

IMPACT OF THE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME IN ALLEVIATING POVERTY AMONG REMOTE AREA RESIDENTS

Reginald Oats

University of Botswana

Private Bag 00702 Gaborone, Botswana.

reginald.oats@mopipi.ub.bw

Abstract

This paper reports findings a qualitative case study located within the interpretative paradigm which investigated the impact of the Skills Development Programme (SDP) in alleviating poverty among disadvantaged communities in remote areas of the Kgalagadi District in Botswana. The study is informed by the bioecological theory. Ten (10) graduates of the SDP and 3 officers who are also trainers were the respondents. The study used purposeful sampling to identify participants. Data was collected through means of individual interviews and observation. The results indicated that there were improvements in the beneficiaries' knowledge and understanding of economic activities they were engaged on. Along the same, participants disclosed that after undergoing training they produced improved products which are better marketable. As such the study makes a conclusion that SDP is a vital tool to alleviate poverty among disadvantaged communities as it empowers them with knowledge and skills to produce products capable of sustaining their livelihoods. Findings also show that beneficiaries have several challenges that hamper the advance of their initiatives such as transportation to markets and difficult terrain. As such amongst the recommendations made are, that there is immediate need for the Government of Botswana to refocus its initiatives towards giving extra help to assist beneficiaries of the SDP with transport and market acquisition if sustainability has to be realized.

Key words: adult education, skills development, entrepreneurship, remote area dwellers, ESD, case study research, qualitative research, poverty eradication, bioecological theory.

Introduction

In an endeavour to ensure that all Botswana are embraced by the national principle of democracy, self-refinance development, unity and *botho*, the government of Botswana took a strategic decision to provide education to the out of school population at basic level. This population includes people who did not get the opportunity to get basic education for one reason or the other. As such the Government of Botswana introduced the National Literacy Programme (BNLP) launched in 1981 as a major adult literacy initiative. From initial stages, literacy was defined as reading, writing and calculating. Conversely, over the years of implementation, literature showed that provision of the 3Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic) is not sufficient and that there was need to make literacy functional in order to be useful to the learners in their daily lives (Motiki, 2006).

Consequently, the Ministry of Education and Skills Development introduced Income generating projects to the National Literacy Programme with a purpose to make literacy functional. The aim of this study was to investigate the performance of trainees of the skills development programme in achieving their initial goals before training. The study also wanted to investigate the challenges faced by those who participated in the skills development programme in the settlement areas of the Kgalagadi district.

Background of the study

At independence in September 1966, Botswana was young, poor and had a fragile democracy. The education system at independence was inherited from the British who had colonized and ruled Botswana from 1885 to 1966. The inherited education system had several features which were not applicable and therefore not beneficial to Botswana (Oats, 2014). The outcome of this condition was that the then government had a huge task to revitalize, restructure and design an education system that would be relevant to the nation and bring about a shift in the country's social, economic and political outlook.

Prior to Botswana's attainment of self-rule adult education was provided on a very small scale by different organizations (governmental and Non-governmental). At that time, literacy classes were conducted by community development assistants, who worked under the direction of welfare office in the Department of Education in collaboration with other stakeholders (Bagele *et al* 2003:5). It was for this deficiency that at attainment of independence the provision of universal access to basic education became a key element and priority for the Government of Botswana (Motiki, 2006). As such several educational policies and programmes have been instituted over the years (National Policy on Education, 1977, Revised National Policy on Education, [RNPE] 1994, Vision 2016 of 1996, Inclusive Education Policy, 2012 and the National Literacy Programme, 1981). The Revised National Policy on Education framework for educational development in Botswana was the most important document as it clearly laid foundation for the implementation of various educational programmes including the National Literacy Programme (NLP).

Initially, the NLP was officially launched in 1981 as the largest government sponsored programme for non-formal education or adult education as it was sometimes called. By then the programme was primarily intended to compliment the formal school system by promoting access to education for out-of-school population and, in particular, by enabling the illiterate men, women and youth to become literate in Setswana and numeracy? in six years, 1980-85"why the inverted commas here? (Ministry of Education, 1979). Covertly, the NLP aimed to eradicate historical socio-economic inequalities and high adult illiteracy rates which had been engendered by a colonial education system that had only been accessible to a privileged few (Government of Botswana, 2012). In addition, the NLP also wanted to create a cohort of educated people with skills to meet the demands of a developing, rapidly changing society and economy as well as to empower previously disadvantaged and marginalised communities in order to enable them to be self-reliant and to improve their standard of living. In order to

achieve these fundamental goals, the Department of Non-Formal Education (DNFE) – a government institution which was charged with the responsibility of developing and implementing non-formal educational projects in the country – adopted an integrated and comprehensive approach to the implementation of the NLP. As such, the NLP covered components such as Basic Literacy, the Literacy at the Workplace Project, Income Generating Projects, the Village Reading Rooms Project, and English as a Second Language.

The skills development programme came to the fore in 2010 effectively to give priority to literacy activities in relation to the creation of a literate environment and informed sector development (Government of Botswana, 2012). The programme provides learners with production and income generating skills such as leather works, basketry, pottery, weaving, baking, dress making, food production, survival or life skills programme, computer skills and entrepreneurial development. To implement the programme productively, the ministry of education, in particular the Out of School Education and Training unit (OSET) works closely with institutions like BOTA in full and MTTC to assist with training and accreditation of programme beneficiaries. This study as such aims to investigate into the impact of the programme in alleviating poverty among disadvantaged communities in remote Kgalagadi District. The word Kgalagadi means "land of the thirst". The district is in the south-western part of Botswana, lying along the country's border with Namibia and South Africa. The remote areas in the district are detached from the mainstream of socio-lingual, socio-economic and socio-political activities, due to inadequate infrastructural development, low level of education of most people, minimal opportunities for economic advance, and lack of information and knowledge about various opportunities that exist in the country. This is in line with government of Botswana (2012) declaration that the skills development programme as one of the programmes offered by OSET serves as a vehicle for poverty eradication through provision of requisite vocational and entrepreneurial skills to the out of school population. The out of school population in Botswana faces a challenge of unemployment and deteriorating living standards, however females in this category face a double challenge because of the vulnerabilities that are associated with their gender. Therefore the study established the rate at which each sex is represented in the SPD, factors that influenced participants to enrol as well as the impact the programme has changed lives of each sex category.

Importance of the study

The importance of this study is to find out the impact of the SDP in alleviating poverty among remote area inhabitants in the Kgalagadi district. The study is informed by the Government of Botswana's recommendation through RNPE of 1994 (Republic of Botswana, 1994) that the Department of Non-Formal Education should; "Give greater priority to functional literacy activities, particularly in relation to the development of a literate environment and support to productive activities in relation to traditional agriculture and the informal sector. The recommendation indicated that the learning of literacy by the participants should serve to empower them by providing them access to opportunities for work-related challenges and productive activities thus education for self-reliance.

Statement of the problem

The aim of this study was to investigate the impact of the skills development programme in alleviating poverty among remote inhabitants in the Kgalagadi District. Kgalagadi District is one of the widest districts and least developed in Botswana with majority of its people based at settlements areas receiving hand-outs from Government. For the just ended Millennium Development Goals, education was regarded as a tool to empower both male and female to enable them out of poverty. For the new agenda which is embraced in the Sustainable Development Goals, education is still considered to be a key player in poverty eradication as well as a playing a pivotal role in realising all the other sustainable development goals. Botswana is faced with a challenge of high unemployment rates.

Unemployment that leads to poor living standards in Botswana is a problem for both the Degree holders and secondary school leavers. However, for those with very low levels of education, or none at all it is a big challenge to find jobs. As already been attested to in the background, most of the remote areas in Kgalagadi are detached from the mainstream socio economic activities. Therefore, the population is characterized by low levels of education, minimal opportunities for economic advancement, and lack of information and knowledge about various opportunities that exist in the country. There is also indication that in Botswana, settlements in the South West region and Kgalagadi are characterized by high levels of poverty with women headed households with many dependents found in deep pockets of vicious cycle of poverty. As a matter of fact, when government initialised the skills development programme and build a training centre in Kang, there was hope for the region. It was in the interest of this study to find out whether the skills development programme indeed assisted the remote area inhabitants by improving their economic status. The study explored the experiences of the participants to establish the impact of the skills development programme in alleviating poverty.

Objectives of the study

The study was informed by the following objectives:

1. To find out the views of participants about the skills development programme in alleviating poverty.
2. To investigate into the challenges faced by participants after completing their training on skills development.
3. To find out their views about the SDP curriculum

Theoretical framework

This study utilised the Bronfenbrenner (1977)'s bioecological systems model as a theoretical instrument so as to demonstrate understanding on the impact of interaction between people based at remote areas and national practices, government support, and environmental conditions by viewing them as systems in themselves (Landsberg, Kruger & Swartz, 2011). According to this theory, development takes place within four (4) nested systems of microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. These systems all have points of contact. This paper positions itself on the microsystem and macrosystem only. With regard to the microsystem, there is close interaction between the family as the first institution all people belong to, and the local community. These relationship contributes to a great extend in the final product that comes out of the inhabitants of a particular locality. At the macro-level, there are factors such as economic, social structures alongside with values and believe systems of particular communities (Donald, e.t al, 2012). For instance if communities in remote areas are not equipped with necessary support resources or they fail to support their projects and initiatives because of poverty and challenges such as transport to markets, the effect will be experienced through the constant deterioration or their motivation to work hard and the decline in project performance and skills obtained. This is given the fact that the influence of the macro-level penetrates through all other layers (Tabane, 2014).

Literature review

SDP curriculum structure in Botswana

The skills development programme offered by the Ministry of Education and Skills Development through the Out of School and Training (OSET) unit serves as a vehicle for poverty alleviation. The programme achieves this endeavor through provision of requisite vocational and entrepreneurial skills to the out of school population under the department of basic education (Government of Botswana, 2014). The programme is demand driven and as such is open to a wide spectrum of adults and youth who want to be trained on vocational and entrepreneurial skills of their interests. Though open to a wide spectrum of populace, the programme specifically targets; adults basic education and out of school education learners, the illiterate and those who have never attended school and youth who dropped out before completing primary education. The aims of the programme according to Government of Botswana (2014) are to:

- Provide learners with skills, knowledge and attitudes that would allow them to adapt to a work situation.
- Assist in preparing learners for employment, self-employment, or and further education.
- Develop a learner's ability and attitude to network with others including finances
- Develop entrepreneurial skill
- Eradicate poverty.

The programme offers skills development in the areas of agriculture, art and design, design and technology, home economics and business management. Most of the training is administered at OSET lifelong learning education centers located at Kang and Maun, however other training is conducted at different regions of the Ministry of Education and

Skills Development. When learners are competent in the skills acquired they are recommended to the accrediting institutions of Botswana Qualification Authority (BQA) and Madirelo Training and Testing Center (MTTC) which is accredited by BQA. It is hoped the accreditation will make them marketable.

The above goals and practices are related to the Indonesian goals on building local capacity through the functional literacy programme. The Indonesian government aims to develop the ability of learners making use of literacy skills to solve problems and meet learning needs in daily life. The programme is learner-centred rather than book centered (2012). This means that the learning activities in Indonesia focus on helping learners reaching/obtaining goals and skills that are relevant to their personal needs and interests. Their programme identifies three stages for literacy learning and recommends that learners participate for at least three years to achieve the programme goal. The first stage is for building basic skills (*Pemberantasan* or “eradication of illiteracy”). The second stage is for guiding the learners in how to use their literacy skills to solve problems and find information in daily life (*Pembinaan* or “guided learning”). The third stage is for developing self-learning capacity (*Pelestarian* or “lasting or continuous learning”).

Conceptualization of functional literacy

Functional illiteracy is imprecisely defined, with different criteria from nation to nation, and study to study (Giere, 1987). However, a useful distinction can be made between pure illiteracy and functional illiteracy. Purely illiterate persons cannot read or write in any capacity, for all practical purposes. In contrast, functionally illiterate persons can read and possibly write simple sentences with a limited vocabulary, but cannot read or write well enough to deal with the everyday requirements of life in their own society.

Based on the above observation, through the last decade some issues on the provision of literacy emerged. The first is whether literacy should be a means to achieve an end or should be the end on its own (Omolewa, 2000). Authors such as Katohori et al (2002) indicate that the skills of literacy are not ends in themselves but need to serve some purpose and practice that is important for their users. For this reason, UNESCO (2003) augmented? by this comes clearly in anada below para. CHECK)encouraging the debate on the launching of functional literacy to supplant the traditional literacy of the sixties. The whole idea was that countries should not restrict literacy promotion to the acquisition of literacy skills, but should proceed to the adoption and use of the skills for improved livelihoods as stated by Oxenham *et al* (2002). The second issue has been the question of the limitation of literacy in economic development. The view that literacy cannot necessarily generate employment opportunities or provide bread on the table for families became common in the 1980,s (Omolewa 2000).

The World Conference held in Jomtein, Thailand on Education For All (EFA) in 1990 indicated the importance of education for all by emphasizing that, "education is a fundamental right and that for countries to succeed they have to educate their people so as to sustain growth and reduce poverty" (Muller 2000:29). Consequently, the Botswana National Literacy Programme incorporated entrepreneurial training programmes in the literacy

programme as mentioned by VIE (2004:44). As highlighted by Kgoroba (2002), it has been realised that the provision of literacy skills alone is not enough. As such there was need to consider in programme development the fact that the characteristics of functional illiteracy vary from one individual to the other, and from one culture to another. Consequently, kind of repeating UNESCO encouraged countries to provide functional literacy to supplement traditional approaches. The idea was that countries should not restrict the acquisition of literacy skills to the 3Rs, but should encompass the use of skills for economic and social advancement.

It should however, be noted that the current concept of functional literacy is more than mere economic skills. It has come to have three elements, which are "literacy, functionality and awareness" (Wagner 2000). The literacy component focuses on the skills of reading, writing and numeracy. The functionality component deals with economic skills. Economic skills are typically taught within the context of income generating projects. The awareness component creates awareness among learners in regard to their social, cultural and political life. All the mentioned components of functional literacy are important in the teaching of income generating skills as indicated in the evaluation of the Home Economics Programmes by SIAPAC- Africa (1990). Here they found that the provision of the 3Rs was essential in effective running of the income generating projects (Motiki, 2006).

Muller (2000) reiterated that adult education programmes that contribute to income generation also appear to be much more effective than those that have a narrow focus on reading, writing and numeracy. This means emphasis on economic functionality has an important implication. The implication is that economic rewards will be more motivating to adults as they are more easily attracted to functional literacy classes than to literacy classes that do not teach economic skills as also identified by Oxenham *et al* (2002). Other reasons for incorporating income generating activities to literacy programmes are noted in studies such as those conducted by Scarborough and Zimmerer (1996) and SIAPAC (1990) where income generating members mentioned that they started the projects because they see the projects as an opportunity to make a difference in their lives, enabling them to contribute to rural development and in projects operated by groups, other members joined in order to socialise. It has also been pointed out by Scarbourogh and Zimmerer (1996) that still others are engaged in income generating project for recognition by their communities.

Rogers (2000) emphasises that literacy programmes that support income generating-projects should link the literacy learnt in classes with the project's activities because in most programmes he studied in Africa, income generating project members were attracted into literacy programmes because of the provision of income generating skills. As Rogers *et al* (1999) highlighted "adults learn literacy skills best when learning for a purpose and that this purpose needs to be built into the learning programme." What is meant here is not about adults using their literacy skills in classroom exercises which were set by the facilitator. Rather about adults deciding for themselves what they want to learn. This implies that literacy programmes need to encourage learners' participation because as the ex-president of Tanzania Nyerere (1980) believed, people's participation in the planning and the decision-

making process of their own development through literacy education is a way of empowering them. Making a further reference to empowerment, President Nyerere observed that, "if people are to develop, they must have power.

Methods

Qualitative research strategies were followed employing focus group discussions, individual interviews and observation. The study used open-ended questions with a combination of semi-structured and unstructured items. Specifically, semi-structured items were used when interviewing education officer/trainers. Semi structured items were chosen for one-on-one interviews because they would allow for probing beyond the answers given by participants to prepared questions (Bacon and Allyn, 2006). The interview technique is seen beneficial for this study based on that it allowed collection and utilization of gestures and facial expressions demonstrated during interviews to add influence to data generated. Focus group interviews were used for obtaining general background information about the topic and as such helped provide general background information on the impact of the skills development programme in alleviating poverty among remote area inhabitants in the Kgalagadi North sub-district. Focus group interviews are essential in the evaluation process and during a programme to gather perceptions on the outcome of such programme (Patton, 1999). The approach was considered for it is cost-effective and time efficient in terms of gathering primary data (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

The researchers also employed observation techniques to confirm the responses detained through focus group discussions and individual interviews. Thus researchers' had an opportunity to visit different projects participants engaged to witness the quality of products being made and environments in which they are working. We therefore had an opportunity to observe projects in their own settings and have a chance to study the total situation. These techniques are deemed to be capable of complimenting and reinforcing each other and as such could add validity to findings of the study.

Population of study

The study targets beneficiaries of the SDP programme who are based at remote areas in the Kgalagadi north sub-district.

Sample and sampling techniques

Ary, Jacobs & Razavieli (2002) posit that sampling is an important and integral element in any research study. A sufficient sample provides a representative section of the target population and hence permits a legitimate generalization of the data obtained. When addressing the issue of selection of the research sites. This study used probability sampling in particular simple random sampling approach to select four (4) remote settlements out eight (8) settlements found in the Kgakadagi North sub-district. Simple random sampling was preferred because it allowed each unit in the sample identified to have an equal chance of

being selected. Further, simple random sampling was utilised because it permits the selection of each unit independent of the selection of every other unit and increases validity in the study. Simple random sampling was used further to identify ten (12) participants from the settlements selected to form participants for the study. To realise this task, names of all beneficiaries of the SDP were obtained from the regional office according to their localities and five (3) selected from each settlement. It is believed that this sample was representative enough of the whole population of beneficiaries in the area.

For the trainers/education officers at Kang centre, purposeful sampling was used to make certain that those trainers handpicked are familiar with the programme to help illuminate the purpose of the study. Patton (1990) concurs that purposeful sampling is a non-random method of sampling where the researcher selects “information-rich” cases for in-depth study. This means that information-rich trainers in this case are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of this research which is the impact of the SDP in alleviating poverty among people based at remote areas of the kgalagadi district.

Findings and discussion

This study sought to explore the impact of the skills development program in alleviating poverty among remote area disadvantaged communities of the Kgalagadi region in Botswana. In attempt to answer the demands of the study, education officer and graduates of the skills development programme were used as participants. Data were analysed and developed into categories, themes and patterns pertinent to the study objectives as drawn from sources of data. This section therefore presents the findings and discussions in accord with themes derived from research objectives.

Participants views about the SDP

Findings show that the skills development programme is deemed a great initiative by participants across the sample divide. One participant said thus, *‘The programme is indeed a great initiative capable of alleviating illiteracy and poverty among people in remote areas’*. The other one said, *‘for us in disadvantaged remote areas, a programme like the SDP is a great opportunity to enlighten us on various skills from our indigenous knowledge fountain.’* The participant further indicated that the traditional education system in Botswana used to expose learners/young people to diverse skill under the principle of utilitarianism which enabled them to acquire skill and appreciation on various skills. As such according to this participant the SDP squarely aims to further what the traditional education system in Botswana started. Adeyemi and Adeyinka, (2002) confirm that traditional education in various African countries involved different kinds of games, including wrestling and running, training for healthy living, cooking, dressing, hunting, farming, carpentry, training to become a smith, drumming, dancing, marriage counselling and critical thinking form part of the traditional curriculum at different stages of the life of the youth. In Botswana specifically, Oats (2014) indicates that initiation schools were used as training centres where children

were prepared for adult roles in their respective communities to capacitate them to fit into their communities and live productively. In addition, Batswana utilised the principle of wholisticism/multiple learning which enabled young people to acquire a variety of skills which made them productive in many ways.

In a nut shell, all the participants unanimously agreed that indeed the skills development programme has benefit to people in remote areas. This notion came across clearly in the comment from the education office representative, who maintained, *“I think SDP target all adult learners and out of school populace, while priority maybe predominantly given to learners who are enrolled in our programmes but we still admit anyone with interests in developing their skills and competencies”*. It is thus evident that the programme is ideal in remote areas where majority of people have not had an opportunity for schooling for various reasons. People in locations which are a distance from goods and services tend to be socially and economically disadvantaged in terms of their access to goods and services (Department of Primary IE and DSHS, 1994).

Based on the above observation that majority of people in remote areas have not had enough access to schooling and education, the SDP is in line with UN Global report on adult and education of 2009 which views learning as a fundamental human right and requires every child, youth, and adult to learn life skills to address personal, socio-cultural, political, environmental challenges in their local and global contexts (UNESCO), 2009). As such the programme has capacity in terms of its content to empower people in disadvantaged communities to acquire skills to better their livelihoods as individuals, groups and communities. This came through very clearly as one participant who had done training in metal work said:

the programme is like God given to us in remote areas because we are disadvantaged and alienated from a range of national benefits, some of us were interested in schooling to the highest level but we found ourselves in remote areas from which it is very difficult or rather impossible to reach places with secondary schools to advance our studies.

From the preceding response it can be deduced that indeed the skills development programme is on track to realise the mandate of the OSET which is to provide quality education to all in line with government mandate of ensuring that all Batswana are embraced by the four goals of democracy, development, and unity and self- reliance. The programme is also in line with the UN EFA goals which are to ensure that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes (goal 3) and Goal 4 which aims to achieve a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults (UNESCO, 2000).

The SDP and poverty alleviating prospects

This part of the article is specific towards finding views of participants with perspective to the potential of SDP in alleviate poverty among people who live in remote areas of Botswana. As such participants were asked to share their views on whether or not the programme content helped them run their projects. Mixed feelings were recorded from participants.

In response, participants pointed out that they have so much faith in the potential of the programme in addressing personal and societal needs of inhabitants in remote areas. This came out very evidently from one participant who ranted that since graduating in dressing making her livelihood has changed tremendously. The participant further said, *'before I went for training, I had very little skills in dress making and as such though I used to make clothes it was not that profitable because quality was questionable. But after training the quality of clothes improved as well as my work speed'*. The participant pointed out that they now make better goods and their work speed has also improved and as such can now make many goods and sell within a shorter period of time'.

For another participant who also trained in dress making, the programme helped her a lot in that she learned about measurement in dress making. When asked to explain her point further, she had this to say, *'one outstanding lesson from the programme is that I learnt how to make proper measurements and design before making clothes. Before undertaking training I just used to cut clothes based on my experience and look of eyes but now I know the need for proper measurement and I too obtained the skill to do so'*. The participant further indicated that now there are less complains from clients based on quality products they get from her. This is given that making accurate body measurements is one of the keys to great fit because having accurate measurements is critical to the success of one's business initiatives and to the success of everything one makes (Clothing Patterns 101, 2016). From the participants response it appears that the participant indeed benefited from the programme and livelihood has improved to some extent.

While most graduate participants felt the programme was a great move to alleviate poverty among people in remote areas, education officer who oversee the programme were reluctant to agree with this. In terms of programme content they felt the programme was relevant but had a challenge on practicality. Education officers were asked to share on whether the programme is capable of alleviating poverty among disadvantaged communities in their area. One officer said,

'according to me while the programme is a good initiative, its challenge is that it is not literate sensitive in that anyone can enrol and at times those who have never attended schooling have a challenge in grasping some concepts and skills and as such after training they fail to implement such skills and concepts'.

Similar ideas of functional literacy were echoed by another education officer who said, *"Our programme is very relevant in today's life because it allows potential candidates to enrich their god given potentials and equip them with relevant skills and competencies to produce goods with a view to improve their livelihood. According to this officer, as shown in the*

above extract, the programme is necessary and relevant because it assists in the beneficiaries' professional development, as well as focuses developing their entrepreneurial skills. In democracy like Botswana, Gastil (1994) posits that democratic leadership accentuates empowerment of all individuals. Besides, democratic states are expected to offer opportunities for all sections of the populace.

One graduate of the programme added,

“For example, after one week training with OSET I was able to utilise my god given talent to take my project to greater heights. OSET took me to a training workshop at Kang for a week on full sponsorship and we were taken through training in bakery and my skills were developed drastically. Presently my bread making project is doing fairly well and I have gone to the extent of sharing skills learnt from training with other women in my village.

It is evident from the above statement that the programme is indeed relevant and has the capacity to alleviate adverse poverty among disadvantaged communities in Botswana.

While the programme has relevant content to the needs of people based in remote areas, others indicated that due to lack of finance they have not experienced meaningful improvement in livelihood. One participant asserted that:

‘we find ourselves in remote areas which are far from mainstream society, these are areas with very few amenities and therefore employment opportunities are also almost absent, As such this programme is an opportunity for us to be self-employed. Personally however, I neither can nor really say my life has changed significantly after training because I do not have resources’.

This response suggests that generally participants have confidence in the programme content and skills they learnt which are capable of improving their livelihood. Both the graduates and education officers have faith that the programme has the potential to reduce the negative impact of absolute and capacity poverty, achieve gender equity, ensure peace, democracy, and improve lives of disadvantaged people in remote communities. This is given that Vocational skills increase employment competencies of youth and adults in remote areas and as such they can improve their livelihood.

However, the responses also highlight inaccessibility to the government funding programmes to remote areas and inequality resulting from location while funding programmes have been rolled out to citizens in various places. It also emerged that since the OSET unit does not have funding options after training, accessing other government funding opportunities is a huge challenge for people in remote areas for reasons such as illiteracy, distance to major centres and ignorance. It implies that residents of cities and semi urban villages have an advantage over those in remote areas because they can access these programmes and benefit better because they are better situated to harness the available resources. This is a cause for concern.

Challenges faced by participants after completing their training

This study illuminated clearly that graduates have numerous challenges in their efforts to implement skills learnt through income generating projects. Majority of them complained among others of marketing challenges, terrain in the form of distance from urban areas and finance. Participants indicated that the programme though provides a bit but does not expose them adequately to marketing skills and as such they fail to market their goods outside the boundaries of their remote communities. Along the same one participant argued thus: *our expectation was that trainers and officers would link us with potential buyers or people we could supply with good for sale in urban areas but too avail*'. A similar view was echoed by one officer who admitted that the programme indeed does not have adequate exposure on marketing skills and that this was a shortcoming on the programme content. Researches were informed that a larger share of the content is practical activity and as such is not comprehensive of a complete entrepreneurial programme. For instance they are not fully equipped to comprehend the basic business knowledge and skills that are prerequisites or co-requisites for becoming a successful entrepreneur (consortium or entrepreneurial education, 2001).

The other challenge raised by both officers and graduates was of poor terrain and transportation. The areas are far from urban areas and have poor road structure wherein only 4x4 vehicle travel safely. As such when these graduates produce goods through their projects it becomes difficult for them to go to urban areas for sale of their goods. Along the same it becomes difficult for potential buyers to visit such areas for purchase of goods. Equally education officers indicated that they are faced with the challenge of often visiting graduates for purposes of monitoring progress. They argue that their sub-region has limited vehicles suitable for the terrain and thus they often fail to support their graduates sufficiently.

The other challenge raised was on funding. All participants raised the issue of funding as an impediment to their progress. They thus categorically admitted that indeed they acquired requisite skills to produce quality goods from training but without further funding to buy adequate material this is a nightmare. This came out clearly when one graduate said *'well we appreciate the support wherein we are fully sponsored for training which involves transportation from remote areas to the training centre in kang, tuition, material, accommodation during training and feeding, but the challenge is that we are unable to start off the projects because of finance.'*

The other graduate along the same indicated that they too appreciate having learnt a lot during training and believe they have acquired requisite skills to start a dress making project but the unavoidable challenge is the start-up capital. The woman said, *'with a dress making project, for me to fit into today's challenging retail world I need quality material and machines and given that we are poor people from already disadvantaged community this is like an illusion for me'*. From the researcher's observation, this was found to be true. Most of the learner participants lamented that they cannot produce quality material because of limited funds. I made observation of their goods during observation visits and truly not many can fit in today's competitive trade marketplace. As such it is clear that without funding after training it is very difficult for the trainees to run competitive projects.

Conclusion

This study revealed that the SDP is a feasible initiative to reduce absolute poverty among people in remote areas of Botswana. The programme is thus with proper monitoring workable, achievable and sustainable. From findings participants who underwent training approved the programme as a viable one capable to alleviating poverty. They also indicated that content covered was relevant to their needs. Although the programme was rated high by participants and education officers/trainers, practically on ground not much was observed by the researcher. Simply put, out of the twelve (12) graduate participants interviewed only two (2) making any progress. The rest indicated that they lack start-up capital is a nightmare given their poor background locations. As such they had either abandoned projects or were producing goods seasonally. Therefore, the researchers believe that without funding after training, learners cannot produce goods which can stand market competition in today's competitive world. On this note, the researchers emphasize that the SDP is indeed a viable and necessary option to improve livelihood among disadvantaged communities and as such should be defended and improved to bring about needed change in remote areas. This argument resonates with the assertion that economic rewards will be more motivating to adults as they are more easily attracted to functional literacy classes than to literacy classes that do not teach economic skills (Oxenham *et al*, 2002).

Recommendations

Based on the findings that SDP is a viable programme to capacitate and alleviate disadvantaged people from poverty, the researcher recommends funding for graduates of the programme to start up their projects. Therefore the Ministry of Education and Skills Development should have a fund which they can use to support the graduates of the SDP to start-up their projects. Along the same, continuous in-service training and monitoring of projects on deliberation and marketing skills given that the one shot training they receive is not sufficient. It is the researcher's opinion that improved deliberation and marketing skills for SDP graduates could help improve quality production.

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