

AFRICAN

EXAMPLES

Putting Africa on the path to industrialisation

One of the first holders of a doctorate in technical education, he has spent a career spanning three decades making technical and vocational education curricula around the world. The researcher, educator and manager told Stephen Makabila that middle-level technological institutions should be well funded to produce the necessary personnel that can propel Kenya to higher industrial levels.

Here has spent the last three decades, often in difficult conditions, making technology education curricula around the world.

Prof Bonventure Wanjala Kerre, the Head of Moi University's Centre for Teacher Education, has developed technology education curricula for Uganda, Zanzibar, Iraq and Liberia.

Most countries sought his expertise in the aftermath of war.

Today Kerre is the only African serving as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) technology consultant.

His journey to prominence began 16 years ago when he led a Unesco study on introduction of Computer Science in technical and vocational education in Eastern and Southern African countries. "Unesco sought me out because, at the time, I was among a few people with a doctorate in technical education," Kerre told *The Sunday Standard*.



He received a PhD in Vocational and Technical Education from the University of Minnesota, in the United States in 1984.

Prof Bonventure Wanjala Kerre in academic regalia

His next consultancy assignment came ten years later when he was appointed team leader of a United Nations Development Programme and the International Labour Organisation-sponsored evaluation study on entrepreneurship education in Kenya and the orientation of the banking sector towards micro-financing.

Unesco assignments



Prof Kerre displays a charcoal stove

In the same year, the Religious Society of Uganda enlisted him to evaluate its vocational training institute.

The following year Kerre was in Dakar, Senegal, as a Unesco consultant on technical and vocational education in Africa.

His next Unesco assignment, in 1999, was in Zanzibar, where he conducted a feasibility study on the establishment of a vocational training centre for girls and women.

"After that I undertook a case study of technical and vocational education for Unesco's International Institute of Educational Planning (IIEP)," says Kerre.

Between 2002 and 2004, Kerre was in war torn Iraq working as a specialist for a textbook quality improvement programme.

" At one time we were evacuated to Paris, France, for safety reasons. Those two years were some of the most trying and

challenging ever in my career," says Kerre.

Some of his colleagues died during the war. He was relieved when in 2005 he was posted to Uganda as Unesco's lead education consultant in a government project.

His latest Unesco assignment came last year as a lead consultant for technical vocational education training situational analysis in Liberia.

"War can be very detrimental to education gains if what I witnessed in Liberia is anything to go by. The country had no institutions offering middle level training, which is key to the development of the manpower needs for any country," says Kerre.

He is currently finalising the report before handing it over to the Liberian government.

Outstanding international leader

Locally Kerre was a research consultant for the Kenya Rural Enterprise Programme's career aspiration for Kenyan school leavers project in 1998.

For his global contribution to technical education, Kerre won the Silivius-Wolansky Award for being an outstanding International leader in technical and vocational education and training from International Vocational Education and Training Association (IVETA) and the Iowa State University Foundation.

Even as he was globe-trotting, Kerre was actively involved in local education. He served as the director of the Centre for Curriculum Studies in Africa at Kenyatta University before moving to Moi University.

"I had to be disciplined to balance between my local work and international assignments," he says.

Kerre is also a member of the World Council of Associations in Technology Education and the International Scientific Committee for the Promotion of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (Unip).

Between 1990-1995, he was the National Coordinator of the Jua Kali Exhibitions Symposia in the then Ministry of Research, Technical Training and Applied Technology. Kerre was born in Bungoma District in 1948 — in a polygamous family with four mothers and 40 siblings.



Prof Kerre and his wife, Mrs Pamela Alivisa Kerre, with their children. Pictures by Peter Ochieng

"Being the first born son the responsibility of caring for the family rests on my shoulders," says Kerre. His inspiration is his mother, Mrs Nanyama Kerre.

PhD in Vocational and Technical Education

After his primary education he joined Rift Valley Technical in Eldoret, then a secondary school, for his Form One and Two education.

After sitting for the Kenya Junior Secondary Examination in 1968 he went to Mombasa Technical Institute for his Form Three and Four, where he graduated with a pre-technician certificate.

In 1972, he joined the Mohawk College in Canada for a diploma course in construction engineering. Two years later he acquired a Technical Teacher Certificate from the University of Toronto in Canada. With that, he qualified to teach in technical secondary schools.

In 1980, Kerre joined Oregon State University in the US for a Masters of Science degree, majoring in Vocational and Technical Education.

He had earlier acquired a Bachelor of Science with a major in trade and industrial education. In 1984 he completed his PhD in Vocational and Technical Education.

"My studies covered planning, curriculum and research," says Kerre.

His first job was as a technical teacher at the Kabete Technical School. He later

worked with the Education ministry for two years as an Education Officer in charge of the administration, supervision and implementation of technical and industrial education programmes.

Between 1984 and 1985, Kerre lectured at the Kenya Technical Teachers College, where he organised training programmes and courses and conducted instruction for industrial trainers, instructors for various ministries and vocational and technical education training institutions.

"I was also responsible for the coordination of research activities for staff in the areas of vocational training and technology development," he says.

Has undertaken over nine academic research projects

From there he moved to the Kenya Institute of Education where he was a senior lecturer and an applied education curriculum specialist. "I was the secretary to the national panels responsible for the development of curricula for primary, post-primary, secondary and post-secondary technical and vocational education," he says.

A year later Kerre joined Kenyatta University as the head of the Centre for Curriculum Studies in Africa. He has also served as an external examiner for Uganda's Makerere University in the department of curriculum, teaching and media.

Between 1999 and 2004, he was a commissioner at the Commission for Higher Education (CHE). " While at CHE, I was appointed chairman of the Committee for Post Secondary and Technical Institutions and a member of Curriculum, Inspection and Physical Science committees," he says.

Kerre has undertaken over nine academic research projects. They include his PhD thesis titled: The Development of Scientific and Technological Personnel in Modern Society. He also has carried out a Unesco commissioned study titled: Technical and Vocational Training in sub-Saharan Africa: A Case Study for Kenya.

Others are on traditional technologies, social studies, development of demand derived vocational training strategy in youth polytechnics and the influence of schooling on career plans and ambitions among graduates in Kenya.

Basic education compromised by congestion

He also conducted a United States Agency for International Development commissioned research on a model for planning manpower development in Kenya, the introduction of computer science in technical and vocational education at secondary level Eastern and Southern African countries, and the need for expanding capacity and improving programme quality of vocational and training education in Kenya.

He has 20 publications to his name.

" I am interested in technical and vocational education curricula designs for the 21st century", he says.

On local education, Kerre says basic education has been compromised by congestion, poor infrastructure and the teachers' shortage. He says the poor learning conditions affect the concentration of pupils and their general performance in national examinations.

The Government, he says, should address the issue of congestion in schools, build more classrooms and employ more teachers.

He says unless action is taken to reverse the trend, education quality in public schools will keep on dropping. "The Government should put more resources into public schools to bring them up to the standards of private institutions without necessarily interfering with investment in private institutions," he says.

Kenya must invest more in technology education

He says measures should be taken to address the expected increase in high school enrolment in a few years. He says the Government should expand access to university by not pegging admission to bed space.

"The Government should also introduce guaranteed loans for all students who qualify for university entry and effect a more efficient method of loan recovery," he says.

On brain-drain, Kerre says the Government should improve the terms of service of local professionals to stop them from seeking better remuneration in foreign countries.

"The issue of brain drain is serious because developed countries are poaching employees from poor economies as their workforce is ageing," says Kerre.

He says Kenya must invest more in technology education to become fully industrialised.

"Middle-level technological institutions should be well funded and sustained to continue producing the necessary manpower that can propel this country to industrialise," he says, adding that most village polytechnics have collapsed due to financial constraints.

Kerre has served on various local and international boards. He is an editorial board member of the Kenya Journal of Education, Kenya Energy and Non-Governmental Organisation ,and Unesco International Scientific Committee for Promotion of Technical and Vocational Education and Training.

Awarded a Distinguished Service medal

Despite his achievements, Kerre believes the best is still to come.

He intends to apply his vast experience to help his community uplift their living

standards.

"I want to use my knowledge and experience to help my people because they are endowed with resources but lack ideas of how to use them for their benefit," he says.

The scholar was awarded a Distinguished Service medal for his contribution to the Jua-Kali sector by retired President Moi.

Last year, Kerre formed Moi University's Centre for Teacher Education. The centre aims to promote the development and training of quality teachers.

"We want to become a centre of excellence in pedagogical renovation, innovation and to review in-service training for teachers ," he says.

The centre plans to provide, through seminars, workshops and conferences, opportunities for the sharing and exchange of ideas and new knowledge among education professionals and students.

Kerre is married to Pamela Alivisa and they have three children — two boys and a girl.

His wife, who has an undergraduate degree in Public Administration, also works at Moi University.

She is undertaking a Masters of Business Administration and a Masters of Philosophy in Development Studies at the same university.

Their children, Michael and Yvonne, sat for their Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education last year at Friends School Kamusinga and Kenya High respectively.

Their last-born, Vincent Felix, is in Standard Six at the Lions Primary School in Eldoret.

"I also have four other children from my first marriage. They all live in the US," he says. His daughter, Patricia, is a Science graduate while his son, Peter, is an IT engineer. The other two children, Elizabeth and Paul, are in school.

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