

Part 2

International Organizations and Education

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International Philanthropic Support for African Education: The Complex Interplay of Ideologies and Western Foreign Policy Agenda

Abstract

Beginning in the nineteenth century, a plethora of western Christian and secular philanthropies introduced “top-down” philanthropic initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa to promote education and “development”. There seems to be a complex link between the agendas of international philanthropies and their home governments’ broader foreign policy frameworks. This paper discusses American philanthropies’ educational initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) from the 1920s to the end of the twentieth century. The paper focuses on four American philanthropies namely, Phelps-Stokes Fund, Carnegie Corporation, Ford Foundation and Rockefeller Foundation. It argues that American philanthropies’ education initiatives helped to push the United States foreign policy agenda of transplanting adapted education in SSA, extending the social stratification of Black Africans in the global geopolitical processes, and promoting race relations. The agenda was promoted within the framework of White racial superiority and American “idealism” which the philanthropies presented as “development” after nations in SSA attained independence.

Keywords: global education, philanthropy, colonial education, education and development, non-state actors

Introduction

Philanthropy as a concept and practice has been around since the beginning of human civilization from Abrahamic traditions, Dharmic worldviews, and other indigenous worldviews. As an act of love, philanthropy has evolved over the years to incorporate market mechanisms to guide decisions of giving (Borgmann, 2004; Edwards, 2015; Phillips & Jung, 2016). Philanthropic practices in traditional African societies were a “level” approach where both the powerful and the poor extended kindness to one another. European-American Christian and secular Philanthropies institutionalized the “top-down” philanthropic approach in Africa as a proselytizing, colonizing and imperialistic strategy (Cunningham, 2016). After World War I, American philanthropies became interested in educating Blacks in SSA (Bledsoe, 1992; Borgmann, 2004). This paper delineates the complicated ways in which American philanthropies’ educational initiatives in SSA from the 1920s helped

promote American foreign policy interests in British colonial empire in SSA. It focuses on four philanthropies: Phelps-Stokes Fund, Carnegie Corporation, Ford and Rockefeller Foundations. The paper argues that the educational support of American philanthropies paved the way for the United States to promote its foreign policy agenda of transplanting adapted education in SSA, extending the social stratification of Blacks Africans in the global geopolitical processes, promoting race relations within the rubric of White racial superiority, and promoting American “idealism” in the form of “development” after nations in SSA attained independence. I use “adapted” education and “industrial” education interchangeably.

Philanthropy and “education transplanting” in Sub-Saharan Africa

Beginning in the nineteenth century, European-American philanthropic idealists saw education as a tool for social experimentation in SSA. Spurred by the “Great Awakening” of continental Europe and the abolition of slavery, the Christian missions used charitable programs in education, medical care, and food supply to promote communication, sustain interaction with the non-Christian world, and to proselytize (Pawlikova-Vilhanova, 2007). Beginning in the twentieth century the “non-state actors” saw the African American experience as a framework for philanthropy in SSA. This idea placed new themes on missionary and colonial agendas and the role Black missionaries from America should play in SSA (Engel, 2015). The pioneering works of African Methodists Episcopal Church (AME) became a paradox for White colonists and White missionaries in SSA. The AME missionaries saw it as a “providential design” to uplift Africans based on their own experience of rising from slavery to freedom (Engel, 2015). White missionaries despised AME missionaries’ activities in SSA for two reasons. First, many Africans abandoned White churches for AME and these Black missionaries facilitated the rise of independent African churches. Second, the White colonists were suspicious that African American missionaries would encourage Africans to join the Pan-African movement that grew in the United States in the 1920s around the Black anticolonial actors. However, the White missionaries and colonizers liked the “industrial education” philosophy of AME missionaries because AME missionaries reached Africans with great ease. The Europeans wanted to work with AME missions to implement industrial education to improve Africans’ working skills into directions that benefitted White supremacists’ interests.

Debates about the ambiguous role of African American missionaries in Africa concretized in the 1920s in recommendations and resolutions that defined the place the African American experience was to have in missionary-colonial government collaborations (Engel, 2015). The first proposition in this regard was made by the Phelps-Stokes Fund, an American philanthropist organization focusing on “Negro education”. In 1920 and 1924, Phelps-Stokes sponsored two commissions to survey schools in Africa to advise the British Colonial Office about where the existing education needed adjustment. The proposition was to transplant “adapted education” on the African soil. Adapted education was developed within the framework of pseudo-scientific racism and new imperialism in the mid-nineteenth century to meet the special needs and characteristics of Blacks in American south.

After World War I, Phelps-Stokes transplanted adapted education in Africa as a strategy to shape Black education policy in America and Africa to reflect the global

policy and practice, promote White American cultural norms and dominant institutions to African societies, expand American interest in SSA, and draw unexploited African regions into an expansionist American empire (Cameron, 1975; Davis, 1980). Phelps-Stokes and Carnegie Corporation established the Booker T. Washington Industrial institution in Liberia and helped implement industrial curriculum in Achimota School in Ghana, and the Jeanes teacher programs in Kenya and Southern Africa to emphasize practical aspects in education and networks of visiting teachers to rural community schools to aid local teachers. Carnegie Corporation and Phelps-Stokes facilitated education visits of African educators to St. Helena Island in South Carolina to study Black education and interracial work in the American south (Davis, 1980).

“Adapted education” and social stratification in SSA

American philanthropic support for educating Blacks was based on the ideology of “social stratification” (Hall, 1994). Before coming to SSA, Phelps-Stokes Fund supported Black education in American south within the rubric of Blacks’ subordination in a stratified White American society. In the early twentieth century, Phelps-Stokes Fund President, Dr. Thomas Jesse Jones, articulated the organization’s agenda to use adapted education to perpetuate the subordinated role of Blacks in Africa (Phelps-Stokes Fund, 1962). Phelps-Stokes recommended that colonial and missionary education systems replace traditional literary education with industrial and agricultural training of the Hampton-Tuskegee model, place mission schools under colonial government supervision, and that colonial government provides financial aid to support mission schools. The recommendation helped establish a system of grants to some mission schools in British colonial territories, streamline Black educational initiatives on Africa, and place the educational initiatives of African American Christian missions under direct supervision of the colonial administration (Sanderson, 1975).

Hampton-Tuskegee education was created on the ideas that: blacks needed “teachers of moral strength and mental culture”; manual labor would solve Black poverty; and Blacks remain in a state of permanent economic, political, and social subordination to the dominant White society. Richard Hunt Davis notes that industrial education was to “become a drill ground to send Black men and women rather than scholars into the world” (Davis, 1980). The Phelps-Stokes Fund pushed the Tuskegee industrial educational philosophy in Africa to ensure Blacks’ perpetual position as semi-skilled and semi-literate people whose manpower would be utilized to help industrialize colonial territories in SSA. The Hampton-Tuskegee education model transplanted in SSA was to prepare and produce African leaders who would cooperate with philanthropically minded Whites.

Phelps-Stokes Commission advocated a low standard of schooling in character development, health and hygiene, agriculture and gardening, industrial skills, knowledge of home economics and wholesome recreation for the Negro masses. Adapted education was to socialize Black Africans to know their place in the emerging global society where European-Americans were in control in Africa. It would ensure that Blacks live in colonial territories in SSA without competing with Whites or demanding emancipation (Healy-Clancy, 2014). Carnegie Corporation and Rockefeller Foundation supported Phelps-Stokes’ educational initiatives in

Africa within the same contexts of racist ideologies which propelled these organizations to support the Eugenics movement of the era. In 1923 John D. Rockefeller International Education Board supported Phelps-Stokes Fund to conduct a survey for the British Colonial Office of educational institutions in British territories in SSA. As a result, Phelps-Stokes Fund provided a blueprint for Carnegie Corporation's educational investment in East and Southern Africa even as the issue of community-based vocational education or university-based education was being debated on the continent (Berman, 1977; Rosenfield, 2014). Edward Berman argues that Carnegie Corporation's support for education in SSA was a way to advance American cultural transformation in British colonial Africa.

Philanthropy, education, race relations and American “idealism”

American philanthropies' educational initiatives in SSA was to engender relationships between Whites and Blacks and showcase American “idealism” in the 1950s and 1960s as British colonial territories in SSA attained independence. White Americans believed the Hampton-Tuskegee industrial education model was the key to solving the Black-White race problem (Davis, 1980). The Phelps-Stokes Commission's goal to promote education in SSA was bolstered by the events of World War I when Europe and the United States saw education of “backward” Africans as critical and promotion of “wise” educational policies in SSA essential to prevent interracial friction (Phelps-Stokes Fund, 1962). Phelps-Stokes Commission members were mostly White benevolent individuals with Kwegyir Aggrey from Ghana recruited to bolster its race composition. Phelps-Stokes Fund crisscrossed West, West Central and South Africa from 1920-1921 followed by visits to East, Central and South Africa in 1924. In South Africa, Phelps-Stokes helped shape Natal policies in bifurcating education for Blacks and Whites (Healy-Clancy, 2014). After its expeditions, Phelps-Stokes provided travel grants to persons involved in African education to visit the United States. Similarly, Carnegie Corporation supported education in Africa to promote United States' connections to the world through immigration, foreign languages, and international exchanges which enabled Americans to engage in the world (Rosenfield, 2014). Carnegie Corporation's educational support in SSA initially took center stage in South Africa after World War I with the backing of the United States government as part of the government's grand agenda to stimulate optimism after the war had weakened the meaning of progress in Europe.

From Phelps-Stokes' initial expedition in the 1920s, to the philanthropic activities of Carnegie Corporation, Rockefeller and Ford foundations in the 1930s and the post independent Africa, American philanthropies positioned themselves as carriers of American “idealism” and worked on the principle that nationalism and internationalism could be mutually reinforcing identities. The liberal idealism of the mid-twentieth century couched America's imperial interests in terms of altruism, evolution and world progress. For these philanthropies, “idealism” meant bringing other countries to American consciousness through the support and partnership with institutions, universities, libraries, and development of professional development for university staff, scientific research and useful publication in former British dominions and colonies (Effah & Senadza, 2008; Weeks, 2008).

Philanthropic support to promote American idealism was felt in South Africa in the 1930s and in countries such as Ghana and Nigeria in the 1960s. The agenda to bring South Africa more firmly into American consciousness persisted until the 1970s when the international community spoke against Apartheid in South Africa even as the United States remained silent about the political situation in South Africa. In the 1970s, Carnegie Corporation shifted its strategy in order not to be viewed as an agent of the United States foreign policy (Bell, 2000). Rockefeller Foundation helped develop the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) which provided grants for thesis support while both Carnegie Corporation and Ford Foundation forged partnership with the Association of African Universities in Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and other newly-independent nations to build institutional management and leadership capacities (Effah & Senadza, 2008).

In the 1950s and 1960s American philanthropies used education as an avenue to promote economic cooperation and development in the newly-independent nations in SSA. Carnegie Corporation, Rockefeller Foundation and Ford Foundation forged partnership with the newly-independent nations to support educational activities in order to promote development and modernization with the understanding that there is much rate of return to citizens attending schools in the newly-independent African nations (Parmer, 2012; Rosenfield, 2014). The philanthropic efforts to promote economic development was influenced by the goal of United States government and private organizations to provide technical assistance-couched in a form of liberal capitalism (Rosenfield, 2014). American philanthropies including Ford and Rockefeller foundations, supported higher education in newly-independent nations to promote human capacity building. American philanthropies also partnered with national educational commissions of Nigeria and Ghana to establish teacher education programs as well as institutes of education, and to provide linkage between institutes of education in African universities and universities in United States or United Kingdom. Carnegie Corporation supported the Ashby Commission of Nigeria to establish more institutes of education, and forged linkage between Institute of Education at University of Ghana and Institute of Education at the University of London and the Teachers College at Columbia University to promote faculty exchanges, teacher professionalism and curriculum reforms (Rosenfield, 2014).

In the 1960s, the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations and the United States Agency for International Development as well as other agencies also collaborated and supported higher education in many areas in SSA, which created networks of scholars, investors, philanthropists, and policy makers that became influential. The programs that American foundations supported, helped steer a middle course between the demands of African nationalists for rapid progress and the elitism of British colonialists in creating an African elite in their own image that were mostly pro-American/Western but contributed little to national development or to interrogation of the existing social inequalities in the societies (Parmer, 2012). Parmer argues that colonial authorities fostered development of native elites for functional purposes to aid colonial rule. Therefore, the tiny minority of educated Africans was great for the colonial administration. It was this western-oriented elites that the American foundations worked further to nurture and develop.

Conclusion

Since the 1920s American philanthropies implemented “top-down” approach to philanthropy to promote education policies that served the interests and charted American foreign policy agenda in SSA. The strategy was part of the western agenda to subordinate Black Africans. However, Black Africans were not passive recipients of western philanthropic influence as we witnessed in the vehement resistance of adapted education in Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria (Mfum-Mensah, 2017). While Black Africans were to be subordinated to the whims and caprices of the higher strategic goals of American and Western powers, as was the common belief of American philanthropies from the 1920s, the reaction of the Africans toward the education model transplanted in Africa showed that colonized and subjugated people set their own agenda overtime and become active agents to resist outside forces. It is clear that during the century of European-American philanthropic initiatives for education in SSA, Black Africans worked to reshape the intentions and forms of an imposed education model.

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