

Moulton, Jeanne, Karen Mundy, Michael Welmond, and James Williams. 2002. Education Reforms in Sub-Saharan Africa: Paradise Lost? Greenwood Press. Westport, Connecticut. London. Price: US \$68.95. xi +212 pages + Bibliography +index.

The subject of education in Africa deserves serious and urgent attention by Africans, African governments (countries) and the international community. Prior to the independence of African countries (the majority of the independence gained by African countries happened in the sixties) the colonial government mainly France, Great Britain, Germany, Belgium, and Portugal introduced Western style education into the continent. Among the most written about issues on education in Africa are the legacies of the French and British colonial educational impact. Karen Mundy, one of the contributors to this volume, has done some seminal work on the education system in Africa especially as it relates to gender.

African countries have many differences and similarities but what makes it possible to discuss education reforms in sub-Saharan Africa possible is that the countries of Africa have a lot in common as far as the education challenges that they face are concerned. For instance, because of the poor economic conditions of the countries, the public support for education has dwindled and the provision of the necessary infrastructures, teachers pay, incentives, supplies and all the necessary support systems are lacking or are at the worst minimum level. Closures of schools and universities by governments which are struggling with how to govern makes it difficult to provide proper and adequate education to many Africans. There appears to be general unrest among faculty and students over government activities. The absence of a strong private sector in the educational system which are affordable by citizens is a major problem in Africa. Most, if not all, African countries are having difficulties managing their primary, secondary and tertiary educational systems. In order to balance appropriate training that the educational systems are supposed to deliver with the development stage of the countries, the governments must first examine what their educational goal and objectives are and what policies should be implemented in order to achieve the educational goal. The strategic plans to help guide educational objectives are often misguided and the priorities are misplaced by the governments. Nevertheless, it is clear that appropriate training is needed to assist African societies to deal with domestic and international issues such as governance, the economy in a domestic and global context, trade, environment, political and sustainable development in order to achieve a civil society.

Generally speaking, most African governments have ambitious goals of free primary education and heavily subsidized secondary and post secondary education. In times of economic boom for the oil rich countries, some progress is actually made in providing free primary education but

overall, the quality of the education is often poor in comparison with other parts of the world. Moulton and Mundy note:

“Yet although the intensity of the educational reform efforts in Africa continues to heighten, there remains a serious lack of research on the design and implementation of what is in this book, describe as a movement for the comprehensive, systemic or system-wide reform of African school system” (p.1).

This book which contains seven chapters provides in chapter 1, an overarching discussion on implementation research and educational reform in sub-Saharan Africa. Chapter one provides the reader with some idea about attempts at educational reform in Africa particularly the one in the 1990s. Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, discuss education reform in Guinea and Ethiopia respectively. Why these countries were chosen by the authors is really unclear but one could conclude that it was because of the authors' familiarity with these particular countries, cases and peoples of the chosen countries.

The book concludes with a discussion of the subtitle: Paradise Lost? It argues that there are similarities in how basic education system was implemented in the case studies presented in chapters 2 through 6. Moulton and Mudy: “Reforms were shaped in accordance with a paradigm, or model, of top down rational, technical planning led by experts seeking permanent solutions to persistent problems.” (p1)

The authors conclude that in the future, more attention need to be paid to the circumstances surrounding the implementation processes of education. Politics have a lot to do with the success of education reform. Perhaps, the strength of this book lies in its examination of the players and actors of education reform in the case studies. Its weakness is in its over generalization. Nonetheless, it is a good resource book for researchers. For a sustained economic growth to occur on the African continent, serious investment must be put in the capacity building of Africans. Education is key to this endeavor. That is why this book is essential to education planners.

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