Reclaiming the Promise of Sociological Imagination in Africa

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Abstract
I have carefully chosen the theme of this paper as ‘Reclaiming the Promise of Sociological Imagination in Africa because I believe this is one area where African sociologists have played an insufficient, relevant and transformational role. The important message in this paper is that it not too late to reclaim our relevance as sociologists and to map out the terrain of our enterprise in relation to the challenges we face in a country like Kenya and in Africa as a whole. As my contribution to the re-launching of the African Journal of Sociology of the University of Nairobi, I want to pose following questions: Why do we research and publish? Why is it important that we have journals of sociology? Is it only to provide us with a medium of academic expression, erudition and mobility? Or is it so that we can, as African sociologists, be interpreters of our own situations and conditions?

Introduction
I have carefully chosen the theme of this paper as ‘Reclaiming the Promise of Sociological Imagination in Africa because I believe this is one area where, as African sociologists, we have played an insufficient, relevant and transformational role. While sociology departments across the continent have had worthy scholars like Ben Magubane, Abdallah Bujra, Archie Mafeje, Akin Akinwowo, Francis Okediji, Peter Ekeh, and several other distinguished and engaged pioneers, the trend in more recent times, as in other social science disciplines, has been a proliferation of writing and materials wanting in imagination, vision or intellectual boldness. It is this recent trend of a sterile array of sociological production which demands that we challenge ourselves and transcend our current overwhelming immersion in producing consultancy and agency-driven papers and materials which mainly address the concerns of our peer review journals or academic appraisal panels. While one concedes that these are critical for academic mobility, in many cases they do not necessarily add in any substantial way to knowledge that interprets or explains our social conditions to ourselves as Africans or contribute to transforming them.

The important message in this paper is that it is however not too late to reclaim our relevance as sociologists and to map out the terrain of our enterprise in relation to the challenges we face in a country like Kenya and in Africa as a
whole. The urgency of this task can not be understated as we enter a new millennium in Africa and confront all the threats, challenges and opportunities that the 21st Century poses for us in relation to issues of global power and movements, new technologies and knowledge, alternative forms of social organization and consciousness, the affirmation of and resistance to novel and irreverent identities and politics and the emergent waves and directions in the global struggles for human rights and democracy, peace and social justice.

Consequently we enter this new era with an intense sense of individual and collective crisis and dislocation, almost in a state of Durkheimian anomie, with the world held under the twin grips of both state and non-state terror and violence, and with enemies of social and individual emancipation regrouping everywhere. All of these are further complicated by an Africa where disease and ignorance have not been conquered or reduced as witnessed by the growth of the HIV/AIDS scourge, the persistence of hunger and famine, and the prevalence of mass poverty, war and gender violence which are reported daily in our mass media.

In response, our political and social leaders continue to stumble from one problem to another in a seeming state of political stupor mixed with frenzied attempts at dealing with their own collective and individual insecurities while ordinary Africans either continue to live with an optimism and resilience built on an incredible faith or get by through a combination of individual and collective bewilderment and/or narcotized drives.

The time, therefore, is ripe to challenge ourselves to rise to the occasion and use our discipline both as an interpretative and transformational medium. The question for us then is why is it that as sociologists we have failed more than we have succeeded as relevant and authentic interpreters of African society and social relations? Why have we yielded the ground to those who practice “academic tourism” as my friend, the historian, Paul Tiyambe Zeleza of Pennsylvania State University has termed it in his book Manufacturing African Studies (1997).

In dealing with these questions, let us begin with our discipline, sociology, recognizing all its historical, institutional and normative baggage and move on to explore how the appropriation, localization and grounding of the discipline
and its armory can actually lead us to transformational and emancipatory agendas through robust and engaged efforts at interpreting and explaining ourselves. Talking about the sociological imagination takes us to the originator of the notion, the radical American sociologist, C. Wright Mills.

Mills (1959:3) began his book, *The Sociological Imagination* as follows:

> Nowadays men often feel that their private lives are a series of traps. They sense that within their everyday worlds, they can not overcome their troubles, and in this feeling, they are often quite correct…Underlying this sense of being trapped are seemingly impersonal changes in the very structure of continent-wide changes.

Indeed this statement still rings true almost half a century later and thousands of kilometers away in places like Nairobi, Kenya from Mills middle and working class America of the 1950s. Yet in that statement which attempts to characterize the modern human condition we can see C. Wright Mills struggling to carve out a mission for the discipline of Sociology in a world in which the claims to the discipline’s scientific status was through a demand for and assertion of scientific objectivity rooted in conventional Western Positivist neutrality. But in the same opening pages of the book, he equally asserts the universality of the modern human condition within the specificities defined by different historical contexts by stating that from where we sit today, all these sound so familiar, so contemporary, almost like the summary of the evening news on our local radio. And as if to elevate his writing to prophetic proportions that transcends his own period, C. Wright Mills, went on further to declare that:

> The very shaping of history now outpaces the ability of men to orient themselves in accordance with values. And which values? Even when they do not panic, men often sense that older ways of feelings and thinking have collapsed and that newer beginnings are ambiguous to the point of moral stasis. Is it any wonder that ordinary men feel they cannot cope with the larger worlds with which they are so suddenly confronted? That they can not understand the meaning of their epochs for their own lives? Is it any wonder that they come to be possessed by a sense of the trap? (op. cit.4-5).

Today, at the beginning of the 21st Century, humankind remains confronted by the overwhelming sense of anomie, alienation and bewilderment that Mills talked about almost 50 years ago. We face economic, political, military and cultural forces and dynamics that exclude and dominate the majority of
persons (or incorporate them in a disadvantaged and unequal manner) both without their active consent and in many cases without their knowledge or ability to consciously shape the individual or collective directions that their lives often take. We frequently see these in the terrible conditions of mass poverty, conflicts and wars, and ecological and other disasters that characterize the lives of very many ordinary Africans today.

Amidst all these chaotic changes and movements, human beings, as Viktor Frankl has told us, possess a drive towards the search for meaning, for an interpretation that somehow makes sense of the experiences that people go through. Different forms of knowledge point to their own answers. Various faith systems offer explanations and guidance determined by belief, while different schools of science offer their differing secular viewpoints.

As Mills pointed out, Sociology as a discipline offers its own analyses, explanations and interpretations through the specific lens of what he has called the sociological imagination. This is a radical and humanistic interpretation of the individual and society and the nature and interplay of history, social forces, relations and structures in the expression and shaping of the human condition. It is this sociological imagination or rather its promise that I propose that those of us who practice sociology in Africa reconsider and reclaim as part of our larger project of interpreting and providing meaning for our societies and contemporary social condition. This is because a serious look at the practice and discipline of sociology in Africa today will show a situation of near abdication of the responsibility of attempting to give meaning or provide our own interpretation of our realities. More often than not sociologists are reduced to mimic men, institutional apologists, bean counters of processes and occurrences. We often demonstrate little or no imagination, neglecting the extensive wealth of imagery, processes and ever changing structures that characterize the dynamic and often turbulent social arenas and laboratories that constitute where we make our lives and livelihoods. What then is this sociological imagination whose promise I am urging African Sociologists to consider and how is it relevant to our conditions as Africans today?
The Sociological Imagination and Africa

Without getting into the endless debate as to whose sociology and whose imagination, questions that take us to the validity and relevance of western sociology for Africa, let us begin this part of our reflection by recognizing sociology’s role as a product of Western modernity and of course the complex and plural role that this modernity has played in shaping our contemporary condition through the various economic, cultural, social and ideological forces of empire creation, colonization, slavery as well as the current global society and economy. That modernity in all its malignant and benign expression was not an all dominant and total hegemonic force that obliterated other histories, traditions and memories. It had to interact, shape and be sharpened by the diverse cultures and civilizations it encountered. It is neither a pure, innocent nor singular modernity yet its strident claims and will to dominance and empire have only reinforced the existence and emergence of our own ‘modernities’ in relation to it and side by side with it (Pred and Watts, 1992, Pieterse and Parekh, 1995, Chatterjee, 1998). The recognition of our own modernity alongside Western modernity is a good place to begin to conceptualize and accept a sociology that is a vehicle, platform or tool of understanding and interpreting the human social conditions consisting of building blocks, foundations and elements that all go into making the building but which can be as different as mud, wattle, clay, cement, timber, bamboo, marble, steel and stones as building materials. Yet they all contribute to making a contemporary structure that can equally possess, engineering resilience, ecological relevance, architectural elegance and artistic beauty. The point here is that just as it is possible to have houses across cultures with comparable aesthetics and functions, so it is possible to recognize sociology as a practice wherever it may be located.

A second preliminary point here is that sociological imagination is not necessarily what sociologists do. Anybody familiar with contemporary sociology knows that we do many things, many of which lack creativity and imagination. Of course, this is not to deny the existence of significant contributions to explain our social realities, but in the contemporary practice in Africa these are not many. This challenge to the sociologist’s relevance is of course not restricted to the sociological enterprise in Africa. We find evidence of the periodic need to defend, promote and/or renew the discipline also in the
West. Mills’ book was one such effort, and more recent attempts have included Peter Berger, Alvin Gouldner and Anthony Giddens (1987, 1996). In his 1986 inaugural lecture, at the Cambridge University Giddens has provided some key elements of ‘what sociologists do’, beginning with a broad recognition that “Sociology is concerned with the comparative study of social institutions, giving particular emphasis to those forms of society brought in to being by the advent of modern industrialism” (Giddens, 1987:1). I must add that this refers to both colonizing societies and colonized societies.

Writing from the African context, Onigu Otite sees sociology as “the study of human interactions, and the organization of social institutions. It thus deals with social processes and social relationships particularly in their institutional contexts” (Otite, 1994:1) Of course, within sociology itself the divisions are many and intense about how we do what we do, and why we do it.

More significant were the sectarian affiliations and identities based on ideology and theoretical positions that used to plague the sociological enterprise of the middle and late 20th Century. All of this internal dissension as well as the publics’ lack of understanding of how different the sociological enterprise is from conventional wisdom, has helped to raise questions about the discipline’s relevance. This is not to talk of the association of the discipline with radical thinking and criticism and militant students and activists, or with conservative pro-establishment functionalist explanations and positions.

The discipline of sociology is therefore not only loaded with tremendous ambivalence in terms of identity and consciousness, but also an intense sense of vocational and professional insecurity both within and outside the academy. This has led to the assertion by sociologists that the discipline is under strain (Giddens, 1987:1) and the recognition of the need to defend it (Giddens, 1996:1-7). In the conclusion to his spirited “In Defence of Sociology”, Giddens (1996:7) stated:

Sociology should regain its cutting edge, as neo-liberalism disappears in to distance along with orthodox socialism. Some questions to which we need answers have a perennial quality, while others are dramatically new. Tackling both of these as in previous times, calls for a healthy dose of what C. Wright Mills famously called the sociological imagination.
It is to this thing called sociological imagination and its usefulness and relevance for our conditions as sociologists operating in Africa that I now turn.

Mills defined the sociological imagination as enabling “its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals. It enables him to take into account how individuals in the welter of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their position” (Mills, 1959; 5). My understanding of Mills’ use of the sociological imagination is that it is an approach, a perspective, a way of looking at social facts and reality, and above all a ‘quality of mind’. It helps analysis, explanations and interpretations to begin from the position of the individual and locate him/her in the period and social milieu that such a person finds himself/herself and how these three elements i.e. individual, history and social structure interact and shape both personal and social outcomes.

In many ways, Mills, long ago like Max Weber, avoided the distracting dichotomy between structure and agency, micro and macro, and synchrony and diachrony. Thus, when the sociological imagination is deployed, analyses and interpretation move across all these divides, and attempt to express both human and social complexity and more simple direct relationships. For Mills, the sociological imagination is also a promise and an approach that “enables us to grasp the history and biography and the relations between the two within society” (Mills, 1959: 6). According to him, it is the distinctive factor that provides the much more profound illumination and depth to the works of all great social theorists and analysts such as Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, Josef Schumpeter and Max Weber. In Africa we find this very quality of mind reflected in the works of social scientists such as Claude Ake, Archie Mafeje, Ben Magubane and Mahmood Mamdani. Indeed C. Wright Mills has posed this quality of mind as something found also in works of social analysis carried out by other social scientists and historians. The Sociological imagination thus provides the handle for posing significant questions of social analysis such as:

What is the structure of the particular society as a whole? What are its essential components and how are they related to one another? How does it differ from other varieties of social order? Without it, what is the meaning of any particular feature for its continuance and for its change? Where does the society stand in human history? What are the mechanics by which it is
changing? What are its characteristic ways of history making? What varieties of men and women now prevail in this society and in this period? And what varieties are coming to prevail? (Mills 1959: 6-9).

With these and other questions that the sociological imagination enables, come “…the capacity to shift from one perspective to another-from the political to the psychological; from an examination of a single family to comparative assessment of the national budgets of the world; from theological school to the military establishment; from consideration of an oil industry to studies of contemporary poetry. It is the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self-and to see the relations between the two.”(Mills, 1959:7)

I have quoted extensively from Mills’ work to underscore the contemporary relevance and appropriateness of what we attempt to do when we do sociology well. It is also to point out that sociology cannot be reduced to works of fragmented and often abstracted empiricism or the stringing together of vacuous notions and concepts that are devoid of historical anchor and yet attempt to explain all aspects of our contemporary African condition. Several such attempts have reduced serious theoretical and empirical problems to sensational labels such as ‘failed states’, ‘predatory politics’, ‘the politics of the belly’, ‘economies of affection’ or other similar uni-dimensional explanations. Mills’ work teaches the importance of the demands of complexity, depth, holistic and historical analyses and the overlapping effect and interaction between structure and agency in the understanding of contemporary African societies. Indeed we see the sociological imagination in the works of a wide range of contemporary scholarship such as in the works of Edward Said, Archie Mafeje, Mahmood Mamdani, Claude Ake and Peter Ekeh.

Although all these cannot be said to be sociologists in the professional sense of the word, a situation recognized by Mills when he ascribes ‘quality of mind’ to sociological imagination as a social science. Perhaps an important point for many of us who operate under the umbrella of sociologist today is that we scarcely do sociology anymore; we claim to do development, gender studies, identity politics, migration studies and several other new sub-disciplinary forms of specializations. We are increasingly lacking in the fundamentals of a solid disciplinary home base capable of providing us with the theoretical,
epistemological and methodological rigors necessary for tackling the difficult questions of social analyses and skirt the realm of ‘troubles’ and ‘issues’ as identified by Mills. And in the process we litter the world with material that possesses neither quality nor depth. We lose ourselves in the fragmentation of disciplines operating with splintered lenses and in our confusion we turn our splintered and fragmented visions of social realities into complete explanations and interpretations. Furthermore, we lack any substantive or clear relationship with other disciplines such as philosophy, jurisprudence, biology, mathematics, linguistics, anthropology, economics, history and psychology. In many cases, we do not know them, read them or care about the knowledge and insights that they produce that can enrich or even transform our own engagement with our social realities. Mudimbe, Houtondji, Appiah, Mafeje, Mamdani, Ekeh, Zeleza and many more such distinguished thinkers of African origin and diverse interpreters of our conditions mean little or nothing to many people in the common rooms and departments of the universities across the continent. Thus we are scarcely provoked, stimulated or inspired. How then do we reclaim the promises of sociological imagination in the context of our practices and vocation as sociologists in today’s Africa? How do we frame the challenges and context of sociology in Africa today?

Framing the challenge and the context of contemporary Africa today

Since the times of Mills, Sociology has reframed its language, conceptual frameworks, and its methodological slant. The discipline has re-engaged Western and other modernity and as a result of its reflexive nature, sociology as it confronts modernity, interprets it, is itself transformed and through its interpretations transforms both our knowledge of and the nature of modernity. In the process, knowledge has proclaimed the era of several ‘Posts’- post-industrial, post-modern, post-development, post-colonial. One can not be sure that the final word is in on the ‘posts’ characterization and how much it applies to the wide variety of social conditions and experiences that are found in our very diverse and uneven world today. But the ‘post’ characterization has been useful for re-affirming the transcendental nature of our practice and our human condition. While, it might not have answered all our questions, it has shown that in living and studying we often go beyond and surpass what we study and who we are and thereby offer us the recognition of the unending dynamic nature of our existence and knowledge.
In spite of the assertion of post-modernity, post-development and post-colonialism, Africa remains with certain key characteristics and elements, namely the pervasiveness of poverty, the instability of political order and regimes and the weakness of democratic political institutions and economies. There is also the limited nature of public access to social services, the relative backwardness of its physical infrastructures, technological and scientific enterprises and production, and the openness of its polities and societies to a higher degree of external influence and control while resource flows and benefits from foreign sources remain minimal. All of these raise important questions about the extent to which one can claim that the ‘colony’ or development in Africa have been transcended. Of course, sociology of development or rural development or development studies are all very popular areas of studies in the different Sociology departments all over the continent and they and their scholars and student provide abundant substantive evidence and controversies around the issues identified above.

The important thing to remember is that Africa’s crisis of poverty, democratization and the problems of peace and social justice are not unique to this continent. Africa is not exceptional with regards to the presence of crisis or the failure to improve the human condition, but in terms of scale and persistence, there is the need to do a lot more to deal with these issues than has been done so far and this is where African sociologists and African intellectuals must rise to the challenge. To do this, Africans must interpret and explain Africa. We must engage and identify our problems. We must find our solutions and own them. In other words, we must reclaim our voices and our minds by providing our own narratives. Africa must be its own interpreter through generating its own knowledge, discourses, stories, myths and narratives. Western social science’s interpretation of the world was its own. It produced its own interpretations, narratives and mythologies. These narratives and knowledge although they contained similarities of experiences and lessons for us were particular and specific discourses that were universalized because of the dominant nature of Western thinking. The rest of the world found aspects of these constructions of realities acceptable and used them as Claude Ake pointed out in “Social Science as Imperialism”.

Today almost half a century after the so-called end of colonization, our stories and the interpretations of Africa continue to be delivered and affirmed through
the lenses and prisms of predominantly non-Africans. Through these discourses, they offer analyses and solutions which we often do not share, accept or/and own. In many cases, Africans are not completely sure of the meaning or the dimensions of the vested interests lodged in these discourses. How then can Africans transform themselves when all we do is receive knowledge, practices and institutions? This is the very reason why we need to reclaim the promise of sociological imagination as a tool to liberate our knowledge and our interpretation from the tyranny of received knowledge, practices and institutions. I see the need for this intellectual emancipation as important for our future as relevant sociologists. Let us examine two of these tyrannies:

**The Tyranny of Received Knowledge**

As a discipline, sociology carries a great deal of historical baggage based on its origins and the key concerns and intellectual projects of its founders. But the discourses are not monolithic. Sociology traces its roots as a discipline from its engagement with issues around Western Enlightenment and modernity. The discipline sought to constitute the basis of western interpretations of the process of capitalist industrialization and the making of Western bourgeois society. Embedded within the discipline’s dominant epistemologies were the tensions between the different variants of western conceptions of civilization and social change. In most cases the analyses were completely embedded in western thought, beliefs and values leading often to ethnocentric, teleological and almost unilinear conceptions of the world and human development. Even the core concepts of Western sociology, in spite of efforts to universalize them proceeded in many cases with definitions based on elements of Western modernity. Examples are supposedly simple concepts as society, civil society, social values and social institutions.

An elementary reading of the formulations of the founding fathers of Sociology such as Auguste Comte, Max Weber, Ferdinand Tonnies, Emile Durkheim and even more recently Talcott Parsons will show this bias. Those social systems that were not located within mainstream Western modernity were studied not as part of sociology but rather under disciplines like anthropology or ethnography. They were primitive, non-industrial or traditional systems. Most sociologists were socialized into these worlds, its
values, thoughts and imagination and were trapped by the very limitations of its incompleteness and inadequacy at interpreting the multiplicity of historical and contemporary humanity. These became not only dominant approaches in Western sociology but were transferred and received by generations of Sociologists outside the western academy. Of course, there were critical traditions in Western sociology that rejected this bondage but it was not till recently with the proliferation of heresies in sociological discourses and the emergence of the post-modern and anti-meta narrative discourses that greater diversity and plurality have been accepted as legitimate parts of interpreting human social experiences. This has given new life to the understanding and study of indigenous cultures and non-Western social systems as they make and remake themselves in their encounters with Western modernity and define their own modernity. The methodological acceptance of the plurality and diversity of human experiences and their co-equal authenticity has re-valued and trans-valued differences in such a way that there is no longer a surrender to weighting and hierarchy that locates certain human societies or experiences as essentially superior to others. Taken to its logical conclusion, this approach presupposes the psychic and social unity of humankind as a concrete analytical starting point.

Thus, as sociologists without going in to the details of different studies and analyses, we can liberate ourselves from the tyranny of received knowledge embodied in the position of a monolithic epistemology, and consequently one dominant rationality, human civilization and development trajectory. This remains very much an issue in contemporary sociology and in concerns with the study of globalization, poverty, ethnicity and development. Indeed with most aspects of sociological studies concerned with non-Western social systems. Sociology in Africa will only begin to contribute to the larger tasks of African development and social transformation only when African sociologists interpret and re-engage the narratives, grammar and idioms of the African contexts and conditions on their own terms. Sociologists in Africa must confront modernity as it unfolds as well as the struggles, tensions and opportunities that emerge from this. Sociology in Africa must interpret African societies and processes through African lenses. This process of course can not be monolithic and uncontested but it must be reclaimed, encouraged and supported.
The Tyranny of Received Practices and institutions

A second area that requires our attention is the tyranny of received practices and institutions. The history and politics that surround this tyranny are closely related to the way the structures and practices that reproduce the domination of specific knowledge systems were created and reproduced. Both Ake in “Social Science As Imperialism” and Edward Said in “Orientalism” have shown us how this was done. As a result of the structures of power that built dominant knowledge, African societies and contexts have also received strategic institutions, establishments and practices that supported unequal and uneven relationships, exchanges and power situation. The institutions and practices that supported and reproduced the domination of Africa and are still used in Africa today are not innocent or neutral. Since they have not been subjected to sufficiently critical scrutiny and interrogation and therefore re-invented and appropriated towards African ends and interests, these have been unable to provide the necessary instruments for transformation. There is obviously the question of both what is African and what constitutes African interests. These are not new and are the subjects of debates by scholars such as Mudimbe, Mamdani and Appiah as they deal with issues of identity, nativism and citizenship.

However, the issue here is that most African countries and societies today operate with institutions, practices, identities and consciousness from their colonial rulers. How much have these been appropriated, adapted and transformed to the benefits of the citizens and peoples of Africa is a question that most of us cannot answer in the positive. What is the state today of the institution of justice? What are the key developments in politics and the economy? What changes have occurred in the family, marriage and kinship? What has happened to education and religion? How have all these affected and been affected by peoples? In many cases, the received institutions and practices have been perverted and stunted to the extent that they brutalize and oppress ordinary Africans as much as under conditions of non-African rule. Sociology in Africa has a task to demystify and unveil these institutions and practices, to explain their limitations and the conditions for their reproduction and to show the limits of repression no matter under what system and the possibilities of emancipation.
So far the literary and the creative arts have done more of this type of work. Sociology by its very nature and its concerns with the human social condition has an equal contribution to make in demystifying and examining politics, power and status, social class, bureaucracy, the military, the family, violence, work and labor, sexuality and religion in Africa today. All of these have institutions, practices and values. Sociology is equipped to engage the sacred and profane, pain and pleasure, hate and love, peace and war, the ordinary and the exceptional, the private and the public, squalor and splendor, not as polarities but in their intricate relationships as they express themselves in the lives of people. Sociology is actually about engaging the routine, ordinary and dramatic social constructions of lives and realities in their sacred and profane forms. It is a terrain where we can interrogate dispassionately and with commitment the underlying dynamics, drives and relations that define and propel what we consider to be given, routine and ordinary and those forces that are dramatic, disruptive and unusual.

How do we as sociologists in Africa deploy all the capabilities and capacities at our disposal to make sense of these institutions and practices not only to understand and interpret them but change them in order to have a better world, no matter how we conceive it? How do we as sociologist interpret and unpack even our conceptions of a better world and of our role and place in it? The answers to these questions reside in the extent to which we reclaim the promises of the sociological imagination.

As my contribution to the re-launching of the *African Journal of Sociology* of the University of Nairobi, I want to pose the following questions: Why do we research and publish? Why is it important that we have journals of sociology? Is it only to provide us with a medium of academic expression, erudition and mobility? Or is it so that we can, as African sociologists, be interpreters of our own situations and conditions?

To help with our thoughts, a quote from Edward Said (1996:23), also a great admirer of Mills, in the *Representations of the Intellectual* provides some guidance:

> At bottom, the intellectual, in my sense of the word, is neither a pacifier nor a consensus builder but someone whose whole being is staked on a critical sense, a sense of being unwilling to accept easy formulas or ready-made clichés, or the
smooth, ever –so-accommodating confirmations of what the powerful or conventional have to say, and what they do…This is not a matter of being a critic of government policy, but rather of thinking of the intellectual vocation as maintaining a state of constant alertness, of a perpetual willingness not to let half-truths or received ideas steer one along.

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Globalization and State in Africa: A paradox
Fred Jonyo

Abstract
Globalization as a meltdown of freer flows of trade; direct foreign investment and finance, the liberalization of trade and investment policies have had both positive and negative effects on national economies. Positively, globalization has created and opened hidden opportunities for some people, groups and countries. At the same time, globalization has negatively impacted on economies through increased impoverishment, inequality, and work security, a weakening of institutions and social support systems and the erosion of established identities and values. Globalization is transforming trade, finance, technology, employment, environment, social systems and patterns of governance. This paper analyses the implications of these trends for global development.

Introduction
The term ‘globalization’ has become fashionable in both academia and the mass media. As a concept, some authors perceive it as an abstract that does not refer to a concrete object but to an interpretation of a societal process. It is an umbrella term for a complex series of economic, social, technological, cultural and political changes seen in the form of increasing interdependence, integration and interaction between people and companies in various locations.

Globalization is therefore used to refer to the collective changes as a process, or even as the cause of turbulent change. Its usage can always take a negative or positive view, depending on one’s perspective. Positively, globalization can be viewed as an engine of commerce, which leads to increased standards of living and wealth for all countries. From a negative perspective, globalization is seen as an engine of corporate capitalism, which results in trampling on the human rights of the developing societies, in cultural assimilation through cultural imperialism and in the destruction of the environment among other evils.

There are many definitions of the concept of globalization, almost all of which are subjective, depending on the definer’s position and experience. According to the International monetary Fund (I.M.F), globalization connotes the growing interdependence of countries worldwide through increasing volume
and variety of cross–border transactions in goods and services, freer flow of international capital, and more rapid and widespread diffusion of technology.

Held et al. (1999:3) conceptualize globalization as the widening, deepening and speeding up of world–wide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life, from the cultural to the financial and the spiritual. However, this paper will not be analyzing the different dimensions of globalization; its main focus will be economic aspect of globalization.

Naisbit (1994) argues that the process of globalization has made it possible to produce a product anywhere, using resources from anywhere by a company located anywhere to be sold anywhere. Globalization can equally be viewed as the absence of borders and barriers to trade between nations (Ohmae 1995): He emphasizes that globalization is the ‘end of geography’.

The Marxist perspective of globalization is that it is neither, an extension of capitalist imperialism nor a radically new form of globalised capitalism, because it seems to bring prosperity only to developed economies.

Contemporarily, there is a debate about whether globalization is a real phenomenon, or only an analytical artifact (i.e. a myth). This debate stems from the need to differentiate globalization from internationalization. It is argued that the world is currently undergoing an internationalization phenomenon and not globalization. In the former, trade and financial flows take place between nations and under the laws and regulations of those nations, while in a global economy it is expected that all international relations (trade, capital flows etc.) would take place under unified international laws and regulations issued and enforced by international institutions (Hirst and Thompson 1996). The frontiers of countries, in a broad sense, are far from being dissolved, and therefore the globalization process is not taking place, and unlikely to happen in the future. For these reasons, the term internationalization would be more suitable than globalization.

The Marxists in joining this debate would point out that globalization is based on the ‘imagined geography’, which is a political tool of ruling neo – liberalists who are strategizing to use certain images and discourses of world politics to justify their political agendas. For example, presenting the
picture of a globalised world allows the Bretton Woods institutions to demand that countries open up their economies for liberalization under Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), which encourage governments to fund privatization programmes ahead of welfare and public services.

SAPs were introduced by I.M.F. and World Bank in the 1980s to assist African developing Countries overcome and respond to economic shocks and structural imbalances or a way to eliminate market distortions and constraints to economic growth (Ake 1995).

A number of adjustment programmes in Africa had varying degrees of corrective measures targeting mainly such things as devaluation of currencies, flexible interest rates, and reduction of government expenditures in privatization, liberalization and institutional reforms. Broadly, adjustment programmes include reforms to:

- Establish a market – determined exchange rate
- Bring the fiscal deficits under control
- Liberalise trade and
- Improve the financial sector, the efficiency of public enterprises and the coverage and quality of social services

Features of Globalization

Globalization being a multidimensional process is characterized in the economic realm with, increase in international trade, increase in the international flow of capital including foreign direct investment, creation of international agreements leading to the emergence of such organizations as the World Trade Organization (W.T.O), development of global financial systems, increase of economic practices like outsourcing by Multinational Companies through a spatial re-organization of production, the spread and diffusion of identical consumer goods to distant countries. Within the cultural realm, it espouses greater international cultural exchanges, the spread of multiculturalism and better individual access to cultural diversity, greater international travel and tourism and massive migration of population.

Held et al. (1999) point out that globalization is made up of the accumulation of links across the world’s major regions and across many domains of activity. They argue that it is not a single process, but involves four distinct types of
changes:
First, globalization stretches social, political and economic activities across political frontiers, regions and continents. Secondly, it intensifies our dependence on each other, as flows of trade, investment, finance, migration and culture increases. Thirdly, it speeds up the world. Where new systems of transport and communication mean that information, goods, capital and people move more quickly. Finally, globalization means distant events have a deeper impact on our lives. The boundaries between domestic matters and global affairs have become increasingly blurred.

Similarly, McGrew (1992:262) observes that globalization refers to the ‘forging of multiplicity of linkages and interconnections between the states and societies which make up the modern world system, as well as the process by which events, decisions and activities in one part of the world can come to have significant consequences for individuals and communities in quite distant parts of the globe’. This definition illuminates how the idea that borders are permeable arose from global events that initially might not have appeared as global because they occurred in isolation. These events nevertheless do shape activities worldwide to the extent that the globalizing economy is a key development of the contemporary history.

This paper views globalization as a process that involves both the broadening and deepening of interdependence among societies and states throughout the world. Broadening refers to the geographic extension of linkages to encompass virtually all major societies and states, and deepening refers to an increase in the frequency and intensity of interactions.

**Globalization and Neo-Liberalism**

Neo-liberalism is rooted in the classical liberal ideals of Adam Smith and David Ricardo, both of whom viewed the market as a self-regulating mechanism tending towards equilibrium of supply and demand, in the process securing the most efficient allocation of resources. Smith and Ricardo posited that any constraint on free competition would interfere with the natural efficiency of market mechanism inevitably leading to social stagnation, political corruption and the creation of unresponsive state bureaucracies. Both further advocated the elimination of tariffs on imports and other barriers to trade and capital flows between nations.
The 1980s saw the emergence of neo-liberalism in new forms as compared to the previous liberal ideas of *laissez faire*, which were less embraced by states in favour of a Keynesianism that called for state intervention in the economy. The governments of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher led this neo-liberal revolution that seemed further legitimised by the 1988-1991 collapse of communism in the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R) and Eastern Europe.

Neo-liberalism with its bias for economic globalization saw this new era characterized by the internationalization of trade and finance; the increasing power and capacity of Multinational Corporations (MNCs), and the enhanced role of international economic institutions like the I.M.F, the World Bank and the W.T.O. The defining tenets of Neo-liberalism include:

- Privatization of public enterprises
- Deregulation of the economy
- Liberalization of trade and industry
- Monetarist measures to keep inflation in check
- Strict control of organized labour
- The reduction of the government expenditure, particularly social spending
- The reduction of government workforce
- The expansion of international markets
- The removal of controls on global financial flows

Neo-liberal proponents of free trade, point out that the elimination or reduction of existing trade barriers among nations would enhance consumer choice, increase global wealth and spread new technologies around the world. However opponents of free trade point out that the profits from such trade are not being distributed equitably. The gap between the poor and the rich countries is shown to be widening. Opponents further argue that the elimination of social control mechanisms has resulted in a lowering of global labour standards, severe forms of ecological degradation and the growing indebtedness of the global south to the north.

Apart from the issue of free trade, neo-liberalism emphasizes the liberalization of financial transactions. This often involves the deregulation of interest rates, the removal of credit controls and the privatization of government
owned-owned banks and other enterprises. Neo-liberal ideologues would argue that such measures would allow for increased mobility among the different segments of the financial industry. This however was proven wrong in the case of the 1997-1998 crisis in a number of the South East Asian countries.

The neo-liberals’ arguments in favour of globalization could be summarized according to the following characteristics; firstly, both the nations comprising the world economy’s industrial core and those in the developing periphery benefit massively when the capital-rich core advances the capital-poor periphery; secondly, the consumers benefit when lower transport costs and reduced tariffs make goods produced far away more affordable. Exporters gain by having a much wider market in which to sell. And thirdly, the more internationalized the world economy is, the more opportunities producers in each country will have in production processes invented elsewhere. In other words faster diffusion of knowledge raises the level of productivity and technology worldwide.

**Globalization: An ideology?**

It is worth pointing out that an ideology is defined as a system of widely shared ideas, patterned beliefs, guiding norms and values and ideals accepted as true by a particular group of people. Ideology offers individuals a more or less coherent picture of the world not only as it is, but also as it ought to be (Manfred 2003:93).

Globalization, too, has its range of norms, claims and beliefs and narratives about the phenomenon itself. However, there is a need to make an analytical distinction between ‘globalization’- social processes of intensifying global interdependence; and ‘globalism’- an ideology that endows the concept of globalization with neo-liberal values and meanings. What is globalization all about? Globalization is about the liberalization and global integration of markets that would in the long run further individual liberty and progress in the world. It is about the triumph of markets over governments. This scheme envisages free trade through the removal of barriers to allow unhindered flow of goods, services and capital.
Globalization benefits everyone.
The proponents point out that market liberalization would lead to a rising global standard, economic efficiency, individual freedom and technological progress. ‘Globalization furthers the spread of democracy in the world’. This claim is rooted in the neo-liberalist assertion that free markets and democracy are synonymous terms. This clearly shows that the language of globalization is ideological in the sense that it is politically motivated and contributes towards the construction of particular meanings of globalization that preserve and stabilize the status quo-the asymmetrical power relations. These powerful narratives have to a large extent succeeded in promoting an overarching neo-liberal worldview through giving collective meanings and shaping people’s identities.

Effects of Globalization

Whereas globalization has immense potential to provide enormous benefits to both developed and developing countries, the reality is that it has failed to live up to this potential. Put differently globalization may have benefited some countries in terms of increased GDP and the flow of goods and services but at the same time it has marginalised some.

This is captured by the World Commission on the Social Dimensions of Globalization, set up in 2001 by the International Labour Organization (I.L.O) which observed:

The current process of globalization is generating unbalanced outcomes, both between and within countries. Wealth is being created, but too many countries and people are not sharing in its benefits. They also have little or no voice in shaping the process. Seen through the eyes of the vast majority of women and men, globalization has not met their simple and legitimate aspirations for decent jobs and a better future for their children. Many of them live in the limbo of the informal economy without formal rights and in a swathe of poor countries that subsist precariously on the margins of the global economy. Even in economically successful countries some workers and communities have been adversely affected by globalization. Meanwhile the revolution in global communications heightens awareness of these disparities.....these global imbalances are morally unacceptable and politically unsustainable.
Specifically the effects of globalization have been seen in the gradual weakening of the political authority of the state. The state sovereignty is under threat given that globalization has increasingly made state borders obsolete.

The spreading of economic maladies appears in the form of contagion. Key economies are closely connected through the globalization process, making such economies mutually vulnerable. This implies that the economic problems can spread rapidly from one country to another.

The rapid capital movements can in certain instances result in destabilization of currencies, for example the collapse of several South East Asian economies in 1997. The operations of globalization with its inherent unfairness in distribution of benefits continues to make developing countries vulnerable and exploiting their labour and resources thereby making them poorer. There has also been massive dislocation of workforce as industries move frequently from one country to another.

Another challenge that globalization is posing, is the ecological security. The successes of development, has provided countries with economic power to increase energy usage with huge emissions of greenhouse gases. The global warming becomes real in a manner that the world’s environment cannot sustain.

Finally, the cultural destruction is quite intense. The rapid cultural westernization greatly alters the traditional livelihoods with unique consequences to the people’s values, norms, beliefs and heritage.

Despite the criticisms against globalization, it is imperative to acknowledge that making globalization work will not be easy. However it is recognized that global interdependence is gaining frequency given the advancement in information, communication and technology. Some of the problems with globalization are inevitable and strategies have to be designed in dealing with them.

It is agreed that markets are at the core of any successful economy. Governments have to make available conducive environments for businesses to thrive and to create jobs. This will surely allow the benefits of globalization
to be felt. The Dairy Industry in Kenya provides insights into how liberalized markets operate within the fabric of globalization.

The Case of the Dairy Industry in Kenya

Kenya’s Dairy industry is regulated through the Dairy Industry Act, Chapter 336 of laws of Kenya as enacted in 1958. This Act saw the establishment of the Kenya Dairy Board (K.D.B), which was mandated to organize, regulate and develop efficient production, marketing, distribution and supply of dairy produce in Kenya.

Mbogoh (2004) points out that the Kenya Dairy Board, however restricted its operations to the regulation of businesses involved in the processing and distribution of dairy products, with a large portion of the industry left under the control of the Kenya Co-operative Creameries (K.C.C). This was the case until 1992, when market liberalization was introduced into the country.

The proponents of liberalization would argue that liberalization policies would improve efficiency in resource allocation by facilitating price adjustments in response to the market forces of supply and demand. Trade liberalization—the opening up of the markets to the unfettered flow of goods and services was intended to lead to growth (Stiglitz 2006).

The liberalization of Kenya’s dairy industry took the form of deregulation both product and consumer prices of milk in May 1992. A government policy statement to license any party interested in getting into the dairy processing and marketing, provided that such firms met the minimum hygiene standards, and opened doors to other players in the dairy industry.

Prior to liberalization, K.C.C had the monopoly in the processing and distribution of liquid milk and other dairy products with an estimated market share of 90 per cent. With liberalization, other players emerged, and the consumer prices of milk increased by 20 per cent to 40 per cent between 1990 to 1994 (Mbogoh 2004). K.C.C received 34 per cent of their supplies from large scale producers, 54 per cent from the small scale producers, and 12 per cent from individual small scale farmers.
It is worth noting that prior to 1983 any firm seeking a license to process and distribute milk and milk products in Kenya, had to be issued with such a license through K.C.C. This saw K.C.C enjoy monopoly power over the dairy industry in Kenya until 1992, as it handled 90 per cent of all milk and milk products that entered Kenya’s marketing system.

Today, the dairy industry is dominated by dairy co-operatives since most of the marketed milk production in Kenya is from small-scale farmers. It is these dairy co-operatives that forward the small-scale farmer’s milk to K.C.C and other current market outlets that have been established across the country. Examples are, the Meru Central District Farmer’s Union (M.C.F.U) in Meru District and the Kitinda Dairy Farmer’s Co-operative Society (K.D.F.C.S) in Bungoma District.

The impact of liberalization has been considerable in the dairy industry. It has led to the emergence of new players. The sector is currently under the competitive forces of K.C.C, Co-operative Societies as well as private enterprises. K.C.C is no longer protected, either through the licensing or the inspectorate facilities of the Dairy Kenya Board. There has been an increase in both producer and consumer prices of milk. The dairy industry has since become vibrant and revitalised as farmers enjoy wider access to the market with improved prices.

The formal marketing system has expanded greatly with the entry of many producers joining co-operatives or supplying their milk to private firms. There is a reduction in the direct sale of raw milk by producers and consumers. There is intensified market competition among the existing dairy firms that in a broad way has improved the quality at competitive stable milk prices both for producers and consumers. The stiff competition ensures there is no monopolistic determination of prices. The liberalised dairy industry has widened consumer choices, while at the same time provided more opportunities for employment.
Conclusion

There is no doubt that globalization has had significant impact on the economic, political and social aspects of life in developing countries. This is evident in privatization, and liberalization of trade, as well as the integration of economic and other decision-making mechanisms in these countries.

The case of the dairy industry illustrates how trade liberalization for example has positive effects on economic growth and development. The sector enjoys vibrant investments, which equally have stabilized the prices of milk and milk products; widened employment opportunities for many Kenyans who are involved and engaged in the various businesses in the dairy industry. Producers have also become innovative and competitive, thereby enhancing efficiency in the production and the distribution of dairy products.

Unfortunately, however, there appears to be a paradox with regard to the implications of globalization, where the African countries’ experience with globalization has been somewhat disappointing. However, these concerns not withstanding merits and demerits to the extent the phenomenon is a reality and African countries have to adopt appropriate strategic measures to respond to the consequences of this inevitable process.

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Incorporation into the Market Economy and Food Security among the Gusii: Paradise Lost or Paradise Gained?

Mary Omosa

Abstract

This article looks at the Gusii’s movement into the market economy and its impact on the region’s food security. The primary aim is to capture shifts in the Gusii’s food security position vis-à-vis incorporation into the market economy and in particular, the weakening of cultivation as a source of food, and the challenges that surround markets as an emerging alternative. The overall observation is that once the Gusii entered commodity markets, and the more such links were established, their food needs, until then secured largely through cultivating land, faced new challenges. The discussion is based on data from the national archives, district agricultural records, oral narratives and empirical literature.

[Key Words: Gusii; Food Security; Incorporation; Market Economy]

Introduction

This article is based on the practical observation that a high potential rural setting that was once food secure is now characterized by regular shortages. Some of the complexities surrounding this issue arise from observations that food insecurity exists in spite of great strides in agricultural innovation and that not all people can access the food that is available. Among the Gusii generally, it is no longer uncommon to find households going hungry not long after the harvest period. The question therefore is, how has this situation developed?

Some modernization theories argue that food insecurity results from a lack of sufficient supplies among the food needy, a condition that they attribute to a refusal to embrace commercial values, which are assumed to generate efficiency in resource mobilization (Pingali & Rosegrant 1995; Braun et al 1993). Proponents of this school recommend, among other things, the commercialization of the factors of production and putting the 'right' policies in place. Others would argue that commodity relations arising from the commercialization of the factors of production engender hunger, and this continues to be perpetuated by imbalances in terms of trade, a skewed
distribution of the world’s resources, and neo-liberal policies (Raikes 1988; Mackintosh 1990). A third position is the argument that food insecurity results from a failure of entitlements, that is, the right to obtain sufficient amounts of the food that is available. Largely emanating from the work of Amartya Sen, this proposition argues that people go hungry because of a breakdown in the relations governing their access to food, following a shift in exchange mappings, or a loss of possessions (Sen 1981).

This discussion aims to put the above issues in a historical perspective. Several interventions, transitions and transformations that took place among the Gusii are traced to the points at which they started impacting on food security. The article focuses on how the Gusii have interacted with change, how they perceived it and how they involved themselves in these processes, and how these have come to impact on their food security position.

**Food Production as a Way of Life**

In the days before colonial rule, the way of life of the Gusii centred on food production. Two major enterprises governed land use: staples and cattle (Uchendu & Anthony 1975, p.27). Cattle and goats were a means of accumulating wealth and their ownership brought great prestige (Vine & Vine 1966, p.9). However, the importance of cattle among the Gusii has diminished over the years. Initially, this was brought about by a reduction in numbers as a result of epidemics, together with government restrictions on stocks and the 1912 abolition of gesarate - the Gusii cattle camps. In later years, the reduction in livestock was compounded by a shortage of grazing lands and labour. The latter came about when most of the young men who used to herd livestock increasingly moved out of the area to seek employment on European plantations and in urban centres. As a result, women started milking cows, a task that they had never engaged in before (Vine & Vine 1966, p.10).

Generally, a distinction was made between arable lands and communal grazing areas. Rights to land were protected and acknowledged by all in the community through utilization, and questions of ownership hardly ever arose in practice. The rule, as enforced by lineage elders, was to make idle land available to anyone who needed it. Independent living for young adult men started with inheriting a piece of land from their father. The timing of when
one could inherit land was dependent on marriage, a sign of having fully entered adulthood. Thus, the land became a source of livelihood and the basis of an individual's boundaries and authority. To provide for oneself and one’s dependants was a basic responsibility. Similarly, women gained access to land and esteem through marriage (Field Interviews, 1995 & 1997).

While this way of life was never static, contacts with the 'external' world facilitated a more rapid change in Gusii agriculture and general livelihoods. But, as we will see below, production for subsistence continued to co-exist with growing crops for the market, and movement into off-farm employment has not reduced the role of cultivation as a source of food. If anything, off-farm incomes appear to have been used to enhance people's opportunities in terms of general lifestyle. However, incorporation brought with it new challenges, some of which directly influenced cropping. However, instead of the marginalization that is implied in commoditization literature (cf. Raikes 1988; Sobhan 1990), incorporation sometimes results in reversed fortunes. Even then, the process of incorporation does not move in the direction predicted by modernization theories (cf. Seavoy 1989; Braun et al 1993; Green & Faber 1994). Instead, while markets may offer expanded choices, they can also make attaining food security a more distant hope.

**Gaining Access to Land**

Among the Gusii, land as described above, was used both for the cultivation of crops and for grazing livestock. Grazing took place on communal grazing lands. Arable land was divided into three categories. One type was the land on which the family homestead stood and where a wife and her children carried out subsistence farming (* egeticha*). The second type consisted of land where the head of the family cultivated crops for his private use (* emonga*). This crop's harvest often served as security in case of a food shortage. The last type (* endemero*) was made up of land that was brought under cultivation by cutting down bush. Several members of the clan cultivated the land on an individual and equal share basis. These 'dispersed' pieces of land later disappeared due to the country's land consolidation policy (Kenya 1965). Some of the ones that survived this policy ceased to exist when the pieces were permanently allocated, to serve as homesteads, for some of the young adult sons that were ready for marriage. This resulted in some close kin having to live far apart. For
the sons who had to relocate, this geographical distance resulted in the need for new networks and alliances, especially for purposes of meeting their food needs.

Customarily, land tenure was based on the principle that every male has heritable rights over arable lands, while grazing sites and forests are shared with kinsmen. When people wanted to expand their acreage, they organised themselves into a group in order to clear thick bush and to till the land. This land was then shared out equally among group members. Kinship remained the chief source of legitimate access to land, and although there were individuals who were relatively wealthier than others, this was not perceived of in terms of the amount of land owned. Wealth, esteem and influence stemmed from having a large herd of cattle, several wives and many offspring (Uchendu & Anthony 1975, p.26). This leads us to ask the question when land size began to vary.

Oral narratives explain that from olden days, people never had uniform amounts of land, in spite of the potential for 'unlimited access'. Once a person occupied a piece of land, he took up as much as he thought necessary and asked his relations to come and live alongside him so that together they could defend themselves from wild animals. Those who had a larger labour force were able to put more land under cultivation, and, over time, they acquired larger holdings. The colonial administration was later to use these 'demarcations' to draw boundaries.

Communal land sites increased after European occupation, as people moved elsewhere, especially following raids by the colonial forces, notably in 1905, 1908 and 1914 (Gethin 1953; Maxon 1971; 1981). Communal land, however, began to disappear around 1928 and by 1935, when *ebisarate* (cattle camps) were finally eliminated by the colonial administration, this communal grazing land became easily appropriated by the administration and its officers.

Therefore, land started acquiring a new meaning as early as 1939. This was about the same period that maize cultivation for sale was at its peak, and several other crops were already being grown for the market. By 1960, the Gusii had started selling and buying land. Ownership changed hands in the presence of clan elders and since there were no title deeds, transactions were
affirmed through effective occupation. These sales were mainly motivated by a desire for ready cash. This need for cash income has continued to be the main reason why people sell their land. While some of those who sold land during their youth needed to raise bride price, these needs have now expanded to include paying for children's education, health care or even purchasing food. The latter suggests some level of desperation. Selling a 'renewable resource' to invest in a 'consumable one' reduces the possibilities for the future.

**Labour Organisation**

In customary Gusii society, division of labour was based on age and sex, and the family was the main source of labour. Male adults were the heads of their families. They generally managed the homes and performed non-routine tasks such as clearing the bush for cultivation, fencing around the homes, building houses, granaries and cattle enclosures (*boma*), and defending the community against external aggression. On the other hand, women performed almost all the routine agricultural and domestic duties. These included seed selection, hoeing, sowing, weeding and harvesting. They also undertook all household activities such as collecting firewood, fetching water, cooking, maintaining the houses, grinding finger millet and raising the children. Young girls helped their mothers with duties around the home and in the fields.

According to Uchendu & Anthony, the older men had the highest prestige. They discussed cattle matters and settled local and domestic disputes. They also supervised activities in cattle camps (*ebisarate*) and advised the young men in these camps on defence and general warfare. While still living in cattle camps, the young men herded cattle and supplied milk to their families whenever some of the cows calved while in *gesarate* (singular for *ebisarate*). They also took part in hunting and trapping wild animals. Uninitiated boys looked after sheep and goats around the homestead and also ran errands for older boys and men (Uchendu & Anthony 1975; Kenya, 1986, p.37-38).

Although having many daughters enabled households to produce more food, this could also have disadvantages as expressed in the saying that *mwanyabaiseke kerandi getakwoma botakana botagosira* which means that whereas many daughters brought in wealth (paid in the form of cattle), the home had no one to clear (and defend) the fields as this was the work of young
men. Expansion farther afield, a source of increased wealth, depended on a household's ability to clear new ground. Paradoxically, the need for more land and subsequent retention depended on a family’s ability to cultivate land in its possession, a job that was largely performed by women and young girls.

Labour groups were common among the Gusii. These were mainly utilized during peak periods such as land preparation and harvesting. These groups were differentiated into egesangio, risaga and ekeombe (Kenya 1986, p.39; Field Interviews, 1995 & 1997). In both organized and ad hoc labour groups, input was measured by the number of hours invested and these were equal and compulsory for each person. Whenever someone was indisposed, he/she was required to send a replacement. Hence, as soon as one decided to participate, one committed oneself to group rules and regulations that governed performing these tasks.

**Food Production Calendar**

Among the Gusii, agriculture was a way of life. The annual calendar began and ended with the starting and completion of farm activities, respectively. Seasons were named according to the agricultural cycle, and celebrations and feasts centred on food harvests. Finger millet was the staple crop, and this was planted throughout the fields. Close to the home, farmers planted vegetables, and within the homestead, they grew maize and other supplementary crops. Each of the twelve months of the year signified a certain stage of the food production cycle.

In January (monungu n'barema) fields were cleared and land preparation began. These activities continued into the months of February (eng'atiato) and the dry spell of March (egetamo) when twigs were removed or trimmed. In April (rigwata) finger millet was sown using the broadcast method. The current pattern of planting in March or earlier is an adoption of the highland agricultural calendar. This suggests that, contrary to arguments in the literature that depict the peasant farmer as one that never adopted and adapted, farming practices among the Gusii were never static. There has been a movement towards a different cropping calendar, necessitated by changing circumstances, mainly access to land and labour. But, there is also information to show that these changes are the result of some external forces (Omosa 1998, p.11).
The month of June (*ebwagi*) was, and continues to be as the Gusii name implies, a period of scarcity. Households that had not stored well or those that had harvested less than enough were faced with shortages. In oral narratives, such households are depicted as belonging to the lazy and poor members of society. Poverty was perceived in terms of human resources, and production was almost always a function of labour input. The month of July (*engoromoni*) was characterized by *ogosuma*, seeking food aid from family/relatives (cf. Vine & Vine 1966, p.13).

In August (*riete*) the men started making new granaries and old ones were repaired and cleaned up in preparation for the new harvest. Harvesting began in August and continued into the month of September (*eburiati ya kebaki*) when sorghum was trimmed to produce a second flowering. October (*egesunte gia chache*) through December (*esagati*) was a period of rest, a time for festivity that culminated in thanks-giving to *engoro*, portrayed in oral narratives as the supernatural. The *ribina* dance marked the end of year and the beginning of a new cycle.

**Food Harvest and Storage**

Food production among the Gusii was, until the 1930s, synonymous with the cultivation of finger millet (*obori*). The failure of this crop meant hunger and surplus meant prosperity and colourful entertainment during rituals and festivals. In retrospect, the Gusii continue to argue that although demanding in terms of labour, finger millet would be preferable to maize or any other crop. It stored well, it was widely used in beer brewing, and commanded a premium price in exchange for other commodities from the neighbouring Luo community and even amongst the Gusii (Uchendu & Anthony 1975, p.28-29).

Variations in quantities of food harvested resulted from the size of the workforce. Households that had a large number of adult children to clear fields, plough and weed were always ahead of the others. Much of this performance depended on the organizing skills of the married women. For this reason, most men sought to marry hard working girls, and polygamy continued to be common for practical reasons.
Having many daughters had additional benefits. Upon harvest, daughters and young boys stored their finger millet with their mothers, while older boys and adult men (husbands) stored theirs separately (emonga). Once the older boys and adult men accumulated enough grain, they exchanged this for goats, and this marked the beginning of their accumulation (okoniba). The food stocks belonging to the head of the household were not accessible to his wife (wives), except in cases of severe shortage. Men with a lot of finger millet in their granaries could use it to pay the bride price for a wife from a family with food shortages. Whenever there was a bumper harvest, the food was stored until the next harvest when this surplus was exchanged for livestock, primarily goats. Therefore, even after a bumper harvest, people continued to cultivate finger millet in the following year. They always worked towards increasing yields, in case of bad months ahead, and households only felt secure when they had food that could last them in excess of one year (Field Interviews, August 1996). After the harvest, finger millet was stored in granaries. After threshing (ok'ora), the grain was stored in emenyoncho (conical containers), chiny'ongo (clay pots) and ebitera (earth holes).

While women were directly in-charge of food storage, production was a communal responsibility. Each member of the household participated in this process, either in clearing fields, planting, harvesting or bringing additional land under cultivation. However, how long a food harvest lasted depended on the skills of a wife. Women were supposed to undertake good storage (gokunga), while men were expected to accumulate (gosacha). The argument therefore that food production has been left in the hands of women is not culturally rooted. In Gusii tradition, men went out in search of food as hunters, and this food was brought home and left in the custody of the wife (wives). Similarly, men cleared fields, expanded the frontiers and defended the community's land against external aggression, thus creating the opportunity for women to grow more food. In essence, therefore, men provided the resources and women utilized them in order to feed their families. But, there is underlying evidence that while women procured and received for purposes of distribution to the family, men accumulated.
Incorporation into the Market Economy

The Gusii were the last of the surrounding ethnic groups to be brought under British rule. Maxon explains this delay as resulting from the fact that before 1902, Gusiland was considered too far in the interior for British interests, which mainly centred on keeping the supply lines to Uganda open. A clan dispute and raids on the Luo, by then under British rule, triggered the arrival of the British in Gusiland. Oral narratives report that in 1905, Ombati from the Bogusero clan approached the British in Kisumu, seeking protection against the Bogetutu, a rival clan. At the same time, a patrol was sent to Gusiland to protect the Luo from raids by the Gusii. This patrol entered Gusiland in September 1905 and forcibly collected cattle as fines. While departing, the patrol was attacked. This offensive was made worse by the presence of Ombati, Bogetutu's enemy, who was now playing the role of interpreter to the British (Maxon 1969, p.350; Field Interviews, 1995 & 1997).

In 1907, the first white men, Northcote and Hemsted, arrived in Gusiland. They identified a site for their base and supervised the construction of an administrative headquarter, the Kisii Station, which was later to become Kisii Town. The highland climate and the fertile soils of the region favoured this decision. The residence of these colonial administrators in Gusiland set in motion the incorporation of the region, both administratively and economically. The Gusii soon selected their own chiefs and headmen, who began collecting taxes and demanded that the people were to bring all criminal and civil cases before the administration.

Gusii resistance heightened when the British administration started demanding taxes. In addition to the poll tax that was paid by every adult male, the people were also expected to pay another three rupees as hut tax, for every house owned (Rodwell 1998). Gusii men were therefore forced to sell their cattle to raise the money for paying these taxes. As a result, many Swahili traders were drawn to the district in search of livestock for re-sale (Maxon 1969, p.353). These developments culminated in the 1908 uprising in Gusiland. The spearing of Northcote by Otenyo in an attempt to stop the administration from driving away Gusii cattle precipitated this revolt. Although the Bogetutu people put up a spirited attack, Northcote had a better-armed force (Field Interviews, 1995 & 1997; Maxon 1969, p.353).
Maxon writes that the Gusii remained hostile to the British administration and force continued to be applied. This was mainly directed towards the large amounts of food that were required to feed the numerous porters and police engaged in the construction and surveillance of the Kisii Station. The food needs of the British administration and their work force depended so much on supplies from the Gusii that when one headman failed to bring in the required amounts, he was locked up until all the food and firewood were supplied (Maxon 1969, p.352). However, in spite of its potential, the physical infrastructure in Kisii remained poor and other support services were equally lacking (Kenya, Agricultural Safari Report 1943). Therefore, Maxon has argued that the lack of expert advice and 'guidance' in agriculture and veterinary matters continued to stifle agricultural expansion. Consequently, while attempting to change what the Gusii were already knowledgeable in, the colonial administration did not help the people to improve their agriculture.

However, the depression of the 1920s in Europe forced many settler farmers out of business, and the colonial administration was compelled to look to the then 'African Reserves' for food and revenue. A staff of 'fully trained' personnel was posted to the area, and seed farms were set up in which high yielding and better quality varieties were tested and distributed. Based on these observations, Maxon argues that the early 1930s marked a turning point for the economy of Gusiiland when partly as a result of the depression, the colonial administration embarked upon a much more 'positive' program of economic development. This manifested itself in efforts to increase production and the introduction of coffee on African farms (Maxon 1971, p.187). Tea and pyrethrum were introduced in 1954 and 1960, respectively.

But, while the Gusii region may have been a grain basket and this made the people prosperous, this success story flows from a much more complex scenario. For example, the outbreak of the Second World War saw the return of many Gusii youth from the Kericho Tea Estates, for fear of being forcibly conscripted. Secondly, a Maize Control Board was established to enforce and regulate marketing, and the compulsory sale of cattle and forced labour for civil purposes was instituted, processes that further interfered with agricultural production. The return of the Gusii youth from the Kericho Tea Estates created a displaced group as they found themselves without an established occupation.
This is mainly because by this time, cattle camps were already outlawed and de-stocking had become policy. Although the presence of these youths contributed to increased production, their return marked the beginning of a form of underemployment, particularly when marketing fell under severe restrictions. For example, in April 1931, all export and sale of foodstuffs was prohibited except by permit, and as a result, local food prices remained low for most of that year (Field Interviews, 1995 & 1997; Maxon 1971, p.171; Kenya 1931a). As we will see later on, in spite of these low prices, restrictions in the movement of maize exacerbated the adverse effects that followed the 1931 locust invasion, notably in the South Mugirango, Bonchari and Bogusero areas of Gusiland.

Evidently, food production in Kisii during the incorporation period can be divided into three phases. The first is the subsistence set-up where, in the absence of 'natural' challenges, food output depended on labour and land, both of which were readily available. The second is the entry into the commodity market and the introduction of maize as an export crop, which stimulated production and at the same time altered the food patterns of the Gusii. Although maize cropping was favoured by the colonial administration, the food needs of the Gusii were nevertheless not severely threatened during this second phase. By the end of the war period, the Gusii were still food secure and crop diversification and trade had come to cushion them against the natural disasters that had characterized their food security in phase one. But, the introduction of cash crops, mainly coffee (but also tea), marked a major turning point in their food security. During this third phase, food production 'returned' to subsistence status, but this time around, the Gusii also had begun to engage in simultaneous cash cropping. The District's food situation is now largely dependent on these choices, the most significant being the movement towards commodity production. Therefore, the struggle has been to produce for subsistence and for the market at the same time.

Establishment of Maize Farming

Prior to the colonial period, maize was a secondary grain among the Gusii, grown only as a backyard crop (egeticha), mainly for roasting. This maize type was of a black and white mix locally known as emekebaru. Seed for this maize was generated as follows: after the harvest, some of the maize was
'roasted' (for purposes of drying) and then hung in the kitchen (isang'ina) where it became gradually covered with soot (omw'are), and this provided the necessary protection until the next planting.

According to oral narratives, the change-over from the traditional mixed colour maize to the pure white seed resulted from a new maize seed that was brought from Uganda by some Maragoli (Luhya) speaking people who had migrated to the area. The local people referred to this new seed as rigegu, a direct translation for molar teeth (amagegu). In 1950 some members of the community decided to plant rigegu seed, while others stuck to emekebaru seed. However, the white maize came out blackened due to cross-pollination. Soon, the entire area decided to shift to planting rigegu seed and this almost marked the end of emekebaru maize seed in the area. Rigegu seed was later replaced by hybrid forms. However, emekebaru has persisted because ‘omonto bwanchete nyama ya gokwa tagotiga’, that is, old habits die hard (Field Interviews, 1996; Bryceson et al 1997, p.2).

Other accounts, however, state that the rigegu seed was introduced in 1918 by the British (Abasongo). At that time, a few people took up the new seed, but they only grew it along the borders of their finger millet fields (chimbebe) and maize served merely as a snack food. This was largely because in the absence of maize milling techniques, the people could not produce maize flour for use in their staple diet, ugali. The change-over from finger millet to maize flour was stimulated by the introduction of the first water-powered flour mill (eregaregu) in the area, in 1919, which mainly milled maize for the colonial government. The flour was used in 'government' institutions to feed the large troops of porters and the police force. Field interviews also suggest that most other people that were in the employment of the colonial administration, such as office clerks, received maize flour as official ration. When going on annual leave, they took this maize flour to their rural homes, and it was from these employees that the Gusii in the 'reserve' learnt that maize too could make ugali. Once maize became widespread and posho mills were available, maize flour became more convenient to obtain than finger millet flour. In 1936, a second flour mill was set up, and the consumption of ugali made from maize flour increased, to the detriment of finger millet. Maize milling continues to be one of the most profitable rural enterprises in several parts of Gusiland. Although maize did not overtake finger millet in acreage until around 1954,
there was a deliberate move to promote maize cultivation, and to increase its availability on the market. Some of the methods used included price incentives, transportation subsidies, inducing a desire for factory-made farm inputs and other household necessities, and coercive ones such as the need for cash income with which to pay poll and hut taxes. Increasingly, the importance of finger millet receded, and while the crop is still perceived as the main staple food of the Gusii, most farmers are now of the opinion that finger millet no longer does as well and is also too demanding in terms of labour input. There is therefore a general fear that finger millet will soon become extinct because the knowledge and skill pertaining to its production is no longer being passed on from one generation to another.

**Introduction of Cash Crop Farming**

Kisii, Embu and Meru were the only Districts in Kenya where Africans were permitted by the colonial government to grow cash crops that were otherwise the privilege of European settlers (Maxon 1981, p.120). The selection of these three districts was based on the observation that these areas were isolated and therefore badly needed high value cash crops (Heyer 1974). The most practical reason, however, seems to be that the soil potential in the three districts was good, and since each one of them was far from European farms, they did not constitute any serious competition to settler farming. The Gusii's enthusiasm to grow coffee is reflected in a report from the District Agricultural Officer (DAO) to the colonial administration. The report points out that it was 'no longer a question of persuading people to plant, but one of selecting the most suitable applicants and allowing them to plant small areas only' (Kenya 1945). A total of 78 hectares were under coffee in 1933, and by 1946, farmers in Kisii had more than doubled the area under coffee.

The introduction of coffee farming marked the beginning of a permanent policy switch from growing food crops for the market to producing raw material for the industry. In Kisii, this became more pronounced when World War II ended, bringing to a halt the need for food exports. With a new era in Europe, import needs shifted to raw materials. However, the entry of the Gusii into cash crop farming only sustained their access to farm incomes, a process that had begun with the introduction of maize as a market crop. As a result of this change in policy, and for many years thereafter, every Gusii farmer
aspired to plant coffee, and those who had some coffee shrubs prior to the 1980s were relatively prosperous. In addition, coffee farming was a gateway to other benefits, such as membership in co-operative societies, which was limited to cash croppers, and it carried such benefits as a credit line and favourable attitudes from extension workers. By independence in 1963, there were over 29,000 coffee growers in Kisii, having risen from a modest 196 growers in 1941. This enthusiasm continued to characterize land use patterns in the area, with every farmer aspiring to have at least some land under coffee.

The shift to conventional cash crops, mainly coffee and tea, was expected to enhance the district's food security. According to the agricultural policy of the colonial administration and that of current thinking, farmers should engage in the cultivation of export crops where they can use their incomes to purchase their own food on the market. It is however questionable how far this is really practicable given that the world market prices for major commodities have progressively dropped. In Kisii, the fall in coffee prices has put those who invested in the crop in a predicament. Returns are now low, and given the multiplicity of household needs, these cash incomes no longer cover general subsistence. At the same time, cash cropping continues to compete for the same resources as food production. And, with rapidly reducing plot sizes, it is impossible to diversify cropping with the hope of broadening the scope for both subsistence and cash incomes.

**Penetration of Markets**

Although markets are not new to the Gusii, their role in the people's food security has changed over the years. The market has been transformed from a place to obtain complementary supplies to a major source of food. However, the most drastic change is probably the amount of control that people have over markets. In the barter era, markets were just an optional source of food, they provided an alternative, but this remained to a large extent just an option. In the colonial period, markets were, for the major part, an extension of colonial rule. In more recent times, a view that has aptly been captured by Skinner, markets have become a mixed blessing, a paradox in rural life (Skinner 1968, p.270).
Measures to engage the Gusii in markets centred mainly on the introduction of new crops, the export of agricultural produce out of the district and the use of political power to enforce these 'linkages'. During this period, we see a struggle by the Gusii to accommodate and at the same time resist forces of incorporation by ensuring that in times of food shortages, only little was. Nevertheless, interdependence between the agriculturally rich Gusii and their food-deficient Luo neighbours flourished from simple barter to a cash economy.

**Exchanging Assets**

Oral narratives affirm that the exchange of commodities has existed as long as people can remember. What is new are the unfolding choices regarding the items to be exchanged, the mode of trade, and expansion in trading boundaries. The Gusii traded amongst themselves, with their neighbours and also with outsiders, such as Indian traders and European merchants. Initially, most of the trade with 'outsiders', including those from different Gusii clans, took place at border points. In cases where the Gusii needed to travel far away, only women went to meet their counterparts, sometimes under the escort of a few men (Field Interviews, 1995 & 1997). Women were preferred because it was believed that they were less likely to be molested along the way. Both sides also feared that if men were to be engaged, they would end up spying on the technological skills of the others. Furthermore, there was a concern that the men might engage in 'stealing' girls from other clans and thus take shortcuts into marriage as opposed to working in order to raise the required bride price.

Barter trade was mainly conducted so as to acquire items that one did not have. From the list of things that the Gusii exchanged amongst themselves it is evident that grain was also traded (Table 1). Finger millet was mainly used to acquire farm implements such as hoes and axes. These iron implements were very scarce, partly because they were made by specific people, belonging to a certain lineage (orumeri). Those who received grain were not necessarily food insecure. They, too, exchanged this grain for a goat or anything else that they needed. Nevertheless, the fact that food was a medium of exchange does suggest that there were those among the Gusii who actually depended on this trade to meet their consumption needs. It is also apparent that agricultural produce was at that time relatively better remunerated than was to be the case in the cash economy.
Besides trading internally, the Gusii also traded with the Luo (Table 2). The Gusii mainly bartered finger millet for Luo pottery, fish and salt. In cases of severe need, the Luo even exchanged their cattle for grain. It is apparent that in both cases, people gave away that which they were best skilled in, while they acquired that which they needed most. Paradoxically, the Luo also gave the Gusii items of weaponry, in spite of the raids that they sometimes carried out against each other.

These trade ties increased in volume to the extent that, when regular markets became established, cattle raids ceased between the two communities (Field Interviews, 1995 & 1997). Much of this trade took place along their common

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**Table 1: Barter trade among the Gusii**
Source: Compiled from Field Interviews, 1995 & 1997; Birundu 1973, p.29

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gusii Item</th>
<th>Luo Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A basket (ekee) of finger millet</td>
<td>A hoe (egesire)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A basket of finger millet</td>
<td>A sickle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One bull</td>
<td>A hoe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 goats</td>
<td>One cow/Bull</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two hens</td>
<td>A small goat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One small basket of finger millet</td>
<td>One knife/Axe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One small cow</td>
<td>One marriage stool</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Table 2: Barter trade between the Gusii and the Luo**
Source: Compiled from Field Interviews, 1995 & 1997; Birundu 1973, p.29

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gusii Item</th>
<th>Luo Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One calabash of finger millet</td>
<td>Same amount of salt (ebara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One pot of finger millet</td>
<td>Same size pot (enyongo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One hoe</td>
<td>One cow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One goat</td>
<td>A small portion of poison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One large basket of finger millet</td>
<td>One shield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One basket of finger millet</td>
<td>Same size basket (egetonga)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One pot of finger millet</td>
<td>Same size pot of sour milk (egechieto)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
border, although in later years Luo traders were to be seen with donkey loads of lick-salt and pots, walking from place to place in the Gusii region, hawking. Before then, the Gusii and the Luo had traded at border points only. There were no fixed market days, although moonlit seasons were preferred, in case night fell in the course of the journey (Birundu 1973). With time, fixed meeting places developed near the common borders and these were later to become market centres and established towns (Obudho & Waller 1976).

Both oral narratives and existing records do not suggest much trade between the Gusii and their other neighbours, except during severe famines. There are, however, some indications that the Gusii traded with the Bantu-speaking Kuria to the South and the Nilotic-speaking Maasai and Kipsigis to the East. Oral narratives also suggest that Arab traders came to Gusii before Indians, Nubians, Somalis and later the British, although they stayed only briefly. They exchanged bangles and beads for food and ivory. These early visits are corroborated by observations that for a long time, Gusii women commonly wore beads and bangles as part of their cultural ornamentation.

The Colonial Era

The District Annual Reports for the period 1914-1945 show that colonial interest in marketing agricultural produce from the Gusii region increased when the World War I broke out. This was necessitated by the need to feed the British troops and allied forces. This demand expanded with the extension of the railway line to Kisumu, the opening of the Kakamega gold fields and the Tea Estates in Kericho, and to a lesser degree, increasing awareness that some parts of Kenya were experiencing food shortages. While these exports lead to the conclusion that the Gusii benefited immensely from the commercialization of their agricultural production (Kenya 1945), this is exaggerated. The period was also characterized by controls the main aim of which was to make grain available at a minimal cost, while no actual investment was made in the long-term development of Gusiiland. The period in question only concentrated on the extraction of cheap agricultural produce for the urban labour force and the export market.

Maxon actually argues that throughout the war, trade in agricultural produce in Gusii was generally depressed. He explains that during this period the colonial administration spent their time and energy producing men to work as carrier
corps, and there were no specially trained agricultural officers assigned to the
district. He further argues that there was little market for Gusii grain except
among the Luo, and although the conditions of the war period made it worse,
the 'position of Gusiland in relation to potential markets long remained an
inhibiting factor to the export of surplus foodstuffs' (Maxon 1971, p.108-9).
This position is supported by the fact that Gusiland was relatively isolated and
remote from any large markets. Produce had to be carried to the lake ports by
ox cart, and from there it was sent to the railway terminus in Kisumu by boat,
a long and expensive route (Gethin 1953, p.3). This difficulty in transporting
agricultural produce to outside markets due to poor infrastructure has
continued to hold back agricultural development even in post-independence
Gusii.

On the other hand, given the volume of exports that left Gusiland, the lagging
behind of the region is best explained by low remuneration. However, unlike
the current period, people then had other possibilities and they could therefore
choose to keep markets at bay. For example, during the period of 1919-1921,
trade reduced due to a slow recovery and poorer prices, an aftermath of the
war. By March 1919, three quarters of the Indian shops were forced to close
down for lack of supplies. Exports from Gusiland were limited to sim-sim
(sesame) and hides. The flow of larger amounts of maize out of the area only
resumed in 1922 (Maxon 1971, p.118-119).

**Indian Traders**

The Indian traders who settled in Gusiland were both a blessing and a
nuisance to the Gusii. These traders had been encouraged to settle in Gusiland
by the colonial administration so as to induce the Gusii to invest in markets.
Secondly, their presence was used to keep the Gusii 'out of town' as traders.
On the other hand, the Indians provided the Gusii with an outlet for their farm
produce. The first Indian traders settled at Karungu, the then Headquarters for
Nyanza (Kavirondo). Thereafter they moved to Kisii, and by 1914 there were
13 Indian traders with 4 shops. The shops stocked cloth, blankets, hoes,
utensils, salt, sugar and tea. These goods were imported into the country by
fellow Indian merchants in Kisumu and brought to Kisii by steamer via Kendu
Bay (Rajwani 1971). Initially, these goods were traded for local produce,
mainly maize, millet, beans, wheat, sim-sim and ghee. Rupees were introduced
The Indian shopkeepers used Nubian, Somali, Luo and Gusii agents to take their goods such as beads, copper, hoes and medicines into the interior of Gusii-land for sale. The colonial administration encouraged this and they even allowed Indian traders to accompany 'officers on safari' to induce the Gusii to invest more in imported goods. Besides raising revenue, this was also indirectly aimed at making the Gusii desire cash income which would then force them to sell and thereby to reduce their herds, in addition to seeking off-farm wage employment. The colonial administration also used the Indians in Kisii to distribute agricultural seeds and farm implements so as to stimulate the production of products that would earn the administration revenue once exported to other districts in the country or to overseas markets.

Alongside the Indians came European traders. Writing about his own trade expeditions, Gethin describes how he moved finger millet and sorghum flour from Kisii to sell to the Maasai, a 70 kilometre journey that he and his assistants made by donkey (Gethin 1953, p.4). Gethin also traded in livestock and wheat. He explains that he got his wheat from Gusii farmers, which he milled before selling it to Indians and Europeans in Kisii and Kisumu, respectively. The Europeans in Kisumu used this wheat flour for baking bread, but this did not continue for long, because wheat soon disappeared completely from Gusii farms (Gethin 1953, p.7; Kenya 1909).

Seemingly, markets provided a source of cash income for the Gusii, while enabling their neighbours to meet their food needs. And, except in rare instances, the Gusii did not, during this period, depend on markets for their food needs. However, over time, Gusii food needs started rising beyond what they could grow themselves. While the introduction of good farming techniques may have enhanced production, diversification of cropping patterns jeopardised the possibilities that increased cultivation could offer. The movement towards commodity production introduced new demands, which then induced change in the search for food, and because of this, the district's food situation was severely disrupted.
Famine, Hunger and Food Shortages

Famine, hunger and food shortages are all types of food insecurity, whose definitions overlap. Food shortages may lead to hunger which in turn may result in a famine. But, in a practical sense, it is difficult to differentiate between them and thus to draw a line between these processes. In general, famine is a severe food shortage that is assumed to give way to hunger and starvation. It is a societal crisis induced by the dissolution of the accustomed availability of, and access to staple foods on a scale sufficient to cause starvation among a significant number of individuals (cf. Braun et al 1993, p.74; Sen 1981, p.39-40; Devereux 1993; de Waal 1993). Hence, famine is a widespread form of food shortage which results in social and economic disorganization and even death. In spite of this, not all famines lead to starvation (de Waal 1990, p.471).

In Gusii oral history, hunger is synonymous with food shortages, and these were perceived to arise from a shortfall in one's harvest. But, there were established mechanisms to enable those faced with hunger or inadequate food supply (enchara) to meet their needs in the interim period. By contrast, famine, locally referred to as egeku (deadly disaster) was seen as an unavoidable occurrence, which suggests that there were no laid down mechanisms to respond to such a situation. Almost all reported famines were attributed to some natural (supernatural) catastrophe that went beyond people's control. Although most of the famines are said to have lasted for no longer than one year, they had devastating consequences on the lives of the people. These famines were eventful, but they are also reported to have come to and end with the harvest of a new crop. However, while there may be fewer famines now, many people are no less threatened by ordinary food shortages than they may have been by famine in the past.

Gusii oral narratives do not indicate whether there were famines and food shortages prior to colonisation. While it could be easily concluded that hunger set in with the movement towards a market economy, the existence of ogosuma (an established food aid practice) and the barter trade in grain suggest that at least some households did face shortfalls, which one might assume they generally countered through precisely these mechanisms. Nevertheless, as we will see below, some of the food shortages went beyond the capacity of such mechanisms to address appropriately.
An Act of God

Food shortages in Gusii were, prior to the 1930s, attributed to natural disasters, acts of God. Consequently, people did not try to intervene directly, although the people did re-organise themselves so as to adapt to the new realities. They migrated, some gave up children, while others fed on anything that was eatable. The earliest reported famine among the Gusii known as langi took place in 1896 (KNFU 1965). This famine, whose name seems to have been borrowed from their Luo neighbours (and in Luo means to lick with the tongue), resulted from ravages by locusts. The locusts initially attacked the lakeshores before spreading to the Gusii Highlands. There were numerous deaths from starvation, and a smallpox epidemic at the same time had disastrous effects on a population that was already weakened by hunger. Many migrated out of the area during this period. The langi famine ended with the successful harvest of 1897.

Although famines are perceived as blanket disasters, this was not the case in Gusiiiland. During the langi famine, some people fed on tree barks, while others fed on animal skins, and by implication some must have fed on animal meat. Moreover, the fact that children were exchanged for food suggests that there were those among the Gusii who had more food reserves than others, and those with surplus food made a profit. And, as early as this period, we see a breakdown in the social safety nets. Instead of resorting to other existing food assistance mechanisms, acute scarcity resulted in giving up children in exchange for food (cf. Rahmato 1991, p.185).

In 1914, the Gusii were afflicted by yet another famine, locally referred to as nyabiage or nyamauga. During this period, which is reported to have been caused by drought, granaries were emptied completely, a rare occurrence and indeed a taboo at the time. People were forced to feed on dead animals and even worse, the bones of these dead animals were ground into flour for consumption, hence the name nyamauga. This was closely followed by yet another famine in 1918, known as kungu, also caused by a delay in rainfall. Some oral narratives refer to this famine as enchara ya kengere or nyabiage. The latter is drawn from the fact that during this famine people were forced to eat ebisagwa, immature sorghum which they boiled in lick-salt. Dis-
strict Annual Reports for the period argue that no deaths were directly attributed to this famine, although an influenza outbreak claimed over 5,000 lives at the end of that year.

It is interesting that both the 1914 and 1918 famines coincided with the period of war in Europe. The colonial administration was already entrenched in Gusiland and exports out of the district were happening, intended to feed troops at sea. Therefore, although official records attribute these famines to drought, incorporation played a considerable role. We have already seen that during the period that the Gusii were under colonial rule, grain was taken from them, both for free and in exchange for cash. The end result in either case was that the people had fewer reserves and any reduction in their next harvest became catastrophic.

Besides the penetration of markets, Gusii oral narratives attribute the 1918 famine, also referred to as enchara ya oino, to some (false) prophecy. This prophecy, attributed to a local prophetess, implored the Gusii not to cultivate their land. She predicted that this would make the white man leave Gusiland. Although this never came true, this line of reasoning makes a lot of sense. Given that the large workforce of colonial porters and police depended on the community for food supplies, hunger would have easily driven them out. The only problem is that the prophetess did not comprehend the fact that before this workforce went hungry all the Gusii would have starved to death since the administration had the machinery to demand food, many times for free.

It appears from the various sources available that Gusiland was one of the 'African Areas' least hard hit by the famine and influenza. Instead, the Gusii to some extent benefited economically during this period as they sold grain to their Luo neighbours who were intensely affected by famine as well (Kenya 1930). However, Maxon argues that the years of World War I brought little benefit to Gusiland. Noting that large demands were made on the area in terms of human resources, Gusiland was, like other African areas, generally neglected in terms of infrastructure development and the provision of social services. To make it worse, the last years of the war were marked by the emergence of a new form of resistance to British rule (Mumboism) which was mercilessly repressed (Maxon 1971, p.116). Nevertheless, the Gusii seem to have emerged from this period in control of
the situation. Over 75 percent of the dukas (cereal shops at the time) closed down as farmers responded to the shortages by not selling grain. And although over 80 percent of the Luo livestock went to the Gusii in exchange for maize, by mid 1918, the Gusii stopped supplying maize for fear that the drought, which had until then been largely limited to Luoland, would spread to their region as well. Consequently, relief maize imported by the colonial administration from South Africa was brought in for sale to famine stricken areas (Kenya 1946). The fact that the Gusii were able to determine when to sell and when not to sell, is indication that at the time food security was perceived as being able to retain adequate food reserves. Markets were therefore meant for surplus produce. It is also apparent that the people were able to foresee food shortages and could refrain from selling what was just an interim surplus.

Some food shortages had more than one explanation. According to the colonial administration, the 1931 famine was the result of excessive rainfall in the months of March to June of the previous year. This situation was exacerbated by increased exportation, the lower than average rainfall of 1929, and the less than abundant harvest of 1928 (Kenya 1930). However, oral narratives attribute the 1931 famine, locally known as nyangweso, to a locust invasion following a curse. The story goes that this curse was brought upon the community by a son-in-law who persuaded a man known as Nyasoni to bring chingige (locusts) upon the Gusii to avenge the death of his father-in-law, a roadside beggar who had been stoned to death through mob justice. This famine is therefore also referred to as egeku kia Nyasoni.

The 1931 nyangweso famine is one of the most notorious in Gusii history. A large number of Abagusii people dispersed to three areas: Subaland, Kurialand and Luoland. Alongside this, some families gave away their children in exchange for food from the neighbouring Luo, Suba and Kuria communities. However, some Gusii families managed to remain. They received emergency food aid, mainly Irish potatoes. Additionally, chiefs were directed to force the Gusii to plant sweet potatoes, and village headmen were specifically instructed to ensure that every man put a reasonable amount of land under this crop. Sweet potatoes were recommended because locusts could not destroy them. This marked the beginning of sweet potatoes as a common feature in Gusiland but, partly for the same reason, sweet potatoes have remained just an
emergency crop, grown only on surplus land, if at all. In 1932, sorghum and cottonseeds were issued and orange seedlings were imported from Zanzibar. A coffee nursery was started and sorghum field trials were expanded for purposes of identifying suitable varieties for the district's conditions. Locusts again invaded Gusiiland in 1939.

While both the District Annual Reports (1931b) and oral narratives agree on the fact that nobody died from the nyangweso famine because it was not followed by an epidemic, the two sources differ on the impact of the invasion. Whereas there are stories of massive out-migration, district reports for this period show that the Gusii suffered little and for the most part, they made profit selling to their Luo and Kuria neighbours (Kenya 1931b). This discrepancy can be attributed to the fact that famines and food shortages impact on people in a diversity of ways. While some suffer shortages, others make profits out of increased demand. Among the Gusii, even at the time, households stored variably and although everybody planted each year, the quantity of harvest and reserves was not uniform.

The nyangweso famine was nevertheless intense. In 1931 alone, the Gusii-Abakuria Native Council spent 20,000 rupees on famine relief, while the government of South Nyanza supplied 21,000 bags of maize. The Luo-Abasuba Local Native Council funded the free distribution of maize to those in their locations who had neither the money to pay nor the ability to work for their food (Kenya 1931a). It is again evident that vulnerability to food shortages varied. At the time, ability to work was as good a source of food as having the money to pay for it. The famous nyangweso famine lasted for one year. The extermination of the locusts and the good rains of 1932 brought this period to an end.

While these famines and food shortages may have been due to natural causes, vulnerability to them was not. Although the Gusii seem to have benefited from the fact that the neighbouring communities were not as well endowed, some people within the Gusii community also suffered immensely at the same time, so they even turned to hitherto ‘food importing’ communities for assistance. The cause of these food shortages went beyond the drought to include the level of preparedness. Hence, looking at famine and general crop failure as an act of God leaves out the human hand, the role of social, political and economic pro-
cesses. The question then is: why do droughts turn into famines and that some sections of the population suffer more than others?

*Man's Own Making*

As already noted, for most of the colonial period Gusiiland was a grain basket. Around the mid 1940s, the Gusii region was known for and encouraged to produce staple foods for the market. But, amidst what can be described as abundant production, people also moved into cash cropping, and although food markets became a reality, some of the accompanying changes presented new challenges. Incorporation into the market economy had two parallel influences on the food situation of the Gusii. First, commercial farming competed with subsistence production in terms of resource allocation. And second, production for export widened the scope by bringing in markets as an additional source of food. In both cases, the emerging importance of outside intervention in the food needs of the Gusii became more explicit and although famines as blanket disasters (*egeku*) ceased to exist, hunger became widespread. Hence, *egeku*, which implies 'things closing in for all', was no longer an appropriate term, because the sources of food had since increased.

Therefore, when the Gusii were next confronted with food shortages in 1961, and unlike previous instances when such challenges were left to the supernatural, the people sought intervention. In April, the Secretary-General of the Abagusii Union wrote to the District Agricultural Officer (DAO) requesting technical assistance (Kenya 1966a). And, in May 1961, the Secretary-General again wrote to the District Commissioner (DC) demanding food relief while indicating that the impending food shortages were now real (Kenya 1966b).

In his reply to the above letters, the District Commissioner noted that the government was aware that there was a food shortage in the Gusii highlands, but that he had decided that it was not necessary to send famine relief to the district. Instead, the National Produce and Marketing Board received instructions to send supplies for sale to the Gusii people. This decision was based on the belief that since the district was part of the highlands, it was prosperous enough to purchase food. Vine and Vine arrived at a similar conclusion by stating that the Gusii's standard of living was higher than that of
most people living in 'underdeveloped' areas. The Gusii were better fed, better clothed, and had more purchasing power than most peasant farmers in North Africa, the Middle East and East Asia (Vine & Vine 1966, p.10). This attitude towards Gusiiland as a grain basket has persisted to date, and people living in the area have never been listed among those likely to be food insecure, largely because food security has continued to be equated with agricultural potential. While this may have been the case at one time, the continued perception of Gusiiland as a grain basket ignores the changes that have taken place in the region, rendering adequate food unattainable for many.

What was initially merely a threat, aptly predicted by the Gusii people who then went ahead to seek assistance, turned out to be real. Army worms (chingeti) invaded the region and unlike locusts, these destroyed all crops, including sweet potatoes. In spite of this, the Gusii did not receive food aid nor did they ever afterwards. The food situation deteriorated and in his 1961 report to the Provincial Commissioner (PC), the District Commissioner of Kisii described the food situation in Gusiiland as quite bad (Kenya 1966c).

However, the reported invasion by army worms during the 1961 food shortages can only be viewed as a coincidence. This is because for about eight years running since 1954, acreage under maize alone almost quadrupled, while that under millet and sorghum remained significantly high. And although maize output was already undergoing a relative decline during this period, in 1961, a record amount of maize was marketed as compared to both 1960 and 1962 (Omosa 1998, p.91). Why then were the Gusii faced with such a threat that even included requesting that there be food on the market to make purchases possible? This is because on their part, the otherwise food-abundant Gusii found themselves 'suddenly' without reserves after they had sold out in anticipation of a regular harvest. And because the maize market, and indeed the entire agricultural sector at the time, was centrally organised, they needed the co-operation of those who were in charge of marketing to be able to purchase food. With poor physical reserves and nothing on the market, the Gusii food security was in jeopardy, in spite of the money in their hands.

The intervals of food shortages among the Gusii started narrowing after 1961. In 1965, the Gusii faced yet another food shortage. Although the administration, as represented by the District Commissioner, tried to deny the
existence of these shortages, this was contradicted in several ways. For example, in his brief, the District Officer (DO) of North Kisii wrote to the effect that the food situation was bad. The government, however, failed to intervene directly. Neither relief food nor supplies for sale were sent to the district, in spite of the fact that the government had imported yellow maize from the United States of America following the countrywide food shortages of 1965 (Kenya 1965). Nevertheless, some of the imported maize still found its way to Gusiland. A trader in North Mugirango had some of this maize in his shop, and a bag cost around seventy eight shillings, about 56 percent over the farm gate price offered to the Gusii by the then Maize Control Board. It is no wonder then that most of the people continued to find it necessary to grow their own food as the surest way to meet their food needs.

Nevertheless, the 1965 food shortage did not impact uniformly. According to the District Agricultural Officer, these shortages were worse in the lakeshore locations (Luo community). The same officer expressed concern that the Luo were already buying food from the higher locations (Gusiiland), but it was doubtful if they were going to be able to continue 'feeding from the market' until the next harvest. This situation, mainly assessed in terms of crop performance and market prices, deteriorated for the Gusii as well, but levels of intensity varied (cf. Kenya 1965).

These food shortages eased up with the falling of ample rain, and by 1966, the food situation was satisfactory. The West Kenya Marketing Board started receiving deliveries and stocks were again building up. Higher-yielding maize seed was in high demand, and bananas were already being exported out of the district by lorry to Nakuru and Nairobi. However, what had been earlier on rejected by the Gusii in spite of having been recommended by the colonial government was now taking effect: farmers in the pyrethrum growing areas shifted away from food crop cultivation, and this was of much concern to the authorities (Kenya 1965).

In general therefore, when land was still plenty and un-demarcated, the Gusii balanced growing finger millet with maize. At that time, farmers only decided between selling and not selling. However, the shift to growing non-food crops meant that farmers had now to balance resource use, prior to cultivation. This was complicated by the reduction in demand for maize, finger millet and
sorghum and the new interest in conventional cash crops, mainly coffee, tea and pyrethrum, as the only crops that could be traded in world markets. Whereas the proportion of land under tea and coffee combined remains relatively small compared to that under maize, the overall effect is still a challenge to the food needs of the Gusii. This is in terms of resource allocation, mainly land, labour and capital and, subsequent to this, the potential of income earned to serve as a cushion for contingencies.

*Life without Growing One’s Own Food*

Prior to the introduction of cash markets, the Gusii traded their surplus produce on a barter system. This form of exchange was fairly fixed, internally generated and negotiated. On the other hand, cultivation of maize on a large scale was first undertaken in Gusiiland purposely for the export market. Thus, demand was externally generated and so was price, although farmers made every attempt to resist low prices. However, by the end of World War II, the colonial administration was of the opinion that the Gusii highlands needed to convert to a cash economy by engaging in the export of high-value low-bulk crops and the importation of food (Kenya 1946).

Although the Gusii had, by 1945, been engaged in markets for close to half a century, the recommendation that they convert to a cash economy was a reversal of the way they had participated in markets up to that point. Until then, the Gusii were largely engaged in markets through the cultivation of finger millet and maize, both of them food crops, but on a scale that allowed them to sell surpluses. Much as some of the people were also now engaged in the cultivation of coffee, this was undertaken alongside staple food crops. The latter scenario came to dominate the cropping patterns of the Gusii, and the purchase of staple grain continued to be associated with undertaking the undesirable, a sign that things were not going well. In later years, however, increased urbanization introduced a new category of persons and 'feeding from the market' became associated with a cosmopolitan lifestyle. This element introduced some 'status' in purchasing staple food, but forced purchasing has remained *ogotonda*, i.e. feeding from the market. As one respondent recounted, 'those who rely on purchases are like birds of the air waiting for others to work, only to join in' (Field Interviews, August 1996).
But, from one food shortage to another, more and more households started acquiring some of their staple food on the market. Over time, food shortages changed from a one-off occurrence to a regular pattern that is likely to have become permanent. The Gusii's relationship with markets transformed from an outlet for their farm produce, and therefore a source of cash income, to a source of food. These varying perceptions of the role of markets in the Gusii's food needs continue to influence the way the people define their food security status. The proposition that people in the Gusii region have a potential to obtain their food on the market while they put their land under other uses has remained unattractive to many. At the household level, this proposal rests on several assumptions, among them, that incomes earned will be sufficient (and the food markets will function). However, while there has been some effort to avoid market failure, the more significant consideration has been largely ignored, that is, that markets respond not so much to needs but rather to a pull, namely the consumers' ability to pay (cf. Mackintosh 1990, p.43; Devereux 1993, p.86).

Hence, what challenges face those among the Gusii who have chosen a 'life without growing their own food'? We have already seen that in so doing, they become like ‘birds of the air’, not because they might not be able to support kin and friend, but because by relying on markets, they double their vulnerability, particularly if they also depend on agricultural incomes for the purchase of staple food. And, as argued by Amartya Sen, the returns from conventional cash crops, and hence their endowment bundle, could fall below what they need to meet their food needs on the market (Sen 1981). Whether in fact there will be food on the market will depend on the 'pull' that such households can generate for traders to respond accordingly. Although the Gusii area is well served with market centres, several parts of the region are impassable for much of the year. Therefore, in addition to a reluctance to engage in the unusual, the recommendation that the Gusii shift away from growing of their own food ignores the practical challenges that this suggestion presents.
Conclusion

This article has highlighted the circumstances under which changes in the food security of the Gusii took place, and in particular, the movement towards production for the market. We have discussed some of the factors that influence how the Gusii continue to perceive their food needs, how they define their food security strategies, and why cultivation has continued to take centre stage. We have seen that while food shortages have always existed, they could now be less conspicuous. Hunger has transformed from being the result of some ‘natural’ and widespread calamity, such as a locust invasion, to being an everyday nightmare for those who are not in a position to obtain food that is otherwise available to others. The question then is: what may have been gained (or lost) in the process of incorporation into markets?

Incorporation dismantled mechanisms that were already in existence, which enabled households to produce food surpluses, by replacing them with others that rendered the people incapable of meeting their own food needs. It is apparent that, while there were losers during the process of incorporation, others gained. Although the Gusii were already engaged in some form of commodity exchange, the introduction of a cash economy expanded these opportunities. Even at this period, we see a differentiation between going to the market to sell and going there to spend money. Furthermore, these commodity relations sometimes failed, as was the case in 1961, when there was a lack of food in the market, in spite of the people’s declared capacity to purchase. Hence, at this point, the market caused as much uncertainty as may have been the case when the Gusii were dependent on cultivation only and were therefore constantly taking a chance with nature. On the other hand, incorporation brought about additional sources of food and reduced the fear of natural calamities, then the most threatening of the causes of food insecurity. This could be viewed in two ways. One, the availability of markets made it possible that households could meet their food needs with supplies from elsewhere. Two, those who faced constraints in engaging in cultivation could choose to acquire some or all of their food on the market, and therefore put their land and other resources to alternative use.

We have, however, also seen that the actual outcome from the processes that were taking place among the Gusii depended on how the people themselves
chose to proceed. First, in spite of the ‘unlimited’ potential to produce, households procured varied quantities of food, and they also stocked them variously. And even when it came to seeking and receiving assistance, people’s levels of success were dissimilar. Partly for these reasons, only some of the Gusii migrated, while others remained behind. Furthermore, incorporation was also resisted. For example, whenever prices were considered too low, or the people anticipated a poor harvest, they declined to release much grain to the market. But this was only to a limited extent. Generally, people were forced to sell so as to raise cash income for other needs, including the paying of taxes. This further suggests that, in practice, life is far more complex than the relationships implied in the literature vis-à-vis the impact of commodity and non-commodity relations on food security.

References


Botswana, Africa's Haven of Ethnic Peace and Harmony: Status and Future Prospects

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Abstract

This paper has the dual objectives to highlight some of the factors that account for the absence of ethnic tensions and conflict in Botswana since independence and to reflect on the future of ethnic relations in the country. It identifies factors such as the nature of ethnic relations during the colonial period, the nature of British indirect rule, the relatively even development across regions occupied by different ethnic groups, deliberate government efforts to create national as opposed to tribal consciousness and the institutions of chieftaincy as having contributed to harmonious ethnic relations. An examination of the current situation, however, points to emerging disintegrative ethnic consciousness. This is evident from three factors: 1) The political debates centred on ethnic representation in the House of Chiefs and the fairness of sections 77, 78, and 79 of the Constitution that are sweeping across the country; 2) the appointment of a Presidential Commission to review sections 77, 78 and 79 of the Constitution, and 3) the focus the subject of ethnicity has received in the print media. It is concluded that Botswana is no longer safe from the ethnic strife, tensions and conflicts that have engulfed most other Africa countries, unless deliberate corrective measures are adopted by the state, drawing from other African countries to identify what works and what does not work.

Introduction

The term *ethnicity* refers to the consciousness of a feeling or an awareness of being a member of a distinctive ethnic group. The members of an ethnically conscious group conceive of themselves as having a distinct identity due to common historical origins (Maré, 1993; Kiyanga-Mulindwa, 1994: 1). They are characterized by a feeling of “we-ness” and display a "sense of peoplehood" and of the "corporate aspect" of sectarian affiliation (Horowitz 1985: 51). Ethnicity, broadly defined, is not new to Africa. It has been a persistent fact of life that predates the occupation of Africa by peoples of European descent. The continent is, in fact, the most varied and ethnically complex of all the world’s continents. With the exception of Lesotho, Somalia and Swaziland, all African states, as we know them today, incorporate ethically distinctive communities (United Nations, 1994) occupying different regions within them. A state like Nigeria, for example, is home to as many as 250 distinct ethnic groups (Osaghae, 1991).
The onset of colonialism appears to have transformed the nature and magnitude of ethnic consciousness across most of Africa. Pre-colonial Africa was characterized by limited to local, small-scale inter-ethnic disputes and conflicts (Mair, 1977; Krymkowski and Hall, 1990) which rarely escalated into prolonged hatred, tensions and conflicts culminating in the kind of genocide witnessed by some nations since independence. However, the coming of colonial rule ushered in a new dawn in ethnic relations in which disintegrative ethnicity assumed prominence over positive ethnicity (Leys, 1975; Nkrumah, 1980; Munyae and Mulinge, 1999). As Nkrumah (1980: 59) asserts, tribes but not “tribalism” in the modern sense existed in Africa before imperialist penetration. But ‘tribalism arose from colonialism…’ As disintegrative ethnicity eclipsed its integrative counterpart, it set the stage for persistent ethnic tensions and conflicts even among groups that at one time co-existed peacefully.

This essay focuses on the question of ethnicity within the context of Botswana. Botswana is a landlocked semi-arid country boarded by Zambia to the North, Zimbabwe in the Northeast, South Africa in the South and East, and Namibia in the West. Although the country gained independence in 1966 as one of the poorest nations in the world, the discovery of diamonds in 1967, prudent economic management, financial discipline, good governance, peace and stability, and public sector development planning have seen Botswana achieve remarkable development (Good, 1994; Maipose and Somolekae, 1996; Maipose, 2003). The favorable economic growth has enabled the government to invest extensively in the social sector, thereby increasing accessibility of social services to the majority of its population (Mandlebe, 1997; Mpabanga, 1997). Although the government has taken initiatives to diversify the economy through manufacturing and other business enterprises, diamond mining remains the dominant economic activity, and the country continues to suffer from the absence of a viable private sector (Maipose, 2003). Thus, given the capital rather than labour intensive nature of the mining sector, the bulk of Batswana who are formally employed work for the public sector. However, the country’s population remains overwhelmingly rural, dependent mainly on cattle rearing and beef production for a livelihood, with large cattle barons rather than small-scale holders dominating the sector.
Compared to most other Africa countries, Botswana presents a rather unique case with respect to ethnic relations. Like other African countries, the country comprises multiple ethnic groups. However, unlike most other African countries, where ethnicity has had disintegrative tendencies by creating conditions for competition and animosities between groups, until the late 1990s Botswana was characterized by integrative ethnicity in which ethnic groups co-existed as equals (Holm and Molutsi, 1992) and devoid of arrogance on the part of any particular group. Until then the country was 'free of divisive struggles that surround ethnically based politics' (Solway, 1994: 225) and enjoyed political stability and a relative peaceful co-existence between its different ethnic groups. Despite such uniqueness, little efforts have been made to identify the factors which are responsible for relative ethnic peace, and to analyze the future of ethnic relations in the country. This essay is a step in that direction. It advances the position that potential for ethnic animosities and resentment in Botswana remains real. Thus, it would be rather myopic to conclude that the ethnic unity and harmony that has characterized the country since independence is likely to prevail well into the distant future. While the country may have experienced a delay in the emergence of the socioeconomic and political conditions that have been responsible for soured ethnic relations in the rest of Africa, there are already indications that the wind of ethnic relations in Botswana is changing course.

**Ethnic relations in Botswana**

Like most other African countries Botswana is an ethnically heterogeneous nation. However, the country presents a rather unique case with respect to the nature and extent of ethnicity in two ways. First, unlike in most other African countries Botswana is characterized by constitutionally grounded ethnic differentiation. The constitution of Botswana delineates eight "principal tribes" - namely, the Bangwato, Bangwaketse, Bakwena, Bakgatla, Batawana, Barolong, Balete and Batlokwa - for the country. These were demarcated between 1899 and 1933 as the "principal tribes" through a Native Reserve Delimitation Commission. The Commission established "native reserves" in Bechuanaland that consolidated the subordination of non-Batswana ethnic groups. In addition, the Commission marked the boundaries of seven native reserves plus the Barolong farms, with the rest of the country becoming
"Crown Land" or "freehold land" (Schapera, 1943). Groups that were located outside the native reserves, e.g. in Kgalagadi, Ghanzi and Chobe, among others, were declared squatters on Crown land. At independence, Botswana's new constitution enshrined the eight Botswana groups occupying the native reserves. It retained the boundaries of the native reserves under the new label of "district". Because of this arrangement, chiefs of ethnic groups other than the eight major tribes continued to be marginalized. They were regarded as headmen or sub-chiefs without the right to represent their people (tribesmen) in the House of Chiefs (Molutsi, 1998).

Second, despite the existence of constitutionally legitimated ethnic differentiation, Botswana, unlike most other African countries, has experienced relative peace and harmony among its ethnic groups and the near total absence of disintegrative ethnicity since independence. While in most other African countries the existence of multiple ethnic groups has often been accompanied by ethnic tensions that have resulted in open hostility, conflict or murderous wars and even genocide, in Botswana ethnic consciousness and tensions have not been apparent. No conflict of the magnitude and devastating nature found in some other African countries has been witnessed here. The country has never experienced apparent tensions and conflict between groups, and has also been devoid of aggravating ethnic competition for political and socioeconomic resources. It is the competition for resources that has been responsible for discord between ethnic groups and for the entrenchment of practices such as the coalescing of political parties along ethnic lines and voting in ethnic blocks in other African countries (Wilson, 1995).

Ethnicity in politics in Botswana exists, but it is not as blatant as in some other African countries. That is, ethnicity is not the most important variable in Botswana's political process, as it has become in countries like Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Malawi, to name but a few. Although ethnicity plays a role in party membership, it is by no means the paramount factor. In Botswana political support along ethnic lines mainly exists in rural areas, where victory for political parties may be based more on ethnic constituencies than on other factors. The Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), for example, has dominated the politics of Botswana because of its ethnically grounded rural support. Nevertheless, ethnic allegiance to political parties in Botswana is not driven by inherent ethnic competition for scarce national resources, like in other African
countries. Across most of Africa, the primary purpose for people of similar ethnicity to join the same political party is to increase the group's chance of ascending the presidency and influencing national development policy decisions. For Botswana it would be more correct to argue that political parties have coalesced along a rural-urban dichotomy: The Botswana National Front [BNF] is mainly the party of the urban residents, whereas the Botswana Democratic Party [BDP] is the party of the (rural) masses; at least at the level of ordinary membership.

Referring specifically to voting patterns, Molutsi (1998:366-67) indicates that, "communities in Botswana have voted for local leaders based on ethnic identity rather than for national leaders and national issues." He argues that both minority tribes (such as the Bakalanga, Subia, Humbukushi, Yei Mabanderu and Basarawa) and majority Batswana tribes have all voted for ethnic leadership. What distinguishes the Botswana situation from other African countries is that here voting along ethnic lines has occurred for reasons different from those in other countries. In countries such as Kenya voting along ethnic lines by minority tribes has been driven by the desire to control the presidency and therefore the national agenda and resources. In Botswana, on the contrary, minority tribes have had to vote along ethnic lines because most of these groups found themselves residing in geographical territories occupied by one or another of the major ethnic groups (Molutsi, 1998). This type of arrangement is said to have led to the assimilation, subordination and subjugation of the majority groups. Furthermore, chiefs who represent tribal interests play a major role in influencing voting patterns in rural Botswana. Because of this, people are inclined to vote for the party their chief is sympathetic to. For instance, people vote for the BDP on account of its being the party of their chief, Sir Seretse Khama (Molutsi, 1998). It is on the strength of this fact that the BDP decided to co-opt and appoint to the position of Vice President Ian Khama, the first son of Sir Seretse Khama, just before the 1999 elections, with a view to strengthening party unity and improving its prospects for winning the elections. The move, aided by a split in the opposition, appears to have paid dividends, as the BDP regained much of the ground it had lost to the opposition BNF during the 1994 elections.
Why the Harmonious Ethnic Relations in Botswana?

Logically, the establishment of native reserves and the consequent subordination of non-Tswana tribes by Tswana groups during the colonial period, and the existence of constitutionally legitimated ethnic inequalities after independence should have prepared the ground for ethnic tensions and conflict in Botswana. But it was not until towards the end of the 1990s that evidence of ethnic tension and competition began to surface in the country. This raises the question of what reasons may have caused this delay. There are several explanations that can be advanced to account for the relative ethnic 'unity', peace, and harmony that characterized Botswana since independence. These include historical factors such as the nature of ethnic relations during the colonial period and the nature of indirect rule employed by the British colonizers. In addition, economic factors, such as the relatively equal distribution and access to resources have had a role to play.

Historically, ethnic relations in Botswana were characterized by the assimilation, subordination and subjugation of minority by majority ethnic groups (Molutsi, 1998). Minority group such as Bakalanga, Subia, Humbukushi, Yei Mabanderu and Basarawa who found themselves sharing geographical territories with any of the majority groups (the Bangwato, Bangwaketse, Bakwena, Bakgatla, Batawana, Barolong, Balete and Batlokwa) were presumed to have become the subjects of the host majority tribe. As such, they were considered to have forsaken their consciousness as distinctive ethnic groups and to have become assimilated to the majority group. Although one may question the authenticity of the assimilation argument, one is likely to be persuaded to believe that the absence of friction and conflict between minority and majority groups suggests that minority groups did not perceive themselves to be disadvantaged. That is, no master-slave situation existed and the level of differential treatment of minority by majority groups was minimal.

The historically grounded harmonious ethnic relations in Botswana were strengthened further by the system of indirect rule adopted by the British. The British had no economic interest in Bechuanaland. Their only goal was to maintain access to their territories in the North, especially the two Rhodesias. This reduced their physical presence in the country. Hence, unlike in other African countries like Kenya and Zimbabwe, Botswana escaped the ethnic
fragmentation and conflict associated with the British administrative practice of divide and rule. British colonialism also did not engineer and actively promote any paramount/favourite tribe in Botswana, as it did in its other colonies on the continent. Although some supremacy was created through the demarcation of native reserves from 1899 to 1933, as indicated earlier, this never assumed the social, economic and political undertones associated with ethnic domination in other British colonies.

Generally, as has been demonstrated by Vail (1996) and Wilmsen (1996), the source of ethnic tension and conflict is the unequal access to national resources among groups. Whenever ethnicity becomes the basis for the allocation of important societal resources such as power, economic development programs, political influence, and positions in the general labour market (Ungar, 1989; United Nations, 1994), it engenders rivalry, tension and conflict and, in extreme cases, even may result in armed struggle and even genocide. In Botswana, resource allocation did not constitute the basis for ethnic tension until very recently, because of three factors. First, the British never attached any economic value to Bechuanaland. As a result, they did not invest in the socioeconomic development of the country and the country attained independence without regional variations in development along ethnic lines that could constitute a basis for competition among groups. The overwhelmingly rural population depended mainly on agriculture for their livelihood (Botswana Government, 1991, 1997). The whole country was equally underdeveloped, access to education was limited and did not deliberately favor some tribes at the expense of others.

Second, being one of the poorest nations in Africa at independence, land remained the dominant resource in Botswana. But the system of tenure allowed access to land for every adult Motswana. As such, land did not constitute a basis for ethnic competition. Ownership of land in Botswana takes three forms; freehold, tribal and state land. Tribal land refers to land which used to be held and administered by the chiefs of the various tribes prior to the passing of the Tribal Land Act of 1968 which transferred control and allocation of such lands to Land Boards. These are corporate bodies whose membership comprises of the chief (as ex officio) and representatives from the district council and central government. Citizens (i.e., nationals) can apply to the Land Board to be allocated land for residence, agriculture (often referred to
as the lands), for livestock rearing (termed cattle post) or for commercial purposes. Relative fairness has prevailed in the distribution of employment opportunities in that access to employment has mainly been based on merit rather than on ethnic affiliation.

Finally, Botswana has recorded impressive economic growth since the discovery and exploitation of valuable minerals, particularly diamonds (Botswana Government, 1991, 1997). This has created increasing revenue that has enabled the government to provide better services to the population. The efficiency in the provision of such services has been enhanced by the village system of rural settlement which concentrates rather than disperses populations geographically. While the overall level of poverty has been rising in Botswana and some regional variations in development are becoming evident, one may argue that, relative to most other African countries, there is some semblance of equality in the "village" distribution of national resources.

Persistent harmonious ethnic relations in Botswana could also be explained in terms of deliberate government efforts to create a unifying national consciousness. The postcolonial state has tried to suppress ethnic divisions by deliberately excluding ethnic identity from official records and especially national censuses. Unlike in most other African countries, where ethnic identity remains a major category in national censuses (Mulinge and Munyae, 2000), the Central Statistics Office in Botswana which oversees population enumeration, steers clear of gathering information that may reflect ethnic identities and languages, as a matter of government policy. In addition, ethnicity has never constituted a major category in official government documents such as national identity cards (omangs), passports and driver licenses. The state has also pursued an aggressive policy of Tswana assimilation through its official language and culture policy. In the interest of nation-building and national unity, Setswana and English are the only official languages in the country. Other languages can neither be spoken at official forums, nor be taught in schools (Holm and Molutsi, 1992, Molutsi, 1998). This approach is not unique to Botswana. It has been attempted in other African countries such as Kenya and Tanzania, but with limited success (Smith, 1981; Birch, 1989).
Finally, the institution of chieftaincy in Botswana has been considered to be one of the factors responsible for the ethnic peace that has existed up to the post-independence period. According to Holm (1996), this averted ethnic conflict by keeping ethnicity localized. Broadly construed this may be the case, but on closer scrutiny, there are indications that the nature of the chieftaincy institution in Botswana creates fertile ground for ethnic divisions by elevating the chiefs of the eight principal tribes to a status of supremacy while relegating those of the minority non-Tswana tribes to headmen and sub-chief status. Given that only chiefs from the eight major tribes sit in the House of Chiefs, minority tribes are denied direct representation by fellow tribesmen. In some parts of the country this has culminated in the emergence of what Solway (1994) referred to as ‘politicized ethnicity.’

**The future ethnic relations in Botswana**

Although no major ethnic rifts have occurred in Botswana since independence, the country is displaying signs of cultural and ethnic challenges comparable to those in many other African countries. These provide evidence that Botswana is beginning to travel the path followed by most African countries during the colonial period. A front-page article printed in the Botswana Guardian of October 6, 2000 entitled “Tribal Wars” best sums up the situation. In an attempt to answer the question as to whether Botswana is on the brink of a national meltdown, the article pointed out that:

Stress levels are rising as ethnic tensions hot up. Tribal rivalry is getting organized: the country's middle class is mobilizing around ethnic affiliations in the ongoing debate over the planned amendment to the Constitution to make it tribally neutral. Botswana's middle class national camaraderie - "the Old boys club" - is breaking down and tribal cabals are springing up in its place. At the University of Botswana, old friendships are being stretched to the limit by tribal rivalry. Yesterday's professional colleagues are today's tribal rivals. Old ethnic divisions in the country's business community are being fossilized, parastatal chiefs and senior government officials have also been dragged into the fray.

There are three key pointers to emerging ethnic tensions and competition in Botswana. These include the debates surrounding tribal representation in the House of Chiefs, the debates focusing on sections 77, 78, and 79 of the constitution, and the proliferation of media stories focusing on the subject. It is to a more detailed discussion of these that we now turn.
Debates about Representation in the House of Chiefs

Political debates surrounding tribal representation in the House of Chiefs - the second house in Botswana's legislative structure - began in 1999. Tribes of the so-called subject (or minority) groups were clamoring for recognition as distinctive entities and for representation in the House of Chiefs which plays mainly an advisory role in the country's politics. They called for the expansion of the House of Chiefs to incorporate chiefs from all tribes in the country. Minority tribes also desired their chiefs to be referred to as "paramount", like those of the constitutionally delineated eight major tribes. Political representatives from these groups elevated such demands to the national level forums by frequently raising them in the National Assembly and debating them in Kgotla (a public meeting or community council headed by the village chief in which community decisions are arrived at by consensus) and political gatherings. In addition, members of parliament and ordinary citizens from subject groups such as the Kalanga, Bakgalagadi and Bayeyi were demanding the recognition of their languages (vernaculars). They called for these to be used in national print and broadcast media and to be taught in schools where currently only Setswana is taught. Although the debates have since lost steam, the matters raised have not been resolved and are likely to surface again in the future.

Political debates centering around sections 77, 78, and 79 of the Constitution

The second pointer to rising ethnic relations temperatures in ethnic relations were the debates questioning the legality of sections 77, 78, and 79 of the Botswana constitution, which delineate eight principal tribes for the country, labelling them as discriminatory. These debates, manifesting a growing discontent with the constitutional status quo in Botswana, peaked in 1999. In recognition of the divisive potentials of these debates and of the rising ethnic temperatures in the country, the government appointed the Balopi Commission of Inquiry with the objective to solicit views from the public concerning the three sections, and to suggest a way forward.

The status of ethnic relations in Botswana became evident from the spectrum of individuals who chose to express their opinions publicly. Broadly speaking,
the debates pitted Tswana-speaking tribes against non-Tswana speaking groups, with the former rooting for the status quo and the later agitating for change. Participants included senior government officials, parastatal heads, academics, prominent business personalities and political party activists. Those supporting the status quo subscribed to the view that there is nothing amiss with the Botswana constitution. They argued that the constitution of Botswana does not discriminate, and those who harboured such ideas had misconceptions. According to them the eight major tribes had an acquired right to their status. On the other side of the debate, those who were opposed to sections 77, 78 and 79 of the constitution saw them as discriminatory, because they deliberately excluded the names of non-Tswana tribes in favour of the eight listed Tswana groups. They maintained that this constituted the basis for persistent discrimination against the rights of those groups to land and administration. For this reason, they called for an amendment to the constitution to treat all tribes in the country equally and to guarantee that all ethnic groups are represented in the House of Chiefs. According to those agitating for change, rectifying the constitution would eliminate the "false supremacy" that the constitutionally legitimated majority ethnic groups enjoyed since independence. This, in turn, would further national unity by creating a cohesive, democratic and tolerant nation amidst diversity.

The findings of the commission reiterated the concern that the three sections were discriminatory and recommended that they should be scrapped from the constitution (Republic of Botswana, 2000). As a result, a Bill on Chieftaincy was drafted by way of scrapping sections 77, 78, and 79. However, despite the president’s initial support of the Bill and the recommendations of the commission, political pressure forced him to shift his stance and promise his supporters that the proposed constitutional change was not going to be implemented. As a result, no substantive steps have been taken in the direction of implementing the recommendations of the Balopi Commission of Inquiry, despite the government having accepted its report in 2000.

**Print Media Evidence**

The third indicator of rising ethnic tension in Botswana is the frequency of media stories focusing on the subject. Since 1999, there has been an upsurge of accusations and counter-accusations on the subject of ethnic belonging in
Botswana in the print media. Newspapers such as *The Botswana Gazette*, *The Sun*, *The Botswana Guardian*, *Mmegi/The Reporter*, and *Mmegi Monitor* all were replete with news items focusing on ethnic relations in Botswana. In our view, the persistent appearance of the topic of ethnicity in the print media was an indication that ethnic relations in Botswana were assuming the status of a major social issue meriting the attention of the public. Even the government-controlled newspaper, *The Daily News*, which is distributed freely to citizens, was not left out in the rush to profile the ethnicity debate.

At the general level the print media have carried numerous calls on Batswana to put national interests before tribal interests. A letter titled “Remember Rwanda and Burundi” appeared in the *Botswana Guardian* of October 26, 2001, stating that, “whether you call it tribalism, ethnicity or cultural divisions, it is all the same. They all are like cancer that can spread very fast and destroy its host very quickly. Right thinking people of our society should strive to root out all signs and symptoms of tribalism before it becomes acute and fully blown… everybody who loves peace in this country must by all means avoid casual talk about issues of tribalism.” The letter concluded by challenging the view that some people rely on ethnicity to access employment, arguing that employment and progression in the country were based on merit and capability rather than on ethnic background. Similar sentiments were mirrored in an article, specifically targeting sections 77, 78 and 79 of the constitution, published in *The Midweek Sun* of May 5, 2002 (p.7). The article cautioned to “put the country before your selfish tribal interests” and called for individuals to “swallow your shallow tribal pride and accept that our society is not treating all people equally.”

The bulk of the print media evidence, however, focused on the open discontent over the ethnic factor in Botswana’s labour market, with article after article dwelling on the ethnic composition of the workforce in the public service, the parastatal sector, and in the private sector, culminating with the conclusion that all sectors are dominated by a particular ethnic group. For instance, in an open letter published in the *Mmegi Monitor* newspaper of July 11, 2000 (p. 16) by a concerned citizen the Bakalanga were accused of being Zimbabweans who were using their tribal identity to monopolize economic opportunities and public service jobs, and of being hungry for power, compared to ‘real’ Batswana. The author of the letter gave the examples of corporations such as
Debswana Diamond Mining Company, Botswana Development Corporations, and other unnamed private companies to demonstrate that the Bakalanga dominated the labour market.

A closely related article appeared in the *Botswana Guardian* of July 15, 2002 (p.3) in which an irate employee at Supreme Furnitures, a subsidiary of the Profurn group which operates the retail chains of Supreme, Barnetts, and Protea Furnitures, accused the management of corruption, tribalism, and favouritism. The author complained that 90 percent of all senior officers in the northern region are Bakalanga, a scenario he concluded had resulted in the employment of more Bakalanga than any other tribe. *The Voice* edition of July 27, 2002 (pp. 1-2) added its voice to the debate by carrying another story pointing to the ethnic contestation in the labour market. In an article with the headline caption, “Bakalanga Accused of Corruption and Nepotism”, the author dismissed Bakalanga rhetoric of marginalization as meant to conceal the fact that they dominate and possess elite status in various spheres of life in Botswana. More specifically, the author singles out the ethnic composition of the public service, utilizing the judiciary as a case study to drive his point home. According to him, of 15 Batswana judges 13 are Bakalanga; the other two are from the 8 principal tribes demarcated in the constitution. In lieu of this the author concludes that:

The Bakalanga are well placed in positions of power and influence. Such positions allow them to dictate pace of change and infuse their ideas at the national level. They have access to strategic information, which they are using to entrench their ethnic kind in the social and economic spheres of the country. It is the Bakalanga who are marginalizing other ethnic groups, not the other way round.

The accusations labelled against the Bakalanga tribe have not gone unanswered. For instance, a member of the Society for the Promotion of the Ikalanga Language (SPIL) writing in the *Botswana Gazette* of August 10, 2002 (p.4) pointed out that some people were simply jealous of the Bakalanga because they are more hard working, and that some tribal bigots who believe that they are superior on account of the constitutional provision that the Bakalanga have been subjected to cannot stomach the fact that the Bakalanga are the most qualified citizens.
As an indicator of the gravity of the ethnic question in the labour market in Botswana the media has also been replete with a chain of articles calling upon Batswana to guard against the divisive tendencies of ethnically inspired bad mouthing. Most of the articles in this category called for better education that guaranteed that benefits trickled down to all. One such article appeared in The Botswana Guardian of September 7, 2001 (p.11), emphasizing the importance of education in labour market attainments. Its author argues that the Bakalanga took to education like ducks to water, while other ethnic groups were not particularly enthusiastic about education. He concluded that it was education that was responsible for Bakalanga dominance in the various spheres of life in Botswana. These views are supported by Werbner (2002) who points out that many senior and capable civil servants in Botswana are from the Kalanga community because that community heavily agitated for and invested in schools during the colonial period. A similar article was printed in The Voice of September 7, 2001 (p. 9) in which the author argued that “instead of demonizing and bashing the Bakalanga we should be making concerted attempts to learn from them … ethnicity has the potential to undermine national unity.”

One may also cite other newspaper articles, such as The Gazette, October 10, 2001 (p.11), Mmegi Monitor, September 19, 2001 (p. 4), and The Botswana Guardian, April 12, 2002 (p.14), to illustrate the upsurge of the ethnicity question in Botswana. In addition, the changing tide in ethnic relations in Botswana has been documented by the few academic studies that are available. For instance, Nyamnjoh (2002:6) pointed to the existence of “growing importance of identity politics and more exclusionary ideas of nationality and citizenship, as minority claims for greater cultural recognition and plurality are countered by majoritarian efforts to maintain the status quo of an inherited colonial hierarchy of ethnic groups” in the country.

**What the future holds: The role of poverty**

The driving question for this essay is what the future holds regarding ethnic relations in Botswana. The ethnic discrimination identified by the various debates that have raged since 1999 is an indicator that Botswana is entering a phase in her socioeconomic and political development that is likely to be characterized by heightened ethnic consciousness. There is an increasing
likelihood that the stratification war in Botswana is slowly but surely shifting its locus more and more from the gender issue to the ethnic question. Since discrimination is a threat to fundamental societal values such as equality of opportunity and merit-based advancement, it might be expected that a natural tension would arise in the interpretation of interactions involving advantaged and disadvantaged group members in Botswana. While advantaged group members may be careful to avoid the appearance of condoning discrimination and as well as to vehemently deny any charges of impropriety, members of the disadvantaged groups might be prone to interpret ambiguous interactions as potentially discriminatory.

Dwindling socioeconomic resources and an emerging socioeconomic trend engulfing particularly the ruling elite and the upper and middle class members of the society point to future heightened ethnic tensions and competition in Botswana. Diminishing socioeconomic resources manifests itself in a number of ways, including high poverty rates, rising unemployment rates and limited educational places, especially in tertiary institutions. These conditions create an environment that increases ethnic competition and elevates the potential for tension, hatred/hostility and even conflict to greater heights. While merit and need may, in principle, continue to be the basis for the allocation of the dwindling socioeconomic resources and opportunities, ethnicity is likely to become an additional credential necessary for one to access certain resources such as employment and tertiary educational and training institutions.

As far as the overall socio-economic situation is concerned, Botswana currently is characterized by "poverty in the midst of plenty". The poverty rate is high with a large proportion of the population living below the poverty datum line (PDL) (see e.g. Good, 1992; Jefferis, 1997). No current data on the extent of poverty in Botswana are available but a study conducted by the Botswana Institute of Development Policy Analysis (BIDPA) in 1997 showed that 47 percent of Batswana (or 38 percent of all households) were living below the poverty threshold of Botswana Pula 100 (approximately 30 US dollars) per person per month in 1993/94. Of these, 30 percent were classified as "very poor". Based on the Central Intelligence Agency (2008) World Factbook, in 2003 the proportion of the population living below the poverty line stood at 30.3 percent. Poverty levels in Botswana vary across the country, with remote rural areas having the highest incidences. For instance, South
West, Kgalagadi, Ghanzi, and the Western parts of Kweneng and Southern districts had the highest poverty rates in 1993/94; 71 percent of its population was classified as people living below the PDL (Siphambe, 2003). Like in most developing countries, poverty in Botswana has a gender dimension: Female-headed households are more likely to be poor than their male-headed counterparts. This poverty manifests itself through lack of adequate shelter or clothing, high mortality and morbidity, poor educational achievement, malnutrition, dependency, lack of social and economic mobility, and vulnerability to adverse events outside the control of the poor (World Bank, 2001). In Remote Area Dweller (RAD) settlements, the major indicators of poverty are widespread, as are symptoms of apathy, dependency and alcoholism.

There are a number of perceived causes of poverty in Botswana. Topping the list is the lack of cash income and the skewed distribution of incomes and productive assets (BIDPA, 1997; United Nations, 2002; Siphambe, 2003). Direct benefits from mining, the dominant economic sector, have tended to accrue only to those in formal employment, and those with the specialist skills needed in the mining industry and other parts of the formal sector. Poverty in Botswana is also rooted in the country’s adverse physical conditions and narrow economic base (United Nations, 2002). The harsh climate makes it difficult for especially rural populations to engage in agricultural activities that could bring them income. And the narrow economic base (read over-reliance on mining), is mainly responsible for the high levels of unemployment in the country. Whereas minerals accounted for the bulk of Botswana’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP), mining is not labour intensive and provides only 3.5 percent of formal employment (BIDPA, 1997; United Nations, 2002; Siphambe, 2003). The situation is worsened by the weak informal sector with low levels of self-employment. Other factors exacerbating poverty in Botswana include weakening of traditional support systems (e.g., loaning of animals, pooling of resources, share cropping, communal production, and the decline of the traditional extended family system); continuing movement of people from rural to urban areas in search of non-existent jobs; and the growing burden of HIV/AIDS, which has put intolerable strain on families who are already struggling to cope (United Nations, 2002). To address the problem of poverty in Botswana, the government has experimented with a variety of policies and programmes. These have included
agricultural entrepreneurship programmes [e.g., the Arable Land Development Policy (ALDEP) and the Accelerated Rain-fed Arable Programme (ARAP)]; financial assistance programmes [e.g., Financial Assistance Policy (FAP), the Small Medium and Micro-Enterprises (SMMEs), and, most recently, the Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency (CEDA)]; as well as social protection programmes (e.g., destitution allowance, and food baskets). Whereas agricultural entrepreneurship programmes aimed to assist or subsidize resource-poor farmers with farm implements in order to encourage food security and raise income, financial assistance programmes have been designed to offer grants to citizens that would assist them to set up or expand private businesses in order to create more employment through diversification of the economy, away from mining and beef industries (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, 1995; http://www.un.org/esa/agenda21/natlinfo/countr/botswana/social.htm; Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 1998). On the other hand, social protection programmes are geared toward assisting vulnerable (destitute) persons in the community to meet their daily needs. The government of Botswana has also tried in a number of ways to eradicate poverty through diversification of the economy away from mining and beef industries, which it has made a top priority for some years now. This approach is based on the idea that for any national poverty alleviation strategy to be successful it must operate within a macro-economic framework that ensures stability and sustained economic growth (United Nations, 2002). The policy aims to boost employment and at the same time to reduce the country’s risk of depending too heavily on a single commodity (i.e., diamonds). Despite the wide spectrum of government policies and programmes, the level of poverty in Botswana remains high.

Closely related to high rate of poverty is the high unemployment rate. A 1987 International Labour Organization (ILO) put the unemployment rate in Botswana in 1984/5 at 25.3 percent. A comparable rate of 23.8 percent was recorded by the 2002/2003 Household Income and Expenditure Survey conducted by the Central Statistics Office (2004:14). These figures show that in a period of about 20 years the unemployment level in Botswana remained almost unchanged with only a 1.5 percent drop from 1984 to 2003. Young people, including those with college diplomas and University degrees, are the most affected by the unemployment problem. With the exception of the technical and professional areas such engineering, medicine, accounting and law, most areas of employment are now saturated. The public service, which is
the dominant employer of school, college and university graduates, cannot offer jobs to the majority of job seekers. Even the teaching profession - the major consumer of graduates in the humanities is getting clogged up. As pointed out earlier, Botswana is experiencing a shortage in educational places, particularly in tertiary institutions such as colleges and university.

The competition for resources in Botswana is likely to be aggravated by an emerging socioeconomic trend that is engulfing particularly the ruling elite and the upper and middle class members of the society. Evidently, these groups are now embracing the second phase of capitalist development at the individual level, that is, they are moving beyond the satisfaction of basic needs to embrace the pride inherent in the personal accumulation of resources. For example, many no longer just desire to own a home in town and one in the rural village of origin, but seek to possess other homes and productive assets such as land to be judged successful. This creates a quest for private accumulation resulting in an artificial shortage in major resources that increases the chances for ethnic-based competition. With specific reference to land, the policy that a Motswana can apply for and be allocated land anywhere in the country is beginning to raise ethnic tensions in villages adjacent to urban centres. The situation in the Mogodishane and Tlokweng villages, which border Gaborone, the capital city, is illustrative. As the concept of sub-urbanisation gets entrenched, more and more members of the tribes originally occupying these villages are finding themselves landless as the urban elite - in many cases not originating from that area - scramble to acquire plots at the periphery.

Whatever path Botswana chooses to take, ethnicity is going to be a major feature in the social, economic, and political fabric of the society in the years ahead. As a matter of fact, the situation profiled by Glickman (1992: 22) with respect to the African continent as a whole is beginning to take shape in Botswana, particularly as resources dwindle. Glickman argues that in Africa, when it pertains to issues of political, social, and economic concerns, there tends to be an overriding loyalty to group interest vis-à-vis other ethnic groups, i.e. people generally advance the interests of their own ethnic group rather than those of the nation. According to Glickman (1992), employment is one area where ethnic interests take precedence over national solidarity. Nevertheless, one cannot argue with certainty that Botswana will join the ranks of other African countries which are characterized by unending ethnic tensions and conflicts. However, the problem can neither be wished away nor swept under the rug. Ethnicity is likely to occupy a prominent role in group dynamics in the future.

There are three major lessons that we can learn from the Botswana case. First,
that ethnic diversity does not necessarily lead to ethnic tensions and conflict. Botswana is a multiple ethnicity country which has experienced ethnic peace and harmony until the late 1990s. Second, the Botswana case refutes the view espoused by some African political leaders - such as Daniel Arap Moi, a former president of Kenya, and Yoweri Museveni of Uganda - that hatred-laden ethnicity in postcolonial Africa is the offshoot of multiparty democracy. Those who espouse this view have argued that democratization tends to promote opportunities for the expansion of ethnic conflict, because having more than one ethnic group demands pulling in different directions, thereby leading to conflict. More often than not, political parties are essentially ethnic coalitions that do not reflect a national outlook, and thus electoral mobilization breeds ethnic divisions and political instability. Botswana however, has been a multiparty democracy since independence. The country never rushed to change its constitution to introduce a one-party state as it happened in most other African countries which were spared from the military coups that swept through the continent in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet, it was not until the late 1990s that evidence of ethnic resentment began to emerge in Botswana.

Third and most importantly, the Botswana case underlines that it is the scramble for scarce resources which is the major basis of ethnic tensions, competition, and conflict. The emergence of ethnic badmouthing in the late 1990s was clearly a function of dwindling resources and especially of scarce employment opportunities. This is evident from the media debates which overwhelmingly focused on the labour market. Indeed, in light of this fact one may argue that while ethnic-based political parties remain an indisputable fact of the political terrain in Africa, it is not the mere existence of multiple ethnic groups in a nation state that is directly responsible for the formation of the same (Munyae and Mulinge 1999). Rather, it is the fear of economic and consequently political and social domination of a group or several groups by another group or a coalition of other groups that is mainly to blame for the existence of ethnic political parties. The postcolonial African state has perfected the use of ethnicity in the allocation of scarce resources such as government jobs and educational opportunities. As such, tribal parties are an attempt by the various ethnic groups to wrestle power from dominant groups and open the resource gates to their members. Unfortunately, the rebirth of multiparty democracy in most countries in the 1990s occurred in an environment that was already highly charged with disintegrative ethnic sentiments characterized by repressed rivalry over resource allocation.
**Conclusion and the way forward**

Lessons from the rest of Africa tend to suggest that once it is deeply rooted, disintegrative ethnicity - like corruption - is hard to eradicate. For Botswana to escape the destructive and counterproductive ethnic tensions and conflict that have rocked many African countries since independence, the political leadership must adopt a more progressive and open approach toward disintegrative ethnicity. The tendency thus far has been for the top level political echelon to adopt a “strategy of denial” in dealing with what is potentially an explosive problem. For instance, the country’s president has previously dismissed ethnicity as something that was being peddled by academics (see *Mmegi, The Reporter*, August 4, 2002: 2). According to him, Batswana lived together harmoniously, but some elites wanted to use ethnicity to their own advantage. This is a common approach to the ethnic question across most of Africa: Nearly everywhere political leaders denounce the existence of tribalism in their country because ethnicity is destructive to their ideals of national unity.

Across Africa, attempts to build cohesive nations devoid of ethnic tensions and animosities have varied widely. One commonly utilized method has been the search for a common lingua franca or a national language to replace multiple local languages (Birch, 1989). For instance, in Kenya and Tanzania Kiswahili was declared a national language, while in Botswana Setswana assumed a similar status. Such languages have, nevertheless, failed to excite a fully-fledged mass sentiment towards unity among dispersed and culturally heterogeneous populations (Smith, 1981), as most ethnic groups have been able to retain their distinctive linguistic and cultural identities even after being schooled in the chosen national language. Another approach to the ethnicity problem has been state control of the mass media, accompanied by the spread of propaganda by the state and censorship of what the press could disseminate to the public (Birch, 1989). Some countries (such as Kenya) have also experimented with outlawing tribal welfare associations, arguing that these perpetuated unhealthy ethnic consciousness, while others tried the constitutional banning of multiple political parties to create single party states, arguing that such parties tended to coalesce along ethnic lines, thereby solidifying rather than weakening ethnic competition and fragmentation (Mazrui and Tidy, 1984). Unfortunately, these measures have failed to produce the desired results in virtually all cases.

A more realistic approach to the ethnicity question in Botswana should be one anchored in the acknowledgement, as opposed to denial, on the part of the state and community leaders, that ethnic consciousness is becoming a major factor in socio-economic and political processes of the Tswana society, and
that new strategies are necessary to keep it under control. To effectively address the problem of surging ethnic consciousness, Botswana must draw from the experiences of other African countries and from its own history to avoid making the same mistakes that have been responsible for the intensification of ethnic competition. The country can draw valuable lessons from the experiences of other countries such as Kenya and Nigeria which are bedevilled by ethnic competition and animosities, and from a re-examination of past strategies utilized internally to foster national cohesion. For instance, rising ethnic consciousness in the country suggests that previous approaches which emphasized using language to create a unified nation no longer offer a lasting solution to the problem. They could also indicate that the harmonious ethnic relations that Botswana has enjoyed in the past are due to factors other than such deliberate steps.

A thorough and clear understanding of the different factors that are responsible for the surging ethnic consciousness in Botswana is central to devising appropriate intervention strategies. For such an understanding to be attained, it is imperative that people talk to each other and decisions are made through debate and compromise. In particular, since ethnic consciousness is at its formative stages, the state should dialogue more directly with the aggrieved parties to understand the basis for their concerns, and to articulate its stance with respect to the resolution of the situation. Through dialogue and collective decision making suspicions and resistance emanating from state decisions could be eliminated. Botswana appeared to have embraced the path of dialogue when the state allowed debate about sections 77, 78, and 79 of the constitution to flourish, culminating in the appointment of the Balopi Commission to collect public views and make appropriate recommendations. The commission was testimony to the state’s willingness to listen to its people. However, subsequent decisions by the state to shelve, rather than implement, the recommendations of the Balopi Commission, could be construed to be a pointer to the state’s support of the view that some tribes are more important than others, which ultimately undermines public confidence in the state’s commitment to dialogue and collective decision-making. By not implementing the recommendations of the commission, Botswana joined the ranks of other African countries which have treated commissions of enquiry as instruments for cover up and/or suppression of socio-politically charged issues.

In addition, considering whose interests may be served through intervention is important. This is particularly so in light of the fact that Botswana has legislated ethnicity by demarcating eight principal tribes in its constitution through sections 77, 78, and 79. Since the legitimacy of these sections has previously been questioned (a situation that led to the Balopi Commission),
state intervention that appears tilted toward the eight principal tribes would amount to crushing some groups while lifting those the state considers to be important. This is more likely to aggravate rather than ameliorate the situation by rousing suspicion and creating further disenchantment among ‘minority’ tribes. Where it is necessary for interventions to be targeted at specific ethnic groups, the state must explain meticulously the rationale behind its actions and involve the leadership from other groups, especially those which are likely to treat the initiative with suspicion.

The state in Botswana should not pay lip service to, or play political correctness with, interventions to curb rising ethnic consciousness. This is a mistake than many other African countries have committed in the past with disastrous results. The continent is replete with governments that have preached loudly against ethnic-based discriminations, while at the same time presiding over the entrenchment of ethnicity as a major factor in public service appointments and the distribution of national resources for socio-economic development. Kenya under Daniel Arap Moi and Mwai Kibaki offers classic examples. Rather than to follow such a route, the state in Botswana should ensure that intervention is based on a long-term commitment to the attainment and preservation of ethnic cohesion. This should prevail regardless of the party or the individuals wielding political power at any particular time. Unfortunately, the experience with the Balopi commission, which categorically recommended the repealing of sections 77, 78, and 79 from the constitution, points to a state that is bent on paying lip service to and/or playing political correctness with the ethnicity question.

In order to diffuse ethnic tensions and possible conflict in Botswana it is also important for the state to address culturally based perceptions. This is consistent with Fisher’s (1998) position that the mindsets or cultural lenses with which the disputing parties - as well as the interveners - view the subject are crucial to understanding and responding to their concerns. For instance, rather than to adopt a blanket approach to rising ethnic consciousness, the state must address separately the push by some ethnic pressure groups like the Society for the Promotion of the Ikalanga Language (SPIL) for the recognition of their culture. This could occur through activities such as the teaching of native languages. In the same vein, the more politically motivated concerns about the institutionalization of ethnicity through sections 77, 78 and 79 of the Botswana constitution and concerns related to the more equitable distribution of resources, particularly employment opportunities, must be addressed separately, based on merit. Finally, to check rising ethnic consciousness in Botswana, the state should create greater values that unite rather than divide the people. The development of a national language, though important, does not offer the ultimate answer in this regard. A constitutional order that ensures that
resources are equitably distributed in the country would be far more important. Given the rising unemployment, there is a need to guarantee that appointments to public office are done on technical cognisance of merit and equity, and that previous attempts by the state to distribute the proceeds from Botswana’s natural resources evenly are improved. In a similar vein, the recommendations of the Balopi Commission that sections 77, 78 and 79 of the Constitution be repealed should be implemented without further delay to restore public confidence that the state does not consider any ethnic groups in the country to be more privileged than others.

References


**Newspaper Article**


**Web Sites**

Education and Information & Communication Technologies (ICT) in Africa: Using ICT to improve education in Sub-Saharan Africa

Paul N. Mbatia

Abstract

This paper examines the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in expanding opportunities in education and improving access to quality education in Sub-Saharan Africa. The paper observes that the application of ICTs has become the engine of change in emerging information societies of the new millennium. While development is increasingly ICT driven, Africa still has limited capacities and infrastructures that support ICT. By use of secondary data, the conditions of ICT development and use in education in Africa are highlighted. The paper further illustrates the potential for improvement in performance of the education sector in Africa with appropriate application of ICT. The conclusion drawn is that the application of ICTs would improve the education sector in Africa in three critical areas namely: Increased access to education, improved quality of teaching and learning and improved efficiency in administration and management of schools.

Introduction

This paper, in particular, examines the actual and potential role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in improving education sector in Africa. The paper is guided by the following question: How can IT be used to improve teaching and learning in education institutions, facilitate civic engagement and help globalize the school curriculum?

To address these concerns, the paper is divided into five sections. Section one provides an overview of Africa’s current development situation. Section two addresses the general theme of ICTs and the related concerns such as access and use of ICTs in Africa. In section three, the paper discusses the actual and potential role of ICTs in improving teaching and learning at high schools and universities in Africa. It also addresses the role of ICTs in the globalization of the school curriculum. Section four examines the role of IT in expanding civic engagement among Africa’s citizenry. The fifth and final section offers suggestions on how to promote application of ICTs in tackling the problem of digital divide in Africa and other development problems within and without Africa’s education sector.
An overview of Africa’s current development situation

Those who have written on Africa’s development situation in the 1980 and 1990 decades concur in observing that while Africa is the most underdeveloped continent. Since the 1980s, the continent has experienced a deep development crisis (Cheru, 1989; World Bank, 1990; Nyang’oro and Shaw 1992; Bloomstrom and Lundahl, 1993 and Mbatia, 1996). The crisis is multidimensional as manifested in the economic, social, political, health, environmental and technological components of the African economies. In describing the worsening development situation in Africa, Bourenane (1992:49) states:

*Africa has today reached a state of “development break-down”, with both the states and the “people” incapable of breaking this vicious circle of regression and poverty. The policies and economic programmes applied in the last thirty years have been destructive in every respect.*

Africa’s poor economic performance (and development crisis in general) since the 1980s is well documented and is reflected using several conventional indicators. A few such indicators are presented in Table 1 which captures the state of Africa’s underdevelopment.

Table 1: Basic development indicators comparing Sub-Saharan Africa with other selected regions

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<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>0.4</td>
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<td>South Asia</td>
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<td>70</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>63</td>
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<td>Developing Countries</td>
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<td>62</td>
<td>1,154</td>
<td>3.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>World</td>
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<td>5,073</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
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*Source: UNICEF (2004)*
Data in Table 1 clearly depicts the severe state of underdevelopment in Sub-Saharan Africa (and South Asia). For example, this region has both the highest Under-5 and infant mortality rates. In 2002, out of 1,000 live births, 174 and 106 children died in Sub-Saharan Africa before reaching ages 5 and 1 respectively. The corresponding figures for the industrialized countries are 7 and 5 respectively. The data further reveals that by 2002, Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia had the lowest Gross National Income (GNI) per capita. Note also that between 1990 and 2001, Sub-Saharan Africa had the highest concentration of poverty as measured by the percentage of population living below 1 USD per day. Indeed, by this measure, half (50%) of the population of Sub-Saharan Africa lives below the poverty line. It is therefore not surprising that life expectancy is lowest in Sub-Saharan Africa (46) followed by South Asia (63).

A pertinent question has been raised on whom to blame for Africa’s current development quagmire? Apparently, while there is a consensus on the nature of the on-going development crisis in Africa, scholars hold different viewpoints on who to blame and what the future holds for the continent. On one hand, the proponents of the Dependency School blame the global capitalist system (external factor) that allows the economically developed countries to continue exploiting the economies of Africa and other developing countries (Dos Santos, 1993). According to this school, unless the structure of the global capitalist system is radically changed, the external forces of exploitation will continue to undermine Africa’s development. In this context, the developed countries should be pushed to remove trade barriers and the restrictive quota system which undermine production and exports particularly from Sub-Saharan Africa. This school of thought gives credence to the dominant afro-pessimism approach that paints a doomed future for the continent. However, those seriously concerned with the (economic) liberation of Africa should use the Dependency School as “a framework for reflection, for problem-solving and for implementation” (Bourenane, 1992:48). At worst, the framework should not be used as an ideology of despair for the African people.

On the other hand, there are scholars (proponents of modernization theory) who blame the internal structures (such as poor governance, corruption, civil wars etc) for their failure to support and sustain development initiatives (modernity) in Africa. In the same vein, other scholars blame the African states for lacking the required capabilities (e.g., to penetrate their societies, to ensure social control of other actors, and to extract and appropriate resources) to facilitate development (Migdal, 1988). In general, those who blame the internal factors also hold the view (somehow implicitly) that such factors
could be addressed locally and resolve the key obstacles inhibiting Africa’s
development. The challenge for the internalists, therefore, is to mobilize local
existing resources (including trained workforce, indigenous knowledge,
modern technology, and capital) to support meaningful development
initiatives.

The development crisis in Africa has attracted diverse responses from various
agencies at different levels. At the international level, the International
Financial Institutions (e.g., the World Bank and International Monetary Fund)
and donor agencies, starting in 1980s, endorsed Structural Adjustment
Programs (SAPs) for African countries. As summarized by Mkandawire
(1992:98),

*The standard package has included reduction in public and private con-
sumption, wage freezes, hikes in interest rates, devaluation, privatization
and opening up the economy to international trade.*

The persistence of poverty and impoverishment of human life, the world over,
has prompted a paradigm shift in the conceptualization of the term
development. By the 1980s, experts realized the limited usage of the term
*development* to mean *economic development*. The usage of the latter was
restricted to macro-economic planning (advocated by such agencies like the
World Bank and IMF) targeting to improve a country’s per capita income.
Paradoxically, some countries experienced economic development (increase in
per capita income) but still remained underdeveloped. The concepts of
*sustainable development* and *human (social) development* were therefore
adopted to re-conceptualize *(real) development* as a more meaningful and
encompassing process. This marked a paradigm shift in the conceptualization
and implementation of development as the *social dimensions* of the process
were given more prominence (Madruga, 2004).

Besides economic growth and sustainability, the (new) human development
approach emphasizes 1) greater inclusiveness and equity in access to resources
and 2) greater empowerment of the poor and marginalized. Overall, the
social dimensions approach to development focuses squarely on people and
attempts to improve their general quality of life.

Among the various UN Agencies, the human development approach is a popular perspective used to inform policies and programmes— at national and international levels. For example, the new perspective informed the formulation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000. However, policies of the World Bank and IMF in Third World countries continue
to emphasize the economic dimensions of development – such as per capita income and poverty levels. The two institutions are yet to fully-envisage the human face of development. This partly explains why the World Bank and the IMF remain unpopular especially among the poor and marginalized groups in Third World countries (Bradshaw & Huang, 1991 and Cornia & Stewart, 1987).

Notwithstanding the paradigm shift in the conceptualization of development, at the national level, African governments have been struggling to adjust to meet the donor conditions and also protect local interests. The upcoming challenges of globalization have further brought about the need for adjustment at the international level. And within nation states, civil society movements – that include Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and Faith Based Organizations (FBO) -- have mushroomed to tackle development problems from within at grassroots levels.

In addition, local and international private organizations (e.g., Multinational Corporations) have invested in profit-oriented ventures. However, despite the multiplicity of development initiatives at different levels and to the dismay of African people (citizenly and leaders), Africa’s development crisis continues unabated. What went wrong?

Many factors combine to explain the current malaise in Africa’s development. First, the external factors are still operational that include:

a) Continued dependence of African economies on the outside world.
b) Weak bargaining position in the world market resulting to poor terms of trade for Sub-Saharan African countries.
c) Economic and political conditions mandated by the International Financial Institutions (such as the World Bank and IMF) that distort local monetary and fiscal policies.
d) Intensified operations of foreign private organizations (MNCs). In practice, MNCs form (triple) alliances with the local elites and the state that give them some “protection” as they exploit local labour and capital to maximize their profits (Evans, 1979).
e) Over-reliance on foreign advisors who do not fully understand the local environment and who may not have serious commitment to solve Africa’s development problems.
Second, there are numerous internal factors that include:

a) Poor governance (as exemplified by dictatorial regimes and civil wars) resulting, inter alia, to the misuse and underutilization of resources.
b) Weak or inappropriate economic policies to protect local interests or industries vis-à-vis the stiff international competition emanating from globalization of the international trade.
c) Existence of many “weak” or fragile states that are lacking in many development capabilities (Banker, 1987; Migdal, 1988 and Bradshaw, 1993).
d) Widespread corruption especially among the ruling elites.
e) Political conflicts based on ethnic differences.
f) Lack of political will among the African political leadership to adopt appropriate (people-oriented) policies to address the felt needs of the people.
g) Weak structures to support and sustain the adoption of modern technologies (e.g. ICT). This explains the worsening problem of the digital divide in Africa (Okwatch et. al, 2007: 248).

The last decade has correctly been labeled the *information age* – out of which *information societies* have emerged. Indeed, the invention and application of Information Computer Technologies (ICTs) has been the most remarkable achievement during the 1990 decade (Herring, 2004.). In particular, the usage of the *Internet* such as the email system or websites to connect people globally and retrieve information, respectively, has become part of our everyday life (Haythornthwaite, 2001). The pace of a nation’s development is thus determined, inter alia, by its capacities to access, apply and sustain the ICT. While development is increasingly ICT driven, Africa’s still has limited capacities and infrastructures that support ICT. Why does this situation obtain in Africa?

The next section of the paper presents three theoretical perspectives reflecting on the critical challenges facing Africa in its struggles to adopt the new technologies – particularly the ICT.

**Theoretical perspectives on the application of ICT in Africa**

The importance of ICT in today’s information society is well documented. Indeed, through the application of ICT, it is now accepted that the world has been transformed into a global village. To date, countries that have excelled in the application of ICT have strengthened their position in the global system.
And as would be expected, these are the economically powerful nations of North America and Europe. Unfortunately, most developing countries have had limited success in the application of ICT. As a result, we have on one hand, the developed countries that have fully adopted digital technology (ICT) and on the other hand, the developing countries (including Sub-Saharan African countries) that have lagged behind in the adoption of the digital technology. The term digital divide is used to differentiate countries with respect to their success/failure to adopt digital technology. In clarifying this term, Wilson in Chen et. al (2002: 77) states:

The expansion of the term “digital divide” to “global digital divide” points to differences in Internet access and use between countries, as well as within countries. Such inequalities have led to substantial asymmetry in the distribution and effective use of information and communication resources between two or more populations.

According to International Telecommunication Union – ITU (2005), in 2003, Africa had 1 main telephone line available for 33 people; the ratio was 1: 2.43 for Europe. Further, Africa had 1 mobile phone available to 17 people; the ratio for Europe was 1: 1.7. In the same year, Africa had 1.56 internet users per 100 people; Europe had 24.17 uses per 100 people. Last, Africa had 1.4 Personal Computers (PCs) per 100 people while Europe had 22.43 PCs for 100 people. These empirical data affirm the persistent problem of digital divide across regions.

Countries that have been left behind in the adoption of ICT (as is the case in Sub-Saharan Africa) are now putting up efforts to bridge the digital divide. But one may ask: Why is there a need to bridge the digital divide by adopting ICT in Africa and what impact does ICT make in the context of development?

A recent study by Shrum et. al (1992: 499) captures three general arguments on the role of ICT (internet) in developing countries. First, the “elixir” perspective presents the Internet as an opportunity rather than a problem. To be sure,

The “elixir” argument asserts that the Internet does not present a potential problem but only an opportunity.

In this regard, ICT should be considered as any other developmental tool to be used to boost production. In particular, through the use of the ICT (Internet), the developing countries are provided an opportunity to participate effectively in the new global information society. For example, within the education sector, use of Internet facilitates access to information (learning and teaching materials) beyond the national boundaries by both students and lecturers. Further, through the use of the ICT (Internet), developing countries can access new information or retrieve data about themselves “that is now often controlled in research libraries in Northern countries.” This way, access to information provides developing countries with opportunities to participate and engage at the international level. However, in the African context, this
line of thought is somehow weak since it places emphasis on the “end product” (application of ICT) rather than on the process of adoption of the new technology (ICT). Only when the adoption of the ICT (e.g., Internet) is conceptualized as a process, can the diverse obstacles inhibiting its adoption and application be identified.

Second, the “affliction” perspective presents the Internet as a tool for perpetuating global inequality at different levels. More specifically,

The “affliction” perspective views the Internet as an engine of global inequality that creates new technology gaps between rich and poor, urban and rural dwellers, English and non-English speakers.

The second perspective gives credence to the dependency school; the economically powerful countries from the North can use the IT (Internet) to enhance their exploitation of the developing countries. Of course, since the Internet is a brainchild of the economically powerful countries of the North, they are better placed to adopt and apply it strategically than the developing countries. And to some extent, the economically powerful countries have used Internet (or the IT) to enhance exploitation of the developing countries (e.g., they can now access all the information they need easily about a country). Even though this perspective is realistic in presenting the nature of linkages (exploitative) between the rich and poor countries, it nonetheless tends to demonize the adoption of the Internet in the developing countries. Yet it is an obvious fact that to date, the Internet (and the IT in general) has a great potential in creating new opportunities for developing countries in the modern global information system. In the context of globalization, no country can be an effective participant in the global village without the use of the Internet/IT.

In between the first and the second perspectives, Shrum et. al. (1992) situate the “teething” argument/perspective which focuses:

On the “teething” troubles arising in less developed areas ... suggesting that a net benefit will eventually accrue to developing areas, but not without significant problems in the short term.

While this perspective is realistic in anticipating “teething” problems associated with adoption of a new technology, it is biased. It is true that there are many problems associated with the adoption of the Internet (and ICT) in developing areas. Indeed, this perspective will guide this paper in identifying the numerous “troubles” that inhibit the adoption of ICT in Africa. However, it is important to appreciate that similar “teething” problems must have been faced in the developed countries when the Internet was first introduced.
Developing countries should therefore learn from the experiences and best practices of the developed countries.

Despite these theoretical arguments on role of the Internet (ICT) in developing countries, scholars and policy makers have generally continued to express their strong views in support of the significant role of IT in facilitating Africa’s development. For example, during a United Nations Population Information Network (POPIN) conference held in Addis Ababa, 1996, it was observed that:

*Access to information and communications technologies is becoming increasingly critical for Africa's participation in economic and political life at national, international, and global levels. Advances in electronic communication networks have created enormous opportunities for developing countries (UNFPA, 1996:1).*

However, these perspectives notwithstanding, the application of modern ICT is making dramatic changes in African societies. First, if development is conceptualized as an increase in knowledge and application of skills to better manage one’s environment, ICT has made remarkable contributions in facilitating Africa’s development. Through the application of ICT such as the Internet, African people can access and share with the rest of the world the massive information available in the World Wide Web (WWW).  

Second, application of ICT in Africa continues to produce a new “class” of well-informed and knowledgeable citizens who are empowered to actively participate in decision making at all levels. For example, ICT has exposed African people to new experiences and practices, which continue to influence their socio-political and economic organizations (Brunello et. al, 2007:67). Third, it is appreciated that the application of ICT has improved productivity in various sectors of African economies. For example, the use of desktop publishing is promising to rescue the weak publishing industry in Africa. In addition, the use of modern ICT has made library searches more efficient and effective. Indeed, through the use of computers and Internet, it is now possible for African people to access any type of information (e.g., academic, research, leisure or work-related) beyond their national borders. To date, an information-based society has emerged and Africa cannot therefore do without the use of ICT. This view is well summarized by POPIN (1996:2):

*Information and technology facilitate the flow of knowledge in modern society. The failure to use information technology is becoming as negative as the refusal to attend school. It is a choice between being left out or benefiting from enormous benefits of information technology.*
A strong link exists between adoption of ICT and education. First, as documented by Rogers & Williams (1986:40), computer communication does not eliminate the need for literacy. Indeed, ability to read and type enhances one’s computer literacy. Second, ICT could be applied to improve access to and quality of education -- especially among the marginalized groups like women and girls. More specifically, Morrell et al. (2007:137) state that “… ICTs also offer many opportunities for women and girls to gain education and technical skills required for them to participate equally in the IT economy.” Overall, their study emphasizes that “… ICTs represent an opportunity to ensure equal access to quality education” (ibid).

In this regard, a study by Wellman et al., (2001:440) reports that the internet provides people with an additional means of communication to telephone and face-to-face contacts. However, it is viewed as more useful for maintaining existing ties than for creating new ones.

A study by Pool in Rogers & Williams (1986:40) observed that “computers will become the printing presses of the twenty first century. Publishing is becoming electronic for both reasons of convenience and cost. Large information bases can be edited, stored, transmitted, and searched with speed and flexibility impossible for ink records on paper.” Two decades after, this prediction has become a true reality characterizing information societies of the 21st century.

Adoption of the ICTs within the education sector is therefore necessary to improve the performance of the sector. In the next section, this paper examines the role of ICT in improving education sector in Sub-Saharan Africa.

**A comparative analysis of the performance of education sector**

The education sector in many African countries is highly underdeveloped resulting in low education achievements at all levels – primary, secondary and post secondary. Table 2 presents data on education statistics showing the poor performance of the education sector in Africa.
Table 2: A Comparison of education achievements in Sub-Saharan Africa with other selected regions of the world

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>65</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia and Pacific</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>94</td>
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<tr>
<td>Industrialized Countries</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>102</td>
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<td>97</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Countries</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Definition of the indicators:

Gross primary or secondary school enrollment ratio refers to the number of children enrolled in primary or secondary school regardless of age, divided by the age group, which officially corresponds to the same level.

Net primary school enrollment ratio refers to the number of children enrolled in primary school, who belong to the age group that officially corresponds to primary schooling, divided by the total population of the same age group.
Primary school entrants reaching grade five refers to the percentage of the children entering the first grade of primary school who eventually reach grade five.

Adult literacy rate refers to the percentage of persons aged 15 and over who can read and write.

The education statistics in Table 2 clearly show the inequality in education achievements across and within selected regions. It is noteworthy that Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia have the poorest education achievements as reflected, inter alia, by net primary school enrollment, gross secondary school enrollment and adult literacy rates.

Between 1997 and 2000, around 60% of the male and female children of school-going age were enrolled in primary school in Sub-Saharan Africa. This means that about 40% of school age children in Sub-Saharan Africa were out of primary schools. The situation in South Asia was slightly better; while the enrollment for male children of school age was 80%, the corresponding figure for female was 65. It is worth noting that in the industrialized countries, nearly all the children of school age (whether male or female) had enrolled in primary school between 1997 and 2000. Only 4% of male as compared to 3% of female of school age children were not enrolled in primary school in the industrialized countries for the same period. These figures confirm wide disparities in net primary school enrollment across and within regions.

It is also clear in Table 2 that not all those enrolled in primary school reached grade 5 – some dropped out of school before reaching this grade. Between 1995 and 1999, the dropout rate was highest in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. In the two regions, about one third (35%) of those who enrolled in the first grade of primary school did not reach grade five. Even though the figures for the industrialized countries were not available for the same period, between 1990 and 1995, nearly all (99%) children who entered the first grade of primary school reached grade five. Again these figures suggest that there are numerous obstacles in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia that constrain the performance of the education sector. Overall, in these two regions, many children of school age never enroll in primary school and a substantive percentage of those who enroll drop out before reaching grade five.

Table 2 further captures education disparities across and within regions at the secondary school level. In particular, the table shows that Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest gross secondary school enrollment. It is unfortunate that between 1997 and 2000, those enrolled in secondary school (male and female) in Sub-Saharan Africa were around 26% of those who were qualified (by age)
to enroll. The overwhelming majority (at least 74%) of those who qualified (were of age) did not enroll for secondary school education. Even though South Asia has relatively better gross secondary school enrollment rates than Sub-Saharan Africa, the majority of those who qualified did not enroll. On the other hand, the industrialized countries reported over-enrollment at the secondary school level for the same period. In these countries, many more people than those qualified (of age) enrolled for secondary school education for the same period. Over-enrollment occurs when those who are over-age (e.g., working people or parents) enroll for secondary school education later in their life trajectories.

Table 2 further presents the literacy situation across regions for the year 2000. It is notable that in this year, 31% of adult male and 47% of adult female in Sub-Saharan Africa were illiterate. The situation in South Asia was slightly poorer in that 34% of adult male and 48% of adult female were illiterate in the same year. Even though the figures for the industrialized countries are not reported for 2000, by 1980, the literacy rate was 99 and 97 for male and female respectively, meaning that, nearly everybody in the industrialized countries were literate. Again, these figures reflect the wide disparities in education achievements across and within the regions. It is particularly important to note the wide gender disparities in education achievements particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. What are the implications of these findings?

At the primary level, large numbers of school age children are locked out of school eventually joining the large pool of illiterate people in these countries. As has been documented, the large category of out-of-school children faces many challenges; some are forced into child labour where they are severely exploited while others move into the city streets to join the street families (Mbatia, 2003). At the secondary level, those who fail to enroll (who are the majority) join the labour market pre-maturely and without the requisite skills to make them productive and marketable. As a result, most of them are unemployed or underemployed (Mbatia, 1987 and PUIB, 2006). This explains the high rate of youth unemployment in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Last, the high rate of adult illiteracy in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia perpetuates the prevailing state of underdevelopment that is characterized by: (a) minimal political participation among the citizenry (KEDOF, 2008:185); (b) low productivity especially in the agricultural sector; (c) slow rate of technological innovation and adoption; (d) large families that put a heavy economic burden to the few family members who are employed (e) poorly informed citizens and (f) poor governance in most public institutions.
Thus far, the discussion on education disparities confirms that Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia have the lowest educational achievements. But what factors explain the low performance of this sector in these two regions? There are many obstacles that constrain the performance of education sector in these two regions that include:

a) High cost (financial) of education at all levels that force the poor out of the education system. For example, in Africa, only a few countries offer free primary education; people meet the cost of education even in public primary schools (UNESCO, 2005).

b) Inadequate school facilities (e.g., classes) and equipment (e.g., desks, books, chalk and other instructional materials) especially in the countryside. As a result, the existing facilities are overcrowded and pupils have to cover long distances to access education. In addition, without adequate equipment, it is difficult to provide quality education (PUIB, 2006: xxix). 9

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9 This is a report by the Public University Inspection Board (PUIB, 2006) that was commissioned by the President of the Republic of Kenya on April 19, 2005.

8 According to the Kenya Elections Domestic Observation Forum (KEDOF, 2008), in 2007 (controversial) elections, the country recorded unusually high voter-turnout for presidential and parliamentary elections that stood at 70.36% and 68.84%, respectively. “This is in stark contrast to the voter turnout of 57% for the 2002 general elections.” In the past, voter turnout has rarely gone beyond 50% and has been exceedingly low during the by-elections.

9 According to PUIB (2006:xxix), “there is a widespread perception that quality of education in public universities has declined as a result of increased student enrolment, inadequate and outdated equipment and facilities and low staff morale due to poor working conditions.”

c) Inadequate teacher training facilities, which explain why in most countries, the demand for trained teachers surpasses supply. As a result, there is a perpetual shortage of qualified teachers especially at primary and secondary levels (Republic of Kenya, 2006:54).

d) Lack of political goodwill to invest heavily in the provision of free education. In most countries, the budget allocation for education is inadequate. For some government, provision of education is not given high priority.
e) Widespread poverty -- in many countries, the majority of the people are poor (e.g., in Kenya, 47% of the population lives below the poverty line). Many of such people cannot afford the cost of education. And unfortunately, most African states also lack the required resources (in addition to goodwill) to offer free education.

f) High rate of unemployment especially among the educated youth. As a result, people are increasingly placing low premium to education (Mbatia, 1987; PUIB, 2006; World Bank, 2005; and Ministry of Youth Affairs (MOYA, 2006).

g) Cultural practices that place more value to alternative lifestyles that compete with education. For example, in some communities, acquisition of traditional “life skills” is considered more important than enrolling in school. In Africa, this largely explains the wide gender disparities (lower educational achievements for females) especially at primary and secondary levels. In such communities, young girls are socialized to take up their traditional roles as wives when they mature and get married. To this extent, formal education is not considered very useful.

Unless these concerns are addressed, the problem of poor performance of the educational sector (as manifested by low educational achievements and wide regional and gender-based disparities) will persist in Africa and South Asia. What is the way forward? Obviously, there is need to rethink the traditional practices of providing education in Africa – which only cater for a small fraction of the population. A Sub-Project Proposal on Harnessing Information Technology for Development in Africa (see the electronic source in the reference) supports this view by noting:

*Africa’s example shows us that an enormous expansion of the formal education system alone cannot address existing, let alone future, basic needs, and even adds new sets of problems such as increased need for training and re-training of teachers, for adaptation of curricula, more textbooks and learning materials, and for improved communications and administrative systems.*

Given this situation, what are the prospects of applying modern technologies – like the ICT – to improve the performance of the education sector? More specifically, can the application of ICT make a difference in improving access to, retention and quality of education offered at different levels (primary, secondary and university) in Africa? This question forms the core theme of this paper and is the subject of the next section.
The prospects of ICT in improving the education sector in Sub-Saharan Africa

This section starts by specifying the meaning of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). In this context, ICTs is a term used to encompass several interrelated Computer-mediated communication (CMC) technologies that facilitate easy communication of information particularly by overcoming the problem of geographical distance. The application of ICTs is mainly done through the use of a computer, which in turn facilitates numerous connections of different information (electronic) networks. The term IT is used in this paper interchangeably with ICT. Such networks include email system, Internet, World Wide Web etc. How can these technologies help to improve education in Africa?

The call to apply modern technologies like ICTs in Africa has been sounded repeatedly by both scholars and policy makers. Such calls have underscored the prospects of adopting ICT in the education sector where it could help: 1) increase access to education; 2) improve the quality of teaching and learning and 3) improve the efficiency of school and education sector administration and management. In further highlighting the prospects of ICT in Africa, Daekwa and Mazibuko (2000: 4) state that:

The promise of Information Communications Technology (ICT) on the continent is enormous. ICT is expected to serve as a catalyst to African communities, allowing them to profit from and contribute to an increasingly globalized society. Emerging ICT holds much promise for breaking down traditional barriers that have limited higher education.

In the contemporary age of information-based society, there is pressure for everyone to acquire new knowledge and skills. However, the globalization of the economy has in particular “made education a crucial element of socioeconomic development”


The pervading influence and utilization of ICT in economic development make it absolutely essential that universities take the lead in imparting skills and knowledge so that graduates have competence in this area.

While the usefulness of ICTs in improving education in Africa is strongly supported, no roadmap is readily available to guide implementers on how to
introduce these technologies in education institutions like schools. While one can appreciate the large number of African countries with national ICT policies as well as ICT policies in education, few countries have succeeded in the implementation of these policies fully. A study by Ferrell & Shafika (2007) reported the following findings in regard to the development of national ICT policies for 53 selected countries in Africa.

Table 3: Development of national ICT policies 2000 – 2007 in Africa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status of national ICT policy development by country</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy in place</td>
<td>13 (24.5%)</td>
<td>28 (52.8%)</td>
<td>36 (67.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy under development</td>
<td>10 (18.9%)</td>
<td>15 (28.3%)</td>
<td>12 (22.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No development underway</td>
<td>30 (56.6%)</td>
<td>10 (18.9%)</td>
<td>05 (9.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>53 (100%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>53 (100%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>53 (100%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ferrell & Shafika (2007)

Table 3 depicts an increasing trend in the number of African countries with national ICT policies in place between 2000 and 2007. While only a quarter (25%) of the sample of 53 selected countries had formulated national ICT policies in 2000, the percentage had rose to slightly over two thirds (68%) in 2007. Conversely, while 57% of the sample had not started formulating national ICT policies in 2000, the percentage had dropped to 9% in 2007. Generally, countries continued to appreciate the importance of national ICT policy over time and engaged in the formulation of the same. Further, reports that: Ferrell & Shafika (2007:6)

> Of the 48 countries that either have a national ICT policy in place or are in the process of developing one, 39 of them (81%) have education sector ICT policies in one form or another or are in the process of developing them.

However, despite the remarkable performance in the formulation of ICT policies in Africa, the implementation of ICT policies in Africa is hampered by myriad constraints. The challenges of implementation are aptly identified by (Evoh, 2007: 4) who opines:

> Despite the recognized role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in improving the quality and quantity of education, ICTs remain a low priority in most educational systems in Africa.
Obviously many countries in the region lack the local capacity and financial wherewithal essential for a sustained integration of ICTs in education.

Beyond the formulation of ICT policies, the adoption of the ICTs entails structural, cultural, behavioural and attitude changes. The adoption of ICTs in the educational institutions -- including schools and colleges – is a complex process that should not be taken for granted.\textsuperscript{12} The process entails: 1) investment in the appropriate infrastructure; 2) resources to purchase essential equipment (like computers) and 3) capacity building efforts to create the required support technical team. Indeed, the adoption of ICTs is a complex process that should be well planned for and managed. The Information Technology Advisory Group (ITAG) further underscores the complex nature of ICT adoption in the education sector and cautions that:

\textit{Improving the use of IT in learning in schools requires a combination of actions \ldots Installing computers with no other support to schools is not particularly effective, and neither is merely training teachers without sufficient IT being available to them in schools (ITAG, 2001:2).}

\textsuperscript{11} A survey by Ferrell & Shafika (2007:7) succinctly captures this reality by noting that: “the development of plans doesn’t necessarily equate with implementation and results on the ground. In most cases implementation remains very dependent on the support of partners from donor community and the private sector.

\textsuperscript{12} In reporting its survey findings, the Ferrell & Shafika (2007:7) observed that “it is also the case that the process of developing an ICT policy for education is complicated. In many instances, the policies that have recently promulgated are the results of several years of consultation with stakeholder groups.”

Overall, the benefits of ICT in education can only be realized “through proper planning, staying focused on educational objectives and understanding the limitations of their capabilities.” \textsuperscript{13}

To what extent has Africa adopted ICTs in the education sector and what are the potential challenges? The remaining part of this paper critically examines the diffusion process; it also reviews the potential challenges in the application of ICTs in Africa’s education sector.
Theoretical and practical challenges in ICT adoption in Africa

The widespread and intensive usage of ICTs worldwide has transformed industrial societies into information societies. Rogers and Williams (1986:10) define information society as:

*a nation in which a majority of the labour force is composed of information workers, and in which information is the most important element. Thus the information society represents a sharp change from the industrial society in which majority of the work force was employed in the manufacturing occupations ...*

Information workers are therefore engaged in the production, processing and distribution of information using modern ICT. During the information age, a compliant education sector should therefore train, deploy and retain information workers including teachers and administrators. Such workers should have the capacity to adopt, control and direct modern ICTs. On the other hand, learners should access modern ICT and would need to be empowered to apply it appropriately. But how can schools and colleges adopt modern ICTs to overcome the many challenges facing the education sector in Sub-Saharan Africa? We can draw from the diffusion theory of communication to address adoption of ICTs in the education sector in Africa.

Diffusion theory of communication has dominated the literature on adoption of technology for a long time. Its conventional thesis is to inform the process through which an innovation is introduced to its potential users who are provided with more information required to enable them to adopt or reject it. According to Rogers and Williams (1986:117), the main elements in the diffusion process are:

\[13\] See http://ictinafrica.com/sector/education.htm

a) An innovation – this constitutes the new idea to be adopted. In the education sector, it includes modern ICT such as computers and use of new teaching technologies such as Power Points.

b) Communication Channels – These refer to the various means through which information is distributed or shared. In the education sector, the commonly used media channels include radio, TV and increasingly, mobile phones and the Internet.
c) Time Dimension – Any innovation takes time from the time it is introduced to the point of adoption or rejection. The time taken depends, inter alia, on the complexity of the innovation.

d) Targeted Adopters or Social System – Typically, an innovation targets individuals or organizations that are likely to adopt it. How fast it is accepted and adopted depends on the characteristics of the potential adopters or the social system within which they operate.

e) Adoption or Rejection of Innovation – The final stage of diffusion process is marked by the decision to adopt or reject it. The decision to adopt an innovation is a complex one that is a function of its perceived relevance, complexity and costs.

Within the African education the ICT diffusion process is faced with myriad challenges at every stage. First is the challenge of understanding the true meaning of ICTs. According to (Evoh, 2007: 13):

> Conceptually, there is a broad misunderstanding of the true meaning of “ICT” among policy makers in Africa. Many technology policy makers tend to interpret the “C” in ICT as “computers,” hence there is lack of multiple conception of ICT and a focus on computers for educational enhancement in African school. In reality, ICT is not limited to computers or satellite and internet technologies.

The second challenge pertains to the inadequacies in ICT capacity in Africa’s education sector. It is evident that most teachers and learners are not computer literate and in many countries, the sector lacks a supportive technical support team to drive the new technology. More specifically, a recent study in Kenya reviewing the quality of higher education found that “there is an acute shortage of qualified staff and facilities.” (PUIB, 2006: 309; see also Republic of Kenya, 2006:39). To address this concern, many countries have relied on ICT foreign experts. For this reason, Evoh (2007: 14) highlights:

> ... the urgency for training and development of indigenous skills and capacities in various African countries to service the emerging ICT sector in the region.

The third challenge relates to implementation. Due to the limited ICT infrastructure and equipments (including connectivity to Internet and computers), even countries with fully developed ICT policies in education cannot fully implement their policies. A recent study by Ferrell & Shafika (2007:9) summarizes the typical implementation constraints faced by African countries by noting that:

> Access to a reliable supply of electricity is a general problem but is particularly severe in rural areas because of the difficulty of connecting to
national electricity grids. There is a general lack of human resources capacity to provide ICT training and equipment servicing, and there is also a lag between availability of ICT infrastructure and the ability of agrarian societies to integrate it to benefit national development.

The fourth challenge is that of general poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa. By 1994, the incidence of poverty was 47% among rural populace in Kenya and by 1997, the incidence of poverty was deepening (PUIB, 2006:262). This explains why a large percentage of the population has no access to education and other assets including radio, TV, print media, computers and connectivity to the internet. Yet the latter are the communication channels commonly used to drive the ICTs in the education sector. To provide sustainable access to ICT infrastructure at higher levels of education, some institutions in Africa have placed additional ICT fees per student. This has become a common practice in all Kenyan universities. Other countries have adopted use of “old” or “recycled” ICTs. For example, the Computer Aid International\textsuperscript{14} specializes in sourcing and distributing professionally refurbished computers for re-use in education and health in Africa and other developing countries (Ferrell & Shaf-i-ka (2007:36). There are other low-cost computing pilot projects – including One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) and NEPAD e-Schools – that countries are experimenting with in several African countries.\textsuperscript{15}

The fifth challenge is that of low budgetary priority placed on the development of the ICT particularly by the African states. For example, according to Shrum et al. (2007:249):

\begin{quotation}
Dwindling government and donor funding to national research institutions means that top management must prioritize and limit funding to those areas perceived to have a potential to produce immediate and demonstrable results. Internet connectivity is rarely perceived as such.
\end{quotation}

\textsuperscript{14} For details you can visit its website: \url{www.computeraid.org}

\textsuperscript{15} For the OLPC you can visit its website: \url{www.laptop.org} or \url{www.olpc.com} and for NEPAD e-Schools you can visit its website: \url{www.eafricacommission.org}

The last hurdle in the diffusion process is the characteristics of both the potential adopters and the education system. To what extent do potential adopters appreciate the modern technologies? Paradoxically, there is some evidence that ICTs are not strongly appreciated in Africa as sometimes assumed. According to Shrum et al (2007:248):

\begin{quotation}
Among the many reasons for low use of Internet by educational and research institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa is inadequate appreciation of the true power and usefulness of this tool. ... Out of 48 scientists [studied at Katumani research centre], only two had direct access to Internet
\end{quotation}
connectivity in their offices. The rest were either uninterested or could not afford it.

If this finding reflects the true reality in Africa, there is need to lobby and demonstrate the potentials of ICTs particularly in higher education. Most important it is imperative to challenge the popular view among some top managers of education institutions in LDCs that ICTs including the Internet is “a part-time hobby rather than an essential tool for day-to-day performance” (Shrum et al, 2007:250).

These challenges explain why the ICT penetration rate in Africa’s education sector has been remarkably low. This creates a situation where many schools and colleges cannot access the ICTs. Accordingly, learners and trainers in African educational institutions are yet to leap optimal benefits that accrue from ICT adoption. Table 4 presents data that highlight the low penetration rate of computers in selected African countries.

Table 4: Computer penetration Ratios of schools in selected African countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th># of schools</th>
<th># of schools with computers</th>
<th>% of schools with computers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>26,000</td>
<td>26,000</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>32,000</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namibia</td>
<td>1,519</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>25,582</td>
<td>6,651</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ferrell & Shafika (2007:20)

It is apparent that except for Egypt, which had computers in all its schools (a penetration rate of 100%), the rest of the countries have exceedingly low penetration rate. This is typical in Sub-Saharan countries where few schools have access to computers. Overall, to improve the general performance of the education sector, the identified challenges should be tackled at every stage of the diffusion process. This will require combined efforts of the African states, donors, private sector as well as civil society organizations.
Application of ICTs to improve learning and teaching in Africa’s education sector

The use of ICTs in Africa’s education sector can boost both the learning and teaching activities. By adopting ICTs, schools, colleges and universities can benefit as follows:

1. Increasing access to useful instructional teaching materials:

In many African countries, teachers/instructors find it difficult to obtain adequate instructional materials at all levels – primary, secondary, tertiary and university. Indeed, in most African countries, there is an acute shortage of updated instructional materials. This problem is manifested through lack of libraries at some levels (e.g., primary and secondary) and the existence of poorly equipped libraries at higher levels. It is unfortunate that in many countries, even university libraries lack effective information management systems and updated reading materials. This problem frustrates both the instructors and learners at all levels.

How can this problem be addressed? By adopting ICT – such as the Internet – teachers/instructors, researchers and university lecturers can access and share as equal partners the existing information in the global networks. On the other hand, once connected to the Internet, learners at all levels could navigate in the information superhighway in search for more information beyond their local libraries and national boundaries. Through Internet connections, schools and colleges can dramatically widen their access to teaching and learning materials.

2. Enhancement of distance education.

There are many gaps in Africa’s education sector that include inadequate physical facilities (e.g., schools), equipment and personnel. In many countries, the available schools cannot accommodate all the prospective pupils and as a result, classes are overcrowded while many prospective learners are locked out of the education system (Republic of Kenya, 2006:54). In addition, there is a perpetual shortage of teachers at all levels. For example, in many African countries, the few public universities can only take a small fraction (of around 5% with excellent scores) of those who complete high school.
adds: The AVU project will deliver instructional programs, strengthen the capacity in African partner institutions, implement a network of infrastructure, and implement a digital library program.

As illustrated by the successful AVU project, through the adoption of ICTs, schools and universities in Africa can drastically expand their student-catchments areas by removing geographical barriers of access. However, much as distance education sounds promising in Africa, it has many (technological) challenges. First, the high cost implications that should be addressed. In Africa, the costs of access to the Computer-Mediated communication networks are highly exaggerated by the high cost of telephones. The second obstacle is the low rate of connectivity to the Internet in Africa. This hindrance is well captured by Marcelle in Darkwa and Mazibuko (2000:6) who explain that:

Even though Africa has 12% of the world’s population, it includes only 2% of the global telephone network with over half the lines in cities. Telephone density is less than two lines per 1,000 inhabitants, compared with 48 per 1,000 in Asia and 280 per 1,000 in America, 314 per 1,000 in Europe, and 520 per 1,000 in high income countries.

In support of the observations that Africa’s telecommunication is severely underdeveloped, Table 5 presents data on communication connectivity. An attempt is made to compare Sub-Saharan Africa with selected regions of the world.
Table 5:  Comparison of Africa’s connectivity to Telecommunication with selected regions of the world

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Number per 100 population connected to telephone by 2001</th>
<th>Number per 100 population who use Internet by 2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia and Pacific</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrialized Countries</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Countries</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Data in Table 5 shows that Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia had the lowest connectivity to telephone and had the lowest Internet users by 2001. More specifically, it is saddening to note that by 2001, only a mere 4% and 1% of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa was connected to phone and used Internet respectively. This was the same situation in South Asia. The data help to capture the problem of digital divide in the world. It is worth noting that while only 1 person in 100 used Internet in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, the corresponding figure for the industrialized countries was 37. Indeed, more that one-third of people in the industrialized countries are Internet users. These figures help to reveal Africa’s major technological challenges – including low connectivity to the ICTs -- that must be addressed to improve the performance of its education sector.

As documented earlier, the major challenges include a) lack of trained manpower (professionals) to support the implementation of distance education; b) absence of supportive policies to enhance implementation of distance education; c) a general shortage of the requisite ICTs infrastructure and d) general ignorance on the potentials of distance education among educators and policy makers. These challenges must fist be addressed to pave way for a successful implementation of distance education in Africa.
3. Improvement of quality.

Through the adoption of ICTs, African teachers, instructors and lecturers would enhance their access to valuable instructional materials. Access and use of such materials would help to improve the quality of teaching. Teachers, instructors and lecturers would be more empowered to deliver quality education. Furthermore, as documented by an electronic source:

*ICTs can be used for teacher professional development through the use of distance education. As many countries in Africa struggle with large number of under-qualified teachers, ICTs could be leveraged to provide these teachers with distance education courses that will not require them to leave the classroom and/or to support on-going In Service (INSET) teacher development programs.*

In the same way, by accessing various sources of information, learners would obtain more information to supplement what they learn in class. Again this would improve the quality of education offered.


Effective learning and teaching are boosted by the interactions between teachers and students. Through the use of ICTs, education institutions can facilitate the interactions of teachers and students. For example, through the formation of discussion groups, using the email system, students are able to engage in class discussions effectively without meeting. In addition, using the same system, teachers can effectively interact with a class without actually meeting. This way, adoption of ICT can strengthen interactions among teachers and students thereby enhancing effective teaching and learning in schools and colleges.

5. Making learning and teaching lively and effective.

By introducing modern teaching technologies, for example, use of Power Point rather than “chalk and talk,” instructors are able to improve the learning moods of the class. Indeed, well-trained instructors are more lively using modern teaching technologies and effective. On the other hand, students are always more attentive to follow a lesson delivered through the use of modern ICTs – that basically emphasizes both visual and audio aids. The use of ICTs thus replaces the traditional “dry lecture method” adopted by many instructors in Africa especially at secondary and university levels.
6. Other ways of improving education sector through application of ICTs.

There are ways of improving the teaching and learning in Africa that include improving efficiency of education institutions through the use of ICTs. Where schools, have installed computers, their efficiency in processing information (e.g., students’ grades) has improved. Further, use of ICTs has strengthened collaboration of scholars and researcher especially at the university level. As confirmed by Shrum et. al. (1992), the use of the Internet by researchers in developing countries (like India and Kenya), enhance collaboration. Practically, through the Internet, researchers are able to share their findings with their peers within and outside their country.

Summary and conclusion

Through the use of selected indicators, this paper has first shown the state of technological development in Africa. In addition, by using education statistics, this paper has described the poor performance of the education sector in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. To help improve the performance of the sector, the suggests that ICTs could be used to address some of the salient challenges. In particular, the paper demonstrates the critical role of ICTs in improving the education sector in Africa. The latter could help improve teaching and learning in schools and colleges. For example, application of ICTs would enhance access to the much-needed information by both teachers and learners. In addition, the use of ICTs would enable many more people who have no chance of ever joining a classroom to be.

This paper also recognizes the many challenges that should be addressed to facilitate the use of ICTs in schools, colleges and universities. For example, given that many schools in Africa are not connected to telephones and electricity, it would be difficult to adopt ICTs. The educational institutions that have access to electricity are also hampered by the frequent power failures (disruptions) in Africa. In general, Africa has the lowest connectivity to both telephone and Internet. These are challenges that must be addressed to pave way for the adoption of ICTs in the education sector. At a global level, there is need to tackle the problem of digital divide.

References:


Madruga, Pichs Ramons. (2004). *The social dimensions of sustainable development: Lessons*


between 11\textsuperscript{th} and 16\textsuperscript{th} March 1996 at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.


Unfortunately, a large number of those who still meet the minimum university requirements are not admitted due to lack of adequate facilities (PUIB, 2006:23). Accordingly, many deserving students (with a high “thirst” for higher education) are locked out of the universities and other tertiary colleges. How can such deserving groups be assisted through the adoption of the ICTs?

Through the application of ICTs, Africa can introduce and/or strengthen the strategy of Distance Education. In fact, provision of distance education in Africa is considered as a realistic way of reaching out a large number of people who have no opportunity of accessing education through the existing traditional channels. The fact of the matter is that the existing physical facilities and personnel (teachers, instructors and lecturers) in Africa cannot match the overwhelming demand for education in Africa. Distance education, therefore has a high potential in Africa. The promise of distance education in Africa is well documented by Darkwa and Mazibuko (2000: 3) who assert that:

*Distance education could be used to make it possible for African secondary school graduates, only a fraction of whom can be accommodated in African tertiary institutions, to enroll directly, and without leaving their homes, in online colleges and universities on the continent and around the world.*

Further, these authors highlight the advantages of distance education over the traditional education system that include:

a) Virtual access to faculty in higher institutions around the world.

b) Introduction of new interactive pedagogical techniques (e.g., more hands-on learning opportunities, independent research, less reliance on rote memorization).

c) The creation of virtual institutions and linkages where resources could be shared by people and organization in physically unconnected places.

The strategy of distance education as a medium of offering education in Africa has been tried on a limited scale but with notable success. In citing an exemplary case of distance education in Africa, Darkwa and Mazibuko (2000:5) observe that:

*The most ambitious distance education initiative on the continent to date is the African Virtual University (AVU) project. This is the first satellite-based attempt to harness the power on information technologies to deliver university education ...Baranshamaje in Darkwa and Mazibuko (2000:5)*
As illustrated by the successful AVU project, through the adoption of ICTs, schools and universities in Africa can drastically expand their student-catchments areas by removing geographical barriers of access. However, much as distance education sounds promising in Africa, it has many (technological) challenges. First, the high cost implications that should be addressed. In Africa, the costs of access to the Computer-Mediated communication networks are highly exaggerated by the high cost of telephones. The second obstacle is the low rate of connectivity to the Internet in Africa. This hindrance is well captured by Marcelle in Darkwa and Mazibuko (2000:6) who explain that:

*Even though Africa has 12% of the world’s population, it includes only 2% of the global telephone network with over half the lines in cities. Telephone density is less than two lines per 1,000 inhabitants, compared with 48 per 1,000 in Asia and 280 per 1,000 in America, 314 per 1,000 in Europe, and 520 per 1,000 in high income countries.*

In support of the observations that Africa’s telecommunication is severely underdeveloped, Table 5 presents data on communication connectivity. An attempt is made to compare Sub-Saharan Africa with selected regions of the world.

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17 According to (Ferrell & Shafika, 2007:35), “… the AVU is an innovative education institution based in Nairobi, Kenya, that services 57 learning centres in 27 African countries. The AVU works with universities based in Africa and other countries such as US and Australia to provide academic programmes and short courses through open and distance e-learning.” See AVU website for more: [http://web.archive.org/web/20060426202907/www.avu.org](http://web.archive.org/web/20060426202907/www.avu.org) for more.
Data in Table 5 shows that Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia had the lowest connectivity to telephone and had the lowest Internet users by 2001. More specifically, it is saddening to note that by 2001, only a mere 4% and 1% of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa was connected to phone and used Internet respectively. This was the same situation in South Asia. The data help to capture the problem of digital divide in the world. It is worth noting that while only 1 person in 100 used Internet in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, the corresponding figure for the industrialized countries was 37. Indeed, more than one-third of people in the industrialized countries are Internet users. These figures help to reveal Africa’s major technological challenges – including low connectivity to the ICTs – that must be addressed to improve the performance of its education sector.

As documented earlier, the major challenges include a) lack of trained manpower (professionals) to support the implementation of distance education; b) absence of supportive policies to enhance implementation of distance education; c) a general shortage of the requisite ICTs infrastructure and d) general ignorance on the potentials of distance education among educators and policy makers. These challenges must first be addressed to pave way for a successful implementation of distance education in Africa.

3. Improvement of quality.

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Through the adoption of ICTs, African teachers, instructors and lecturers would enhance their access to valuable instructional materials. Access and use of such materials would help to improve the quality of teaching. Teachers, instructors and lecturers would be more empowered to deliver quality education. Furthermore, as documented by an electronic source:

"ICTs can be used for teacher professional development through the use of distance education. As many countries in Africa struggle with large number of under-qualified teachers, ICTs could be leveraged to provide these teachers with distance education courses that will not require them to leave the classroom and/or to support on-going In Service (INSET) teacher development programs."

In the same way, by accessing various sources of information, learners would obtain more information to supplement what they learn in class. Again this would improve the quality of education offered.


Effective learning and teaching are boosted by the interactions between teachers and students. Through the use of ICTs, education institutions can facilitate the interactions of teachers and students. For example, through the formation of discussion groups, using the email system, students are able to engage in class discussions effectively without meeting. In addition, using the same system, teachers can effectively interact with a class without actually meeting. This way, adoption of ICT can strengthen interactions among teachers and students thereby enhancing effective teaching and learning in schools and colleges.

5. Making learning and teaching lively and effective

By introducing modern teaching technologies, for example, use of PowerPoint rather than “chalk and talk,” instructors are able to improve the learning moods of the class. Indeed, well-trained instructors are more lively using modern teaching technologies and effective. On the other hand, students are always more attentive to follow a lesson delivered through the use of modern ICTs – that basically emphasizes both visual and audio aids. The use of ICTs thus replaces the traditional “dry lecture method” adopted by many instructors in Africa especially at secondary and university levels.

6. Other ways of improving education sector through application of ICTs.
There are ways of improving the teaching and learning in Africa that include improving efficiency of education institutions through the use of ICTs. Where schools have installed computers, their efficiency in processing information (e.g., students’ grades) has improved. Further, use of ICTs has strengthened collaboration of scholars and researchers especially at the university level. As confirmed by Shrum et. al. (1992), the use of the Internet by researchers in developing countries (like India and Kenya), enhance collaboration. Practically, through the Internet, researchers are able to share their findings with their peers within and outside their country.

Summary and conclusion

Through the use of selected indicators, this paper has first shown the state of technological development in Africa. In addition, by using education statistics, this paper has described the poor performance of the education sector in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. To help improve the performance of the sector, the suggests that ICTs could be used to address some of the salient challenges. In particular, the paper demonstrates the critical role of ICTs in improving the education sector in Africa. The latter could help improve teaching and learning in schools and colleges. For example, application of ICTs would enhance access to the much-needed information by both teachers and learners. In addition, the use of ICTs would enable many more people who have no chance of ever joining a classroom to be. This paper also recognizes the many challenges that should be addressed to facilitate the use of ICTs in schools, colleges and universities. For example, given that many schools in Africa are not connected to telephones and electricity, it would be difficult to adopt ICTs. The educational institutions that have access to electricity are also hampered by the frequent power failures (disruptions) in Africa. In general, Africa has the lowest connectivity to both telephone and Internet. These are challenges that must be addressed to pave way for the adoption of ICTs in the education sector. At a global level, there is need to tackle the problem of digital divide.

References:


