Non-formal Education in Lesotho: Current Status

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Introduction

Lesotho has over the years enjoyed the privilege of being regarded as one of the African states with the highest literacy rates. The Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre (LDTC), a department of Ministry of Education charged with the responsibility of providing basic and non-formal education programmes in Lesotho undertook a study in 1985 and established that the literacy rate was 62%. Recently with the financial assistance of UNICEF, the same department engaged in a similar study. The preliminary findings indicate an increase of about 18% to the 1985 study. It would seem that the Lesotho Government is keen to know about the state of national literacy. Yet, the question of who provides non-formal education, the programmes/curriculum offered, funding, supervision and monitoring as well as learners and instructors immediately surface once the question of literacy is being addressed.

Background to NFE

Background to non-formal education shows that the government of Lesotho established LDTC as early as 1976. The department offered basic and non-formal education. However, history will show that there are a number of non-governmental organisations that are also engaged in providing non-formal and basic education. The Lesotho Association for Non-Formal education offers non-formal education programmes similar to those of LDTC. These suggest a duplication of effort to a certain extent. It has to be noted though that LDTC is more experienced in developing materials and supporting various groups of people who want to complete and attain primary and secondary certificates.

Other organisations offer vocational skills (Bethel Community Development Centre and Itjoreng vocational Training). Others still seem to gear towards providing adult learners with life skills. Reference is made to organisations such as Development for Peace Education (DPE) and Lesotho Federation of Democratic Unions (FDU). For DPE, the important task is to transform the world of the illiterate people whereas FDU is interested in training adults to improve their work place. There may be several organisations whose activities are duplicated by others. Lack of a monitoring system at government level aggravates this possible problem.

Funding

The majority of NFE organisations receive their financial support from external funding partners. UNICEF has been playing a major role in funding a variety of organisations including the Non-formal Education Inspectorate and LDTC. However, there seems to be a need to work a fund which government and funding organisations as well as NFE providers can contribute. This suggestion is based on the observation that in 1996, the following funding organisations were funding one or more NFE NGOs: Irish government, the Netherlands government, UNICEF, the Danish and the
German Association of Adult Education. Perhaps the move towards central fund means that there should be a policy to guide NFE activities.

There are positive developments towards NFE Offerings. The MOE put in place an officer responsible for non-formal education. Her starting point has been working toward the formulation of a policy as well as producing an NFE directory. These two consultancies were being undertaken simultaneously and the work is not yet complete. The assumption is that a national policy on NFE will guide a variety of activities – programmes, curricular, monitoring and supervision as well as establishing the extent to which such programmes have contributed towards better society.

As Lesotho engages in EFA Assessment 200, it becomes apparent that formal education indicators of achievements and for non-achievements can be easily established. Yet this cannot be said about sub-sectors such as non-formal education. What seems to be a problem is monitoring systems for NFE.