

Education in East Africa

My talk today comes out of my experience beginning in 1961 with a program called Teachers for East Africa. Perhaps none of you has ever heard of Teachers for East Africa, or TEA as it was called, but it was a program sponsored jointly by the governments of the United States, Britain, and the soon to be independent countries of East Africa -- Kenya , Uganda, Tanganyika, and Zanzibar. It was a relatively small program, involving fewer than 600 US teachers in its 10 year existence, and after 1964 the bulk of the US role in the program was eliminated in favor of the Peace Corps. In addition to the US teachers, a comparable number of British teachers was also involved in the program.

MAP

Let me show you where we are talking about on the map. (point out Lake Victoria, countries and bordering countries,) Uganda, slightly smaller than Oregon. Kenya, quite a bit larger, but with a vast sparsely settled arid region here in the north. Tanganyika and Zanzibar, together make up present-day Tanzania. Tanzania, the largest of the three countries, is about twice the size of Nevada. In 1960, populations ranged from 6M in Uganda to 9M in Tanganyika.

POINT OUT FAMILIAR LANDMARKS: KAMPALA, ENTEBBE, OWENS FALLS DAM; NAIROBI, MARA, SERENGETI

I am going to be showing you slides from three different trips to the region: first, from during the 2 and a half years I spent there as a teacher, beginning in 1961, at a place here...in western Kenya, in the provincial capital of Kakamega, at Kakamega High School, an African Boys boarding school (just here). The next group of slides is from 2003, when a group of us returned and traveled.... Finally, last November another teacher from that era and I...

END OF MAP

Let me set the stage for you in the summer of 1961. In the US, John Kennedy had just become president. In East Africa, the British were in the process of relinquishing control as the countries moved toward independence. Many British expatriates, including teachers, were leaving and there was an insufficient number of African teachers to fill existing positions just at a time when an effort was being made to increase the number of secondary or high

schools.

All of the East African countries became independent during the 2 and 1/2 years I was there. By being away during that time, I missed out on the Cuban missile crisis. In November 1963, just a month before I left to return to the States, President Kennedy was assassinated. I'm probably the only person you know who learned about it first in Swahili over the radio. At the end of 1963 and beginning of 1964, there was a brief and bloody civil war in Zanzibar, just weeks after it gained independence, which was put down by Tanganyikan forces, Zanzibar became part of Tanganyika and the name was changed to Tanzania, or Tanzay-nia.

SLIDES OF TEACHERS COLLEGE AND FLIGHT OVER

Now, as teachers in the Teachers for East Africa Program, we were all sent to high schools or teacher training colleges, where African students were trained to teach grades 1 through 8.

THIS IS THE LANE LEADING INTO MY SCHOOL We taught under a British educational system. Education was definitely a privilege in those days. In Kenya, for example, there were nationwide exams at the end of the 4th and again after 8th grade. Students who did not get a sufficiently high score could either repeat the grade or drop out of school completely. And many did drop out. Those who passed the 8th grade exam then became part of the pool to compete for the limited number of places in secondary schools. (Some form of this competition for high school admission still exists today.) In the 1960s, students sat for an exam at the end of 4 years of high school that was sent out from Cambridge University.

NEXT KAKAMEGA SLIDEUP

My school was a boarding school with 280 boys, 60 in each of the 4 high school years and then 20 in each of two additional years. This additional two years was called 6th form, as those of you familiar with the British system know, and corresponded roughly to junior college, but with a curriculum limited in our school to English, math and the three basic sciences -- chemistry, physics, and biology. Students who completed 6th form might be expected to go on to university and a career in a science-related field.

The majority of the schools in the 60s, and certainly the well established schools, were

boarding schools. This may have been in the British tradition, but it made some sense, despite the cost, due to the fact that roads were so poor and schools tended to draw from a fairly large area. In addition, there would probably be no electricity at home and students in the few day schools usually had chores at home that kept them from studying in the evening. Schools were generally all-boys or all-girls, and the number of girls in school was considerably less than the number of boys.

Besides the exams, another factor which kept students out of school was the matter of school fees. At my school I believe the fees were in the \$50 to \$75 range for a year -- for room, board, and textbooks. That sounds like quite a bargain, and it was, but for a peasant family trying to put several children through school, it was often a substantial burden. When students couldn't pay their fees, they might miss school for extended periods -- which led to lower test scores, and might mean repeating a year of school. For me, and I didn't fully realize this until much later, these delays meant that many of my students were almost as old as I was, at 22 or 23 years old.

SHOW REST OF KAKAMEGA SLIDES HERE

To give you some idea of student numbers on a national level, and to move us into the present, I am going to read a quote from a speech given in 2005 by then President Benjamin Mkapa of Tanzania:

A survey conducted in 1962, a few months after independence, showed that only 23% of Tanganyikan men and 7 % of Tanganyikan women over 15 years of age had attended any formal school at all; 85 out of every 100 adults were illiterate. Today, the rate of illiteracy is down to 15% only, and all the children have access to a compulsory and free 7-year primary education, with a Net Enrollment Ratio of 95.6% for boys and 93.8% for girls. In 1961, the total number of children in primary schools was 486,000 only. This year over 7.5 million Tanzanian children, almost 50% of them girls, are in 14,257 primary schools that have been built in every village of our country.

Commenting on the growth in secondary education and the number of students in secondary schools, he said:

Today, we have 524,325 students, 47% of them girls. Of those who joined secondary schools this year, 49% are girls. The number of secondary schools has increased from about 10 in 1961 to 1,745 this year, 69% of which are owned by the government. (end quote)

So you get some sense of how things have changed since the 1960s, and I think we can infer that the statistics are similar for Uganda and Kenya, though Tanganyika might have been slightly worse off in terms of educational development in the 1960s. Also in the period from the 1960s to the present, populations have more than quadrupled, so they have gone from being in the range of 6 to 9 million to 25 to 37 million today.

Let me back up for a moment and bring you up to date with those of us who taught under the program in the 60s. In 1999, I was having a conversation with one of the two people from those days that I had kept contact with. We were wondering what had happened to all our colleagues and wondering if they felt that the experience of teaching in East Africa had affected their lives as much as it had affected us in terms of our continuing interest in Africa and sensitivity to the struggles of the world's poor and other global issues. Each of us had been back to East Africa a time or two in the intervening years. We decided to try to find others who were part of the program, maybe start a newsletter. Well, this friend was caring for his elderly parents and he didn't have a computer, so the task fell to me. Using the internet and lists compiled at Teachers College 40 years ago, in 5 years we found about 400 of the original 600 former teachers, plus over 50 of our British colleagues and 2 Australians.

Others in our midst have stepped forward to organize three reunions, the first in 2001 in Washington DC, only days after 9-11, which, despite last minute cancellations, was

attended by 130 people. Two of the 3 East African ambassadors came, as well as a representative of the third. It was a great time for reminiscing, but also for getting more current on the present situation in East Africa. We made the decision that we wanted to further organize ourselves and renew our commitment to education in East Africa.

In 2003, 32 people attended a 2 week reunion and fact-finding trip in East Africa which included seminars in each of the 3 countries. In Kampala, Uganda, where we had done some initial training in the 60s, we spent a day in which we fanned out in small groups to visit schools. Over the two week period, a total of over 50 schools in the three countries received visits. Last year there was a reunion in Tanzania attended by 18 of us. I did not attend that one, but the quote I read earlier from President Mkapa was from a speech he delivered to the group.

(Middle group of slides) This is from one of our seminars during our three day conference in Kampala. That is our leader addressing the group, and seated behind him are US embassy people and a local educator.

We had a chance to renew old contacts. This gentleman was... He is now... where the emphasis is on practical subjects with the intention that graduates will be able to get jobs. At Nkumba they also strive to create more opportunities for female students, who were traditionally excluded from university education.

A keyboarding (what we used to call typing) class at Nkumba. Remember this is a place where electricity... There are classrooms full of computers at the university too.

These young women are part of a hospitality career program, which trains students for jobs in the tourism industry. They prepared a light meal for our group during our visit.

This is the group of us getting ready to leave Kampala in three minivans for Kenya. The young woman in the center is...

This is at a school for orphans, many of them AIDS orphans, run by a Canadian agency. The teacher here is teaching two grade levels, facing opposite directions in the same room. Note that the children are not well dressed. Textbooks were in short supply, with each book being shared by 4 or more children.

At some schools we had a chance to teach a class or two. Here I'm teaching a geometry lesson using some things that I had brought from home.

This is one of three of my former students that I was able to locate. His name is He had gone on to become a scientist with a Kenyan government agency where he invented a vaccine for a type of pneumonia in goats and sheep.

This is Orren Tsuma, who, unbeknownst to me until this trip had gone on to....

The fellow in the center here who was a teaching colleague at Kakamega. He went on to become....

I had a chance to visit the fellow in the flashy shirt. He is ...He works in community development and has established a trade school in a rural area with the intent of training people for employment in the rural areas. This is part of the carpentry workshop.

The tailoring class.

After the 2001 reunion, we formed an organization, Teachers for East Africa Alumni (TEAA), and we have obtained 501c3 tax exempt status with the IRS. We have a website. Based on our school visits, we've chosen 9 schools and Nkumba University to assist. For each school we have a liaison person who sees that our money is well spent. Assistance thus far has been in the form of books, lab equipment, and computers. Our income consists of money left over from the reunions and individual donations. Some of our individuals members are also doing things on their own -- helping with school fees, assisting

their former schools in various ways. One individual member received a small grant from UNESCO for a community library.

Last November, the treasurer of our organization and I -- my title is scribe -- spent three weeks in East Africa. We visited a dozen schools, including the nine we've sent money to, having a look at how they have spent our money and discussing how they might use more. By the way, the expenses for all this travel comes out of our own pockets. The organization's money goes entirely to school aid.

I'd like to describe to you some of what we have learned from our return to East Africa. First, each of the countries has recently instituted free universal primary education as mentioned by President Mkapa. Sounds like a good idea, but in fact it has led, in many instances, to huge class sizes. We heard stories of first grade classes with 60 to 90 children in a class. One has to wonder how much education is taking place, and how many of the 60 to 90 enrollees are actually in attendance each day. Many private schools have sprung up, proclaiming better quality instruction -- with fees, of course-- but I think it is fair to say that this is definitely a transition period for primary education.

At all levels, we found textbooks are often scarce or nonexistent. Much of the instruction consists of children copying notes from the chalkboard into their notebooks, and it is easy to imagine that the notes on the chalkboard come from the teacher's own notebooks from when they were in school. Teachers are often poorly paid and take on other jobs to make ends meet. One principal told us of teachers who had been on the payroll, but were not coming to work, going to other jobs instead.

In science classes we found that lab activities had been absent in many schools for some time and the government had dropped the lab requirements several years ago. Lab requirements have recently been reinstated in Kenya, at least, but many teachers seem to lack the confidence or inclination to do lab activities. Resources are lacking to properly supply and stock labs.

Computer education is spotty. Many day schools do not have electricity, and those schools that have electricity may experience an irregular supply due to recent droughts which have diminished the water supply to run the main hydroelectric dam on the Nile where it pours out of Lake Victoria in Uganda.

On an individual level, school fees and related expenses are still an issue. We spoke to one principal who, in addition to the fees for his own 4 children, was paying the fees of 13 relatives who had lost one or both parents to AIDS or other causes.

Our efforts as an organization continue. We had a fundraiser this spring and raised \$12,000 from our members, and we have just received a foundation grant of \$30,000 from the All Is One foundation. When we add in the projects of individual members, we judge that all told, our assistance thus far is valued at somewhere in the 60 to \$70,000 range.

The assistance varies among the schools, depending on the school's individual needs. In one school the emphasis might be on supplying textbooks, in another it is stocking a lab so that chemistry can be taught properly. A couple of schools are building their capacity in computer education, and we have begun work with another NGO that is engaged in shipping refurbished computers to underdeveloped countries. We are looking at purchasing something called eGranary units from an organization at the University of Iowa. As I understand it, these are external computer hard drives that contain thousands of resources plucked from the internet. Their use gives an internet-like experience, but without the expensive internet hookup, and they are much faster than an internet connection in these countries would be.

I think the rest of the story is best told with the slides, so let's have a look at those.

SHOW REST OF SLIDES

<http://cs.gmu.edu/~henryh/TEAA/>

Thanks, I've enjoyed having the opportunity to tell this story.