Contextualizing inter-generational support reciprocal care between lonely elderly persons and the idle youth

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ABSTRACT

The country**,** Kenya, has implemented a policy of free primary education. This is meant to make basic formal education accessible to all. These considerations need to be looked at against the backdrop of the tenets agreed on by Education for All (EFA) and the Education Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The year agreed on for attaining these goals is 2015 and it is fast approaching. In the year 2000, at the World Forum on Education in Dakar, Senegal, over one thousand participants agreed to work cooperatively to help developing nations achieve six education-related goals. Among the goals were, "a call to support early childhood education… basic life skills, adult literacy … and education quality."

Introduction

The country, Kenya, has implemented a policy of free primary education. This is meant to make basic formal education accessible to all. These considerations need to be looked at against the backdrop of the tenets agreed on by Education for All (EFA) and the Education Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The year agreed on for attaining these goals is 2015 and it is fast approaching. In the year 2000, at the World Forum on Education in Dakar, Senegal, over one thousand participants agreed to work cooperatively to help developing nations achieve six education-related goals. Among the goals were, "a call to support early childhood education… basic life skills, adult literacy … and education quality."

The MDGs were adopted by the international community and lay further emphasis on the EFA goals. We realize from the MDGs and EFA that some percentage of the objectives has been achieved amidst a number of challenges. A lot of other initiatives have been developed but the ultimate goal of education as stated by EFA and MDGs remains as stated by various scholars as "problematic." (Ambira, 2002, Olubale 2001 and Sifuna D. 2004)

In Addition, after results of National examinations are released, over half the number of candidates are unable to progress with basic formal education because of poverty and mismatch between needs and formal education among other factors. Most of these students who do not continue with formal education go in search of courses in various training institutions where they can continue with formal education. No all the students go for further education hence creating idle youth. The educational system Africa adopted indicated by various scholars (Shiundu, J.S, Omulando, S.J 1992; Fasokun, J. 2005) shows that education meant "ways of teaching and learning in Africa which are based on indigenous knowledge accumulated by Africans over long periods of time in response to their different physical, agricultural, ecological, political and socio-cultural challenges. The indigenous knowledge is an amalgamation of diverse cultural experiences commonly generated by diverse African cultures, and passed on as valuable information from generation to generation.

This scenario is replicated in our present educational systems except that one cadre of persons   seems to be left out: the idle youth and the alone elderly. How can we utilize their abilities and skills so that they do not become idle and alone?

'African traditional education systems ensured that the socio-cultural and economic features shared by the various age groups were addressed. There were laid down modes and festivities of events like childbirth, marriage, death, pestilences and so on. Every skill, knowledge or attitude learnt was either for protection, acquiring of food or shelter." (Sifuna, 1994, Datta, 1984).

Without disparaging the aims of modern education systems, we need to look again at the unrecognized aspects of the African traditional education and modern education and find out what has created a scene of idle youth and alone adults. Can the two different education systems collaborate, tease out and conjure up an education system that will take care of these groups?

What is even more worrying is the population figures. A close examination at the population of most parts of the world shows that there is a likelihood of dependants arising from current schooling modes. Another set of dependants is being born by retirement plans arising out of salaried employees. There is the non-mentioned cadre of the non-salaried member of a community who have been living off the sweat of the salaried persons in the community. Again, other factors like seem to have played a role in the decreasing number of certain communities. We will use the census statistics from Kenya to illustrate this.

The recent statistics of the Kenya National Census (2009) revealed that one community (the Luo tribe) that used to rank second in numerical size among the 42 known tribes in Kenya,

dropped down to number four. These statistics have compared the Kenya Population Census of 1969 and 2009. Factors that have contributed to this scenario are attributed to poverty, disease and food insecurity. (Lodiaga M. 2008) This environment makes the youth; women and men adopt a behaviour patterned on a cycle of hopelessness, irresponsible behaviour and dependence. Idle youth engage in malpractices mainly drugs indulgence and immoral sexual activity. These activities necessitate funds and the pressure faced by these young girls and boys puts financial burden on salaried workers stretching friends, relatives and well wishers to the breaking point.

Rank	Tribe	Total Number
1.	Kikuyu	6.6.m
2.	Luhya	5.3.m
3.	Kalenjin	4.9.m.
4.	Luo	4.m.
5.	Kamba	3.68.m.

Source: Kenya national Bureau of Statistics 2010 Population figures.

To avoid these devastating losses, we must respond by empowering the community. We need to create an enabling environment that helps to nurture vulnerable persons especially the idle youth, the lonely elderly persons and the HIV/AIDS orphans both girls and boys. We must help in educating and supporting one another. It is vital that humanity builds a positive life style and maintain families.

Some neighborhoods are fragile places with uncertain futures. Maintaining daily livelihood has become very difficult since those who have small businesses need to be nudged forward given that the climatic changes and the recession have hit the country. Those who are self employed are struggling, for there is limited business opportunities in the villages.

Working class families struggle to maintain a good quality of life within this economically mixed area set against a back drop of community issues of illnesses; malnutrition; poverty; ignorance; significant levels of crime and lack of or difficulty in accessing organized adequate education.

It is in this backdrop that Rokawelja Turning Point Women Group has decided to address these issues by empowering the women, children, girls, boys, the youth and the elderly through sensitization; counseling; initiating income generating activities; educating the populace and engaging in de-bereaving and counseling sessions at community level. The region selected for this intervention is Siaya County of Nyanza Province in Kenya. Most of the members of this women group come from this county. As womenfolk, we realized the need to empower ourselves in all fields that are beneficial to society. The group has members from all professions of life: the membership encompasses the school educated and the *"life educated."*

Need for Training in Literacy in Tune with Lifestyle In 21st Century and Beyond

One way of inculcating this type of education in the existing curricula is to make it universal. The introduction of Community and social studies could be a viable approach. However, the terms community studies and social studies have not been given adequate interpretation. The interpretations seem to be relegated to people who may not have performed well in their academic worlds: a kind of second class alternative.

It should be realized that Social work as a subject requires intuition, it leans more on emotional intelligence so it is not tangible. It erroneously gets relegated to fields of the not very observant in society. The arena of social studies or even community development work is overlooked as an area for low achievers in an academic world as discussed by Amritlal S. (2005) in their seminar presentation on the teaching of social studies. The subject content extends to cover areas like promoting communication in the fields of social development, social welfare and human services. Its' major focus is on delivery of services, which most people take as a matter of course, quips O'Connor M. (2005). It is in this territory that traditional social work services for the elderly people can be given emphasis. Key areas that would need stressing on when curriculum is being drawn for care for the elderly should include the notion that at times the elderly seem to portray a sense of powerlessness, helplessness, low self-esteem and low self-efficacy. These areas, according to Wellington B. (2007) rank high.

The study carried out by Wellington (2007) revealed that, "substantive issues that affect the elderly people are inadequately addressed by existing elderly services and intervention approaches. In response to the social and political changes in contemporary society, a community work approach can be a useful method to change old people from passive clients into active and empowered individuals with a positive self-image. This would be effective in strengthening elderly people's contact with the community, eliminating elderly people's negative self-image, protecting elderly rights...

In the current era, 21st Century, whether in Africa or elsewhere in the world, the elderly may need some services that the youth; both girls and boys can offer. Care for the elderly will involve both girls and boys and both groups stand to benefit in their own ways. Activities such as use of electronic gadgets performed by both sexes, mobile telephony services that an elderly person may not be conversant with can easily be activated and accessed by the youth on behalf of the elderly.

The other area where the youth can assist in is reach, accessibility and use of electronic appliances. For instance, the use of radio, video, the television set, digital camera and so forth. Some of these appliances have within them the ability to entertain, inform and record. The television set, video and all its related electronic equipment can be used by the youth as a socializing agent with the elderly. Two things would be achieved here: companionship and some kind of education. Maslow's hierarchy of needs which has been the dogma of human needs states that no man can live alone. One famous poet John Donne who lived from 1572 to 1631 in his famous poem also retorted,

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. ..... any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee. http://www.johndonne. 28th August 2011

The meaning of the excerpt above has been analyzed by various authors, but the most relevant definition comes from The American Heritage New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy (2006), as, "No one is self-sufficient; everyone relies on others."

Hence the education discussed here could be made possible in a learning center with special arrangements. The education will not be compulsory, no examinations will be administered, no fees will be paid but services will be provided to both the youth and the elderly.

Why is it that children must progress from primary school onto secondary school and when they are old, we seem to have no use for them? Why does this seem to be the regular pattern? I

guess the answers to these questions will orbit around; "that is what has always been done," purports Alison Love (2004).

Traditionally, the extended family system in Africa took cognizance of the elderly, but now it seems there is a strong delinking in families where the elderly are left on their own. No longer relevant. Rayfield (1983) argues,

"the main problem of modern schools, starting with missionary schools during the colonial time, is that they withdraw children from society and inculcated them with values and knowledge that make it difficult for them to return to their society. The very existence of classrooms conveyed the strong message that one needed to be away from the usual settings to learn."

Why then, can we make this information available to those who are willing to learn without charging fees and without making the candidate do an examination that categorizes them?This kind of education like most traditional community education has four characteristics as Rayfield continues to state that the kind of education experienced in traditional Africa had the following features,

a) it is completely effective, i.e. the child learns all he/she needs to know to become a functioning adult; b) although the education involves harsh trials and ordeals, every child who survives them is allowed to "graduate" c) the cost of education is not prohibitive; and

d) Children are not totally withdrawn from the work force.

If the idle youth would do positive activities for the elderly who may never have had the chance to do them in their entire life like using a motorbike or some form of motorized vehicle to transport them to some far off place they have always walked to amidst frustrations and procrastination to get services like medical attention, this would create a feeling of social togetherness.

The idle youth would be absorbed in meaningful tasks as s/he or a group keeps the elderly persons company, the mischief the youth engage in will be greatly reduced and jobs would be done where a salary is not the end product in all cases.

Why does the Current School System select those who Perform well Academically? What Do we do with the Rest?

The first question: why do we leave out or select certain individuals and promote them within the formal education ranks? The answers for this question would rotate around "we want to select the best candidate so we must measure, assess and evaluate".

WHAT CAN BE DONE? Logistical arrangements can ensure that the two parties benefit: here are some activities that have been suggested: In the ROKAWELJA WOMEN GROUP, the women are further clustered in different committees: agriculture expert, medical, educationists, information technologists, entrepreneurs, social workers, to carry out the different sections of the project bearing in mind that we all have different capabilities and strengths.

The Agriculture Experts And Enterpreneurs Committee

This committee will ensure that the youth can engage in agricultural activities. The proceeds from the sale of products in farming fruits and vegetables, digging fish ponds to rear fish, rearing chicken, rabbits, pigs, and goats and so on can be used for other purposes.

The Medical And Social Committee

The elderly persons can be doing some physical exercises by feeding the fish, fishing them when they are mature enough, helping to process them and packaging them for sale. This will keep them busy instead of idling away their time and merely waiting to die. These items would serve many purposes, ensuring that both the lonely elderly and the youth have nutritional food and proceeds in terms of cash that the two can use to fulfill some of their needs.

Transport Including Tourism

The youth can have accesses to motorbikes which can be used to ferry the lonely and other elderly vulnerable persons to visit friends, attend to official issues in offices, a task s/ he may have relegated to unreliable persons, visit hospitals and so on. The youth can be engaged in acting like tour guides when they take the lonely elderly in experiences they would have wished to be involved in. Domestic tourism can be enhanced. The lonely elderly persons would appreciate a difference in their daily life styles. The proceeds from the sale of the activities that generate funds can be used to facilitate such excursions and reduce monotony in the lives of many.

Gathering information from the elderly persons and publishing it electronically or in print form

The idle youth can be engaged in interviewing and harnessing information from the elderly and publishing this information electronically or in print form as a modern way of preservation. If we look at the population distribution in terms of age, we would realize that this problem of idle youth and lonely elderly needs to be addressed.

The Recodred Informaion Can Be Preserved For Posterity?

The information could be physically transferred from one region to another to enable the world know about the different cultural practices amongst different communities. The elderly can continue sensitizing the youth on issues they have first-hand information on. They would be able to use the knowledge to their benefit and the elderly would see themselves as being persons of some value in the community. A kind of co-operate social responsibility.

The Elderly as Resource Persons

The elderly in most communities also consist of experts in certain areas and fields. These professionals could be very useful resource persons in settings that require skills that have been tested. For instance, in the medical profession, public relations, agriculture, nutrition and the teaching profession. The elderly can be resource persons in various fora where they have seminars and even in existing institutions.

Activities That Enhance Physical Fitness

The youth can treat the lonely elderly person in activities like dancing, playing games that will help them stretch their muscles and help check diseases that develop through lethargic lifestyle. Dancing to tunes and rhythm that befit their status can be very valuable. Competitions can be arranged within the community and this will enhance literacy in a different level: the spirit of co-operation and learning from a variety of sources. The two groups of persons will also get motivation to socialize when they join such groups. The women group has bought some equipment which can be used to aleviate back pains. It is a thermal massager which can be used to assist the elderly and people with back pains.

Meaningfully occupying the lonely elderly and the idle youth

There was in Africa, the extended family support system that kept a lot of life programs in check. The communal lifestyles adopted meant that no one was ever alone and the youth had a lot of activities that kept them occupied meaningfully. There was some reciprocity. Ideas and knowledge

per see was handed down to the oncoming generations as indicated by Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2004) who purport that, "education is one of the oldest industries in human history, education is therefore the main instrument employed by the society to preserve, maintain and grapple with its social equilibrium; hence a society's future depends largely on the quality of its citizens."

Part of the activation of this group was propelled by what has been observed in this locality

• Some elderly live very lonely lives because they cannot provide for themselves.

• Plight of the HIV/AIDS affected and infected persons since most are now left lonely.

• The ***"uninformed village"*** mentality that adolescents; must be married or must have sex obeying their bodily demands hence culminating in unwanted pregnancies or infections. It is important to make informed decisions based on information that is worthwhile. Hence the need for a training institute.

• It has been realized that with the increase in mortality and spread of the diseases, the knowledge levels are not increasing; a lot of un-informed and un-educated decisions are rampant. This state of affairs necessitated the need to create awareness and sensitize these groups especially on educational and aspects of, HIV/AIDS. Here the HIV prevalence rate is 24% which is more than three times the national rate in Kenya. There are many orphans – the National AIDS Control Council estimates that almost 50,000 children in Siaya have lost one or both parents due to AIDS.

Project Objectives : What is /are the main objective(s) of the proposed project?

 i. Implementing an institute where training of the youth and the elderly can be conducted.

 ii. Designing a curriculum that will be used to train the youth and the elderly.

iii. Creating meaningful employment opportunities for the youth after training especially on useful ways of spending time for the vulnerable groups by enabling them to engage in sustainable community activities.

iv. Utilizing knowledge and cultural practices from the elderly on ensuring food security and other progressive community values.

 v. Generating funds from selling the produce from agricultural activities and published information from the elderly to other communities.

vi. Fighting poverty and checking on lonely elderly persons through partnership in the villages.

Project Description how will the project activities and outcomes be measured and which partners will be involved and how?

Using monitoring and evaluation techniques

• The Rokawelja Turning Point Women Group and representatives of Yala Community Development Stakeholders and CBOs representatives or any other will be meeting weekly to evaluate and discuss individual cases of targeted beneficiaries and response from Well Wishers.

• One of the donor communities, Millenium Development Goals (MDGS) will be engaged to monitor and evaluate the

project by Rokawelja Turning Point Women Group. We shall share ideas to develop and execute plans to enhance the programme. At the end of this programme, we shall have the programme audited and / or reviewed to enhance future planning and management.

• The beneficiaries will also evaluate the project from time to time.

• Before the Program begins the status quo be documented by experts who will then pitch the present status and the previous status.

Cross cutting issues:

(1) **Gender equity and equality**, All members of the communityty will be involved, men, women, boys and girls.

(2) **Crisis- and conflict-sensitive planning**: The training will also include psychosocial support, guidance counselors and education specialists.

(3) **The inclusion of civil society organizations**? The monitoring and evaluation will be done by members from this group. It is expected that the community will participate in these activities.

(4) **Civil society organizations and government departments;** they will also provide experts to help run the project.

Executive summary project description:

The enhancement of hands-on-practices in educational training is the major focus of this proposal.

We are emphasizing the intangible curriculum of caring for each other, reciprocating activities between and among generations. This proposal would seem to lean on emotional literacy. But this proposal argues that this education is not acquired from school or social settings, it is for all those in the community who have a right to knowledge which will enable them make decisions that are worthwhile.

This education will fill in the gap created by formal education.

This education could be made possible in a learning center with special arrangements. The idle youth and the lonely elderly will be occupied in meaningful ways.

The education will not be compulsory, no examinations will be administered, no fees will be paid but services will be provided to both the youth and the elderly.

Siaya County which has recorded a decrease in its Census, through statistics, has provided the situational analysis. We are likely to see the impact of this proposal if all other facors that can cause decline in populaion are assumed for pupposes of research.

Improved healthier and higher levels of care of the elderly, better living, increased entrepreneurship in this community, conservation of important cultural information can be witnessed as a result of these interventions. Replication of these tasks can be done in other Counties.

This article is about the needs of idle youth and lonely elderly persons and to provide adequate training in an institution.