4) reducing child mortality rates; (5) improving maternal health; (6) combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; (7) ensuring environmental sustainability; and (8) developing a global partnership for development.

challenges. A meta-narrative approach⁹ is necessary which embraces the recognition that students come to school from different places and different backgrounds, and find themselves situated differently along a continuum of privileges. Understandably, just as nations desire sovereignty and development, students on their part have a shared interest in receiving quality education. In fact, we suggest this method since we are not convinced of a single framework that will always be relevant without employing several techniques to address the multidimensionality of poverty and other African challenges – such as quantitatively massive but qualitatively limited education. A framework that captures the various multiple deprivations and policy questions to be analysed, a meta-narrative human development with major implications for the nexus between education, capabilities deprivation and self-development can serve as a particularly targeted and path-dependent weapon against deprivation. This radical rethinking is a *gestalt* (unified whole) of a field of mutually dependent elements that contributes to the achievement of agreed objectives. Focusing on rights in education has the effect of breaking down social and economic barriers of marginalisation in Africa's relations with the Global North. In the work of Macleans A. Geo-JaJa & Xiucheng Yang (2003), entitled “Rethinking globalization in Africa”, it is suggested that the curriculum needs to be informed by ways of living, by making sense of experience and by building on individuals' and societies' own cultural capital. Cultural rights have to be embedded in the schooling system in order to achieve cultural empowerment and self-development. Purpose-orientated education with content and context of functionality in society, we argue, has a role in developing characteristics in children, such as openness and reciprocity, that are crucial to deliberative efficacy and democratic inclusion.

The recognition of the right to or rights in education for social integration dates back to the post-colonial period in response to education for the emerging local economies. Yet despite this identification the obstacles in and the complex nature of the existing education and the need for rethinking the task of securing education rights are well documented (Geo-JaJa 2004; Lou and Geo-JaJa 2009; Spreen and Vally 2006; Robeyns 2006; Tomasevski 2006). If this is true, schools need to be more thoughtful about culture, cherishing it and building on the webs of meaning, value and community which students bring to education. This campaign needs to give special attention to educational quality and requires a drastic change. To rethink education in Africa, curricula must assume an active rather than a passive role in African societies; schooling must be seen as a bridge-builder between tradition and global cultures. To recapture traditions and integrate them into global cultures one has to understand that development related to modernity requires a rethink, and that a new understanding of development will have to focus on inclusion rights. Accordingly, as we consider ways to indigenise education and development, we contend that only when rights in education becomes a project in which many voices participate, and which embody new analytics and thinking on inequality and injustices, will education be transformed into environments of learning which foster growing collaboration between Africans and the Global North.

⁹ In this context, a meta-narrative approach is a development framework that is particular and part-dependent on the interconnectedness of policies.

According to Jandhyala Tilak (2002) and Macleans Geo-JaJa (2006), ensuring more than the basic right to education is not only a matter of morality or social justice; it makes great economic and human sense. Educational investment might not directly lead to development or to the primacy of education in responding to African developmental issues. On the contrary, an incomplete understanding of the interlocking nature of social, cultural, economic and political issues, particularly that of local language in the school system, can lead to a series of policy tensions or undesirable outcomes. The following can be concluded:

- (1) African countries have distinct historical antecedents as well as different economic histories and different levels of development. Implementing a one-size-fits-all language policy in all African countries can negatively affect education outcomes and sustainability. With limited resources and drastic budgetary cutbacks affecting critical social sectors, which have intensified problems in education and economic problems, there is a need for direct policy intervention, a visible strong hand – usually that of government – to help the crippled invisible hand of market forces.
- (2) Africa, with its immense human, linguistic and natural resources, can be made into an economic power if its superior language is respected in the education system.
- (3) Scaling up investment in local language for human development is not simply a question of throwing more money at education; rather it is a question of what type of education and what focus of education the money is buying. For instance, in some countries where teaching has continued in a colonial language, decades later students remain functionally illiterate and suffer from exclusion despite years of schooling.
- (4) It is recognised in the literature and in our paper that Africa must start with literacy in indigenous languages, and then revolutionise education away from systems developed by and for the Global North. Indeed, the education system has failed virtually everywhere in Africa as rights and culture are not integrated in schooling. Improving rather than abandoning traditional social foundations of education in Africa must inform new reforms in bringing societies closer together, instead of fragmenting them or serving to reproduce the existing unequal social injustices.
- (5) In respecting the sovereignty of nations, the Global North must be a significant participant in realising the Africanisation of education or rights in education by providing unconditional support to building “knowledge capabilities” and a universal set of capabilities to meet at least the threshold for living.

There is one approach which has yet to be tried in Africa – the laboratory of philosophical and theoretical foundations – and that is the active learning method¹⁰ in education and the bottom-up approach to development. Perhaps, above all else, it is for Africa to find its own educational priorities in the localisation of education and indigenisation of instruction with language. These forms, which demand different

¹⁰ Complementing lecture-style teaching, the active learning method involves hands-on exercises, the experience of which stays in learners’ memories for a long time.

responses in different circumstances as advised by Freire (1978), are much more effective in harnessing Africa's vast potential upon the learning of its citizens and in facing Africa's challenges. Here, then, are the main principles and recommendations for an education (meta-narrative) design. Pedagogy and educational design must start with a focus on self-determination and locally-based outcomes, moving towards integrated curricula that focus on learning aimed at acquiring a reflective ability to shape the community, stressing people's self-determination and self-development by unleashing the power of a learner's classroom. Reforms currently instituted and pushed by the World Bank Group's education strategy 2020¹¹ (World Bank 2005) do not in fact provide such an environment or knowledge for the majority of people in peripheral communities.

Regardless of which framework is adopted, it is important to understand that the role of responsible citizenship (duty-bearers) at all levels of education, particularly at the basic primary level, is to (a) educate citizens who will be able to contribute to self-development, and (b) to enhance the quality of an education that currently holds dual interest – the local and the global – as a starting point for combating social deprivation in an effort to foster social integration and national unity. The goal is to give people the power and capabilities to change their own lives, improve their own communities and determine their own destinies. In other words, a fundamental transdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning is required. From this perspective, we make the claim that what ought to be compared is not access (*right to education*), but rather quality of education (*rights in education*), in which teachers, parents, students and schools are all accountable parts of the equation. The suggested approach offers an appealing alternative to both the developmentalist and modernisation approaches¹² in immediate post-independence which laid the foundations for development in Africa. Above all, language, which is inevitably a major preoccupation for a society in liberating itself from colonialism and in refusing to be drawn into neo-colonialism, is still searching for its own re-creation, post-Washington Consensus.

Conclusion and recommendations

We have tried to offer you an insight into the achievements and failings of the Washington Consensus Project. In sharing these perceptions, we hope to enable others concerned with (a) the importance of rights in school and (b) focus of reforms in development to reflect on some of the lessons that have been learned in Africa and perhaps consider these within their own contexts. We pause to say that attempts to reform and design education programmes must focus on basic human rights – linguistic rights and social inclusion. The continued neglect of distinctive local

¹¹ The World Bank Group's education strategy 2020, entitled *Learning for All*, focuses on learning, i.e. the educational outcome, instead of schooling, i.e. school attendance (World Bank Group 2011).

¹² The developmentalist approach is the catechism of developmentalist and modernisation discourse anchored on the structural-functionalist approach of binary division of societies into polar opposites: traditional and modern.

features, of the importance of language in dignity, and of levels rather than stages of development in education reforms are bound to have negative results.

We challenge the belief that the localisation or Africanisation of education, particularly in the language context, will not significantly contribute to social rights or quality education. On the contrary, our paper gives support to the thesis that the non-use of indigenous languages in schools is an obstacle to universal literacy and constitutes a bottleneck for human capability advance and social integration and development in Africa. Furthermore, in creating unbalanced development the prestige and continued reliance on English, French or Portuguese as both official and essential languages for education and literacy even leads to the inability to address the livelihood needs of all citizens, since the school systems emulate mainstream education conceived exclusively in terms of productive agents that fuel economic growth. The suggested complementary alternative is informed by the perspective of the politics of rights in development, the politics of human rights, the politics of proactive emancipation, as well as by the politics of self-empowering education that reside within every community's and nation's destiny. The realisation of this potential requires two major preconditions: (1) a clear localised contextualisation as well as an understanding and analysis of the roots of the challenges and (2) an understanding of the historical context and reasons within which policy-makers and Africans have not been activated in ensuring rights in education. This is significant, since the latter contributes to the cultural and linguistic homogenisation process which has led to intensified educational poverty, marginalisation and capability deprivation. These qualitative outcomes, together with the loss of language choice and human dignity, lead us to believe that current African education is in dire need of "re-engineering", and not just reform and adjustment or pre-packaged solutions which ignore every kind of cultural invasion, whether open or covert.

Accordingly, it is no longer sufficient to talk of efficiency of the existing colonially-modelled educational system or of a neoliberal framework that cannot deliver capabilities. Rather it is more significant to talk about the potential of rights in education; that is education that does not conform to the ideology of markets promoted by the World Bank/IMF for Africa. This suggests that the role of education seems to be seen as being that of supplying the global economy with a docile and cheap labour force that is schooled in English. For us, it is only appropriate to reposition *rights in education* over *right to education* and over education anchored in the removal of adverse influences that inhibit the struggle to re-create a society – the re-conquering by the people of their own world. It has become obvious, as many commentators have pointed out, that indigenous knowledge and language are indispensable for inclusive development.

Where does this leave Africa? We acknowledge the relevance of human rights, particularly linguistic rights and cultural rights, and their integration in education systems as the core to freedom, social justice and peace for inclusive development in Africa. The failure of nation states (governments) and the international community to deliver rights in education, which has left Africa in its current poor state despite enormous human and natural resources, informs the call for a rethink, reconstruction or replacement with a complementary but improved orthodoxy,

which we term the meta-narrative. Unlike “modern” education, “functional” education¹³ – which we are recommending for Africa – views knowledge and minds not as commodities, or as just being human resources to be developed and exploited and then cast aside, but as treasures to be cultivated to improve the quality of life. The question we would like to leave our readers thinking about is: should localised education be uprooted as barbaric, old-fashioned and primitive just on the basis of its shortcomings, just because its values have been completely ignored by modern schooling? Why should the shortcomings of modern education not be considered under the same critical lens?

It is our hope that stakeholders will ensure that learners participate and achieve in school, particularly those burdened with deprivation and those located on the outer edge of society, who may be more vulnerable to exclusion in development. However, despite the fact that African indigenous education has often been portrayed as being primitive, the authors strongly advise that it must be clear for decision-makers to see indigenous languages and education as the most effective and formidable means of addressing present and future African challenges. The imposition of standard global curricula and conventional reforms together with colonial *linguae francae* has only inhibited the ability of African countries to declare education to be a universal and inalienable right or a path away from material and spiritual poverty. Schooling today represents a significant departure from Africanness in education and from the responsibility of a strong state for universal and inalienable rights in education. These are some of the mechanisms that have pushed African communities into crises of human rights and social justice within a rapidly-changing global economy.

What becomes evident in reviewing the literature is that reforms intended to mitigate the present circumstances suffer from programme ontologies (explicit specifications of a conceptualisation), or require either adjusting to or doing away with African indigenous education. These framings and the insight that education is an end in itself have significant validity. Evidence further suggests that education is a direct driver of inclusive development and fosters the emancipation of communities from disempowerment and eventual exploitation and dependency. Taken together, all concepts of education should be used as an index of human rights and of the degree to which a country can be considered to be developed. This view informs this article’s advocacy for the return of humanism to the centre of the education agenda in Africa. We count on these insights and recommend that Africa must think globally and act locally as education needs to go beyond economism.

We close this paper by stating that *rights in education* – the right of learners to native ideologies and a culturally respectful education that enables citizens to make better use of opportunities and achieve valued capabilities represents a challenge for the new millennium. In sum, consistent with rights in education, we argue that international communities, together with local stakeholders, should take effective

¹³ By “modern” education, we mean schooling that is all about power that produces ultra-conformists who lack creativity, free thought and effective independent thinking ability. By “functional” education, we mean the symbiotic match of education in context and content with the community it serves as well as sustainable development – education provided in a way that is consistent with human rights.

measures for citizens to have access to an education in their own culture, and provided in their own language (see UN 2007, Article 14). To this end education needs to be human rights-centred, curriculum-localised, and appropriately resourced in a meta-narrative approach based on intercultural competence and a rejection of paternalism.

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