

Developments and Trends in Secondary Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

Ken Kaziputa Ndala
University of Witwatersrand
ndalak@hse.pg.wits.ac.za

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I. Introduction

The development of secondary education in Africa and other low-income countries is receiving renewed interest. Governments and the donor community alike have expressed concern over the need to expand access to relevant and good-quality secondary education, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Their renewed commitment has in general terms come as a result of three confluent factors.

First, the expansion of primary education has been propelled by Education for All initiatives (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Many of the countries that have committed themselves to the attainment of EFA and MDG goals have moved towards high Gross Enrolment Rates (GER) for primary education. But higher enrolment rates in primary schools has increased pressure on secondary schools, and attempts to expand secondary education have resulted in a deterioration in quality.

Second, expansion also appears necessary because the secondary education curriculum has lost some of its relevance. The need for a more sophisticated labor force equipped with appropriate competencies, knowledge, and workplace skills is increasing in many economies, coupled with the need for such labor to be available globally. In addition, secondary education is increasingly considered to be complete on its own: rather than aiming exclusively to pave the way for a subsequent university education, it should enable graduates to operate small businesses or find employment without further qualifications. The current secondary education curriculum has proven to be inadequate for this task.

Third, the demand for a renewed commitment has also come as a result of the critical role a well-educated young generation can play in enhancing democracy, human rights, and rule of law; good citizenship is one outcome of a good education. In addition, it is hoped that the inclusion of relevant teaching content on the prevention of HIV/AIDS—a burning problem in SSA—at this important stage in a young student's personal development will help them take long-term decisions to avoid risky behavior.

This paper is based on a review of various assessment reports on the performance of secondary education in SSA and summarizes developments in the sector over the past few decades. It begins by outlining what the main purpose of secondary education in SSA has been in the past, and whether and how this purpose may be changing. The paper then briefly describes the outlines of a quality secondary education according to UNESCO. This provides the basic framework for the subsequent analysis of the current status of secondary education in SSA and how it has developed, focusing on the key issues of access and equity, quality, relevance, and policy.

2. The Purpose of Secondary Education

It appears that from decolonization onward, education experts have had difficulties in articulating objectives for secondary education in Africa. Secondary education tended to simply continue working towards the purposes set by the old colonial education system. The first education policy released by the British government in Africa after reassessing the status of education in 1925 stipulated:

African education should be adapted to local conditions by placing emphasis on local traditions, vernacular languages, technical, vocational and religious education (Fafunwa, 1971, p. 46).

Although there have been efforts to clearly state the aims of secondary education in relation to specific African needs, the current goals appear, by and large, to be the same as those under colonial administration. Little has been done in Africa to develop goals that can provide credible solutions to the challenges the continent is experiencing today.

Some attempts, however, have been made to define the essence of secondary education from the perspective of Africans (Fafunwa, 1971). Many observers believe that the stated purpose of secondary education should reflect the conditions in Africa, which are often fundamentally different from those in other parts of the world. For example, much of Africa is still battling with problems of food, poverty, clothing, shelter, or access to primary education. According to Fafunwa (1971, p. 51), secondary education in Africa should therefore aim to develop the following abilities in the African youth:

1. To think effectively;
2. To communicate thought clearly;
3. To make relevant judgment;
4. To play one's part as a useful member of one's home and family;
5. To understand basic facts about health and sanitation;
6. To understand and appreciate one's role as a citizen of a sovereign country;
7. To understand and appreciate one's cultural heritage;
8. To develop economic efficiency both as a consumer and as a producer of goods;
9. To acquire some vocational skill;
10. To recognize the dignity of labor;
11. To develop ethical character;
12. To appreciate the use of leisure;
13. To understand the world outside one's environment;
14. To develop a scientific attitude towards problems;
15. To live and act as a well-integrated individual.

Decades ago already, new purposes for secondary education in SSA were thus articulated; little has been done in the meantime to turn them into reality. According to most of these proposals, the main goal of secondary education should be to produce graduates who are able to stand on their own feet after completing their secondary education, be it through employment or by starting up a simple business that can sustain them. The experience of the past two decades, however, suggests that the performance of secondary education is simply not up to the task. Programs have

instead tended to be exam-oriented, aiming to secure their graduates a place at university, which further accentuates inequity.

Interestingly, the twenty-first century has seen a renewed interest in a redefinition of the aims of secondary education in SSA. This interest comes in response to the various challenges that have been emerging. For example, many of the SSA countries are attempting to attain universal primary enrolment; as a result, secondary education is threatening to become the weakest link in the education system.

Against this background, three main aims are coming into focus. A report on the status of education in SSA released by UNESCO-BREDA (Aw & Mariro, 2001) summarizes these three key aims, as outlined in numerous documents on secondary education, as follows:

1. Enhance young adolescents' basic knowledge to raise their general education level;
2. Prepare students for their harmonious integration into working, professional and social life;
3. Prepare students for higher education or technical and vocational institutions.

The aims of secondary education as suggested by Fafunwa (1971) and those summarized by UNESCO (Aw & Mariro, 2001) show a great degree of similarity. The first three listed by Fafunwa refer to the cognitive essence of the education process; the UNESCO report summarizes them as “enhancing knowledge.” Thus, the main concern for secondary education is to provide youth with capabilities to engage in critical thinking on the basis of knowledge. They should be able to communicate their ideas well and make relevant judgments.

The second category as articulated by UNESCO focuses on the home, the workplace, and social life more generally. This can be better understood in the context in which Fafunwa defines his aims four to eight, stressing the point that, as much as we may impart critical thinking skills in youth, the extent to which they will be integrated into their community is also important for their further development. In SSA, where most secondary education graduates do not have access to higher or tertiary education, this integration is especially important. Good citizenship—relating to issues of human rights, crime prevention, and respect for the rule of law, among others—should be of the utmost importance for them.

The third key purpose of secondary education concerns vocational skills, a domain that has been highlighted in various documents; Fafunwa refers to these aims in number nine, and also 14.

Whatever phrasing is chosen to express the main purposes of secondary education in SSA, implementation has clearly been inadequate. While the stated purposes have evolved quite a bit over time, their effective incorporation into the secondary education system continues to be a challenge to this day.

3. Outlines of a Quality Secondary Education

Articulating the purpose and basic outlines of a quality secondary education is a precondition for assessing whether these goals are being achieved by a given system. Such an assessment will then use different angles, for example access, quality, equity, planning and management, as outlined by Gottelman-Duret (1999). The simple framework analysis outlined below was used by Bregman and Bryner (2003) in their study of the performance of secondary education in Africa. The framework has been adapted for the purpose of this report, whose analysis will not require all its details.

Table I: Attributes of quality secondary education

ANGLES OF ANALYSIS	ATTRIBUTES
Is the system accessible to all?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Do all adolescents have equitable access to secondary education? ▶ Are transition mechanisms in place for smooth progression?
Is the secondary education curriculum well structured, relevant, and balanced?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Does the curriculum provide content that prepares students for further studies? ▶ Does the curriculum provide competencies to participate in the world of work and democratic societies? ▶ Is the curriculum gender and poverty balanced? ▶ Do secondary education graduate profiles exist, and are they updated regularly? ▶ Does the curriculum include sufficient information on healthy lifestyle, ecology, and civic and community life?
Do the inputs (teachers, learning materials, school environment) generate maximum student learning at secondary education level?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Do secondary teachers and trainers have sufficient knowledge and training of the subject they are teaching? ▶ Do the teaching and pedagogical practices stimulate student understanding and creativity? ▶ Do evaluation and feedback mechanisms appropriately assess student knowledge and guide further instruction? ▶ Are sufficient and updated learning and teaching materials available in all the regions of the country at all schools? ▶ Does the school environment enhance the learning process?
Do policies and institutional governance allow efficient organization, implementation, monitoring, and allocation of resources?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Are adequate strategies and operational plans in place and agreed by all major stakeholders? ▶ Are funds equitably disseminated and allocated? ▶ Do administrative structures allow for accountability mechanisms? ▶ Is the structure of the system set up to allow students smooth transition between levels as well as within levels?

Adapted from Bregman & Bryner, 2003

A good national secondary education system should be able to provide educational services to a country's citizens regardless of their geographical location, gender, learning abilities, or socio-economic status. Once enrolled, students should also be able to complete all grades and the secondary level overall.

Bregman and Bryner (2003) observe that although relevance is an elusive indicator of quality, the curriculum should nevertheless be defined in the context of social, cultural, and economic requirements of individual countries and in the context of regional and global developments. Countries need educated citizens who are able to understand difficult issues, make informed decisions, and hold officials accountable for their actions. Attaining high levels of scientific literacy is also crucial for participating in the new global knowledge economy.

The quality and relevance of teaching is held by many observers to be the single most important factor that determines secondary school effectiveness. Bregman and Bryner (2003) maintain that this implies teachers with a solid knowledge of the subjects, interactive pedagogy, keen classroom management, and the ability to provide students with helpful feedback and evaluation. Sufficient supplies of teaching and learning materials and up-to-date student textbooks also augment the teaching and learning process.

The quality and relevance of teaching, however, is embedded in a quality national education system, which in turn requires supportive government policies. These will affect the way in which resources will be allocated and whether they will be sufficient for the achievement of the set goals. Governments that allow regional and local flexibility in the adaptation of the curriculum to local needs, in the recruitment of staff, or in the involvement of communities—parents, teachers, and students—in educational decisions create relevance and ownership. Policies that provide accountability mechanisms will also encourage quality services.

4. The Current State of Secondary Education in SSA

Most assessments on the state of secondary education in SSA are based on the analysis of data at national level. It is also not uncommon that most relevant data to be used in an assessment are in fact unavailable. International indicators like Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Gender Parity Index (GPI), or Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) are frequently used to show differences in participation in secondary education across countries. However, little comprehensive data and analysis of secondary education at sub-national level is available, which makes it difficult or impossible to compare not just the performance of different countries but their performance with respect to geographical regions, urban or rural settings, rich or poor populations, or different groups of students (such as disabled students).

4.1. Access and Equity

Several assessments of secondary education in SSA (Aw & Mariro, 2001; Bregman & Bryner, 2003; Cuadra & Moreno, 2005; Lewin & Cailloids, 2001; Mulford, 2002) and the available data from UNESCO suggest that access, quality, and relevance of learning are currently not sufficient to support economic and social development. To name but the two most obvious figures: the illiteracy rate in SSA is quoted at 39 percent, with Gambia having the highest at 69 percent and Zimbabwe the lowest at 11 percent, while the GER average for secondary education is just between 20 and 25 percent for the approximately 88 million people in SSA (out of a total population of some 600 million) who are of secondary-school age (Bregman & Bryner, 2003).

Table 2: GERs for secondary education in select SSA countries (1980-2002)

	1980		1990		2002	
	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female
Angola	13	9	12	n/a	19	17
Botswana	21	22	43	45	73	75
Lesotho	18	21	23	21	35	39
Malawi	3	2	4	3	33	29
Mozambique	5	3	8	6	16	13
Swaziland	38	37	47	46	88	91
Tanzania	3	2	5	4	6	5
Zambia	16	11	20	15	28	25
Zimbabwe	8	6	50	46	36	35

Source: UNESCO, 1991-2005

The analysis by Lewin and Calloids (2001) shows that of the 150 countries for which GER figures were available, 44 had a GER below 40 percent; of these, two-thirds were in Africa. SSA countries had the lowest GERs, and most of these countries were francophone.

Table 2 shows that overall, GERs in SSA have not substantially increased between 1980 and 2002, with the exception of Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi—which experienced a dramatic rise in its GER from just 4 percent in 1990 to 33 percent in 2002—and Swaziland. Tanzania has roughly remained stagnant since 1980, while Zimbabwe has experienced a decline in the past decade.

In 2000, the proportion of the SSA population with some secondary education was significantly lower than in other regions of the world (World Bank, 2005) despite the fact that in the 1960s, SSA had a higher share than South Asia, the Middle East, or North Africa.

Taken together, these figures suggest that in SSA, only a small minority participates in and finishes secondary schooling.

Although there are some increases in GERs, female participation has persistently lagged that of males; the 2002 EFA Global Monitoring Report points out that 22 percent of girls and 26 percent of boys have access to secondary education. Most SSA countries show GERs of less than 40 percent for girls (Table 2). Exceptions are Botswana and Swaziland, where the female participation exceeds 70 percent. However, it appears that both countries have traditionally had a higher share of females in the overall population than other countries (Ansell, 2002), which tends to push up female enrolment. Considerable efforts are still needed to promote girls' access and retention in schools.

As mentioned earlier, a special concern are marginalized groups on which information is hardly available. It is reported, for example, that 65 percent of the SSA population live in rural areas. There is therefore a clear need to disaggregate education statistics to see whether there are rural-urban discrepancies. The same applies to socio-economic indicators or children with special needs. It is well known that secondary education tends to be available mostly to an elite; most secondary-school pupils are likely to come from comparatively well-off families. Parts of SSA also have nomadic populations, whose participation in secondary education is presumably fairly low. At present, most statements about the various marginalized groups that are left out of statistics and analysis would have to be based on conjecture and assumptions.

4.2. The Curriculum

The debate on improving the quality and provision of secondary education in developing countries has often revolved around the question of relevance of the curriculum. Remarkably, this has been an outstanding concern for secondary education in SSA from its inception.

In order to remain relevant, the curriculum at all levels should follow cycles of ten years or less, sufficient time to take account of new approaches, technologies, and knowledge as well as other emerging issues that need attention. As a rule, such change has not occurred on a regular basis in SSA. Interestingly, the demand for change in the secondary-school curriculum has been amplified by its awkward position within the hierarchy of educational development: secondary education, being in the middle of primary and tertiary levels, has been identified as the weakest link in education development (Mulford, 2002). Poor results at that level have two consequences: first, those who do not proceed to tertiary education tend to be unproductive and contribute little to the development of the economy and of social life. Second, those who do proceed to tertiary education have not gained the relevant skills that the contemporary world needs.

Notably, at a 1962 UNESCO meeting which discussed the adaptation of the general secondary curriculum in Africa, experts were of the opinion that secondary education in Africa should no longer retain the academic character it had had up to that point and that secondary education should be adapted to suit the needs and realities of the countries in question. This, however, was not new; the Phelps-Stokes Report on Africa had already pointed in that direction (Scanlon, 1964). The challenge has

persisted to this day: which types of education programs can be adapted to African settings and how can they be implemented? Even in the early twenty-first century experts are still grappling with these questions.

Adapting the curriculum to new conditions has not been easy for several reasons. First, as long as the purpose of secondary education remained vague and the curriculum reflected the priorities of colonial administrators, change was difficult to achieve. A special problem in this area was the continued use of examinations from overseas examination boards. Even today, some countries still favor overseas examinations, while others have set up their own national examination boards (Ansell, 2002). Second, cultural and linguistic diversity across and inside countries have discouraged a unification of policies. For example, in countries where several languages dominate, disagreements over which language should be used in education have ended up promoting the use of colonial languages like English.

The irrelevance of the curriculum has been accentuated by the emerging calamities that Africa, and especially SSA, has been experiencing. HIV/AIDS, increasing sexual harassment and youth violence, widespread degradation of renewable resources, and attempts to impose cultural homogeneity are all issues that need to be reflected in the curriculum (Mulford, 2002) since education has a key role to play in overcoming these threats. To the extent that the curriculum fails to address these challenges, many experts have described it as outdated and overloaded (Mulford, 2002; Bregman & Bryner, 2003).

Most documents reviewed for this paper agree that the typical secondary education curriculum in SSA today is above all oriented towards its function of serving as a selection mechanism for universities. In a conference held by UNESCO in December 2002 in Oman, current secondary education was described as involving a “college-bound curriculum and examination driven evaluation system over-emphasizing test scores measuring cognitive achievement and entrance to university” (Mulford, 2002, p.8). Many experts argue that the curriculum promotes rote learning and provides few opportunities to transfer and internalize knowledge.

Some positive developments in the curriculum have been reported, however. South Africa and Namibia are among the countries that have recognized the limitations of their outdated and rigid curricula and have made great efforts to revise them with relevant content and structures. More SSA countries now need to follow their lead.

4.3. Technical and Vocational Training

In the past, the secondary education curriculum was closely associated with technical and vocational training, a situation that dates back to the times of colonial administration. (The British government had decided in 1925 to make technical and vocational education a part of the curriculum for secondary schools.) In the 1980s, technical and vocational training in Africa received quite a bit of attention from donors—especially the World Bank—and most secondary curricula in SSA were rewritten to include vocational subjects. Malawi, for example, received support from the World Bank to ensure that at least one secondary school in each district offered

technical subjects. Educators thought that technical subjects would provide the skills that were needed for a country's self-sustainability.

That hope has been dashed. Most of the countries that institutionalized the teaching of technical subjects in secondary schools are now struggling to provide teaching and learning materials for these subjects because the costs are usually very high (World Bank, 2001). This has prompted many secondary schools to abandon technical subjects altogether.

In addition to the costs of teaching and learning materials, the relatively low prestige of technical and vocational subjects also contributes to their low attractiveness. The opinion is still widely held that technical subjects are for people whose academic performance is insufficient to cope with a more intellectual course of study (Fafunwa, 1971). This attitude may also be a factor behind the poor salaries attached to technical jobs in government. Although there has been a shift in attitude relating to the status of technical jobs, technical education is still ultimately regarded as a poor—even degrading—substitute for purely academic pursuits (Ansell, 2002).

A variety of studies indicate that in technical and vocational fields, public education systems generally have a weak track record in meeting the demands of the labor market. As a result, prospective employers often pay little attention to certifications and instead insist on a demonstration of skills and abilities (World Bank, 2005, quoting Chapman, 2002).

In recent years, most SSA countries have detached technical and vocational training from the secondary education curriculum and created totally new tertiary programs. It remains to be seen whether this institutional change will enhance the quality of technical and vocational education.

4.4. Quality of Teachers

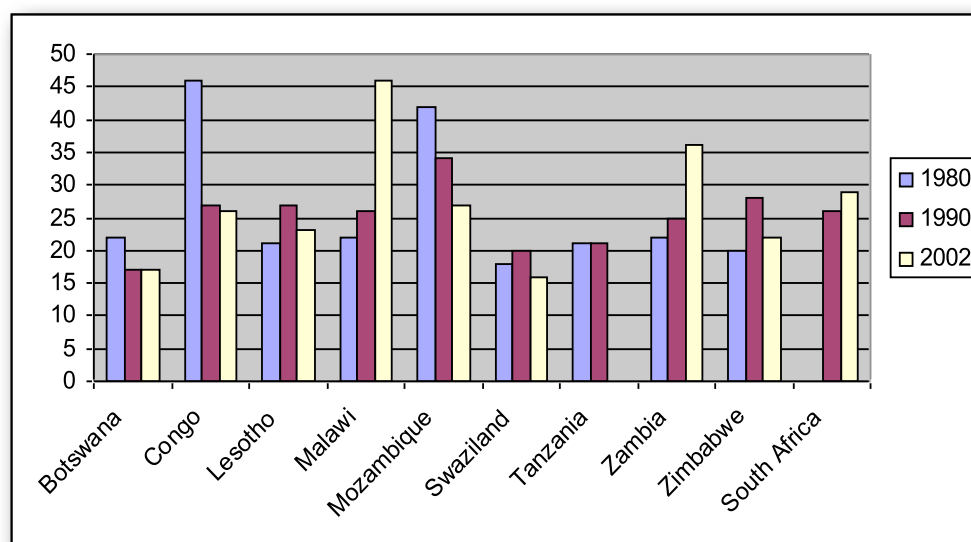
Teachers are a key enabling factor in improving the quality of secondary (or indeed, any) education. In low-income countries like those in SSA, teachers become a critical—and sometimes the only—resource for the teaching and learning process. Thus, the quality and quantity of the teaching force in secondary education in SSA is a concern as they are critical to any reform designed to improve quality. This task is made more difficult by the almost complete absence of data relating to the quality of teachers in SSA. Making objective generalizations is therefore highly problematic.

The scarce data suggest that only slightly more than 50 percent of secondary-school teachers in SSA have the proper qualifications, which is insufficient for the achievement of quality (UNESCO, 1991-2005). Malawi was at the bottom of the list in 2000: only 27 percent of its teachers in secondary education had the necessary qualifications. These figures were interpreted by some reports (Aw & Mariro, 2001, Bregman & Bryner, 2003) as an indication that the SSA countries are faced with serious teacher shortages in secondary education. This is true if one accepts a PTR of 20:1 as the standard; however, if one considers that a PTR of 40:1 may be more appropriate for these low-income countries, teacher shortages appear as less of a pressing problem in SSA. What is worrying, however, is the lack of data on teachers' qualifica-

tions, which makes it very difficult to gain an accurate picture of the situation on the ground.

Figure 1 shows a general downward trend in the PTR of most SSA countries in the period 1980 to 2002, with the exception of Malawi, Zambia, and South Africa. Botswana and Swaziland kept their PTR below 20:1 whereas Mozambique dramatically reduced its PTR from over 40:1 to slightly over 20:1. Malawi, by contrast, saw its PTR increase from 20:1 to 40:1. The key question, of course, is what PTR is appropriate for the provision of quality secondary education in countries with severe financial constraints. It would appear that a PTR of 40:1—considered to be high in developed countries—is manageable and sustainable while still ensuring proper educational provision. Pushing the PTR below 40:1 might in fact deny access and increase costs.

Figure 1: PTRs in select SSA countries (1980-2002)



4.5. Quality of Teaching and Learning Materials

The quality and availability of learning and teaching materials in SSA is evidently a problem, but just how much of a problem is difficult to determine since data are scarce. Individual studies have been carried out in specific countries, but many countries do not provide relevant data to UNESCO, which makes proper cross-country comparisons impossible.

The existing studies, however, suggest that most of the teaching and learning materials in SSA are outdated and in many cases unavailable. It is reported that two to three students are forced to share one book in the classroom (Aw & Mariro, 2001). Access to materials available on the Internet is cumbersome and the delays in downloading frustrating to teachers and pupils alike. Cases have been reported where books were available in principle but management problems prevented them from being distributed properly, or indeed being distributed at all (World Bank, 2001). It is

common to see a teacher rely heavily on a textbook while students spend more time copying notes from the chalkboard than absorbing what they are being taught.

4.6. Education Expenditures

Limited public resources and competing public spending priorities have over the past several decades prevented many countries in SSA from allocating sufficient funds to the development of their education systems. The data available for some countries (Table 3) show that the education sector there accounted for between one and 11 percent of GDP; as a percentage of government expenditure, education did not exceed 25 percent in the 1990s. Indeed, in 1995 most low-income countries spent well below 20 percent on education (Lewin & Calloids, 2001).

Table 3: Public expenditure for education in select SSA countries (1980-2000)

	Education spending as a share of GDP (%)			Education spending as a share of government expenditure (%)			Secondary education spending as a share of total education spending (%)	
	1980	1990	2000	1980	1990	2000	1980	1990
Botswana	7.1	8.4	8.6	16.1	15.9	n/a	29.2	48.8
Congo	7	5.6	4.2	22.6	n/a	12.6	29.1	n/a
Lesotho	5	3.8	10.1	12.2	13.8	18.5	33.4	34
Madagascar	5.4	n/a	2.5	8.4	10.3	n/a	25.5	n/a
Malawi	3.3	3.4	4.1	30.8	17.3	n/a	15.7	13.3
Mozambique	3.8	6.3	2.4	12.1	12	n/a	n/a	15.7
Namibia	1.6	4.7	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	35.9
Rwanda	2.7	4.2	2.8	21.6	25.4	n/a	19.9	9.6
Seychelles	5.8	8.5	7.6	14.4	11.9	n/a	n/a	46.4
South Africa	n/a	n/a	5.7	n/a	n/a	18.1	n/a	n/a
Swaziland	6.2	6.4	5.5	n/a	22.5	n/a	34.3	29
Tanzania	4.4	5.8	n/a	11.2	11.4	n/a	21.1	32.1
Uganda	1.2	2.9	2.3	11.3	22.5	n/a	58	60
Zambia	4.5	n/a	n/a	7.6	8.7	n/a	25.5	34.5
Zimbabwe	6.6	n/a	10.5	13.7	n/a	n/a	21.4	30.6

Source: UNESCO, 1991-2005

It is reported that secondary education is most expensive relative to GNP per capita in countries with the lowest enrolment rates (World Bank, 2001). Studies have also shown that developing countries with low secondary enrolment rates—most of them in Africa—cannot finance substantially higher participation rates from domestic public resources under current cost structures (Lewin & Caillods, 2001). Although

some countries have increased the funding allocated to secondary education, the absolute amount of funds might not be sufficient to generate a tangible impact.

Nevertheless, the funding increases evident in Table 3 do indicate the commitment of some governments to improving secondary education. Notable here are Botswana, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, while Malawi, Rwanda, and Swaziland saw a decline in the funds allocated to secondary education in 1990. Recent figures from Malawi show that in 2000, the secondary education sector received just 14.9 percent of the total education budget (Ministry of Education, 2000). With such funding one wonders how committed Malawi is to meet the challenges the secondary sector is facing—and the question should be asked of other countries in SSA as well.

5. Policy and Management

In the secondary education sector in SSA, policy and management have seen some progress over the past decades but continue posing a challenge. Progress on policy and management has been registered mainly in the development of strategic plans by national governments. The UNESCO Working Group on Education Sector Analysis reports numerous reviews that have been undertaken in the secondary sector over the past three decades (Samoff, 1996). Most of these analyses have shown little improvement in the involvement of local stakeholders, institutional capacity-building, or the management of human and physical resources. It is observed that most of the sector analyses involved a study team selected and paid by an agent who commissioned the study, rather than national stakeholders. Generally the team is led by an expatriate, though it typically includes one or more researchers from the country to be studied. Such analyses often fail to include grassroots stakeholders like teachers, parents, and students, which diminishes ownership of results and leads to implementation problems further down the road.

The sector has problems of institutional capacity and capacity-building in education management and administration. This has been a persistent observation over the past three decades, but little seems to be done to change it (Samoff, 1996; Bregman & Bryner, 2003). Despite various training programs—general and specific, shorter- and longer-term—there are still deficiencies in managerial and administrative skills. Furthermore, secondary education still faces teacher shortages regardless of increasing numbers of training programs. Other findings show that low salaries and poor working conditions have also contributed to the weakening of management capacity as teachers and administrators have lost morale (Bregman & Bryner, 2003).

The allocation of financial and human resources stands out as the biggest challenge in this area. The studies show that there is limited and declining funding for secondary education. However, what shows up in national statistics as a reduction in expenditure may in some cases indicate a positive development, be it the maximization of available funds through responsible use (which encourages private investment), or the decentralization of responsibilities and funding, which has given some schools a bigger role in spending. Some governments are empowering schools to control the use of funds directly rather than having it dictated. However, the overall level of funding is clearly inadequate.

Even today, one of the most formidable challenges faced by secondary education in SSA with regards to policy and management is the fact that many policies have been instituted by colonial administrations. The colonial influence is still at work in most African countries today; some observers would see it perpetuated in the fact that development agendas continue to be set by outside actors. A study carried out in Zimbabwe and Lesotho by Ansell (2002) affirms that both governments attributed the lack of change in their secondary curriculums to resistance against abandoning colonial models of education. In its report UNESCO (Samoff, 1996) recognized that donor agencies have often become direct participants in national agenda-setting and have directly affected policy decisions. Given the uncertain and unstable economic, social, and political conditions prevailing in most of SSA, it is likely that such influence will continue.

6. Conclusion

This paper attempted to retrace the development of secondary education in Sub-Saharan Africa over the past decades. It observes that secondary education is receiving renewed commitment—but also pressure—as a result of the expansion of primary education. It notes that regardless of renewed commitments, secondary education is still affected by challenges that have existed for decades. Little, it seems, is being done to deal with those challenges; indeed, the sector has lost again many of the gains made in the late 1980s in terms of access, and SSA is lagging behind other regions of the world. The quality and relevance of secondary education have deteriorated, not least with the emergence of HIV/AIDS and increased crime, war, and violence. The need for a sophisticated labor force equipped with competencies, knowledge, and workplace skills to deal with the complex world of today is not being met. The influence of colonialism still continues and has to some extent deterred the development of policies that could deliver genuine change in the lives of the people of Africa.

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