CITIZENSHIP AND CURRICULUM: ISSUES FOR

ASSESSMENT AND CERTIFICATION

Keynote address to the AEAA Conference, Cape Town, 25—27 August 2003

Before I begin, I would like to thank AEAA, Conference hosts UMALUSI, and in particular their CEO Dr Peliwe Lolwana for inviting me to join you here today. I have been asked to address you on the topic of citizenship and curriculum, which I hope you will admit is a very broad topic.

Africa is a continent crowded with unsung educational heroes and unsung educational success stories. Here are two, taken at random: learners from Botswana have recently performed impressively in international assessment exercises as compared to their peers in the sub-region. After three years of a National Reading programme, Zambian grade three learners are now reading at the grade five level[1]. These stories and many others show the possibilities of vigorous and imaginative reform for our continent. But as we know too well, these efforts are eclipsed in the public mind by an altogether more sombre picture of Africa.

To go by the current images projected daily around the globe, Africa seems to inspire hope and despair in equal measure. 2003 is the 40th anniversary of the Organisation of African Unity; on 25th of May the fledgling African Union celebrated its first birthday in Maputo. The states of the union are gearing themselves up to supervise good governance on the continent through the NEPAD initiative. All but the foolhardy must agree, though, they have a desperately long road to walk. Africa is a continent of 850 million people in 54 states, 600 million of who live in the 48 states of sub-Saharan Africa. This region is the poorest in the world. And, as Lusophone political scientist Patrick Chabal says, '…the continent now endures a greater degree of strife than at any time since independence' (Chabal, 1997). What is it about Africa that produces such tragedy despite evidently admirable intentions? Why data this picture produce in us such paralysing inaction? Can it ever be turned around?

I am here today to tell you that it can, though it will not be easy, and that the educational community in general and the assessment and certification sub-community in particular, is one of the principal keys to the solution. The first step is not to become mesmerised by the symptoms and to try to understand the mechanisms that generate those terrible features of our society. We can best begin to understand them by examining the nature of state and citizenship in Africa. I hope to show you that the two are intimately connected and that the state, insofar as it has failed to produce the conditions for universal citizenship, has contributed to its own malaise. The only way out is through the construction of a strong and vibrant citizenry. At the heart of the practice of modern citizenship is an effective education and certifying system.

First let us examine the nature of citizenship. To begin with, a citizen is an autonomous individual who is able to exercise two crucial capacities: the first is the capacity to make independent political and civic judgements; the second is the capacity to display the skills and knowledge necessary to make a decent living, and to continue doing so through changing social circumstances. Together these capacities allow the citizen to participate in relations of equality with other citizens in the political community of the

[1] Secretary for Education, Zambia, at the Dfid Conference in Johannesburg, April 2003.

nation state. All of this depends far more centrally on education than is commonly realised, and increasingly so. We conventionally, and legitimately, assume that all members of a national society are equal citizens of a country by virtue of being legal natives of a country. But this ignores of course the advantages of birth and wealth. The only mechanism remotely capable of endowing individuals with the wherewithal to counter these disadvantages of birth is education. And the only way that society can recognise a successful encounter with education is though a reliable, valid and legitimate certificate.

Let us examine a little more closely my claim that education engenders capacities for citizenship participation unobtainable otherwise. Let me look first at the claim that effective education, and a certificate to prove it, is increasingly required for a job. This is of course a central claim of the analysts of globalisation who do not cease to tell us that we are now living in a knowledge economy, an information society, a society where smart workers are increasingly the norm, where an educational certificate is increasingly needed for a job in the formal employment sector. It is commonplace for this account to be dismissed out of hand where Africa is concerned, not least because so few adults in Africa are taken up by the formal labour market. However, a longer historical yiew will show that there is slow but steady modernisation of all economies in Africa. And if we look at where the growth of jobs is, where the demand is showing the greatest growth, then the answer is quite clear: it is for workers with a certificate. Let us look briefly at the South African case. Between 1970 and 1995, there was a 17.6% growth in the total number of jobs in the formal sector. In this period, the demand for graduates grew by 2028%; for those work seekers with a school-leaving certificate it grew by 350%; for those with some high school experience, by 53%; for those with only primary school experience, by -24%; and for those with no education -79%. In other words, demand for certificate less workers dropped steadily; demand for those with certificates grew steadily. Perhaps the picture is not presently as dramatic elsewhere in Africa, but it is certain nevertheless that the same pattern will be found over time. The kind of economy that we have, or will have, increasingly demands schooled workers, skilled workers, and possession of that skill is signalled by the possession of a valid certificate. This is the global picture, and it is a picture that can only be hastened by the dynamics of a globalising world. Africa can delay but not avoid coming into this global picture.

There are social benefits to a state from an educated citizenry with jobs too. The better educated and better employed a citizenry is, the more likely the following will occur:

- reduced costs of welfare and social security, because workers can increasingly care for themselves and their families;
- reduced costs to the state for health care, since workers can increasingly pay;
- greater civic engagement;
- greater egalitarianism and commitment to democracy;
- reduced costs of criminal justice;
- greater social interdependence, hence reduced communal strife.

(Newby, 2003)

An educated citizenry thus is a precondition for the evolution of the 'limited' or night watchman state, the state that superintends but does not have to direct every aspect of the lives of its citizens. We may say that the less educated a citizenry is, and the less independent its citizens are, the more the state has to intervene in the lives of its citizens. The more the state intervenes in the lives of its citizens, the less

citizenly they become, the more subject they become.

Through a cruel confluence of circumstances, which includes the aftermath of colonialism, drought and famine, the oil price crash of the 1970s, but also, let us admit, poor and venal government, corruption and despotism, Africa has struggled to make the transition to a fully democratic political and social order. All the countries of Africa have struck out bravely in the direction of democracy, but all too few have made it successfully. If the analysis above is correct, then it is at least in part because these countries have been unable to create a critical mass of independent and autonomous citizens with stability and a stake in their country. With the majority of their population still stuck in subjecthood, these countries have been unable to withdraw to the position of a hands-off democratic state, and have been drawn into regulating and ruling their subjects directly. They have been drawn, in other words, into a form of governance that political scientists call 'neo-patrimonialism', a form of rule that depends on relations of patronage and personalised power, on relations between patrons and clients that cuts across the operation of impartial bureaucracy and democracy. Particularistic obligations, rather than the universal conditions of democratic equality, decree who should distribute what to whom. This is the tragedy of Africa: unable to create a majority of independent citizens, states have been driven into neo-patrimonialism because the majority of their populace have been stuck in subjecthood, without the means for becoming independent citizens. The plight of the African state is thus at least partly due to a failure of citizenship, and the failure of citizenship is the failure of an effective universal education with its effective assessment and certifying procedures.

We have to recognize that his cleavage in our societies, this division into citizens and subjects, was not inaugurated yesterday. As Mahmood Mamdami (1998) reminds us, it came with the colonial state which recognised from the outset two kinds of political identities - a civic identity for the citizen, with citizen's rights, written into civil law and enforced by the central state: and an ethnic identity, which defined you by where you came from, by which area you belonged to, by your local custom, by means of customary law. Citizens were ruled by the central state, and they occupied a space of rights; subjects were ruled by the local state, more often than not yoked to a notion of traditional rule, and they occupied an ethnicised space. It was on the basis of ethnic identity that subjects had a claim to land. Citizens (who in the colonial period were mainly settlers) thus had individual rights; subjects (who were largely the indigenous peoples under colonialism) had group rights. When the colonies became independent, everyone was formally declared a citizen in a free and equal democracy. But not everyone was given the capacity to be a citizen. After the first long decade of independent Africa (1960-1975), continuities with the past became increasingly visible, and what Patrick Chabal calls the co-existence of two discordant political logics became inescapable: a central logic of rights that regulates the lives of individual citizens (by now a settler cadre expanded by a smaller or larger indigenous elite), and a local logic of communal rights, ties and obligations that regulates the real politics of the distribution of wealth and power. These two logics have come partly to overlap, to occupy the same space. The dual and divergent logics of citizenship and of subjecthood thus perpetually unsettle the public space in Africa. On this restive ground arises civil strife of the most depressing kind.

It seems inescapable that the legacy of colonial rule has thus unleashed a genie of discord at the heart of post-colonial independence by entrenching an ethnicised subject identity in Africa, leaving ethnic subjects to compete for scarce resources like land, without giving them alternative capacities with which to

establish themselves in the new independent citizenly space, without giving them the wherewithal to don the cloak of the independent citizen in a newly independent country.

It should be clear that I believe that the best way — in fact, the only way — to capacitate our would-be citizens is through a rigorous education capped by a school-leaving certificate with legitimacy and clout. But on what do I base my faith? After all, if the major institutions of democracy and independent rule did not survive unscathed after Africa's first long decade of independence, why should schooling and certification be expected to fare any better?

Let us approach this question by examining more closely what capacities education might confer on subjects, or more accurately, on schooled learners from subject homes and communities. We have seen already that a good certificate magnifies the opportunities to get a job, and thus the possibility of independent support for self and family. The benefits this confers on individuals, especially in a country beset by unemployment, is already considerable, as it does on the central state that is directly responsible for one less subject soul. But emancipating as this may be for the person concerned, such a person may remain bound into her or his subject community. An economic emancipation from communal dependence for livelihood does not necessarily mean emancipation from the cultural and local political obligations of neo-patrimonialism. The fortune of the employed worker —the fortune of the school principal, the pension clerk, or the government official — is here seen as a well deserved windfall for the extended communal network, and strong expectations will exist to redistribute that windfall. In a system or in a community where subjects outnumber citizens, and parts of South Africa also fall into, that category, aspirant citizens will find it very difficult to elude the cultural bonds of communal expectation that will continue to provides shackle to the ancestral subject community. In this way, the informalised local polity may continue to act as a brake upon accession to the wider national public sphere where citizens meet as equals. Indeed, it may incapacitate her or him by multiple Lulliputian threads of obligation even when accession has been secured. Aspirant citizens may, in other words, find themselves bound to their home communities by cultural imperatives even when they have become educated, left home, and entered the wider polity, economy and world of work. The conclusion is that it is communities, not only individuals, which must be granted access to full citizenship via education.

But education and an education certificate do not only grant subjects access to the worlds of' national politics and work. Ever since the eighteenth century English philosopher John Locke we have known that education, when it is properly executed, provides the neophyte with tools for thinking and discrimination that enables her to make independent, individual judgments which depend for their validity on criteria that transcend the communal self interest of the local world from whence the aspirant citizen comes. These criteria are not intrinsically better, except in the sense that they are more broadly, more generally, more universally applicable. By learning to exercise these forms of judgment alongside those of her traditional forms, by learning when it is most appropriate to use the one set or the other, our aspirant citizen learns to exercise an independence and an autonomy that are precisely the capabilities fitting for citizenship. John Locke was clear that these inner resources were the best, perhaps the only, defence an individual might have against the arbitrariness and indiscriminateness of religious and political power. Education provides the individual citizen with inner resources that confer a protective (or negative) power upon the individual citizen. When educators and intellectuals emphasize the importance of critical thinking, they are thinking about the benefits conferred on individual citizens by this capability. But the discipline of education confers also the capability to think beyond the critical and the defensive, beyond even education's

received knowledge to produce new ideas and insights, innovations and creations that the discipline, or the industry, perhaps even the nation and the world have not hitherto seen. Those are the inner resources that a good education confers and a good assessment and certification regime sanctifies. As you can see, the capabilities embedded in such positive power go well beyond the utilitarian endowments for a job that much resources also confer. They go to the animating heart of an active and creative citizenry and a living democracy.

Paramount as these capabilities are for a vibrant nation, they are nevertheless dreadfully vulnerable to nullification from at least three different quarters. The first two sorts of threat are directly political in nature; the third sort of threat brings us back to the citizenly responsibilities of the assessment and certification community for assuring the nation, as I hope to show you presently.

The first threat comes from patrimonial elites, front politicians or officials whose base of power and authority depends on traditional subject loyalties, and whose position is thus threatened by the more universalistic politics of fully-fledged citizens. Such elites have used public office and even elections as support mobilising tools. In the end, the continuing base of support for such elites depends on a continuing majority of subjects in the nation or in a region, a circumstance that only a determined universal education policy will erode. The second threat is closely related. Where the first threat rested on the ability of elites to subvert the citizenly institutions of the democratic state, the second threat rests on a more extreme mobilisation of subject resentment against the invariably more well off citizens. This mobilisation is not simply a rising of rich against poor, but too often takes the form of an ethnic mobilisation, since local subject identity in Africa is all too often ethnic identity, as we saw above. The anatomy of this resentment has been brilliantly captured by Ugandan scholar Mahmood Mamdani (1998), who shows how located ethnic subjects develop resentments against more mobile citizens precisely because the latter are more mobile. The term used in Kiswahili is 'mzungu', literally restless person who will not stay in one place. All over Africa, the settled locals, who have not been endowed with the capabilities for mobility by education, resent the capacitated restless ones, the citizens This restlessness or capacity for translocating is of course not just a physical capacity but a cognitive one too. As we saw above, good education endows the citizen to think beyond known bounds, to project and generalise outwards to new discoveries. Where subjects are bound into their local context, citizens by definition possess capacities to transcend their context, physically, cognitively, even metaphysically.

And it is this dual sense of mobility and restlessness that subjects fear and resent, a resentment all too easily fanned and exploited.

Laid over this resentment is ethnic identity. In times of scarce resources, famine and strife, ethnic animosity comes to be the political shorthand for subject-citizen, and even subject-subject resentment. And in Rwanda, the ethnic overlay has been so strong, so ruthlessly exploited, that ethnic apprehensions have driven even citizens to act again as ethnic subjects and to strike out against an ethnicised citizenly mobile minority. Marndani has in his recent book sought to show just how and why, in this most tragic part of the continent, judges, teachers, even human rights activists, took active part in the Tutsi genocide. What we should conclude from this is not that the potential emancipations of education will be trumped by ethnic identity and animosity, but rather that education cannot change history; even less can it on its own challenge a state form that still embeds the difference between citizens and subjects where the majority are still subjects. What it can do is offer individuals a set of capacities for acting and prospering

as citizens in a free and democratic state.

Still, even this service can be placed in jeopardy[1] all other things being equal, which is where the spotlight of citizenly responsibility now thus on assessment and certification. Let us say we, each of us lives in an enlightened country where the ruling government has realised that education holds the key to the creation of a responsible and prosperous citizenry. Let us grant too that our country is well on truck to achieving universal schooling within ten years – after all, no more than our governments promised at Jomtien not so long ago. Now, what are the threats to fulfilling the government's admirable promise? What are the different ways in which education can fail to deliver to learners the capabilities they need, deserve, have been promised, and should have? And what is the assessment/certification community's role in this regard? In the discussion that follows, I will use South Africa as ray example, since it is the one I know best.

The first major threat can be called the *opportunity to learn threat.* Are learners provided with the opportunity to learn the curriculum — that is, the knowledge and skills that are laid down in the curriculum? Well, how would we know? We would only know if the public assessment and certification system designed the ir instruments so that they were based as fully as possible on what was supposed to be learnt. This can only be done, in turn, if the curriculum stipulates in sufficient detail what learners should learn, and when. Until recently, the South African general curriculum was stipulated far too vaguely for assessment to be calibrated to curriculum and for OTL thus to be estimated. This was a serious flaw in the curriculum design, which the Minister of Education's Curriculum Review committee duly pointed out. But I have to say that it is sad that no voice from the South African assessment community was raised in this regard. If OTL cannot be assessed because the link between curriculum and assessment, curriculum and certificate, is too tenuous, then a key accountability feature of assessment is flouted. I conclude that, in this regard, the SA assessment community flunked their first accountability test to government and its citizens because they failed to alert government to the fact that OTL could not be assessed from their seriously under-stipulated curriculum. The same problem seems to be looming with respect to the country's FETC, and it will be interesting to see whether our community will make their voices heard in this regard.

The second major threat, closely related to the first threat, has to do with assessing whether curriculum delivery is being correctly *paced*. Are grade 3 learners getting grade 3 level knowledge? Are grade 7 learners getting grade 7 level knowledge? Again, we would only be able to know if the assessment community was conducting regular systemic assessments at the different levels to see whether curriculum delivery was doing what it was supposed to be doing and inducting the students at a pace that puts them on track to meet the exit level expectations of the curriculum. Again, in South Africa, the community has rather shirked its responsibilities in this regard, and it was not until non-governmental education agencies designed grade 3 and then grade 6 tests that the country woke up to the fact that, partly because of badly trained teachers, partly because of inefficiency, and partly because of the under-stipulated Curriculum 2005, our learners were learning - *are* learning - at a pace that is putting them behind: the evidence shows that many South African grade 3 learners read and count at grade 1 level, and grade 6 learners are almost two grades behind where they should be (Taylor. Muller and Vinjevold, 2003). Here again you can see the crucial public accountability role of your community, one once more not well-fulfilled in the South African case.

The third major threat to accountability, after OTL and lax pacing, has to do with *quality* of the knowledge and skills of the curriculum itself. Are these appropriate for a growing economy and a vibrant citizenry? A key test in this regard is how a country fares in comparison to its peers with respect to powerful knowledge domains like maths and science. Here again, South Africa's learners are performing lamentably. Not only did they come last of all participating countries in the international Third International Maths and Science Survey (TIMSS), but they also have come last in the MLA Unesco survey which compares thorn with their neighbour countries like Botswana and Zambia and nine other African countries.

South Africa performance on Grade 4 MLA numeracy test, 1995

GRAPH to be taken in.

There are a number of conclusions to be drawn from the above. The assessment and certification community of a country has an absolutely crucial role to play in accounting to its citizens and its government whether its learners are being offered the knowledge that they should be (0TL), at a pace that will ensure that. The learners will cover the curriculum (pacing), and that the knowledge is of a kind and quality that is comparable to that offered not only by its neighbours but to that offered to learners in countries it wishes to place itself alongside of in the global economy. In other words, the assessment and certification community has the responsibility to let a country know whether it is on course to producing its future citizens. As we saw above, South Africa's community has so far hardly met its responsibilities in this regard, and it has fallen to non-governmental agencies to provide the crucial signals. As we also saw, the price a country pays when it either does not have these signals or ignores them is that it is all too easy for the learners to get less, at a slower pace, and of a lesser quality, than both they and the country require and deserve. To put the matter even more pointedly: when the assessment and certification community fails in its accountability task, the quality of citizens is impaired. In Africa, as we have also seen, this can mean the difference between a steady climb towards citizenly prosperity or a slow slide into mediocrity and strife-torn subjecthood.

I started my talk today by saying that we can help turn Africa in a positive direction, though it would not be easy. I have tried to show that the education and particularly the assessment community has a central role to play in this task. All countries have to develop indigenous assessment systems to produce their citizens. But strength lies also in regional cooperation and coordination. Just as NEPAD has made a solemn undertaking to regulate good governance, so AEAA faces a similar challenge to develop for the sub-region, indeed for Africa, a set of assessment capacities, procedures and structures to help each other meet our accountability responsibilities. If this AEAA Conference takes only a small step in this direction, it will have struck a major blow for democracy in Africa.

I thank you.

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