

**"Education and the Development of Nationhood in Kenya", in Ruth Bett (ed.), *Re-invigorating the University Mandate in a Globalising Environment: Challenges, Obstacles and Way Forward* (Nairobi, DAAD, 2005), pp. 326-342.**

### **ABSTRACT**

After the attainment of political independence, it became necessary for different ethnic groups in Kenya to see themselves as members of a large family – the nation – within which their various ethnic groups would harmoniously co-exist and work together for the good of all. They were expected then, as now, to conceive of themselves as one group of people forming one nation, not as different ethnic groups constantly hostile to one another. Education was seen as the best means to achieve this goal. So immediately after independence, the government of Kenya assigned educational institutions the role of instilling feelings of nationhood and promoting national unity. Since then there is no single government document on education that does not emphasize this role. This paper attempts to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the philosophy behind using education as a means to instill nationhood and promote national unity. In order to do this the paper first examines the meaning of the terms 'nation' and 'nationhood'. Then, the paper analyzes the recommendations of the Ominde Commission Report of 1964 regarding the role of education in instilling feelings of nationhood. This is because the Ominde Report is the one that lay the foundation upon which all the subsequent educational reports and other similar documents in Kenya are now built. The analysis reveals inherent difficulties in trying to use educational institutions as a vehicle for inculcating nationhood and promoting national unity. This is mainly because nationhood is an attitude of mind and the nature of attitudes is such that their formation and maintenance is influenced by factors largely found outside the school system. By way of conclusion the paper suggests that schools are mere reflections of the society that maintains them, and that nationhood can be achieved only if every section of the Kenyan community is involved in its promotion, with the adult world and the political establishment leading the way as role models to be emulated by the learners in schools.