



# Kenyans Need an Education That Is Human: A Call to Conscience

By Wandia Njoya



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This is a call to Kenyans of conscience to step back and reflect on the lies about education that are circulating in the media, the schooling system and government. Foreign sharks have camped in Kenya to distort our education. Using buzzwords such as “quality” and “global standards”, these sharks seek to destroy the hopes, dreams and creativity of young Africans, not just in Kenya, but in the whole region, and to make a profit while at it. With the help of local professors, bureaucrats and journalists, they spread hatred for education among the population. At the same time, they ironically create a thirst for schooling that makes parents resort to desperate measures to get their children into school, going as far as accepting violence and abuse in schools that causes children to take their own lives.

This insanity must end.

We must accept that education is a life endeavour through which people constantly adapt to their social and natural environment. Education is more than going to school and getting the right paper credentials. Education occurs anywhere where human beings process what they perceive, make decisions about it and act together in solidarity. That is why education, culture and access to information are inseparable.

However, since colonial times, both the colonial and “independence” versions of the Kenya government have worked hard to separate education from culture and access to information. They have done so through crushing all other avenues where Kenyans can create knowledge. We have insufficient public libraries and our museums are underfunded. Arts festivals, where people come together and learn from unique cultural expressions, have been underfunded, and by some accounts, donors have been explicitly told not to fund creativity and culture. In the meantime, artists are insulted, exploited and sometimes silenced through censorship, public ridicule and moralistic condemnations in the name of faith.

All these measures are designed to isolate the school as the only source of learning and creativity, and this is what makes the entry into schools so cutthroat and abusive.

But entering school does not mean the end of the abuse. Once inside the schools, Kenyans find that there is no arts education where children can explore ideas and express themselves. In school, they find teachers who themselves are subject to constant insults and disruptions from the Ministry of Education and the Teachers Service Commission. Under a barrage of threats and transfers, teachers are forced to implement the Competency Based training which is incoherent and has been rejected in other countries. Many of the teachers eventually absorb the rationality of abuse and mete it out on poor children whose crime is to want to learn. This desperation for education has also been weaponized by the corporate world that is offering expensive private education and blackmailing parents to line the pockets of book publishers.

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By the end of primary and secondary school, only a mere 3 per cent of total candidates are able to continue with their education. This situation only worsens inequality in Kenya, where only 2 per cent of the population have a university degree, and where only 8,300 people own as much as the rest of Kenya.

But listening to the government and the corporate sector, you would think that 98 per cent of Kenyans have been to university. The corporate sector reduces education to job training and condemns the school system as inadequate for meeting the needs of the corporations. Yet going by statements from the Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA) and the government, there is no intention to employ Kenyans who get training. The government hires doctors from Cuba and engineers from China, and then promises the United Kingdom to export our medical workers. KEPSA is on record saying that we need to train workers in TVET so that they can work in other African countries.

It is clear that the Kenya government and the corporate sector do not want Kenyans to go to school and become active citizens in their homeland. Rather, these entities are treating schooling as a conveyor belt to manufacture Kenyans for export abroad as labour and to cushion the theft of public resources through remittances.

The media and the church also join in the war against education by brainwashing Kenyans to accept this dire state of affairs. The media constantly bombards Kenyans with lies about the composition of university students, and with propaganda against “useless degrees”. The church has abandoned prophecy and baptizes every flawed educational policy in exchange for maintaining its colonial dreams of keeping religion in the curriculum to pacify Kenyans in the name of “morality”.

The government is now intending to restrict education further through the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) which seeks to limit education through pathways that prevent children from pursuing subjects of their interests, and by imposing quotas on who can pursue education beyond secondary school. At tertiary level, the government is devising an algorithm that will starve the humanities and social sciences of funding. It claims that funds will instead go to medical and engineering sciences, which are in line with Kenya's development needs.

But recall that foreigners are doing the work of medical professionals and engineers anyway, so "development" here does not mean that Kenyan professionals will work in their home country. They will work abroad where they cannot be active citizens and raise questions about our healthcare and infrastructure.

The proposed defunding of the arts, humanities and social sciences aims to achieve one goal: to reserve thinking and creativity for the 3 per cent of Kenyans who can afford it. This discrimination in funding of university education is about locking the majority and the poor out of spaces where they can be creative and develop ideas. It also seeks to prevent Kenyans from humble backgrounds from questioning policies and priorities that are passed under dubious concepts such as "development needs" that are largely studied in the humanities and social sciences.

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Clearly, there is a war against education and against Kenyans being creative and active citizens in their own country. For the 8,300 Kenyans to maintain their monopoly of resources, they need to distract Kenyans with propaganda against education, they need to limit Kenyans' access to schooling, and they need to shut down alternative sources of training, information and knowledge. By limiting access to schooling and certificates, the 8,300 can exploit the work of Kenyans who have not been to school, or who have not gone far in school, by arguing that those Kenyans lack the "qualifications" necessary for better pay.

We must also name those who enable this exploitation. The greedy ambitions of the political class are entrenched by people who, themselves, have been through the school system. To adapt Michelle Obama's famous words, these people walked through the door of opportunity, and are trying to close it behind them, instead of reaching out and giving more Kenyans the same opportunities that helped them to succeed. This tyranny is maintained by a section of teachers in schools, of professors in universities and of bureaucrats in government, who all fear students and citizens who know more than they do, instead of taking joy in the range of Kenyan creativity and knowledge. The professors and bureaucrats, especially, are seduced into this myopia with benchmarking trips abroad, are spoon-fed foreign policies to implement in Kenya. They harvest the legitimate aspirations of Kenya and repackage them in misleading slogans. For instance, they refer to limited opportunities as "nurturing talent", and baptize the government's abandonment of its role in providing social services "parental involvement".

These bureaucrats and academics are helped to pull the wool over our eyes by the media who allow them to give Kenyans obscure soundbites that say nothing about what is happening on the ground. They also make empty calls for a return to a pre-colonial Africa which they will not even let us learn about, because they have blocked the learning of history and are writing policies to de-fund the arts and humanities. We must put these people with huge titles and positions to task about their loyalty to the African people in Kenya. We call on them to repent this betrayal of their own people in the name of "global standards".

We Kenyans also need an expanded idea of education. We need arts centres where Kenyans can meet and generate new ideas. We need libraries where Kenyans can get information. We need guilds and unions to help professionals and workers take charge of regulation, training and knowledge in their specializations. We need for all work to be recognized independent of certification, so that people can be paid for their work regardless of whether one has been to school or not.

We need recognition of our traditional skills in areas like healing, midwifery, pastoralism, crafts and construction. We need a better social recognition of achievement outside business and politics. It is a pity that our runners who do Kenyans proud, our scientists, thinkers, artists and activists who gain international fame, are hardly recognized in Kenya because they were busy working, rather than stealing public funds to campaign in the next election. Our ideas are harvested by foreign companies while our government bombards us with useless bureaucracy and taxes which ensure that we have no impact here.

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Most of all, we need an end to the obsession with foreign money as the source of “development”. We are tired of being viewed as merely labour for export, we are tired of foreigners being treated as more important than the Kenyan people. We are tired of tourism which is based on the tropes of the colonial explorer and which treats Africans as a threat to the environment. And the names of those colonial settlers who dominate our national consciousness must be removed from our landmarks.

Development, whatever that means, comes from the brains and muscles of the Kenyan people. And the key to us becoming human beings who proudly contribute to society and humanity is education. Not education in the limited sense of jobs and certificates, but education in the broader sense of dignity, creativity, knowledge and solidarity.

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