VARIATIONS ON THE THEME OF
SOMALINESS

edited by
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Self Criticism and Self Analysis

Education among the top priorities

When trying to find a cure for a patient, it is important first to identify the cause of his illness then to administer the correct medicines in correct dosages. So far, I came to the very simple but inescapable conclusion that one of the roots - if not the only one - of our problems is that the mass of our people lacks the basic education needed for a modern life according to our deepest wishes. It is also my conjectural hypothesis that our people too easily fall prey to other people's will and influence, a fact that in its turn causes our main weakness: the failing to produce people endowed with a sense of leadership. Therefore if my 'diagnosis' is correct, the 'cure' we need is more and more education. In the following few paragraphs, I explain a 'therapy' which may solve our 'health' problems.

These paragraphs contain also what I was unable to emphasise to the American Embassy in Rome which denied me the United States Entry-Visa as a student when the American University in Washington D.C had already accepted my application and offered me a fellowship stipend, in order to pursue a Doctoral Degree in Mathematics Education.

More education is what we need in order to allow our people to overcome the current crises and the desperate socio-political situation in which we find ourselves. With the development of countrywide education we would help our young people to develop a sense of self-determination and that sense of leadership which is needed in a modern society.

We need writers, journalists, a body of teachers and people capable to win the admiration of the general public and to make the rest of the people somehow 'afraid to disagree', what we need are people who may have a good and beneficial influence on the behaviour of our society; in other words we need leaders, community and society leaders. Our top priority is not only the formation of political leaders.

Although in the urban areas the number of people who are capable of reading and writing is fast going up, the concept of education still remains an alien one to many of our people. During the last fifteen years, most school activities were hampered by the socio-political situation of the country, and above all, in the last ten years the civil war upset all our educational system. A whole generation already lost their first compulsory schooling, many others have not had, up to now, the possibility to resume their schooling after the outbreak of the civil war.

There is no university level education available at all, nor are teacher training courses available, and the keen and well-intentioned people who, as teachers, are running our elementary and intermediate schools have not getting any kind of assistance to improve their professional teaching skills refreshment training, upgrading seminars, in-service courses, access to the world-wide bibliographical materials, etc.

Library are open, neither public nor private ones. Even among the commercial activities, there are no bookshops, if not for selling stationary materials. There is a total lack of books written in the native language, the official medium of instruction.

Insufficient or inadequate supply of textbooks, no guides nor support materials for lesson preparation, lack of any other teaching resources; these are the major constraints to our eager to get urgent remedies for.

It is clear that we will get nowhere in the future unless we help our present and coming generations to escape the darkness and blindness of illiteracy. We must be aware that we need education in order to be able to run our country. Therefore education is, and must be, among our top priorities if we wish our people to become mature culturally.

We must produce among us personalities capable of becoming leaders and managers in the vital sectors of modern life, such as education, economics, sanitation, public health, skill development, legislation, etc. Teachers, economists, medical doctors, civil service administrators and judges are therefore urgently needed. We need technicians, valid technicians and skilled manpower among us, in order to reconstruct our country.

It is probably too early to talk about decentralised formal education, for we cannot so far guarantee even a centralised one, but we should encourage any activity in the various sectors of instruction: formal or non-formal education, adult education, both in public and private sectors. Mass education must be our keyword!

First steps towards a new style of life

On several occasions I have heard that 'in Africa wars break out because of a lack of balance between the urban and rural populations, between the rich and poor'. I think that in most cases, and at least in our case, there is no conflict between these two sections of the population, but I believe, instead, that the problem arises when a rural society such as ours has to face the process of transformation to an urbanised one. It is precisely this process which becomes a dangerous one when a society has no adequate means ('basic culture', solid economy, 'democracy', enough time) to hold out against the side effects of this transition. Within a very short period, our society has to undergo a process of transformation, which for many other societies has taken centuries to complete. We should be able to help and to encourage our people in this critical stage of auto transformation from a rural to an urban style of life.

In order to do so, we should be professionally determined, but at the same time culturally sensitive and respectful for our traditional values and cultural heritage. We must be more influential in all aspects of social life, but at the same time act in accordance with traditional law and custom. This kind of greater flexibility would lead to a more satisfactory education of the masses and fully acquaint our people with the value and the importance of education.

Post-emergency side effects

In the recent past, international donations have played an important role in the survival of our people, but in my opinion, these donations tend always to be oriented either towards emergency issues, such as epidemics, famine, drought, etc., or towards the physical aspects of development, such as buildings, infrastructures, wells, roads, etc., no real attention is given to the human and social side, to the promotion of local, qualified human resources. During my last visit to Hargeisa, my birthplace, I felt that we people were becoming too dependent on international aid. That is another danger to be avoided!

Our people should realise clearly that foreign aid cannot, and will never, substitute their effort for self-sufficiency. The role of foreign aid is to come through emergency situations, to allow us to set off again towards progress, and to fasten the process of development by increasing our self-determination.

Our schools should, hence, put at the top of their needs Capacity Building Programs. This is where the needs lie, and means training and reorganisation of technical, administrative and managerial skills. It is through this that we can help our students under an acacia tree and to have capable people to educate them, instead of raising huge buildings for purposes which offer no quality or no appropriate instruction.
Education and Culture

Educational policy and decision-makers, curriculum curators, text books writers, trainers of the trainers, teachers and librarians, these are the sectors for which we need proper qualified directing classes. We need, in these sectors, people who can identify and design priorities, and plan, implement, monitor and evaluate suitable national education programs.

Concluding remarks

Local authorities together with the international communities involved - directly or indirectly - in the development of our country should review their prioritising methodology of the country's needs. Today, a good ranking methodology should reveal that education is a major need, and no effort will be, and remain, productive for our society without good investment directed to the advantage of human resources.

Despite the lack of an internationally recognised government, our people are once again living 'a normal life'. Schools up to the higher level of education are reopening in all major cities of the country. Post secondary schools are being organised: an excellent example is the Amoud University in Borama, and the Institute of Practical Research in Hargeisa. The international scientific community is therefore invited to support long-term educational and development proposals, even those individual projects produced by persons who are working hard today in order to serve their people well tomorrow.

I seize the opportunity of this address to my people and to all people interested in the well-being of my country to thank the American University; to some members of its faculty and to its Office of International Student Services for their sensitivity towards my case. I would also like to thank the members of the Faculty at the Department of Mathematics in Pisa, for their encouragement to continue my research in the education of mathematics.

Finally, since shortage of professional and technical staff is already creating a major constraint in our country, I wish encourage the educated fellow countrymen and fellow countrywomen residing abroad to return home, even temporarily for short periods, and to participate directly in the reconstruction and the development of our country.

Yvonne Lassenius

Studies in Social and Health Care as Perceived by Somali Students in Finland

Background

My presentation concerns the perception of Somali students studying social and health care in Finland. I will start with a short description of the background of this research. In 1992, I started a study, the idea of which was to find out the meaning of health for Somalis, or in other words, when do they have a sense of well-being, when do they feel healthy. The theoretical framework of this research was based on Professor Madeleine Leininger's theory 'Culture, care, diversity and universality' and her transcultural 'Sunrise' model (see References). The ethnographical research method has been used in this study. Information was collected through observation, interviews and participation during two years. In this study, nine Somali students participated (Lassenius 1994).

One of the major findings was that the most important source of well-being for Somalis comes from obtaining a sense of inner peace from their religion. When they have followed all prescriptions of the religion, a sense of well-being follows. As life is predestined, one cannot alter it. In Finland, we are used to give health advise to people by asking them to eat healthier and take care of themselves so that they can live longer. But for Somalis, we have to motivate them by talking about a healthier life instead of a longer life.

The present research

I have had the advantage of teaching multicultural groups in which several Somali students have participated. In December 1995, the first multicultural group of students at our institute finished their basic studies in social and health care, which was also the first of its kind in Finland.

I was asked to study how the Somali students have experienced their studies. In this research, I used the same method (the mini-ethnographic method and Dr. Leininger's theory) which I applied to the study described above. My findings can be summarized within the following six categories:

1. Language
2. The quality of applied care (caring care)
3. Workplace training
4. The role of the teacher
5. Different groupings of students
6. The substance of the education

Language

The importance of learning Finnish as fast and well as possible and this above all through practical participation with one's own patient, especially children and elderly people. The practical participation with one's own patient, especially children and elderly people. For elderly people in Finland, they have experienced war and are very interested in talking about it. For the Somali students, this was a good way to get contact with their patients and to speak Finnish. With children, they could learn the language easily. Children are very direct and immediately corrected the Somalis if needed.

The students also wanted to learn English, which was not included in the teaching