

BOOK REVIEWS

Combating Poverty through Adult Education: National Development Strategies, Chris Duke (ed), Croom Helm, London, 1985 (pp 253, £17,95)

Chris Duke, the editor of this volume, poses the question in the introduction, how can large scale adult education programmes combat poverty? After reading the book one might pose the question in slightly different terms, ie is it possible for adult education to combat poverty? The question as posed by the editor implies more of methodological issues than what the book is actually about. The case studies presented and compared address the very important issue of the actual role of adult education in the reduction, amelioration or abolition of poverty.

Using case studies from Brazil, Kenya, India, Nicaragua, Chile, the Republic of Korea (South) and Sri Lanka, national adult education programmes are analysed within the framework of:

- national context
- Adult Education Agency and Programme
- aims and objectives
- cost effectiveness and evaluation
- important features of each programmes such as personnel and societal purposes, teaching methods and motivation
- nature and preoccupation with literacy
- management aspects of large-scale adult education programmes.

In spite of the wide divergence of national contexts (from authoritarian and directive like Chile and Korea, through capitalist oriented contexts like Kenya, Brazil, India and Sri Lanka, to revolutionary radical marxist Nicaragua) some common themes emerge as the editor indicates in the concluding chapters. Firstly, the answer to the question posed at the beginning is answered in the characteristic adult education language of continuous, not so clear and not very optimistic terms. Adult education has a limited role to play in the reduction, amelioration and even less so the abolition of poverty. In Nicaragua the literacy campaign with its political as well as economic and cultural objectives comes *after* the revolution has achieved structural changes. In Brazil, the effects of the literacy programme are given as individual rather than social, while in India the adult educators due to lack of training among other factors became even more conservative in the process of implementing adult education programmes. Only in the Sri Lankan case study with its spiritual basis is it concluded with any degree of confidence that the educational process is central to achieving the Sarvodaya hierarchy of awakening and development leading to the welfare of all. The editor cautions, from all the cases, and I agree, "against expecting too much of adult education, especially acting alone in the war against poverty".

Why is adult education accorded a limited role? The answer is best given by the author of the Brazilian case study who concludes that poverty is a political matter, and by implication requires a political, structural change solution. The important issue of the national context and political will vis-a-vis adult education is given adequate attention by all authors and makes an interesting comparison; witness the almost complete congruence of the political will and people's desired changes of Nicaragua on the one hand and the strong bureaucratic enforcement of adult education programme designed by the state to achieve state determined objectives in the Susmud

education programme of Korea. In Chile, the changes in the national context after Allende forced changes in the adult education programmes as collective action was drastically curtailed all round. The editor rightly concludes that the national context in political, economic, historical and cultural terms is decisive in what can or cannot be possible for adult education programmes.

Another group of issues has to do with the type of agency (whether governmental or non-governmental), the programmes (whether these are literacy only or literacy plus other components), the conception of and methodology in adult education. Again these are given adequate treatment throughout with interesting variations of the same theme. The editor concludes this theme by agreeing with the Brazilian author that adult education programmes always need to be integrated and linked with economic strategies and with the resources and efforts of ministries. This has an important implication for the Western industrialised school of thought which tends to see adult education programmes outside the 'system', as the author indicates.

On the whole the book provides good comparative material on various themes of adult education and poverty. If one were to put the case studies on a continuum of strong to weak case studies (in methodological and analytical depth terms) on the one end of the continuum would be the Nicaragua, Brazil and Sri Lanka cases with Kenya on the other end because of its rather general approach. However, the cases have something unique or strong about them, making all of them worth reading.

The weakness is that the editor rightly suggests that poverty is made up of many 'building blocks'. However, it would have been useful to suggest some of these blocks for readers to have a clear picture of what levels of poverty are being compared.

Secondly, the international links in adult education are not given adequate treatment in most of the case studies, except perhaps Nicaragua and Sri Lanka. If one traces the history of adult education from Elsinore 1929 to Paris 1985, the influence of the international conferences on the changing perception of, and priorities in, adult education become very apparent especially in developing countries. How are national adult education programmes affected by these changes in perception? It would have been interesting too if a historical time framework in international perspective had been considered in the comparison. Nicaragua of 1979, Brazil and Chile of the early sixties and Sri Lanka of 1958 (the genesis date of Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement) are quite different historical periods in adult education and international development terms. The reader might be advised to read the concluding chapter as it delineates the issues more clearly than the introduction which has long complicated sentences (one sentence is 10 lines long!).

However, the book makes very interesting selective and reference reading depending on what is considered relevant for a particular situation. A Zimbabwean interested in a liberation based national literacy campaign will find the Nicaraguan case study very useful reading. The Kenyan emphasis on the role of adult education on consciousness raising and women would be useful given the multiplicity of women's organisations and their educational role. The Brazilian Mobral case study and to a certain extent the Indian case study provide useful methodological issues relating to how to evaluate the educational impact of a programme separately from other programmes and appeals. The Brazilian case study also provides an example of the Freirean method coopted in his own home ground. The Sri Lanka Sarvodaya Shramadana provides a very interesting and spiritual based way of looking at development as being concerned with the total human being within a hierarchy which gives the spiritual the top position followed by the moral, cultural, social, political and economic components. Poverty as a product of wealth can be seen in terms of greed and craving, Sarvodayana therefore "teaches how much is enough" in bringing total human satisfaction!

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