

Inaugural Lecture of Professor Kofi Poku Quan-Baffour

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Topic: Education for Development: Adult Basic Education as a Tool for Socio-Economic Transformation

1. Introduction

The major preoccupation of the 21st century society is development. The quest for socio-economic and political emancipation and transformation has become the dominant concern of all progressive organisations and governments in this millennium. To ensure the implementation of the development agenda among member states the UN has set up some guidelines popularly dubbed the 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs set up by the UN to advance the course of socio-economic and political transformation in the world are:

- Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger
- Achievement of universal primary education
- Promotion of gender equity and empower women
- Reduction of child mortality
- Improvement of maternal health
- Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Ensuring environmental sustainability and
- Development of a global partnership for development

In the developing world which includes African countries development in general has been stagnant or at best very slow due to multiplicity of factors including colonialism and lack of access to education. It is argued here that the only vehicle available for individuals, communities and nations to achieve socio-economic and political transformation or advancement is *EDUCATION*. Zmeyov (1998) affirms that the main goal of education today is to provide individuals with a multifaceted training, and principally with knowledge and skills for

creative activities, for adapting to the changes in the natural social environment and for lifelong learning. Education is therefore essential to the development of skills and knowledge to compete in the 21st century (Chan, 2010). In line with this paradigm this paper focuses on the role adult education in general and adult basic education in particular can play in the improvement of human lives in South Africa.

2. Adult Education: The Phenomenological Perspective

In this section I provide a brief description and classification of the concept- **Adult Education**- in general and **Adult Basic Education** in particular. The acronym ABET stands for Adult Basic Education and Training. Basic education is the initial formal education which in the South African context is up to seven years of schooling. ABET is a discipline and one of the facets of the broader field of **Adult Education** which is why it is an academic department like other disciplines at the university of South Africa. ABET is also an interdisciplinary field which cuts across all disciplines hence we [practitioners] draw on and combine various perspectives and disciplines around adults and youth for the enhancement of human capital development. Perhaps due to lack of relevant information some people including even academics have the tendency to think that basic education refers only to literacy programmes and this wrong perception must be corrected. Current debates in the field point out that basic education is not just literacy; it is more than that. The sixth international conference on adult education dubbed CONFITEA VI (2009) clearly states that the scope of basic education is broader than reading and writing. Literacy itself goes beyond reading, writing and numeracy and includes communicative practices, critical thinking, active citizenship, individual rights and improving the quality of life. A lifelong learning perspective implies integrating literacy and adult education in all sub-sectors of education, from early childhood education programmes to both formal and non-formal adult education programmes (CONFITEA VI). Contributing to the debate Yates and Tilson (2000) intimate that basic education includes those programmes with alternative curricular such as basic health, nutrition, family planning, literacy, agriculture and other life related and vocational activities. Basic knowledge and skills in the above mentioned areas which contribute to socio-economic and political transformation and eradication of extreme

poverty among adults and their communities is indeed more than reading and writing. Giroux (2005) for example, argues that the practice of critical literacy goes beyond the functional and cultural definitions of literacy that emphasizes decoding and accumulation of facts. In a more explicit exposition of its parameters McKay and Singh (2004) point out that adult basic education (*teaching and learning*) projects aim at enabling adults to improve their skills and knowledge so that they can fully and effectively function in their daily lives and in their social contexts. Basic education programmes strive to engender human values of tolerance, gender justice, and interculturality and serve a range of social, economic and developmental roles. A fundamental aim of such projects is to build the dignity and self-esteem of the learner (McKay & Singh, 2004). Adult education has always been part of humankind but as a discipline it is relatively new with little written about it especially in the developing world where it is most needed. It is for this reason that adult basic education is wrongly and narrowly perceived by some people as only reading and writing. Lamenting on the apparent lack of information regarding what adult basic education consists of, Konwles (1990: 27) intimates

Considering that education of adults has been a concern of the human race for a very long time, it is curious that there has been so little thinking, investigating and writing about adult learning until recently. The adult learner has indeed been a neglected species. This is especially surprising in view of the fact that all the great teachers of ancient times- Confucius, Lao Tse of China, the Hebrew prophets and Jesus Christ in Biblical times, Aristotle, Socrates and Plato in ancient Greece and Cicero, Evelid and Quintillian in ancient Rome- were all teachers of adults, not children.

In this paper I deliberately use the generic term; Adult Education to include both aspects of what others describe as Adult Basic Education and Training(ABET). In other words I conflate the terminology unless where I wish to refer to the concepts more narrowly. The reason being that the use of the term Adult Basic Education to describe one small division of a whole lot of activities might create confusion as to the importance UNESCO attached to Adult Education and the type of activities which come within its scope (Hely1962:35). UNESCO (1976) and the Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (2009) describe adult education as the entire body of

educational processes, whatever the content, level, method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn in a new direction and bring about changes in their attitudes or behaviour in a twofold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development. In reality and in practice adult education is more than just a marginal aspect of education in general because it traverses every degree from the most simple to the most advanced. In purpose adult education traverses every degree from education as an end in itself to education solely as means to other ends (Hely, 1962). GRALE (2009) adds that adult education is a sub-division and an integral part of a global scheme for lifelong education and learning.

The scope of adult education is thus very wide with many facets. It is an all-embracing term that covers all organised provision for the education of adults, whatever the level, motivation and purposes. Adult education is quite flexible in the way it is organised. For example periodic seminars or conferences on health, development projects, community education, leisure, agricultural extension, family planning, child care, skills training (e.g. poultry keeping, carpentry, painting or sculpture), literacy, numeracy, civic and environmental education, cultural activities (traditional songs, dirges, drama or dances), family life education and further training for adults – all fall within the domain and scope of adult education.

According to Kaye and Harry (1982:11) adult education is “the provision of educational facilities and resources outside the context of both the formal schooling system and the professional/vocational training sector, for educationally and socially disadvantaged adults”. Adult Education, in the view of Kaye and Harry (1982), should provide what is needed to help people live better lives and enable them to make full use of existing social, economic and educational facilities as equal members of society. Thus the discipline - adult education- and its practice should equip adults with practical skills which may not only enable them earn a living to reduce extreme poverty but also make them active and more responsible members of their respective communities. In the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adult

basic education provides a critical way of making local poverty reduction and economic development efforts- whether in agriculture, natural resource management, small enterprise or credit mediation- more participant driven, cost effective and locally self-managed and therefore more sustainable(McKay & Singh, 2004).

The scope of adult education is wide and it includes all non-formal, continuous and in-service education activities meant to improve the lives of adults. Grattan (1971:3) affirms that the scope of adult education is wide and encompasses all activities with educational purpose that are carried out by people engaged in the ordinary business of life. The main points in the above definition are that “the activities be purposefully educational, that they be engaged in by adults and that at the same time the adults also be engaged in their ordinary routine”. The description also suggests that there are no limitations on what subject matter adults may study and (that) how they deal with the subject matter can be equally various, the way being wide open to experimentation. Adult education is thus a highly fluid, flexible, multifaceted operation in all its aspects with its activities ranging from vocational, recreational, informational and liberal to political endeavours of adult members of society. Bown and Tomori (1979:17) add that:

Education has to increase people’s physical and mental freedom – to increase their control over themselves, their own lives, and the environment in which they live. The ideas imparted by education or released in the mind through education, should therefore be liberating skills. Adult education thus covers a wide range of educational activities that could assist the individual adult to become a liberated and fully developed citizen of his or her community.

In South Africa ABET includes all that has been referred to above. The difference here is that education and training are integrated into one system (National Department of Education policy document on ABET 1997:3). The underline issue in adult education is to empower adults to transform their lives. Although in assisting adults to transform their lives we use every research method the emphasis is mostly on *Action Research* and *Participatory Research* for local curriculum design which enables adults reflect on local problems that affect them at individual and community levels. As part of research method to improve lives of adults Action

or Participatory Research employed by practitioners becomes didactic. The use of *transect walk* as both research and teaching tool is a case in point.

3. Epistemological and Theoretical Foundations of Basic Education

From the Epistemological point of view the two theorists and strong pillars in the field of adult education are Paulo Freire and Malcolm Knowles. Both Freire's *Critical Pedagogy* and Knowles' *Andragogical theory* provide practitioners with knowledge and guidance and serve as the theoretical basis for basic education- adult teaching and learning. This presentation is therefore grounded in the theories of Freire and Knowles.

Paulo Freire's theory of critical pedagogy involves and emphasises the objective and unbiased reflection on existing knowledge and practice [Glass, 2010: 15]. The underlying principle of the theory is that education should be a process and practice of setting people free from socio-economic and political doldrums. The task of the oppressed is therefore to liberate themselves from the oppressors i.e. the bad situations in which they might find themselves. Freire's critical pedagogy is situated in the life world of participants in basic education because the theory is grounded in dialogue and praxis, reflection and action. Dialogue is an encounter between people who name the world; it is an epistemological process that cannot exist ...in the profound absence of a profound love of the world and for people (Kaufmann, 2010). Indeed it is through dialogue that people gain critical consciousness of their situation, reflect on it and take action to transform it. As Freire (1974: 36) aptly points out critical pedagogy is a call for reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it. Kaufmann (2010) adds that critical consciousness which encompasses being aware of power relations, analyzing habits of thinking, challenging discursive and ideological formations, and taking initiative, is developed in student-centred dialogue that problematizes generative themes from everyday life, topical issues from society, and academic subject matter from specific disciplines.

The theory has great influence on the socio-economically and politically disadvantaged- the oppressed [e.g. the unskilled labourer, the unemployed, the dispossessed, the marginalised, the poor and the vulnerable] men and women in society. Critical pedagogy as a transformative theory gingers the oppressed to seek immediate practical solutions to transform their circumstances through education. From the grass root basic education [i.e. literacy, numeracy,

health care and skills learning] to a highly advanced learning programmes education should liberate adult men and women from ignorance, poverty and helplessness. In Freire's (1974) own words, "every human being, no matter how ignorant or submerged in the culture of silence s/he may be, is capable of learning or has the right to learn". Giroux (2010:2) points out that the theory, *critical pedagogy*, affords people the opportunity to read, write and learn from themselves i.e. to engage in a culture of questioning that demands far more competence than rote learning and application of acquired skills. In other words critical pedagogy advocates for providing adult learners the opportunity to relate learning to their lived experiences and thereby writing themselves in the concrete conditions of the daily lives.

The theory has implications for adult teaching and learning throughout the developing world. Freire's ideas have entered educational discourse from the most cosmopolitan centres to the most remote corners of the earth. He has made enormous contribution to educational transformation in our time because the struggle for socio- economic and political emancipation of the oppressed still draws from Paulo Freire's insights.

The ideas and thoughts expressed in Freire's book, *the Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1974, is as needed today as when it was first articulated and published. The scaring growing income gap between the rich and the poor in our midst today is the consequence of inequality in access to education (Glass 2010). In view of this reality while adult education may be regarded as continuing education in the North (i.e. developed world) here in the South (i.e. in the developing countries) it is mostly seen as a compensatory education to assist the educationally disadvantaged youths and adults to make up the loss. In South Africa in particular although apartheid or discrimination has been scraped from the country's statuses almost all white schools still use language (*Afrikaans*) as a gate keeper to deny and exclude 'the natives'(i.e. non- Afrikaner children) access to better education. The high unemployment, poverty and crime situation in this country today are the direct consequences of denying the indigenous people of this nation access to better education. The situation demands a critical reflection of the education system by all stakeholders if education is to bring about equality and justice and above all address the MDGs. Critical pedagogy as a transformative theory encourages adult educators to inculcate in their learners knowledge and skills for critical reflection through

engaging them in dialogue and activities that may enable adults to critically appraise their situation or circumstances and take action to improve them. Wickett (2005) affirms that transformative learning is based on the learner's ability to acquire new understanding through critical self-reflection. This may result in a new meaning perspective that is more inclusive and integrative of one's understanding of one's experience. Meaningful learning occurs when we follow a process that enables people to examine their relevant life experiences (Wickett, 2005).

Knowles' *andragogical theory* is also of much importance to adult education in general and basic education in particular. The term *andragogy* which refers to the art and science of helping adults to learn was coined by Alex Kapp, a German educationalist, in 1833 but Knowles popularized and extended it into a theory of adult learning in the late 1950s (Chan, 2010). Knowles (1990) premised the theory of *andragogy* on six crucial assumptions about the characteristics of the adult learners that are different from assumptions about child learners. These assumptions are:

- **Self-concept**

Knowles (1990) postulates that as the individual matures his/her self concept moves from being a dependant personality toward one of being a self-directed human being. The adult is thus a self-directed learner who does not need rigid control but guidance and support to achieve a specific learning goal. In his view self directed learning

describes a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies and evaluating learning outcomes(Knowles, 1990).

- **Role of experience**

As a person matures s/he accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning. The repository of an adult's experience is a rich resource for learning. The greatest asset of the adult learner therefore is lived experience because adults learn by drawing from their experiences. The adult comes to the learning situation with a

wealth of experience which should be tapped by the educator to enhance learning. In view of the lived experience of the adult learning becomes a two way affair i.e. the educator learns from the learner and the learner learns from the educator.

- **Readiness to learn**

Adults tend to be ready to learn what they believe they need to know. As volunteers of learning adults come to the learning situation on their own accord with learning needs that must be fulfilled.

- **Orientation to learning**

Adult learners have orientation towards the application of knowledge to immediacy. They learn for immediate application of specific knowledge and skills to solve problems now and not for future. The learning orientation of adults therefore shifts from subject-centred to one of problem- centred or task-oriented which is why adult teaching and learning must be based on problem solving i.e. practical solutions- and not spoon feeding.

- **Motivation to learning**

Adults are intrinsically motivated because they know why they want to learn specific skills. Since adult learners are self-motivated it is incumbent on the educator to organize learning activities around their (learners') needs in order to sustain the motivation for the achievement of learning goals.

- **Need to know**

Although adults are self –motivated they need to know the value of learning and why they need to learn some skills.

The application of the above andragogical principles allows the educator to meet the interest of adult learners in planning learning objectives and activities to solve real-life problems (Chang, 2010).

4. Adult Basic Education: An International Concern

For some decades adult education has been recognised by as an inseparable aspect of citizenship in any democratic community. The difference today is one of degree and added

urgency. Not only is adult education more than ever a national necessity but it has now become a matter of international concern (Hely, 1962:11). The United Nations Organisation since 1945 has organised series of conferences on the need for adult education as an instrument for development especially in the developing countries. The fifth international conference on adult education organised by UNESCO was held in Hamburg (Germany) between 14 and 18 July 1997. The conference, dubbed CONFINTEA V, (Fifth International Conference on Adult Education) was organised by UNESCO Institute of Education. CONFINTEA V, attended by 1, 507 delegates from 135 countries, reaffirmed the importance of adult education in the modern world. The conference emphasised the importance of adult education, especially skills training and literacy, in helping to alleviate extreme poverty and ignorance; consolidating democratic processes, protecting human rights, and promoting creativity, competence, peace and gender equality among all citizens of the world. CONFINTEA V suggested to governments of various countries to ensure that work-related adult education provides the specific competence and skills for entry into the labour market for occupational mobility, and to improve the ability of individuals to take part in diversified models of employment (CONFINTEA V, 1997:34). The conference reaffirmed the fact that everywhere in the world literacy should be a gateway to fuller participation in social, cultural, political and economic life. Since literacy enables individuals to function effectively in their societies the conference suggested that it must be relevant to people's socio-economic and cultural contexts. In 2009 the UN held its 6th international conference on adult education. The conference dubbed CONFINTEA VI which took place in Brazil reiterated the importance of basic education in the contemporary globalised and knowledge based world. Indeed, the various conferences held by the UN on Adult Education are yielding some fruits as they positively continue to direct and influence governments' policies and attitudes towards adult education in general as a tool for transformation, especially in the developing world.

5. A Brief History of Basic Education

5.1 Adult Education during the Ancient Times

Adult basic education as a practice existed in ancient times. As a multi-disciplinary it cuts across history of education and therefore not a new practice. Tracing the origin of writing, Grattan (1971:27) says, "the art of writing first appeared in Mesopotamia and spread from the Indus Valley. It developed to meet the needs of the account keepers in the Temples. Literacy as part of adult basic education spread most widely where a large trading class developed, for this class early discovered writing to be useful in keeping account and conducting communication". In Athens and Rome where the percentage of literate citizens is believed to have been quite high, oral modes of communication played a very large role in adult education. Talk, both informal and purposive, is and always has been a pedagogic instrument or mode of instruction of immense significance to the adult. To many adult minds, talk is the most significantly educative of all forms of communication (Grattan, 1971).

Adult education occupied a unique and important position in ancient Jewish and Greek education systems. Touching on the existence of adult education in ancient Jewish times, Smith (1965:6) says, "The Jewish synagogue was the first school of adults and among the Jews 'popular education' began with the teaching of adults gradually extending down until after six or seven hundred years it reached the child". This indicates that in the ancient Jewish world adult education preceded childhood education.

Venter (1988:36) describes adult education provision among the Romans as early as 500 AD. From a historical stand point, the importance of religious instruction and religiously motivated instruction in adult basic education cannot be over stated. Moses was certainly a teacher transmitting to the people the Ten Commandments and a considerable body of Law besides. The same is true later of Jesus and his disciples and great successors like Paul ... (Grattan, 1971). As noted from Biblical stories, Jesus Christ was an adult educator par excellence who trained, educated and prepared his disciples (adults) as the foundation stone of his new movement - Christianity. Venter (1988) affirms that Christians erected schools of their own, with the result that three institutions for adult education- the Catechumenical, Catechetical and the Episcopal schools- came into being. All the *pupils* of the catechumenical schools were adult converts to the Christian faith whose instruction in Christian life and doctrine was undertaken by the bishop himself (Venter, 1988). This type of adult basic education was most relevant

to the needs of the Jewish society at the time because it offered adults special training in singing, praying and devotional skills. The curriculum covered Biblical history, devotional singing, the Lord's prayer, the doctrine of trinity, the sacraments and so on, according to learners' level of development and progress they had made on the way to membership of the church, which was the ultimate objective of this kind of basic education.

5.2. Early development of adult education in England

The literature on adult education locates the roots of adult basic education far back in the history of humankind, but as Grattan (1971) states; it got its present general shape during the last two centuries under the conditions of industrial society. Smith (1965:4) reports that adult education in England is at least as old as Christianity and may be said to date from the landing in Kent in 597 AD of St Augustine, who came to instruct the English in the new faith. In modern England adult education was started in 1812 by William Smith, a door keeper of the Wesleyan Church who obtained permission to use two rooms on the church premises to teach men and women reading and writing (Smith, 1965). Adult education in England expanded from this humble beginning to the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and the idea of a working men's college in 1854 (Smith 1965). Adult education started to gain popularity in England after 1854. The curriculum of the working men's college covered History, English, Grammar, Bible class, Geography and Arithmetic. Grattan (1971:65) adds that British adult education had its origin in sporadic religiously inspired, philanthropic efforts during the eighteenth century to teach poor working people of all ages to read and understand the Bible and catechism. The classes were usually held on Sunday since that was the only day on which the poor had leisure.

5.3. The development of adult education in South Africa

The history of adult education provision in South Africa presents a unique and pathetic situation. An educational supplement to City Press Newspaper (25-06-95) edition reports that at the political freedom in 1994, "there were over 15 million illiterate adults in South Africa. Some of these people coped well with their daily lives without the skills offered by being

literate, but many did not". This poor state of affairs can be traced to the country's history, though like most of emerging countries South Africa is not alone in its high rate of illiteracy.

The development of adult education in South Africa started with night schools for black South Africans at the beginning of the 20th century. This development of adult education in the form of night schools illustrates a relationship between educational programmes and wider political and ideological interests or considerations. Bird (1984:192) reports that the first effective night school system in South Africa at the beginning of the last century was initiated by the South African Communist Party to train its members for political leadership in the party. Later on following the 1924 conference which launched trade union activities for Africans, party-initiated schools for adults were established under the general direction of the veteran Communist Party leader T W Thibedi who launched a drive against illiteracy. The night schools initiated by the Communist Party taught adults English, Arithmetic and History and were supremely concerned with the political education of their members. The night schools however had to contend with political controls, as well as administrative and financial problems.

As Bird (1984:210) laments, "the carefully orchestrated attacks made by the state on the night school movement were part of a total strategy to implement apartheid". In referring to extracts from parliamentary speeches by famous politicians on the debate concerning the Bantu Education Act of 1953, Christie and Collins (1984:160) offer readers the gist of why some political leaders of South Africa were not in favour of black education in general and adult education in particular. Christie and Collins (1984) report the following: "We should not give the natives an academic education, as some people are too prone to do. If we do this we shall later be burdened with numbers of academically trained Europeans and non-Europeans, and who is going to do the manual labour in the country? I am in thorough agreement with the view that we should so conduct our schools that the native who attends those schools will know that to a great extent he must be the labourer in the country." Herein lies the *raison d'être* for the rigid control over adult education and training in particular and black education in general. In spite of deliberate state controls, regulations and cutting of subsidies, private adult education and training programmes in the form of night schools continued on a minimal scale under the scrutiny and watchful eyes of the state. In 1962 there were 33 night schools and 19 continuation classes with a total enrolment of 2,218 adult learners (Bird,1984).

Writing on some efforts by a tertiary institution in the area of adult education for blacks in the Cape, Harrison (1973:346) reports that the first attempt at adult education in the form of literacy classes was undertaken by the then University Of Good Hope (now UNISA) in 1905 when the University set up

evening classes for an initial 144 adult learners. The adult education activities for the University of Good Hope, however, did not cover most areas of the country. Nor did it offer programmes for illiterate adults. It nevertheless provided a much needed source of education for local people. Harrison (1973) reports further that a national system of adult education was formulated in South Africa after the Second World War as a result of the government's 1945 Eybers report which led to the creation of a division of Adult Education under the Department of Education. A National Advisory Council for Adult Education was then set up to assist in the promotion of art, and the advancement of science, physical education and adult education. The government's effort was, however, a drop in the ocean judging from the fact that no serious effort was made to educate many adult people of the country in literacy and practical skills. Malherbe (1969:7) estimates that in 1969 only about 13,000 persons out of a total African population of 11,000,000 had completed a secondary education and very "Little was done for the large number of African adults who require basic education. In the Republic, the Transkei and in all Territorial Authorities there were only 60 night schools providing primary education) and 21 continuation classes (post primary)(Malherbe, 1969)". Despite the inadequate provision of adult education for all citizens of the country, segregation laws of 1957 and 1962 respectively closed down night schools for domestic and industrial workers in white areas (Malherbe 1969). As reported by Harrison (1973) the Spro-Cas education commission of 1971 "described this step as deplorable and backward" and consequently recommended that "night schools and continuation classes especially for adult Africans be considerably expanded and situated in areas where there is greatest demand for them". This historical survey on adult education in South Africa exhibits a situation of neglect and inadequacy; perhaps it was that poor state of affairs that prompted the 1994 government of National Unity to make Adult Basic Education and Training a priority in order to address this appalling situation.

6. The Context and Rationale for Adult Basic Education and Training in South Africa Today

The estimated 15 million adults, out of the population of 42 million people, who could not read or write, even in their home languages by 1994 were mainly adult black citizens, men and women (City Press, 25/6/95). Most of these adults were rural women who lived in ignorance because of lack of basic education. Many factors including political, cultural and geographical location denied most black children access to education during the apartheid era. Schools for blacks were mostly too far away from farms and small rural holdings where most black families

lived and worked as labourers. Most small children had to walk several kilometres in rain or hot sun in order to attend schools for black children. Moreover in view of the harsh conditions and insecurity in South Africa at the time of apartheid parents could not allow small children, especially girls, to travel on foot through the bush to attend schools which were too far away from their homes. The black schools in the country were also impoverished by the apartheid system which led to millions of black children either dropping out or not enrolling at schools at all. The consequence is that millions of economically active adults (men and women) in the countryside now lack basic knowledge and skills to enable them actively participate in the socio- economic activities of the new South Africa.

Without basic education and training rural black illiterate adults might remain cut off from the social, economic and political activities of the country. The lack of basic knowledge and skills could keep many rural folks, particularly, women in perpetual poverty, dependency and ultimately make them vulnerable to all sorts of abuses within their families and communities. To get adults on board the socio-economic activities political intervention became crucial and in line with constitutional provisions (i.e. *education is a right for all citizens*) a policy for adult basic education and training was enacted in 1997. The policy on Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) was in response to the demand for basic knowledge and skills for millions of adults, especially rural women. The policy framework envisaged;

A literate South Africa within which all its citizens
have acquired basic education and training that enables
them to be effective participants in socio-economic and
political processes and to contribute to the reconstruction,
development and social transformation

(Department of Education,1997:16).

All over the world, the conventional statistics on literacy are useful for benchmarking but they do not reflect the full spectrum of skills associated with reading and numeracy hence UNESCO developed the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP). The LAMP measures levels of literacy among adults. Level one for example indicates that the individual has poor

skills and may be unable to determine the correct dose of medicine to give a child from the label on a package. The LAMP provides robust data on the distribution of reading and numeracy skills within the youth and adult populations. It also delivers information needed to effectively plan and carry out initiatives to improve literacy skills.

7. The Value of Adult Basic Education and Training

Adult basic education and training has a variety of values relating to the individual, the community and the country at large.

7.1 Value of ABET for the individual

- **Skills and knowledge**

Adult basic education and training has much value for the individual. It offers every adult who seeks or requires knowledge and skills access to them. In the words of Kaye and Harry (1982:9) "adult education should encompass ... education for, and by groups involved -- not merely the opening of new channels of access to a form of knowledge and culture designed by the privileged groups in the society for those of a less privileged status, but the encouragement of the less privileged to produce for themselves the knowledge and skills which they need in their struggle". Thus through the provision of basic education and training for adults, individuals can acquire practical skills (e.g. sewing, knitting, painting, building, sculpting, typing, reading or writing) which may enable them to earn a living and become fully independent adult citizens of their respective communities and the nation at large.

- **Adjustment to socio-economic conditions**

Basic education and training for adults could assist individuals to adjust to marital, parental, vocational or socio-economic and political responsibilities. These adjustments involve aspects of education which cannot have any real meaning until the individual is an adult and a mature member of society. It is a fact that most of the things people need to understand in the contemporary modern world are those which adults can fully grasp hence the need for adult basic education to enable adults to understand the world, its changes and challenges in order to adjust well to them. If adults are to understand the changes which are taking place today and the problems they create; if they are to have the knowledge which will enable them to control their effects, adults must recognize that their education can never be

complete (Hely, 1962). Surely all education must be a process of adjustment of each individual to the world around him or her. However, since his or her world does not remain constant but keeps on changing, and since the individual is one of the potential agents of change, adjustments should be a continuous process and not something which can be accomplished all at once during the stages of childhood or youth. This is the sentiment which underlies the South African government's intention to make lifelong learning a part of the adult education programme.

- **Intellectual curiosity, freedom and leisure**

Adult basic education and training has value in creating an atmosphere of intellectual curiosity, social freedom and tolerance, and stimulates in adults the demand and ability to take part in the development of the cultural life of their day. ABET can also make adults confident in whatever task they have to perform, and thus break down the barrier of psychological fear -- which makes some adults too powerless and impotent to discharge their duties to the full. With the leap in individual advancement many people have become lonely as family members are often apart from each other discharging professional or economic duties. ABET offers the lonely adult worthwhile activities like learning to play the organ or piano, paint, weave, knit, cook or garden, write short stories or poetry, or study some aspects of their own traditions and culture. ABET thus provides education for leisure.

- **Retraining and change of career**

ABET has value in assisting individuals to change their circumstances, status or professions. Many adults find themselves in professions and careers that no longer pay well or are less lucrative on the job market. Others are losing jobs because automation does away with the demand for unskilled labour and replaces it with skilled technologists. Today no one is more helpless than the mass production factory worker who sees automation dispense with his services on the conveyor belt. Technology is bound to move in the direction of automation, for one of its principles is that manpower should never be dissipated by being used to do what machines can do because manpower is too costly and too precious (Hely, 1962). Such a principle however cannot be understood nor appreciated by the hundreds and sometimes thousands of workers thrown out of work by technology.

Another task of ABET therefore is to help men and women understand the factors behind the instability of vocational life and to assist them to acquire attitudes and values based on flexibility and willingness to change, and to make provision for the retraining of adults, which takes into account their needs, abilities and interests and also the new type of vocational opportunities which are opening up. Thus the accelerating rate of change has focussed international attention on the inadequacy of formal education in childhood and on the need for further education throughout life (Hely,1962). In this way adult basic education and training could be seen as a road to an improvement in financial status. As a vocational education it may assist adults to diversify their skills, know more and perhaps earn more.

- **Provision of education and training opportunities**

Adult basic education and training could provide educational opportunities for individual adults who for various reasons have failed to obtain, or missed, formal schooling. Part of ABET's work deals with remedial education whereby adults "polish" or add to what they learnt some time before. It offers adults opportunities to learn new skills or broaden their interest and keep their intellectual faculties alert and flexible. ABET thus includes a wide range of activities by which men and women attempt to satisfy their thirst for knowledge and skills. It is a fact that no matter how effective the contemporary schooling may be it can never fully prepare youths to meet the world as it will be when they are adults. The fundamental function of adult education therefore is to keep the balance between people and circumstances in the changing world. Thus ABET as part of the general lifelong education has a supplementary role to play in keeping professionals up to date in their various careers. Grattan (1971) sums up the value of ABET for the individual as follows:

- to educate the whole person
- to keep our minds open
- to base our judgement on facts
- to prepare for new occupations
- to ensure social stability.
- to direct social change
- to improve teachers and teaching
- to enlarge our horizons

Adult basic education and training is needed because it is only through it that the full development of human potentialities be achieved for the achievement of the MDGs.

7.2 Value of ABET for the community

- **Community building**

The various skills and knowledge that ABET offers adults may assist them to initiate development projects to advance their communities instead of always waiting for government to come to develop their areas for them. Quoting from Sir John Maud's speech at the 1949 UNESCO conference on what adult education could do for citizens of an emergent country, Hely (1962) writes:

But now we find ourselves having apparently achieved power and not knowing how to use it. The need which adult education, I would suggest, must today above all things, is this need to find significance in our work, to find significant creative possibilities as citizens of our country, as citizens of the world, can be discharged. If, indeed, adults were to have control over the changes taking place in the world around them then they would need to be well informed through adult basic education and training in order to exert their influence wisely within the frame work of democratic political institutions. Thus education for civic responsibility could only be achieved through adult basic education and training.

'To educate is to liberate' and therefore the task of adult education is to provide individual adults with the knowledge essential for the performance of their economic, social and political functions and especially to enable them, through participation in the life of their communities, to aspire to a fuller and more harmonious life.

- **Assisting community members to understand change**

An important value of adult basic education and training is to assist communities and their members to understand the nature of change and to recognise the extent to which they themselves can shape and fashion it and to control its effects. We live in an era of rapid and constant change. Community members should become aware of this fact and accept modernisation, which is concomitant to changes in the contemporary world. Kanyile (1988) contends that traditional communities and cultures have to change in order to modernise and

adult education programmes have a role to play in changing a culture. To a very large extent the adaptation of African cultures to the modern way of life can be better achieved through the provision of adult basic education and training.

7.3 Value of ABET for the country

- **Fast economic development.**

Adult basic education and training has a great contribution to make towards the economic development of a country. The fact is that adults could use their newly acquired knowledge and skills at once for the benefit of a country, whereas years would pass by before children reached that stage where they could practically use the knowledge and skills acquired. ABET therefore has a speedier effect on a country's economic development than educating children in school. The whole point of adult education is to help people to contribute to, promote and participate in national development (Bown and Tomori, 1979).

- **Basic quality education for citizens.**

The UN conference (CONFINTEA V) held in Hamburg, Germany in July 1997 recognised and reaffirmed the role of adult basic education in responding to profound changes taking place in various countries of the world. In most democratic countries, including South Africa, (basic) education is a right and should act as a means by which adult citizens of all races who are educationally underprivileged may gain the knowledge and skills to survive in the ever changing contemporary world. The government's new policy on adult basic education and training (1997:7) states that "ABET must be understood within the overarching goal of building a just and equitable system which provides good quality education and training to adult learners throughout the country". Adults thus can utilise the knowledge and skills gained from ABET to press for the building of a more humane society.

- **Improvement of manpower needs**

ABET has value in improving the manpower needs of a country. It offers in-service training or continuing education programmes for modern manpower needs of emergent countries. At independence most African countries had few highly-skilled personnel. As less skilled people are on the job in the various sectors of the economy, additional specialised education and training in management and technology must be given to them, as adults, in order to equip workers to cope with the new tasks and national responsibilities entrusted to them. This affirms the South African government's policy on ABET (1997) which points out that one value of adult basic education and training is to create a literate South Africa within which all its citizens have acquired basic education and training that enables effective participation in socio-economic and political processes to contribute to reconstruction, development and social transformation.

8. Some Impact of Basic Education on the lives of People in South Africa

Illiteracy is a stumbling block to development. As Aitchison and Alidou (2008:1) intimate, "illiteracy has several social implications such as low productivity and lower incomes which has some linkage with HIV/AIDS and therefore has effect on all national development efforts."

Recognising the fact that illiteracy negatively impacts on the country's development as a nation the South African government decided to launch a literacy campaign, dubbed *Kha Ri Gude* [let us learn] in 2007, to fast-track literacy delivery. The plan was necessary because South Africa's system of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) was not reducing the number of illiterates and functional illiterates in spite of the constitutional right of all South Africans to basic education in their own language. At the time of launching the Campaign, there were about 4.7 million total illiterates (who have never been to school) and another 4.9 million adults who were to varying degrees functionally illiterate (they dropped out of school before grade 7) – a total of 9.6 million (McKay, 2011). The provinces most affected by illiteracy are KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, Limpopo, and to a lesser extent, Gauteng, Mpumalanga and the North West. For example, KwaZulu-Natal has 1.1 million adults with no schooling and another 1 million who are functionally illiterate. The distribution of illiterate adults who are disabled follows a similar pattern. Illiteracy statistics reflect the apartheid era patterns of "racial" disadvantage. Sex

differentiation is not as skewed although in 2001 women represented 60% of the unschooled (McKay, 2011).

The Campaign was to target both the truly illiterate (the unschooled) and those who dropped out of school too early to have developed functional literacy. The plan targets all of the totally unschooled who are educable and many of the functionally illiterate (a potential total pool of about 7.6 million). To reach the Dakar goal of a 50% reduction in illiteracy amongst 9.6 million people, some 4.7 million people are the immediate target of this plan in the years 2008 to 2012 (McKay, 2011). The drastic reduction of illiteracy figures from 15 million in 1994 to 4.7 million in 2010 has been possible largely because of the partnership between UNISA's Department of Adult Basic Education and Training [ABET] and the national department of education. As its contribution to the eradication of illiteracy, unemployment and poverty the University of South Africa established an academic department for Adult Basic Education and Training. The ABET department has since trained over thousand educators to teach adults in the various communities basic education. The training of basic education facilitators for all adults by the UNISA ABET department resonates with the UNESCO's (1990) education for ALL and provides a platform and an impetus for achieving the goals of the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action. The provision of basic education for adults also coalesces with the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development which is intended to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals on poverty reduction, women's empowerment, HIV and AIDS and Environment Conservation (McKay, 2011) and the reduction of illiteracy by 50% by 2015.

Through the provision of basic education millions of adults in the country have acquired reading, writing, numeracy and job related skills. Most of these adults have created their own jobs and even employ others to work with them. On follow up visits to some of the ABET centres in the provinces in course of this year I observed that most of the adults who acquire basic education have become entrepreneurs. In most rural communities they have opened small businesses ranging from tuck shops, restaurants, child care centres, hair salons, dress making, knitting, poultry keeping to fruit and vegetable sales. This, to a very large extent, contributes to the reduction in unemployment and its concomitant social problems. The self-

employment initiative also assists, particularly single parents, to put food on the table, pay school fees and buy clothes for children.

Basic education plays meaningful role in socio-economic and political activities of the country. Apart from basic skills such as reading, writing and numeracy, it enhances HIV AIDS awareness, prevention and care, family planning (safe sex and birth control). For example basic education makes adults, particularly women, aware of the socio-economic consequences of have many children and enables them to reduce and space child birth. On the 31/10/11 the world was told that we are now 7 billion and basic education has a crucial role to play in controlling population growth locally and globally.

Basic education has also made most adults confident and more skilled. Most adults, particularly in the rural areas, are able to operate ATM, cell phones, write letters, read the Bible, sing in the choir and sign documents at the Bank, Post Office, Home Affairs and other offices.

As the basis for lifelong learning ABET gives adults the foundation for further studies in skills training and academic programmes. On a follow up visit to ABET centres in the rural communities of Taung in August this year I met over 60 adult learners who passed ABET Level 4 and have enrolled for FET courses in basic carpentry, electrical works, brick laying, building and painting of houses. The examples here illustrating some impact of basic education indicate the crucial role ABET plays not only as tool for transformation but also the basis for lifelong learning.

9. Conclusion

It is very sad that despite the role ABET is playing in the socio-economic and political life of South Africa many universities in the country do not offer courses in basic and or adult education. Realising the important role of basic education in the socio-economic and political transformation of the country, the new Minister for Higher Education is taking steps to entrench adult basic education as one of the priority areas in the country's development. UNISA has already demonstrated its commitment to the eradication of illiteracy and the establishment of the basis for lifelong learning through the creation of ABET as a department. In line with the

Ministry of Higher Education's effort it is my prayer that UNISA would continue to see basic education as an important tool for transformation and provide the department of Adult Basic Education with the necessary academic, financial and material support to teach adults for socio-economic transformation of South Africa. Now that ABET is put under Higher Education we hope to succeed.

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