

## **More than Classrooms: Statement on Expanding Secondary Education 13 February, 2006**

The numbers of children completing Standard Seven, and ‘passing’ the primary school terminal examinations, have increased rapidly in recent years. High pass rates can give enormous pride and hope to students and their families. These same hopes are dashed, and joy turned to pain, when large numbers who pass are unable to continue with secondary education.

Securing access to secondary schooling has reached crisis point. According to recent reports, 61.9% of those who passed Standard Seven from 14 regions have failed to join secondary schools. Some regions are more affected than others. For example, Dar-es-Salaam managed to absorb only 21.7% of its 21,971 Form One prospects while Mbeya could only take in 5,709 out of 43,866, a mere 13%. Even Tanga, a region with a relatively impressive intake rate at 67.5%, left out 4,542 qualified primary school leavers.

This is not surprising, for Tanzania has one of the lowest rates of secondary schooling in the world. According to latest data, less than one in ten Tanzanian children are able to access secondary education. Uganda sends almost double the proportion to secondary school, and Kenya almost four times as many.

The Fourth Phase Government has certainly taken note. According to media reports, Prime Minister Lowassa has directed all regions to ensure that at least 50% of qualified primary leavers receive secondary education by March 2006. All over the country, national leaders, local governments, religious bodies, MPs and citizens themselves are mobilizing to construct secondary schools. We commend the Government and other actors for taking action. It is precisely this sort of focused, resolute and get-things-done-on-the-ground leadership that this country needs.

**In these efforts, however, a fundamental truth should not be forgotten. Secondary schools are more than buildings and desks. Classrooms are important, but teachers, books and basic funds for running schools are even more vital.** Wherever possible, one also needs libraries, laboratories and basic equipment. Every secondary school therefore requires at least a minimum package of inputs. Doing less is to dash the expectations of students and their parents, and risks creating a veneer of education that will not enable our people to thrive.

The minimum package is needed for primary education as well, but is more acute at secondary level. Teachers need to be knowledgeable in specific subjects, and better motivated and supported to teach adolescents. The minimal training they require needs clarification. Learning is difficult without books for regular reference. And schools must be able to pay their bills. We don’t need just any school in Tanzania, we need quality schools. Students who complete secondary education should be able to think, ask questions, solve problems, innovate, create jobs, and move with confidence.

In his speech to Parliament on 30 December last year, President Kikwete emphasized expanded schooling and urged us to focus on quality of education. Leaders at all levels need to provide leadership on the quantity and quality of education at the same time, instead of taking the view that we build classrooms first and worry about the rest later.

The Secondary Education Development Plan (SEDP) was meant to be a balanced plan, with corresponding budget, to guide investment. But its implementation appears to have hit serious snags. The MPs who recently called for SEDP to be reviewed have a point. How it can be effectively implemented needs clarity. There are even two ‘versions’ of SEDP: an optimistic scenario in Ministry documents and a lower, perhaps ‘realistic’ scenario reflected in the agreement with the World Bank. Moreover, unlike PEDP, SEDP does not seem to have broad political and donor support. The reasons for this should be investigated, and strategic solutions found. Secondary education is far too important to be under-funded.

Instead of a restrictive process, reviewing SEDP should be a broad, open and public exercise. Besides technical experts, students, parents and teachers, the Tanzania Teachers’ Union (TTU), the Tanzania Education Network (TEN/MEI) and other civil society organizations can provide valuable advice. As always, HakiElimu stands ready to contribute to Government efforts to provide quality basic education for all, the very foundation of our democracy and wellbeing.

Signed,

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Executive Director

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that enables people to make a difference  
in education and democracy.

HakiElimu’s vision is of a Tanzania where  
all children enjoy their right to a quality basic education,  
where schools respect the dignity and human rights of all people,  
and where education promotes equity, creativity, critical thinking and democracy.