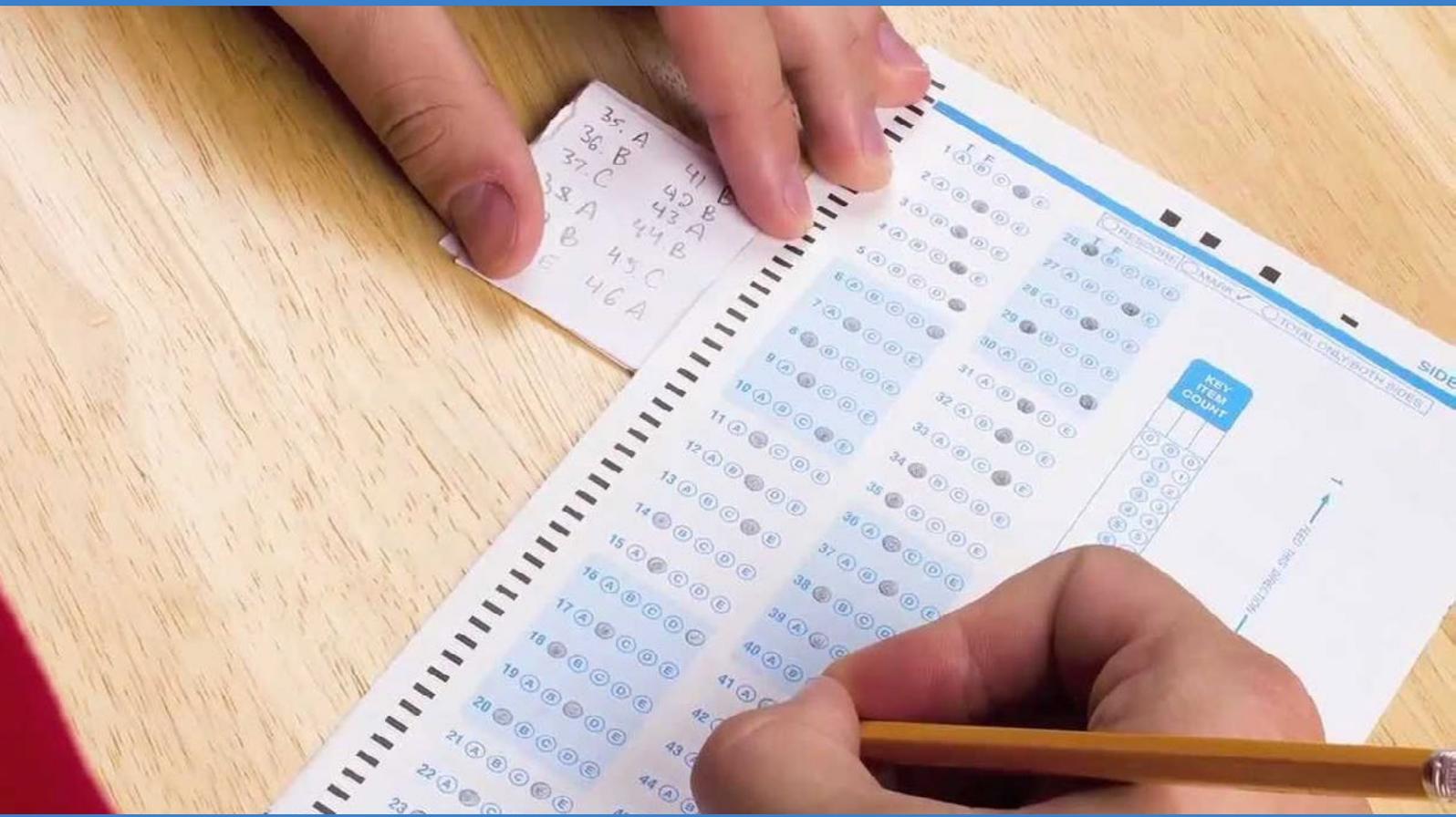


School of Fail: Why Exam Cheating Equals a Corrupt Nation



By Stephen Mukhongi

Duncan Momanyi, 18, is among the 525,802 candidates who sat for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations in 2015.

As Duncan explains, his parents however were not elated with his examination results as they felt he could have posted better grades like his cousins and friends from other schools.

“Some of my friends had straight A’s and I know very well they got exam leakage while I got a C+ through my own effort yet my parents compare me with them saying I have failed. That really broke my heart,” he says.

On October 2015, during the examinations, the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) expressed concern over reports of rampant exam leakages.

Some of the reported malpractices involved teachers as well as complacent supervisors who allowed students to sneak to examination halls with written answers. Unconventional methods were also employed where leaked exams were sent through *WhatsApp* messages on smart phones at a fee.

“It is our considerate view that exam leakage in this country has reached alarming levels, putting the credibility of our education system at stake,” said Bishop Maurice Makumba Muhatia, Chairman KCCB Commission for Education and Religious



Education during a press conference October 23 at Waumini house in Westlands, Nairobi.

"If not checked, this evil is likely to jeopardize the future of our young people, the credibility of professionalism and integrity of our country," he said.

According to the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC), the 2015 KCSE exams recorded the highest cases of irregularities, with a total of 5,101 candidates having their results cancelled compared to 2014 when 2,975 candidates had their results cancelled for cheating.

A number of schools had their entire results cancelled with 46 out of 47 counties involved in irregularities according to Ministry of Education.

"We had an unprecedented rise of exam irregularities in 2015. I apologize to the public for these," Dr Fred Matiangi the Cabinet Secretary for the Ministry of Education stated as he released the 2015 examination results at the KNEC headquarters in Nairobi.

The issue of integrity of exams has led to concern being expressed up to the highest level of government with President Uhuru Kenyatta issuing a directive to the Ministry of Education to come up with an effective plan of tackling the vice by March 30, 2016.

According to Ms Koki Ochieng, Lecturer of Journalism, United States International University – Africa, the recurring issue of exam cheating in the country is as a result of societal expectations.

"For one, we glorify success and condemn failure. In fact Kenyans don't take failure very well, neither do we understand how to calibrate success," she says during an interview with *The Seed*.



Education CS, Dr Fred Matiangi' he says exams cheating should be a matter of concern to everybody

"For instance a child who has 250 marks, out of a possible 500 has 50 percent of the mark but we want all our children to get over 80 percent, because of that we never link education to outcome. We always praise success but we don't condemn the wrong path to success. Consequently, it is easier to steal in Kenya because there are no dire consequences," says Ms Koki.

Fr David Otieno, Rector St Mary's Junior Seminary Kwale in the Archdiocese of Mombasa agrees with Ms Koki saying "*Mtoto umleavyo ndivyo akuavyo* (a child will grow depending on how you nurture them) because as teachers, guardians and parents we are bringing up a nation, so if we bring up a dishonest children we will end up having a corrupt nation."

"Students who steal national exams know deep down that they did not work hard to pass, so when they qualify to go to university they will do the same and later graduate to become quack doctors, incompetent teachers or corrupt public servants," he says.

"Stealing exams cannot be tolerated in education and if this continues we will be destroying our education system in Kenya," warns Fr Otieno.

According to Ms Koki, there is a lot of emphasis on passing national exams since they take a person to the next stage in life which is normally associated with societal indicators of success.

"These days the question is, can you afford a nice house; a nice car; or a lavish lifestyle? That is why you find people living beyond their means to make an impression, because that is what is expected in the African context," she says.

Exams malpractice therefore is a clear reflection of the runaway corruption in our institutions where people don't look at merit as an entry point to leadership or lucrative positions, explains Ms Koki.



Bishop Maurice Muhatia, he says the Church has a lead role to play in ensuring exams integrity



Managers and administrators of private Catholic Schools during the CaPEIA Conference held at CUEA. The conference addressed issues affecting the Church in provision of education in the country including examination cheating

“For every successful position people want to use dubious means to get there, most people don’t like hard work. If one gets stuck most of the time they don’t have the patience to go through the motions, because it is really emotionally draining to go through due process and so for many, it much easier to follow the corrupt way,” she says.

For these reasons Ms Koki believes that by tackling exams malpractice in our schools we will be killing two birds with one stone as this will help nip corruption in the bud.

The high level of cheating was a subject for discussion during the Catholic Private Educational Institutions Associations (CaPEIA) Conference that was held at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA), in March.

The event brought together managers and administrators of private nursery, primary and secondary schools as well as colleges run by the Catholic Church in Kenya under the theme “Catholic School – A Place to Encounter Jesus Christ, the Compassion Teacher.”

During the meeting, Bishop Muhatia, who is the patron of CaPEIA noted that the serious problem of cheating in national examinations is a matter that worries everyone.

“We need to address it conclusively in order for us to be a nation that trusts and works on issues with integrity,” said Bishop Muhatia

of the Catholic Diocese of Nakuru during the four day conference March 8-11.

Bishop Muhatia during his key note address at the CaPEIA conference told the participants that the challenges currently facing the education sector including exams malpractice provides them with a unique opportunity to create and sustain a Catholic character within their particular institutions.

“You are leaders with spiritual and educational mandate and your reach extended both into the classrooms and into the community... you have the capacity to make our institutions not only centers of character formation and excellence but also hubs of God’s mercy, justice and love,” he said.

“The life, the values and the feeling of each school derive in large part from commitment to your calling, your prayer life, and actual positive relationships with teachers, support staff, students and pupils. The instilling and living of Gospel values are what sets us apart and gives us a distinctive character. This is our trade mark! This is our DNA!” he stated.

In an interview with *The Seed* Bishop Muhatia said the role of the Church is to draw the attention of the society to such kind of ills and evils as well as to inform the people not be involved in this kind of vices and especially because the Church itself is involved in education for the purpose of a better society tomorrow.



Ms Robi Ochieng Journalism Lecturer USIU. She says that exam malpractice is a clear reflection of the runaway corruption in our institutions



Fr David Otieno, Rector St Mary's Junior Seminary, Kwale. He creating will destroy education system in Kenya

"In due course we will present to the country our proposed plans on how we are going to address the management of examinations because we should never have a situation such as we had," said Dr Matiang'i who was present at the meeting on March 8.

"If you are a person of serious conscious, it is painful to know even when you sleep at night that 5,101 children have a bleak future," he said adding that the affected students have suffered on accounts that have nothing to do with them and pointed out the

role played by schools and rogue KNEC officials in abetting exam malpractices.

"How can it be that 52 years after our independence we cannot manage exams in a manner that everyone trusts what we are doing? Yet testing and measuring the performance of our children is the ultimate objective of any education system," the CS posed.

"I apologized this year; I do not intend to apologize again next year We must do things differently and all of us must be concerned about this," said Dr Matiang'i



Students during prayers at St Peter's Seminary in Kakamega. The Catholic Church has over 8,000 educational institutions representing 30 percent of all educational institutions in Kenya, including special education facilities all of which play a crucial role in imparting value systems to students