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POLICY PAPER

EDUCATING AFRICA FOR THE FUTURE

Here are eight policy decisions to think about

Senator David Coltart

ANALYSIS

Imprint

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Executive Summary

Africa in many respects is at a crossroads. Decades after the end of colonial rule, much of Africa's great potential is unrealized. At the root of this is the crisis in the education sector. Education infrastructure is collapsing in many countries amid an increase in school enrolment, rising cost of education, high teacher shortages in both primary and secondary schools, and reduced public funding for basic and higher education.

Eight policy decisions need to be taken to reverse this trend:

1. The education sector must become the number one priority in national budgets.
2. African governments must elevate and value the teaching profession
3. African countries need to identify and nurture their best talent.
4. African teachers need to optimise the use of technology to improve access to, and variety of, educational material.
5. The education curriculum must intentionally balance between academic and vocational education.
6. More public participation and stakeholder involvement in policymaking
7. Focus on the girl child.
8. Autonomy for schools rather than centralized control.

Unless we address the crisis in education throughout Africa its economic and developmental goals will not be met. This crisis needs a broad continental consensus which transcends partisanship and nationalism.

An overview of the current status of education in Africa

For all of Africa's wealth – the human capital, mineral resources and tourism potential – millions of Africans remain poor. Many young educated Africans are still endangering their lives trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea in leaky boats in search of better livelihoods. Millions of Africans across the continent, particularly in my own country Zimbabwe, have plans to immigrate to the United States, Europe, and elsewhere. One of the main reasons for this is the biting crisis in the education sector throughout Africa. Young people have lost hope in their own education systems, in their own countries, and in their own continent.

As a citizen and a former Minister of Education of Zimbabwe, I will use my country experience as a starting point to discuss the state of education in the continent and rely on the knowledge obtained as a result of that experience to propose pragmatic policy solutions to change the trajectory of our education systems.

In recent years, nearly a decade after I left office, teachers' strikes have paralysed learning in many other countries including Kenya, Uganda, Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria, Angola, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mauritania, Malawi, Tunisia, Guinea, Chad, Lesotho and Zim-

babwe. Across the continent, there is deep rooted tension and distrust between the governments and the teaching profession. Teacher morale is at an all-time low. The strikes have become a phenomenon that governments must deal with, due to the shrinking public purse and the rise in competing priorities to address the many socio-economic challenges.

Besides, public funding of education has reduced. Global statistics show that as a portion of all government expenditure, the spending on education in Sub-Saharan Africa has fallen from a high of 18% in 2005 – the highest in a 20-year period – to 14% in 2021¹. As a share of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the education expenditure has largely stagnated at between 3-4% in Sub-Saharan Africa². The reduced investment in education has locked out approximately 19%³ of all children of school going age, who should be in school but are not. For many who are in school, textbooks are hardly available. The classrooms are few, such that in some countries like Zimbabwe, it is not unusual to find classes of 65 children, against the continent's average of about 40 pupils to one teacher⁴. And in other countries such as South Africa, university students had to protest the high cost of education. Even revered universities like my own alma mater, the University of Cape Town, are under threat.

1 Data from the World Development Indicators available from <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>

2 Ibid.

3 UNESCO data published in the Global education monitoring report, 2020: Inclusion and education: All means All. Available from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373718>

Right across Africa massive challenges are presented in the education sector. Even relatively competent governments are overwhelmed by Africa's young population. Education systems simply are not keeping up with population growth.

We are not training enough teachers; we are not building new schools quickly enough to keep up with the population growth.

Policy recommendations on how to improve the education system in Africa

It is in the context of this continental crisis that we need to ask what can be done? I pose eight policy solutions to educate Africa for the future.

1. The Education sector must become the number one priority in national budgets in Africa

It may seem obvious that there needs to be adequate investment in education, but it has to be said that African governments need to make education their number one budgetary priority in actual terms. For instance, World Bank data shows that in 2020 Germany spent an estimated US\$183 billion on education, more than six times what South Africa, touted as one of Africa's most advanced economies. South Africa spent just US\$21 billion⁵. When looked at in terms of portion of GDP, South Africa could appear to be doing well spending an equivalent of 6.2% of its GDP on education, against Germany's 4.7%, but the *actual* figures tell a different, more real story.

The World Bank and the UN educational, scientific and cultural organisation (Unesco) noted in a 2022 report on education financing that countries in Sub-Saharan Africa had cut spending to education in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, they were unlikely to "implement urgent actions to recover learning losses and address the already high learning poverty levels"⁶.

For a globalized world, and for graduates of Africa's education system to meet the needs of the 21st century, more resources need to be invested in education. There are two examples relevant to Africa: Finland and Singapore. Finland, after the Second World War, had a relatively poor education system. They had massive economic challenges, but the Finnish people as a nation transcended partisanship and decided to invest in education as a national project. Since the 1950s, the Finns have invested heavily in education and set very high standards for themselves. It has been a generational project that has now lasted some six decades. In the course of the last 60 years, they have utterly transformed

their education sector. Today, Finland is rated as the country with the "best education system in the world" according to one report published by the World Economic Forum⁷. By boosting their education system, they have utterly transformed their economy.

Singapore has a similar story. From a poor country in the 1960s with an economy smaller than Zimbabwe and even Kenya's, Singapore is today an economic powerhouse with an economy that's 14 times larger than that of Zimbabwe, and three times larger than Kenya's, Eastern Africa's largest economy⁸. Singapore's economy has been built on the back of massive investment in education over six decades, as the country's founding leader Lee Kuan Yew illustrated in his widely-acclaimed book *From Third World to First*.

What is significant in both countries is that they have not paid lip service to the notion that education is a priority. In Zimbabwe the education sector is nominally our top priority. If you look at the budget announced in Parliament, the education sector tends to be the biggest *theoretical* recipient of budget money. But my own experience as a minister is that in practice, this isn't so. The theoretical budget is rarely matched by the actual amount transferred to the education sector. The reality is that the Ministry of Defence, other security ministries and the Office of the Cabinet, get the lion's share of finance in real terms. I suspect that this is the case in most African States.

It is a prickly issue, but when it comes to the budgetary priorities in countries, particularly in Africa, governments are spending far too much on national security and the self-preservation of existing governing parties. Africa still has far too many bloated cabinets and bureaucracies which allow many African leaders to have lifestyles that are way above the standards the vast majority of the people they govern. The tragedy is that even in democratic countries, where there is a chance of a peaceful and lawful transfer of power, governments rarely take the hard decisions to invest in education because there is an understanding that the fruits of those decisions will not be enjoyed during their tenure of office.

4 Data from the World Bank and the UNESCO Institute of Statistics. Available from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.ENRL.TC.ZS?locations=ZG>

5 Data from the World Development Indicators available from <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>

6 World Bank & UNESCO (2022). *Education Finance Watch 2022*. Available from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/publication/education-finance-watch-2022>

7 Colagrossi, Mike. (2018, Sep 10). 10 reasons why Finland's education system is the best in the world. World Economic Forum.

Available from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/09/10-reasons-why-finlands-education-system-is-the-best-in-the-world>

8 Data from the World Bank available from <https://data.worldbank.org/?locations=SG-ZW-KE>

For a sustained transformation of African educational systems to succeed there needs to be a long-term financing policy. The fruits of such investment will not be seen in one parliamentary or presidential term of office. If democrats find this unpalatable, how about the tyrants whose only objective is the retention of power at any cost? This is why we need to develop a deep-rooted national consensus and understanding that successful investment in education needs to be a generational project. Indeed, the African Union's Agenda 2063, the 50-year development plan recognizes investment in education as core and key to Africa's development⁹. But the question remains, will African governments implement the goals and aspirations for their national education systems to produce "well-educated and skilled citizens, underpinned by science, technology and innovation for a knowledge society"?

If the world spent just an equivalent of 10% of the money spent on nuclear weapons in the last 50 years on education in the third world, the world would be a much different, better, and safer place than it is today. And Europe particularly would not be facing the specter of people trying to cross over the Mediterranean into Europe in the numbers they are now.

I end with this question: Why does Africa need sophisticated fighter jets and weaponry, when we can't even buy textbooks for our children? Africa will become a far safer place when children have hope and that will only come through a massive and sustained increase in our investment in education.

2. African governments must elevate and value the teaching profession

In most African countries, teaching as a profession was held in high esteem, attracted the best talent, and paid well. Most successful people attributed their success to the influence of their teachers. However, years of underfunding of education amid increasing workload led to the perennial strikes for better terms of service, agitation for better and more infrastructure to mitigate classroom congestion and a messy teacher-to-pupils ratio. Consequently, the alluring prestige of the profession was slowly eroded. For instance, a February 2022 report of the African Union showed that in Madagascar, frequent absenteeism of teachers and lack of training for most primary school teachers, had not only led to decreased enrollment levels, but also there was a high number of unqualified teachers in the education system¹⁰. Other literature shows that in Ghana, some teachers have senior high school certificate raising concern about the aptitude and qualification of teachers, and the quality of teaching in schools¹¹.

In South Africa and Kenya, the concern about the quality and number of qualified teachers is addressed through mechanisms of continuing education to equip teachers with new skills and pedagogical knowledge to be able to deliver the goals of the evolving curricula.

My experience in Zimbabwe shows that teaching now attracts many people who aren't able to study for other professions, or the profession is taken as a backstop until better opportunities in other professions come along. Teachers are poorly paid and cannot afford to adequately educate their own children. They live in squalid conditions. They have few resources. Soldiers in the country have better working and living conditions than teachers. I recently visited a school in Dibilishaba in southwestern Zimbabwe, and I was staggered by the shocking living conditions of the teachers. These teachers who earn paltry salaries had banded together to get themselves a few solar panels, some batteries, and a satellite dish so that they can get access to Wi-Fi. Through their own dedication they realized that access to the internet is a crucial component of their mission to uplift the children in their care. This conforms to my own experience about the resilience of our teachers who have been historically our greatest asset and remain diligent and utterly committed to their vocation.

Contrast these circumstances of teachers in African countries with those of their counterparts in Finland and Singapore. In Finland, one must have a Masters degree in to become a teacher. A 2018 report on Education for Global Development published by the World Bank noted that teachers in Finland are "are highly valued, the teaching career is prestigious, demanding, and reserved for the most talented and hard-working."¹² It is very competitive profession that "only one fifth of all applicants to primary teacher education programmes in Finnish universities are admitted. Their conditions of service reflect their status in society"¹³. In Singapore, if one wants to study education one has to have top secondary school examination marks. They are paid a stipend during their training and bonded for three years. They have a professional development programme that allows them to continuously upgrade their education. In other words, the Singapore Government treats the teaching profession in the same way most African countries treat engineers and doctors.

We need to change our mindset as Africans about the value of the teaching profession. We need our best brains teaching our children. I find it ironic that we Africans treasure all children with a passion and yet are prepared to put our children into the hands of people who themselves have a second-rate education and who lack motivation. If we truly love our children, and by children, I mean all our Nations' children, then as

9 African Union (2015). Report of the commission on the African Union Agenda 2063. The Africa We Want.

Available from https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36204-doc-agenda2063_popular_version_en.pdf

10 African Union (2022). Second Continental Report on the Implementation of Agenda 2016, p19.

Available from https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/41480-doc-2nd_Continental_Progress_Report_on_Agenda_2063_English.pdf

11 Buabeng, I., Ntow, F. D., & Otami, C. D. (2020). Teacher Education in Ghana: Policies and Practices. *Journal of Curriculum and Teaching*, 9(1), 86-95. Available from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/index.php/jct/article/view/16692>

12 Saavedra, J., Alasuutari, H., & Guitierrez, M. (2018). Teachers and trust: Cornerstones of the Finnish education system. World Bank.

Available from <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/teachers-and-trust-cornerstones-finnish-education-system>

13 Ibid.

governments, we will ensure that we attract the best brains and the best-educated teachers, not dispirited, anguished individuals who are looking for any job. We need motivated, well-educated and enthusiastic teachers. Without that critical component any thought of an African renaissance will remain a mere dream.

3. African countries need to identify and nurture their best talent

“Africa will be a continent where the talent of the child and the youth will be fully developed, rewarded and protected for the benefit of society,” according to the African Union’s Agenda 2063.

Countries across Africa have burgeoning populations. Existing schools are overwhelmed by the growing numbers of children. African governments are neither building schools nor training teachers quickly enough to keep up with the increasing number of children needing an education. Therefore, talent-spotting, especially for disadvantaged children, is difficult in learning institutions already saddled with high enrollment numbers, teacher shortages, and other weaknesses of the national education system on the continent. Consequently, some countries have created *centres of excellence* for their best and brightest in the country, to experiment, nurture and perfect their talents in academics, sports and the arts.

I had a similar idea for Zimbabwe, to identify two high schools in every province in the country develop them into “academies” offering world-class education in every province for the most-talented disadvantaged children. Kenya had a similar proposal to transform at least one high school in every constituency into a centre of excellence. In South Africa, different provinces explored the idea of turning some schools into centres of excellence. The idea behind these academies or centres of excellence was to equip them with optimum conditions for educational excellence in the three As, namely academics, athletics and the arts – that means modern classrooms, laboratories, workshops, libraries, sports facilities, art centres, and everything that a world-class school requires. These schools would recruit the best teachers, deploy the best technology, and provide all the learning materials needed for the success of these schools. Thereafter, the headteachers would competitively identify bright disadvantaged children and recommend their admission based on their academic aptitude, athleticism, or artistic talents. In these centres of excellence, they would be nurtured, their talent sharpened, in readiness for showcasing it on the world stage. The criticism against these centres was that it was elitist. My response was that it was not elitist because only disadvantaged children would attend.

One of the greatest tragedies in Africa is that there are millions of highly talented children, who are getting little or no education and whose talents are unexploited. There are bright children living in squalor, who aren’t identified and even if they are noticed, there is no mechanism to nurture them, to channel them into good schools where their na-

scent talent can be enhanced and allowed to blossom. Private schools do this in Zimbabwe and in many African countries but are too expensive and so poor talented children rarely get into them. My belief was, and is, that these highly talented jewels (talented disadvantaged children) have the capacity to inspire the rest of the nation. They are the ones who will create jobs, to lead us on the sporting field to the highest goals possible, who are going to demonstrate all the artistic glory Africa has to offer. If their talents are identified and nurtured, they can disproportionately grow a nation’s capital in a way which ultimately benefits all.

Governments need to invest heavily in ensuring that the talents of underprivileged children are not lost, if needs be by investing in new schools with excellent facilities which are specifically designed to nurture the unique talents of underprivileged children. The starting point in changing the negative education narrative in Africa is to ensure that our best talent is identified, nurtured, allowed to thrive, and given opportunities to compete with the best in the world, so that it in turn can inspire future generations. Already some African countries such as Ethiopia, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique have centres of excellence for tertiary and university education. Scaling these to high schools and primary schools will be a great first step of identifying talent early, nurturing it, and gearing basic education towards the individual and national development goals and priorities. The progressive upgrading of schools into centres of excellence, through massive long-term investments in the education sector will in the end transform the whole education system by providing world-class inclusive education.

4. African teachers need to optimize the use of new technologies to improve access to and variety of educational materials

The best teachers in the world struggle to teach without adequate education materials. In most African countries textbooks are in short supply and most children and teachers do not have access to the internet. The unit cost of textbooks tends to be high, a situation created by relatively small orders of individual textbooks, further compounded by cartels in the publishing industry who conspire to push up prices. Computers, smartphones and internet infrastructure and access are prohibitively expensive. Most teachers do not even have smartphones. By leveraging on the use of these digital devices, as rolled out in South Africa, Kenya, Botswana and Rwanda, school children have an early access to computers, and subsequently develop the key digital skills needed to thrive and succeed in the knowledge society. Many other countries such as Tunisia, Nigeria, Angola and Uganda are experimenting with digital literacy programmes with similar objectives.

We need to think collectively as Africans and collaboratively publish basic textbooks in certain common subjects which can be produced in massive quantities and used right across Anglophone and Francophone Africa. This will offer the economies of scale and lower the production cost.

Specifically, we need to recognize that the most important years of education are in the first decade of a child's life and focus on ensuring, at the very least, that education materials for this stage of education are given priority. Governments must prioritise investment in education materials to ensure that all children have access to the educational materials required for fundamental numeracy and literacy skills. While the provision of education materials for secondary education is important, the key investment required in the short-term is in primary education

Tied to this, is the need to dramatically increase both teachers' and students' access to the internet, particularly in rural areas. The first gamechanger which I tried to implement was the concept of "school in a box". I worked very closely with Apple to develop a box for rural schools comprising an iPad, solar panels and a projector. The iPads were to be loaded with comprehensive teaching materials to enable teachers to teach chemistry or biology in the most remote rural schools without access to the internet or traditional laboratories. Chemistry and biology experiments would be created virtually and loaded on to iPads, which lessons could then be projected onto a bare white classroom wall, greatly enhancing the teaching materials available to teachers and the learning experience of students.

The second gamechanger unfolding throughout Africa is the brainchild of someone schooled in Africa - Elon Musk. Although Musk is a controversial person, his Starlink project with its high-speed, low-maintenance broadband has the potential to hugely transform the education sector in Africa. While Starlink is not the only provider of broadband in Africa, at present there is no other company which provides this potential. My understanding is that for some US\$110 per month recipients can receive high-speed broadband internet¹⁴. Starlink has recently announced plans to extend Starlink to some 22 African nations, including Zimbabwe¹⁵.

If African governments collectively enter into agreements with Starlink it may be that rural schools can be linked to high-speed internet which has the potential to dramatically change the access of teachers and students to the best online teaching materials and supplements the world has to offer. The key however is work together to reduce the cost of accessing Starlink (or any other company providing a similar service) so that it becomes affordable to poor schools across Africa. At the same time western donor nations need to consider making computers, smartphones and other hardware available to African schools at the lowest possible cost.

If African governments collaborate in a continental exercise, they can negotiate a dramatic reduction in the unit cost of such equipment. Once again, such an exercise needs African governments to allocate the necessary budgetary resources

to purchase this equipment and to provide the servicing back-up required to keep such equipment working in future.

5. The education curriculum must intentionally balance between academic and vocational education

Aligning education systems and curricula to the national development goals remains a key goal of many countries, especially given the post-independence experience, where some countries realized their education systems were producing graduates who were ill-equipped for the job market. For example, Kenya and Tanzania, whose post-independence educational system emphasized self-reliance, had to recalibrate their systems to align to the new realities of the job market. Kenya has once again changed its curriculum to competence-based in a bid to prepare the graduates of the education system for the job market.

South Africa, Rwanda, Benin, Senegal, Morocco and even Ghana, have all adopted curricula that focuses on building on competencies. It is logical that if any curriculum is going to teach carpentry and joinery or welding and fabrication effectively, teachers must be trained in practical skills and all the materials required to teach such skills provided. This requires a massive investment. Accordingly, while ostensibly there is a new vocational curriculum in some of these countries, due to teacher shortage, lack of equipment and inadequate funds, some institutions teach these practical skills in theory, and therefore students come away with limited, or non-existent practical skills. To deal with the massive investment, countries such as Ghana have adopted public-private partnerships to inculcate the practical skills in their students and match their skills to those in the industries.

Finland has achieved a remarkable balance between academic and vocational education. Nonacademic, practically skilled, children in Finland, obtain an outstanding vocational education. Students who, for example, are talented carpenters, are taught the skills in school which enable them to become world-class carpenters. Schools are staffed by teachers who themselves are talented carpenters. Schools have lathes, saw, drills, wood - all the materials one needs to teach carpentry in a practical way. In contrast in Zimbabwe most of the technical schools which taught these practical skills have fallen by the wayside. It is far cheaper to teach English and mathematics because all one needs is a teacher, a blackboard and textbooks.

However, countries must merge the pedagogical ideals of their educational curriculum, with the socio-economic goals and political realities. This fine balance has to be maintained, for as Nelson Mandela, the first black South African president and Nobel laureate, said: "Education is the great engine

14 Condon, Stephanie (2022). What is Starlink? Everything you need to know about Elon Musk's satellite internet service. ZDNET. Available from <https://www.zdnet.com/home-and-office/networking/starlink-satellite-internet-how-does-it-work-cost-features-speed/>

15 Labuschagne, Hanno. (2023, January 20). Zimbabwe and 21 other African countries getting Starlink before South Africa. *My Broadband*. Available from <https://mybroadband.co.za/news/broadband/476903-zimbabwe-and-21-other-african-countries-getting-starlink-before-south-africa.html>

of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mine worker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another.”

If African economies are going to grow and compete with industrialised countries the teaching of vocational skills is crucial. It requires a balance between the teaching of academic and vocational subjects. Tied to this is the need to identify the particular talents and gifts of children so that they can be channelled into academic or vocational schools. As stated above a whole new generation of teachers with practical skills needs to be developed. Again, for this to be successful governments across the continent need to increase education budgets to meet this need.

6. More public participation and stakeholder involvement in policymaking

Far too many African governments, and this is particularly so in Zimbabwe, develop policies from the top down without consulting adequately with stakeholders.

I had the unusual “benefit” of being appointed Minister of Education as a lawyer with an acute appreciation that I was not an educationist. In my first meeting with top civil servants in the ministry I expressed this concern and advised that I couldn’t develop policies unless I learned from them, and unless we all consulted broadly. I then coopted the leaders from teachers’ trade unions and our best educationists into a National Education Advisory Board (NEAB). Before I implemented any policy, I made sure that there was a broad consensus amongst my senior civil servants and NEAB.

Public consultation in policymaking boosts stakeholder and citizen buy-in, improves transparency, increases efficiency and effectiveness of policies and regulations. In many countries on the continent, education policies have run into implementation headwinds due to the absence of public consultation.

Whether it is about changing the curriculum in Kenya, adopting digital technology in Botswana, or even redefining teachers’ terms of service or the cost of education in Ghana or South Africa, all these require adequate consultation, because it is not just about an education system, but about the future of our children, and our country. We all have a stake in it. Broad and genuine consultation and consensus building is critical if we are going to transform the education sector throughout Africa.

7. Focus on the girl child

The African Union Agenda 2063, the development roadmap for Africa, anticipates that in 2063 “will have full gender parity, with women occupying at least 50% of elected public offices at all levels and half of managerial positions in the public and the private sectors”¹⁶. “The economic and political glass ceiling that restricted women’s progress will have been shattered”¹⁷, the roadmap predicts. Recent Unesco data supports this prediction as it shows that the enrolment numbers and the primary school completion rates for both boys and girls are within five percentage points of each other¹⁸.

While the need for an equitable distribution of educational resources between boys and girls may seem obvious to most people, there is a major strategic reason why heavy investment in the girl child must be a key component in addressing the crisis in education in Africa. It is rooted in the goal that entire nations appreciate the need for a generational, decades-long, commitment to education, which is necessary to create a national desire to invest heavily in education. We will not achieve this generational desire if mothers themselves do not appreciate the importance of education.

When we deprive mothers of education, we deprive their children of having a motivator to explain to them how important education is for life. If mothers themselves have had a deficient education, they are at a disadvantage. They may not inspire their children to learn. It follows that giving the girl child a good education goes far beyond what that single child will benefit from - it is in fact a foundational prerequisite to ensure that future generations do the same. It is a critical component in developing a decades-long, progressive and continually enhancing vision for education in every nation. When mothers understand the need to make education the absolute family priority then nations change; and not only do girls benefit, but boys also reap the dividends.

As former US President Barack Obama said in 2015 in Kenya, “any nation that fails to educate its girls or employ its women and allowing them to maximize their potential is doomed to fall behind in a global economy”¹⁹.

8. Autonomy for schools rather than centralized control

Finally, we need more autonomy in the education sector. While governments have to be involved in developing curricula, channelling resources, achieving economies of scale in the procurement of educational materials, and in the development of efficient assessment schemes and examination systems, it is wrong to think that governments are

¹⁶ African Union (2015). African Union Agenda 2063. The Africa We Want. Available from https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36204-doc-agenda2063_popular_version_en.pdf

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ UNESCO (2022). *New estimation confirms out-of-school population is growing in sub-Saharan Africa*. Factsheet 62/ Policy Paper 48. Available from <https://inee.org/sites/default/files/resources/382577eng.pdf>

¹⁹ Obama, Barack (2015). Remarks by President Obama to the Kenyan People. The White House Archives. Available from <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/07/26/remarks-president-obama-kenyan-people>

solely responsible for the development of strong and effective education systems. Indeed one of the reasons why some education systems fail is because of centralized control of education which undermines the critically important role of parents in the education of their children.

One of the critical reasons why there remains a difference in attitude, even to this day, by parents towards education between Zimbabwe and South Africa is that the Todd Government in the 1950s deliberately engaged parents and involved them in the education of their children, whereas the South African apartheid regime shunned parents and deliberately excluded them from having any role in the education of their children. Black parents in apartheid ruled South Africa had little say in the education of their children and that tragically resulted in a totally different mindset amongst the vast majority of parents in South Africa regarding the value of education.

I am generalizing now, and there are obviously exceptions, but in Zimbabwe education is revered still by parents. Parents understand the importance of education because they have been involved in the education of their children as far

back as the 1950s. The result is that in Zimbabwe several generations have developed understanding the critical importance of education.

In my experience in Zimbabwe the best schools are those where headmasters and teachers work closely with parents and local communities. Where one encourages parents and local communities to get involved in developing their schools, that is where one gets the best possible quality of education. What marks out many of Zimbabwe's top schools, both private and public, is the involvement of parents and the intense interest they display in the education of their children.

Accordingly, governments throughout Africa need to involve parents in the development of education policy, and the location, running and maintenance of schools. It is a fine balance which needs to be achieved because most parents are not educationists and so should not dominate the development of policy at national or school level. But they must be consulted and involved at every level if a broad national understanding and desire to enhance education is to be achieved.

Conclusion

In writing this paper I am deeply conscious of the fact that I am not an educationist, and that the development of the finer details of education policy need competent and objective subject matter experts to succeed.

However, as a former Minister of Education and the initiator and developer of one school in Zimbabwe (which is now one of the top schools in Zimbabwe) I have some understanding of the extraordinary challenges facing this sector. Zimbabwe itself faces the greatest crisis in its education sector in decades and if this is not addressed the future economic development of Zimbabwe will be retarded for generations

to come. Addressing the issues raised in this paper is the crucial game changer for Zimbabwe and Africa.

No matter what economic programmes African nations have, no matter what resources we have in Africa, if we do not educate our children for the future, our economic goals and objectives will not be met.

We need to think again. My hope is that this paper stirs debate and provokes renewed determination to tackle the deep-rooted problems in education systems throughout Africa.

This paper was developed from a speech given by Senator Coltart to the 2nd Annual Maalim Seif Hamad Legacy Conference held in Zanzibar on the 22nd and 23rd October 2022.

