

ISSUES IN POLICY AND PROVISION OF NON-FORMAL BASIC EDUCATION IN EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

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Introduction

This paper argues that the policy and provisions of non formal/basic education in the region is partly premised on the basis that we share common problems of illiteracy, poverty, gender inequality and limited democratic participation by the citizens. Based on that, it discusses the following policy issues; (i) language policy, (ii) centralisation of programming, (iii) need for collaboration between the state and NGOs in non formal basic education, and (iv) the need for integration of efforts between formal and non formal provisions. Finally, I explore within our varied contexts the following challenges: (a) to explore possibilities to re-conceptualise non-formal programs, (b) use of multiple languages in non-formal education, (c) substantively negotiate program planning and implementation and (d) exploring alternative approaches to the provision of non-formal basic education.

Education is perceived as an instrument of economic growth, productivity, politicisation, and enculturation of humanity. It therefore has been assigned a task of being a pre-requisite for the development of labour, control of fertility, mortality, and fostering improved quality of life and increased life expectancy in both developed and developing nations! (UNESCO, 1995). The Copenhagen declaration and program of action adopted at the world summit for social development, March, 6-12^h 1995 also highlighted the importance of education for social equity and social justice. Education was to fight poverty, to create productive jobs, and to strengthen the social fabric and achieve human security. The program emphasised the need for access to education through provision of literacy and Universalisation of basic education and primary health care (United Nations, 1995). The CONFINTEAV conference enlarged this vision of the central role of basic education in facilitating participation among all citizens of the world. It portrayed education as a gateway to an enhanced social, cultural and economic life (UNESCO, 1997). Some people question if Africa should still be putting basic education/literacy as a priority when the world is going for scientific and technological innovations (Nodoye, 1997). Given the problems of illiteracy and poverty, basic education/literacy seems to be a reasonable priority for the region. This summit therefore, is essential in that it gives us as non-formal education practitioners, administrators, researchers and policy makers in the region an opportunity to reassess our efforts in the provision of these forms of education. It will also serve as a regional platform for sharing experiences, successes, challenges and prospects in the formulation and implementation of NFE policies. Again it takes place at the threshold of the 21st Century which gives the region an opportunity to prepare for a better future for its communities. One of most critical policy challenges is where the region is located in the globalisation enigma. The region is faced with the negative and divisive impact of globalisation characterised by the "unholy" alliances of economic blocks in Europe, America, Pacific and Indian oceans. This resulted in financial and cultural competition that wedges the division between us as Africans and further our exploitation.

As a region, we are still plagued by high general and infant mortality, low life expectancy, low rates of economic growth, low school enrolments and high illiteracy rates. Education and other essential services continue to be under budgeted while the military and the executive branches of our respective states enjoy a lion's share of Gross Domestic Products. I need not over state the fact that as a region, we have a huge potential on which we could rely to pursue genuine development by investing on our most abundant resource, the people. The past three decades have witnessed varying degree of commitments to education as a pre-condition for the development of the region since the sixties. Unfortunately, that has declined as leadership began to show signs of nostalgia, fatigue and corruption in the nineties. Ironically, our leaders

participated and endorsed the spirit of world summits on social development and education from Jomtien (1990) to Hamburg (1997). This is notwithstanding the fact that each state has its ideological commitment to its people; differing configuration of professional staff and adult educators; variability in policy linkages and resource allocation between formal and non-formal education (Bhola, 1998). In fact, there has been competition for resources, especially after the Jomtien declaration that emphasised formal over non-formal basic education. Recently, the Delors Report also paid more attention to formal at the expense of non formal and informal learning (Bhola, 1997). The region like the rest of Africa, found itself caught in the cog-web of essentially, conflicting international policy frameworks. The outcome was that we continue to be plagued by illiteracy and other interlocking structural dilemmas such as poverty, gender inequalities and lack of the culture of democracy.

Illiteracy: This implies inability to perform certain tasks that are necessary in one's life because of lack of literacy skills. There is a prevalent myth that wrongly equates the notion of 'inability' to deficiency. A related myth being that once one is exposed to literacy the deficiency is removed and the victim would rise out of poverty and join the middle class. While a few cases of success have been noted, overall, literacy has limited impact on the social structures of poverty and inequality (Beder, 1991). Illiteracy inscribes a sense of powerlessness, lack of self-confidence and self-esteem on the illiterates. However, it is at best just a social construct, not an indicator of the person's failure. In the region, some communities function quite well without the magic of literacy. Some actually chose to ignore it in pursuit of other goals they perceive to be priorities. For example, students during the liberation struggle in South Africa. Hence, In South Africa today, it is estimated that close to 15 million or 51% of the Black population are functionally illiterate (Lawrence & Van Rensburg, 1996). Adult educator should look at literacy more as a proactive act to enable individuals to take control of their lives not as a form of rehabilitation. Unfortunately, literacy workers do not act as advocates of their learners instead they stigmatise them (Beder, 1991). The program should not be conveying middle class values that ignore the histories of participants and reinforce their poverty.

Poverty: Illiteracy seems to prevail among those members of society who are also in both absolute and relative poverty and lack access to basic amenities. Lawrence, et al, (1996, p. 12) notes that "the legacy of rural schooling is such that it is plagued by lack of adequate buildings, inadequate sanitation, unqualified teachers, lack of books and poor government infrastructure." The rural people can also be characterised as unemployed, living in unsanitary conditions, lacking the capacity to engage in economically productive activities, illiterate and without political voice. Walters (1995, p. 95) argues that "within the South African economy there has been a crisis for the past, two decades ... there is about 50% unemployment and widespread poverty." Similarly, in Botswana, a recent study on *Poverty and Poverty Alleviation* conducted by the Botswana Institute of Development Policy Analysis found that 47% of the population live below poverty datum line. This was more so in rural areas where 48% compared to 36% in urban villages and 23% of urban households live in poverty. Approximately 60% of the poor and 70% of the very poor households are in rural areas of Botswana (Jefferis, 1997). The issue is that the region continues to be beset by poverty. The argument is that the largest proportion of people living in poverty is disproportionately rural. Closely related to poverty is the general problem of gender inequality.

Gender inequality: In spite of the momentum sparked by the World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) the progress in improving the conditions of rural women in the region is still painfully slow. In some cases, there have been some losses of what women have gained over the years. For example, in Zimbabwe, the Supreme Court recently upheld discriminatory customary law by ruling that a woman is a minor and denied her the right to inherit her parents estate (Sayagues, 1999). Educational inequality between men and women still exists (except may be in Botswana and Lesotho) because of the existent cultural and historical circumstances. On average, women continue to constitute the majority of the illiterates, this has been partly mandated by societal structures and supported by certain religious denominations that controlled education during the colonial period. Education for women was meant to subordinate and model them into better house-keepers which inscribed them with a homemaker identity (Mafela, 1994). Ironically, even the

educational opportunities that are offered both formally and non-formally in the region, still continues to relegate women to typically female low paying jobs. In spite of that, women are blamed when children do not do well in school because the home does not provide sufficient criteria for school success. This is an aspect of victim blaming (Askov & Brown 1992). The fact that women make up the majority of the population, the illiterates, and the poverty stricken in the region makes their plight a gender and social and economic issue. Their demise is reinforced by the lack of democratic culture.

Lack of democratic culture: It should be apparent that women and the general population that resides in the rural areas are afflicted by all forms of inequalities partly because of their limited participation in decisions that profoundly affect their lives. The usual rhetoric about "democracy" and "good governance" is based on the fact that this section of the population continue to be deprived of benefits of Independence and are not yet ready to question the status quo. For these people, it is still enough for them to match to the drums of election campaigns once in five years, only to lose their representatives to places of power and influence such as parliaments and councils.

In non-formal education settings, they are excluded from being part of the decision affecting their lives as learners, they continue to be indoctrinated with what the curriculum experts perceive to be good curricula content for them. The results are that classes are empty monologues carried out by educators with limited learner participation. The argument is that without participation, there can be no democracy and without the latter, it is not feasible to talk of 'good governance' and the 'rule of law' while the majority of the people are not participating in decision making. It is against this background that the paper intends to raise some policy and provision issues in non-formal education in the region. It is argued that to some extent, the provision of non-formal education as broadly conceived below, would help to redress the endemic problems of illiteracy, poverty, gender inequalities and lack of democratic culture characteristic of East and Southern Africa.

Issues of Policy and Provision of Non Formal/Basic Education

Nations in the region are confronted with the task of national development and a rather contradictory role of improving the quality of life of the citizenry. There is a growing recognition that the education of the adult population is essential to ignite and sustain growth and development which necessitates proactive policies to enable adults to have access to educational opportunities. The provision of education for adults requires expansion of both formal basic education and use of alternative means of non-formal

education that would **empower participants and cultivate** the culture of democracy. Nonformal education, as used here denotes all forms of education that are offered outside the school system including second chance opportunities for those who dropped from school. It also encompasses the provision of vocational and basic functional skills deemed desirable in their context to enable persons to have new vision, be productive and able to imagine alternatives to **improve the quality of their** lives. Basic education/literacy on the other hand, entails the provision of reading, writing and numeracy skills **accompanied by** basic functional skills related to agriculture, fishery, craft and other economic skills deemed essential in a particular context. These have to be understood within the policy framework of learning as a lifelong process. The aim is to prepare adults to engage in continuing education, each learning according their talent and capacity to live, work and learn in this ever changing sets of circumstances to enhance individual, group and community productivity.

Non formal should introduce learners to crucial life skills such as nutrition, health care, education and democracy. This is crucial for those who are otherwise disadvantaged such as the poor and women. NFE has to be adapted to the needs and circumstances of those who reside in the rural areas who also constitute the bulk of the poor. NFE should not be judged according to the number of people who have been helped only to read and write, they should be made part of the local and national workforce. However, Demetron (1997) cautions that literacy does not translate into sufficient upwards, mobility from services and manual labour into professional industrial economy (p. 149). Literacy in the region therefore, should help people to develop positive self-esteem and a sense of personal and community significance as they contribute to public good as farmers with their improved skills and competencies.

Non-formal education policies are informed by the desire to get people from all walks of life to participate in development. Bhola (V995) quotes the President of Namibia saying that "Government is fully behind the National Literacy Program ... the associated development ideology is rooted in the will to deal with the inherent inequalities and backlogs which are obstacles to development" (p. 43). In Botswana, Government also view education as essential for development, the National Commission on Education (1977) states that "a fully literate population is an important long term objective if Botswana's other national objectives are to be met' (**Ministry of Education, 1977, p. 67**). These states realise that illiteracy would hamper any effective national development efforts. Literacy is seen as essential for successful promotion of rural development and **enabling participants to partake in development**. Consequently, depending on the ideology and resources of each state, the region experienced various forms of provisions ranging from mass literacy campaigns, programs to literacy projects.

I therefore proceed from an assumption that in spite of efforts in each of the countries, there are some general trends that cut across situations. I hope this will give us the opportunity to dialogue, share experiences about the provision of non-formal education in our countries. These issues includes: language policy; lack of diversity and centralisation of programming; Lack of collaboration between the state and NGOs in non-formal education sector; and lack of integration in the provision of formal and nonformal education in some countries.

(i) *Language policy*: The issue of the language of instruction in formal and non-formal education remains a central piece of the puzzle of developing a responsive curriculum. The choice of certain languages over others generates an emotive debate among curriculum developers and participants which makes it a crucial component of the discourse on provision of non-formal/basic education in multicultural societies. The debate is made more complicated if there is an overarching metropolitan language of European descent like English, French or Portuguese, which have come to be dominant and culturally over rated. In some cases, languages of political and economic elite are given sufficient linguistic capital to rise to the status 'national language.' For example,

Kiswahili and Setswana in Tanzania and Botswana respectively. These languages bind these nations together but limit the recognition of nationalities and language diversity in these countries, they exclude use of minority languages as means of self-expression. The minorities are assimilated through school and other state sponsored institutions. The out come has been a raging debate over the possibility for the use of mother tongue (MT) among different ethnic groups. Non-formal education programs increasingly enrol minorities. The use of their mother tongue would enhance linguistic equity and effectiveness of teaching and learning in non-formal settings. Learning in adulthood is a result of effective interaction between adult learners and teachers. Adult educators should establish commonly spoken languages in a given setting and use it to enhance the relevancy of the program to the felt needs of participants. Participants would only learn national and official languages later after they have acquired reading and writing skills (**Kalmar, 1992**).

I recognise budgetary limits of our situation and the multiplicity of languages, however, there is need to localise programs and make decisions in consultation with the learners. This would probably reduce problem of dropouts as program would animate real life conditions and help learners with skills they need beyond their immediate locale (Maruatona, 1997). Learners are to be given chances to choose which language is to be used before literacy materials are developed. In Namibia for example, they had a choice between different regional languages of Gcereku, Mbukushu, Setswana and San. Each of the languages has been developed into a written script by NGOs working among these communities. Learners are given the chance to make a transition into English later at their own choice (Bhola, 1995). This is a strategy to preserve the cultural identities of these communities through codification and use of their languages education settings.

(ii) Centralisation of programming: Centralisation denotes the concentration of decision-making authority at the top of the organisational hierarchy. Adult basic education, like other forms of education in East and Southern Africa has potential for facilitating ' a few people who possess social, political and economic power. The political control by curriculum turned to represent meanings from the perspective of the powerful. This has been branded 'banking education' (Freire, 1972). Such an approach leads to teachers having minimal influence on curriculum contents and choice of texts to be used. which is an anathema in adult education (Maruatona, 1994). A centralised basic education curriculum leads to a 'top-down' delivery of education where program content is handed down as a 'welfare' gift by those in power to those afflicted with illiteracy and other challenges. This approach to basic education ignores gender, racial, political and ideological power relations and the assumptions of learners in basic education. Learners do not participate in designing the program and its implementation. It initiates the poor, the underprivileged and the minorities into the ideology of a unitary, dominant cultural tradition" (Giroux, 1988, p. 61). Therefore, non-formal basic education should accommodate the diverse socio-cultural needs in each state in order for it to be a plausible alternative to formal school.

However, most of the non-formal education provisions are government sponsored and compete for limited resources with other services. Consequently, there are some economic and political benefits to be derived from a centralised curriculum. These include the reduction of costs by having one uniform program serving the whole nation. Centralisation averts costs of producing materials in different languages for different ethnic groups. It also assists the state to uphold 'approved' practice and unify people under one flag (Lauglo, 1990). The region is also confronted with the need for collaboration between the state and NGOs in the provision on basic education.

(iii) State NGOs collaboration in NFE: In addition to the provision of basic literacy skills NFE is charged with the responsibility of incorporating other forms of general knowledge that learners need to become productive citizens in each country. Learners should be exposed to discussions of themes like human rights, environmental protection, democracy, ethnic harmony, women and development issues, AIDS, and basic income generating skills. The debate is whether skills should be taught separately or integrated with literacy?

Some NGOs have established ways of working with communities from where they are and introducing them to new concepts and skills that would help learners maximise the use of skills in their lives. Experience show that there are NGOs that are better suited to discuss about some of these issues better than government. States should therefore, be willing to work alone with some genuine NGOs to help to effectively disseminate information about these issues to the population. This approach helps to accommodate diversity and enable NGOs to play a key role in maximising the potentials of communities in which they work. For example, the REFLECT project in Uganda and other places demonstrated the benefits of this partnership between NGOs and the community. Quite a number of NGOs worked alone with communities to provide literacy and other functional skills during the Apartheid era in South Africa (Prinsloo, 1990).

These efforts need to be rekindled and improved in order to work alone with development oriented NGOs to provide literacy and other skills to those who are deprived in the region. People could be taught skills on tourism, fanning, fishing and other relevant skills to enhance their productivity. The main goal is for learners to be able to be self-employed giver the large unemployment rates in the region. However, this suggestion is made notwithstanding the conservative missions of some NGOs, but they could work with rural poor on a short to *medium* term basis to help them figure out their development paths. The choice of working with certain NGOs should be left to the communities and local extension staff. They will determine which NGOs to work with depending on their community identified socio-economic needs and challenges. The point about collaboration is that government efforts are too widely spread and some NGOs have considerable experience working with poor communities, which justify collaboration. The last issue is that states at times fail to integrate formal and non-formal education efforts.

(iv) Integrating formal and non-formal education provisions: Most countries in the region have adopted lifelong learning as a guiding principle for their education policies. However, in spite this, implementation does not automatically translate into equitable access to both formal and non-formal education, unless there is a clear integration of both forms of education. The provision of varied forms of non-formal education is a significant indication of ideological commitment to distributive justice. Adult basic education and other forms of non-formal education provide educational opportunity to members of society who have been denied access. Education is intended to give them knowledge and skills to enable them to gain access to social, economic, cultural and political possibilities. This policy can only be achieved with an establishment of coexisting formal and non-formal systems leading to the same recognisable basic education accreditation to enable participants to gain access to continuing education. Experiences from Tanzania are helpful to all of us in terms of showing potential for parallel progress and equivalencies in both formal non-formal sectors. In Botswana, the policy anticipates that non-formal education will be operated as an alternative mode of delivery leading to adult basic education certificate, equivalent to ten years of formal schooling (Ministry of Education, 1994). Education however, should be viewed as intended for broader goals beyond certification, and preparation for the service of capital. It should be intended for democratic culture and enabling people to participate effectively as citizens (Bhola, 1997). The process should not be too concerned with uniformity at the expense of diversity of learners' cultural realities. The content should enable learners to utilise skills acquired from both formal and non-formal sectors to improve their livelihood. In view of these concerns, there is need to explore some challenges which would enable us as practitioners to share ideas, values, experiences and limitations as we struggle to achieve some of these policy ideals through non-formal education in the region.

Future Challenges for NFE Policy and Provision

The notion of future challenges is not intended to suggest that you are doing anything wrong but rather to help us to think together about alternative policy and practice to make programming more responsive to the felt

needs of participants. I intend to put forth suggestions for us to ponder as we confront the multiplicity of policy options outlined above as non-formal adult educators. The basic purpose is to determine how we could integrate policy and planning of formal and non-formal provisions for adults in order to achieve the general and ideological aim of lifelong learning.

The initial learning experiences such as basic literacy, should be culturally rooted within the community in which it is provided in order to be responsive to their needs and to motivate them to embark on further learning. Learners should be assisted to face challenges that require reading and writing skills in their daily lives as self-employed and employed individuals. There should be policy congruence between formal school and the non-formal sector in order to motivate both children and adults who have to learn outside school. Some of these challenges are; Re-conceptualisation of our provisions; Use of multiple languages in NFE programs; engaging in substantively democratic negotiation of the planning of programs and Exploring alternative approaches to the provision of non-formal education. The bottom line in each case, however, is for us as **adult educators** to critically assess our contexts to establish if such an approach would be viable in our area of practice before it is adopted.

(a) *Re-conceptualisation of NFE*

The provision of NFE in our region will have to be re-conceptualised both as concepts and modes of practice. For example, in most cases at basic literacy level, we should debate whether we should be providing a monolithic and a diversified program. Some scholars argue that monolithic programs are not sufficiently equipped to deal with varied cultural and contextual needs of participant, especially in the rural areas. The tendency is for the contents of primers and textbooks to be prescribed from the centre. The end results being that we impose our worldview on the less privileged that use these textbooks. Subsequently, learners fail to see the value of literacy in their lives. As planners and policy makers we assume that we know what poor people need to survive, ironically, that is not always true. The inevitable outcome is that learners dropout of such programs and we turn around and blame them for not taking advantage of the provisions.

Participants in our programs happen to be the poor, minorities, and women living in rural areas where there is limited community involvement in the conceptualisation of literacy and other non-formal education provisions (Quigley & Holsinger, 1993). For example, a study by Blialalusesa (1996) reports that women in a literacy program in Tanzania, complained that the literacy program intended to improve their conditions and alleviate their status did not succeed. They concluded instead that 'the knowledge imposed on them could have been useful if it had reflected the realities of their lives and provided them with a means of exercising control over their lives to effect change' (p. 27). This is not unique to Tanzania, in most countries, program developers continue to deny learners the opportunity to be independent adults. It could be observed that literacy and other forms of non-formal education content should go beyond being treated as neutral bodies of knowledge but be reflective of the learners' realities (Apple, 1993). The content should include local and regional content. National issues such as national unity, democracy and peace are to be included when experts at the centre edit and prepare materials for printing. The government also has to make funding available for these programs to enable learners to some extent take control of their learning if programs are to make an impact on their lives. We should reconceptualize non-formal as a plausible option for the provision of education and not as a second rate learning without consequences, because this view contradicts the political leadership's rhetoric about education being essential for development.

One aspect of re-conceptualisation would be to decentralise NFE provision. This refers to the transfer of authority from high echelons of the state to geographically dispersed agents of a central governments system thereby, strengthening regional and local staff. The outcome is that the state would render more responsive

services because local staff members are informed about local situations (Lauglo, 1990). Street (1991) advocates a more learner-centred model that would cater for multiple cultural realities, he calls for the provision of 'literacies' not single literacy. According to Kebathi (1985) planning has to be localised since "where planning and implementation is done at national level, the local communities view the program as something from outside, and belonging to Government or the officers in charge" (p. 123). Decentralisation in Kenya, enabled local staff to integrate socio-economic and cultural practices of the community in their planning. The outcomes motivated and sustained the interest of learners in the program and enabled them to acquire skills necessary to address development and their daily challenges successfully (Kebathi, 1985). The implication of decentralisation for learning was that learners talked meaningfully about issues affecting their lives as individuals and community members this enhanced program effectiveness among them.

(b) Use of multiple languages

Closely related to decentralise programs, is the need to utilise more local languages in different contexts, especially during the early stages of the provision of basic literacy in both formal and non-formal education. It is presumed that the use of local languages would have cultural and pedagogical benefits. The fact is that literacy classes are not meant to be quiet havens where the only voice ringing sense in class is that of the teacher. The use of local languages have some advantages in that it enables learners to articulate their realities more clearly in class which facilitates the easiness of learning. It also enhances the preservation of their cultural values embedded in their languages. The disadvantages are that there are too many languages and some are not yet written. The contention is that such unwritten languages also need to be codified in order to help to preserve them for posterity as their children are "drowned" with the so-called 'national and official' languages. Materials for basic education should be generated from local settings in conjunction with local communities, who are natural experts. The choice of language between the local, national and even official should be left to participants. The use of mother tongue first and later deciding to switch to any language for broader interaction is preferred over beginning with the official language. In a recent study, literacy learners in North Western Botswana indicated that they wished they could learn in their mother tongue and later in Setswana for them to interact with people from other parts of the country and government officials (Maruatona, 1997). All these matter necessitates the participation of learners in democratic decision making in the planning process.

(c) Negotiating the NFE program planning

In order for the above ideals to be realised it will not take only the good will of practitioners and policy makers. Participants in basic education and other forms of NFE will have to engage in negotiations regarding what should constitute the content of NFE programs. The basic assumption is that people know their problems and are certainly aware of some solutions to these issues. They also have broad experiences in their local situation that needs to be incorporated in the program. Hence, participants should be part of the planning process. The argument is, that there is need for negotiation in order for them to clearly define their territories. Planning is a social practice that is unashamedly political. Planners and stakeholders must negotiate their interests and concerns in a substantively democratic way (Cevero and Wilson, 1994). Therefore one of the most important issues to be taken into account is that planning is done by and for people. People represent a variety of interests but have asymmetrical power relationships in terms of influencing outcomes of the planning process (Cevero and Wilson 1998). As nonformal educators, we depend on serving volunteer participants effectively, we then, have an ethical concern with whose interests are served? The act of being inclusive bears testimony to the fact we intend to democratise the planning process as both an ethical and strategic undertaking. The other aspect is that as adult educators, we should be concerned with constantly exploring alternatively ways of improving our practice to enhance service delivery.

(d) *Exploring alternative approaches to Non-formal education*

As non-formal educators we should be open to new and innovative alternatives that are being tried elsewhere both in the South and the North. There are a number of community-based participatory techniques such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) which has been tried in Botswana and other countries. The technique proved to be a versatile tool for involving communities in identifying problems, prioritising them and coming up with community action plans. This approach could be adopted and used to generate community responsive programs for non-formal education programs among the rural poor in our countries. Recently, a community based development NGO developed a strategy called REFLECT- (Regenerated Freirean Literacy Through Empowerment Community Techniques) which has carried out pilot projects in Uganda, El Salvador and Bangladesh. It strengthened Freirean pedagogy with the use of Participatory Rural Appraisal Technique. The outcome was an alarmingly successful involvement of learners that was reported to be "empowering". In this program, the participants produce their own learning materials. Archer & Cottingham (1996) indicated that "as the participants construct their own materials, they take ownership of the issues that come up and are more likely to be involved to take local action, change their behaviour and their attitudes" (p. ii). The learners independently arrive at solutions to their problems through their own analysis that gives them a lot of faith in the results. It is therefore, suggested that aspects of REFLECT strategy could be adopted to implement the provision of non-formal education programs and projects in the region provided it is feasible in a given context.

The Tanzanian approach of establishing equivalencies between formal and nonformal programs is instructional in helping us view non-formal as instrumental in fulfilling the policy of lifelong learning. Another one is the South African Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) program that was designed to provide adult basic education and training opportunities to Africans after Apartheid. It has given people an opportunity to train and acquire accredited certificates outside the formal setting. However, because of its over emphasis on certification it has been 'accused' of being concerned with preparing people for capital and not for self-employment and democratic participation (Bhola, 1997b). The criticism is founded since given the unemployment rates in that country, it should be striving for enabling people to be self-employed not training rural people to provide cheap labor for capital. The programs have to be focussed on local potentials to maximise the people's use of local materials to improve their lives. Such programs would help rural communities to avert illiteracy, alleviate poverty and reduce gender inequalities and inculcate democratic culture. This has to be more so among women and girls who should gain access to education in non-formal settings to transform their lives and challenge institutions that have reinforced their subordination over the years.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that the process of non-formal/adult basic education in East and Southern Africa centres around ways of linking education to development and the fight against illiteracy and other interlocking structural problems of poverty, gender inequality and lack of democratic culture in our societies. It discusses some policy and provision issues, concluding that contrary to both international and national rhetoric that paints education as an essential pre-requisite for social development, not much has been done to achieve the goal. There is a predominant control of the curricula by experts at the centres thereby not allowing local staff and the affected communities to decide what they need to learn as adults. Finally, it poses some challenges for us to explore alternative ways of improving theory and practice of non-formal adult education programs under the rubric of lifelong learning. It argues that non-formal should be re-conceptualised to make it consequential for the learners for them to improve their quality of life. The aim should be to embark on practices that would help learners to use acquired skills to improve their lives as individuals and community members in the region.

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