

**LIFELONG LEARNING POLICIES IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES: THE NORTH vs THE SOUTH****An adult educator's view****Charlene Keja-Kaereho**

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**INTRODUCTION**

This paper focuses on the discussion of Lifelong Learning Policies of various countries. Concentration will be paid on the policies recommendations, evaluations done and examples at community level.

The policy discourse of lifelong learning was introduced in the international scene in the seventies with the Faure Report issued by UNESCO 1972. Since, then the discourse of lifelong learning has been interpreted in different ways and consequently, operationalized in a variety of ways. Varied as the practices are on lifelong learning, the term itself is more widely used in Europe and in some countries in Asia, as well as Africa but very rarely.

There is a great need to discuss the conceptualisation of lifelong learning in developed and developing countries. Developing countries also called the south, focus on development while the developed countries (north) focus on global competitiveness when incorporating lifelong learning.

This paper will discuss the conceptions of the north-south countries on lifelong learning before the policies are conferred. It is mostly through or based on a conception of a phenomenon that any policy can be implemented.

The North Countries - The declared focus on lifelong education emanated from an increasing awareness that we are situated in a rapidly changing world, where knowledge and skills need constant updating. The impetus for

nations to embrace lifelong, rather than initial, education was the recognition of the need to ensure economic competitiveness in an increasingly complex and globalized world. The transition from lifelong education to lifelong learning as the policy driver has been understated. The 1996 Delors Report prepared policy makers for a shift of focus from education to learning.

The OECD Policy Report and Torres (2003) observe that education indicates a more provider-guided model of learning activity, whilst learning suggests the focus is on the learner's needs.

Similarly, education implies formal system of provision, while learning suggests a wider notion of non-formal and informal systems. The emphasis on lifelong learning suggests individuals are responsible for their own self-direction, in a way that is integrated with the existing process of life itself.

Enslin (2001) points out that lifelong learning in United Kingdom (UK) is often synonymous with the education and training of adults. However, lifelong learning claims to both carry lifespan connotations and blur the distinctions between formal, non-formal and informal provision. Learning can be provided through variety of sources and from organisations for which education is not necessarily their core business, such as non-governmental organisations, health and welfare organisations.

In the view of developed countries, lifelong learning is defined as:

*All purposeful learning activity, undertake on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, ensuring social integration and to achieving equal opportunities (EU 2000:3-6).*

Equal opportunity in lifelong learning is interpreted throughout most of the Western world as vocational skills education. The trend is towards individualism, with an emphasis on its value for human, rather than social capital. The assumption is that adults will update the skills and knowledge they learnt at school according to the demands of the labour market. From this basis it is implied that people will contribute to wealth creation and the national economy in a way that will ensure social cohesion.

The South Countries - In countries such as Africa, South Asia and Latin America there are arguments for a broader and more holistic view of lifelong learning than the human capital. The first stems from the social and cultural values rooted in societies where collective learning is valued more than individual learning. Avoseh (2001) argues on behalf of African nations, that indigenous populations have always had a well-established tradition for lifelong learning. This system privileges the collective, community and spiritual over the economic, with a focus on social rather than human capital. This education was by passed by colonial administrations, which displaced the education for all system with selective formal education that trained people to support colonial rule (Yule, 2001).

The second consideration is the present day reality of inequitable access to basic, primary education. Lifelong learning in adulthood is not necessarily an update for initial education. For some adults it may be either a first time experience of formal education or simply a life experience itself.

Countries' definition of lifelong education and learning is significant. In the description below the terms appear interchangeable, possibly deliberately:

*Lifelong education is a comprehensive and visionary concept, which includes formal, non-formal and informal learning extended throughout the lifespan of an individual to attain the fullest possible development in personal, social and vocational and professional life. A key purpose of lifelong learning is democratic citizenship, connecting individuals and groups to the structures of social, political and economic activity (Aitcheson 2003:165).*

From the north and south countries' definition of lifelong learning, it can be viewed that the goal of lifelong learning in developing countries is democratic citizenship and seen as a connecting activity while in developed ones is vocational skills and view it as an individualistic activity.

We propose lifelong education as a master concept for educational policies in the years to come for both developed and developing countries.

In **Thailand**, the urgent need to reform the curriculum and the management of education due to economic, social and educational crisis was the context for laying down of the legal basis of lifelong learning. Education is defined

as the learning process for personal and social development through imparting of knowledge, practice, training, and transmission of culture, enhancement of academic progress, building a body of knowledge by creating a learning environment and society with factors available and conducive to continuous lifelong learning. The policy examines debates on the development of lifelong learning activities in the country. It stresses the linkages between lifelong learning and the efforts made to build a knowledge-based society. In the context of the post-1997 economic crisis, lifelong learning is also considered as an instrument to protect the country from such risks in the future.

The law states that credit accumulated by learners shall be transferable within the same type or between types or from different educational institutions, including learning from non-formal education or informal education, vocational training or from work experience.

The guidelines for developing the appropriate lifelong education into a learning society are: a) provision of appropriate education to cover all age groups of learners (before school, schooling, working and aging groups); b) developing of appropriate contents to meet the needs of the learners, to enable them to apply their knowledge in their actual vocations (learning to know, to do, to be and learning to live together); c) development of more varieties of qualified learning resources (family, society, resource centres and ICTs; and d) promotion of inter-related and transfer of knowledge in the three systems of education.

In *China*, its 1995 Education Law stipulated that the state operates a lifelong education system and to create conditions so that its citizens learn throughout life. Three years later, the Education Invigoration Action Plan for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century states that a lifelong learning system be established throughout the country by 2010. Finally, in 1999, a decision on Deepening Education and all round promotion of quality education provided for the strengthening of the lifelong learning system was taken.

Concretely, the four major drives to lifelong learning are: 1) to universalise literacy and basic education; 2) to popularise higher education; 3) to systematize vocational education; and 4) to practice community based adult

education. Not only is lifelong learning seen as an important education perspective but more important, it is the means for development where the end goal is for China to be a learning society. China's lifelong learning policy is strongly based on the adult education policy. Meaning the lifelong learning has been incorporated in both the educational and developmental policies.

The policy recommends that central authorities need to clarify policies and funding allocations for lifelong learning in particular.

One approach by which learning opportunities are democratized is through the community learning centres (CLC). In Asia, the CLC is a local place of learning outside the formal education system. Located in both rural and urban areas, it is usually set up and managed by local people in order to provide various learning opportunities for community development and improvement of the quality of life. CLC have been recognized as effective delivery mechanisms of literacy and continuing education programmes through community-based approaches.

On the other hand, *Namibia and South Africa* coming from a context of post-colonial and post-apartheid regime have likewise embraced lifelong learning to the reality of the large gaps of educational access. It is also important to note that within the region, through the South African Development Community (SADC) there is a Technical Committee on Lifelong Education and Training, whose main objective is to foster regional cooperation and integration by promoting Lifelong education and training as an integral part of all education and training.

The two countries' delineated lifelong learning policies have defined lifelong education as 'a comprehensive and visionary concept which includes formal, non-formal and informal learning extended through the lifespan of an individual to attain the fullest possible development in personal, social and vocational and professional life. Education is viewed in its totality, and includes learning that occurs in the home, school, community, and workplace, and through mass media and other situations and structures for acquiring and enhancing knowledge, skills and attitudes'.

Lifelong education, in response to the constantly changing conditions of modern life, must lead to the systematic, acquisition, renewal, upgrading and

completion of knowledge, skills and attitudes are required by these changes. A more advanced form of operationalization of lifelong learning is the setting up of structures to ensure programmes and resources.

In Africa, community schools are examples of how initiatives brought closer to the community are more flexible as they have adjusted their schedules, their facilities and provision of staff according to the needs of their intended beneficiaries. Adult Literacy week is also a mechanism of making visible the participation of learners and the need to democratise learning opportunities in the society. One of the key outcomes of these learning festivals is their ability to mobilize all partners (government, NGO's, academic institutions and private sector) involved in learning. Moreover by celebrating learning through widespread use of mass media, the importance of learning throughout life is given high visibility. In Africa, particularly Namibia, the NOLNET centres and Community learning centres are examples of offering lifelong learning activities at community level.

While it is clear that many of the policies have espoused or adopt a holistic approach of lifelong learning, in its implementation, there is unevenness in what features are operationalized.

In **England (UK)**, the definition of lifelong learning policy was diffused in the governments' strategy to develop a learning society by promoting learning at home, the community, the workplace and in traditional institutions. The policy did not include any specific institutional arrangements for lifelong learning in the universities. Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) represent an important innovation in the way lifelong learning for adults is designed. The principle behind individual learning accounts is that individuals are best placed to decide what and how they should learn. But is also assumes that investment in learning should be a shared responsibility. This policy describes the background to the introduction and subsequent sudden withdrawal of a national programme of ILAs in England.

Lifelong learning policy in the UK is linked to the employment policy. In this case, lifelong learning is mainly advocated because it increases flexibility and responsiveness to labour market changes. Therefore, besides the transformation of the school system, critical importance is the development of adult education, particularly through work-based learning. Improving the

knowledge and skills of the workforce is considered to be a key element of realizing lifelong learning for all. There are multiple and variable definitions of lifelong learning and there is a certainly need to link policies to definitions as well as a need for better definitions.

*Sweden* was the forefront internationally on lifelong learning not only nationally but influencing Europe. The Swedish lifelong learning policy and practice is more integrated into higher education, both learning and teaching appeared to become more individualized. Sweden access to higher education for adults has been a comprehensive policy since 1970's as part of wider policy towards social equality. This has been a deliberate policy aiming both at personal development and as a response to social development. Later in the years this policy has become more market and economically oriented.

The use of IT and distance learning is well acknowledged in all systems. Even that lifelong learning policy has been fully accepted, there was scepticism amongst academics toward them on a number of grounds. Some believed that lifelong learning and associated values or goals, such as individual learning or developing the capacity to transfer knowledge and skills, were parts of traditional higher education. Also as the extent to which individual or independent learning is seen, as something new is a matter of national higher educational culture.

The country should define lifelong learning within mission statements and university plans. Set up policies or structures to identify needs and to anticipate the demands for lifelong learning.

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

All countries policies stress that, in the context of globalisation, governments can no longer rely solely on the school system for providing the skills needed by the economy. In most cases it seems clearly that expanding enrolments and improving the quality of school education will not be sufficient to meet the demands of the labour market. There are different factors regarding development in each country and they influence the way that lifelong learning policies have been pursued in the countries.

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