

# **Geoffrey Wango, A Biographical Note of his writings and publications**

**By Kariuki Wangai**

To cite this article: Wangai, K. (2018). *Geoffrey Wango, A Biographical Note of his writings and publications*. Nairobi: The Counsellor Magazine.

## **Preface**

I first met Dr Geoffrey Wango in 2004 when he visited my office at Phoenix Publishers where I was serving as Publishing Manager. He, alongside co-author Mungai Kariuki, had submitted a manuscript on the requisite skills for counselling in the school context that was finally published three years later (Wango, G. M., & Mungai, E. K. (2007). *Counselling in the School: A Handbook for Teachers*. Nairobi: Phoenix Publishers). The manuscript had been under review and Wango, then doing his Doctorate in the United Kingdom and home briefly for research, was making a follow-up. I was impressed by his simplicity; he was a humble, quiet and shy person. It was stimulating to meet an intelligent gentleman with enormous knowledge and such straightforwardness. We became friends and he contacted me on several occasions for opinions on pieces he had written. He also embarked on additional publications. When I suggested that we write an autobiography, in April 2015, Dr Wango told me he had about 120 publications. In the course of writing, we have now established that he has over 150 of them including books, Journal articles, papers, research and contributions in various works. This short autobiography captures these publications.

## **Acknowledgments**

It was on an official assignment as an editor at Phoenix Publishers that I first met Geoffrey Wango in September 2004. Over the next ten succeeding years, my repeated contacts with him and our discussions have been on writing and publications. I am grateful that this has resulted in so many of his publications, published and unpublished, far much more than perhaps any of us would have envisaged.

There are many to whom, for help in assembling the materials in this paper, Dr Wango and I are highly indebted. They include: Commonwealth Scholarship Commission who granted Wango a scholarship for a PhD at Birmingham University in the United Kingdom (2003 to 2006); Kenya Literature Bureau; Ministry of Education; Phoenix Publishers; The Jomo Kenyatta Foundation; and the University of Nairobi.

Dr Wango wishes to express his utmost gratitude to all the authors of the papers, books and publications - and all the participants - in the research cited. He is also grateful for the contributions of various colleagues and others to his books, Journal papers, conference and seminar presentations, journalists who have conducted interviews, and other publications.

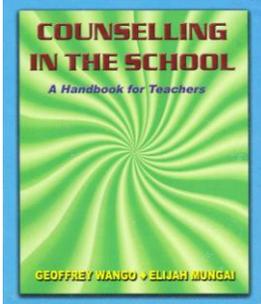
### **Wango the Writer and the Counselling Psychologist**



***Dr. Geoffrey Wango  
Senior Lecturer  
Psychology Department  
University of Nairobi***

Kariuki Mungai and I had agreed, in April 2016, to write an autobiography for Dr. Geoffrey Wango in anticipation of his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 2016. Mungai was to write a more personal note as a friend, former colleague, teacher and counsellor (Mungai, 2016). The note was to be in a more informal sort of style while I was to adopt the academic (scholarly) style. It turned out albeit difficult for me because I had to put together all the books, journals articles, reports, research and conference papers and other publications by Wango. Interestingly enough, the papers were there but were not organised in chronological order to enable immediate access. We have been able to do that now but the autobiography has extended to March 2018. We pray that Wango celebrates birthdays that surpass his over 150 publications and 250 citations on Google Scholar as well as 400 reads on ResearchGate.

## Geoffrey Wango, the Writer and the Counselling Psychologist



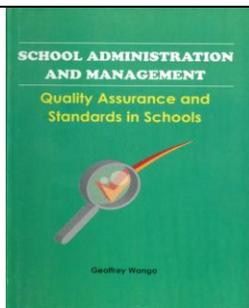
Wango, G. M., & Mungai, E. K. (2007). *Counselling in the School: A Handbook for Teachers*. Nairobi: Phoenix Publishers.

The manuscript on *Counselling in the School* arrived on my desk at Phoenix in 2003. At the time, we were fully engaged in developing a mass of school textbooks following the implementation of Free Primary Education (FPE) by the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government under President Mwai Kibaki. I had a look at the manuscript and developed an interest, partly informed by my background in teaching and writing articles with a counselling psychology angle in the Kenyan press. I despatched it for review and received a favourable report. Soon, I was communicating with the authors who turned out to be Geoffrey Wango and Kariuki Mungai. One of the authors, Wango, was pursuing a PhD in the United Kingdom. We talked about revision of the book and Wango said he was going to see me when he came to Kenya for his research.

I first met Wango in my office on an afternoon. I was actually surprised by his simplicity, soft voice and smile. I found him seated calmly at the reception perusing through one of our books. If you meet Wango for the first time, you notice that he likes smiling a lot. But behind the smile is a very serious man, highly focussed and task-oriented. I asked him if he had any other publications, complete or in press and he informed that he had the Master thesis (Wango, 1998a), research reports (Wango, 2003) and several unpublished papers (Wango, 1998b; 1999; 2000, 2001a; 2001b). I suggested I go through some of them in order to understand his writings. This was the beginning of our cooperation in publishing with Dr. Wango.

We continued working on the book until it was published in 2007. Wango had now presented a

paper based on his PhD thesis (Wango, 2006a) his completed thesis (Wango, 2006b) and several other papers (Wango, 2006c; 2006d; 2007). Thereafter, the book on Counselling in the School was recommended by the then Kenya Institute of Education (now Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development) and put in the Orange Book that lists books recommended for buying by schools. I was personally excited, because it meant that the book was to be used in schools and other institutions.



Wango, G. M. (2009). *School Administration and Management. Quality Assurance and Standards in Schools*. Nairobi: The Jomo Kenyatta Foundation.

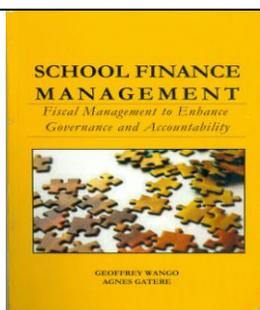
When Wango came back to Kenya in October 2006, we were fully engaged in *Counselling in the School* (Wango & Mungai, 2007). I was also aware that he had written several papers on education (Wango, 2001a; 2001b; 2006c; 2006d). At some point in time, we agreed to explore writing a book on education but we had no specific subject or title. During one of our meetings, he told me about a book he had been writing on quality assurance and standards in schools that was aimed at enhancing the quality of education management.

Wango had been working as a member of the Primary School Management (PRISM) National Lead Team (1996 - 2000) that had produced a series of Training Modules and publications on School Management Guide (Ministry of Education, 1999) and on research and evaluation in education and programme implementation (Crossley et al., 2005). The Training Modules were as follows (Ministry of Education, 2000a; 2000b; 2000c; 2000d; 2000e):

- Module 1: School Development Plan
- Module 2: Management of the Curriculum
- Module 3: Management of People
- Module 4: Management of Resources
- Module 5: A Guide for Trainers of Trainers

Later, he was also part of the Strengthening Primary Education (SPRED) programme, and he had immense knowledge of school administration at the national and international levels especially on gender and education (Ministry of Education, 2007a; Wango, 2001a; 2001b). I offered to have a look at the manuscript and it was impressive. I suggested that he consults someone who could add aspects of (school) administration and management as part of the quality assurance, a suggestion he embraced with conscientiousness.

Dr. Wango contacted several people including the following: Agnes Gatere, Teachers Service Commission; Elijah Mungai, Ministry of Education; Fred Oanda, Ministry of Education; James Sankale, Ministry of Education and later Ministry of Children and Youth; Peter Wachira, Ministry of Education; and Thomas Omuga, Ministry of Education. As a result, the Quality Assurance and Standards section was placed in the middle of the book, while aspects of Administration and Management were put in the introductory section. Later pages included School Finance and other resources. I must admit the book was a masterpiece though Wango left out Phoenix and instead contacted The Jomo Kenyatta Foundation, who finally published it as *School Administration and Management. Quality Assurance and Standards in Schools*. (Wango, G. M., 2009). It was a major contribution to the Kenyan Education sector that had lacked such an informed practical approach. Subsequently he has done other equally-successful publications with the Jomo Kenyatta Foundation.



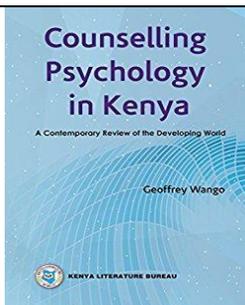
Wango, G. M., & Gatere, A. W. (2012). *School Finance Management: Fiscal Management to Enhance Governance and Accountability*. Nairobi: The Jomo Kenyatta Foundation.

The book on *School Administration and Management* (Wango, 2009) was an instant success. Wango was invited to several meetings of school heads, who were grappling with how to manage their institutions in a manner that satisfied the requirements of the education ministry. In discussions with head teachers, the issue of improved school finance management kept

coming up. The editors at The Jomo Kenyatta Foundation were keen to have a book on school finance. Dr. Wango made a proposal and as usual discussed it with me. I suggested that he co-authors a book to fill this gap, once again reluctantly letting it go to another publisher!

Work on the book commenced in 2010. Dr Wango requested Agnes Gatere to assist conduct research and interviews on School Finance Management. Dr Wango kept coming to see me because at several points he felt overwhelmed, almost giving up on the project. The book was taking away a lot of his time, especially when he joined the University of Nairobi on full time basis in February 2011. Incidentally, we met more often as it was easier to meet at the university that was a walking distance from my work station.

Dr. Wango wanted to concentrate more on counselling psychology, his area of specialization. He was already working on a manuscript tentatively titled *Counselling Psychology in Kenya*. But *School Finance Management* (Wango & Gatere, 2012) had gone too far, had taken a lot of time and he and co-author Gatere had written two papers arising from the research (Wango & Gatere, 2014; 2016a). It thus could not be abandoned and I urged him on. I must say that Wango was extremely excited when the book was finally published in 2012. I earned an invitation to lunch the next day, on the basis of the encouragement! We discussed the need to complete the book on *Counselling Psychology in Kenya* particularly since Wango wanted to increase the number of his professional papers in counselling psychology.



Wango, G. M. (2015). *Counselling Psychology in Kenya: A Contemporary Review of the Developing World*. Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau.

By 2010, we had become familiar with each other and I could freely meet and talk to Dr Wango anytime including on Saturdays when we often had lunch together. It was during one of the lunch dates that he talked about a book that he had started working on while in the

United Kingdom, *Counselling in Kenya*. I said I would be happy to give an overview of the manuscript.

I need to go back awhile to 2007. Kenya had been plunged into chaos following disputed Presidential Elections held in December that year. As a result, over 1,200 people died while thousands were displaced from their homes. The Ministry of Education was highly involved in psychological intervention programmes for pupils and students, including teachers. Subsequently, the Ministry developed Psychological Intervention Guidelines for Guidance and Counselling teachers and school administrators. Dr Wango was deeply involved in the development of the Guidelines, a series of psychosocial support materials for use in Schools among pupils, teachers and administrators. These materials were used in training of administrators and teachers as well as assisting pupils and students to cope with the trauma.

These were:

- *Violence, What I Need to Know*
- *How to Overcome Sadness Caused by Violence*
- *Helping you Cope with the Stress of Violence*
- *Tips for Teachers*
- *Tips for School Administrators*

These materials were very helpful in schools. During one of our meetings (we held formal and informal meetings so it was all a mix up), Wango appeared lost in thought. I may not be able to write everything we discussed but he told me that he honestly did not understand what could have caused all the violence in Kenya. He wished researchers, particularly counsellors and psychologists, could examine and intensify knowledge and understanding of traditional societies. He told me he was about to complete a paper he was writing on the development of guidance and counselling in schools and educational institutions (Wango, 2013a; 2014a; Wango 2014b), and once done would spend time to really understand our traditions and how they are linked to our behaviour. In particular, he mentioned the emergence of ethnic sects and rued that whereas teenage groupings attracted a lot of study among psychologists in the western world, this was not happening in Kenya. In his own words: ‘We need to understand

our philosophical underpinnings and the psychology of elections.’

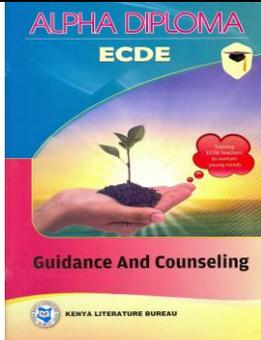
I suggested that *Counselling Psychology in Kenya* that was a work in progress then be expanded to explore aspects of our traditions hitherto unfamiliar to many scholars. He noted my words with precision; at one time when I suggested that the book seemed to address various traditional societies rather than the Kenyan nation, he reminded me that it was my idea and quoted the exact words! Though I was overwhelmed that he took my suggestion that far, he calmly told me that it was the best format to come up with a book that could also enable us and others understand our people.

I must say I was surprised by the writing, including style and professionalism, adopted in *Counselling Psychology in Kenya*, and not without reason. In *Counselling in the School* (Wango & Mungai, 2007), we had come up with a handbook meant for teachers engaged in guidance and counselling in schools. In *School Administration and Management* (Wango, 2009); as well as *School Finance Management* (Wango & Gatere, 2012), Dr Wango had placed emphasis on three areas, that is, (1) professional competence; (2) knowledge; and, (3) skills and techniques. The books were based on Kenya. In *Counselling Psychology in Kenya* (Wango, 2015a) the focus is on developing countries and traditional societies. I actually felt Wango had gone too fast with himself to take a global outlook. I said as much.

We agreed I was to look at the book and provide input since the book was no longer a Kenyan concern but had taken a global perspective. In the next four years (2011 - 2014), we had a lot of discussion on counselling psychology, much more than I had anticipated. I must say this was not surprising since Wango had prepared several papers on Counselling, Guidance and Counselling and hence even my own curiosity was aroused (Wango, 2007; 2008; 2010; 2011a; 2012; 2013a; 2013b; 2014a; 2014b; 2015b). In fact, reading through one of the papers, *Synchronic Hermeneutic Phenomenological Approach* (Wango, 2013a), I told Dr Wango that he was using difficult terminology that was more international than Kenyan. He laughed and said he would change the title. He never did!

I have done a book review of *Counselling in Kenya* (Wangai, 2018) and I hasten to add that it

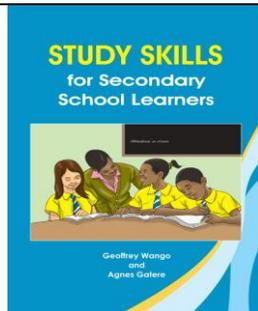
is remarkable. In my own view, Wango had come of age as an author and counselling psychologist. I was proud of the writer I had met at the beginning of a long life career.



Wango, G. M., Kimani, P. W., Osaka, J., Githinji, S. N., & Amayo, R. A. (2015). *Early Childhood Development Education Guidance and Counselling*. Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau.

By 2014, I had become a personal friend and consultant to Dr Wango. Earlier in 2013 he was contracted, together with others, to write a book on guidance and counselling in early childhood development education for a state publisher, the Kenya Literature Bureau. After the formal workshop, he visited my office and we talked extensively about children. He wanted to discuss the kind of books that children read and liked, as he felt this would inform the guidance and counselling that should be accorded to children. He was counting on me for such information, noting that I worked for a publisher who had done a lot of titles for young children. I was impressed with the kind of research that he undertook in his books and publications. *Early Childhood Development Education Guidance and Counselling* (Wango et al., 2015) was finally published in 2015.

It was also at this time that together with Agnes, they started investigating how to improve on study skills among students in secondary schools.



Wango, G. M., & Gatere, A. W. (2016). *Study Skills for Secondary School Learners*. Nairobi: The Jomo Kenyatta Foundation.

The idea of writing a book on *Study Skills for Secondary School Learners* (Wango & Gatere, 2016b) was in my opinion highly welcome since many students fail to perform in school and later in life due to lack of prerequisite skills. I was privileged to have read the first draft of the book and several subsequent copies. In the end, we discussed with Dr Wango on the need for a short book with pictures and illustrations. We also discussed the need for mentoring and mentorship programmes particularly for young people and in schools. As a result, they prepared a Power Point Presentation based on Study Skills book (Wango & Gatere, 2016c). I was personally thrilled that the book included aspects of personality (character formation) development which Wango had discussed extensively with Mungai.

A lot of our discussions have also dwelt on how counselling can resonate with the needs of the people and hence the book on Parenting (Wango & Gatere, *In Press*). The book on parenting and counselling is still in press and we have certainly discussed it more than any other publications and the reason have to do with the intricate details, language as well as the challenges of parenting in modern living.

### **A Short Interview with Wango**

Wango is a gentle person and seemingly low-keyed personality except for his writing that uplifts him way above many other scholars. But writing is not as straightforward and I felt it would be worthwhile to include a short conversation with him. I asked Wango what he had to say about his writing and this is what he said:

*I truly thank God for the gift of life, the knowledge God has graciously granted me, and the opportunity as well as the gift of writing. I don't consider myself more special than others; I only express that my inspiration is from God. I work hard to put across well-rounded arguments in some logical sequence, a simple straightforward way, that's for sure. I am not the hero but the many people I talk to and that support me. They include family, friends, colleagues, students and participants in seminars, conferences and others who have taken part in various researches.*

I consider Dr. Wango a master in a wide scope of knowledge in counselling psychology, education, policy, gender and development particularly in developing countries. I asked Wango, 'what it is about books, papers and articles that enable you express yourself best, and how do you go about it?' He replied:

*Everyone is gifted in their own way and it is important to identify your ability and potential. I love sentence fragments and I am emotionally overwhelmed when I express myself – it is a passion and it is irresistible. I also have to put together various ideas that may appear clumsy, but in the end they are patched up and make interesting reading. Writing adds meaning and knowledge to life and I certainly want to make a contribution to humankind.*

Lastly, I wanted to know about his inspiration, favourite books and authors, world leaders, who, what and those who had motivated him and his overall view of life. He laughed at this and told me:

*I must say I have found several writers and countless writings quite fascinating. I will mention a few like The Holy Bible that is my life and spiritual stimulation. I have read all the writings of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe among others. My favourite columnists are in the Sunday Nation, that is, Yusuf K. Dawood, Phillip Ochieng, Gerry Loughran and Chris Hart. Of course Obama's autobiography is stirring and had a remarkable impact in my life.*

*The article or writing that I would consider had an enormous or colossal dynamism on my life was a fascinating and mesmerizing commentary on storytelling by Peter Guber in Psychology Today (March April, 2011). I was given the Magazine by my best friend, Agnes Gatere because as she put it, 'it has a wonderful article on storytelling. I have never seen a person who is filled with such a passion to write so I know you will be inspired.' The article was actually thrilling and I read it again and again. It changed my life and I still have the copy of the Magazine. This is because the article is not just about storytelling or how to write but it is an inspiration; it is also a vivid description*

*about choices made in a major successful career by Guber. His career spans over several years and has influenced enormous people all over the world.*

*Guber states there are several facts about story telling as an art, that is, (1) In order to tell a story to an audience, one must be purposeful; (2) One must know the audience; (3) To tell a purposeful story to the audience, you need to prepare. Of course Guber concludes that 'you can't get anywhere without them (audience)'. This is knowledge, experience and competence. There, you have it.*

I sincerely want to include the rest of my interview with Wango in my autobiography.

## **Conclusion**

To be sincere, I do not have a conclusion as I would like to write a formal autobiography. But since this is not an informal one either, let me be as academic as possible and wrap it up!

Dr Wango is a teacher, counsellor, inspirational speaker and mentor. His writings between 1998 to 2018 in a span of 20 years are an estimated 150 publications including books, Journal articles, Modules, Conference Papers, Power Point Presentations and other contributions that incorporate 24 Postgraduate (Masters and PhD) and 30 undergraduate research reports. When I asked Mungai about the number of publications, he told me over 100. I checked and found that Wango has over 50 papers and books (published and unpublished), and has facilitated in over 70 Seminars and Conferences in Kenya and abroad. He also has over 30 Power Point Presentations but only three (3) are available online. I was excited to note that he has 250 citations on Google Scholar and over 400 reads on ResearchGate. I am also aware of the guidance and mentorship he has provided to numerous other students and researchers. I had asked him if we can put most of the short papers and other essays together so that I can compile them into a book. I have also requested to write a more comprehensive autobiography.

In spite of the many publications, sales of books in the developing world are often modest. Dr Wango tells me he is not wealthy but comfortable. In my own view, he is too intelligent and

certainly has too many ideas that he needs to put on pen and paper. But what I like most is the fact that Wango has been able to successfully use the books and publications as a flagship in establishing a reading and writing culture particularly in Kenya.

Dr Wango is a straightforward and humble, respectful and compassionate. For me, I admire his intelligence, auspiciousness and honesty. He tells me of his favourite authors, among them Chinua Achebe and that 'I admire his simplicity and ease of communication. Achebe was a great man and I would like to be remembered as humble and dignified as well'. I think highly of his determination, self-confidence as well as the way his papers are embedded effectively in relevant details. He credits his faith in God for his success, 'Our lives are never about ourselves but serving the Lord with wholehearted devotion. Our purpose is to God and serving Him diligently'.

Happy birthday Dr Wango.

### **Publications by Geoffrey Wango, Geoffrey Wango and co-authors and Other Contributions**

Elijah, D. M., Kimani, E. N., & Wango, G. M. (2013). Gender-related challenges faced by students in learning technical courses in Machakos technical training institute, Machakos County – Kenya. *Prime Journal of Social Sciences, Vol. 3:1*, 557 - 564.

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