

Lifelong learning and the pursuit of a vision for sustainable development in Botswana

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This paper analyses Botswana's commitment to lifelong learning policy and discusses how it can help the state achieve its vision for sustainable development. First, it argues that while Botswana is renowned for its economic success, it still fails to address positively such traditional challenges as poverty, unemployment and income inequality, which are increasing disproportionately, especially among the youth and non-literate adults. These structural problems can be attributable partly to the low quality of education, which does not enable learners to reduce their risks and vulnerabilities. The paper outlines the concepts of lifelong learning and sustainable development and work from there to analyse the national education policy. It is acknowledged that the state made commendable progress in delivering basic, extension and continuing education since adopting lifelong learning in 1994. However, the delivery failed to use education to transform people's lives. The education itself failed to balance quantity with quality effectively to inculcate a culture of democracy. These issues need to be critically addressed because they invariably hamper Botswana's efforts to deliver quality education and attain its vision for sustainable development. Finally, the paper suggests that the education system should incorporate lifelong learning principles, effectively involve learners in decision making and teach for empowerment.

Keywords: sustainable development; lifelong learning; adult basic education; out-of-school education; extension education

Introduction

The General Assembly resolution of the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003–2012) places literacy and basic education at the heart of lifelong learning. Adult basic education is crucial because it focuses on the acquisition of life skills for every child, youth and adult to enable them to address their social, political environmental and cultural challenges. It also facilitates effective participation in the economies of the 21st century and is essential for the attainment of social goals such as eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, curbing population growth, achieving gender equity and ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy (UNESCO 2006).

The 2006 African Development Bank (ADB) Report noted that adult basic education transcends basic reading, writing and numeracy. Being literate in Africa demands more complex interactions than focusing on letters and numbers: it extends to other dimensions of life. Basic education is linked with prospects for working with

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adults and youth to reduce poverty as targets the disadvantaged. UNESCO observed that literacy assists adults to participate fully in the development of their countries (UNESCO 2008). The report acknowledges that basic literacy in Africa faces numerous challenges. For example, Africa houses the world largest number of the poorest of the poor and non-literates. Literacy would help them to derive the fullest benefits of technology and information in their immediate contexts.

The need to provide skills has created the essential impetus for Botswana to adopt a lifelong learning policy in order to enhance the sustainability of its educational provisions. As used here, lifelong learning denotes what Walters (2001) refers to as the totality of learning activities that occur in formal, non-formal and informal contexts. Lifelong learning exists in all societies in different forms and contexts. Its benefits include enabling nations of the South to address micro issues such as continued subordination of women and children, unemployment and work instability, and macro issues of globalisation, and also challenges the running of the world by multinationals and growing rabid forms of individualism. Second, it serves to impart skills for livelihoods in the South as well as being required to develop critical thinking and citizenship (Torres 2003). However, its roles are not always positive: Mendel-Añonuevo (2002) observed that it deskills workers through adoption of technologies to enhance profitability resulting in massive retrenchments. Also, lifelong learning fosters the falsehood of equating voting and market to democracy, and this view needs to be vehemently challenged. Nations therefore need to foster effectively organised lifelong learning programmes designed to facilitate deliberative democracy and embrace multiculturalism, decentralisation and effective engagement with the civil society for sustainable development (Crowther, Galloway, and Martin 2005).

As used in this context, sustainable development implies a wise use of resources within a framework in which all aspects such as environmental (e.g., air quality), economic (e.g., jobs and income) and social (e.g., decent housing and reduced crime) factors are taken into account. It is about improving people's quality of life while at the same time safeguarding resources to maintain a decent life for future generations (Harcourt and Escobar 2005). All development efforts should ensure that these two overarching development frameworks are taken into account in their planning. The United Nations (1987) defines sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This expands the narrow view of development that equates it to what happens to the economy. Instead, it seeks to establish a stable relationship between human development activities and their natural environment (Harcourt 1994). Engaging in sustainable development requires educational planners who respect local realities and endorse multiple perspectives on social and ecological issues.

Lifelong learning explores ways to keep up a delicate balance between the three aspects of sustainable development and systemically critique the idiosyncrasies of traditional education policies (Jarvis 2001). Consequently, Preece (2001) proposes that lifelong educators should facilitate education for social purposes, bridge the gap between the learning-rich and the learning-poor environments to provide all citizens with academic and functional skills. This can only be achieved if planners take into account the circumstances of the marginalised. Sustainable education should also be based on the drive to give indigenous knowledge systems a place in educational discourse and practice to make them self-sufficient and preserve their cultural

identities (Robertson 2004). This can be done through a sustained effort to transform traditional educational ethos into one informed by principles of lifelong learning.

This paper explores the extent to which the policy of lifelong learning in Botswana furthers the national vision for sustainable development. First, it describes the socio-political and economic context of Botswana. Second, it explores the concepts and practices of lifelong learning within the country's policy framework and how they help it to adhere to principles and features of sustainable development. It analyses the extent to which the policy aids the country to attain its vision and development plans along with general benefits associated with lifelong learning. It also illustrates the challenges the country faces in its efforts to deliver its vision for sustainable development. Finally, it suggests ways in which the adopted lifelong learning policy aids the country to attain sustainable development.

Botswana: the context

On attaining independence from Great Britain in 1966, Botswana was one of the 10 poorest nations in the world. The colonisers had neglected all aspects of development infrastructure, resulting in a disproportionately high rate of non-literacy. Today, with approximately 1.7 million people, Botswana is frequently cited as a country with good policy making and an effective service delivery system. The United Nations Commission for Africa ranked Botswana number one in Africa for its expanded policy support index, macro policies, poverty reduction policies and institution building (Bank of Botswana 2007). Botswana has consistently pursued multiparty democracy since independence. However, like in other African nations, the ruling Botswana Democratic Party won all the successive elections, rendering the state a de facto one party system (Youngman 2000a). A disturbing feature of having a monolithic government is an increased potential to have reduced popular participation, increased apathy and an unprecedented concentration of power in the presidency. The presidency has overbearing powers that undermine the independence of the legislature, executive and the judiciary. For example, they are all appointed by the president, who has power to dismiss them from their lucrative executive positions (Good 2008). This results in a lack of open discussion of issues, resulting in docility and permeation of blind submission to authority, even among opposition operatives. The lack of constructive dialogue denies citizens the opportunity to engage in policy debate.

In addition, multinational agencies such as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) encouraging the state to shift from its welfare policies of the 1980s to neo-liberal free market capitalism in the 1990s. The state reduced expenditure on key services such as provision of clean water, health and education in favour of cost sharing and cost recovery.

Economic situation

Botswana's economy expanded rapidly from US\$2098 in 1975/76, reaching a phenomenal GDP (gross domestic product) per capita of \$4526 by 2004/05. By 2006 GDP per capita was estimated to be US\$6436, thereby qualifying Botswana to be a middle income country (Bank of Botswana 2006). The growth has been attributed to the discovery and exploitation of mineral wealth. The growth is driven

by capital accumulation rather than improved human productivity and growth of employment opportunities (Limi 2006). As a result, growth coexists with unacceptably high rates of unemployment, income inequality and persistent poverty. Unemployment has persisted since independence as people migrated from rural to urban areas without adequate technical skills for formal employment. It increased from 10.2% in 1981, to 13.9% in 1991 and 19.9% in the 2001 census. The recent Labour Forces Survey (LFS) put it at 17.6% after factoring in work in subsistence agriculture. About 77.5% of people aged 15–19 years with senior secondary education were unemployed compared to older people (Bank of Botswana 2006). The Bank of Botswana Report (2007) cautioned that unemployment remains high among females at 19.7% compared to 15.3% for males. It was highest among young people, at 34.9% among the 20–24 age cohort. The other significant point was that unemployment was highest at 69.5% among people with no training and declined gradually to 5.5% among those holding degrees. The LFS indicated that although it was not conventional to add discouraged job seekers to the calculation, it increases the unemployment to 31.6%. Discouraged job seekers are ‘unemployed’ individuals who have given up looking for a job and have retired back home. While unemployed are defined as those who are actively looking for a job. Most discouraged job seekers are in rural areas.

In terms of income, the richest 10% of income earners received 56.6% of national income, and the richest 20% enjoyed 70.3% of the national income. The poorest 20% of the people received only 2.2% and those in the lowest decile share 0.7% of the national income. The gap between the top and the bottom deciles was 77.6%, making Botswana the third highest in Africa in terms of income disparities surpassing only Lesotho and Namibia (United Nations Development Program [UNDP] 2005).

According to Good (2008), poverty in Botswana is part of a chain of inequality and disadvantage circle extended by ‘hunger, child mortality, crime punishment and poor human development generally’ (66). The Bank of Botswana recommends that the state should create employment not use wholesale redistribution to reduce income inequality (Bank of Botswana 2006). The bank acknowledges the need for lifelong learning but fails to critique the curriculum and pedagogy at both academic and practical training institutions. The levels of unemployment are an obvious contradiction between the country’s economic ratings and its high literacy rate. Consequently, social services such as education legitimate rather than promote social and economic equality (Youngman 2000b). Poor education fails to enable the disadvantaged to participate in their socio-economic contexts (Markku and Tero 2006). The following paragraphs demonstrate that Botswana has adopted a lifelong learning policy, developed a vision and implemented national development plans in the effort to redress the above challenges without much success. However, it is argued that changing the educational policy alone without changes structural facets will not necessarily result in sustainable development.

The national policy framework

Egbo (2000) observed that education in Africa failed to enable the poor to move from the margins of their societies to take charge of their lives. It reinforced neo-colonial relations characterised by oppression, Eurocentricism and assimilative and hegemonic content. Educational delivery lacked planning and did not sufficiently

equip learners with reflexes of perspective development to facilitate a smooth process of internal social, political and economic change (Silue 2003). Unlike other African nations, Botswana does not lack planning – it has organised a series of ten five-year national development plans since 1966 – but the outcomes are just as devastating to the poor as those in the rest of Africa. This is partly because the state did not implement even half of the planned activities because of its poor work ethic. Cruikshank (1998) suggests that African leaders collaborate more with international capital while the poor slide into poverty. Maruatona (2004) notes that after independence, Botswana, like other African governments, intended to improve the welfare of its people through the provision of essential services but has since retreated to neo-liberal demands such as cost sharing. The efforts to provide services were overshadowed by lack of clear strategies to use education to diversify the economy and improve people's lives. Below is an analysis of the efforts to attain sustainable development through implementing the education policy, the national vision and national development plans.

The Revised National Policy on Education

Since independence, Botswana made considerable efforts to provide adult learning to citizens through the provision of out-of-school education to youth, adult men and women. Out-of-school education is intended to provide learning opportunities outside the mainstream schooling for those who lacked access to basic education but wish to further their studies (Ministry of Education 1993). The Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) was based on the report of the National Commission on Education, 1992/93, which was established by the president to review Botswana's education system since 1977 when the first National Commission on Education was launched. The 1977 National Commission on Education was charged with formulating the nation's educational philosophy, setting goals for educational development and to suggest strategies to achieve these goals. The Report of the National Commission on Education 1977 (Republic of Botswana 1977), noted that '[a] fully literate population is an important long term objective if Botswana's other national objectives are to be met' (167). Unfortunately, in spite of the commission's acknowledgement of the importance of adult learning for national development, it did not make any recommendations on adult education. It was suggested that a separate white paper be developed for literacy but this never materialised (Youngman 2000b). This placed literacy at a major disadvantage because it was never focussed upon as a national priority.

In 1992, given the changing socio-economic situation, another commission was constituted to review the successes and challenges of the policies developed based on the previous policy and to suggest ways forward. It led to the publishing of the RNPE in 1994. Its main task was to develop relevant education to help transform Botswana from a predominantly agriculture-based economy to an industrial economy that could compete in the global market. It was developed against the backdrop of Botswana experiencing a decline in revenue because of the depressed diamond market. It also was intended to address the issues of youth unemployment, which posed a challenge to national education policy (Tabulawa 2009). The 1994 RNPE had the following adult learning objectives: to ensure basic education and further education and training are relevant and available to a larger number of

people and for lifelong education to be provided to all sections of the population. The policy was more inclusive with sections on out-of-school education, vocational education and training and special education, which are relevant to the development of opportunities for adult learning. The policy was framed along lifelong learning principles and clearly supports adult based formal, non-formal education, extension and continuing education. However, it lacked basic facets such as a national qualifications framework to help authenticate all forms of learning. The proposed qualifications framework was commissioned and has been in abeyance over a couple of years.

National vision and development plans

In 1993, His Excellency the president appointed a team to develop a national vision: *Vision 2016*. Following extensive national consultative deliberations at the *kgotla* (community meeting places), a vision was developed. It was intended to provide a framework and guidance for national strategic policy development. Critical to this vision was its call for the nation to engage in transformation across a broad spectrum of social, economic, entrepreneurial, political, spiritual and cultural contexts. It envisioned a situation where there will be equal access to educational opportunities regardless of one's socio-economic status.

Vision 2016 has become a milestone policy development document since one of its seven pillars advocates for the creation of 'an educated and informed nation'. Its other pillars are that development should lead to the creation of a prosperous, productive, innovative, compassionate and caring nation (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning 2003). It challenges providers of all forms of education to use flexible modes of educational delivery, which will allow people to enter and learn at all points of their lives without being inhibited by age or structural limitations (Presidential Task Force 1997).

Like the RNPE, the vision is premised on viewing learning as a lifelong process, and it demands a widened mechanism towards the development of a comprehensive advocacy for the provision of adult learning. In addition to the vision, Botswana has five year national development planning cycles to organise its planning systematically. The government believes that a long-term planning perspective is necessary to achieve sustainable development. Planning is done through consultations between government and communities (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning 1997).

The national policy on development is based on five national principles of democracy, development, self-reliance, unity and *botho* and *Vision 2016* (*botho*, a well rounded character who is well-mannered courteous and disciplined and can realise his or her full potential both as an individual and as part of the community). The policy also underscores the crucial role of education in its achievement. For example, The National Development Plan 9, 2003–2009, incorporates aspects of *Vision 2016*. The plan has a chapter devoted to education and identifies lifelong learning as an overarching principle of national human resource development strategy. It gives an overview of the national educational policy framework and identifies projects to be implemented within this plan period (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning 2003). Consequently, the Ministry of Education and Skills Development, in conjunction with its educational partners, has developed policies, programmes and

short-term projects to enhance the provision of lifelong learning. The policies for adult learning are based on the definition of adult education in the report of the National Commission on Education of 1993, which categorised it as follows:

Adult basic education: the provision of opportunities for all adults, namely out-of-school youth, women and men to complete basic education (i.e., to the level equivalent to grade 10 or Junior Certificate (JC)).

Extension programmes: the provision of programmes for young people and adults to develop new knowledge, vocational skills, attitudes and techniques that would help to improve the quality of life in their homes and communities.

Continuing education: the provision of opportunities to young people and adults who have successfully completed junior school to continue their education by full time and part-time studies in academic and vocational centres. (Ministry of Education 1993)

Adult learning has been concretised by recommendations that would enable the government and other stakeholders to promote lifelong learning in Botswana. The government has set up the Botswana Training Authority as a legal framework for the provision of lifelong learning, and it recognises all forms of vocational education and training beyond formal schooling. It reorganises, accredits and assesses all state and private vocational education and training institutions.

Adult basic education (BE)

The 2003 National Literacy Survey puts the national literacy rate at 81% compared to 68.9% in 1993. The literacy skills among those with fewer than five years of education were determined by testing them and computing their mean score in English and Setswana reading, writing and oral tests. However, the adult literacy programme does not cover 71.5% of the eligible population, which never attended adult literacy. Major reasons advanced for non-attendance were that people were either not interested, there no facilities in the area, they did not know of the availability of literacy classes or that they did not have time to attend (Chilisa et al. 2005). The state continues to give a considerable share of the national income to education, but it has fallen short of the 6% of the GDP as advocated by UNESCO. While government provides free primary education, it is not compulsory. Unfortunately, the government re-introduced school fees in the first three years of secondary schooling, and in spite of the efforts to identify and assist resource poor children this might reduce enrolment of learners whose parents can not pay. This would be contrary to the spirit of *Vision 2016* and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to increase access to which Botswana is a signatory. It also runs contrary to UNESCO recommendation for basic education to be free and compulsory and poses a major challenge for the country to meet the education for all goals (UNESCO 2007).

Another provider of adult basic education is the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL), which provides education by distance mode. Historically, it was under the Department of Non-Formal Education (DNFE) – now called Department of Out of School Education and Training (DOSET). BOCODOL was created as a semi-autonomous institution by an Act of Parliament in December, 1998. Its establishment furthers equity in provision of education in line with the aspirations of *Vision 2016*, which stresses the need for every citizen to be accorded

educational opportunity. It provides learning opportunities for individuals who for various reasons cannot or do not wish to attend formal schooling to attain the Junior Certificate. Its current enrolments are impressive: for example, between 2000 and 2006 it enrolled 6763 students comprising of 4615 females and 2148 male learners for the Junior Certificate up from about 1839 learners in 2000 (Botswana College of Open and Distance Learning [BOCODOL] 2007). These represent very impressive efforts to provide adult basic education at this level. It is evident that there are more females than males enrolled by distance learning. This increases their opportunities to further their education.

Adult literacy education

The Department of Out of School Education and Training (DOSET) provides adult literacy education through the Botswana National Literacy Programme. It is the largest point of government-sponsored out-of school education. Unfortunately, it has shown a steady decline in enrolment from 1997 to date as indicated in the table below.

Since 1997, the programme experienced a progressive decline in enrolments, suggesting that it no longer attracts new learner. The problem is that the data do not distinguish between newly enrolled learners and those who enrolled in the previous year, which makes it difficult to determine the accuracy of these figures. Nonetheless, the sustainability of the programme is questionable. The decline can be attributed to the fact that the programme uses primers that were developed in the early 1980s without be adapted (Maruatona 2002). In addition, an apparent increase in enrolment numbers during 2002 reflected the Department's focus on workplace literacy in urban areas only.

Recently the government commissioned UNESCO's Institute of Lifelong Learning (UIL) to help develop an adult basic education programme (ABEP) equivalent to standard 7 in formal school in line with the recommendations of the RNPE. (ABEP level one is equivalent to standards 1 and 2. ABEP level two is equivalent to standards 3 and 4 while level 3 is equivalent to standards 5 to 7 in formal school.) UNESCO engaged in needs assessment activities and used the data from the 2004 comprehensive evaluation of the Botswana National Literacy Programme (BNLP) to develop a curriculum blue print. The institute consultants worked with DOSET staff to write materials in order for staff to sustainably do it on their own in future.

Literacy provision outside government-sponsored programmes

In addition to the government, some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) provide literacy but there are very limited data on these activities. Overall, it is

Table 1. National Literacy programme – annual enrolment figures 1997–2002.

| 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|
| 17,588 | 15,917 | 14,474 | 12,004 | 9,399 | 13,329 | 13,045 | 10,694 | 10,694 | 11,039 | 9,267 |

Source: Department of Out of School Education and Training, 1997–2007.

extremely complex to determine the statistics for adult literacy programmes outside the government-operated literacy programme. The only significant adult basic education and literacy provision outside government is the one operated by the Debswana Mining Company. It has been offered since the 1970s. Since 1971, the Debswana diamond mine in Orapa has operated an adult basic education and literacy programme based on materials used by the South Africa Bureau of Literacy and Literature and also used in their mines. In 1998, Orapa mine introduced materials based on the South African Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) to their programme. The materials are in both English and Setswana for different levels of learners. They cover such topics as basic survival and functional skills and introduction to computing. Adult basic education is offered to mine employees who have not been to school or have a level of literacy below grade 7 in primary schools. The programme has been adapted to the Botswana context and supervisors and learners are understood to be content with it (Youngman 2002).

The above discussion highlighted the successes and challenges in the provision of adult literacy education in Botswana and represents national and private sector efforts to meet the themes of the Hamburg Declaration and the Agenda for the Future and the goals of the 1990 Education for All (EFA) agenda. The increase in the demand for ABE and workplace literacy signifies a growth in the recognition of the role of education for personal, community and national development. However, the programme faces some challenges.

Lack of balancing quality and quantity

The major challenge for this level of education is the need to increase enrolments, because the consistently declining literacy enrolment rates pose a major sustainability challenge. However, learning for sustainable development requires a balance between quality and quantity in the delivery learning. Basic education has achieved quantitative increases but failed to meet the quality imperative. Bandary (2005) succinctly observed that quality include high level of student achievement, the ability and qualification of staff, the standard of facilities and equipment: 'The effectiveness of teaching, planning and administrative processes and the relevance of programmes to the needs of students and nation' (185). He further observed that the quality of human resources hinges upon the provision of good quality education across all levels such as basic education, vocational education, tertiary and continuing education to increase employability of citizens. Botswana has quantitative increases that are not accompanied by increased employability. For example, the nation records large numbers of students who go through the education system but remain unemployed even after 10 years of schooling. The challenge of quality is also compounded by the lack of systematic statistical documentation of adult learning outside formal school. In addition, while the state has achieved a near total enrolment for formal schooling, the national literacy rate of 81% is not translated into employment for youth because education lacks ICT and other critical industrial skills.

The BNLP continues to employ literacy group leaders (facilitators) who are paid low wages in the form of honoraria for the hours taught. They continue to teach under trees and some of them walk very long distances to teach groups in different communities. In general there are no additional reading materials to create a literate

environment (Maruatona 2004). This is a far cry from quality delivery. Recently, government deployed staff with diplomas and degrees in primary and secondary education at DOSET. They were exposed to two weeks of training on the principles of adult education. It is argued that this training is not sufficient to prepare them to provide quality literacy education. The programme needs teachers with a diploma in adult not primary education. Botswana therefore still has a lot to do to improve the quality of education and meet the expectations of the 2005 Global Monitoring Report, which advocates for skills that would enable youth to be employable or self-employed.

Lack of democracy and empowerment skills

Basic education provision does not further citizens' democratic participation. There is no coordination between the state and other providing agencies. This is in spite of the fact that Botswana has been a beacon of democracy in Africa. The education delivery does not show any evidence that beyond holding elections every five years and providing basic generic social services such as education and health there is real democracy in state operations. Decision making is heavily centralised. For example, Maruatona (2004) concluded that teachers and learners have minimal influence on the literacy curriculum content as literacy education is overseen by the National Literacy Advisory Committee. This committee makes all key policy decisions on the operations of the programme without any representation of the learners. It is chaired by the deputy permanent secretary in the Ministry of Education and includes other extension departments, non-governmental organisations and the head of the Department of Adult Education. Teaching and learning is teacher- and primer-based. However, any strategic transformative education should deeply involve learners in decision making to help them direct lives (Freire 1990). Centralised planning is not democratic and leaves limited opportunity for local involvement and innovation. Learners do not have an impact on decision making in DOSET. As Mpofu and Youngman (2001) note: 'It provides a standardised national framework in which there is little discretion at district level, for example, the budget is controlled from the headquarters' (582).

DOSET introduced five regional adult education officers (RAEOs), who oversee the activities of district adult education officers and junior staff in their respective regions. However, the officers do not have authority to change the curriculum in line with needs in their contexts. Consequently, the programme does not effectively reflect the needs, histories and realities of learners. This does not facilitate learner empowerment or enable them to participate in the country's democratic dispensation. Planners should pay attention to experiences that respond to the complexities of civil life and impart skills needed to help learners to participate fully as citizen (Keogh 2003). The literacy programmes instead strive simply to train learners at a level equivalent to standard 7 in formal schools without guarantee of future employment.

DOSET has also failed to involve civil society agencies effectively in developing materials. In fact, civil society did not play a key role in the curriculum development, which means that the government controls the process and its outcomes. The government needs to collaborate with civil society to represent the interest of people

(Keegh 2003). Working effectively with civil society would enhance the potential of the national literacy programme to empower learners.

Vision 2016 also advocates for transforming Botswana into an open democratic and accountable nation. It has also been argued that learner involvement can enhance the capacity of literacy training agencies to respond to the needs of the learners. Effective adult basic education should facilitate democracy. However, in Botswana it only emphasises teaching basic and some rudimentary economic skills and excludes political values and concepts that might help learners to become full participants (Harcourt 1994). It is therefore argued that the present curriculum is not ready to empower learners and needs to be changed.

Extension programmes

The character of extension education in Botswana remains amorphous and defies clear operational definition, but its services are non-formal programmes offered to out-of-school youth and adults to provide them with technical and survival skills in their communities. In Australia, it provides essential knowledge and skills to facilitate the capacity of farmers and rural communities to respond to the market and changing technologies, which enhances their resilience (Dymock 2007).

These kinds of services in Botswana are offered by different service ministries such as Health, Education and Finance and Development Planning. Partly because of the amorphous nature of the services, they lack effective coordination. Extension services in Botswana are perceived to facilitate rural development (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning 2003). Efforts to coordinate rural development are made through the Rural Extension Coordinating Committee (RECC), which falls under the Rural Development Policy (RDP). The RDP is a sub-division of the Socio-Economic Policy, which is a part of the Economic and Financial Division in the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning. The RECC is responsible for monitoring and co-ordinating extension programmes. It links with the districts and villages through District Extension Teams (DETs) and Village Extension Teams (VETs).

Extension work in Botswana is sustainable because it is estimated that there is one agricultural demonstrator to 500 farming households, which is an acceptable distribution by any measure for a developing country. In addition to the agricultural extension officers, there are other extension offices in Health and other ministries who deliver training in their respective areas of practice or speciality. Over the years, health services extension has been carried out by the Ministry of Health, which coordinates national health services countrywide. Its main strategy is health promotion and ill-health prevention. They have a joint Primary Health Care Conduction Committee, which is responsible for educating adults on health matters. The committee provides information, trains members of the Village Health Committees, produces and distributes health education materials and teaches expectant mothers at anti- and post-natal clinics leading to reduced infant mortality.

The Botswana College of Agriculture (BCA) provides farmers with targeted courses based on needs identified by the farmers through the Denman Rural Training Centre and its satellites centres, which are situated at various strategic locations such as Mahalapye (central), Francistown (north-east) and Maun (north-west). This enhances access and makes the content fit the needs of farmers in various

contexts. Since 1997, the Women's Affairs Department has organised several gender sensitisation workshops for different ministries and held several refresher courses for extension officers. The Ministry of Local Government also carries out adult learning activities through the Department of Social & Community Development, which is also responsible for social welfare. The ministry also over sees the Remote Areas Development Programme (RADP), which focuses on assisting people living in remote and arid areas of Botswana.

Extension services are not only confined to government. Some non-governmental organisations provide extension services to adults, thereby exposing them to lifelong learning opportunities. NGOs address issues of rural development affecting disadvantaged groups such as minority communities, women, children, youth and persons with disabilities. *Emang Basadi*, for example, is a women's association that organises training on democracy, voter education, gender and sensitisation of the population on HIV/AIDS issues and provides small-scale business skills for women. The Kuru Development Trust provides multiple practical skills such as sewing, basketry and craft making to ethnic minorities. The Botswana Adult Education Association (BAEA) has held numerous adult learning activities such as the Adult Learners' Week and the Week of the Elderly celebrations in conjunction with DOSET since 2006 (Oduaran et al. 2008).

Extension programmes have played a major role in the provision of adult lifelong learning opportunities. These activities will help Botswana to further the Hamburg goals of striving to achieve gender equity by 2015. They have also exposed extension staff to skills that would improve their productivity. However, Lekoko (2002) noted that government departments' and NGOs' extension work is not coordinated to make efficient use of the limited resources to attain sustainable development.

Continuing education (CE)

The third aspect of adult education provision is continuing education (CE). CE in this context refers to planned formal and non-formal educational programmes for adults who intend to continue their education beyond the basic level of grade 10 (Junior Certificate). Continuing education provides yet another opportunity for the realisation of *Vision 2016*, which calls for Botswana to be 'an informed and educated nation' by 2016. CE is offered by BOCODOL, the Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) at the University of Botswana and other government and private institutions. The National Commission on Education of 1993 identified BOCODOL and CCE as the lead institutions in the provision of continuing and distance education. Since its inception in 1998, BOCODOL has provided distance education courses for senior secondary education and has five centres around the country. It registered 17,666 students made up of 11,858 females and 5808 males for the Botswana Government Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE) (BOCODOL 2007). This represents a significant increase in learner enrolment outside formal school and shows national strides to increase access to learning for those who were otherwise excluded. In addition, there has been a massive expansion of private educational training institutions from the mid-1990s to the present. This suggests an increase in the demand for the BGCSE and tertiary education qualification.

The demand for CE has also been expanding in the areas of tertiary and professional training. The Extra Mural Unit of the Centre for Continuing Education

at the University of Botswana grew from an enrolment of 1779 participants who enrolled for the part-time programmes such as the certificate and diploma in accounting and business studies in 1998/99 to 2202 students in 1999/2000. It then declined to 1686 students during 2008/09. It also offered a number of 'Improve your business' and 'Start your business' non-credit-bearing courses in conjunction with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. It has however experienced a steady decline in enrolment from the highest figure of 2202 in 2006 to 1654 in 2008. The set-up favours part timers in urban areas, with the main campus enrolling an average of 300 students annually while about 50 students are enrolled at other centres.

The Department of Distance Education provides a diploma in adult education and a diploma in NGO management by distance mode. The unit also administers a diploma in primary education programme targeted at 6000 teachers countrywide. Its numbers are not impressive, ranging from in 63 students in 2004 to 36 in 2009, although intensified marketing courses could help remedy this. The unit has also organised public awareness courses, provided public lectures on a number of issues such as crime prevention, HIV/AIDS and an awareness course on the patients' bill of rights in Botswana hospital services (Adekanmbi and Modise 2000). This indicates that citizens continue to engage in lifelong learning. Continuing education is therefore a significant way to help learners adjust to the changing world of work, and it encourages learners to invest in their future career prospects even through it has challenges, some of which are outlined below.

CE programmes fail to provide employment skills

Some of the challenges in the delivery of continuing education include failing to equip learners with sufficient skills to be self-reliant and self-employed. The challenge remains that trainees from CE programmes are not sufficiently prepared to take up employment opportunities. There is a disproportionately high number of unemployed who are senior secondary school or its equivalent leavers and who have no skills to be either employed or self-employed in any sector. This was conformed by the recent *World Bank Survey of Doing Business* report, which observed that although Botswana ranked 38 out of 118 countries, the work ethic of its national labour force, which was ranked as inadequately educated, was revealed to be one of the greatest challenges (World Bank 2009). A Bank of Botswana Report (2007) also noted that the majority of the 'educated' youth fail to make a transition from a rural-based economy to urban centres. This is very severe for senior secondary school leavers, who constitute 77.5% of the unemployed. The education system fails to prepare citizens to break from the shackles of poverty, unemployment and other human degrading experiences. As testimony to this deficiency, the 2006 Bank of Botswana Report called for the provision of essential lifelong learning skills to enable young citizens to acquire skills to improve their lives through gainful employment.

In addition, the education system fails to focus on the needs of the learners. Below, in a brief discussion of the ways forward, the paper suggests that the education system of Botswana should incorporate lifelong learning principles to strengthen its quality, strive to ensure an equitable distribution of resources at all levels of education and effectively involve learners in educational decision making. At the same time, teachers should view teaching as a vocation and teach for citizen empowerment to further nourish a culture of sustainable learning in Botswana.

Providing seamless lifelong learning services

Another practical challenge is the lack of a seamless effort to provide lifelong learning opportunities across all levels of education in Botswana. The argument is that while the government endorses lifelong learning as an overarching policy principle, there is a lack of comprehensive structures to incorporate it into the educational system. At the lowest level, the demand for quality lifelong learning calls for the provision of pre-school education for children and adult literacy opportunities. The education system in Botswana leaves pre-school education to sporadic provision by private providers. This leaves it only to the few who can afford it, and the poor are denied access to pre-school education.

There is also no clear connection between formal school and non-formal and extension education to enable people to move flexibly between them. This denies learners a chance to acquire long-term functional skills to improve their productivity, especially in the agriculture sector. Productivity requires learners to learn flexibly and apply knowledge and technology in production; those who are non-literate are excluded. These school dropouts need skills to make them amenable to being employed or to re-enter the education system. Botswana therefore needs to consider offering a seamless and effective lifelong learning programme characterised by clear pathways and articulation of the knowledge, skills and competencies typical of a lifelong learning programme. As indicated, what exists now lacks basic and extension services and clear performance indicators, and is very weak in terms of quality assurance.

As an extension of this concept, there is also need to organise tracer studies and an assessment framework to follow up learners to see how training affects their work and to assess them to help improve the quality of their delivery. An assessment framework would give credence and recognition to all kinds of learning to facilitate learner mobility within different sectors of education and training. This would enable learners to use their qualifications and certificates to seek employment or self-employment.

Involving learners in decision making

The provision of literacy as a human right has become an international goal. The provision of literacy need not be focused on facilitating political and social control but rather on assisting individuals and communities to use literacy to liberate themselves. As Wheelahan (2007) observed, there is need to redirect learning from the knowledge and skills to the pedagogy of developing and enacting human qualities needed to thrive in a future that is radically unknowable.

The focus of lifelong learning agenda should help to shape the vision of literacy in each context. Provision should be driven by the needs of individual learners and their communities, and the use of participatory approaches is crucial in assisting planners to identify and articulate social, economic and political circumstances of their communities. Planners for sustainable education need to pay more attention to the needs and contexts of their learners – especially women and minorities – to ensure that their needs are addressed through education. For example, literacy planners could use participatory techniques such as the Regenerated Freirean Literacy Empowering Community Techniques (REFLECT). This is a programme

that uses integrative participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) technique and the Freirean approach to generate literacy programmes. It was used with very positive outcomes among communities in Bangladesh, El Salvador and Uganda between 1993 and 1995 and has since been implemented with varying success in a number of African states by governments and NGOs (Archer and Newman 2003). McCaffery, Merrifield and Millican (2007) observed that it helps to create local literacy programmes with the potential to radically change the immediate circumstances of the participants. It uses techniques such as maps, diagrams, time lines and matrices to generate vocabulary, and reading texts to develop reading, writing and numeracy skills. Although REFLECT outcomes can be minimal, their impact is very strong on individuals.

In Botswana, Maruatona (2004) implemented REFELCT in the north-western region and demonstrated that people found its techniques very useful because it used familiar democracy and consultation strategies. One of the challenges however, was the use of Setswana as the sole language, which excluded some minorities. Participants should use their local languages to generate written scripts to enable them to learn faster and through their familiar modes of communication. Governments also needs to be innovative through using alternative modes of delivery such as mobile schools and providing food rations for parents living in remote areas to encourage them to stay with their children during school terms. The involvement of learners in decision making requires setting up local learner committees. These would enable planners to capture the cultural values of communities and build them into the curriculum rather than imposing majority culture on minorities. Involving learners would also help to convert literacy, extension and continuing education programmes into training grounds for democratic participation.

Teaching for citizen empowerment

Central to citizen empowerment is striving to use teaching as a tool to challenge unjust and oppressive treatment and to give people the power to exercise their desires to engage in deliberative democracy. Habermas (2001) refers to deliberative democracy as the ability to engage in well-reasoned arguments to critically assess evidence and to engage in constructive dialogue with other citizens. As discussed earlier, teachers in some sub-sectors of the education system in Botswana, especially those who have just been conscripted to teach literacy, see it more as job than a calling. They were trained as primary or secondary school teachers. They lack the essential tools such as the passion and drive to teach adults so they are doing it as a last resort. Learning should be made part of the democratic culture centred on sharing views and enabling participants to feel a sense of self-control after learning. Learning should enable minority participants to question some taken-for-granted values espoused by the majority culture and to make informed choices and defend their rights (Fiedrich and Jallema 2003). Roffey-Barentsen and Malthouse (2009) observe that learners who have engaged in reflective learning view the teacher's contribution as an addition to an ongoing debate and critically filter it through their own values and experiences.

It is essential to empower teachers across all levels of education to stimulate dialogue on issues to teach and learn from their learners. According to Wheelahan (2007), teaching is a vocation or a framework in which an individual connects

knowledge skills, attributes, dispositions and values with a deep understanding of their profession and use this connectedness to define themselves. This helps teachers to navigate the uncertainty of life. Empowerment therefore would give Botswana teachers a sense of identity and offer them the opportunity to teach with passion and commitment.

On the other hand, some literacy teachers have been paid only honoraria for over 20 years. This illustrates their unprecedented level of commitment to the vocation of teaching. For them it is not only about money: teaching defines who they are and what they view as their contribution to others. DOSET therefore needs to regularise their conditions of service and organise courses to help them teach effectively.

Conclusion

Overall, Botswana has the essential infrastructure to provide sustainable lifelong learning from cradle to grave. The system is characterised by monolithic political system and unevenly distributed economy along geographical and gender lines. Policy is available in terms of educational policy, a national vision and the national planning framework. The provision of education is divided into adult basic education, extension and continuing education. The main challenge is that while Botswana endorsed lifelong learning as a policy framework, its structures do not show features of a seamless system of delivery with clear pathways and a coordinated qualification system. Another critical limitation is the lack of clear strategic approach to lifelong learning. As a result, the education system fails to balance quality with quantity, does not focus on the felt needs of learners and does not impart democracy and empowerment skills. Therefore there is need to incorporate principles of lifelong learning, involve learners in decision making and teach for empowerment as opposed to providing learning that is demand-driven and only based on what tutors and facilitators can offer in order to foster sustainable development through lifelong learning.

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