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Education for Prisoners as a Driver for Sustainable Development in Kenya

Ongek Margaret

Lecturer, School of Education, University of Kabianga, Kenya

Otieno Shem Oricho

Postgraduate Student, School of Postgraduate Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Kisii University, Kenya

Abstract:

In line with a Policy Framework for Education, Training and Research (2005), the government of Kenya committed itself to ensure equitable access to basic education and training for all and sundry regardless of their status such as being disadvantaged, vulnerable or even imprisoned. More often than not, the general public usually tends to view prisoners as culprits of law who ought to be punished for their sins and people to be avoided by all means. However, this mentality is gradually changing given the government's efforts to transform prisoner concept and livelihoods by according them (prisoners) both academically and vocationally oriented forms of education. This step confirms the government's realization that education for prisoners is instrumental in the attainment of national goals for sustainable development. As a driver, education has the capacity to empower prisoners with knowledge, skills and values that would go a long way to impact positively on their lives, families and humanity in general. Acquisition of requisite skills and values would also trigger the rehabilitation and eventual integration of prisoners back in to society. This paper surveys the various facets of education in prison with an intention to make certain suggestions which would intensify its impact upon society and eventually accelerate sustainable development.

Keywords: Prisoner, vocational education, rehabilitation, driver, sustainable development

1. Introduction

The world's current total population is estimated at 7,456,807,483 (7.5 billion) with China taking the lead (Worldometers, 2016). Of this, approximately 10.2 million people consisting of men, women and children are held in penal institutions around the globe (Walmsley, 2013). This figure is alarming given the international trend in escalating crime rate with modern technological apparatus currently in use. It is imminent that the wave of criminality will shoot and without taking education to the prisoners, then illiteracy and ignorance will add to the already deplorable state in which the world finds itself. The continued prevalence of criminal activities world wide might drastically slow down the drive to the desired sustainable development through education.

Ishumi (1976) defines education as a self-accumulating process with no end beyond itself. It is further stressed that the purpose of education should be to maximize social efficiency. However, with regard to imprisonment, the optimal attainment of education is impeded by incarceration which conditions one to being a prisoner. This occasions the undisputable and imperative need to accord prisoners worthwhile education. Education includes not only the process by which a teacher develops in his learners new capacities and habits, but also the process by which a state modifies the behavior of its citizens in order to make them conform to higher moral standards (Singh, 2009). Singh (ibid) further submits that it is difficult for any government to do away with all vices. Perhaps this is the more reason why governments engage prisons to help reform prisoners to effectively participate in sustainable development.

According to Ishumi (1976), submission is made that there is a strong relationship between education and development. Ishumi (ibid) elaborates further that it is through educating society that men and women become aware of their need to participate in the development of their communities, and that development is a process but not an end. The Kamunge Report (1988) and Bogonko (1992) both stress that one of the objectives of education was to train and prepare high level manpower needed for development. Sifuna (1980) views education in Kenya as a tool necessary to foster skills required for productive activities in terms of development. Sifuna (ibid) further asserts that 35 percent of Kenya's national budget went to education. In this respect, it is important that everyone in Kenya be availed access to education without social discrimination. As much as there is need for the citizens of Kenya to get education at an early stage in life, it is however lamentable that many young people are in prison. This is according to the findings of Awilly (2015); Waswa, Otor, Olukoye & Mugendi (2007) submit that the decade between 2005-2014 has been identified as the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (D.E.S.D). This decade orientated all education toward sustainable development and recognized the role of education in developing sustainable societies. Waswa et.al (2007) further point out that education has unmatched potential to contribute to sustainable development. This is the argument that forms the basis of this paper, that education has the capacity to empower prisoners to participate in productive activities in society, and thereby accelerate sustainable development in Kenya.

There is a marked relationship between incarceration and youth unemployment in Kenya according to Vickie (2014). Based on this premise, it is arguable that perhaps offering education prisoners could be a conduit through which skills, knowledge and values could be passed on to this segment of the population with an aim to make them productive and useful members of society.

This paper is divided into sections. The first section provides a brief general glimpse into statuses of world prisons with regard to prisoners' rights especially their right to education. The second section dwells on historical episodes of education for prisoners in Kenya. The third section captures those facets of education that prisoners are accorded in Kenya, including those areas that are dormant but necessary and therefore need to be hastened. The fourth section contains a discussion on education as a driver for sustainable development, and lastly conclusion and recommendations are made.

2. A Global Glimpse into Prisoners' Rights with Emphasis on Education

Douglas (1992) while referring to data compiled by the United States (US) Department of State, scrutiny of 155 nations' prisons practices that violate basic human rights was done. These violations were considered inhumane and impacted negatively on the degree of economic development. Douglas (ibid) further asserts that it was not until 1960s and 1970s when the US Supreme Court stated that a prisoner retains all the rights of an ordinary citizen other than those expressly taken away by the law. The violations included harsh and primitive conditions, overcrowded living situations, inadequate sanitary conditions, inadequate nutrition, failure to allow visitation, physical mistreatment of prisoners, substandard medical care and forced labor for long hours.

Douglas (ibid) points out that in Denmark and Sweden liberal rules on censorship has been allowed and prisoners are allowed to openly air their grievances and complaints of their conditions. They may write any number of letters and can also communicate by telephone. There is no difficulty in making their views known outside and seeking help in pursuing their grievances. Bensinger (1992) also presents his analysis of Israel and US Correctional institutions as unfit for human habitation, sanitary conditions are poor, occupational, vocational and educational opportunities are virtually non-existent, that these violations in addition to rehabilitation exist in name only. In Israel there are many Commissions that in recent years have decried the prison conditions, calling for reforms. In Scandinavia, the Criminal Justice Policy is totally divorced from political debate. Decisions about the best practices to manage criminal justice are left to the relevant professionals who consult closely with academics. Correctional officers in Finland fill both rehabilitative and security roles. Each prisoner has a "contact officer" who monitors and helps advance progress toward return to the society (The Atlantic, 2013). Overall, the law has specified that the execution of sanctions shall aim at the inmate's re-adaptation to the society.

According to The Sentencing Project (2014), the United States of America has the largest prison population in the world, with more than 2.2 million inmates currently in the nation's prisons and jails, which is a 500% increase over the last forty years. This is surprisingly pathetic given the fact that life sentence has quadrupled since 1984. On the other hand it is relieving to note that in the US, every year many citizens leave prison to begin a new life. Many ex-offenders struggle to reintegrate into their communities. They also face significant challenges in re-entering the job market, and in this context, recidivism often ensues (Brown, 2013). Consequently, it can therefore be argued that were there focused prison educational programmes in U.S.A. many a prisoner would have been greatly empowered.

In Africa, conditions surrounding imprisonment are pathetic. In Togo for example, young people as well as adults may go for an average of six months without trial. Togo's poor treatment of her prisoners contributes to its poor world record as far as matters of human rights are concerned (Y Care International, n.d.). The preceding on-line source further submits that, over 30 per cent of the detainees, those less than 25 years are detained in these prisons. In Lome prison for example, which is the capital city, upto 80 percent of detainees are in pre-trial confinement. This represents one of the highest numbers globally not to mention that the prisons are extremely crowded. This scenario has led to poor sanitation which stifles sustenance of education programmes in prison. In recent times, it has become apparent that improvement of prison conditions in Africa is imminent as hinted by on-line source (African Prison Project, 2004-2016). The preceding source affirms that this project is advocating for an education that would enable prisoners acquire essential skills for effective living. In Kenya for example, several views have been fronted for the need to offer relevant education to prisoners. In this regard, Thatiah (2016:14) posits '...we need to break the cycle of poverty and crime by equipping them (read prisoners) with useful skills and keeping the brilliant minds behind bars engaged in useful pursuits'. Overall, it can be observed that the African Prison Project works to restore dignity and hope to prisoners in the entire continent. This way, prisoners can in turn find their production oriented occupations in society once they secure their freedom from prison.

3. Historical antecedents of Education for Prisoners in Kenya

The conventional Prisons System was introduced in Kenya by the British East Africa Protectorate through the enactment of East Africa Prisons Regulation in April 1902. At independence, the reforms in the penal systems were stepped up with the enactment of chapters 90 and 92 of the constitution leading to the establishment of the Kenya Prison Service in 1911. Since its inception, there has been gradual increase in the number of prisons, prison staff and prisoners-which currently stands at an average population of 54,000 (Ndungu, n.d.). The steadily growing size of this incarcerated population jeopardizes sustainable development and occasions the need to accord relevant and quality education to prisoners.

The Kenya Prison Service was created under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Heritage and Sports. Currently, Kenya has 92 Correctional Institutions, that is, 89 prisons, 2 Borstals and 1 Youth Training Centre. Liberalization of education in Kenya in 2003 has culminated in expansion of education services throughout the country including Kenyan prisons. Consequently, many inmates have been equipped with requisite skills and knowledge that are crucial for national development. Kenya has registered laudable steps in an attempt to

reform prisons in general, but particularly education services (Kenya Prison Services, n.d.). It is noted that at a women's prison in the Kenyan capital city, inmates are accorded basics of common law classes. This has greatly helped the inmates launch their appeals and even defend themselves in court (The Stanford Prison Experiment, 2014). Vocational training engagement also plays vital role in reducing recidivism in many places in Kenya (Mbatha, 2010). The Kenya National Library Services (2016) has also extended its operations to prison. Through its outreach services, the Kenya National Library has benefited prisons such as Lan'gata, Naivasha, Nanyuki and Kodiaga in Kisumu just to mention a few. Indeed, while this gesture attests to existence of empowerment of prisoners in Kenya through education, the crux of this paper now is to explore the degree of impact of this education upon sustainable development. This definitely calls for the need to first examine the various facets of education that are on offer before assessing their impact. The former task is therefore what builds the next section.

4. Facets of Prison Education

From time immemorial prisoners have been considered to belong in the marginalized or even disadvantaged group of world populations. This segment of humanity is usually characterized by gross deprivations across the social, economic, and even political realms of life. Deprivations that assume a human orientation are normally instituted on the premise that prisoners are convicts of crimes against persons, property, social values or even political regimes. Of the basic human rights enshrined in both authoritative global and national legal documents, education is paramount and ought to be accorded to all and sundry as is rightly submitted by United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 1995:43) thus;

- 'Education should be available to all who can benefit from it, and prison education departments need to serve the whole prison community, just as schools and colleges should serve their local communities'.

While the foregoing excerpt seems to support the need for education providers to accord prisoners meaningful education irrespective of their orientations, it becomes imperative to note that just as prisoners are diverse in background, age, offenses committed, interests and even abilities, so is the nature of education these people should be accorded. This paper surveys those facets of education that prisoners are offered especially in Kenya with an aim to bring out the role of education as a facilitator of development in the country. The main facets are basic education, vocational education and tertiary education.

4.1. Basic Education

This segment of education is foundational and includes courses or subjects which are designed to offer inmates a chance to attain formal qualifications making them be at par with other learners 'outside' prison. In Kenya, basic education usually comprises primary cycle of education whose main purpose is to equip learners with literacy, numeracy and appropriate life skills for survival in the contemporary society. However, for ease of discussion, in this paper, basic education is considered to be both primary and secondary levels of formal learning. According to UNESCO (1995), there are three main objectives of basic education within prison environment namely; to keep prisoners meaningfully engaged; improve quality of life of inmates; and lastly to equip prisoners with useful skills, knowledge, understanding, social attitudes and acceptable behaviour. Of the three objectives, the last one seeks to directly empower prisoners to not only engage in gainful activities but have a chance to further their education and training especially in the post-release dispensation. Both primary and secondary education therefore play a key role in preparing offenders to be useful members of society not only during imprisonment but as well after release. Akin to mainstream learners at these levels, prisoners are equally subjected to national examinations culminating in certification.

4.2. Vocational Education and Prison Work

This form of education is integrated with practical work in prisons and is most popular in many countries of the world such as France, Finland, Nigeria as well as Kenya just to mention a few.

Vocational education curriculum generally consists of skill-oriented trades such as carpentry, shoe-making, tailoring, plumbing, weaving, sewing, laundry, cleaning, cooking, baking, and masonry. Acquisition of these skills by prisoners while in prison is viewed as the best preparation for post-release life. This is because the skills would enable potential ex-prisoners to enter into self-employment or simply engage in production oriented activities thus enhance their livelihoods by ensuring they can afford steady incomes. While this integrated programme has been lauded in many forums, its critics view it as having elements of extortion of prison labour especially while inmates are still serving their prison terms. The argument is that the needs of the prison institution and other external entities are seen to supersede those of the offender. Such critics cited in UNESCO (1995) submit that;

- '...in designing training programmes in prison, a balance should be kept between the real demand ... and the prisoner's interests ... the most effective programme would be for their integration into society' p. 35.

The foregoing excerpt notwithstanding, it is the standpoint of this paper that the benefits vocational education recoups to the prisoner far outweigh the transient instances of extortion that may or may not be evident during a prisoner's time of imprisonment.

4.3. Tertiary Education

This level of education comes long after attaining the minimum score of C+ in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) in order to gain entry into a higher learning institution. While some prisoners have managed to reach this level, it is usually a very small percentage. This fact could be attributed to lack of stationary libraries, tutors, and sufficient guidance on how to excel beyond the basic education level. This is due to the fact that prisoners often register as private candidates hence do not get enough exposure to

teaching and learning resources as their counterparts in mainstream learning institutions. This points to the need for the Kenyan government to redress education in prison with regard to staffing, resources and even time allocation among other elements.

5. Other Vital Areas of Education

There are other areas that feature narrowly in prison education in Kenya but could be further explored to enhance their impact on national development. They include agricultural farming, sports and physical education, theatre, visual arts, music, pageantry and poetry among others. Concerning physical education, UNESCO (1995:41) reports that 'sport is rarely seen as an integral part of prison education programmes'. Lack of physical education programmes can actually be attributed to some of the factors already elsewhere in this paper. The preceding notwithstanding, it is noteworthy that education is indeed a cog in the wheel of sustainable development regardless of the level and dimension of education be it basic, social, vocational or even tertiary. UNESCO (1995:18), corroborates the foregoing on education for prisoners in that it;

- '...aid(s) the process of resettlement; it can help the offenders to take a non-offending path... by providing the basic education and skills which make law-abiding survival more possible; qualifications both general and vocational, which make attainment and holding of worthwhile jobs more possible; stability and structure to an individual's life; especially the first few months after release; a mind broadening and maturing experience, and perhaps ... prestige, success and self esteem in the non-criminal work'.

The next section now focusses on prison education as a driver for sustainable development.

6. Education in Prison as a Driver to Sustainable Development

Eshiwani (1993) and Singh (2009) underscore the fact that education is one of the most important social institutions in the modern society. Both Eshiwani (ibid) and Singh (ibid) further aver that education ought to promote social equality and bring about a sense of responsibility within an educational system which provides equal educational opportunity for all. Education is necessary to understand the life, the world, the nature and utilizing it (Singh ibid). This instills in the peoples' understanding the need to have access to education if at all sustainable development has to be pursued and realized. Considering the undisputable role of education, it is of cardinal importance to take learning to those who cannot conveniently access it such as prisoners.

Awilly (2015) in her case study of the King'ong'o Prison, Nyeri in Kenya reported that majority of the prisoners were the youth who did not go beyond primary level education. The study also reported that the convicts felt that had they attained high level of education, they would have better job opportunities and stable income. Common crimes engaged in were robbery, drug trafficking and defilement. The findings of the study further established that about a half of the prisoners involved in the study admitted that their level of education forced them to resort to crime as a suitable alternative. These confessions strongly serve to confirm that education is indeed a catalyzer of development, enabling people to generate innovative thoughts which eventually would culminate in meaningful development ventures.

Ishumi (ibid) asserts that development and education are indispensable ingredients for the health of a nation. Ishumi (ibid) defines development as an advance from the lower, less satisfying, less peaceful stages of being to higher satisfying, emancipating conditions. It is the strongest argument of this paper that education in prison may however not be of much benefit to the desired sustainable development the nation of Kenya anticipates if certain reforms are not undertaken. To this effect, Poole and Regoli (1980) and Lariviere (2001) cited in Gatotoh, Omulema & Naissuma (2011) submit that there is a strong positive relationship between level of education and support for rehabilitation. The preceding observation concludes that prisoners with higher education are more likely to embrace positive attitude towards the desired change. Ochami and Okang'a (2014) conducted a study at a main prison in Kisumu, Kenya and reported that 70 percent of the sampled 369 respondents agreed that prison rehabilitation programmes influenced reformation of offenders. The findings further established that literacy and educational programmes highly influenced reformation of offenders. Ochami and Okang'a (ibid) further submit that if prisons would be well equipped to offer vocational skills and other rehabilitation services, then they have the capacity to tremendously transform the behaviour of the incarcerated. It is noteworthy at this point that majority of prisoners eventually get released and re enter the society, therefore prisons present a meaningful environment during which meaningful achievements may be realized that would go along way to make education for prisoners beneficial both to the individual and to the entire society.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to survey various elements which are relevant to prison education with an aim to eventually offer certain considerations that would go along way to intensify the impact of this segment (prison) of education on sustainable development. It has been observed that for along time society has dismissed prisoners as social misfits with nothing of value to offer. This view is contrary to Human Rights watch that stresses on the dignity of humankind regardless of their status in society. The need to accord prisoners meaningful and relevant education among other reforms has been underscored. It is apparent that education alone guarantees prisoners emancipation from the shackles of criminality, poverty, ignorance and low self esteem to mention but a few. It is

this role that education for prisoners plays that ought to be enhanced as discussed in this paper in order to sharpen its impact on sustainable development.

7.2. Recommendations

Based on the issues discussed above, this paper makes the following recommendations.

- Prison work should not simply provide cheap labour for private companies or governments, including the Kenya government, but that other meaningful activities could be incorporated focused on employable skills and reintegration of prisoners into society.
- In a recent large scale study documented in Global Prison Trend (2015), it is argued that prisoners who receive education and vocational training are less likely to return to prison after release. They are also more likely to find employment than their peers who did not receive such opportunities. This positive finding puts the onus on the government to ensure that there is adequate educational facilities and effective teaching staff in Kenyan prisons. This will hasten prison education culminating in the production of skilled and qualified manpower that can accelerate sustainable development.
- Kenya can borrow a leaf from countries like Burkina Faso, Canada, and USA where volunteer agencies from both religious and non-governmental groups have complemented government efforts to accord education to prison populations (UNESCO, 1995).
- Given the low level of basic skills among prisoners in many countries, Kenya included, there is need to provide sufficient funding of educational and vocational training programmes as a way to check recidivism, particularly among the young prisoners.
- The Ministry of Education has a responsibility to enhance quality and relevant learning in prisons in Kenya.

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