

Educating for good governance

By Ridwaan Asvat, issued by Regent Business School

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Research indicates that there is a strong correlation between education and governance. There are multiple relationships between education and good governance and they are cyclical and mutually reinforcing. Of particular interest are the characteristics of education systems and the content of education, which may mediate the effects of education on governance. Within this context the nature of both the structure of education systems and content of teaching and learning are critical. In particular, education that is socially inclusive and relevant has a positive effect on governance, while education that alienates or marginalises individuals or lacks relevance to the aspirations and possible livelihoods of people may have negative effects on governance. For example, the content and skills about which a citizenry is empowered through education will determine how it has an effect on governance.

Socially inclusive and relevant education and skills development empowers civil society in terms of being more informed, bearing appropriate knowledge and holding the structures of governance accountable by assisting in the prevention of corruption. An increase in productivity through skills development and appropriate education also improves productivity, increases economic equality and contributes to political stability.



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Thus, globally, both in the developed and emerging economies, education is widely accepted as a leading instrument for promoting good governance. More recently, though, we have witnessed major disruptions in education. Marginalised youth are demanding access to affordable or free education, relevant pedagogy and curriculum transformation. More specifically, skills development for employability has been identified as a priority area for educational policy and practice. This is not surprising since there is overwhelming evidence to demonstrate that skills development can play a seminal role in promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth and good governance, with benefits accruing to individuals, their families and society in general.

South Africa is no exception to the unfolding global drama of student protests. Against the backdrop of corruption and state capture, poor and marginalised youth have revolted and this social movement is demanding for free and inclusive higher education and a transformation of the core curriculum. More specifically, the youth have demanded relevant education and skills that could empower them for employability. This is not surprising since there is overwhelming evidence to demonstrate that inclusive education can be a game changer in promoting sustainable economic growth and the socioeconomic development of countries, with benefits accruing to individuals, their families and society at large.

There is now overwhelming evidence that improving education for the world of work can help improve incomes of the poverty-stricken, provide citizens with more choices in their lives, help alleviate poverty and advance good governance. Whilst the demand for socially inclusive education and skills development in South Africa is not unique, it is an issue which is currently regarded as critical by global leaders as well as a range of international organisations. For example, this is exemplified by the International Labour Organisation and the World Economic Forum. There are firm recommendations to prioritise education, lifelong learning, job training and skills development linked to inclusive growth strategies. In this respect, in 2014, South Africa through the auspices of the department of higher education identified a hundred skills that were critical to its growth strategy and the national development plan.

Thus, equipping youth and the emergent workforce with the skills required for the jobs of today and those of tomorrow is a strategic concern in the national growth and development strategy of South Africa. Ultimately, the country's prosperity will depend on how many of its people are in work and how productive they are, which in turn rests on the skills they have and how effectively those skills are used. Skills are a foundation of decent work and are the cornerstones of overall development and good governance.

Consequently, further advancement in the economic growth of our country is predicated on putting knowledge and innovation to work and developing new products and new services. This will definitely require good governance to deepen skills pools and to expand access to market-relevant skills development.

The process of skills development does not happen in a vacuum. There is need for availability of good-quality education as a foundation for future training and a close matching of skills supply to the needs of enterprises and labour markets. When applied successfully, this approach nurtures a virtuous circle in which more and better quality education and training fuels innovation, investment, economic diversification and competitiveness, as well as social and occupational mobility and more work opportunity. In the end, governance succeeds.

Good-quality education complemented by relevant skills development opportunities, as a result, prepares future generations for productive lives, endowing them with the core skills that enable them to continue learning. Lifelong learning for lifelong employability should be the central guiding policy principle.

We are now some two decades into independence and whilst South Africa has reached some important milestones in terms of its post-apartheid education strategies, the time has arrived to re-evaluate our policies and strategies for education.

Various research reports reinforce the problems and challenges of education in South Africa, particularly in terms of relevance and skills requirements for the growing economy. Quality and relevant education, moreover, seems to be wanting. Wage employment in the modern sector is largely stagnant, and unemployment among educated youth is substantial and increasing. As a result underdevelopment is prevalent and governance is found wanting.

Finally, if this issue is not dealt with timeously and decisively, the rising expectations of the youth could contribute negatively to the development trajectory of South Africa and possibly lead to destabilisation. The prime challenge, therefore for South Africa over the next few decades is to find productive employment for the millions of annual new entrants to the labor force. The roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, i.e. the public, private and non-governmental sectors, need to be identified. Broad participation in policy development for critical, socially inclusive and relevant educational and training needs is essential for good governance and the future growth path of the country.

It's the least we can do for the future of our youth and country.

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