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Gender Perceptions of the Botswana National Literacy Programme Among the Minorities in the Chobe District

By TONIC MARUATONA*

Abstract

This paper discusses a gender analysis of the perceptions of the Basubiya in North Western Botswana towards participation and utilisation of the Botswana National Literacy Programme (NLP). The need to determine the effects of the National Literacy Programme on the lives of the learners continues to be a major concern to adult educators, Programme administrators and adult education researchers. The paper identifies reasons for participation in the programme among the minorities from a gender perspective. It explores the effects of the programme on the lives of men and women in Chobe in terms of how they utilised the literary and practical skills to improve their lives. Finally, the study examines the teaching and learning and general problems they had as learners in the National Literacy Programme. The paper concludes that there were no significant gender differences in terms of the reasons for enrolment in the NLP. However, there were some gender differences in the division of labour which in turn influenced their use of the skills acquired in their various social roles. Consequently, the learners noted that the programme enabled them to perform their roles as men and women in Chobe more effectively.

Introduction

Lack of sufficient information on how the Botswana National Literacy Programme impacts on the lives of the recipients has been an issue in Government and Non Governmental circles since its inception in 1980. Hence, this study has set out to determine the effects of the National Literacy Programme (NLP) on the lives of the Basubiya learners in the Chobe District. The effects of the programme were determined through establishing how it helped them to meet their needs in life. A deliberate attempt was made to establish if there were any gender differences in the use of skills acquired or even in the problems encountered in the programme. Gender as used in this paper denotes social practices that are organised in terms of the reproductive divisions between males and females in the society. It focuses on culturally constructed meanings assigned to men and women on the basis of their anatomical, social and economic role differences in the society (Connell, 1987; Mathews and De Hart, 1987; Maendeleo, 1994). The provision of literacy and other education services in society are usually a joint responsibility of Government, Non Governmental Organisations (local and international) and the private sector. In Botswana however, Government is the largest literacy programme provider. It is also assisted by efforts of NGOs like the World Lutheran Federation and the Botswana Christian Council. The NLP was officially launched in 1981 after it had been in operation from as early as 1978. Consequently, it was evaluated in 1987 and the evaluation report indicated the need for the revision of the curriculum and updating of the materials of the primers. More importantly, it concluded that the effects of the NLP on the learners remained unknown and subject for exploration (Gaborone, Mutanyatta, and Youngman, 1987). The report went on to catalogue the successes in enrolments and the

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learning by the participants. It however, did not show explicitly how the programme affects the learners as participants in the NLP from the minorities, at an individual, family and community levels (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, 1996).

In spite of lack of information on the effects of the NLP on the participants in Botswana, reports from other countries indicate that literacy programmes have been associated with having a profound impact on the learners. For example, experiences from Tanzania (Kassam, 1979), Thailand, (Varavarn, 1989), and Nigeria (Okedera, 1981) indicate that the learners' lives were transformed by the learning process at the individual, family and community levels. In a nutshell, in Tanzania the literacy process enabled the participants or graduates to develop 'voice' and enabled them to produce useful practical and literacy skills which they then utilised to improve their socio-economic conditions (Kassam, 1979). In Thailand, the learners felt more informed and articulate as a result of the programme. They reported that after graduating they could now freely ask questions in public meetings and took an active part in various development projects in their communities (Varavarn, 1989). Experiences from Ibadan, in Nigeria, indicate that functional literacy was essential in the lives of the graduates, the writer indicating that literacy could be associated with income generating opportunities. Furthermore, literacy enabled individuals to become socially effective (Okedera, 1981).

Reports from Sweden demonstrate that literacy experiences need to be designed to cater for the peculiarities of the marginalised and minority groups in the society. The learning process has to take into account their unique environmental, social, economic and linguistic realities (MacNab, 1989). Literacy, in this respect, should not be used to enable the dominant culture to extend their cultural values over the minorities because this would enable the dominant culture to be the only recognised culture in relation to other cultures. However, cultural minorities have been reported to engage in counter hegemonic but less overt struggles in order to retain their cultural autonomy (Apple, 1993; Maruatona, 1994).

The issue of minorities is closely linked to language because regardless of how small a community, it still has a well developed language to use in communication. Because of this factor, some research has been focused on the advantages to be gained from using mother tongue as a medium of instruction in literacy and other educational programmes. Okedera and Okedera (1992: 92) conclude that "mother tongue language appears to be the best medium for literacy for psychological, educational and sociological reasons." This issue has been raised by several scholars, among them Wagner who concluded that mother tongue should be used, not the language of the dominant groups in the society (Wagner, 1990).

Available literature also indicates that literacy is useful in a variety of ways in the lives of the graduates as individuals, family and community members, thereby justifying why it should be promoted in various countries (Youngman, 1986; Freire, 1972, 1990; Street, 1991). All these authors argue that literacy could have an effect on the lives of the graduates and the development of their nations as long as the processes of literacy are targeted to the felt needs and aspirations of the learners and their communities. Literacy has also been framed in terms of being a source of empowerment and liberation for enhancing the potential for the social and economic advancement of the literates (Freire and Shor, 1987; Gadotti, 1994; Freire and Macedo, 1996; Youngman, 1996).

In the Botswana context, however, there has been a strong correlation between enrolment in the literacy programme and being economically disadvantaged. Most enrollees of the programme are also living below the Poverty Datum Line. The 1993/94 Household and Expenditure Survey indicated that 45% of the population live below the Poverty Datum Line.

This is more so among female headed households. Female headed households on average earn two times less than male headed household in the rural areas and two and a half times less in the urban areas (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, 1994). The provision of literacy in Botswana needs to take into account the needs of the minorities and the disadvantaged if it is to facilitate empowerment, transformation and the improvement of the conditions of the minorities.

Objectives of the National Literacy Programme

This section of the paper provides a brief examination of the objectives of the NLP in order to relate them to the perceived effects of the programme on the lives of men and women in the Chobe District. Botswana, like most of the developing nations, was compelled by the high rates of illiteracy among the people at Independence to consider the necessity to redress it. Hence, the first ever national commission on education identified literacy as a prerequisite if Botswana's other development objectives are to be met. As the report puts it: "a fully literate population is an important long term objective if Botswana's other national objectives are to be met" (Ministry of Education, 1977: 67). The state realised that illiteracy stood to hamper any effective national development efforts. Consequently, the quest to eradicate illiteracy led the Government to state in the National Development Plan Four that the successful promotion of rural development rests upon the ability of the population to read and write and be able to communicate. The prevalence of illiteracy hampers the dissemination of information (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, 1978).

The initial efforts to tackle illiteracy were under the Department of Social and Community Development. The Department's strategy was to consult with the potential participants as extensively as possible on the type of programme they would need to tackle their problems effectively (Ministry of Education, 1978). However, this approach and the effort that was involved was ignored when the Initial Consultative Document of 1979, which laid the basis for the current programme, was drawn. The responsibility for promoting literacy was also transferred to the Department of Non Formal Education under the Ministry of Education.

The NLP objectives were stipulated in the National Initiative Consultation Document in 1979 as follows:

To enable 250,000 presently illiterate men, women and youth to become literate in Setswana and numerate over six years 1980-85.

The teaching to be understood in the context of development issues relevant to the respective Districts and Nation.

The term "literacy" to be interpreted to imply that a person can comprehend those written communications and simple computations which are part of their daily life (Ministry of Education, 1979:1-2).

The National Literacy Programme (NLP) was officially launched in 1981 by the then Minister of Education who tried to forge a link between illiteracy and underdevelopment and observed that:

for a great majority of the people, if life in the modern society is to be lived to

the full, they must be released from the bondage of illiteracy if they are to make their best contribution to their families, their communities, and their nation, for them, basic literacy with which numeracy is involved is an essential requirement.... They must be given the chance to read and write for these are two of the skills needed to help them play their full part in national development (Morake, cited in Youngman, 1995: 19).

The point is that the then Minister identified reading and writing as useful skills for development and did not take into account the role of practical skill acquisition. Therefore the original purpose of literacy within the NLP was to read and write within the context of development issues. However, the Department of Non Formal Education which is responsible for the provision of literacy could not complete the task in six years as originally envisaged.

The programme experienced some problems of dropping out which could be attributed to lack of time to attend because of other social responsibilities or to the irrelevance of the content to the needs of the learners (Omoding-Okwalinga, 1993). Consequently, the functional skills aspect was introduced. The first attempt to include practical skill training in literacy was stated in the sixth National Development Plan (1985) which also sought a link between the NLP and the Primary School. The young literacy graduates were to join primary schools. A programme on basic literacy and skill training for income-generating activities for older graduates was also incorporated. This was intended to increase educational and employment opportunities for the graduates and also to reduce inequalities in access to education and work (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, 1985). The redefined objectives of the National Literacy Programme were spelt out in the Sixth National Development Plan (1985-91) as follows;

To help the learning needs of communities in the rural and remote areas for adult who never had a chance to go to school... and for children who are living in villages without schools.

The Department will expand its non -formal activities beyond reading, writing and numeracy. The needs of rural communities in terms of skills required for income generating activities will form the basis for expansion (National Development Plan Six, 1985-1991).

The above objectives demonstrate the Government's commitment to impart productive skills to the formally illiterate members of society. It also shows an expanded perception of literacy on the part of Government. The redefined objectives put emphasis on the projected potential of the literates to increase productivity as a direct result of the learning process.

The NLP was evaluated in 1987 mainly through the use of a test administered to a representative sample on literates. It revealed that about 81% of the respondents scored at an equivalent of grade Four in the formal school system. The problem was that the examiners were interested in the outcomes and not the process of acquiring this apparently credible pass rate. It did not find out what is really going on in the literacy classes. For example, how the curriculum is constructed and the dynamics of teaching and learning processes. The evaluators noted that in spite of the good performance there was need to review the curriculum and reinvigorate the teaching and learning process (Gaborone *et al*, 1987).

The Department of Non Formal Education (DNFE) and other departments have

taken a number of initiatives to improve the delivery system and to sustain the programme. Among the measures taken were that DNFE collaborated with the National Library Services to operate Village Reading Rooms (VRRs) for adult learners. They generally encouraged the promotion of income generating projects by the literates and they are currently working on introducing a course in English. They are piloting work based literacy in some Parastatals and that seems to be working well with men. The problem, however, is that the primers are not responsive to the work needs of the target group. In 1992 the Government constituted a National commission on Education to look into ways of improving the education system in Botswana. The commission articulated the place of literacy under adult basic education within the framework of lifelong education. Unlike the 1977 commission on education, the 1993 report came out with a number of recommendations on adult basic education and literacy. It stated that literacy should continue to be offered under the Department of Non Formal Education (DNFE). The Working conditions and payments of the Literacy Group Leaders need to be improved. It was also recommended that the National Literacy Programme be evaluated soon after the publication of the literacy survey done by DNFE and Central Statistics Office (Ministry of Education of Education, 1993).

The Department recently conducted a literacy survey with the Central Statistics Office which revealed a number of issues about the situation of literacy in Botswana. The survey reported that enrolments had a tendency to decline. For example, in 1993 there were 3,767(48.8%) participants in primer 1 and they decreased to 1,588 (about 20.6%) in primer 5 during the same year. The data also revealed that getting communication and knowledge skills were identified as the main reason for enrolment (54.8%) Other noticeable reasons for enrolment were improving personal life (11.8%), and 9% indicated that learning was a means of getting employment (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, 1996).

There is need therefore, to determine why participants do not think of the programme in terms of productive skills provision but only for the acquisition of reading and writing skills. It is against this background that a closer analysis of the activities of the National Literacy Programme will be undertaken with the aim of determining the ways in which it could be used by the minorities in Chobe.

Purpose, Scope and Process of the Study

The basic purpose of the study is to establish whether there are gender differences in participation and utilisation of the Botswana National Literacy Programme among the Basubiya community. Pursuant to this objective, answers were sought to the following questions:

- a) What were the reasons given by men and women for enrolment in the NLP?
- b) What did they see as impediments to active participation in the literacy programme?
- c) How did the learners utilise the skills acquired from the programme as individuals, family and community members?
- d) What problems did they encounter in the programme and how best did they think such problems can be addressed?

The target population of the study included the literacy learners, Literacy Group Leaders and

the Literacy Assistant in the area. The literacy learners were the main focus group of the study because they comprised of the men and women who have studied under the National Literacy Programme. They were perceived as the people who could provide the researcher with the appropriate information on how the programme has affected their lives as men and women learners in Chobe. The Literacy Group Leaders and Literacy Assistant on the other hand, were interviewed because of their involvement with the programme on a daily basis as adult teachers and a programme administrator. The researcher believed that their insight and knowledge of the learners and the reasons for their enrolment in the programme might help to further authenticate the expressed views of the learners. In the process this would help to verify the information given by the learners.

These groups were interviewed because the researcher felt they possessed the characteristics which one intended to establish and analyse. Leedy (1980: 92) indicates that "the results of a survey are no more trustworthy than the quality of the population or the representativeness of the sample" It was then assumed that all the respondents involved in the study would make it as representative and as trustworthy a population as possible, hence, these people were selected for inclusion in the study. Data were collected from the Chobe Enclave villages of Mabele, Kavimba, Satau and Parakarungu. These villages were chosen for the study because they were predominantly made up of the Basubiya community. The exercise also involved getting to satellite settlements of cattle posts and lands where most of the literacy learners were found.

The researcher used a combination of procedures for sampling. Because of lack of prior information on the subjects it was not appropriate to use a random sampling procedure. On arrival in the field, it became apparent that the number of the respondents was going to be very limited since not many people were taking an active part in the literacy programme in the area. Consequently, a purposive sampling procedure was used. The respondents were interviewed because they were perceived to have useful information after the initial pre interview discussion with them. They were selected for interview on the basis of their lengthy experience in the programme, that is, at least one year or more of being a participant in the programme.

The other procedure that was used was the snow-balling approach. This is where on arrival, the researchers conveniently identified the Literacy Group Leader who would direct us to one learner and then he/she would direct us to some of the learners they recalled from class. In the end, almost all the learners who were in the programme for a year or more were interviewed. The learners' knowledge of each other proved more valuable in identifying them for the research team. Consequently, because of the relatively small size of the population there was no need to select a smaller sample in order to generalise the findings to a bigger population. The total number of respondents was 68, made up of 60 learners, 7 Literacy Group Leaders and 1 Literacy Assistant. No sampling to facilitate data collection was done for the LGLs and the LA because they were very few.

Data collection was carried out with the help of two research assistants and an interpreter who mainly worked with the researcher who did not know the local language. Two sets of questionnaires were developed, pre-tested and validated through being given to three colleagues in the Department of Adult Education to determine if they reflected the purpose and objectives of the study. The researcher designed a questionnaire for the literacy learners and another for both the Literacy Group Leaders and the Literacy Assistant. In addition to the answering of questions on the questionnaire, the researcher did some observation of classes in session and asked for permission to check the students' work. The learners were

interviewed by the researcher and the assistants because of their relatively low reading abilities. Some of the Literacy Group Leaders were interviewed because their questionnaire was in English which they could not read very fluently. However, the questionnaires for some of the LGLs were given to them to complete and submit to the researcher the following day. This arrangement minimised the chances of the questionnaires getting misplaced by the respondents. Most of the interviews were conducted in their homes and lasted from one to one and half hours. Some interviews were shorter depending on whether the interviewee could speak Setswana and there was no need for translation. Often the researchers went back to some of the interviewees to clarify some issues. The familiarisation of the translator with the people in the villages and settlements made it relatively easy to access the respondents and therefore provided some leads.

The process of data coding and analysis was done with a computer. The data were coded onto a spread sheet after which it became easier to compute totals and percentages, which enabled the researcher to conduct data analysis and presentation effectively. The data collected through the observation and documentation in the locale of the study were only referred to where they gave additional and supportive information on the issue being analysed.

The major limitation was that the Basubiya, as a minority group in Botswana, are significantly different from other communities because of their socio, cultural and economic peculiarities which are, in turn, influenced by the differences in the environment. Therefore, findings from this community cannot be generalised with confidence. The other factor is to do with the geographical location of the area. One can not compare the findings from the predominantly wet Chobe to for example, the Kgalagadi desert because the environment makes the communities in each of these areas significantly different from each other.

One of the major limitations was the language barrier. The researcher does not speak Chisubiya and so it was fairly difficult to get reliable impressions of the respondents, even with the help of an effective interpreter. In spite of the above mentioned limitations, the writer is confident that the study has generated data which makes a significant contribution to the theory and practice of adult education. It should also set a stage for further studies along the same lines among other ethnic communities in Botswana.

Characteristics of the Population Studied

A total of 60 literacy learners were interviewed in all the four Subiya speaking villages of the Chobe. Most of the respondents for the study were living at the lands and cattle posts outside the main Subiya villages of Mabele, Kavimba, Satau and Parakarungu. The population of the learners was 60 which was made up of 51 (85%) women and 9 (15%) men. The distribution is skewed in favour of females. One male respondent observed that "other men thought that this thing is just a joke, they would not use the skills from the NLP for any thing, there is no need to spend time playing with these young teachers under the trees" (Male respondent from Barannge cattle post).

However, this reflects a general feature of male attendance for the National Literacy Programme (NLP). This was recently confirmed by a National Literacy Survey carried out jointly by the Department of Non Formal Education (DNFE) and the Central Statistics Office which showed that fewer men than women attended the literacy programme (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, 1996). Men give various reasons for abstaining from the literacy programme and the result is that there are consistently fewer men than women. In a study conducted in the South East District of Botswana only a few men were reported to be

attending the literacy programme. Few men reported that the programme assisted them to carry out activities they were already involved with, like gate keeping or being a night watchman which required writing skills (Maruatona, 1995).

The Literacy Group Leaders followed the learners to the lands sometimes on foot. Some travelled for a distance of between one to two and a half kilometres to attend to the learners in the settlements. Those learners who attended and lived in the village were either not working or worked for the drought relief projects. It could be argued that the programme attract the poor and the drought relief workers - mainly female heads of households who needed the writing skills at their work when they had to sign for their payments. The ages of those interviewed varied greatly from between 10 to 65 and above. The highest concentration was 30% for the age range of 35-44 followed by 26.7% for the age group 25-34 which consisted of individuals who were employed working for the drought relief. Only a few people of school going age were going to the NLP in Chobe. On the other hand, the older people did not seem to show much interest in the programme, even those who did gave eye-sight as a constraint.

The ethnic composition of the learners indicated that they were 78% Subiya, 12% Basarwa (found primarily at the cattle posts), 7% Tawana and 3% Hambukushu. Most of them could speak their mother tongue and a bit of Setswana. Among the Basubiya about 44% could speak Setswana though with relative difficulty.

Characterisitics of Group Leaders and Literacy Assistant

The data for the Literacy Group Leaders and the Literacy Assistant indicated that there were eight in all, seven LGLs and one LA. There were five females and one male LGLs and the LA was male. It was also reported that the previous LGLs were females. The educational level of the LGLs varied, five of them had a Standard Seven Primary School Leaving Certificate and three had a two year Junior Certificate. The relatively fewer male LGLs might suggest that the employment structure in the country allows men to find jobs in many more sectors of the economy than women. Hence, women are the ones who have to take this low paying job. It should also be noted that the male LGL was in the cattle post area and taught a class which was predominantly male. Except for the LA, all of the LGLs who did the actual teaching were Chisubiya speaking.

Reasons for Participation in the NLP

The main reason given by the literacy learners for participation in the NLP was that they needed to be able to read and write and be numerate. 95% of both men and women pointed to this reason. Only 5% indicated that at the end of their studies they hoped to find any form of employment or be self employed. These few were among the 25-34 age category which is not surprising because this is about the time when people are searching for work and meaning in their lives in order to develop themselves. They hoped that the programme would not only provide them with literacy skills but also some practical skills that would enable them to find employment in the future. As one 25 year old woman captured it: "I am poor and a single mother who has to provide for my family without any assistance other than for working in drought relief" (respondent from Satau).

Reading and writing were looked at in a very diverse way. They were seen by some respondents as utilitarian in that they would enable the learners to perform certain tasks which they hitherto could not do like reading letters and giving correct change to customers. Many respondents indicated that they needed the writing skills because Government officers

discouraged them from putting a cross or dipping their fingers in ink in order to sign for money or other services which required writing skills. A substantial majority of them participated because they had to sign their names. One woman said "I needed to be able to write so that I can sign in the offices at Kasane, people there discourage us from putting a cross when we receive drought relief money" (respondent from Satau village). Consequently, 25% of both men and women mentioned learning to write Setswana as a major thing which would enable them to feel free when they travel anywhere in the country. This raises the issue about the desire for the use of mother tongue in literacy programmes. A proportion of the respondents clearly appreciated the value of learning the language which has the greatest influence in Botswana.

The fact that only a minority think that they may get a chance to find jobs through the programme confirms the results of the National Literacy Survey of 1994 (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, 1996). This suggests that this aspect is not stressed in the recruitment for the programme or that people realise that the teaching they receive from the programme would not enhance their prospects for employment. It could be argued that the programme does not stress the provision of practical work skills. Individuals tend to view it as mainly intended to provide reading and writing skills. This has also been confirmed by the LGL's and the LA's responses who unanimously agreed that the NLP provided the learners with chances to learn to read and write and none of them mentioned practical skills or employment opportunities. It should be noted that there were no discernible gender differences in terms of reasons given for participation in the literacy programme. Both men and women pointed to reading and writing as the main reason for participation in the programme, and among both a few mentioned employment but the variation was not significant.

Language Used in the Programme

The issue of which language is to be used in the NLP has been present since its original design (Townsend-Coles, 1988). Some scholars have stressed the significance of mother tongue vis-à-vis the use of the national language. The respondents reported that the language used was Setswana. In order to analyse the issue of language, the respondents were asked to give a description of a typical lesson that they could recall. Most of them recalled being shown a picture and either being told what they could see or asked what was in the picture. The teacher taught them how to write the words and letters that followed from the pictures. On being asked how they discussed the picture when they were not fluent in Setswana, 56% indicated that the teacher used Chisubiya to facilitate their involvement in the discussion. 44% reported that they had a working knowledge of Setswana but also acknowledged that it was not sufficient for them to engage in discussion of pictures that required elaborate knowledge of Setswana.

It could be concluded that the use of Chisubiya in class was predominant, especially, during the discussion and those who had some knowledge of Setswana still found it insufficient to enable them to discuss, freely in class. As one LGL put it: "I discourage them from using Chisubiya because they have to learn Setswana. But at the same time, there are things which I cannot explain clearly in Setswana and so we resolve the problem through the use of Chisubiya though I try to discourage its use in class" (LGL from Satau village). This supports the argument raised in favour of the use of mother tongue which many writers believe has profound pedagogical, cultural and social value to the learners (Okedara and

Okedara, 1992). It is apparent that if people learn to write in their mother tongue, they develop the skills of reading and writing which in turn predispose them to learning to write in any other language.

Use of Reading and Writing Skills by Individuals

In pre-colonial Botswana, individuals depended on the coherence of the extended family units for sustenance and social security. This support base has diminished with the emergence and expansion of the capitalist political economy during the colonial and post colonial era. Individualism has become a characteristic feature among the communities and this has been attributed to urbanisation and migration from rural to urban areas by individuals without appropriate skills (Motts, 1994). It could be argued, however, that even in the rural areas the coherence of the social fabric is fast declining as the majority of the rural population is slipping into poverty (Maruatona and Adeola, 1995). A recent report on income distribution indicated that about 45% of the rural population live below the Poverty Datum Line and the majority of these belonged to female headed households (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, 1995).

It was against this backdrop that the learners were asked how they utilised the skills from the NLP in their daily lives. The study found that the use of the skills by individuals varied greatly depending on whether the skills sought were reading, writing or practical skills. The use also varied along gender lines. For example, when asked how they used the skills acquired from the NLP 35% of the women indicated that they used the skills to write letters to relatives staying far away, followed by those who suggested that they enrolled so that they should be able to write their names, and administer medication without the problem of giving an over- or under-dose. Some women indicated that they sold beer and needed to be able to change money to avoid being cheated by their customers. The least mentioned item was to get a job which was mentioned by only 7% of the female interviewees. About 12% noted that they did not gain anything from the programme as individuals.

It could be concluded that the utility of the programme was restricted to day to day life chores like writing letters, signing their names (especially when they are paid for working on drought relief projects) and administering medication. The idea of getting a job as an individual is still seen as not a critical purpose that could explain why participants came into the programme. This correlates quite positively with the reasons given for participation which were centred around reading and writing for both men and women in Chobe. Most of the men pointed to writing their names and counting cattle as uses of the skills.

Use of the Skills at Family Level

Among the Basubiya, just like other patriarchal ethnic communities in Botswana, productive family activities are distributed on gender lines with men controlling comparatively lucrative asserts like cattle (Motts, 1994). The women and girls tended to household chores, for example cleaning, cooking and other indoor activities. The men and boys looked after cattle which have to be herded throughout the year because of their proximity to the wild life control area. One male respondent observed that: "I find the skills from the programme useful because I can now count my cattle and do not only rely on recognising the missing ones by colour and other attributes" (male interviewee from Satau cattle posts) One female respondent on the other hand, reported that now "I can assist the children with their homework especially the parts that are in Setswana. I can read their school reports if they are

written in clear writing” (female respondent from Parakarungu).

However, the distribution for use of the skills in the family varied greatly among women respondents. About 31% of women pointed out that it helped them to administer medication to their children and other family members. This was followed by 25% who reported that they used the skills to help their young children with their home work and reports. Note that the majority of the respondents who helped their children were women, which shows the extent to which women seem to be engaged in learning activities for the sake of helping others, thereby, performing a nurturing role. 12% indicated that they wrote letters to relatives which facilitated communication without exposing their internal family matters to the public through getting strangers to read for them.

A few women, about 10%, reported that they sold traditional beer and used computation skills to change money. This is essential for the family in that their money was used in the household which made women productive member of their families. However, there were about 20% who reported that they did not use the skills in their families. It can be concluded that female learners used the skills to assist members of their family in a number of ways like administering medicine, assisting children with their homework, writing to distant relatives, and in the sale of beer. Most of the men, on the other hand, indicated that they used the skills in signing when they received money from drought relief and other services whereby literacy is helpful. They also used the skills in counting their cattle. One man reported that he hoped he would find employment. Some reported that they did not use the skills from the NLP in any way in their lives. Consequently, most of the men and women used the skills to bring income into the family.

The LGLs and the LA viewed the programme as useful to these people because now they can read and write. They have been exposed to a working knowledge of Setswana that could enable them to communicate with their distant relatives and other Batswana. The male LGL summed it when he observed that “It has been useful to them in that it has enabled them to access and use Government schemes and programmes like other citizens of Botswana” (LGL from Barannge Lands).

Use of the Skills in the Community

Community activism can be determined in terms of involvement in community activities like Village Development Committees (VDC) and other committees in the villages. The degree to which individuals are able to be bold enough to speak at public spaces like at the Kgotla (community meeting place) and the Church with confidence signify the extent to which the skills are used in the community context (Varavarn, 1989). In the study however, when the learners were asked how they used these skills in the community or public arena they indicated that they did not use the skills in any way. About 80% of the respondents reported that they were not active in community affairs nor engaged in community services. However, 10% suggested that they now could read the Bible in church, a thing they could not do before they came to the programme. Another 10% reported that they have since become active in village committees like the Village Development Committee (VDC) and the Village Health Team (VHT) which helped to keep the village clean. One woman from Kavimba who was a chairperson of the VHT said “I am in the village health team and we go around the village with the people from the clinic campaigning against throwing dirt around in our village and we learned about these thing in ‘Gaegolelwe’ non formal education”(interviewee from Kavimba village).

Notwithstanding the fact that the study is limited in scope and geographical coverage, it can be tentatively concluded that the learning process did not enable the learners to become community activists except for a few. This corroborates a similar study undertaken in the South East District among the Setswana speaking people which recorded very minimal instances of community activism as a result of the involvement with the NLP (Maruatona, 1995). This might suggest that the NLP does not enable the learners to become community activists when they complete the literacy course. A close analysis of the primers and other reading materials indicated that they did not contain sufficient information on general community issues.

Provision of Practical Skills

One of the questions sought was to determine whether the participants were taught any practical skills especially that most of them were not of school going age and could not join formal school after primer five. As noted earlier, according to the redefined objectives of the NLP they needed to acquire some practical skills to enable them to cope with their socio-economic needs. It became apparent that this component of the NLP was not implemented effectively in the Chobe District. About 12, which is 32.5% of the 51 female respondents, reported that they were taught practical skills in basket making by other learners. Some women reported that they used the practical skills in basket making they learned from other learners in the class to make baskets. They found that role to be useful to them because that is one of the duties of women among their community.

Male learners on the other hand, reported that their male teacher was working with the local blacksmith, who was a learner in the programme, to help them to carve wood and make stools. The researcher was shown some completed stools and others were still being made by two male learners. One of the male learners was handicapped as he did not have fingers but he coped and showed us with pleasure how he managed to handle a plane and other tools when he was doing woodworking in class. The teacher confirmed this learner's active involvement in spite of his physical difficulties. It appears that the provision of skills was organised according to whether the teacher was male or female. The male teacher reported that he did woodworking at school and though he himself could not make stools, he helped the learners with some technical aspects of measurement and effective handling of tools. What was interesting was that the teachers set time aside for practical work. The learners took the lead in this aspect because they were the 'experts'. It could be argued that the skills provision was gender related and, therefore, the class taught by the female teacher could not easily attract male learners because she could not teach 'male skills.'

Satisfaction of the Learners' Needs

There is a generally strong assumption held by adult educators, especially of the humanist tradition, that learners should be helped to identify their own needs and be involved in experiences that would help them to meet their needs (Freire and Macedo, 1996). An effective programme should be designed in such a way that it helps the learners to tackle their identified needs (Freire, 1972, 1990; Street, 1991). The learners were asked to indicate whether the NLP assisted them to tackle their needs as men and women in Chobe. 41.6% of the learners indicated that they were taught about the methods of ploughing or growing horticultural crops. The learners suggested that had it not been for the financial constraints, they would try and carry out some of the suggestions made in class to improve their socio-economic conditions.

Another smaller group reported that they had always wanted to be able to read and write. Therefore the NLP has provided opportunities for them to meet their needs as adults in the Chobe area. They also learned about what is happening on the other side of Botswana. They learned the national language which could enable them to get along easily with other Batswana. Some of the learners reported that the programme has given them a chance to learn some skills, for example, vegetable gardening. Some women indicated that it gave them the chance to improve doing their family chores like giving medication to the children. However, a few of them (3.33%) felt that the NLP did not help them in any way to meet their needs as individuals and community members.

It can be concluded that really all the learners perceived the NLP to have been useful in helping them to meet their needs in one way or the other. It helped some of the learners in Chobe to meet what they viewed as needs like the introduction of new methods of ploughing, reading and writing and generally enabling them to do their task better as individuals and family members. This concurs with earlier studies which reported that the NLP managed in some cases to assist the learners to meet their needs in spite of its problems. It has exposed them to some skills which proved to be essential for improving their situations, albeit in disturbingly few cases (Maruatona, 1995).

Problems Encountered in Their Teaching Process

On being asked what problems they had in the teaching and learning process the learners and the LGLs concurred that their main problem was the use of Setswana in class. 43.3% of the learners stressed that language was a major obstacle. Some indicated that their problem was the decline in eye-sight, especially among those in the age range 55-65 years. Others complained that the time allocated was too short and did not give the teacher the chance to explain things when they did not understand. Another concern was that the LGLs deserted the classes, and the learners were left without an LGL on a number of occasions and this led them to relapse into illiteracy. In these cases the teachers seemed to have gone off to look for better opportunities elsewhere. This was succinctly put by one woman: "They [teachers] just use us to prepare provision for themselves as they are preparing to move off from the village to look for better paying jobs in Kasane and other towns in the country"(learner from Parakarungu).

However, about 38.3% of the learners felt that there were no problems in teaching. In spite of that, the LGLs and indeed the LA confirmed that there was a real problem of language in that even the LGLs themselves did not speak Setswana fluently. It can be concluded that both the learners and the LGLs could not be expected to engage in a constructive dialogue in a language which each group does not fully comprehend. It can be maintained that the use of Setswana as a medium of instruction in the literacy programme among the minorities represents a problem in the teaching process. In addition there were also problems of a general nature.

General Problems Encountered in the NLP

The respondents were asked if there were any general problems they encountered in the programme other than those pertaining to the teaching and learning process. There was a consensus that the main problem ranged from their seasonal activities like ploughing and cattle herding and other activities related to their means of livelihood. Most of the women indicated that they had to look after their households. The men stated that looking after the cattle was the sole reason why their attendance was sporadic. Some suggested that the

problem was lack of classrooms for the programmes especially during the rainy season, or when it got too hot, dusty or windy. A group of respondents from the Parakarungu lands complained of the absenteeism of teachers. These teachers just taught them for a short while and would disappear. The situation was summarised by one woman thus: "The teachers always resign all the time we are about to learn something, they are just using the programme to prepare for other opportunities. It would be better if they found someone who is willing to work on a more permanent basis" (respondent from Parakarungu lands). Another problem was that teachers walked up to two kilometres to the lands on foot to teach there. It was also reported that the programme has been fraught with with all sorts of administrative problems including the fact that the previous LA, who had been there for a long time deserted the programme without a systematic handover.

There were some problems that were affecting individuals because of their social status. One single woman reported that her problem was that she had to look after her family and cattle as a single woman. One blamed her husband for not allowing her to attend as regularly as she wanted. Others indicated that they did not encounter any problems in the programme. It could be observed that the programme in the Chobe had problems because of the way labour was organised on a gender basis. This is because men and women concentrated on the socially defined tasks for them which, in turn, did not allow them to attend classes during certain times of the year.

On being asked what could be done about their problems the learners indicated that there was no way they could leave their seasonal activities to attend the programme. Such a programme has to be scheduled around other seasonal activities like ploughing and cattle herding. There was need to build a shelter to protect the learners from weather problems like rain and dust. The learners at Kavimba lands suggested that they would be happy to assist to build a shelter for the programme. As for the absenteeism of teachers, the learners felt that there was need to pay them better if they are to be retained in the programme. It should be noted that Government endorsed the recommendation of the National Commission on Education of 1993 to double the honoraria for the LGLs from 1995 (Ministry of Education, 1994). But in spite of that, they still leave the programme in large numbers. Some felt that there was nothing they could do, it was up to the Government to restructure the programme in such a way that it would benefit people in different situations in Botswana. While the programme is hampered by problems some of them could still be resolved, provided there is co-operation between the state and the community.

Conclusions

The majority of the literacy learners who constituted the population of the study were women who were concentrated in the age group 35-44 years. There were only a few men in the study and this reflects a general trend in the participation pattern by men and women on the National Literacy Programme since its inception in 1980. In Chobe, most of the learners have been in the programme for 1-2 years and were still studying various primers depending on the progress of each learner and how they integrated this process with their other social roles. The literacy learners gave a variety of reasons for participation in the NLP. The primary reason was that they needed to be able to read and write either their names or letters to facilitate communication with distant family members. Only an insignificant minority among them pointed to finding employment as a reason for participation.

The participants were either motivated by their personal circumstances like the need

for counting their cattle or external factors like the Government officers who discouraged the use of ink for finger print or a cross when they had to sign for drought relief money or to receive any Government service. Other than that, they mentioned writing letters and learning Setswana language as a crucial medium of instruction in Botswana. It is not clear why the functional skills are not mentioned as reasons for participation in the Programme. This needs to be explored in the future. However, it should be noted that there is no significant difference between men and women in terms of their reasons for participating in the NLP.

The major language used in class was Setswana whilst Chisubiya was regularly used to explain unclear issues. The teacher and the learners admitted to having been using Chisubiya to explain certain concepts that were so complex that the teacher could not generate sufficient vocabulary to explain them in Setswana. The teachers also had some problems in expressing themselves very clearly in Setswana during the interviews though they comprehended and taught the written version of the language. Setswana was also singled out as a serious problem in teaching and learning. There was no gender difference with regard to the fact that Setswana was complicated for the learners.

The NLP enhanced the lives of those who participated in it. The learners used reading/writing and practical skills in different ways depending on their situation. Most of them pointed to writing letters as a critical use of the newly acquired skills in their lives. However, at the family level, there were notable gender differences because women used the skills for medication of their children and everyone in the family. The men mainly used the skills for counting their cattle or those of their masters if they were employees. Both men and women consistently agreed that they did not become community activists as a result of taking part in the programme. This contrasts with evidence from elsewhere where literacy programmes led the new literates to become community activists. For example, in Tanzania and Thailand acquisition of literacy made individuals very active in their community after completion of their literacy work (Kassam, 1979; and Varavarn, 1989). The difference might be explained by the lack of focus on community issues as demonstrated by the primers. This will certainly vary from context to context. There will be need to address issues related to community participation more vigorously in the teaching materials than is done at the moment.

The study indicates that gender roles were reinforced by the NLP in that men cited cattle management as the way they used the acquired skills in their life role. Women pointed to administering medication to the children. For example, the women mentioned the lesson on collecting firewood as strengthening their role as women in the community, it assisted them to gather firewood more sustainably. However, both were agreed that there were limited practical skills that were offered in the course other than what they learned from each other as learners. The few skills that were offered were gender biased in that men learned carpentry while women did weaving and basketry.

The learners thought the programme could help them meet their needs in that it provided new skills on ploughing and vegetable gardening. The majority of them felt that their needs have been satisfied in that they can read, write, sign and have now been exposed to opportunities to learn what is happening in the rest of Botswana. They can access the Government sponsored daily newspaper and read in Setswana. It could be concluded that the Basubiya men and women felt that in spite of its problems, the programme helped them to use skills like writing to satisfy their psychological, social and economic needs as individuals and family members.

Overall, the study indicates that the gender roles are reinforced by the programme.

Therefore it could be concluded that gender issues were significant when it came to the distribution of roles among men and women. Gender as a factor, however, need not be over emphasised because there were other comparable issues that affect men and women like language, since most of them were non-Setswana speakers and experienced problems with its use in class. The respondents were also in general agreement that they had several problems in the programme and singled out seasonal work as the most critical stumbling block to their learning. They also pointed to problems of the hostile weather conditions exacerbated by lack of shelter. The fact that on average the learners were usually poor also somewhat transcended gender lines. It could be argued that while gender is a significant issue, it does not supersede the ethnic and class status as defining characteristics of the literacy learners in Chobe.

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