HANDBOOK OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EDUCATION

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10 Social Justice in African Education in the Age of Globalization

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Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to consider the possibilities and limitations for realizing social justice goals in African education in the global era. It will do this through reviewing the social justice implications of a range of initiatives that have emerged at the regional level. We have focused on sub-Saharan Africa because as a region it is most at risk of being left behind by the globalization process (World Bank, 2006; Economic and Social Research Council [ESRC], 2006). The decision to focus on the regional level is because of the increasing significance that is attached to this level by African governments, donors and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) (see Robertson et al., 2007). This is exemplified by the launch of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and the more recent Commission for Africa (CFA). There has also been a proliferation of other regional initiatives, all of which have implications for social justice and education. The chapter will start by setting out a theoretical framework for understanding social justice and a broad overview of the wider context of social justice and education in sub-Saharan Africa. The chapter will then focus on five inter-related themes that together exemplify the possibilities and limitations for realizing social justice goals on the continent.

Toward a Framework for Understanding Social Justice in the African Context

The American political scientist Nancy Fraser provides a thought provoking analysis of social justice in relation to globalization. She argues that:

Until recently, most theorists of justice have tacitly assumed the Westphalian sovereign state as the frame of their inquiry. Today, however, the acceleration of globalization has altered the scale of social interaction. Thus, questions of social justice need to be reframed. Whether the issue is structural adjustment or indigenous land claims, immigration or global warming, unemployment or homosexual marriage, the requirements of justice cannot be ascertained unless we ask: Who precisely are the relevant stakeholders? Which matters are genuinely national, which local, which regional, and which global? Who should decide such questions, and by what decision-making processes? (Fraser, 2006, p. 1)

Here Fraser draws attention to the complexities of social justice debates in the global era in a way that we suggest has relevance for Africa. For example, she highlights the limited applicability of the Western state model (the Westphalian state) as a framework for considering non-Western contexts. She also draws attention to another feature of the
debate, namely, that understanding issues of social justice requires taking account of the broader economic, political, and social contexts. Fraser’s ideas have the following implications. First, rather than assuming that issues of education and social justice will take a similar form to those in the West, we need to base our argument on an analysis of the African context. Second, just as important as the issues themselves is an understanding of the process by which some voices get heard in educational debates whilst those of others remain marginalized.

Fraser usefully draws attention to three dimensions of social justice. The first, “redistribution” relates to access to resources which in our case equates with access to a quality education and the potential outcomes that arise from this. Here we find Sen’s concept of capabilities to be useful in terms of understanding the range of cognitive and affective outcomes that contribute to a person’s well-being; namely, what enables learners to become economically productive, healthy, secure, and active citizens (Sen, 1999). Access to and ideas about what counts as a quality education, however, are contested in the context of neoliberalism and the increasing marketization of education as we will argue. The second dimension, that of “recognition,” means that we need to first identify and then acknowledge the claims of historically marginalized groups. In the African context these include women, rural dwellers, victims of HIV/AIDS, orphans and vulnerable children refugees, cultural, linguistic, religious, racial, and sexual minorities and indigenous groups. In this chapter, issues of recognition roughly equate to the extent to which the needs of these groups are catered for in understandings of the quality of education, including the formal and overt curriculum and the way that schools are resourced. The third dimension, “participatory justice,” includes the rights of individuals and groups to have their voices heard in debates about education and to actively participate in decision making. Importantly, for Fraser and indeed for the argument of this chapter, this is a prerequisite for realizing issues of redistribution and recognition.

Before proceeding, a few riders are necessary. Careful consideration needs to be given before applying the concept of social justice to the African context. The origins of the term lie outside of Africa in the European Enlightenment and in the development of Western humanism. These events coincided with particularly brutal periods in African history, including the advent of Western colonialism and the slave trade. It is important to acknowledge this history whilst also recognizing that indigenous understandings of justice have been present on the continent since precolonial times (Ramose, 2006) and how ideas of social justice have often lain at the heart of struggles against colonialism and slavery. Indeed, there has been a recent upsurge in interest in social justice as a concept on the continent and this is reflected in a range of new initiatives and publications. It is also important to acknowledge the enormous diversity of views around social justice issues in Africa and, as is the case elsewhere in the world, their often contested and contradictory nature. A third caveat in applying a social justice framework to Africa relates to the relative predominance of redistributive issues over those of recognition and participation compared to similar debates in the West. In this respect Susan George (2003) has argued that the deepening of poverty and inequality under globalization is the most profound obstacle to realizing global rights. In the African context we argue that whilst issues of redistribution are clearly central, they are inseparable from those of recognition and participation.

The Context of Social Justice in Africa

The aim of this section is to highlight elements of the broader context of social justice in the African context as a basis for understanding education’s role in realizing social justice
With 11 percent of the world’s population (700 million people), Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for only about 1 percent of the global gross domestic product (GDP) (World Bank 2005: xx)

Africa has seen its share of world trade fall from 6% in 1980 to less than 2% in 2002. Africa has suffered because developed countries restrict Africa’s ability to sell its products in their countries as well as other ‘supply side’ barriers. (CFA, 2005)

Share of world exports that dropped from more than 3.5 percent in 1970 to about 1.4 percent at the end of 2002 (World Bank 2005: xx)

Flows to investment in Africa by foreign investors are average for all low-income countries if measured as a percentage of Africa’s income (2-3%) but are low in absolute terms. It is strongly focused on high value resource-based industries like oil and diamonds. (CFA, 2005)

Large sums of money depart Africa in the form of capital flight estimated at $15 billion a year. About 40% of the stock of African savings is held outside the continent. (CFA, 2005)

As a percentage of GDP, Africa’s share of remittances is higher than that of either the East Asia or Pacific region or the Europe or Central Asia region. However, in cash terms, Africa receives less in remittances than does any other low-income region. (CFA, 2005)

Figure 10.1 Africa in a globalised world integration of African countries in the global economy.

Different explanations are offered to explain Africa’s predicament and for the nature and causes of social injustice on the continent. The Commission for Africa (CFA, 2005), for instance, identifies a range of political causes that includes poor governance and civil conflict linked to structural issues, and also a poor investment climate; a continuing dependency on primary commodities; high transport costs; a weak transport infrastructure going back to the colonial legacy; and, late entry into manufacturing. These structural factors are exacerbated by environmental ones, such as low agricultural productivity and the impact of climate change; and by a range of human factors including the impact of poor health and low levels of education coupled with the pressures of population growth and urbanization. The CFA also mentions a range of factors associated with Africa’s relationship with the outside world including low levels of foreign direct investment (FDI), a changing aid environment, and Africa’s lack of control over world markets.

An alternative analysis written from the perspective of the Namibian labor movement, exemplifies a more radical tradition of thought on the continent dating back to the work of Walter Rodney (1972) and Kwame Nkrumah (1965) and incorporating recent analyses.
of Africa’s problems by some radical critics of globalization (Amin, 1997; Bond, 2001; Chossudovsky, 2001; Hoogvelt, 1997). From this perspective Africa’s current position is principally explained in terms of the legacy of the slave trade and extraction of natural resources by Europeans, which culminated in the colonization of the continent and more recently by neocolonialism, which has been exacerbated by neoliberal globalization; the impact of the Cold War which fueled many foreign funded wars and conflicts; the continued material, financial, and intellectual dependency of Africa on her former colonizers; the Bretton Woods institutions (IMF/World Bank), and the use of foreign aid as instruments through which the West continues to dictate—often to the detriment of the African people—policy and governance in Africa; and, poor leadership by most African leaders who are preoccupied with their positions of power and self-enrichment with only a minority of African leaders prepared to voluntarily relinquish power (Labour Resource and Research Institute [LaRRI], 2003).

At the heart of these more radical critiques is an analysis of the impact of neoliberal ideas on the development agenda in Africa linked to powerful donor and international interests and the implications of these for poverty and inequality on the continent. In a recent state of the art literature review (Robertson et al., 2007) the authors trace the development of neoliberal ideas from the 1980s to the present. Although there have been shifts in the form these ideas have taken and in their relative influence, they have remained a powerful shaping force on policy discourses. Exponents of neoliberalism have
often opposed the very idea of social justice emphasizing instead the role of the individual entrepreneur within a free market as the basis for freedom and prosperity.7 As Ndoye (1997) and others have argued, these ideas sit uncomfortably with the collective and communal basis on which many grass roots organizations have historically labored in Africa.

Debates about social exclusion and injustice in Africa are also linked to demands for greater democracy and voice for marginalized groups and for more accountability of political leaders. Many commentators have questioned the credentials of some of the leaders and regimes associated with regional bodies such as the African Union (AU) and initiatives such as the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD; Bond, 2001; LaRRI, 2003) and the CFA. There was criticism of the CFA, for example, because of an apparent hesitation to name the ruling class oppression which exists in many places (with women, the rural poor, migrants, and refugees among principal victims), and the divisive role of ethnicity, tribalism, religion, and regionalism (CFA secretariat, 2005, p. 1). These criticisms must be seen in the context of a discussion of the form of the nation-state that has emerged in Africa. Debates about the state in the West assume the predominance of the ideal of the so-called Westphalian state model.8 The form of state in Africa, however, is more commonly characterized as a postcolonial state. Whereas nations based on the Westphalian model emerged from preexisting empirical entities, the borders that territorially defined postcolonial African states were arbitrarily drawn by colonizers. Unlike in the Westphalian model, the mode of rule in postcolonial states has variously been described as “personal rule,” “elite accommodation,” and “belly politics,” and as a “shadow” or “neopatrimonial state” (see Bøås, 2003 for a summary).

Some commentators, whilst recognizing the validity of some of these criticisms point out that NEPAD and the CFA also contain commitments to peace, security, democracy, and social justice, but that these aspects need to be further strengthened. Some also suggest that “good governance” should not necessarily rely on Western models (Ake, 1998; Cheru, 2002; Cornwell, 1998). Cornwell argues that greater accountability of African leaders ought to involve “the creation of voluntary neighbourhood governments and rural grass roots movements that produce alternative institutions of decision making, drawing on customary notions of justice, fairness and political obligation” (1998, p. 14). Cheru (2002), has identified a series of grass roots, civil society organizations, such as peasants’ organizations, informal economy and self-help associations, the human rights movement, trade unions, and religious organizations, prodemocracy forces, women’s movements, environmentalists, and other civil society movements, including those with an educational focus.

Access to Education

We have suggested that access to a quality education is a fundamental aspect of redistributive social justice in African education because so many continue to be denied such access. Basic education provision has been correlated with an improved economic growth and productivity including agricultural productivity (Appleton & Balihuta, 1996) and individual economic welfare (Hannum & Buchmann, 2005). Education is seen to have a critical role to play within local communities through providing access to information that can support the feasibility and diversity of sustainable livelihoods and can give communities access to their rights (Lawrence & Tate, 1997). Many of the regional initiatives provide support for the Dakar framework9 and for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) relating to education, namely:
• Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling;
• Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.

Figure 10.3 provides some facts and figures concerning access to education. Although lack of access is a general issue affecting hundreds of thousands of African children, the situation is worse for some groups than for others. For example, it is alarming that in Africa girls can expect to stay in school for only six years compared to eight years for boys (UNESCO, 2002). Poor educational outcomes and low participation rates become more pronounced at the secondary and tertiary levels and in vocational education. The focus of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on the access of girls and women to education is not only a question of recognizing their equal rights. It is also perceived to have wider benefits to health and welfare, including the fight against HIV/AIDS and greater control by women over their own fertility (see also Benefo, 2005; Department for International Development [DfID], 2000a; Hannum & Buchmann, 2005; Lloyd, Mensch, & Clark, 2000). Citing recent research (Abu-Ghaida & Klasen, 2004), the CFA, for example, argues that

Countries which are not on track to meet the gender parity MDG target in education (and nearly half of those are in Africa) will have child mortality rates one and a half per cent worse than countries with better education systems, and they will also have two and a half per cent more underweight children. (CFA, 2005, p. 181)10

Educating women and girls can also contribute to their alleviation from poverty and can have wider economic benefits.11 It has a positive effect on overall labor supply through increasing the amount of time women work (UNESCO, 2003). Finally, educating mothers

- African has the lowest school life expectancy of any region. A child in Africa can expect to attend school (including primary, secondary and tertiary education) for 7.8 years compared to a world average of 10.5 and an average for all low income countries of 9.9 years (UNESCO, 2005: 38).
- The gross enrolment ration (GER) in pre-primary education is the lowest for any region at 5.6% compared to a global average of 48.6% and an average for low income countries of 34.3% (UNESCO, 2005: 302).
- The region has the lowest GER in primary education of any region at 91% in 2002 with the largest number of children primary school age out of school children (40, 370). Primary education on the continent has the highest drop out rate for any region (40.5% compared to 25.5% for all low income countries) and the lowest transition rate to secondary education (53.8% compared to 84.5% for all low income countries) (UNESCO, 2005: 44).
- Africa also has the lowest GER for any region in secondary education at 28.4% and in 2002 compared to a global average of 65.2% and an average for all low income countries of 58.3% (UNESCO, 2005: 342). At 2.5% Africa has the lowest GER of any region in tertiary education. This compares with a global average of 21.2% and an average for low income countries of 11% (UNESCO, 2005: 350).

Figure 10.3 Participation in education and training in Africa.
through adult literacy programs has been linked with improving their children’s attendance and performance at school (UN Millenium Project, 2005).

Those with special education needs, including physical disabilities, are often excluded as already overstretched and underresourced schools fail to meet their needs (UNESCO, 2005). Orphans (including AIDS orphans) and other vulnerable children are more likely to be excluded. A death of a parent has been related to a delay in starting primary education and girls’ lowered school attendance (Ainsworth, Beegle, & Koda, 2002). The conflicts that have blighted the continent in recent years have had a big impact on issues of access and social justice (see Robertson et al., 2007). A UN Development Programme (UNDP; 2005) report, for example, observed that half of all primary schools were closed or destroyed during Mozambique’s civil war between 1976 and 1992. Furthermore, the UNDP states that countries in conflict are likely to spend less on education, and parents are less likely to send girls to school for fear of violence (Kirk, 2004). Similarly, poor children are far more likely to be deprived of education and affected by conflict than wealthier children (Seitz, 2004).

The debate, however, is wider than access to primary education. Tackling youth and adult illiteracy through adult literacy programmes is also important for realizing social justice goals (UNESCO, 2005). There is much debate in the literature over the precise meaning of literacy although there is less dispute over its benefits. It is seen not only as a fundamental human right but as central to economic growth, sustainable development, individual and community empowerment, and the fostering of democracy. Thus it is tragic that whereas in most other parts of the world the number of illiterates has declined, in Africa there has been an increase from 108 million in 1970 to 141 million in 2004, and that of the 30 countries most at risk of not achieving the target of ending illiteracy by 2015, 21 are in Africa (UNESCO, 2006). Part of the reason for this is the relatively low priority accorded to literacy programs and adult education in government and donor spending priorities.

Similarly there are pressures for increasing access to preprimary education where the foundations for learning in later life are laid. Africa currently has the lowest enrolment in this sector of any region (see Figure 10.3 above). There are also growing demands for access to secondary and tertiary education given the role these levels can play in supporting sustainable development, including the provision of middle and higher order skills. In the case of higher education the development of an indigenous capacity for research is considered essential for tackling Africa’s problems and breaking the chains of dependency on the West (African Union [AU], 2005; Tikly et al., 2004). Furthermore, as we have seen, globalization has contributed to the informalization of labor. In Africa, as Afenyadu et al. (1999), Tikly et al. (2003), and King and McGrath (2002) point out, a very significant proportion of school leavers are likely to enter into the jua kali informal sector which is the mainstay of many local economies. In this respect, these authors ask whether some basic vocational skills ought to be included under the heading of basic education. Similar arguments are advanced about access of children and adult learners to basic agricultural and other livelihood skills such as various kinds of crafts. What is emerging is the need for a holistic and balanced approach to funding education for all across the various sectors and levels of education and training, taking into account differences in local realities and priorities across the continent.

The Quality of Education

The issue of access, however, does not stop at getting learners into formal education. A key feature of social injustice in education on the continent is the poor quality of educa-
tion that is experienced by many learners. However, as Ilon (1994) has argued, there is a growing gulf in educational opportunities between emerging global elites and the rest of the population: “a national system of schooling is likely to give way to local systems for the poor and global systems for the rich” (p. 99). Within this highly differentiated environment, a top tier will benefit from a private education that will make them globally competitive; a middle tier will receive a good but not world class education, whilst the majority, the third tier, will have a local, state education that will make them “marginally competitive for low-skill jobs” (p. 102).

The quality of education is important for several reasons. For example, there is evidence from the wider literature that improvements in the quality and relevance of education can ultimately have a beneficial impact on enrolments and on continuation rates (Bergmann, 1996; Lloyd et al., 2000; UNESCO, 2005). Improvements in the quality of education are associated with improved cognitive and affective outcomes that can contribute both to economic growth and to social cohesion.

The poor quality of education is related to a range of factors, chief amongst which are an underqualified, poorly paid, and poorly motivated teaching force (which has also been depleted due to the impact of HIV/AIDS) (e.g., AU, 2005; CFA, 2005); a lack of basic resources that include teaching materials and textbooks; large class sizes (a problem which has been exacerbated by recent growth in enrolments); a perceived lack of relevance of the curriculum (see below); the prevalence of teacher centered and authoritarian teaching; a poor infrastructure that includes a lack of electricity, potable water, and basic sanitary facilities; and a lack of leadership skills and low levels of community involvement. Issues of quality in higher education are further exacerbated by the brain drain and a poor research infrastructure. A key issue relating to education quality in the global era is the need to address the growing digital divide in African education. Africa significantly lags behind the rest of the world in terms of popular access to technology (UN, 2005b). There is a growing consensus about the potential benefits of information and communication technology (ICT) use in supporting a more student centered, problem based, and collaborative approaches to teaching and learning and to assessment (Haddard & Draxler, 2000; Hawkins, 2002; World Bank, 2004). However, to achieve these benefits and to transform learning, ICT use has to be integrated into national policy and into practice in schools. In this respect, according to UNESCO, most African countries are still at the “emerging” stage of development (Farrell & Wachholz, 2003) and the upshot is that many learners continue to be denied access to even basic ICT skills.

Other issues relating to quality are less widely recognized but are also important from a social justice perspective. Bush and Saltarelli (2000) describe how education has two faces, and its negative side can promote rather than reduce the chances of violent conflict. The authors argue that the negative face shows itself in the uneven distribution of education to create or preserve privilege, the use of education as a weapon of cultural repression, and the production or doctoring of textbooks to promote intolerance (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000, p. vii). Davies (2004) discusses the multiple ways that school systems might reproduce social inequalities, increase tension, and be a catalyst for war. One example of this relationship is pointed out by the UNDP which highlights how school exclusion as a result of poverty contributed in Sierra Leone to young people joining the rebel armies. Furthermore, girls and women are more likely to experience gendered abuse in African schools (Forum for African Women Educationalists [FAWE], 2003; Leach, Fiscian, Kadzamira, Lemani, & Machakanja, 2003) and teenage girls may expose themselves to sexual risk in order to fund their education (Vavrus, 2003, 2005). Girls also face particular difficulties in accessing some areas of the curriculum, such as science and mathematics and technology education (Swainson, 1998). Children, who suffer
abuse and neglect at home, may be especially vulnerable to bullying and abuse by teachers or fellow students in school (Leach et al., 2000). AIDS orphans are more likely to fall into this category as well as suffering, together with learners, who are HIV positive, the stigma attached to the disease.

Both NEPAD and the CFA make several recommendations to improve education quality (e.g., CFA, 2005). Chief amongst these is the need to improve the quality of teachers, the curriculum and pedagogy, a better supply of textbooks and other learning materials, greater accountability, and community involvement. NEPAD, in particular, makes proposals to address the digital divide and there are several NEPAD initiatives in the area of ICTs as well as a range of similar initiatives. Some commentators have argued that the curriculum needs to become more girl friendly; for example, by emphasizing subjects more accessible to females and by paying greater heed to women’s strengths and custodial roles in African culture (Mazrui, 1999). A key issue is the lack of women in senior positions within institutions and at a national policy making level. An important consideration for teenage girls is the availability of appropriate sanitary facilities (UNESCO, 2005). For organizations such the Federation of African Women in Education (FAWE), which champions the education of girls and women on the continent, gender issues need to be tackled in a holistic way and must be mainstreamed into all areas of policy and practice (FAWE, 2003b). The CFA document refers in particular to the need for support for orphans and vulnerable children. For example, those living in remote rural areas are more likely to attend schools with a poor infrastructure. A growing area for curriculum reform is the development of life skills programs that include the provision of HIV/AIDS education and the teaching of citizenship. The quality of education with respect to the practice and teaching of human rights and citizenship is particularly important for refugees and those living in contexts of violence.

The African Cultural Renaissance and the Burning Language Question

Issues of education quality in Africa are intimately tied up with culture and language. For example, the CFA argues that “Education systems are often based on inherited curriculum content that is limited to conventional academic subjects…. Curricula should be designed with regional histories, cultures and languages in mind” (CFA, 2005, p. 187). Elsewhere in the report there is a suggestion that development must be African-led and informed by African values. A view of the “collectivism/communalism” of African culture is counterposed against the “individualism” of Western understandings of what development entails, and this has been a consistent aspect of African humanist thought and in thinking about the African Renaissance—a concept that provides much of the political and intellectual inspiration behind NEPAD and in turn the CFA. Whilst these ideas fit with some of the earlier perspectives outlined, they need to be more adequately developed. For example, no consideration is given to what cultural values ought to be selected, given that Africa itself represents a wide range of cultural traditions, languages, and religions, nor to which norms and values ought to be transmitted where they are associated with the oppression of other groups.

With respect to the language question, the CFA report (2005) explains that the problem of identifying and implementing a suitable medium of instruction policy is intimately tied up with the way that colonial boundaries were drawn in the past. A key tension is around whether African-led development is best served by using indigenous or European languages as the medium of instruction (Association for the Development of Education in Africa [ADEA], 2005). On the one hand, the use of a global language as a medium of instruction can help to diffuse ethnic tensions through providing a lingua franca.
Furthermore, the acquisition of English in particular is recognized by many as important for gaining access to power and prosperity. English as a medium of instruction is favored by many parents, as evidenced by the growth of English medium private schools. It is also cheaper to obtain suitable learning materials in English and it is sometimes seen as a “neutral” medium in a multilingual setting (ADEA, 2005, p. 1). On the other hand, no country has successfully advanced scientifically without significantly developing indigenous language/s; examples here include global success stories such as Japan and Korea (Mazrui, 1999). Furthermore, there are pedagogical and psychological benefits to learning in one’s own language, especially in the early years. These advantages feed into more critical perspectives which see the spread of European languages as vehicles for Western consumer culture and as an aspect of neocolonialism (e.g., Brocke-Utne, 2001; Brocke-Utne, Desai, & Quorro, 2004; Moodley, 2000; Pennycook, 1995; Phillipson, 1999; Watson, 1999).

Language rights are becoming ever more complex in the global era. For Phillipson (1999), the complexity is around the use and recognition of different dialects and forms of English, besides Standard English. For Rassool (1999) it is about recognizing language rights in transnational settings, such as the language rights of refugees or migrants. Speakers of minority languages may be particularly disadvantaged by blanket language policies that promote either a global language or a local majority language (Brock-Utne et al., 2004; Trudell, 2005). They may perceive learning in these languages as a threat to their culture (Aikman, 1995) and certain ethnic groups, including pastoralists and nomads, find formal education alien and even hostile to their culture (e.g., Dyer, 2001; Tshireletso, 1997).

Faced with conflicting perspectives and complexity, African countries are increasingly adopting a phased bilingual or even trilingual approach, favoring indigenous languages in the early years and global languages such as English in the later years (Heugh, 2005). In some countries, such as South Africa, choice of languages for learning is left up to individual school communities within broad national guidelines. The Great Lakes Initiative (GLI; 2004) has specifically identified overcoming the deep ethnic divisions caused in part by the legacy of the colonial language issue as fundamental to securing regional co-operation and peace. Many regional initiatives, including the CFA, NEPAD, and the AU, are committed to developing and promoting African languages but shy away from detailed policy recommendations about how this commitment can be realized in practice. The problem is that the resources, training, and political will required to support such a policy are often lacking (Brock-Utne et al., 2004) and schools often to revert to English as the default medium.

The Privatization and Marketization of Education

Debates about access to quality education are bound up with the privatization and marketization of education on the continent. Privatization and marketization has been a feature of education policy in low-income countries since the 1980s (Bullock & Thomas, 1997; Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1998), although the degree of marketization has varied considerably across the continent (Bennell, 1997). The increase in privatization is related to the influence of neoliberal ideas in contemporary globalization. In most African countries, marketization has involved encouraging the policy of charging user fees, a proliferation of private schools and universities, and the development of a limited notion of “choice” for some students in the urban areas.

The CFA initiative provides support for partnerships in the provision of education and training. It points out that
non-state actors, including faith-based organisations, civil society, the private sector and communities, have historically provided much education in Africa. Some of these it claims, are excellent, but others (often aiming at those who cannot afford the fees common in state schools) are without adequate state regulation and are of a low quality. (CFA, 2005, p. 186)

The CFA is supportive of public/private partnerships, particularly in relation to secondary and tertiary education provision. Privatisation has major implications for social justice in education. For example, the introduction of user fees had disastrous consequences for primary and secondary school enrolments during the 1980s and early 1990s in many countries. Private education has also been associated with growing educational inequality in countries such as Tanzania (Lassibille, Tan, & Sutra, 1998) and the quality of private schools compared to government schools in Africa has been extremely variable (Kitaev, 1999). The policy of encouraging private provision in secondary and tertiary education since the 1980s has led to only a modest increase in enrolments at these levels throughout sub-Saharan Africa (secondary school enrolment, for example has only slightly risen from 20.1% in 1991 to 24.3% in 2000) (UNESCO, 2002). The African Union argues that the privatization of higher education poses risks for what it describes as the “fulfillment of the broad mission of a university, spanning critical thinking, knowledge generation, innovation, production of different skills, ‘an enlightened citizenry’, laying the foundation for democracy, nation building, and social cohesion” (AU, 2005, p. viii).

The proposed marketization of higher education through the introduction of a General Agreement on Trade in Services has proved controversial in many low income countries (Tikly, 2003b). The implication of African countries signing up to such an agreement would be to open up the provision of education to a range of international suppliers with Western, industrialized countries having a distinct market advantage. The recently adopted Accra Declaration on GATS and the Internationalization of Higher Education in Africa calls for an internationalization process that is mutually beneficial. It called on African governments to exercise caution on further GATS commitments in higher education until a more informed position is arrived at on how tradable, transnational education can best serve national and regional development priorities. In the same vein, higher education institutions, expressed concern (Association of African Universities [AAU], 2004) that market forces alone are inadequate to ensure that cross-border education contributes to the public good and by implication social justice.

Leadership, Governance and the Representation of Marginalized Groups

All of the initiatives emphasize the importance of education’s role in relation to leadership and governance. These issues are important for our purposes because they impact on the third aspect of Fraser’s framework, namely the rights of marginalized groups to be represented and to have their voices heard in policy debates. Some of the regional initiatives make specific recommendations relating to “good governance” that are echoed in the wider literature (e.g., Ashton & Green, 1996; Carnoy, 1999; Cheru, 2002). However, it is also important to recognize that implementing change requires going beyond developing the technical capacity of leaders to effect change. We have seen in relation to the earlier discussion on the postcolonial state that a key issue in advancing African social justice relates to creating greater accountability. For the CFA (2005), education has an important role to play in this regard because it is argued that a more educated citizenry is better able to make leaders accountable to them.
However, the emphasis in most of the initiatives is on developing leadership capacity in government (i.e., developing top-down leadership). Little, if any, attention is given to the need to develop leadership capacity outside of government within civil society. In this respect there is a tension between the commitment in NEPAD and the CFA toward developing democratic institutions and providing training for civil society organizations that would allow them to effectively engage in policy advocacy and policy making. For some critics there is also a tension between developing effective and accountable indigenous leadership and the continued dominance of donor led agendas in determining policy (e.g., Sogge, 2002; Samoff 1992, 1999).

Conclusion

Social justice issues in education in Africa are multilayered. They are overdetermined by the realities of poverty and inequality on the continent and by Africa’s worsening position in relation to the global economy. Many of the issues we identified relate to a lack of resource. In this respect the CFA recommends that “donors and African governments should meet their commitments to Education for All, ensuring that every child in Africa goes to school. Donors should provide an additional U.S.$7 to 8 billion per year as African governments develop comprehensive national plans to deliver quality education” (CFA, 2005, p. 184). However, perhaps the largest risk facing the CFA and the other initiatives is that the international community will fail to find funds to meet their commitments, particularly in a global context where development funding is increasingly being diverted away from Africa to support the U.S. led “war on terror” (see Robertson et al, 2007). There is also a silence in the initiatives concerning the relative priority that African governments themselves should give to education funding over other areas of government expenditure such as support for armed conflicts. Finally, it has been suggested that drawing too sharp a line between the three elements of social justice represents something of a false distinction and that redistribution of educational opportunities, recognition of the rights of marginalized and socially excluded groups, and their participation in determining policy priorities are mutually reinforcing objectives.

Notes

1. NEPAD was adopted by African Heads of State in October 2001. It is the official development project of the newly fledged African Union (AU). NEPAD is an integrated development plan with the goals of achieving sustainable economic growth, eradicating poverty, and ending Africa’s marginalization from the globalization process (NEPAD, 2001a).

2. It is conceived as a commitment on the part of Africa’s leaders to their people and as a framework of partnership between Africa and the rest of the world. The Commission for Africa was launched by then British Prime Minister Tony Blair in February 2004 with the aim of taking a fresh look at Africa’s past and present and the international community’s role in its development path. Although it was established in part to respond to NEPAD and other initiatives on the African continent, it was also designed to take advantage of the United Kingdom’s chairmanship of both the G8 and, in the second half of the year, the European Union, and to target recommendations at these bodies as well as other wealthy countries and African countries.

3. Although some reference is made to these in the text, these are outlined in more detail elsewhere (Robertson et al., 2007).

4. Specifically, the origins of social justice lie in the thinking of writers such as John Rawls who himself drew on a longer tradition going back to the Jesuits and encompassing the liberalism of John Locke, the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, and the moral philosophy of Emmanuel Kant.
5. See for example, *Pambazuka News* which is a pan-African imitative that provides a weekly forum for discussing social justice issues on the continent, including educational issues! Retrieved April 11th, 2007, from http://www.pambazuka.org/en/

6. For example, just as some Western norms and values sit uneasily with some principles of social justice so too do some African ones. This is evident, for example, in the practice of female circumcision, in patriarchal attitudes to women, in homophobia, and in the suppression of indigenous and other minority groups. Further, some individuals and groups who may support some social justice goals, for example, racial equality, may hold deeply conservative views in relation to other issues, such as the role of women in society.

7. We are thinking here in a particular about neoliberal thinkers such as Hayek and, famously Margaret Thatcher who actively opposed the very category of “the social.”

8. A particular “ideal type” model of the state as a sovereign authority associated with the peace agreement in Westphalia in 1648 that is characterized by a demarcation between the public and private institutions; the autonomy of the state which lies in its control over economic resource and a monopoly on violence; the assumption that the rule of law is based on popular support; and, that the state is a nation-state, in the sense that it is governed by an in-group based on common cultural and ethnic heritage.


10. Following in the same vein, the CFA recommends that “in their national plans African governments must identify measures to get girls as well as boys into school with proper allocation of resources. Donors should meet these additional costs” (CFA, 2005, p. 185).

11. Providing girls with one extra year of education has been estimated to boost their eventual wages by 10 to 20% (Dollar & Gatti, 1999).

12. Two thirds of the African countries affected by conflicts had enrolment rates of less than 50% during the time of the conflict (Watkins, 2000). According to a DfID commissioned report (Smith & Vaux, 2003, p. 9), 82% of the reported 113 million children out of school were from crisis and postcrisis countries.

13. The definition offered here is that adopted by the UNESCO (GMR) team (UNESCO, 2006, p. 30): “A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community’s development.”

14. In this regard, as Butcher (2001) has pointed out, of the 818 million people in Africa, 1 in 4 have a radio; 1 in 13 have a television; 1 in 35 have a cell phone; 1 in 40 have a fixed line telephone; 1 in 130 have a personal computer; 1 in 160 use the Internet; 1 in 400 have pay TV.

15. Related to the above point is that older, nondigital ICTs also have an important role to play in supplementing teacher knowledge and providing increased opportunities for disadvantaged learners. Whilst digital technologies might transform education in the longer term, an exclusive focus on newer ICTs is likely to disproportionately benefit elites who have access to them and have the effect of exacerbating the digital divide at least in the short term.

16. A survey of ex-combatants in Sierra Leone found that an overwhelming majority of those who joined the brutal rebellions were youths who had been living in difficult conditions prior to the onset of the war and that half had left school because they could not afford the fees or because the school had shut down (UNDP, 2005, p. 159).

References


