Secondary Education in Tanzania: Key Policy Challenges

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1. Introduction

Since 2002, Tanzania has seen an ambitious set of policy reforms in primary and more recently in secondary education. These have dramatically improved the state of education in the country, particularly in terms of classroom infrastructure and enrolment. Some of the key achievements are highlighted in the next section, 'Background'. We could take more time to explain these successes, but perhaps HakiElimu was not invited to this meeting to elaborate on these!

The topic we were given are the major policy challenges in secondary education in Tanzania. This is consistent with our general approach, where we acknowledge progress made, but then move on to focus on the challenges, so as to make a good thing even better. We are confident that the Government and its partners also prefer spending valuable time on what still needs to be done, and how to do it best.

This essay presents five policy challenges in basic education. In most cases primary and secondary education are treated together, because they are inextricably linked in so many ways, and because success at the secondary level is fundamentally dependent on getting the basics right at the primary level. In assessing the five policy challenges, we are guided by the following three simple questions regarding secondary education:

- Are our **goals clear, consistent** and are they the **most important**?
- Will the goals lead to the **results** we seek?
- Given resource constraints, are our **priorities the most strategic**?

All the challenges are linked to a central policy question, which is clarity about the goals and purposes of education, or about defining the meaning of an educated person. We briefly outline the conceptual and policy issues, and make specific recommendations in each case.

2. Background

Since 2001, Tanzania has taken major strides to revamp its primary and secondary education sectors. The Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP, 2002-2006) and the Secondary Education Development Plan (SEDP) implemented starting in 2004 have led to significant improvements in provision of basic education in the country.

2.1 Primary school enrolment

The most impressive achievement has been expanded enrolments. Enrolment in primary education increased from 4,839,361 in 2001 to 7,959,884 in 2006. The Net Enrolment Ratio

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(NER) in primary schools increased from 65.5% in 2001 to 96.1% in 2006. This means that nearly all the children of primary school age are now enrolled in primary schools.

2.2 Secondary school enrolment
Increased primary enrolments create increased pressure further up the pipeline at the secondary level. Expansion of secondary enrolment has been equally impressive, though far from reaching the levels attained in primary education. Enrolment in Form 1, the first year of secondary education, increased from 99,744 in 2003 to 243,359 in 2006. GER has increased from 10.2% in 2003 to 20.2% in 2006. Secondary NER is reported to have doubled from 6.3% in 2003 to 13.4% in 2006.

2.3 Infrastructure
Increases in enrolments are matched by improvements in school infrastructure. New classrooms have been built and new schools constructed. Primary schools across the country are characterized by new classrooms. More than a thousand new government secondary schools were built between 2003 and 2006; and the number of secondary schools has increased from 1,083 in 2003 to 2,289 in 2006, largely through the establishment of new government secondary schools (whereas prior to SEDP much of the increase in recent years was led by private secondary schools). Toilets (pit latrines) and teachers' houses have also been constructed in large numbers too, though at a lower pace as compared to new classrooms.

2.4 Books and teachers
In recent years the provision of books to the school level has increased dramatically, primarily through the 'capitation grant'. The pupil: book ratios have improved, though are yet to reach adequate levels, possibly because the full capitation grant has not reached the school level on time. The supply of teachers has also gone up, with over 32,000 new teachers recruited in the first three years of PEDP alone. However, the increase in pupils has outstripped the recruitment of teachers. Albeit belatedly, greater attention and resources are given to recruiting teachers for secondary, who need to be better equipped than primary school teachers. In August 2006 President Kikwete announced that all university BA students in education will get a full scholarship in a move to spur the supply of competent teachers.

In sum, Tanzania has experienced tremendous progress in education in the last five years. After decades of neglect, these efforts were sorely needed. The Government's political commitment has been exemplary – from President Mkapa's second term in office to the steadfast resolve in the current government exhibited by President Kikwete, Prime Minister Lowassa and Minister Sitta. The rhetoric has also been backed up by resources, as the budget for basic education has increased significantly in each year of this period. There is a clear sense that things are moving, and a feeling of excitement and optimism. For all of this, the Government and its partners (including the Government of Norway and the World Bank) deserve commendation.

But this does not mean that the future is going to be any less challenging. As the numbers in primary education swell and the momentum to expand secondary education gathers steam, even greater strategic policy clarity will be needed to guide prioritization, resource allocation and implementation. We suggest the following five challenges are the most critical today.

3. Five Policy Challenges

3.1 Policy challenge one: Establish clear targets
Unlike in primary education, it is difficult to ascertain the actual targets and timeframes for secondary education in Tanzania. The SEDP document has two sets of targets – the 'maximum

growth' scenario endorsed in official government documents with a target of 50% NER by 2009 and a significantly different 'medium growth' scenario endorsed by the World Bank agreement with the Government. Despite several attempts, we were unable to establish which the agreed target was, possibly because there is no such thing.

Moreover, recent attention to secondary expansion appears to make little reference to either of the two SEDP scenarios. Drawing from key political statements, the functional targets appear to be a) enrol all those who passed primary education in 2005 *right now* (an order was given to accommodate those not yet enrolled within months) and b) ensure there is/build a secondary school in each ward. The initial focus has largely been on construction of schools and classrooms, and belatedly on finding adequate teachers. However, we are yet to see the details of this 'plan'; the coherence/coordination between its different aspects such as teacher training output, book provision, libraries and laboratories; and how this set of targets 'updates' existing SEDP documents. Crucially, there appears to be significant shortfall of resources as compared to requirements, and in this case it is not clear what will be covered and what will be left out, and the basis on which these choices will be made.

The lack of clarity described above makes it difficult to focus actions and measure progress. We recommend a single, consolidated and coordinated set of targets for secondary education to be reflected in a single, agreed SEDP document.

3.2 Policy challenge two: Focus on outcomes, not inputs
Education yes, but for what? Clarity of targets is one thing, but setting the right targets is another. Target setting in Tanzania, as elsewhere, suffers from two major problems. It is focused on *quantitative aspects* and on *inputs*. In this there is disconnect between the 'promise' of education, or expectations of it, and its conceptualization. Education is expected to produce graduates who are able to thrive in a fast changing world, meet challenges and solve problems, be entrepreneurial and create jobs, and be critical and active citizens. Yet targets rarely focus on these sorts of outcomes of education, and methods of measurement do not measure these sorts of skills and attributes.

The recent rapid expansion of both primary and secondary education has inevitably affected quality. The tension between quantity and quality in education is well known – and a debate is needed on these serious trade offs. But it is mistaken to plan to take the view 'let us take care of quantity and enrolments first, and worry about the rest or quality later'. A recent report on the evaluating the World Bank's global primary education programmes, carried out by its Independent Evaluation Group (IEG), noted that "Most of the WB projects have focused on expanding access and less on improved learning outcomes*"* (World Bank: 2006; xii). Importantly, the IEG argues that both access and improvements in learning outcomes need to be addressed together.

> Countries need to resist the temptation access first and improve learning outcomes later; expansion and quality improvement can have mutually reinforcing effects. However, competing pressures may make it difficult to undertake quality retrofitting at a later data.
> (xii)

The main point here is that education systems ought to have a clear set of intended outcomes for its learners, and design all the rest of the pieces around these learning outcomes. In focusing on outcomes, we posit that the most important aspect of education is the *capabilities* of its graduates; and that perhaps the most important question to ask of education systems is *'what are its students able to do?'*

What are the capabilities we have in mind? These are things that will enable students – whether of primary, secondary or other levels of education – to thrive in the world and in the next stage of formal schooling where applicable. In either case the capabilities are likely to be largely similar. An ability to read and write fluently; to comprehend, analyze, ask questions and think critically; be creative, innovate and solve problems, even when faced with new challenges. We also have in mind a set of aptitudes such as being reflective, balanced and considerate of others; self confident and wanting to take initiative; ability to think out-of-the-box and laterally, and perhaps most importantly an ability to exercise the imagination. A full discussion of these outcomes is beyond the scope of this presentation (see Annex 1 to see an example of capabilities focus of one system); the idea is simply to illustrate the sort of things that should be the prime focus of education policies. Once there is this clarity of vision about the purposes of education, it can guide the development of the entire education system.

We recommend a revision of education policy that focuses on the capabilities of its learners, i.e. the skills, abilities and aptitudes of its graduates, because this is what will enable students to thrive in the world and more effectively contribute to national development. Most urgently this should be reflected in the ten year costed outline (following the Abuja declaration) as well as future updates of PEDP and SEDP. Eventually these elements will need to be incorporated in a carefully thought through education policy in Tanzania.

3.3 Policy challenge three: Teachers and teacher support over infrastructure
Curiously, recent developments notwithstanding, policy attention and implementation in Tanzania (and many other countries) continue to equate education progress with the erection of school buildings. Buildings are of course important, but teachers matter more. When you cannot have everything and trade-offs need to be made, priority should be given to teachers over buildings. Many will agree that the most important thing in education is the interaction between motivated, competent teachers and their students. Therefore education policy, as well as programs, budgets and political exhortation (including photo-ops) should hone in on this fact.

What does this mean in the Tanzanian context? First, there needs to be greater clarity on the meaning of a competent teacher – of what is expected of all teachers and how this will be monitored and measured. Currently, basic competence is defined in terms of formalistic certification based on passing examinations that rarely measure the attributes of an effective teacher. Instead measurement should be based on a balance of subject knowledge and pedagogical skills, with an emphasis on measuring whether teachers have the ability to inspire students to learn.

We have visited many schools over the years, and a major problem is that teachers are often not in the classroom interacting with students (they are either away or in the staffroom). A somewhat dated study by UNESCO showed that Tanzanian teachers spend among the least amount of time teaching compared to others worldwide, and there is no evidence to suggest this situation may have significantly improved. When in the classroom most teach using rote techniques – requiring pupils to copy or repeat notes on the board. Violence, gender discrimination, and at times abuse continue to take place regularly. Yet these same schools have many teachers that appear qualified on paper, and may pass school inspections that fail to capture these sorts of concerns. Overall, therefore, there is an urgent need to strengthen the *standards of teaching* in both primary and secondary schools, and to bring back (as we say in Tanzania) the respect of the profession.

Second, teacher training, both pre-service and in-service, needs to be focused on the sort of teacher competence attributes describe above. This will require a fairly radical transformation of

the content and method of teacher education, including provisions for teacher 'upgrading'. Similarly, the role of inspectorate needs to transformed from one of 'checking or policing' formalistic requirements to one that is akin to serving as resource people and 'coaches' or 'mentors'. The Teachers' Resource Centres, spread across Tanzania but whose role is not clearly articulated in education policies, could play a key part here. So can libraries, which have received little attention to date, if thought of beehives of learning and exchange. If, as a colleague of ours puts it, "a school without a library has no soul", reform programs need to think seriously about the role of libraries in promoting learning. At the primary school level the *Tusome Vitabu* project implemented by Care International in over 1,000 primary schools offers a model worth expanding, but whether this will be done at the end of the project life in 2006 remains to be seen.

Third, persistent problems with teacher welfare need to be comprehensively addressed. A joint study by HakiElimu and the Tanzania Teachers' Union (TTU), incidentally conducted when the current Minister of Education Margaret Sitta was the union's president, revealed serious concerns with the living and working conditions of teachers that require serious attention. In 2006 the Government has made impressive progress in getting salaries paid on time, in clearing payment arrears, and in focusing on the need for teachers' houses, particularly in rural, remote areas. As important as these are, they come across as somewhat piecemeal and ad-hoc, and more systematic policy and programmatic work is needed to provide teachers with the basics they need to do their job effectively.

In short action is needed in three key areas regarding teachers: improved teacher training and support, better understanding and enforcement of standards and ethics, and basic guarantees regarding teacher pay and welfare. Perhaps this is the right time to develop a new *'compact'* with teachers that connects teacher standards and teacher welfare. On one hand the Government can commit to do a, b, c as minimum guarantees to all teachers, in exchange for teachers committing to do x, y, z to meet minimum standards, reflect core ethical principles, and ensure they do their very best to help children learn. Such a compact can only be jointly hashed between the Government and the trade union, with CSOs and others serving as resource people. The fact that the current minister for education is the immediate past president of the teachers' union and the federation of trade unions is a rare opportunity not to be missed.

The bottom line is this: without motivated and competent teachers focused on pupil learning, all the reforms will come to nought. If teachers are at the heart of education, they ought to be at the heart of our policy and practice, budgets and political rhetoric as well.

3.4 Policy challenge four: measuring success
In Tanzania, when all is said and done, educational success in primary and secondary education is measured in terms of examination results. Graduates are categorized into two camps *'wamepasi'* and *'wamefeli'*. Seven years of primary or four years of secondary education is judged on the basis of one set of one-time examinations. The past Minister for Education, Hon. Joseph Mungai, used every opportunity to point out that pass rates in the Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE) had increased from about 22% to 50% under PEDP, and this was clear proof that the quality of education had improved.

What do these examinations look like, and what do they measure? My colleagues and I had a careful look at the PSLE last year. The examinations are multiple-choice, and in large part measure regurgitation of facts. Even the English and Swahili language PSLE do not require students to write a single sentence! In large part they do not measure analytical or problem solving skills. They do not measure the outcomes or capabilities as described above. The increased pressure to perform has meant that teachers teach to enable students to pass the

exams, 'cramming' to remember things that are not likely to help one much and which will be forgotten shortly after the examinations anyway. The constituent parts of the final examination scores have also been changed, such that the Swahili language score (in which Tanzanian students do best) count for more, and the overall performance score improves, when in fact there may no actual improvement. Our calculations suggest that it is possible for primary school leavers to pass Swahili and fail everything else and still score above the overall pass rate for the primary examinations.

The risks here are great: that we distort learning objectives to focus on aspects that are not the skills and capabilities we desperately need, and that we lull ourselves into believing we are doing much better when in fact we are not. No wonder that a common concern of teachers of tertiary education is that their students lack basic competencies, and that the number one complaint of employers in Tanzania is not red tape or corruption or infrastructure but the lack of human resources – despite improved pass rates.

If examinations is what 'counts'; examinations should count what matters. We recommend that examinations policy and structure should be significantly revised. First, the possibilities of using continual assessment should be explored and introduced. The terminal examinations should count for only part of the final result. Second, the assessment should measure the capabilities and skills we need. These include complex comprehension, analysis, problem-solving, creativity, and writing. Third, the constituent part of the final scores should reflect an appropriate balance of what a well-rounded competencies required by all students.

3.5 Policy challenge five: language of instruction

Tanzania has a peculiar arrangement whereby the medium of instruction in primary level is in Swahili before it abruptly switches to English at the secondary level. The idea is that pupils will become fluent in English at the primary level, and therefore have the competence to deal with this 'more international' language at the secondary level. The actual fact, as any observer of public schools can tell us, is quite different. The vast majority of public primary school leavers develop little confidence in English and many cannot string together a simple paragraph. Consequently, they are unable to follow what is taught or written in English in secondary school, and this contributes to poor learning. Concurrently there is the emergence of an elite class that sends its children to private schools in English, whose costs are too prohibitive for most, and whose impact is likely to exacerbate social inequalities.

Educationalists worldwide generally agree that one learns best in your own language, or at least in a language you know well, and that doing so does not impair your ability to learn a second language such as English. We believe this is how you do it here in Norway, for example, where all levels of education are offered in Norwegian and English is taught as a second language. The same approach is used in other countries that are doing well in terms of education and the economy, such as Sweden, Netherlands, Indonesia, and Korea. In Tanzania a longstanding research project (LOITASA) and commentators such as Martha Qorro have made cogent arguments for making Swahili the medium of instruction throughout primary and secondary levels. Despite this, the Ministry appears to have been steadfastly uninterested in pursuing an open exploration of the language issue. To the best of our knowledge SEDP does not address the language issue at all.

But the question of medium of instruction cannot be ignored or sidelined if secondary education is to produce capable students. The policy challenge is how to teach in a medium with which the vast majority students are comfortable, as well as build proficiency in English – which is increasingly valuable in a globalizing world. We do not have the answers, but two next moves

seem sensible. First, invite and encourage several private and government secondary schools to serve as 'pilots' of teaching using Swahili as medium of instruction (including development of materials, teacher training, etc), and monitor performance carefully. Second, invite all sides on this issue to have a thoughtful, open debate – based on solid evidence and research – and use it to inform policy.

4. Conclusion

In this paper we have argued that educational achievement is worth its name if and where it helps students to develop capabilities, aptitudes and skills that will enable them to thrive in further education and in the world. This approach measures success in terms of learning outcomes rather than inputs, assessing both the quantity and quality of student graduates. It is focused on the central question: 'what are students able to do?'

The education reforms in Tanzania have been impressive in quantitative terms. But they have failed to embody clarity of vision in capability terms, when in fact this is precisely what the country urgently needs. When President Kikwete talks about education liberating the country from poverty, and people creating jobs for themselves, and people being creative (a word he uses often) – we do not think he does not have in mind people who go through rote learning and pass multiple choice exams – but people with real abilities to think, question, solve problems, take initiative, and make things happen.

Our basic point is simple. The major education policy challenge in Tanzania is to have basic education goals focused on capabilities, and organize everything else (teacher education, curriculum, textbooks, libraries, examinations, inspection, use of mobile phones, internet and other technology) around this. Teachers will need to be at the heart of this transformation, and therefore must be meaningfully involved from the beginning and throughout. This is the right time to do it. The question is whether the Government, its development partners, civil society, and all of us are up to the task.

Annex

Ten Qualities of a Student
Primary Years Program of the International Baccalaureate Organization
Sourced from http://www.ibo.org/pyp/slideb.cfm on 6 September, 2006

Inquirers~ Their natural curiosity has been nurtured. They have acquired the skills necessary to conduct purposeful, constructive research. They actively enjoy learning and the love of learning will be sustained throughout their lives.

Thinkers~ They exercise initiative in applying thinking skills critically and creatively to make sound decisions and to solve complex problems.

Communicators~ They receive and express ideas and information confidently in more than one language, including the language of the mathematical symbols.

Risk-takers~ They approach unfamiliar situations without anxiety and have the confidence and independence of spirit to explore new roles, ideas and strategies. They are courageous and articulate in defending those things in which they believe.

Knowledgeable~ They have spent time in our schools exploring themes, which have global relevance and importance. In so doing, they have acquired a critical mass of significant knowledge.

Principled~ They have a sound grasp of the principles of moral reasoning. They have integrity, honesty and a sense of fairness and justice.

Caring~ They show sensitivity towards the needs and feelings of others. They have a sense of personal commitment to action and service.

Open-minded~ They respect the views, values and traditions of other individuals and cultures and are accustomed to seeking and considering a range of points of view.

Well-balanced~ They understand the importance of physical and mental balance and personal well-being.

Reflective~ They give thoughtful consideration to their own learning and analyze their personal strengths and weaknesses in a constructive manner.

HakiElimu

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