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PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KENYA:  
Some Critical Constraints  
on their Effectiveness.

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the CPE examination and the effect that it has had on primary school teaching and the students within the schools. The paper is divided into five sections. After the introduction, the second section considers the nature of the CPE and its effect on teaching both examinable and non-examinable subjects in the upper primary school. The third section examines the repeater phenomenon and describes the various methods of repeating. The fourth section considers some of the effects of the presence of repeaters within both the primary and secondary school systems, as well as the CPE as a method for selecting students for secondary school. The final section makes recommendations concerning (a) reform of the CPE, (b) reformed CPE and repeaters, (c) administrative reform and repeaters, (d) the need for a general policy on repeaters, and (e) policy towards primary school teachers.

The evidence is drawn mainly from Rift Valley Province.

## INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this paper is to point in detail to some of the effects that the present selection system for entry to secondary schools is having upon education in Kenya. It will be shown that this nationwide computerised examination (known as the Certificate of Primary Education - CPE) has resulted in a number of quite critical conditions that were not foreseen when this particular process of selection was inaugurated in 1965 and 1966. Amongst the more serious of these are the restraints set by this examination upon most forms of curricular improvement in the upper primary school; a corresponding situation in the secondary schools where it is increasingly feared that success in the CPE is a poor indicator of secondary school skills; and finally, and most alarming to some educators, the accentuation of the repeater phenomenon whereby in many districts the upper primary schools have become congested with candidates attempting the CPE for as often as three or four consecutive years. The discussion is then followed by a consideration of what alternatives are open to government, if the present crisis in the schools is to be alleviated.

Although this study will be principally concerned with the deleterious effects of the selection system within the schools, it is recognised that the malfunctioning of the CPE and the vast build up of students prolonging their years in the upper primaries is partly due to the wider politics of education in Kenya. Almost any selection system would be under severe pressure in a situation where it had become widely admitted that the primary leaving certificate was no passport to employment.<sup>1</sup> The six years under review (1965-71) were therefore a time when the highest class in the primary school - standard seven - became, from a curricular viewpoint, almost exclusively concerned with entry to government secondary schools. Concurrently students' aspirations for secondary education came to reflect the worsening employment situation for primary school leavers, and this has been seen in turn in the terminology applied to success or failure in the CPE: the Ministry of Education's original notion was the majority of the standard seven leavers would regard their certificates as passes even though they did not gain entrance to secondary schools.<sup>2</sup> In practice, however, the majority

1. See for instance the debate on the extension of primary education, Republic of Kenya National Assembly, Official Report, cols 1047-66.
2. It is interesting to note that Brownstein in his study of primary school leavers (1966) was surprised to find that many of those who had passed CPE returned to repeat the following year.

of Kenya students continue to regard their official 'passes' as failures as long as they do not gain them a government school place. As can be imagined, the waiting period during which students strive to convert their notional passes into a 'real' pass has the additional effect of producing successful form one students in the secondary schools whose average age in many districts is certainly not getting any less, and may well be rising even. Students are thus caught in a situation where job realism and the national rhetoric about providing ever more secondary school places make them cling to their primary schools; the rhetoric however conceals the fact that government secondary school expansion (theoretically four new government streams per province per year) cannot begin to satisfy the rising demand from the primary schools.

#### CERTIFICATE OF PRIMARY EDUCATION

Against this short general background it may be profitable to examine the nature of the CPE and assess its part in creating the present state of affairs. Since 1965 this examination has been of the multiple choice variety where answers are indicated by marking one of four possible boxes on a sheet of paper that can be scanned by a computer. The subjects covered are three, - maths, English and general group consisting of science, history, geography and civics.

English and the C. P. E.: At the time of its inauguration, it was felt that the total number of CPE candidates made the assessment of written or essay work prohibitive; consequently, there is now no occasion to write anything longhand in the examination beyond one's name. However, the removal of this writing requirement has produced a number of conditions that are simply not compensated for by the dramatically improved objectivity and speed of the new marking process.

Firstly, it has a tendency to obscure the differences of ability between candidates, since nobody fails to finish all the questions in the papers. Towards the end of the examination the poorer students fill in at random (but with a 25% chance on average of being correct) all the answers that they have not been able to work out. And, as can be imagined, on the occasions where a particular paper gets very difficult towards the end (maths in 1970 was an example of this), the random-guessers are often in a stronger position than the bright student who conscientiously attempts to work out his answers. Indeed, it is now quite widely admitted by primary school heads and children in the upper primary that there is a strong element of luck in the exam. Over the years there have been sufficient bright students getting poor results, and poor students doing

very well for the credibility of the exam to be brought into disrepute. It is an interesting comment therefore on its alleged objectivity that in many parts of the country success or failure should be considered a question of bahati na sibu (lucky strike), and that some headmasters have been so worried by this element that they have gone to the length of administering the whole CPE examination to their standard one or two class, reaching in the process the conclusion that some standard one and two children with luck can pass the CPE with reputable marks.

It may be difficult to believe that the element of luck is as significant as some pupils and teachers believe; however, this was not the most serious consequence of removing the assessment of written English from the examination. The real crisis in the average primary school is the knowledge that written English ability is no longer examinable. The change in the selection system has not made a significant impact on the few high cost English medium primary schools where teachers are sufficiently qualified and confident to teach the wider skills of English expression. But in the thousands of ordinary schools whose reputations with the parents derive from their continuing to gain between four and ten secondary places each year, teachers feel themselves forced to pay scant attention to compositional skills. Nor is this only in standard seven. Such is the intensity of competition for secondary school places that the methods conceived of as necessary for success pervade teaching as far as standard four and five. Rightly or wrongly, the CPE is seen, apart from the element of chance, as a technique in which long and sustained practice is vital for success. Hence multiple choice teaching extends throughout the upper primary school standards in many areas, and pupils have begun to regard time spent on composition, whether in English or the writing up of history, geography or science notes, as time wasted. Thus primary teachers for whom the English essay was an integral part of their own elementary education find themselves in a situation where pupils come close to refusing to work on composition skills that are not examined.

In each of the subjects, the CPE is seen as requiring a very close acquaintance with a body of fact. The right answers, culled from the previous six years papers are carefully memorised and worked over. In English this means, amongst other things, that the long list of the commonest mistakes of East African English speakers has to be continually

reproduced in multiple choice settings, and pupils trained to select the correct structure amongst a number of tempting alternatives. Although this may be a convenient way of setting an examination, the consequences in the average school are that the wrong answers are presented to the pupils as frequently as the correct ones - a procedure that is clearly of little value in improving the English structure of the weaker children. The style of the CPE English examination has also switched the interest of teachers away from whatever books on the syllabus require the students to 'answer in their own words' towards those that provide practice in multiple choice answers. This has meant the virtual abandonment of the Oxford Progressive English course with its heavy emphasis on comprehension and written English towards whatever books offer the teacher an escape from the tedious practice of constructing multiple choice items himself.

The 'Unofficial' Syllabus for CPE: In English as in the other subjects it is widely felt that the books prescribed on the syllabus (however good they may be for other purposes) are of little direct value in coaching pupils for success in CPE. Generally they do not have a specifically East African orientation, and naturally most of them are not multiple choice. The result is that upper primary students have, in tens of thousands, gone outside the official syllabus to find books that would directly aid them in preparing for secondary school selection. What have in fact become the standard texts in Kenya's upper primary school classes are a series of books developed by Indian school masters and published in Nairobi, Nakuru, Sotik and other towns. The most popular of these are (and the full list runs to at least twenty titles):-

The C.P.E. 1971 Pupil's Companion in all Subjects.

The Complete C.P.E. Guide Book.

The attractions of such books are not very different from similar texts developed in India, America and Europe for the same end. However, the selection pressures in Kenya have perhaps given them a proportionally greater popularity than this genre elsewhere. For one thing, they are absolutely up to date in the sense that there is a new edition each year, and each fresh edition contains as an appendix all

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3. Among a much longer list are the following more popular titles:-  
Progressive Practice Papers for CPE: All Subjects (10/-); Complete All Subjects for CPE (10/-); The CPE Pupil's Companion in All Subjects (16/-); Preparatory Workshop in General Subjects (7/50); The Complete CPE Guidebook (15/-); All-in-One CPE (12/50); Prepare yourself for CPE (15/-); An Introduction to Primary Science (3/50); Primary English: Objective Practice (9/50); Preparatory Tests in English, Maths, and General Subjects for CPE (7/50).

the previous years' CPE questions with answers, but, more crucially, gives the teacher and the pupils a large number of multiple choice variations of the question types raised by the CPE. If any new type of question is introduced in the CPE of, say, 1971, that particular item will be discussed, analysed and reproduced in a variety of multiple choice contexts for the candidates preparing for the following year. Nor are these books mere test papers; they are in fact five textbooks in one, with the text derived entirely from the recent years' test material. There is no extraneous matter, and the contents are presented attractively with clear illustrations, maps and diagrams. Each block of teaching material is tested (with answers) in turn. In a word, they are, at some 15/- the single best investment that most pupils can make in CPE success for the coming year. Indeed it may be noted that individual primary school success in CPE seems to correlate quite highly with the spread of these texts. In a small survey of some 300 standard seven students in the Rift Valley Province, it was found that only 39 did not actually use or possess a copy of one of these books. More than fifty per cent possessed a copy of their own, and in some of the more successful schools between 70 and 80% of the children had a copy. This impression that perhaps half of the entire standard seven in the country possess a 'Guide' or 'Companion' is given confirmation by the fact that between January and September of 1971, 65,000 copies of the current 'Companion' had been sold.

Impact of CPE on Examinable Subjects: At this point some of the further effects of the exam syllabus upon the primary school curriculum should be looked at. It appears, as a general finding, that there is much cynicism amongst primary school teachers about the possibility of innovation in curricula when teaching is under its present constraint. A number of teachers have of course been exposed to discovery methods, the principles of new maths and new science; there is, however, a strong countervailing trend in which pupils know from their CPE texts what are the answers or the definitions and scientific laws, and increasingly regard as a waste of time proving by rudimentary experiments what they already know. Inevitably perhaps the present style of objective test concentrates on the general rules and definitions, and the pupils resent time not spent on revising these. Additionally few primary schools have the equipment or facilities to carry out scientific experiments as the syllabus suggests.

On the mathematics side one of the most serious changes, parallel to the lack of interest in the writing of English, is that some



of the skills such as the careful construction of graphs and geometric figures are no longer considered important either by students. In the actual examination all the figures are provided and it is only necessary to infer from inspecting the graph or drawing which of four alternatives is the correct one. Furthermore, a casual inspection of some of the children's workbooks in standard seven will reveal in most subjects lists of question numbers at the side of the page and then merely the corresponding answer letter, - a, b, c, or d.

Impact of CPE on Non-examinable Subjects: However, it is some of the non-examinable subjects which would appear to fare worst in the primary school at the moment. These are Swahili, domestic science and handicrafts practical agriculture and religious knowledge. As can be imagined, the teachers in these subjects have to be unusually gifted to hold the attention of the children. In some primary schools it has been found that while these periods remain visible on the timetable they may often in practice have been scrapped in favour of one of the more important examinable subjects. And even if these subjects are taught as intended, it is a common complaint of teachers that a section of the students simply revise other subjects from the CPE Companions while the lesson proceeds. There is, therefore, the somewhat paradoxical situation in which the only subjects which have a vocational side to them, and which stand high in the rhetoric of politicians and primary school curriculum experts are those subjects which are least regarded in the schools. It is moreover asserted by some headmasters that pupils have formed the habit of skipping domestic science or handicraft periods, and may be found at home working on the really critical subjects. Equally with Swahili, it is a matter of some concern to those who see Swahili taking a more prominent place in national life that the standard of primary school Swahili has probably in fact deteriorated over the last decade.

Effects of the System on Teachers: It will be noted later that aspects of the standard seven cramming system are having a serious effect on the pupils; but for the moment it is equally worth pointing out that many of the teachers regard themselves as the victims of an examination system in which they have no say. Admittedly there must be a large body of teachers who favour a system where a restricted corpus of information is all they have apparently to communicate. But many of those who have been interviewed in the course of this study obviously deeply resent the fact in the pupil's eyes the teachers cannot compete with the CPE texts in the business of preparing successful candidates for secondary schools.

The students have a very fine perception of how much is required of each discipline, and teachers who begin to give too much detail either find that they lose the classes' attention or that their detailed notes are not heeded. An example may help to illustrate the point; at the moment, for reasons that will be explained later, the History section of the examination centres round the various whites who 'discovered' parts of East Africa, the Arabs and the Portuguese on the Coast, the abolition of the slave trade, and missionary contribution, and some of the major political and constitutional landmarks in the development of the independent states of this region. Names, dates, and places are the principal test items, and, as with the science examination, the pupils exert themselves to learn all this information, and see no need for any of the detail of sequence and motivation linking their discreet facts. For instance, probably no standard seven student this year does not know that Mbatian was a Maasai leader (there was a question last year which asked whether he was a) Kamba, b) Maasai, c) Chagga d) Nandi); however, most students know nothing else about him at all. Nor is there an absence of books now on local African History. In a situation where the examination cannot test any coherent knowledge of African life and custom, students cannot be blamed for their restricted interests, nor the schools for not investing in more relevant teaching materials. The majority of standard seven who eventually have to abandon hope of secondary school entry thus leave their primary school with no connected knowledge of the history of East Africa, and even the successful minority have to persevere to form three before they encounter African history again. If it is conceded that history in the primary schools should give pupils a working knowledge of their own people's history and its place within the wider history of the nation, it seems clear that the present single national examination is not encouraging that goal; and in other subjects it must be admitted that the situation is not dissimilar.

#### REPEATERS IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

Before turning to recommendations over the selection system, it is necessary to deal at some length with those students who take the examination for CPE more than once, since almost no serious work has yet been done on this repeating element in the schools.<sup>4</sup> It has to be admitted that the build up of these repeating candidates in the primary

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4. Brownstein, op. cit.

schools is partly a function of the lack of secondary places. Also, repeating is certainly not a new phenomenon in Kenya, as many colonial education officers would admit. However, it has been much more marked since the introduction of the present computerised examination. The plain reason for this is that this type of examination has been seen clearly to favour those who can manage to sit it twice or three times. The CPE is presently a revisable examination; the tests and techniques of six years' papers have to be memorised, and with the help of the CPE 'Companion' certain types of questions applied to allied subject matter. The only difficulty is how to continue to find a place in a primary school for the two to four year period necessary to reach the limit of one's ability.

CPE and Deception: One word is in order before attempting to explain something of the complexity of the repeater phenomenon in Kenya, and that is that the main people involved with working the system are for very good reasons those least ready to divulge the truth. From the pupil's side it is widely believed that if the government, the computer or whoever may be responsible for form one secondary selection should find out that they are taking the examination for the third or fourth time, then they will not be considered as favourably as those taking it fresh for the first time. Deception over age and the number of years spent in the primary school becomes second nature to the point where many pupils will still not admit to having been repeaters even after successfully entering secondary school. On the headmasters' and teachers' sides there is as formidable hesitation in discussing the problem. This derives from the fact that a school's reputation rests on its successful form one candidates, and headmasters are disinclined to admit that it is the repeating element in the school that brings them their success.

With this proviso, the present findings which derive from studying numerous primary schools and 15 secondary schools in the Rift Valley Province may be outlined. It should however be stressed now that the critical nature of the repeater problem in the Rift Valley is not judged to be a local problem. It is clearly of national dimensions.

Legal Repeating of St. VII: First of all, it must be said that repeating is not illegal. Repeating is allowed in Kenya according to a series of criteria laid down by the government. The most important of these is that a repeater in standard seven may take the examination once again provided he is not preventing some child from proceeding upwards in the

normal manner from standard six. Furthermore, most of the provinces have rules about the minimum age for repeating, and the number of points required on the first occasion of taking the CPE. Headmasters have to forward their lists of repeaters to the District Education Office for authorisation, and the convention in populous districts is for them to admit to something between 5 and 10 repeaters in a class of 50, perhaps the commonest being the number 5. This figure taken across the whole district usually produces an 'official' number of repeaters equalling some 5 to 10% of the total standard seven grade. Thus for instance in Kajiado District this year the official figure is only 84 repeaters in a total standard seven of 801. In the much more populous Kericho District with its seven thousand odd candidates for 1971, it may be assumed that the official figure will be in the region of 700. These official repeating figures are however recognized by many District Education Officers as having scant relation to the actual number of repeaters in the upper primary. In the absence of any hard data, the official attitude on this question fluctuates between alarmism and fatalism. But as will be seen, it is very difficult to maintain a state of concern over a problem whose dimensions are not known.

#### Varieties of Illegal Repeating

Some of the commonest ways of staying illegally in the upper primary school for periods of three to seven years will now be outlined.

Repeating in the same school: The first type is when repeating is done in the same school. Here the critical factor is how good the mark was in the first attempt at CPE. Pupils work out marks on the basis of a 12 point scale for each of the three subjects, and amongst the various districts there is considerable variation over what constitutes a good first attempt. For instance, in the fierce competition of Kericho District a child receiving between 15 and 20 marks may be forced to go back to standard five or six for a year or two before he can attempt CPE again, while in Kajiado or Samburu, Headmasters may readmit a pupil to standard seven with as few as 11 to 15 marks. Thus a pupil who gets a poor grade must either be content to go back down to his own standard six, if there is room, or he must move to a district where he may be admitted to standard seven with a lower level of initial pass. Meanwhile those who received better marks but still failed to get into secondary school will ask to repeat standard seven in the same school. It is at this point that the headmaster becomes involved in a very delicate balancing act. He may have between 15 and

25 students whose marks are adequate and some of these will be pupils who have already repeated once in the school. The difficulty is to make room for them all.

Repeater 'Streams': If the school is a very popular one, then standard five and standard six will both have very nearly their full complement of 50 pupils, who would normally proceed upwards to take the place of those who had just sat GPE. In practice, standard six has an exam at the end of the year and the class is divided into those ready to go up to standard seven and those who should repeat standard six. This is in direct contravention of the rule that repeaters should on no account prevent a standard six boy from gaining a standard seven place. Nevertheless, it is not common for parents to take exception to their child being kept back. After all, the school has been entrusted with getting their child into secondary school if possible; parents know very well that once their child reaches standard seven, it will be through the good offices of the headmaster that it will be allowed to repeat several times. A compromise is therefore reached between the headmaster and the parents. They, on the whole, have to trust his judgement and allow their child to be held back temporarily, on the understanding that his turn for repeating the really crucial grade will come eventually. As can be appreciated, the logic of the need to accommodate repeaters in standard seven, means that all the way down the school to standard one, there is repeating, usually by the weaker pupils. Sometimes, of course it does not reach the bottom of the school, because a standard in the middle of the school may have less than its full complement; but in the most popular schools, repeaters can sometimes only be accommodated by ensuring that all the way down to the standard one entry from the nursery school, a number equal to those repeating in standard seven is held back in each grade.

This type of repeating with internal selection in the various standards means of course that some schools which appear to be carrying streams of 50 children up through the system are in reality catering for less. Accommodating ten repeaters at the top of the school can mean that as many as sixty other children have to repeat in the other standards. Put another way, it appears that many schools are in fact made up of two streams - the fresh students and the repeaters. Naturally it is not the case that the same students have to repeat in each standard, while the bright students move up unimpeded; but there is clearly a tendency for

the weaker children to be held back in order that the more talented will have the chance to repeat as often as is necessary in the top standard. And although theoretically the weaker student should eventually reach standard seven, he will do so after spending substantially longer in the school system. In effect, the weak student repeating in the lower standards makes it physically possible for the better students to repeat standard seven, and in the process he has to pay for each extra year in school. It becomes thus more expensive for a poor student to reach the top of the school than a talented child, and it is understood that this situation has led to some of the less talented children withdrawing from schools all together. Some of the implications of this are rather difficult to assess without more detailed studies of how the bright and less talented children move through the primary system. But even without this information on the differential costs of primary schooling for the various categories for children, the system of blocking sections of classes all down the school must force a revision of the statistics on primary education. If it is in fact the case that in some districts it is virtually impossible to get into secondary school without spending two or three years illegally in standard seven, the actual percentage of school age children attending primary must be substantially less than the declared district or provincial figures.

Double Promotion: There are two other variations on repeating within the same school, both of which derive from the fact that nobody really expects to be able to reach secondary school in one attempt in many areas. One of these may be termed double promotion, where headmasters try to prevent some of their brightest children from having to spend the extra year or two in the system. Such children are promoted from standard five to standard seven directly, where they can spend a year familiarising themselves with the necessary techniques and then take the examination the following year.

Sitting-in on Standard VII: A similar group to these are the children who come from standard six and sit through standard seven without registering for the examination or paying examination fees. They are thus able to repeat standard seven without the fear that they can be officially identified as repeaters. The school may in this way be able to show that it only has the correct limit of 50 candidates taking the examination, while a further ground of between 5 and 10 can be practising without official knowledge. As has been suggested the whole complex operation of accommodating repeaters in the same schools is one that

involves a considerable degree of deception. It is always possible that the provincial or district education office may try to purge the schools of illegal repeaters; thus the school registers must not reveal that somebody has been in the same class for three years. It is necessary therefore for the child to change his name from year to year, if only in the school register. In the same way when the application form for entry to secondary school is filled in year after year in standard seven, the candidate continues to stress that his age is 14 or 15, and completes an outline of his entire primary schooling which invariably shows that he has only been in school seven years. This deception has reached a point where some pupils will not admit being three years in standard seven even when they are being questioned by someone not connected with the Ministry of Education. On the other hand, students will sometimes admit to being longtime repeaters in the same school, although their headmasters may vigorously deny this if questioned separately.

Repeating by Transfer: In most cases, headmasters have a very shrewd idea about who is who in their upper standards; however with the other main type of repeating - by transfer from a different school - it is possible for them too to be in the dark. This type of repeating is also very widespread, and is practised by the students who cannot be accommodated in their own schools. Such students tend to move, either because their marks were not high, but they did not want to go down to standard six, or because they may have repeated more than once in their original school. A study of transfer patterns in fact demonstrates some rather interesting relationships between school quality and repeating. What happens is that the best schools can afford to hand-pick their repeaters. They cannot dispense with a significant repeating element in standard seven, otherwise they will fail to maintain their success rate in CPE; but they can select some 15 to 20 candidates who have come near to success already. The rest have to disperse to other schools or be demoted. In general they find places in schools which are trying to build up a reputation for secondary school success, particularly those which cannot make up a full stream of 50, and those with poor teaching staff. In such schools repeaters may well make up 75 to 80% of the top class. A pattern develops therefore in which schools tend to hold on to their best repeaters, while the others move to the poorer schools. However, in areas where no less than three attempts at CPE is the norm



for secondary school entrance, even quite good students will spend one of their repeating years in a poorer school. In for instance the Elgeyo-Marakwet region, it is apparently accepted practice for many repeaters from the better schools on the top of the escarpment to go down on to the valley floor, and take a year or two in the less populous schools there before returning to their original area. Often however, because of the constraint of having to live with family or kin, repeating relationships will be worked out amongst four or five neighbourhood schools in a single locality.

The actual process of transfer may be done either officially or without going through the prescribed channels, but both cases usually involve a measure of deception. Officially it is necessary to have one's headmaster and District Education Officer sign a transfer form vouching that one has just completed a certain standard. The majority of those using transfer forms have just failed standard seven but headmasters are quite generally prepared to certify on the form that the student has only just completed standard six. Both the Education Officer and the headmaster of the school to which he transfers know what 'completed standard six' usually signifies on one of these forms, but generally no questions are asked. However, there is frequently the fear that the official route may lead to complications; so the great majority of repeaters organise their transfers personally with the headmaster concerned.

Repeating and Regional Variation in Access to Secondary Schools: Transfers can in addition be viewed as having two main purposes; either to provide the opportunity of moving within the same district until a ceiling on attainment is reached or to allow one to move out of the district to another area in which it may be easier to repeat successfully. As the CPE marks necessary for entry to secondary school vary enormously from district to district depending on the historical development of secondary schooling, and the size and enthusiasm of the school going population, there are often considerable advantages in transferring to a district where the competition is not so severe. Transfer outside the district is not feasible for the majority of children; they have to be content in the main with repeating until their own district's qualifying mark is reached. But one or two examples will help to demonstrate the scale of inequality in this sphere. In Kericho District, headmasters will generally allow their standard seven candidates to repeat if they received 21 to 25 marks in their first attempt at CPE. The average improvement on CPE anticipated on the second attempt will be some 5 to 6 points, taking



the good students up to a mark of 26 to 30. These good students will then require a third attempt to reach the mark of 31 to 32 necessary to get into the best government secondary schools. (This year, for instance, nobody entered Kabiana or Kericho High School with less than 51 points). Thus the bright students will have to apply themselves for three years to mastering and improving their CPE technique if they are to reach government secondary. In addition they will have to organize their transfer and their board and lodging as they circulate the school system in the process. By contrast, there is a government day school at Ngong village just outside Nairobi where only one member of form one this year got a mark higher than 20. That is to say that almost the entire class entered a government secondary with the sort of mark that would have forced them to retake standard six and then repeat standard seven several times had they been in a different district - like Kericho.

Transfer Alternatives: Where good students will take three attempts to reach such a high qualifying mark, less able candidates may have to repeat as often as five or six times to force their mark up to this height. In these circumstances, many of those who can will move to a less competitive district. They have the following alternatives, which depend very largely on where some of their kin may have settled. a) Rift Valley: Firstly, there is usually the possibility of moving into a primary school attached to a settlement scheme or cooperative society in some area of the former White Highlands. At the moment Makuru District and Trans Nzoia, where many tribes have acquired land, are certainly less competitive than the tribal homelands of Kericho, Nyanza and other parts of Western Kenya. Even in the large area of the Highlands that is still in European hands, the labour is often predominantly from one tribe; children from the same tribe who have been having difficulty in repeating successfully at home frequently transfer to these Rift Valley schools, stay with kin or friends and take CPE again. b) Backward Areas: A second alternative is to transfer to one of the more 'backward', often pastoral districts. Quite often the boundary situation between districts is not particularly rigid, and there will be a small spill-over colony of Kikuyu, Kamba or Kipsigis in pastoral districts such as Kajiado or Narok. Repeaters who transfer into some of the schools just inside an area such as Maasailand find themselves in a situation dramatically different from what they have left. Instead of being one of 7,000 candidates for 700 places (the Kericho situation), he would become in Kajiado District this year one of 800 candidates for 160 places. Where such favourable odds exist, it is not surprising to find

that a significant number of candidates in such border schools arrived by transfer in standard six or seven. Even when there are no kin to board with in these areas, it is sometimes possible to get access to some of the primary boarding schools; and other cases have been found when parents, realizing the opportunity for their weaker children, have gone to the lengths of renting a room for them in a town like Kajiado, Karok or Maralal. c) Municipalities: Yet another possibility is to migrate to Nairobi or Nakuru, where again secondary government schools are in much greater numbers, and as a corollary the qualifying mark for entrance can be considerably lower. For instance this year some 40% of the standard seven candidates in Nakuru municipality gained access to government schools.<sup>5</sup> It is possibly this situation in the municipalities that has the most important long term consequences for education in Kenya. If these urban centres can continue to maintain the rather steady growth of their secondary school places, the cohort of children with secondary school potential will be able to gain entrance there appreciably earlier than their counterparts in some of the rural areas. In effect the backlog of repeaters has become so great in some of the rural areas, that all but the very exceptional child have to mark time for two to five years. Consequently some of the urban schools are beginning to have form one classes that are quite clearly composed of children who spent only seven years (from 4 or 5 to 12 or 13) in primary; up country, however, it is equally clear that some upper primaries have a powerful block of the over twenties, and subsequently some form one streams may have an average age of not much less than 20. It does not need to be pointed out that any such continuing urban-rural imbalance in secondary school places is bound to encourage the present migration to the towns.

#### EFFECTS OF THE REPEATERS WITHIN THE SCHOOLS

Given a repeater element in standard six and seven which may range from 10 to 80% according to school quality and location, it is appropriate to consider some of the effects upon teaching in the top primary.

Fresh students and Repeaters in Standard VII: One of the principal effects is what headmasters describe as the demoralisation of the fresh cohorts from standard six in the face of an older and more

5. The figure of 40% is perhaps exceptional because of a sudden extension of form I streams in one of the secondary schools of Nakuru.

experienced group who have been painstakingly pushing their grades up for two years or more. Although the challenge of defeating the repeaters may be an incentive to the exceptional child the majority of fresh children from standard six acknowledge the fact that it is impossible to gain entrance to the best secondary school without repeating at least once.

Repeaters in Form One of Secondary Schools: The last statement has to be qualified since the ratio of fresh students to repeaters in form one will vary considerably from district to district and from school to school within the district. Thus Kabianga and Kericho, the leading schools in Kipsigis country, have qualifying marks so high that almost nobody but a repeater can enter. Kabianga for instance had no fresh student in its double stream entry of 80 in their form one of 1971. Tambach, similarly, appears to have had 100% repeaters in its single stream; Kericho High School had as high as 85% repeaters in one of its first form classes. In the less intense competition of Nakuru District, schools such as Molo, Michinda and Njoro are closer to a 75% repeater composition of their form one classes.

As a generalisation to be qualified by further research, it would look as if the fresh element in Rift Valley secondary schools might be 25% on average in form one. But when these figures are translated to individual primary schools, it does not mean that most schools manage to get one fresh child to secondary for every three repeaters. In fact in a competitive district, the majority of schools which gain secondary school success get no fresh student places there. If for example a typical class of form one is examined, it may have students drawn from between 17 and 30 different primary schools. More than half of these primaries will only have had successes with their repeaters, and the fresh students will be drawn disproportionately from a small number of the privileged schools, whether boarding, mission run, or in the townships.

Apart from this latter type of primary school, the general run of schools in the rural areas have a situation where the repeater is in a much stronger position than the fresh student. A few examples will give the odds between the two groups. Beneath is a list of the 25 individual schools which were successful in getting one or more child into a single first form stream in Kabianga. These individual primary schools have naturally not been mentioned by name, but the four columns of figures show

very strikingly the advantage that the repeating student has over his fresh counterpart. It is not claimed that any individual figure is accurate (accuracy is well nigh impossible in this kind of calculation), but the general tendency of the odds is probably not far off the mark. The repeaters who make up anything from 25% to 75% of the standard seven classes can be seen to get approximately 1 out of 3 of their number into secondary, while the fresh group has either no chance or odds that may be as long as 20 to 1.

School code	Repeater success	Fresh success	Size of Std.VII	No. Repeated*
1	3	3	45	15
2	2	6	43	14
3	6	3	42	13
4	11	0	50	30
5	1	0	32	8
6	4	0	30	10
7	2	0	22	10
8	4	2	23	12
9	4	0	50	30?
10	2	1	35	7
11	3	8	32	15
12	1	0	17	5
13	9	0	38	28
14	3	0	38	10
15	3	0	37	13
16	5	1	34	15
17	10	0	50	15
18	6	0	28	12
19	6	0	42	25
20	0	1	29	13
21	4	0	42	10
22	6	0	40	7
23	16	1	48	25
24	7	1	32	7
25	3	0	26	16

\*The last column shows the approximate number of repeaters in the whole Std. VII class.

Multiple Repeating: There is a further refinement on this picture of the odds in upper primaries. There are not in fact two competing groups in a typical standard seven class in some areas, but at least three. It was found for instance in Kericho District by careful discussion with the form one classes of the best schools that the majority of successful students had repeated three times, the next most common category was twice, after that came those who had not repeated at all. The same odds will be reflected in the ordinary primary school, where the repeater elite will consist of those who have taken CPE at least twice, and now only need an improvement

of two or three points to reach secondary school. Younger repeaters may still be 10 to 12 points away from success, and the fresh element have yet to find out.

Effects on Teaching: Pedagogically, the situation becomes extremely harmful. The many primary school teachers who have been prepared to discuss the situation point to the fact that the older repeating elements effectively control the teaching context. The requirements of the fresh students are that the new material on the standard seven syllabus be taught, while the sole need of the repeaters is to concentrate on some of the more complex areas, and to have ever more practice at multiple choice tests. The result is that the repeaters force the pace of the class, and the fresh students must reconcile themselves to picking up on their own the basic standard seven curriculum. Thus standard seven becomes exclusively a revision class even for those who have not yet learnt what the others are bent on revising. It is not therefore surprising that students do not have a coherent picture of the various subjects that are studied when testing precedes learning. The destructive effect of this on the fresh students can be avoided to some extent in primary schools that have two standard seven streams. Then it is not uncommon to put all the repeaters plus the best of standard six into one stream and fill the second with the bulk of the standard six who were promoted. However, headmasters who have this option make up only a fraction of all primary school heads.

Constraints on Curricular Reform: The combined effect of the repeaters and the nature of the CPE have made it necessary almost to abandon interest in curriculum reform in the upper primary. As has been suggested earlier, headmasters and standard seven teachers are by no means complacent about their role as cramming advisers for this critical examination, but their disenchantment with the teaching process conflicts with their knowledge that the reputation of the school and the staff is almost entirely derived from success in CPE. The standard seven teachers are therefore prepared to work during the vacations and after school with their CPE candidates, in an attempt to keep the momentum of the class up throughout the CPE year. Most well-organized schools will have their standard seven class in school for the first two weeks of the April and August recesses, and in addition, one member of staff will teach on Saturday mornings or in the late afternoon. In a number of the 'best' schools, it is common practice for standard seven to remain in school after 4 o'clock until light

fails, the teachers taking it in turn to organise this revision.

In this state of affairs any project such as the UNESCO-UNICEF scheme for covering the country with a network of primary school supervisors (eventually there is to be one for every 20 schools) must grapple with the fact that the curriculum reform to be encouraged by these men is unlikely to be heeded as long as it is out of step with the dictates of the CPE examination.<sup>6</sup> This programme, and other initiatives and suggestions of commissions in Kenya, aim very laudably to give the curriculum of the upper standards some additions that will make it of practical value to the majority of children who do not have the fees, the ingenuity or the staying power to remain in primary school until they succeed in gaining a secondary place. The objectives are to make the primary school much closer in its orientation to the requirements of rural development, by instilling in children an interest and competence in agriculture, handicrafts, home economics, and by swinging even the traditional literary subjects towards more rural or urban relevance. In a word it is an attempt to recapture the sense in which the upper primary used to be some preparation for leaving school.

Status of C. F. E. 'Pass': Standard seven at the moment is by no stretch of the imagination a terminal standard as far as the curriculum is concerned and the CPE has for almost ten years ceased to be considered a leaving certificate. This is to say that a very good CPE pass is useful only for access to secondary, and the latter is only possible if the holder's family possesses the required fees of 450/- per annum for government boarding school. The holders of good CPE certificates whose fathers or elder brothers are poor find themselves in a position not much better than those who have 'failed' CPE in the popular sense. Indeed the writer is acquainted with a boy who in recent years had the highest CPE grade in the whole of one division in Nakuru District. Lack of fees prevented him taking up the government school place he was offered, and his certificate has become worth only the 100/- odd shillings that the families of less bright boys would be prepared to purchase it for. Naturally when the employment hopes for the holder of a bare East African Certificate of Education (EACE) at form four have declined so substantially over the last few years, a good CPE pass is little consolation. In the words of one of the primary headmasters interviewed, those who fail either through lack of fees or lack of ability to move into secondary, become 'like useless logs of wood lying around the country-side'.

6. A description of the Unesco-Unicef project is contained in J.R. Hakemulder, Unesco-Unicef Project on Primary Teacher Training in Kenya, delivered to a Symposium on Educational Innovations in Africa, Addis Ababa, 1-10 September, 1971.

It must be noted that there are two equally important ways of regarding standard seven and the CPE: a) as the terminal educational experience for the approximately 70% who do not gain entrance to some form of secondary school. b) as the qualifying year and selection examination for those moving on through the formal education system. Of course, this distinction between the two groups of children is not one that can be discerned in standard seven itself. Headmasters do sometimes impress on the children a need for realism about post-primary, especially in schools where perhaps the pattern is for only one or two out of 50 to go on to secondary. But the commonest threat about the future is that children will not be allowed to repeat. This is employed to stir them into working harder for CPE, rather than alerting them to think about alternatives to secondary school entry.

Repeating and Dramatic Improvement in Grades: The whole drive of the upper primary, then, is towards secondary school entry, and even the weaker students and those who have possibly had a very low mark in their first attempt at CPE do not seem ready to abandon hope of later success. Nor can they be blamed for their optimism about what repeating may do for their scores. All the evidence of those who eventually enter secondary schools seems to point to the possibility of raising CPE scores by a considerable margin by repeating. The average improvement for the eventually successful may be in the region of 6 points, but most pupils know of much more dramatic improvements. Even in the Kajiado and Narok Districts where primary schools are on the whole not very sophisticated in coaching for repetition, the evidence of some 80 confessed repeaters in the secondary schools showed that almost half of them had improvements in their second attempt ranging from 7 to 16 points. It is only then necessary for a standard seven class to know of a few instances of average children whose scores have leapt from, say, 16 to 27 in a single year for there to be a great optimism about one's chances. Admittedly there must be a number of children who fail to improve their scores even by repeating several times, but that they are in a minority is shown by the widespread determination to repeat, even among the less gifted pupils. So long, therefore, as the very dull have some basis for hoping that CPE may favour them the next year, it will continue to be difficult to convince parents and children that they should be more realistic and set their sights on some of the subjects not directly relevant for secondary school studies.

Standard VII as Terminal in Tanzania: The nearest example of the alternative way of regarding the last years in primary school is Tanzania. There the determined effort to diversify and make more relevant to the majority the curriculum of the primary school has led within a space of only three-years to an amazing variety of pursuits in standards six and seven. This is not to say that Tanzanian primary students have necessarily abandoned their interest in gaining access to secondary schools, but at least the attempted revolution in attitudes has been accompanied by a near freezing of secondary school expansion, and, more important, by a rigorous campaign to make more attractive the alternative of working directly in the rural areas after primary school. By contrast, in Kenya so far, the demand for syllabus revision in primary school has not been accompanied by any change in the political rhetoric that spurs more and more local communities to invest in Marambee Secondary schools. The difficulty here for Kenya is how to make the curriculum and examination in the top primary face two ways, and as will be seen in the section of recommendations, there are really only a limited number of specifically educational initiatives open to the government. In 1971, as in the colonial period, altering the syllabus towards some more rurally relevant material will not substantially alter the students' perceptions of what lies after primary, unless mere syllabus reform is somehow linked to a massive investment in rural opportunity and employment.

Impact of CPE on Secondary Schools: Before turning to recommendations, there is one last area where the combined impact of CPE and the repeater phenomenon has begun to cause some alarm. This is the fear that secondary school quality itself is being affected by the present selection process. It is suggested that this may be happening in a number of ways. Firstly, the secondary schools place emphasis from form one on some of those English expression skills that have been largely abandoned in the upper primary. This may not be thought particularly important for a boy who has only spent a year in standard seven, but it must be remembered that in many parts of the country form one is composed of those who have spent two or three years at least on the same uncreative primary routines. The stultification of the learning process and its restriction to skills of recognition and memorisation makes it difficult to cope with English as a medium of expression in the secondary schools. It is not really possible if English is a foreign language virtually to abandon personal expres-



sion in it for three years and then expect to be able to take advantage of the secondary (often expatriate) teacher's demands for creativity and composition.

Secondly it must be recognised that although repeaters are by no means a new phenomenon in Kenya, but go a long way back into the colonial era, there is a clear correlation between their dramatic build up and the change in the selection process during 1964-66. Admittedly their expansion in scale is also due to the drying up of employment for primary school leavers during the same period; but this would not necessarily have had quite the same effect, had it not been accompanied by an examination that was conspicuously revisable, and, more significant, by the new ruling that entry to secondary would be based on the criterion of exam success alone. It is worth pointing out that prior to this period repeaters had been actively discriminated against; they had firstly to get a higher pass in the old KAPE examination than the fresh students in standard seven, but they had also to brave the interview with the headmaster of the secondary school. At that point there was a great deal of discretion granted to headmasters in the selection process, and they were well known to prefer young boys who might not have performed so well to some of the very mature looking candidates with the higher marks. The system of personal interview effectively kept the really old students out of most of the secondary schools, and had the further effect of making them disinclined to repeat so often. However, as government secondaries expanded with independence, and local headmasters were appointed, it became clear that some of these would be under the most intolerable pressure from parents and politicians if they continued to have the last word on secondary entry. Consequently, the present Order of Merit system became the only factor in selection. There no longer seemed any point in circulating one's feeder primary schools and discussing with headmasters some of the brightest boys in that year's standard seven, since selection now meant that the computer printed out in order of merit all those who had chosen a particular secondary school as the first of their three possible options. For each secondary school, it was now only necessary for the authorities to draw a line beneath the fortieth or eightieth candidate depending on whether the school was single or double stream.

Headmasters are very well aware of what this can lead to in practice. In for instance Kabianga Secondary where almost 1000 candidates put down that school as their first choice, the line is drawn at the 30th candidate. There is no way of knowing how old those selected are, or how many have repeated several times, until they come into form one in the first term. This order of merit system combined with an examination where a really conscientious twenty five year old can outflank a bright fresh student in standard seven has produced some very motley looking form ones in various parts of Kenya. The sanctity of merit (as defined always by the CPE) has also removed the system of discriminating in favour of some of the more 'backward' communities in the country. As districts are no longer co-extensive with tribal groupings, the merit ranking only takes into account the best 40 or 50 boys who happened to be sitting their CPE in that particular district. It cannot naturally take account of the fact that repeaters from more progressive tribes deliberately take their CPE again in some of these districts like Kajiado, Narok, Samburu, Kwale etc. In some areas local pressure has tried to erect a quota system by tribe against these outsiders temporarily in the district. But nothing can be done with the colonies of other tribes permanently settled in the district. They are entitled to go to their district secondary school - with the result that the Kamba and Kikuyu settled at Ngong (just inside Kajiado District), Loitokitok and Kajiado Township have the edge over the Maasai now in the three stream entry to Kajiado Secondary School and the single stream at Oloolaiser, while the Kipsigis colony in the Kilgoris division of Narok District now control 60% of the double stream entry to Narok Secondary. Examples could be multiplied from other districts. Secondary schools therefore are intended to be nationally recruited institutions, and are helped to be this by the employment of a merit system alone. However, despite the rhetoric that nationally recruited secondaries will help to defeat the menace of tribal suspicion, much of the evidence of the last six years is that district or unofficial tribal quotas have had to be quietly added as criteria of selection, to prevent the swamping of one people by the more determined repeaters of its neighbours. For instance, up to 1966 recruitment within the Rift Valley was on a Rift-wide basis, meaning that anyone wherever his home in the Rift could put down one of the secondary schools as his first choice. By 1966 this had filled, for example, the Elgeyo-Marakwet schools of Kapkenda, Tambach and St. Patricks with outsiders to a point where the

locals were prepared to oppose the trend by force. This local-outsider tension caused by the merit system is by no means solved today, and many headmasters from such marginal schools would testify that they receive their list of successful candidates with much trepidation - anxious that the local majority tribe be not able to point to an increased outsider presence in 'their' school. At the moment therefore the declared government policy of discriminating in favour of educationally resistant peoples is in conflict with the now deeply entrenched merit system.

The CPE as a Predictor of EACE Performance: As secondary schools are expensive to run, it is equally important from the point of view of manpower planning to know whether there is much certainty that those who perform so well in CPE will do the same four years later in the East African Certificate. Headmasters are naturally anxious when their form ones are selected in such intense competition that they should receive those most able to take advantage of secondary studies. And it is the impression of many of those who have been interviewed that some of the long term repeating element have really lost the will to learn by the time they finally reach the secondary school. They have become 'tired' after spending 11 or 12 years in primary school, and consider that they have earned themselves a time to relax. The size of this tired group must not be exaggerated, but many schools can point to a section of their form one who may have come into secondary with high CPE marks, but have gradually drifted down the school in the four years, to collect a third division, or a mere pass in EACE. In the Coast Province, for example, the Kamba repeaters who transfer to the Shimba Hills from up country to take CPE in the less competitive atmosphere of the Coast, enter Coast secondaries like Shimo la Tewa with some of the highest CPE marks. Subsequently however their performance does not measure up to this, and only a fraction of them are said to have the ability to get into the upper secondary school. Now, as before the introduction of CPE, there are pupils who manage to get very high points through impersonation or cheating in the CPE, and who will fail the EACE resoundingly in four years' time. But the more general concern amongst educationists is how good a predictor of secondary school potential the new multiple choice CPE actually is. To help to assess the position in this matter, a study is being carried out by the writer in conjunction with the Provincial

Education Office, Nakuru. The first group to take the new style CPE in 1966 and who passed out of the schools in 1970 are being looked at for the Rift Valley Province in particular. And although a complete analysis must wait until later, it is already worthwhile pointing to a preliminary conclusion from the data on two of the main school in Kericho District:-

Kericho and Kabianga Schools - correlation between EACE and CPE

<u>EACE GRADE</u> (1970)	<u>CPE MEAN MARK FOR BOYS IN EACH CATEGORY</u> (1966)	
1st division	231	(N= 14)
2nd division	238	(N= 24)
3rd division	232	(N= 41)
EACE (pass)	233	(N= 25)
Fail	228	(N= 15)
	total 119 students	

As can be seen, in this district where it was necessary to gain a very high mark even in 1966 to get entry to secondary, there is very little correlation between a high CPE score and a good result in EACE. In fact those who just managed to get a bare pass in EACE had a higher mean in CPE than those who got first divisions or third divisions!

Primary Pupils' Perceptions of Secondary Schools: There is in some schools a comparable degree of concern amongst some of the older students over this question of relationship between CPE and EACE. How widespread these feelings are in the country is difficult to gauge, but in Kericho District the question of whether age and frequency of repetition (despite good CPE marks) placed some ceiling on learning ability was an open subject of discussion in secondary schools. The writer was asked by a number of form one and two students in this district whether repeating CPE six or seven times, or being in the late twenties meant that you were going to fail the EACE. This was by no means a flippant question, but reflected the common belief in that district that long term repeaters will fail in four years' time. Although such worries afflict some students once they are in secondary, they cannot be said to diminish interest in repeating at the primary level. This is partly because the facts about employment openings for EACE failures has not yet seeped down to the primaries, but mainly because the government secondary boarding school offers on its own account a style of life for four years that

cannot be compared with the rigours of life in primary. Secondary school life is pictured by primary children as an escape from the drudgery of the CPE syllabus, and from the irritations of frequent punishments into a situation where, rightly or wrongly, there are judged to be good meals, free uniforms, films and TV, where work men clean the compound and where you can be treated as a relatively independent adult. Most important from the point of view of the old or long term repeater it is a life from which he cannot be removed for even the grossest academic incompetence. Once into secondary school, students are quite secure until the next hurdle of form 5 entrance. It should not be surprising that students continue to invest 70/- per annum in standard seven school fees in the hope that they can get four full years in this kind of atmosphere for a total cost of \$90. In addition to the majority who perhaps see secondary school in this kind of way, there is a small category of students who know that they have learnt nothing of value in the treadmill of the upper primary, and who regard the secondary school as their only chance to learn anything significant about the world. It is common to regard Kenya students as having a completely utilitarian attitude towards secondary studies; however as primary learning becomes increasingly routinised, it is possible that the group just mentioned may well become larger.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

If the foregoing pages have some application to provinces or districts beyond those that provided the focus of this study, it is clear that much more thought might be given to this whole inter-related area of CPE, repeating and secondary selection than is at present the case. For the moment it will only be possible to outline some of the problems that urgently require government attention, suggesting in the process some of the alternatives that might be considered.

##### 1. Action on the CPE

This seems to be one front on which even a slight improvement could have a disproportionate influence for good; and the prime question must be whether it is possible to set a multiple choice examination of this sort in a way that is more discriminating between fresh young students and hard-core repeaters - that is to say an examination that is not easily revisable. The chief constraint on this at the moment in Kenya is that the exam is set largely by the subject specialists in the Inspectorate of

the Ministry of Education. This body is clearly aware of the need for more feedback on the items they set for primary school children year by year, but their main duties involve secondary education. The expansion of this secondary sector has been so rapid and in some sense uncontrolled that the inspectorate have more than enough to do with sorting out the critical curricular and time-tabling problems of these 300 odd schools. It is perhaps physically impossible for them to combine this work and their other related advisory duties with the time-consuming item-analysis on each year's CPE, and the guarded pre-testing of discriminatory items for the next examination. What is perhaps needed here is a small educational testing unit located in the Ministry itself, with personnel supplied in a continuous way either from such a body as the Institute for Development Studies, or from one of the large universities abroad that has made the construction of tests its professional concern.

Such a body would have necessarily to work very closely with the Inspectorate and particularly over the question of whether the exam should test achievement only (as now) in the work of the primary syllabus, or whether there should not be a general intelligence component. At the moment, it is perhaps one reason for its revisability that the exam is syllabus-bound and is, with the possible exception of English, quite largely derived from certain set texts. This has come about partly for reasons of egalitarianism, since examiners were chary of setting test material that could not be found in the standard seven books of even the poorest and most remote primary school. Setting items from the more progressive primary texts discriminates in favour of the urban and better endowed primaries. Consequently thorough and rapid distribution of inspectorate approved primary materials should precede the now long overdue need to base the achievement sections of the CPE upon the best available texts.

Non-examinable Subjects and CPE Reform: To what extent the CPE can be utilised to encourage interest in some of the presently non-examinable subjects such as Swahili and some of the more practical skills to be promoted by the primary school supervisors is rather difficult to assess. Including Swahili in the CPE has always been open to the charge that it would favour the areas from which it later spread inland. But at the level at which Swahili achievement would be tested, this would not be a substantial objection provided progressive Swahili materials and teachers were equitably distributed throughout the primary schools. Craft-based

subjects have also been thought to discriminate too sharply between those schools with the premises and equipment to practice them, and those without. But even if examination in these at the primary level does not appear to be feasible within the present structure, it seems possible that the reconstituted District Education Boards and supervisors might well interest the local school committees in the construction of a practical subjects classroom. This sort of development could perhaps attract harambee effort quite rapidly, provided it could be linked in people's minds to the concurrent growth of village polytechnics, and the now inevitable mushrooming of institutes of technology at a higher level. Students quite rightly fought shy of non-literary, or craft-type subjects so long as there did not seem to be any avenue for further training on the technical side after primary. It now however seems possible that a highly diversified pyramid of technical training from the end of primary up to the technological institutes could be constructed. It is perhaps the right moment for all the various foreign and local initiatives in technical and technological training to be rationalised, so that local communities can be guided to build up their own regional system at its different levels.

## II. Reform of the CPE and the Repeaters

It is next worth considering what would be the effect upon the thousands of repeaters if the CPE was made less bound to a particular set of contents. Related to this is the question of the English component of any future examination and its impact on English skills in the primary school. To try and get closer to these critical questions, two tests which had been developed by H.C.A. Somerset were administered to a pilot group of six primary schools (300 children) in the Makuru and Kajiado Districts. One of the tests was of verbal analogies with very restricted English content ('Man is to boy as woman is to ?'), and one was of English vocabulary. It was thought that some such test as the first, where reasoning seemed to be more important than knowledge of English would give a better chance to the fresh standard seven student than he would receive in the ordinary CPE English examination. Although the results have not been carefully analysed yet, the preliminary conclusion points to there not being so much difference in the results of the two tests as was initially anticipated. Repeaters tend to perform better on both tests, even though the gap between them and the fresh students

is narrowed considerably on the verbal analogies test. Probably however in a country where English is a foreign language, even a test which attempts to restrict English content is going to favour those who have been exposed to various sorts of English tests for three or four years longer. Equally it must be remembered that repeaters who are familiar with the test process itself are going to have a headstart over those who have not yet tried a nationwide government examination.

Notwithstanding the edge that repeaters will continue to have in most English test situations, it was found in some of the primaries that fresh students did have much better odds than they are likely to have in the conventional CPE examination. It has been asserted earlier in this paper that the majority of primary schools in some parts of the country have ceased to get any success with their fresh students. In at least some of those tested in this sample where previously only repeaters had succeeded, fresh students did manage to capture a number of the first ten places. Naturally in the sort of inferior primary school which is simply used as a repeater refuge in the main, it was not expected that the small group of demoralised fresh students would be successful. This however does not vitiate the general conclusion that tests can be devised which give young children who have been the statutory seven years in primary school a better chance of success than the present selection system.

As to the encouraging of written English again in the upper primary school, there are two possibilities for using the CPE to this end. Firstly it is conceivable that an essay component could be introduced to the CPE, and used perhaps to decide amongst some of the borderline cases. In practical terms this would be immensely complicated, since it would not be a single national borderline, but a different borderline for each district, and in some cases for each school. The second alternative is to move the structure of the exam so far from its present revisable style that it is no longer profitable to teach English the way it is presently taught in standards six and seven. This would involve dropping the present remedial English component, and concentrating on those comprehension skills which can only be prepared for by continual reading and writing in English periods.

Teachers will feel much more confident about teaching expression when they are not under pressure to revise a mass of little tricks and mistakes of East African English speakers.



III. Administrative Reform on Repeaters.

Educational and Social Implications of Banning Repeaters: Given

a reform of the CPE so that six or seven years' practice does not any longer ensure a secondary school place, it is important to note that this would probably only remove a fraction of repeaters. Before looking at ways of moving against the great bulk who would otherwise remain, the political and educational ramifications of such a move must be seen quite clearly. The principal educational objections to repeating are a) its blocking effects upon the lower standards moving in progression through the school b) the stultifying influence upon studies in standards six and seven, where the same curriculum is reworked to a point of tedium and c) its involving the majority of teachers and pupils in some areas in an elaborate game of deception. The social and political issues are equally grave. The incidence of repeating reflects the very marked differences in secondary school provision in various parts of Kenya. Thus banning repeaters throughout the school system from a particular year and trying to start from scratch would mean in effect that in some districts the majority of two age cohorts (who had been waiting for the 3rd time repeaters to move on) would lose their chance of secondary school entry completely. Yet these groups of children might not be any less deserving than their counterparts in the urban areas and the more favoured districts who did not have to wait in line so long to obtain entry to secondary school. Certainly if repeating were to be stopped administratively, the first and second time repeaters of these most competitive districts would have to be granted the occasion to take the examination once more (as private candidates) with an assurance that their papers would be viewed no differently from the fresh students.

It would be possible by such devices to clear the bulk of the standard seven repeaters out of the way for a year or two, but what guarantee would there be that the process would not build up again? One good reason for being pessimistic about clearing the system of repeaters is the humane one that many primary school headmasters are simply not prepared to turn out on to the hopeless labour market a child who is 12 or 13 years old after taking his CPE for the first time. If it is accepted that parental pressure will result in such young children being kept in school for one or two years, whatever the government tries to do to reduce

repeating, then there are two options open for consideration.

1. Extension of primary school by 2 years: Primary school life can be formally extended for a further two years so that the leaving age is closer to 15 or 16. This notion has been aired in a debate in the National Assembly as recently as March 1971, and it gained a considerable amount of support from members. It was however pointed out by the government in the course of the debate that adding on two classes on a national scale would be 'unimplementable' financially, particularly as such classes would be best fitted out with pre-vocational or technical facilities.<sup>7</sup> The discussion ended with the government promising a paper on the subject in the near future. This does not necessarily mean that the issue has been shelved, since there has been a very significant development in this very subject of extending primary schooling within the last few months of 1971.

In Nyeri District of Central Province, certain primary schools have been encouraged by government to construct form one classes to be operational early in 1972.<sup>8</sup> These classes will be built through the contributions of the local school committee and parents, but it is assumed that the government will provide equipment, teachers and running costs, just as they do with the other primary standards. The response from the individual schools offered form one has naturally been very enthusiastic, but this has just underscored a general uncertainty about where these new style government form ones will fit into the existing secondary tier of education.

It is assumed that they will be in direct competition with the Harambee Secondary Schools. The latter have no government aid or teachers, and consequently have to charge fees much higher than the rate in government secondary schools. It is hard therefore to imagine any child preferring his local Harambee Schools to this new style of government provision. It thus looks as if a new category of secondary education is being introduced which will provide the seventh standard leaver with at least a five level system of secondary education to move into:-

a) The high cost national institutions for the very few children with bursaries and the children of well-to-do families.

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7. For the Hon arap Cheboiwo's motion on the extension of primary schooling see footnote 1, p.1.

8. Since this paper was written, this scheme has been rejected by the Government.

b) The few low cost national institutions, drawing very gifted children from all over the country.

c) The district or local government schools (boarding and day) which will continue to draw their children from a wide range of primary schools in their respective areas, and will offer four or six year courses.

d) The 'village' secondary schools, which will tend to offer two year courses to KJSE, and will be physically closely related to a large primary school. The majority of its students will possibly come from this single school, though doubtless others will be drawn from the few other primaries in the immediate area.

e) Finally, the Harambee and Private Schools, with higher fees than all but category a) above.

In areas where this system will be operating in 1972, it may be imagined that this year's standard seven will divide itself up in the following way. The top scorers in CPE (between 5 and 10 students) will continue to gain access to categories a, b and c. The next twenty to twenty five pupils may well continue into form one (d), going as secondary day students to the same government school they attended in its primary section. A third category will continue to repeat standard seven, in the conviction that a four year district government school is to be preferred to the local alternatives, whether harambee or government. A much reduced fourth category will enter Harambee schools, particularly those that can offer boarding facilities. And finally a small number of students will leave the formal education system entirely, through lack of fees, lack of interest, or the desire to seek a job.

Whatever the exact divisions amongst these various categories, it must be seen that this Nyeri experiment will have the effect of substantially raising the percentage of standard seven going to government schools in certain areas. This will mean that possibly as many as 50 to 60% will gain government places from those primary schools offered the new style form ones. And such schools may well have as high as 90% of their standard seven classes proceeding to some kind of secondary school. This will be much greater than the national average, and will inevitably raise questions about the equitable distribution of secondary places unless the Nyeri principle is swiftly applied to other regions.

Any large scale extension of the new form ones is bound to have a salutary effect on both the size of the repeater element in standard seven, and should allow for better teaching in the upper primary. Pro-

bably however the blockage will then transfer itself to form II, where pupils will attempt to repeat KJSE in the hope of transferring to a four year secondary. Or more likely there will be an accentuation of the present illegal repeating of EACE. It is difficult to assess how widespread such repeating is at the moment, but in a situation where the job prospects for form four leavers with less than Division 2 passes is already fairly gloomy,<sup>9</sup> it seems clear that more and more students will use the Harambee and private secondary tiers to try to improve their EACE grades.

2. Raising School Entry Age as in Tanzania: The alternative to adding form one and two onto primary schools, to carry children to an age when they can be more appropriately left to fend for themselves, is the Tanzanian one of starting primary education two years later, at seven rather than five. Although such a move is favoured in certain educational quarters in Kenya, there would be some substantial difficulties. Already Kenya is covered by a vast network of pre-standard one nursery schools, some of them run in accordance with modern nursery technique, but most offering little beyond child minding. If children were increasingly to remain in these between the ages of 4 and 7, there would need to be a large government investment in plant and teacher training if children were not to be taught a great deal in nursery years that would clash directly with the New Primary Approach now adopted from standard one onward. This expedient therefore would produce older pupils in standard seven, but possibly have very little additional effect upon the problems of the upper primary discussed in this paper.

#### IV. Need for Policy Declaration

In the meantime, as Kenya decides between its options on this question, some clear central policy on repeating should be worked out that can be applied equitably to the various regions. At the moment the matter is very much left to the individual provincial or district office to decide, and the consequence is that the complex repeating network is allowed to continue undisturbed in some areas, while in others, such as Siaya and Kisumu Districts in November 1971, relatively drastic action was taken against both teachers and pupils who were alleged to

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9. The situation for Form Four leavers on the employment market is well set out by P. Kabiru Kinyanjui, 'Education, Training and Employment of Secondary School Leavers in Kenya', Conference on Urban Unemployment in Africa, Sussex, 12-16 September 1971.

have been involved in illegal repeating. As has been pointed out, there is a great inequity in possibilities for repeating in various districts; where primary schools are full in standards six and five, as the result of migration to the area or inadequate primary school provision, it is very difficult to repeat legally. But in areas, like Myeri, where standard five and six often have as few as 30 or 35 children in each class, the headmaster has traditionally been allowed to permit repeaters to fill up his standard seven class to the regulation size of 50. In such a situation, most children who wanted to could repeat standard seven once legally, and there was a much smaller incidence of deception. However, when an attempt was made to bring Myeri closer to the national average in 1971, and require headmasters only to admit repeaters to a point where they constituted 10% of the fresh standard seven pupils, there was an outcry, and combined local pressures overruled the administration. Justifiably perhaps in this and other instances where the educational administrators have attempted to clear repeaters out of the schools, there has been resentment that one area should be treated severely when the policy nationally was one of laissez-faire. Any central statement of repeater policy, however, must also make quite clear to headmasters and pupils what is not known at the moment, - that is, are fresh standard seven children picked in preference to legal repeaters in secondary school selection. If this is so (which it seems to be in fact) then headmasters and legal repeaters should know by what margin of marks they have to excel fresh students to be treated like them. The present uncertainty leads countless standard seven pupils to prefer illegal to legal repeating.

#### V. Primary School Teachers

Finally, and probably of more benefit than any other measure in the long terms interests of primary school quality, is the treatment of primary school headmasters and teachers. They are a group which in general has felt itself neglected in the post-independence years. The fixation has been with secondary and higher education, and the primary teacher has progressively lost status vis a vis the community in which he lives. With minimal supervision in many areas, it is not surprising that absenteeism has become commonplace and that many teachers have tried to combine teaching with business interests. Their diminishing social and professional significance has coincided with a situation in recent years, where it has become more and more difficult to escape upwards into