

Adult Education Methods in the Promotion of Integrated Community-Based Development

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Abstract

One of the effects of a top-down approach in adult education is the tendency to formalise the programmes. The objectives are centrally set after the educators have come out with a long list of learning needs of adults whom they have not met in their lifetime. The content of the programmes is charted out by subject 'specialists or experts' who also know how much adults learners can take! Methods of teaching are usually prescribed to the adult educators, and if funds are available, detailed adults' education handbooks are produced to guide educators. Teachers' manuals are also prepared to go with the learners' primers. Sometimes, adult education programmes are taught by untrained educators who simply read instructions in the teacher's manual to the adult learners. Finally the adult learners are subjected to national examinations, and the results are published nationally although the individual learners do not get them because their classes are no longer in operation when the results are announced.

This article shows how the top-down approach in adult education has created obstacles to adult learning. These obstacles can be avoided by the use of the bottom-up approach consisting of living and working with the adult learners, and in trying to understand their social realities. The article points out the most important factors of the socio-economic system of any community which will help the facilitator/animatoir to realise the complex situation of working with the people, and developing their own programmes for social and economic development.

Introduction

The top-down approach in adult education in Tanzania has created various obstacles to learning. The gist of this article is on how techniques for qualitative (participatory) research consisting of studying with the people, learning the history of their community, and educating oneself about the socio-economic activities of the community, social and political institutions, and people's

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perceptions on development can correct the problems created by the top-down approach to adult education.

The article starts by showing how the top-down approach in adult education in Tanzania has created various obstacles to learning, and how they can be avoided. The article then looks at participatory research techniques as a strategy of working with the adult learners in understanding their social reality, planning, implementing and evaluating adult education programmes which can in turn solve some of their problems. The need for this approach has recently been clearly expressed by some scholars (See Mlekwa, 1994: and Foster, 1994:62) although they did not show how this was to be done. Finally, the article looks at grassroots capacity building for participatory project management.

1. Top Down Approach and its Obstacles to Learning

In this section, we shall focus on four main problems which have made the top-down adult education programmes ineffective in Tanzania. These are: the lack of understanding of adult learners; irrelevant adult education programmes and inappropriate methods; unsuitable and inexperienced educators; and inappropriate evaluation. These problems overlap in most cases.

1.1 Lack of Understanding of Adult Learners

This is mainly a result of copying from the formal school system. Such tendencies are greater in those places where adult education programmes are taught by people trained as school teachers, and have had no opportunity to look at the adult learner from a different perspective besides that of a 'pupil'. There is more to being an adult learner than age. The adult learner is a participant in a social system of production which puts various pressures on him/her to behave in certain ways. The adult learner has responsibilities towards the family, the community with its various institutions, and the state. Most important is that adults work to produce and reproduce the material, as well as social conditions for their existence. An observation of a village community illustrates this social reality so well. Without an instructor or a supervisor, adults wake up in the morning, and do what each one knows need to be done for the day. After work, there are various other activities waiting for them such as meetings, recreations and worship.

There is need for adult educators to study the adult learners in their material and social environment to capture their activities, thoughts, capabilities, weaknesses, aspirations, needs and other psychological qualities. This is not

something to be done once and for all, but a continuous process of learning from and about adults, and the way the changes in the material and social environment give rise to new aspirations and needs.

The adult educator should never say, "I know the Zaramo, Chagga, Sukuma or Masai, and therefore I know their needs and aspirations." These are only adults in general. Even the people one knew some ten years ago might have changed as a result of economic, social and political events. The adult learner is therefore constantly changing.

1.2 Irrelevant Adult Education Programmes and Inappropriate Methods

Some of the topics taught to adult learners are either irrelevant or uninteresting. There are a number of examples from the functional literacy programmes in Tanzania. One primer, *Better Maize Growing*, was used in Hanang District, but when the peasants' farms were observed, it was evident that their agricultural techniques were ahead of those described in the primer (Kweka, 1987). The content of that primer was thus irrelevant for them.

Another primer, *Better Cashewnuts Growing*, was used in Mtwara Region. The content appeared very relevant for the improvement of cashewnuts production, but other social and economic conditions were not conducive to the use of the primer. By then the prices of cashewnuts were poor, and the government was using repressive legislation to force the peasants to weed their cashewnuts farms. The peasant nicknamed it a 'government crop' since the government would fine or imprison them if they did not weed the cashewnuts farms. These measures did not apply to other crops like cassava and peas. The peasants were thus not interested in cashewnuts production, and therefore the primer was uninteresting to the adult learners (Kweka, 1986).

It is difficult to be able to get a topic or topics which are relevant and of interest to a wide section of the population. Even where we are required to teach about health issues, some topics will be more interesting to a section of the population, but not all.

The methods used must thus arouse the interest of the adult learners and sustain it to the end. If one method fails, the adult educator should try another method which will work better with the adults learners.

1.3 Unsuitable and Inexperienced Educators

One other serious problem with traditional adult education lies with the teachers. In most adult education classes one finds volunteer teachers who are only primary school-leavers without any training in adult education. These are mostly

young and inexperienced (Kweka, 1994). Unfortunately, we do not ask ourselves how adult learners feel when they are taught by people who are younger than themselves, and inexperienced in dealing with adults.

The young and inexperienced volunteer teachers depend too much on the teachers' manuals, or even on the learners' primers. There is very little or no discussion on what the adult learners have read in the primers, and to relate this to what happens to the learners in real life situation. As a result, adults see adult education as irrelevant since it does not help them solve their day-to-day problems.

Furthermore, there are no plans to train adult educators or facilitators for work at the grassroots level. Those who are trained for certificate or diploma courses end up doing administrative jobs in adult education institutions rather than co-ordinating adult education at the ward or grassroots level. But even then their training is based on the top-down approach, and the methods of teaching are subject-centred rather than learner-centred (Mpogolo, 1985). Thus adult education is reduced to literacy or the ability to read and write. On top of this, literacy is perceived as a technical aspect, rather than a social function, in communication.

1.4 Inappropriate Evaluation

Another weakness in the traditional top-down approach is in the system of evaluation where the learners are not involved. Tanzania has developed a system of setting a national literacy test after two or three years, aiming at finding out how many people have become literate. However, no one asks them if they were interested in what they learned and, if not, how it could be improved. Adults are thus subjected to an examination that would not help them in the future

All these weaknesses make adult learners feel that adult education is not relevant to solving their day-to-day problems. Due to this adult education campaigns are always characterised by high rates of absenteeism and drop-outs. In order to redress some of these weaknesses, there is need to know more about the community, and learn how to work with adult learners in planning their adult education programmes.

2. Theoretical Framework for Participatory Research

The main characteristic of participatory research is that both the researcher and the people investigate social reality, and participate in a programme of action with the aim of changing that reality (Hall, 1981). The issues to be investigated

could focus on poverty, ignorance and disease, but one must avoid the tendency of compartmentalising social reality according to one's academic background. A study of poverty, ignorance and disease in a community will reveal that these problems are interrelated. The situations that give rise to these problems must be investigated in order that situations are transformed in the process of combating the relevant problems. The whole community, with all its socio-economic factors, must be studied in order to establish integrated community based development projects (Koineh, 1993). Figure 1 illustrates the most important elements in the socio-economic system of any community.

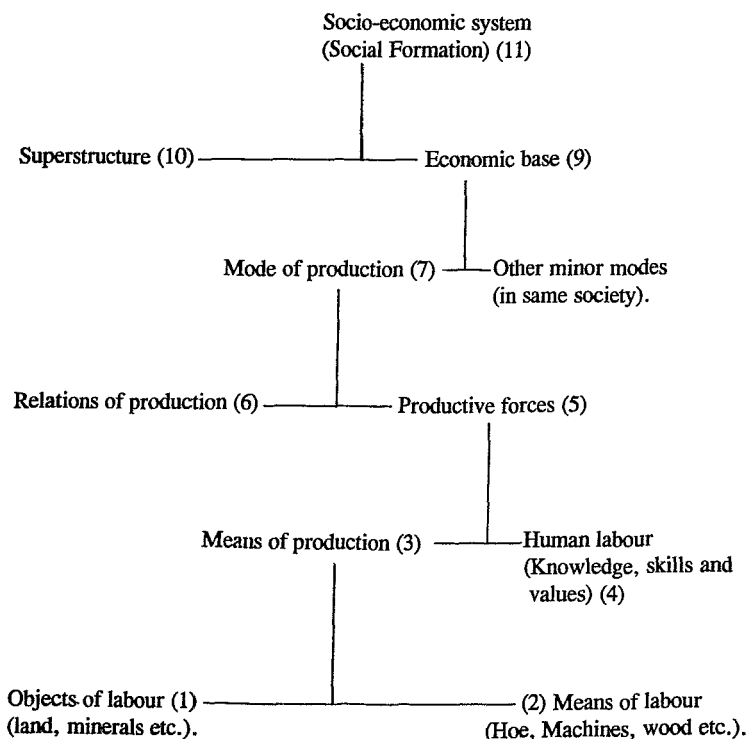


Fig. 1: Elements of the Socio-economic System

The following are brief notes of some of the most important elements in Figure 1, and how they can be related to adult education and the development of any community.

2.1 Productive Forces

Productive forces include objects of labour, means of labour and human labour. Much can be understood by observing both the quantity and quality of these aspects. Human labour plays a key role in development as it tries to improve the objects of labour, the means of labour, as well as the use of better methods of production. A good example is where people are taught proper conservation, rejuvenation and maintenance of the environment, and instructed on the use of ox-ploughs. A good analysis of productive forces in a community will therefore look at the skills which have been achieved, and the problems which might have arisen as a result of changes in the system of production.

2.2 Relations of Production

These are the relations of ownership and control of the means of production. In less-developed societies land is held by ethnic groups, clans or families. Individuals are given the right to use land by heads of these institutions. The individuals who get land in this way have certain obligations to render to their head. Such practice has ceased to operate in most societies in Africa, and small holder peasant ownership predominates in many countries. But this should not forestall studies on the existence of patriarchal relations of production in any community. In fact, in the absence of official title deeds, property relations need to be studied and the way they influence development in the community.

In Tanzania, besides the few workers who are employed in agriculture, industries and the service sector, the majority of the people are peasants. The peasants live in small communities (villages), and they own land which they cultivate with family labour.

Some scholars maintained that the peasants were firmly linked to the international capitalist system (Iliffe, 1972; Shivji 1975; Raikes, 1979), while others maintained that they were not yet 'captured', and that they enjoy a relative measure of autonomy (Hyden, 1980). But it is clear that the control by the international capitalist system on the peasants differs from place to place. For example, some peasants produce coffee and according to bye-laws, they are not allowed to abandon it even if the bottom has fallen out of the market. On the other hand, there are those who can decide what to produce according to the demand on the market.

The peasant communities are becoming more and more dependent on foreign aid, particularly for the importation of farm inputs, establishment of economic infrastructure and social amenities. Such concepts as self-reliance, sustainability, local capacity building and National Execution Modality (NEX) have been coined to show the effort of some governments or institutions to minimise the dependence syndrome. So far, no one has come out with what could be called 'the last aid package', and perhaps no one needs to see it!

2.3 Superstructure

The development of the economic base gives rise to institutions and social ideas which are referred to as the superstructure. For example, educational institutions are established to provide knowledge, skills and values which will help promote and consolidate the economic base. It is important to study the role of various cultural, political, legal and religious institutions in each society, particularly when there is the desire for social change.

2.4 The Researcher/Educator Attitude

The researchers/educators must maintain respect and equality among the people they are working with. They should not present themselves as 'experts' who imposes their views on the people but as 'learners' among the people. For example, one could be an expert in water-borne diseases in his or her department, but at the community level the researcher/educator is only a 'learner' of water-borne diseases in a given socio-economic context. Researchers/educators must be ready to learn from the community, imagine and share the community's feelings, aspirations and experiences. They must be committed participants in the transformation and improvement of the lives of the people.

3.0 Techniques in Participatory Research

The main objectives of participatory research is to develop or promote a number of integrated community-based development projects. We do not go into the community with a specific project in mind, or with a hidden agenda for the people in the community. We are assuming that our financier (the government, local or foreign donor) is democratic and liberal, and will allow people to come out with their own development projects. In other words, if people are to decide on their own development projects, then aid must also be community-based; allowing people to decide, design and plan, or else participatory research will remain a sham.

Participatory research, also known as qualitative research, differs markedly with quantitative research where the demand for hard data calls for the need to develop detailed statistical procedures. Participatory or qualitative research is not easily handled with statistical procedures since its purpose is to investigate topics in all their complexities. The qualitative researcher does not approach the research with specific questions to answer or hypotheses to test as is the case with quantitative research. The qualitative researcher is sometimes referred to as the 'instrument' because of the manner through which he/she gets the subjects to express their thoughts freely around topics or event. This makes it difficult to use research assistants in fieldwork unless they have been trained in qualitative research methods.

The main characteristics of qualitative research (see Bodgan & Biklen, 1992) are:

- (a) It has the 'natural' setting as the direct source of data, and the researcher is the key instrument. The emphasis here is to study things in their 'natural' environment, and the way they 'naturally' behave.
- (b) It is descriptive rather than statistical. Nothing that is observed is trivial as it could lead to a better understanding of social reality.
- (c) It is concerned with processes rather than simply outcomes or products. You will understand a person better, for example, by knowing where that person comes from, rather than simply knowing where he/she is. History plays an important part in all case studies.
- (d) It tends to analyse data inductively, that is, discovering general laws from particular facts.
- (e) Meaning is an essential concern to the qualitative approach. It is important to know how people perceive their world rather than what we call it ourselves.

There are basically two stages in community participatory research, namely:

- (a) Assessment and analysis of the community socio-economic situation.
- (b) Assessment and analysis of individual/group learning needs and development projects.

The first task is therefore to study the community and its inner driving force in order to come out with projects which are related to other community activities and the available natural and human resources. The following are some of the important areas to be studied, and should be related to our discussion of the socio-economic system above.

3.1 Areas to be Studied

3.1.1 A Short History of the Community

Communities have not always been what they are. There have always been times of crisis and serenity, or depression and boom. The people have interpreted this history in various ways in their struggle against real or imagined enemies. This has to a great extent shaped their views about life and aspirations. In some communities, this body of knowledge forms a special discipline, with local experts who pass it on to other people in the community.

3.1.2 The Socio-economic System of the Community

A good account of the community should include all that was discussed above on the socio-economic system, bearing in mind that the community is linked to a larger system outside it. For example, a farming community is linked to national and/or international institutions through the supply of agricultural inputs, technological dependence, marketing, loans or grants and agricultural policies. It is therefore important to investigate both international and external factors which contributed to the development or underdevelopment of the community.

3.1.3 The Superstructure

There is need to relate the superstructure to the economic base as the former enforces or promotes existing production relations, or acts as a brake to further development of the community. The following elements need to be investigated.

- (a) Social services: education, health, water, etc., with their history.
- (b) Social structure: rich and poor relations, ethnicity, gender, race and their problems.
- (c) Political institutions: membership to political parties, political activities and political leadership, politics and socio-economic development.
- (d) Religions and religious institutions: their contributions to education and socio-economic development.
- (e) Social interaction: communication system, news media, gender issues, marriages, and recreational activities.

3.1.4 People's Perceptions on Development

Their problems, aspirations, attitudes and practices; with their views on transforming the socio-economic system.

3.2 Methods.

The following methods are useful in the first stage of participatory research.

3.2.1 Documents Analysis

Before getting into the community, the researcher is advised to read any documents on the community to familiarise oneself with the community. Some communities have a written history, and this can be a good starting point. Others have official reports on some projects, while others have some useful records in schools, religious institutions, health centres, co-operatives, political party offices, and village government offices. The data from these sources can be used to reconstruct the history of the community.

3.2.2 Discussions on History

Even where the history of the community is available from written records, it is important to get it from the local people themselves. Efforts should be made to get well-informed local historians to provide the history of the community. Discussion with other people in the community should be sought to counter-check this information.

It should be noted that this is not a discussion on dates but rather a discussion about how people struggled against natural and social constraints in their development. In other words, how the community's struggles have contributed to its own development. The history should include both successes and failures, and the lessons the community has learnt from these experiences.

At this stage various discussion groups -- for example, women, youth, entrepreneurs, leaders and various occupational groups -- should be organised to find out how they look at their past, and how their history has affected that social group.

3.2.3 Participant observation

Economic, social and political life of a community needs to be observed carefully by looking at what people are doing and not doing. The researcher needs to prepare an observation schedule for various economic activities in the farms, at homes, at the shopping centre(s) or discussions involving various participants.

It should be noted that we are talking of 'participant observation' and not 'participatory research' since we have not yet identified principal areas of

concern for dialogues and transformation. The researcher is only learning from the community before engaging in meaningful dialogue with the various groups.

3.2.4 Researchers' Records

The researcher must keep a record of all the observations and discussions. At the beginning of the day's work, the researcher reads the previous day's notes to see what needs to be followed up. The researcher draws up a list of the observations to be made, and the people to be contacted for discussions. She/he then looks back at the main objectives of the study to see what else needs to be done for the day, taking note of all previous appointments, promises and problems.

While in the field, the researcher should make sure that he/she does not appear to be too obsessed with note-taking. This will scare the participant and interrupt the natural course of social interaction, and even cause the suppression of important information during discussions. The best advice is to learn to listen to what people discuss, and do the recording in their absence. At the end of the day, the researcher finishes recording the day's activities and takes note of all new factors which need to be explored.

In the absence of a detailed structured questionnaire, the researcher's notebook becomes the most reliable tool for investigation where all the moves in the field are recorded. The notebook is to the researcher what the spear is to the hunter.

3.2.5 Interviews with Different Leaders (Unstructured Interview)

These interviews will show the existing programmes/projects and their performances. They will also show the leaders' perception of community development, their problems and solutions. A very active community will have many programmes/projects, and this is a reflection of how they think they can solve their problems. However, one needs to be cautious with information coming from leaders as it is sometimes exaggerated for various reasons. Their data should be checked with data from other sources at the district or grassroots levels. In other cases some leaders and community members will not know all the programmes/projects as they may be sponsored by different organisations or may be outside their areas of interest or competence.

The interviews should focus on:

- (a) The people's views on existing community projects (water, health, education, etc.) and if they have done anything to support the projects.

- (b) The people's perception of the projects and community development.
- (c) The problems of the people in the community.
- (d) What has been done to solve these problems.
- (e) The alternative/other projects which could solve these problems, and how.

In these interviews, special attention must be paid to the disadvantaged groups such as women, youth, the unemployed, and the poor.

At this juncture, the researcher knows the community fairly well, and can now move to the second stage in participatory research where groups are identified for an in-depth dialogue and planning for social action or project. It is at this stage that we can talk of needs, assessment of various groups, designing, planning, monitoring and evaluation of adult education programmes.

4.0 Identification of Principal Areas of Concern

The data collected so far will be able to give in detail the problems of the community, and some suggestions on what could be done to solve them. But this is not enough for purposes of transforming the socio-economic contexts of the problems. At the community level, we need to identify three categories of participants according to the nature of problems. First, there are problems such as those of water and public health which need the co-operation of the whole community. The community leaders must be aware of the problems, and how to sensitise people on those problems before mobilising them for solutions. The second set of problems concerns some groups in the community, such as women on gender inequalities or youth on unemployment, and the poor on non-acquisition of important social services. Thirdly, there are problems concerning individuals such as when making a decision to join an existing vocational training programme or starting business. However, even at the level of the individual, people tend to benefit more by co-operating with others in reaching decisions on what could be done.

Nevertheless, in order to come up with feasible projects, dialogue with community leaders, groups and individuals is necessary. The way this will be done depends on the resources available, the objective of the donor and the nature of the problems. The people could be called in to contribute resources provided they see why they should contribute. They would also want to know if their resources are in safe hands.

The question of resources is very crucial in participatory research. In many cases, donors stifle the spirit of participation by deciding unilaterally the type of projects they would like to support -- for example, shallow wells, pit-latrines, charcoal stoves, export crop production, tree planting, writing post-literacy primers, etc. -- and normally such specific projects will not have been discussed by the local people. In this case, the researcher ceases to be a researcher and begins to sell the projects to the people. In order to promote participatory research, donors should widen their areas of operation and fund projects which have been adequately discussed at the community level.

In adult education, the researcher should hold dialogue with various groups of people in the community. The most important groups will be: women groups, youth groups, adult education learners, traders, poor peasants, unemployed community members, religious groups, members of co-operative and non-governmental organisations. The dialogue could centre on:

- (a) How these groups perceive the economic, social and political problems in the community
- (b) The root cause of these problems
- (c) Community efforts to solve these problems
- (d) How the groups have participated in solving these community problems
- (e) Problems of the various social groups
- (f) Their participation in various programmes of adult education
- (g) The relationship between adult education and development
- (h) What kind of adult education programme can help solve their problems? How should it be run? Who should teach? etc.
- (i) How much could participants contribute?
- (j) How can we involve the participants in planning, designing, monitoring, managing and evaluating the programmes?

The researcher should then hold a dialogue with individuals in the community trying to seek their views on projects/programmes which could solve their economic, social and political problems. The individuals should come from the various groups discussed above, and the dialogue should focus on:

- (a) Views on existing adult education programmes and their participation.
- (b) Their perception of adult education and development.

- (c) Problems of the people in the community and how they could be solved.
- (d) The problems of the individual interviewee.
- (e) How he/she is planning to solve them, and the resources available.
- (f) Could adult education solve some of these problems? How?
- (g) What projects or programmes in adult education would the interviewee suggest to help solve some of the problems?
- (h) How should this programme/project look like? Who should teach it? How should the participants plan, monitor, manage and evaluate it?

The next stage is to start and manage some projects with the community people, or small social groups in the community.

5. Grassroots Capacity Building for Participatory Project Management

The main activity at this stage is to hold planning sessions with the project participants. In these sessions, participants should discuss the objectives of the project, and how those objectives can be evaluated. For example, a project on literacy should discuss what the neo-literates could do, and the methods of assessing if that objective has been achieved. This should be a permanent feature of all community-based projects. At the beginning, they should discuss the objectives of the whole project, and later on, the objectives of the various components of the study and how to evaluate them.

In the planning process, they should discuss the content of the programme or the activities they want to engage themselves in, and see if they can satisfy their stated objectives. The facilitator should try to see if the programme will actually cover the most essential elements of the course they want to pursue, ensuring that there is a logical sequence of activities in the programme.

The planning sessions with the participants should discuss the resources they require for the programme. The question of resource persons, guest-speakers, facilitators or trainers must be discussed with the participants in order to get them the type of people they want to work with. Training of facilitators in how to work with the adult learners on planning the objectives, content, methods, organisation and evaluation of programmes is essential.

The teaching/learning materials must be identified and how to get them. It is not easy to get ready-made learning materials for every lesson, but the facilitator must try to improvise as much as possible. A good facilitator will prepare flip charts, flannel graphs, posters and displays, some real objects, short

notes and newsarticle cuttings for his/her group. Where there are local newsarticles, arrangements could be made to produce some of the teaching/learning materials in the newsarticle. In Tanzania, the local/zonal rural press could serve the needs of many such groups. It must be cautioned that dependence on materials prepared for wider readership will in most cases go against relevance and learner participation in the management of their projects.

Similarly, the discussions should include the methods and organisation of the programme. The learners could decide to have lectures, story telling, discussions, field visits, guest speakers, role-playing, debates, practical training or any other method which will make learning more effective (Bwatwa, 1990). The organisation of the programmes should put emphasis on increased participation of individual adult learners in the implementation of the projects.

Finally, there must be a discussion on how to control and evaluate the programme. Keeping records of what is taking place in class will enable the participants to evaluate their programme, as well as improve it. In most cases the participants will be able to say whether or not they have achieved the objectives of the programme, and what were the main problems in the programme. The facilitator should help them do some quantitative analyses where the need arises, and how to write short evaluation reports.

If the participatory project management is well-carried out, the participants will be in a position to plan other projects without much support from outside. In other words, the project will have enabled grassroots capacity building for self-reliance. This is a crucial element for their own development:

6. Conclusion

The main gist of this article has been to show how to develop participatory and integrated community based development projects. We have shown how one could carry out participatory research techniques, and how to involve the people in planning, organising and evaluating their own community projects. We have also shown that the participants will have the opportunity to learn how to solve their problems, and build their capacity for more integrated community programmes.

We have emphasised that we need the participation of the local people in solving their problems. But one cannot be too specific about participation due to the varying elements of the socio-economic conditions. One must live and work with the people in the natural setting of their communities. This is involving, demanding and time-consuming, but the end result is worth the effort.

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