

FOUNDATIONS OF ADULT EDUCATION

International policy dialogue: Challenges in implementing lifelong learning for adults

A Namibian perspective

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, much has been said about lifelong learning around the world. In both developed and developing nations, changes in work organization and management, coupled with a focus on markets, consumption and lifestyle have drawn leaders and policy makers to the rhetoric of lifelong learning. There is a growing recognition of the need to move towards lifelong learning, specifically that which focuses on informal and non-formal learning by adults. The purpose of this paper is to provide a framework for an understanding of lifelong learning as part of everyday life and its importance to development.

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There are a number of weaknesses in the current situation in implementing lifelong learning for adults. The diverse organisations and personnel engaged in adult learning usually identify their programmes with their own sector, for instance health or agriculture, and seldom see the common denominator in their work that derives from the shared goal of helping adults to acquire new knowledge, skills and attitudes. Hence, there is a low level of awareness of the common field of adult learning/lifelong learning for adults and of its importance to development in a developing country like Namibia. There is lack of recognition of adult learning in Namibia. Due to this, there is no common vision for adult learning, and there is no overall policy to guide organisational and programme development. For a time, there is a policy that is developed, but the usage of such remains a rising of eye-brows looking at the current practises.

The challenge is - how do we reshape the school curriculum to give adequate attention to this aspect of education? Economic, social and cultural changes mean that we now live in a knowledge society that requires permanent learning. We must come to regard day-to-day learning as routine. We should take part in organized learning throughout our lives, whether for personal or professional development. Non-formal learning should permeate our daily lives. In short, we must rely less on traditional institutions and become more self-directed in learning. The challenge is also on - how do we effectively bring about a learning culture in our citizenry to shift the responsibility for active and deliberate learning to individuals? In the next century, learning outside of schools will count more in view of the rapid rate at which knowledge and skills acquired through formal learning becomes obsolete. Lifelong learning is necessary for upgrading skills and knowledge for career advancement as jobs go through rapid transformation in a high-tech, knowledge-based society. Re-tooling the workforce is also a necessity if Namibia is to remain competitive. How do we affect the shift from over-dependence on traditional classrooms to "learning centres" and intensive use of technology as in distance and web-based learning? How do we shift the responsibility for developing learning opportunities from the government to employers?

Policy issues:

National Conference on Adult Education, 1998 - In 1997, UNESCO held the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V). This landmark conference generated international commitment to the right to education throughout life and the creation of a learning society. The major outcomes of the conference were the National Plan of Action for Adult Learning, which included in its recommendations the proposal for a national policy on adult learning and the establishment of the National Council on Adult Learning.

The Presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Training (1999), called for the recovery and recognition of the whole sector of education, culture and training. The importance of lifelong learning for Namibia's development was emphasized and stressed the need for Namibia to be a learning nation. The challenges of youth unemployment and the devastation caused by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, amongst other factor, were highlighted. The report also placed strong emphasis on the role of adult learning. It stated that,

"Namibia should inspire to being A Learning Nation in which all citizens have supported opportunities for learning throughout their lives. It proposed increased recognition of the scope of adult learning, improved co-ordination and strategies for strengthening Adult Learning Organizations, a focus on learning and work, and better utilization of communication technology. There are recent international commitments to Adult Learning. Namibia is a party or signatory to a number of recent commitments proposals and initiatives that promote adult learning. The World Education Forum in 2000 declared the Dakar Framework for Action, which set Education for All (EFA) Goals for this time to 2015. A number of goals express or state commitment to adult learning, particularly the following: *"EFA Goal IV: Achieving a 50 % improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults"*.

The goals of EFA have been given priority by the African Union within the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Furthermore, the United Nation Millennium Declaration in 2000 set specific goals for development and poverty reduction by 2015. One of these goals has direct implications or connotations for adult learning in that it refers to elimination gender imbalances in all levels of education. There are goals that indirectly imply a need for adult learning, such as health and agriculture goals. The U.N. General Assembly in 2001 implemented a resolution or a pledge on the U.N. Literacy Decade Towards EFA (2003-2014), which seek to promote literacy amongst adults as well as children.

The Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture implement a strategic plan (2001-2006), which is a working document at policy level. It is organised in eight National Priority Areas where lifelong learning is one of those areas. According to the recent National Policy on Adult learning, "Adult learning can support economic policies, and social, environmental, political and human resource priorities programmes. It also provides an overall policy framework for the development of adult learning. The National Vocational Training Act, Act 18 of 1994, regulates the Vocational Education and Training Policy (VET) in Namibia. The Act has been amended to cater for institutional, community and industrial based training. There are related policy and legislation of importance to adult learning. This includes the National Policy on HIV/AIDS for Education Sector (2003), Labour Act, Act no. 6 (1992), Affirmative Act, and Act no. 29 of 1998 by the Employment Equity Commission.

There are challenges of administration (co-ordinating, policy implementation and monitoring adult learning in Namibia. To meet this challenge, the Government established the National Council on Adult Learning to be responsible for the promotion and co-ordination of adult learning, policy development and maintenance of standards in the provision of adult learning. The Council involve adult learners' representatives as member of it.

Basic skills learning for adults:

Mostly the majority of adults need basic skills, especially women and disadvantaged social groups need special attention regarding lifelong learning opportunities.

The creation of the National Literacy Trust (NLT) has come as a motivation in terms of not only incentives, but also support the basic education of adults in Namibia especially through non-governmental organisations. It also supports undertakings and engages in any other related activities that further the interest of adult education. Another strategy is the National Training Levy for Vocational Education and Training in Namibia. The National Levy provides an important new source of funding for work-related adult learning, including not only vocational skills but also the generic skills required across all work places. The opportunities for learning are there; sometimes it is only for the people to avail themselves to those opportunities. If the programme is need-oriented (content) and the mode of delivery (method) is well planned, the participation of the adult learners will improve dramatically. The fact that some programmes are free of charge and some are very cheap is a motivation factor for improving participation.

A large number of Ministries also provide programmes for the public, which involve adult learning aside from basic skills programmes. The Ministry of Education runs the Adult Upper Primary Education programme, the Adult Skills Development for Self-Employment project, and manages the Community Learning and Development Centres. It is also responsible for formal vocational training, Community Skills Development Centres, and programmes for out-of school youth. The Government's involvement in adult learning also includes the adult learning component of agricultural and forestry extensive, water point

management, community-based natural resources management, land resettlement, tourism development, small and medium enterprise development, primary health care, rehabilitation of people with disabilities, prison education, broadcasting, gender awareness programmes, voter education, and road safety campaigns.

The state-subsidised educational institutions, namely Namibia College of Open Learning (NAMCOL), the Polytechnic of Namibia, and the UNAM, also provide significant programmes that are beyond basic skills, including distance continuing education. Parastatal corporations, such as NAMPOWER and NAMWATER, and private sector companies, provide extensive education and training for their own employees, primarily to enhance their work performance.

Qualifications framework and equivalencies:

The legal framework for the activities of Namibia Qualification Authority (NQA), which pertains to the setting of standards, is provided for in the NQA Act of 29 of 1996. The National Qualifications Framework established in 1996 has provided a structure for the evaluation and recognition of competencies learned outside formal education, and has thus created progression opportunities for adult learners.

Recognition for Prior Learning and Skills Development - the basic premise underlying the process of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is that people learn many things outside the formal education and training systems, and that such learning, no matter how, when and where acquired is worth of assessment and recognition. Prior learning with respect to both the occupational standard and the curriculum standard is recognized in terms of the reward of a qualification accredited by NQA. RPL enables the NQA to qualify qualities of numerous Namibians. It is a means towards employment creation and as such is high on the priority list of Namibia. At the moment NQA is directed with RPL since the Vocational Training Board of Namibia implements it. The concept of NQA was developed out of the need for qualifications that are more relevant, flexible and coherent, but at the same time provide for learners' achievement to be recognized and certified. The Vocational Training qualifications and the Mature Age Entry Scheme at PON and UNAM are

recognised under qualification framework and also as equivalencies. As the N3 course is equivalent to Grade 12.

Partnerships:

Non-formal education in Namibia is provided in order to: provide and promote literacy and numeracy programmes, provide adult skills development and to provide opportunities for distance education. Adult learning in Namibia is funded through Government departments, parastatal corporations, private sector companies, non-governmental organizations and community-based organisations, and individual learners. Approximately 30 directorates in 15 ministries spend money on adult learning in programmes.

The Namibian Government is the major provider of adult learning. According to National Development Plan Two (NDP2) 2001/2 - 2005/6, 32 directorates in 18 ministries, offices and agencies provide programmes, which involve adult learning. The Government is responsible for providing basic education to all citizens, including adults.

The National Training Authority, the NQA and National Examination Board with the advice from the National Council on Adult Learning are responsible for recognition and certification of adult learning programmes. Adult learning is multi-sectoral, involving different ministries within Government, as well as parastatals, private sector, and non-governmental organisations and community based organisations. There comes the National Council on Adult Learning to co-ordinate all those activities been carried out in those different agencies. The maintaining of effective communication with partners through networking, sharing of information, seminars and conferences is a part of been linked to one another.

Students completed any National Diploma at the Polytechnic of Namibia have an entry into Bachelors' Degree at the UNAM. The CED programme at NAMCOL leads you to an admission status at UNAM in the Department of Adult and Non-Formal Education. The N-courses from Vocational Training Centres is a gateway to PON for more advanced courses. UNAM and PON shared facilities in terms of regional centres that are outside Windhoek. This includes NOLNET centre. The sharing of tutors among NAMCOL, UNAM, PON, and other non-governmental organisations as part-time tutors.

Distance learning:

The reality that the mode of delivery (distance) is suitable for most adults is a motivation in itself. The expansion of community libraries, which likewise constitute valuable venues for information, guidance and counselling, can be regarded a tool for promoting participation of adults in distance learning. Computer facilities are available. The more support students get the more they will participate in the programmes preferred. The administration and co-ordination of programmes should meet the distance learners/students interest by all means as long as rules and regulations are applied effectively. Programmes should be flexible and short-termed, taking into consideration the principles and characteristics of adult learners as outlined by Malcolm Knowles.

International cooperation:

DVV of Germany is a joint venture of the Department of Adult and Non-Formal Education, European Union, joint venture with the UNAM, Centre for External Studies on the MASTEP programme and also to many other education sectors by donating computers, books and other equipments.

In conclusions, the issues involved in promoting lifelong learning nationwide are pervasive or persistent and universal. The challenges seem formidable and the solutions to problems hardly simple. However, to propel Namibia into the group of developed nations and knowledge-based economies, these challenges must be met. All stakeholders in the communities, the education enterprise and the government must have the vision and commitment to make the necessary paradigm shift to prepare for the future now instead of waiting to respond to it when it arrives. Every tomorrow is the future!!

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