Lifelong learning for facilitating democratic participation in Africa

TONIC MARUATONA
University of Botswana

Lifelong learning has come to be internationally recognized as a framework in the development of sustainable education. However, in spite of rhetoric and its endorsement in some nations' policy documents, lifelong learning is not operationalized and Africa continues to be plagued by social maladies such as HIV/AIDS, capacity poverty, low quality education, global marginalization and ineffective governance. The article argues that post-colonial Africa transited from concern with service delivery, went through structural adjustment policies to focusing on African renaissance. It indicates that some countries have embraced lifelong learning as policy framework but have not made sufficient efforts to translate that in their teaching and learning. It contents that lifelong learning in Africa can only be effective if African communities are encouraged to make concerted efforts to embrace principles such as deliberative democracy, multiculturalism, decentralization of decision-making and helping to redirect the agenda of civil society as a way to use lifelong learning to enhance public participation in Africa.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore ways in which Africa could employ the principle of lifelong learning to address its multiple challenges as it inches towards the ideal of beyond the learning society. Lifelong learning would enable Africa nations to address micro issues of the continued subordination of women and children, unemployment and work instability, and macro issues of globalization, running of the world by multinationals and growing individualism and the need for enhanced connectivity (Torres 2003). Mendel–Anonuevo (2002) observed that it serves contradictory roles such as imparting new skills for employment and or providing learning for strengthening democracy. It serves to impart skills for livelihoods in the South as well as being required to develop critical thinking and citizenship right to people from all walks of live. It seeks to promote individual autonomy and social justice on the one hand and profiteering on the other. It has been designed to inculcate the culture of peaceful co-existence, and participation in decision making (Mendel–Anonuevo 2002). In spite of the holding promises from lifelong learning, Africa continues to suffer underdevelopment and loss of state control of their development agenda as a result of globalization. It argues that the continent could employ effectively organized lifelong educational programmes to facilitate

deliberative democracy, embrace multiculturalism, decentralization and effective engagement with the civil society to include all voices. Walters (2001) refers to life-long education 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 contents, as individual and groups move through their life stages. She observed that while it is important for national competitiveness, the major challenge for life-long learning in Africa is that countries such as South Africa, which embedded life-long learning in its policy documents, lacks an elaborate mechanism for its pedagogical and organizational delivery.

The paper argues that this gap can be filled only if lifelong learning is not only left at policy levels but is elaborated in practice to enable programmes to respond to the needs of communities in their contexts. It contends that learning opportunities for the poor should help them realize that they do not only need financial aid. Rather, African nations should be assisted to determine and redress factors that accounts for their demise. Lifelong education should help them develop capacity to deliberate on effective strategies to partake in changing their lives. However, as Ogunsanya and Thomas (2004) observed, education can have an impact only if other wider structural issues are addressed.

Africa's troubles could be traced to the endorsement of the World Bank-initiated *Agenda for Action* of the 1980s and International Monetary Fund (IMF)-imposed structural adjustment policies (Daubon 2005). Structural adjustment policies prom-ised accelerated development by compelling African leaders to cut expenditure on essential services such as education and health but promote export-driven products, devalue their currencies, and privatize public enterprises for the benefit of the few (Ansprenger 2003; Armstrong 2004). Africans have reached a point where they have lost hope and have naturalized poverty and other precarious circumstances.

Poverty is an international concern; for example, the United Nations (2002) report revealed that more that 2.8 billion people live on less that the equivalent of US$2 per day, while more that 1.2 billion people live on less that the equivalent of US$1 per day. The report noted further that Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest proportion of people who are poor, with poverty affecting 46.3% of the population. Poverty has been described not just as a lack of material wealth but people's lack of power to address the circumstances that perpetually keep them in that situation (Daubon 2005). Sen (1999) argues that poverty should be viewed in terms of capa-bility deprivation, which refers to an ability to exercise the freedom to choose and act according to one's conscience. This bring the use of lifelong learning strategies to assist the poor to develop essential skills, live productive lives and engage in social participation into a sharper focus. First, the article provides a schematic trail of African development from the 1960s to date. It argues that African lifelong educa-tors should strive to use democratic strategies in learning, decentralize decision-making to turn people into active citizens and activate civil society to hold African leadership accountable to their communities.

The African context

Since Independence, most African countries have been eluded by development, resulting in tragic consequences such as increased poverty, declining provision of public services, a collapse in the sociopolitical infrastructure, and sociopolitical

turmoil (Ambrose 1995). Nabudere (2001) concludes that African nationalism did not lead to a nationhood founded on ideals of democracy, human rights and duties. Independence instead led to the creation of dependent post-colonial nations with strong economic ties to the metropolis and former colonizers. Some indebted African nations have been compelled by donors to change from a one-party system to multi-party democracy as a prerequisite for continued financial aid. Democracy in Africa therefore is characterized by passive voting for parliamentary representatives or for the presidency, without visible commitment to democratic dialogue on social issues with their electorates. Mendel–Anonuevo (2001: 148) indicates that Africa is not yet democratic because 'democratic state is not possible without active citizenship.' This calls into question whether elections show the leadership's genuine commitment to democracy or whether they are just done to appease the donors. In spite of the practice of democracy, the majority of Africans do not have input into the operations of their states because they are non-literate, inflicted with capacity deprivation, poverty, disease, desperation and weakness, which could be attributed to globalization.

Globalization as used here refers to the process through which sovereign national states are crisscrossed by an unregulated movement of capital, technology and knowledge controlled by international corporations (Beck 2000). It creates a state of instability characterized by social anxiety and dependency on the part of developing nations (Morrow and Torres 2000; Ansprenger 2003). Morrow and Torres (2000) observed that local events are influenced by what happens many miles away and *vice versa*, thereby blurring national boundaries and shifting national allegiances. Globalization redesigned economic and political structures of the world's socio-political structures. It stifled potential for Africa to transcend the negative effects of both colonialism and imperialism, furthered African bankruptcy, impoverished its poor and enlarged the gap between African and rich Western nations. Cruikshank (1998) observed that it wedged disparities in income between African local elite and the electorates and also gradually shifted power from elected officials to transnational corporations.

As a result of globalization, developing nations experience exclusion from the use of technology, resulting in their workforce being considered redundant by technology-based international corporations (Bauman 1998). The outcome has been that workers in capitalist institutions, such as banks based in Africa, are often subjected to austerity measures such as retrenchments and retraining programmes, with limited or no focus on the needs of their nations (Maruatona 2002). Consequently, the globalization 'gravy train' has bypassed most of the people and selected a few elite, which furthered the age-old colonialist strategy of 'divide and rule'. Cruishank (1998) notes that African leaders seem to collaborate with international capital by serving as local agents while the majority of people in rural and urban areas continue to slide into poverty. McDonough and Feinberg (2003) conclude that states cannot be viewed as agents of freedom and liberty but of colonialism, globalization and oppression of their own people. These are characterized by failure of private economies to create sufficient employment, lack of income for the enjoyment of basic civil rights and lack of individual autonomy and citizenship rights and duties. The interests of communities are subsumed under those of international capital and profiteering (Korsgaard 1997). Globalization has led to a deepened sense of exploitation and exclusion of women and minorities from participating in national affairs.

National governments in Africa are not able to control international capital criss-crossing their boundaries and they are 'forced' to pursue an imposed economic and educational agenda. Egbo (2000) notes that African education fails to maximize learner potential at individual, group and national levels; this has failed the poor in enabling them to move from the margins of their societies. Education reinforces neocolonial relations characterized by oppression and an assimilative content intended to provide value-neutral goals prescribed by the metropolis. Ntiri (1998: 110) observes, 'In Africa, education has become the instrument to monopolize choice occupations and political power.' African education therefore is not designed to meet the larger social values but provides a narrow curriculum, which cannot redress socioeconomic inequity and bridge the gap between Africa and other world economies. The following sections provide a brief historical analysis of the African state from post-Independence to renaissance and illustrate the potential role of lifelong learning in facilitating participation in Africa's development.

The post-Independence era, 1960–1985

The 1960s was marked by tremendous desire by new governments to provide basic services. For example, African anti-colonial leaders such Kwame Nkurumah of Ghana, envisioned African economic growth, characterized by fruitful social development, democracy and peace linked to striving for eventual continental unity. Most governments intended to improve the welfare of the masses, through the provision of education, health and other essential services. Some nations such as Botswana and Kenya endorsed the capitalist approach to development while Angola, Tanzania and Mozambique endorsed the socialist perspective of equating industrialization with equitable provision of social services and equitable distribution of national resources. However, in both cases, they left the systematic development of people off the agenda. In spite of different ideological routes, they all arrived at the same devastating results of poverty, inequality and social decay (Deng 1998). For example, even the so-called success stories such as Botswana, with a GNP per capita of US$4000 and a tiny population of 1.7 million inhabitants, suffers significant class inequalities; in 1993, 47% and in 2003 about 30.1 % of the population lived below the national poverty datum line. The 2002–2003 Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HEIS) results revealed that 5.1% of persons in cities and towns, 19.3% of persons in urban villages and 36.1% of persons in rural areas lived below a dollar a day (Central Statistics Office 2003). This shows that poverty is predominantly a rural phenomenon. Consequently, most African nations remain heavily indebted, reduced to producers of primary services, aid dependent, and face endemic proportions of HIV/AIDS pandemic (Ansprenger 2003).

In spite of these challenges, Africa experienced some positive economic growth in the period 1975–1984, when the continent experienced a relative short-lived boom as a result of the discovery and exploitation of minerals in countries such as Botswana and Zambia. The boom had a limited effect as it was accompanied by uneven development agenda, which focused on the urban elite and excluded women, and the marginalized in urban and rural communities. For example, in Botswana poverty is most severe in the west of the country, where 71% of the minority population live below poverty datum line (Republic of Botswana 2004). This suggests a lack of effective participation by rural communities in the national

economy. Most African nations recently privatized national economic asserts but failed to create employment opportunities and guarantee a satisfactory level of welfare to all citizens. The boom therefore benefited only a few in urban areas and excluded the rural majority, as illustrated above in the case of Botswana.

In the mid-1980s, Africa was struck by inflation that caught the continent unprepared (Iheduru 1999). The leadership had pursued weak development strategies, but also experienced spells of drought, which did not allow them to adjust to inflation. It has been argued that the problem was that African countries had weak public policies and could not transform their economies given the international economic changes (Deng 1998). They pursued single commodity economies and sold semi-processed raw materials such as diamonds and copper. They did not diversify the economy in order to have multiple commodities. Unfortunately, governments have no consistent set of policies in place to deal with the worsening situation (Deng 1998). National policies are geared towards creating a stable environment for foreign capital, sales of national resources at below market prices and the creation of marketing opportunities, rather than pursuing rational public policy for essential national development priorities (Morrow and Torres 2000). Consequently, the burst tremendously reduced the capacity of African states to control their economic futures and increase their expenditure on education and other essentials (Burbules and Torres 2000). Despite these challenges, Sahn, Dorosh and Younger (1997) attributed African crisis to drought and cultural biases in rural areas. They attributed failure to African peasants' inability to take advantage of the boom and adapt agricultural technologies. However, the authors fail to explain why poverty affected more women than men, even during the boom. The authors conveniently ignored the poor prices and lack of markets for African agricultural produce, which better explains the continent's economic decline (Thomas and Wilkin 1999). The tragic situation of some African states was further complicated by the introduction of structural adjustment policies in the mid-1980s.

Structural adjustment era, 1985–2000

Following the economic burst experienced by some African nations, the structural adjustment policy was being introduced as a condition for an IMF loan to reverse the process of economic decline. The thrust of the adjustment policy was essentially to cut down on national expenditures on social services, and it lifted the populist view cherished by some governments who felt obliged to provide social services to their communities. The structural adjustments ignored the socioeconomic realities of the African situation. It did not facilitate the participation of the Africans technocrats in the planning. IMF officials had a limited view of African contexts and how the adjustment policy could be adapted to cushion the rural poor. The result was that such projects widened economic disparities between the elite and the majority of the people in rural Africa, who had come to be dependent on government services. It made nations lose opportunities to implement effective national welfare programmes (Korsgaard 2001; Armstrong 2004). This period was inevitably marked by poor economic growth rates among indebted African countries, except for only a few, such as Botswana, who did not undergo the imposed structural adjustment regimes.

The African intelligentsia failed to act collaboratively with their people to negotiate better conditions during the structural adjustment period. Julius Nyerere

(cited in Deng 1998: 59) called on Africans to re-institute community to facilitate development: he states, 'the first step must be to reeducate ourselves. In our traditional African society, we were individual within a community, we took care of the community and the community took care of us.' Nabudere (2001) captured this African virtue when he contended that the failure of economic transformation is not a result of African culture but the neocolonial relations of production and the failure of government to deliver stolen land and other essential asserts to communities who were dispossessed during the colonial era. The structural adjustment policy increased indebtedness and continued exploitation of the natural resources of African countries, thereby deepening the misery of its people. Ironically, the debts did not benefit the majority of people, save for administrative technocrats and the political elite. Twenty years into structural adjustment policies, some Africa countries are poorer that they were 30 years before (Ansprenger 2003). Structural adjustment advocated private capital in Africa, which created mostly low-skill and low-wage jobs such as retail assistants, office clerks, truck drivers and nursing aids, while trained nurses and doctors from the continent are enticed to migrate to developed nations. It could be argued that in Africa, structural adjustment policies as part of globalization brought human security for a few, but impoverished the majority of the people. Paradoxically, one of the positive things about globalization is its emphasis on democracy but, incidentally, it reduced the capacity for African states to provide services for their people to effectively participate in the democratic process (Burbules and Torres 2000). Consequently, efforts to make Africa economically independent were ushered in by African leaders through the New Partnership For Africa's Development (NEPAD) document, which articulates what Africa needs to do to redirect its course and take charge of its future.

African renaissance era, 2001 to date

Africa remains the least developed continent in spite of being so richly endowed with natural resources. The continent needs some economic reforms, an appropriate context-based non-Western democratization process, reduction of poverty, and education of its people to enable them to take control of their development agenda (NEPAD 2001). This people-based development strategy requires the use of lifelong learning strategies to harness the capacity of African leadership to improve the welfare of its people. African leaders have acknowledged that development can be undertaken only if there is true democracy, respect for human rights, peace and good governance (NEPAD 2001). However, Africans remain apathetic, ignorant and cynical about public issues and are not motivated to undertake their citizenry responsibilities. The task facing African leaders in the renaissance is to redefine the place and role of the African state to generate active participation of communities in democratic decision-making. They have to promote the involvement of women, youth and the marginalized in the socioeconomic development. Democratic participation in Africa is not an entirely new phenomenon because traditionally, people came together and engaged in face-to-face discussions on issues of mutual concern, leading to collective decisions. For example, this can be testified by a Botswana proverb, which translates as 'each person has to speak their piece so that the best idea prevails'. The assumption is that people have the capacity to use their vibrant social systems that could secure their collective interests in the public arena. What they

need is an enhanced capacity to participate in decisions affecting their individual and collective lives.

NEPAD envisages effective public involvement of communities in genuine discussions, which would enable them to explore alternative means of reducing the negative impact of social structures such as gender inequality, poverty, lack of dignity and impoverishment. It would enable them to engage in self-help groups, which could form a basis for their participation in political decision-making, as espoused by the African renaissance. In spite of the acknowledgement of the value of education in development, there is a lack of clear articulation of how it is to be organized to enhance Africa's capacity to create vibrant and democratic societies. Clearly, there is need for the renaissance agenda to be brought closer to people's everyday lives so that they live fruitfully and participate in social discussions. This article argues that effective lifelong education programmes could help Africa to achieve its renaissance ideals. Proceeding from a lifelong learning perspective educators have to make efforts to empower people through adopting the idea of creating learning societies. However, Africa should provide lifelong education tied to enhancing the following critical principles: deliberative democracy; multiculturalism; decentralization of decision-making; and reactivation of civil society in Africa.

Lifelong learning for deliberative democracy

Lifelong learning includes any formal, non-formal and informal educational experiences designed to provide education to individuals to enable them to function in different contexts. It is founded on Delors' (1996) four principles of 'learning to Be', 'learning to live Together', 'learning to Do' and 'learning to know'. In some African countries such as Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, lifelong learning is endorsed as part of educational policy discourse (Walters 2001). Deliberative democracy, on the other hand, involves people determining what kind of community and nation they would like to create through indulging in extensive conversations about public choices. They dialogue about public policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. People engage in citizenry and civil debate about issues affecting their communities (Mathews1999).

Lifelong learning is not a new phenomenon for African because most languages have proverbs which suggest that learning, which is perceived as changing experiences into knowledge, skills and attitudes, has always been a centrepiece of people's livelihoods. The task of lifelong learning in Africa is to engage learners in productive public discussions and decision-making in their contexts. This can be achieved only if educators strive to operationalize lifelong learning within the context of a deliberative culture. Furthermore, to establish a democratic culture – which is viewed as an essential ingredient for local participation – could help communities to think nationally but act locally. In the context of lifelong learning, educators should be willing to educate and at the same time learn from the wisdom of their adult learners.

The backdrop to this effort must be the recognition that lifelong education is increasingly being recognized as a human right. Its legitimacy, however, will not stem from the rhetoric of international agencies such as UNESCO but from how educators earn the cooperation and respect of communities within which they work

(Maruatona 2002). Africa's development has to be based on transparent dialogue between the leadership and communities, as opposed to the current situation where dialogue is characterized by a litany of empty promises. African societies are not immune to lifelong learning because they have always learnt on a life-wide basis by using age-based logic and wisdom, which comes with lifelong experiential learning. These have guided their experiences for centuries. For example, the use of the community meeting place (the *Kgotla* system) in Botswana facilitated people's involvement in democratic deliberations. Ideally, at the *kgotla* all are free to share their views to provoke constructive reaction and criticism, resulting in decisions that would yield common social good. The people's collective wisdom is embedded in such institutions and they help to establish consensus. Unfortunately, such institutions have since been undermined by the political elite, who converted them into a forum where they manipulate communities for their own ends and are no longer viewed as sites of productive discussions. Singh (2003) argues that in Africa, a substantial proportion of women and the minorities in rural and urban areas are still denied access to their right to education and the opportunities it brings, such as living healthier and more productive lives.

The current practice of democracy in Africa restricts people's deliberative capacity because it is made synonymous with occasional voting once every five years. Voting is a critical aspect of democracy but it alone does not necessarily facilitate active participation or citizenship, which are considered essential for democracy. As Heather (1999) indicated, active citizenship plays a key role in public life, enabling society to identify its problems, negotiate about them and work towards a common social good. Currently, the public in most African countries are discontent and cynical about democracy. They felt left out of decision-making, apart from voting once every five-odd years. Lockyer *et al.* (2003) indicated that lifelong learning should facilitate active citizenship by ensuring that it educates youth and adults about the democratic process, their rights and responsibilities, in order for them to be motivated to perform as responsible citizens. The process of deliberative democracy should enable citizens to have skills of enquiry, communication and participation in civic responsibilities. Lifelong learning should help citizens to become autonomous beings who have a critical perspective to the education they receive and could challenge the assimilative approach to education, which prescribes what is to be taught and in what language (Landson-Billings 1994). They should help citizens to develop a critical appreciation of reality and be tolerant in the context of exercising democracy (Davis 2003). The desire for deliberation would remain an intangible ideal unless lifelong educators help citizens to actively learn to engage in democratic processes in all aspects of their lives.

Democratization through lifelong learning should starts in primary, secondary, university and non-formal and informal educational experiences. The establishment of deliberative democracy would also allow communities to engage in constructive dialogue and be sensitive but relentless in their criticism of the leadership, which would improve the delivery of democracy, gender equity and social justice (Singh 2003). Africans need the kind democracy discussed above, which can only take roots if citizen are actively involved in deliberative democracy. Access to lifelong educational experiences will not be sufficient unless people are involved in decentralized educational policy-making process at all levels. Public involvement would enable individuals to own programmes or ideas without feeling alienated

(Archer 1998). Also, it must be kept in mind that issues of poverty, inequality, class difference and unemployment are structural in nature and might not be addressed solely by education. However, the poor need more that just material support to effect change in their lives because change can be achieved not only by giving material support but by building human capacity to engage in deliberative democracy and inculcate the spirit of multiculturalism.

Lifelong learning and multiculturalism

In most instances globalization, as indicated above, stigmatized and disempowered certain sections of African communities, such as women and minorities. Africa needs a lifelong learning policy that would minimize the negative impact of globalization on these groups. This can be achieved partly through the use of multicultural approaches in organized lifelong learning experiences.

Multiculturalism denotes education that questions and advocates for redressing ethnic, racial, cultural and gender exclusion (Sleeter and Grant 1999). Effectively organized lifelong learning experiences should lead to the realization of the goals of a sustainable future, democracy and equity, as envisioned in the African renaissance era. Africa is culturally diverse and therefore difference should be seen as the starting point in organizing lifelong learning, as opposed to being obstacles to achieving individual and social life goals. Ethnicity should be the basis for self-understanding and definition of every community (Fletcher 2000). Lifelong learning should create a condition where people's basic material needs and dignity are met, including their participation in activities that directly affect their community and nation (Thomas and Wilkin 1999). The major task of educators would be to bring policy-makers and other stakeholders into the fold in incorporating principles of lifelong learning in the development of policies, programmes and projects. A multicultural approach calls for engaging learners in dialogue to generate materials in order for lifelong learning to counter the negative effect of social and cultural exclusion and at the same time facilitate social transformation.

Multiculturalism enables cultural groups to develop their own autonomous or indigenous bodies of knowledge without risking being assimilated or integrated by the social elite. Simon (1992: 10) argues that curriculum development perpetuates a limited state-legitimated knowledge and 'those who either fail or refuse to acquire or display the required capacities are marked or mapped, and disadvantaged … in the reconstructed relations of social inequality.' This warns of the harm inflicted on minorities by the powerful elite who currently control the content and delivery of education. Multiculturalism therefore is an aspect of a strategy that lifelong learning could use to accommodate multiple perspectives and viewpoints in the process of facilitating learning. It should negotiate differences between sociocultural groups and the struggles for equal recognition on behalf of those who are currently excluded (Haans 2001). It becomes a form of resistance against oppression by helping educators to formulate practices that would respect and reconcile demands for national unity with the need to acknowledge, honour and respect African cultural diversity.

Lifelong learning would enable minorities to question the taken-for-granted notions of what constitutes the content of teaching and learning, through portraying alternative identities and social arrangements from a multicultural approach.

Curriculum development is based on a repertoire of diverse cultural nuances, such as a respect for languages and arts of all communities in any given context (Sleeter and Grant 1999). It would help African nomadic communities such as the Fulani in West Africa, the Masai in East Africa and the San in Southern Africa, who are currently silenced because of their semi-nomadic ways of life, to realize their voice and gain access to resources to improve their social and economic status. Weil (1998: 31) observes that multicultural education 'should be valued for its ability to encourage critical thought … initiate critical disquisition within a climate of investigation and help students author their own reasoned judgment.' Lifelong learning should equip learners with valuable critical thinking skills for them to participate in democratic discourses. Educational practice can never be taken out of its cultural and social contexts (Gee 2003). A decentralized curriculum developed from a multicultural perspective is viewed as an essential part of the broader sociopolitical struggle, which challenges exclusiveness and advocates inclusiveness in planning lifelong learning.

Teaching in lifelong learning should also facilitate connectedness, care and celebration of difference in the community to assist the marginalized to address institutional power. It should encourage learners to freely discuss their fears, anxieties and prospects for a collective future truthfully; there should be a sense of trust and respect for each other in the learning circle (hooks 1994). Giroux (1995) urges educators to help learners from the dominant culture to unlearn their privileges. He views one of the crucial tasks of critical educators as being to organize learning experiences that would mobilize cultural diversity and gender equity in society. Teachers should challenge learners to critically assess what would work best to sustain their lives. Lifelong learning should go beyond the acquisition of basic reading and writing skills to develop capacity to enable the learners to challenge relations that structured the situation that disadvantaged them (Simon 1992). African educators should not attempt to romanticize the histories of their learners but enable them to interrogate their voices and critically scrutinize their experiences (McLaren 1994). They should work with learners of all ages to challenge the content of what they learn and adapt it to their conditions and realities. Yzaguirre (1998) demonstrates that learning from each cultural group could lead to a stronger nation compared with looking at multiculturalism as challenging the current hegemonic power relations. The process of facilitating diversity can also be achieved through decentralizing curriculum planning, as opposed to attempting to assimilate cultural minorities.

Lifelong learning and decentralization

Decentralization refers to the transfer of authority from high echelons of the state to geographically dispersed central government agents, thereby strengthening local staff to enable them to make decisions in their daily work. It would enable lifelong educators to learn more about the needs of local communities, since education is intricately embedded in social and cultural contexts (Barton and Hamilton 1998). As presently organized, the structures of lifelong education in Africa are weak in terms of how they will be operationalized. Only a few countries in Africa, such as Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, included lifelong learning as a defining policy principle, but they have done little to prepare for its pedagogical and institutional

delivery (Walters 2001). The current provision of formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences is largely the prerogative of technocrats and excludes learners from effectively participating in deliberations about the curriculum. This is contrary to the official rhetoric on lifelong learning. Maruatona (2002) observed that the grounded realities of the taught curriculum reveal that it reinforces expert designed curriculum and does not include principles of decentralization and involvement of the learners.

Decentralization would help to involve local-level teachers who would use their experiences to bring local perspectives which represent the realities of their communities. It can be facilitated by involving lifelong educators in the selection of textbooks and the development of reading materials, for them to infuse the aspirations and histories of their learners to make learning materials responsive to the needs of African learners. The process would place non-formal educators in the South in a position to incorporate aspects of local culture in the discussion of subjects such as numeracy, family planning and HIV/AIDS, which would help learners to critically discuss their worldviews and assumptions (Torres 2003).

Decentralization would enable African communities to take charge of their lives, to help their leaders to realize their cherished ideals of a peaceful continent run by an accountable and transparent leadership. This would be an essential ingredient to help them prepare to alleviate poverty among the rural and urban poor. The other benefit of a decentralized approach to the planning of lifelong education is that it permits genuine dialogue between different forms of education so that they could share resources and exchange strategies to help maximize the use of whatever resources are available on the continent. The most valuable of Africa's resource are its people, and as long as they learn on a lifelong basis, they are likely to uplift the continent. This can occur only if policy decision-making is decentralized in order to help African leaders move from seductive international declarations such as the Hamburg and Dakar frameworks of action to taking concrete steps to address the learning needs of the people and encouraging them to learn on a lifelong and life-wide basis. Learning would encourage people to own programmes and development projects to reduce deprivation of capacity. According to Torres (2003), decentralized lifelong learning programmes would help African communities address their precarious situations without over-reliance on the state or international donors such as the World Bank, with its conflicting agendas and priorities.

Lifelong learning and civil society

Lifelong learning is essential to help civil society organizations to participate in engaging their members in public discussions. Welton (2001) describes civil society as a network of associations that institutionalizes problem-solving discourses on questions of general interest in the framework of public spheres. They represent the interests of members in an amplified form in the public arena. According to Delanty (2000), the value of civil society is not its ability to overcome conflict but to promote trust and solidarity, which allows democratic culture to prevail and flourish. Unfortunately, the elite in African countries seek to limit the capacity of civil society by asserting their official hegemonic authority and, as a result, civil society organizations are weakened. Maruatona (1999) observed that in spite of these challenges, adult educators should strive to train and strengthen the leadership of trade unions

to play a meaningful role in securing a democratic culture in Africa. Welton (1997) argues that civil society can be strengthened through the provision of effective adult education designed to facilitate a democratic culture through designing lifelong learning projects for organs of the civil society.

Involving communities in democratic discourse can be realized only through a vigorous civil society which uses lifelong learning strategies to engage rural and urban workers and communities in general in the process of democratizing their sociopolitical structures in order to challenge the dominant paradigm. It is contended that in Africa, the imposition of Western democracy and global capitalist interests require a docile and ostensibly cheap labour, which makes state governments stifle the growth and development of strong civil society organs to attract the so-called direct foreign investment.

However, the weakness of civil society leads to loss of civil and social efficacy and collective benefits associated with active public involvement in democratic discourses. A mutual relationship between civil society and lifelong learning is perceived as an essential component for launching a culture of democracy in Africa. Macdonald (1997: 2) notes, 'in the Third World societies characterized by histories of repression…some form of popular participation is essential in order to build more durable and legitimate democratic institutions.' This view is applicable to the African context because it calls upon lifelong learning institutions to work with civil society organizations such unions and churches to enhance democratic participation and culture in Africa. There is a need to establish working relationships with an agenda for social transformation between lifelong education and civil society organizations to assert the recognition of multiple identities among African societies. Such a lifelong learning programme should strive to make individual and collective members of the civil society autonomous, enable them to deliberate critically and assess broadened possibilities in their lives. Ambrose (1995) noted that state accountability depends upon the vibrancy and political vision of the civil society. All these ideals can be only achieved if African political leadership and those working for organs of civil society organize lifelong learning for all categories of African societies.

Conclusion

This article has argued that lifelong learning is essential for Africa to combat the negative effects of globalization, deprivation of capacity, poverty and other maladies, which continue to plague the continent. Globalization in Africa set some countries back in their development path because it restricted their capacity to provide social services and effectively control their affairs. The article outlined three major phases in the development of the African state from the 1960s to date. It demonstrated that during the initial stages of Independence some states were committed to the provision of social services. However, structural adjustment policies led to the withdrawal of basic services such as the provision of clean water, education and free healthcare. These led to widespread poverty and impoverishment, thereby failing African nations in realizing the ideals of democracy and economic recovery. However, the current African leadership envisions a renaissance phase designed to make states accountable, democratic, transparent and willing to fight poverty in order to attain social and economic prosperity for all. The article contends that without the use of a comprehensive lifelong learning strategy to attain these goals, all

these ideals would remain empty slogans. Finally, it suggests that there should be a provision of lifelong learning guided by principles of deliberative democracy, recognizing multiculturalism, engaging in decentralization and strengthening of civil society through adopting the lifelong learning principles to enhance democratic participation in Africa.

References

AMBROSE, B. (1995) *Democratization and the Process of Human Rights in Africa: Problems and prospects* (London: Prager).

ANSPRENGER, F. (2003) Hoping for the new partnership in Africa's development (NEPAD)? The long history of reform concept for Africa. *Development and Cooperation*, 30, 364–367.

ARCHER, D. (1998) The evolving concept of literacy in REFLECT. *Participatory Learning and Action Notes*, 32, 100–108.

ARMSTRONG, E. (2004) Globalisation from below: AIDWA, foreign funding, and the gendering of anti-violence campaigns. *Journal of Development Societies*, 20(1–2), 29–55.

BARTON, D. and HAMILTON, M. (1998) *Local Literacies: reading and writing in one community* (London: Routledge Publishers).

BAUMAN, Z. (1998) *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* (Buckingham: Open University Press).

BECK, N. (2000) *What is Globalization?* (Cambridge: Polity).

BURBULES, N. and TORRES, C. (eds) (2000) *Globalization and Education: Global perspectives* (New York: Routledge).

CENTRAL STATISTICS OFFICE (2003) *Household income and expenditure survey report* (Gaborone: Government printer).

CRUIKSHANK, J. (1998) Are we aiding the enemy? Adult education in the global economy. *Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education*, 24(1), 101–113.

DAUBON, R. (2005) A primer for promoting deliberative democracy and the dynamics of development at the grassroots. *Journal of Public Deliberation*, 1(1). Available online at: http://services.bepress.com/jpd/vol1/iss1/art4 (accessed 8 April 2005).

DAVIS, I. (2003) Developing education for citizenship. In A. LOCKEY, B. CRICK and J. ANNETTE (eds) *Education for Democratic Citizenship: Issues of theory and practice* (London: Ashgate Publishing).

DELANTY, G. (2000) *Citizenship in a Global Age* (Buckingham: Open University Press).

DELORS, J., AL MUFTI, I., AMAGI, I., CARNEIRO, R., CHUNG, F., GEREMEK, B. et al. (1996) *Learning: The treasure within* (Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century) (Paris: UNESCO).

DENG, L. (1998) *Rethinking African Development: Towards a framework for social integration and ecological harmony* (Eritrea: African World Press, Inc).

EGBO, B. (2000) *Gender Literacy and Life Chances in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Toronto: Multicultural Matters).

FLETCHER, S. (2000) *Education and Emancipation: Theory and practice in a new constellation* (New York: Teacher's College Press).

GEE, J. (2003) *What Video Games Have to Teach us About Learning and Literacy* (London: Falmer Press).

GIROUX, H. (1995) The politics of insurgent multiculturalism in the era of Los Angeles uprisings. In B. KANPOL and P. MCLAREN (eds) *Cultural Multiculturalism: Uncommon voices in a common struggle* (London: Bergin and Garvey).

HAANS, C. (2001) Active citizenship in a multicultural perspective. In O. KORSGAARD, S. WALTERS and R. ANDERSEN (eds) *Learning for Democratic Citizenship* (Copenhagen: Association for World Education and the Danish University of Education).

HEATHER, D. (1999) *What is citizenship?* (Cambridge: Polity).

HOOKS, B. (1994) *Teaching to Transgress* (New York: Routledge).

IHEDURU, O. (1999) *The Politics of Economic Opportunities and Democracy in Africa* (London: Croom Ward Press).

KORSGAARD, O. (1997) The impact of globalization on adult education. In S. WALTERS (ed.) *Globalization and Adult Education and Training: Impact and issues* (London: Zed Books).

KORSGAARD, O. (2001) The struggle regarding citizenship: From social citizenship to active citizenship, from adult education to lifelong learning. In O. KORSGAARD, S. WALTERS and R. ANDERSEN (eds) *Learning for Democratic Citizenship* (Copenhagen: Association for World Education and the Danish University of Education).

LANDSON-BILLINGS, G. (1994) *The Dream Keepers: Successful teachers of African American students* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass).

LOCKYER, A., CRICK, B. and ANNETTE, J. (eds) (2003) *Education for Democratic Citizenship: Issues of theory and practice* (London: Ashgate Publishing).

MACDONALD, L. (1997) *Supporting Civil Society: The political role of NGOs in Central America*. (St. Martin: St. Martin's Press).

MARUATONA, T. L. (1999) Adult education and the empowerment of civil society: The case of trade unions in Botswana. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 18(6), 476–491.

MARUATONA, T. L. (2002) A critique of centralized literacy programs: The case of Botswana. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 45(8), 736–745.

MATHEWS, D. (1999) *Politics for People: Finding a responsible public voice* (2nd edn) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Illinois Press).

MCDONOUGH, K. and FEINBERG, W. (eds) (2003) *Education and Citizenship in Liberal Democratic Societies: Teaching for cosmopolitan values and collective identities* (London: Oxford University Press).

MCLAREN, P. (1994) Multiculturalism with a postmodern critique: Towards a pedagogy of resistance and transformation. In H. GIROUX and P. MCLAREN (eds) *Between Boarders: Pedagogy of politics and cultural studies* (New York: Routledge).

MENDEL–ANONUEVO, C. (2001) Lifelong learning and citizenship: Possibilities for strengthening democracy in the 21st century. In O. KORSGAARD, S. WALTERS and R. ANDERSEN (eds) *Learning for Democratic Citizenship* (Copenhagen: Association for World Education and the Danish University of Education).

MORROW, R. and TORRES, C. (2000) State globalization and educational policy. In N. BURBULES and C. TORRES (eds) (2000) *Globalization and Education: Global perspectives* (New York: Routledge).

NABUDERE, D. W. (2001) When nationalism, ethnicity and citizenship converge. In O. KORSGAARD, S. WALTERS and R. ANDERSEN (eds) *Learning for Democratic Citizenship* (Copenhagen: Association for World Education and the Danish University of Education).

NEPAD (2001) *Report of the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development* (Lagos: Nigeria).

NTIRI, D. (1998) Africa's educational dilemma: Roadblocks to universal literacy for social integration and change. In D. NTIRI (ed.) *Office of Adult and Lifelong Research* (Michigan, MI: University of Detroit).

OGUNSANYA, M. and THOMAS, H. (2004) Unblocking the blockages: Challenges for Nigerian Education. *Journal of Development Societies*, 20(1–2), 79–88.

REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA (2004) *Botswana: Millennium development goals status report 2004* (Gaborone: Tiger design and Graphics).

SAHN, D., DOROSH, P. and YOUNGER, S. (1997) *Structural Adjustment Reconsidered: Economic policy and poverty in Africa* (London: Cambridge University Press).

SEN, A. (1999) *Development as Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books).

SIMON, R. I. (1992) *Teaching Against the Grain: Texts for a pedagogy for possibility* (New York: Bergin and Harvey).

SINGH, K. (2003) Right to education: Foundations of education for all (EFA) process. *EDEA Newsletter*, 15(2–3), 16–17.

SLEETER, C. and GRANT, C. (1999) *Making Choices for Multicultural Education: Five approaches to race, class and gender* (3rd edn) (Columbus, OH: Merrill).

THOMAS, C. and WILKIN, P. (eds) (1999) *Globalization, Human Security and the African Experience* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinek Publisher).

TORRES, M. (2003) *Life Long Learning in the South: Critical issues and opportunities for adult education* (Stockholm: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency).

UNITED NATIONS (2002) *United Nations Millenium Declaration* Resolution adopted by the General Assembly. Available online at: http://www.un.org.millenium/declaration/ares 552e.htm

WALTERS, S. (2001) Adult education in lifelong learning in Southern Africa. In O. KORSGAARD, S. WALTERS and R. ANDERSEN (eds) *Learning for Democratic Citizenship* (Copenhagen: Association for World Education and the Danish University of Education).

WEIL, D. K. (1998) *Towards Multicultural Literacy: Theory and practice for education for liberation* (Boston, MA: Peter Lang).

WELTON, M. (1997) Civil society as theory and project. In D. WILDEMEERSCH, M. FINGER and T. JANSEN (eds) *Adult Education and Social Responsibility: Reconciling the irreconcilable?* (New York: Peter Lang).

WELTON, M. (2001) Perspectives on citizenship in the age of information. In O. KORSGAARD, S. WALTERS and R. ANDERSEN (eds) *Learning for Democratic Citizenship* (Copenhagen: Association for World Education and the Danish University of Education).

YZAUGUIRRE, R. (1998) The new American identity. In F. ESSELBEIN, M. GOLDSWORTH, R. BECKARD and R. SCHUBERT (eds) *The Coming of the Future* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey- Bass).