

# **Conceptualizing Public Service Equity and Equality in Kenya: Towards Zero Unemployment**

By

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## **Abstract**

*The issue of unemployment, defined in this paper as lack of jobs, lingers many minds in Kenya. It is alleged that unemployment is the root cause of poverty, crimes, illiteracy, poor health care among others unfavourable conditions that continue to afflict the people of Kenya today. It is in this state of afflictions that prescriptive philosophers seek to challenge the human mind as far as possible in trying to understand basic issues such as suffering, pain, death, happiness, good and evil, which they seek to explain by speculation. This paper is a speculative engagement of Public Service Equity and Equality practice as a panacea to the alleviation of the problem of unemployment and its resultant afflictions in Kenya.*

**Keywords:** *Equity, equality, development, unemployment, development, Practice*

## **1. Introduction**

Unemployment continues to dominate many minds, governments, organizations and families. It is common to find people exploring theories, researches and proposals to address unemployment. Governments across the world are engaged in practices aimed at alleviating unemployment. Reasons for these efforts are associated with the effects of unemployment in the society. Such effects as theft, robbery, drug trafficking, poor health, depression, robbery, prostitution, drug abuse, suicide, juvenile delinquency, school drop-out, strikes and all sorts of deviant behavior have all been linked to unemployment. Unemployment is therefore, as seen from its effects, the greatest problem in the world today. There is urgent need for a radical theory and practice that will unravel ideas that could bring this puzzle to a fecund end so that democracy could make congruent contributions to development. In its aspirations, a conceptualization of Public Service Equity and Equality Practice in Kenya propounds that citizens and their institutions together with principles are undermined by unemployment. Unemployment is the main source of inequality and inequity, being an offshoot of improper sharing and distribution of job opportunities in Kenya.

Unemployment has been mentioned in Kenya's reports nearly since the achievement of independence. For instance unemployment concerns with regard to the 7-4-2-3 system of education were conspicuously mentioned in The Gachathi Report of 1976. The Report noted that:

(...)One of the largest problems confronting the country is that of unemployment. The problem is aggravated by the annual outputs of school leavers whose number continue to swell following the enormous expansion of the education system in the first years of independence (...)Unemployment which was said to have started among primary school leavers had spread to embrace even university graduates (Republic of Kenya, 1976:33-34).

According to Maleche (1976), the Kenya National Assembly's Select Committee on unemployment (1970), made calls for change of education system to address unemployment noting that:

Of fundamental importance to the solution of unemployment problem will be a reform of content and scope of educational curricula in the nation's education system. The present curricula are too exclusively academic. The school-leavers cannot apply their knowledge to farming or to other activities like bookkeeping, masonry, and carpentry and joinery. The school curricula should therefore be revised to give them a more practical bias. Teaching on agriculture and practical skills should be established both at primary and secondary schools (Maleche, 1976:13)

Muya (2000) argues that the 8-4-4 system of education, which was pre-vocational in nature, was introduced in January 1985, following the Mackay report of 1982. King and McGrath (2002), report that:

(...) the 8-4-4 policy arose out of the concerns that a basic academic education might lack the necessary content to promote widespread sustainable (self) employment (...) King and McGrath (2002:89).

The 8-4-4 policy emanated from the assumption that it would equip pupils with employable skills thereby enabling school dropouts at all levels to be either self-employed or secure employment in the informal sector (Eshiwani, 1992). As King and McGrath (2002), observed the new system intended to orient youths towards self-employment. The new policy would improve the student's employment potential and thus make them self-reliant (Amutabi, 2003). However, as Owino (1997) reported the crisis of unemployment remained evident. As of today, the Government of Kenya mentions unemployment as a major problem in Kenya.

## **2. Methodology**

This paper is based on a reflective speculation in its theorization and therefore does not conform to conventional methodologies.

### ***Conceptualizing the Idea of Public Service Equity and Equality***

The Public Service Equity and Equality Practice postulates that equity and equality cannot be achieved through ethnic and gender balance or political devolution. The Practice propounds that attention and focus must be put on the individual person occupying an office. Political reforms, gender and ethnic balance would obtain equity and equality when all public service opportunities are considered on a person's benefit, which in turn distributes employment opportunities as well as unemployment amongst all Kenyan citizens.

The Public Service Equity and Equality Practice calls for employment orientation in the public sector in which people work on rotational basis. This is explained such that all persons with qualifications for employment in respective skills are all employed by the government as the job opportunities belong to them all. However, since they all cannot serve at the same time, they will have to be put in cohorts. The first cohort works for a period of Five years and proceed on leave to pave way for the next group, which will as well work for the same period and pave way for the next so that all persons have got an opportunity to serve and earn.

### ***The Discourse of Public Service Equity and Equality Practice***

This Practice discourses that unemployment in Kenya is caused by imbalances and improper distribution of job opportunities in the Public Service. This Practice observes that employment opportunities in the Public Service are communal resources and that no one individual, or group would have them at the expense of the other members of the community. It is noted that whereas the political wing of the society has embraced elements of equity and equality, for example putting a ceiling on presidential terms in

office, parliamentary and civic term limits, the non political arm, mostly seen as the public and civil service has not.

Persons who are occupying positions in the public service prevent those who seek employment by declaring that there are no vacancies. To deny a fellow citizen a chance to benefit from a public job opportunity is to be selfish and this undermines national interest. No one individual should benefit from a communal opportunity.

### ***Dissenting Grounds***

In the Kenya's public sector, mostly seen as the government, people are offered jobs from the time of employment until retirement. Retirement age is Sixty (60) years, whereas the age of hire is between 18 years. Given that in Kenya there are many qualified people than there are available job opportunities, it means that some people work at the expense of others. Consider the scenarios below:

#### ***Scene 1***

Tom and Jerry are age-mates, 21 years old. They attended the same institution for training and attained the same qualifications as accountants. There is a vacancy for a district accountant and Tom has been hired and Jerry is left out. Tom is going to work until he retires at Sixty years, for there to be a vacancy in his current post. Jerry will be Sixty years when Tom retires and therefore not suitable for considerations.

In the scenario of Tom and Jerry above, Tom has benefited from the public office while Jerry has not and thereby resulting in extreme inequity and inequality.

#### ***Scene 2***

Mary and Anne are both women 30 years old. They hold similar training background from a university. In their country, there is a law that provides for 40% of job opportunities in the government to be given to women and the retirement is Sixty years. There is a vacancy for a public school teacher. They both apply and Anne is given the job. This position will be vacant when Anne retires. At her retirement both ladies will be same age and so Mary will be unsuitable for hire. It is apparent from this scene that although the affirmative action was to benefit women, it can be seen that the same has created inequity and inequality among women.

#### ***Scene 3***

Democratic practice in Kenya lays emphasis on inclusive governance that ensures equitable distribution of public positions to root out tribalism and marginalization. For over Forty years Kenya has been independent, Otieno's region has had ten people who have held cabinet positions and about Eight Hundred holding other public offices. On many occasions the same people have continuously held the offices and they have had personal gains. Otieno does not see how awarding a cabinet position to these people benefited his entire community as this was individual rewards for political support.

### ***Situation Analysis***

From the Three scenarios above it is clear that the practices so described although intended to embrace equity and equality in a democratic society, they are in themselves anti-thesis of the same efforts. This illustrates that equity and equality cannot be built along gender, regional, race, ethnicity or religious grounds, but at the individual level.

It is on the basis of these scenarios that the Public Service Equity and Equality Practice seeks to articulate the understanding of democracy, from the traditional understanding of the rule of the people, by the people and for the people to: Participation of all, in all, by all and for all. The underlying principle is that an equitable society is possible where everyone is given a chance to bake the cake and eat it. In every society, each member has a role to play that fits him or her in the communal membership. This way, the

current practice in the non-political practice of the employment in the public service is the extreme cause of all effects of unemployment and the exploitation of man by man.

***Purpose of This Practice***

The purpose of this Practice therefore is to provide and advocate for a system of sharing job opportunities in the Public Sector that ensures equity and equality among the members of the public, thereby achieving participation of all, in all, by all and for all, and articulate the approach to democracy.

***Justifications for the Practice***

The practice in hiring people in the public service is that once someone is hired, he or she serves until retirement, or may be dismissed or incapacitated in one way or the other. This practice means in itself that one person would stay in office in life time at the expense of those not hired.

The approach espoused in the paragraph above was put in place at the time when job opportunities exceeded the available manpower and this was at the independence stage. Indeed, there are people who are holding public office since independence. This way, it is evident that there are some people, who have never had a chance to serve, despite the fact that they are qualified. This situation gets worse at this time when the number of those qualified has exceeded the available job opportunities. Indeed, statistics indicate that the number of those unemployed is higher than those employed.

Given that democracy has the import of having the will of the majority as over-riding factor, the practice in the public service as seen in this scenario is a sense of a minority controlling the majority. The people hired in the public service have come up with some strategies to alleviate unemployment, which have been in themselves ineffective:

***Loans to stimulate entrepreneurship:*** This engagement is redundant because many youth leaving school do not have assets that will serve as collateral towards repaying the loans. Furthermore, majority of them are coming from universities and colleges already with education loans to pay. Some have borrowed from Higher Education Loan's Board while others have sold their property or taken loans from elsewhere. It is only sound that those people who have been working be asked to take loans to venture into businesses and other investments. People who have been working have saved or earned money that could be put into investment. A fresh graduate has nothing and should be given a chance to make the same earnings.

***Private Sector Initiative:*** Whereas the private sector initiatives contribute much to the alleviation of unemployment, the sector can be strengthened by those from the public sector. Some of the officers in Government positions earn a lot of money that is enough to open more private sector initiatives. This way, when made to serve for a given period, they will invest their earnings, thereby enhancing the public sector initiative.

***Vocational Courses:*** As already seen in the introduction of this paper, the Kenya government has tried to address unemployment through education. This has not obtained and it is not worth to put hope in such efforts.

**Contributions of this Practice**

In its long term aspirations, this Practice will:

- a) Contribute towards the respect and observation of human rights
- b) Contribute towards alleviation of poverty
- c) Contribute to the strengthening of democratic institutions and processes
- d) Contribute towards anti-corruption initiatives
- e) Contribute towards equity and equality in sharing of resources
- f) Contribute to the strengthening of democratic practices for all
- g) Contribute towards economic and social development

#### 4. Conclusion

From its discussion, this paper concludes that Kenya could make strides towards socio-economic growth through the Public service equity and equality practice. This is premised on the fact that such a practice will distribute job opportunities among all citizens thereby stimulating and enhancing investment.

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