

HANGING BY A THREAD:

The Impact of Donor Funding Trends on ABE NGOs in KwaZulu-Natal

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Declaration

This dissertation represents original work by the author and has not been previously submitted in any form to any university. Where use has been made of the work of others, this has been duly acknowledged and referenced in the text.

Signed: _____

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Chapter One

Introduction:

Constitution (Section 29, 1996): “everyone had the right to basic education, including Adult Basic Education” (DoE, 2001: 6)

The Constitution of the newly democratic South Africa guaranteed the right to Adult Basic Education (ABE) for all South Africans. Five years after the Constitution was passed as the highest legal authority in the country, progress on delivery of ABE services has been dismal. Indeed, the trend has been that the intense activity around ABE policy-making in post-apartheid South Africa has not been accompanied by crucial implementation. This dissertation examines the dynamics within the ABE sector and begins to identify some of the impediments to achieving literacy for all in South Africa.

An examination of ABE, a declared development goal of the democratic government, highlights the politics of aid and what is problematic about government priorities. The dissertation firstly demonstrates that not enough support and resources are directed at this sector even though it is a pivotal component of any development agenda. I pose the question: Can South Africa realistically expect to consolidate democracy and compete in the global marketplace if the majority of its people cannot read and write?

Secondly, the dissertation argues that ABE non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the organizations that were most instrumental in keeping ABE initiatives

alive during the apartheid era when government disregarded education for Black people, have been almost completely marginalized. Government on its own cannot hope to successfully provide universal literacy services when it does not have the capacity or experience in this regard. NGOs have their expertise, experience, and innovative materials which at the very least contribute to government efforts. However, this resource can easily be lost as NGOs continue to dissolve in the face of funding constraints.

The impact of donor funding trends and government inaction towards ABE NGOs has been severe. Amongst NGOs, it has led to an all-consuming obsession with sustainability at the expense of delivery. This dissertation concludes that such a focus is counter-productive to what should be South Africa's urgent goal - to "break the back of illiteracy" before it continues to snowball.

This dissertation examines the impact of donor funding trends on ABE NGOs with a specific focus on NGOs in KwaZulu-Natal. It answers the following questions:

- 1) What have been the donor funding trends for this sector?
- 2) How have these trends affected the operations of ABE NGOs in KwaZulu-Natal?
- 3) What role has government played in "filling the gap" in funding/resources and also in terms of coordination and support for the sector?

- 4) What sustainability strategies have NGOs adopted in light of funding constraints?
- 5) What are the alternatives and what is the future of the sector?

The dissertation sets the context for its findings by discussing research on the extent of the illiteracy problem, international policy and approaches to ABE, history of ABE in South Africa including policy developments, and current provisioning of ABE services. It discusses the challenges faced by NGOs in a transitional South Africa and then the broad trends of donor funding in a developing South Africa.

The focus of the latter half of the paper is research findings obtained through a survey and case study of key ABE NGOs in KZN, major donors, government and academics. The findings confirm much that is found in available literature on ABE. The findings also bring to light interesting challenges and dynamics within the sector. These observations then suggest avenues for further exploration.

Terminology:

This dissertation uses the terms “literacy”, “Adult Basic Education (ABE)” and “Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET)” interchangeably although “literacy” is the preferred term. “ABET” is the term found in all government policy documents. The shift to employing the term “ABET” has been attributed to three factors:

- 1) “ABET” is a more formal term and gives the sector legitimacy in the formal education system. The criticism of this view is that ABET then becomes viewed as the adult equivalent of education for children without due regard for the unique learning needs and abilities of adults.
- 2) “ABET” is in keeping with a focus on economic development. Thus, literacy is not just for literacy's sake but also for the improvement of livelihoods through formal training and employment. The criticism of this view is that it is only relevant to the labour market and the formal economy. In this view, those that do not fall into these categories – for example, senior citizens and “housewives” – are marginalized. The goal of universal provision gets obscured in the process.
- 3) Others argue that the term “Adult Basic Education” arose out of the need to measure qualifications and certify someone as having received a basic education (Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000). One is left wondering why the term ‘literacy’ does not in itself represent some measure of qualification or establishing ability. In other words, one is either literate or illiterate and there must be some definitive dividing line.

In this paper, “literacy” is the preferred term because it is simple and conveys the idea sufficiently. This paper also comes down on the side of a rights-based approach to ABE within which the term “literacy” has been more commonly used in the past.

Rationale for the Study:

The researcher chose this research subject due to her personal experiences in the sector. Firstly, the researcher passionately believes that literacy and knowledge is empowering. This rests on the assumption that literacy is a necessary tool to better negotiate daily living given a rapidly changing and “modernizing” world. As well, given the history of apartheid in South Africa, illiteracy was very much a tool of oppression. Thus, literacy for emancipation is an urgent goal.

Secondly, the researcher was involved with organizations that conducted literacy work. Her hands-on involvement in the day-to-day running of such organizations led her to be fully cognizant of the enormous constraints they faced due to lack of funding compared to the alarmingly widespread need. It became clear that sources of funding for the sector and levels of commitment to support the sector were dwindling amongst donors, government and the private sector. While this was rapidly coming to pass, there was minimal attention to the needs and reality

on the ground. Literacy work amongst NGOs seemed to become more and more donor-oriented and fee-for-service oriented. This indeed was disconcerting given the need and inability to pay at local community level. Developments in the field seemed to suggest that literacy was no longer being upheld as a basic right. As well, the “die-hards” committed to work in the sector were fast burning out and the future seemed bleak.

Finally, there was insufficient attention to giving voice to the plight of ABET NGOs, particularly noting that they had maintained their commitment to the sector in the toughest of circumstances during the apartheid era. NGOs were facing a backlash when all confidence was directed towards a new democratic government that promised “delivery, delivery, delivery”.

Major studies or surveys on the state of the sector that were commissioned by government or donors were too large to focus on any particular stakeholder (Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000; Harley, et. al., 1996; Budlender, 1998). This dissertation seeks to delve deeper into the state of ABE NGOs through in-depth study of a few NGOs and the impact of donor funding trends on them. The focus is on the major ABE NGOs in KwaZulu-Natal; this is because of better accessibility but it is also notable that KwaZulu-Natal has the highest level of illiteracy in the country (Harley, et. al., 1996).

Chapter Two describes the research methodology employed in this dissertation, outlines the limitations of the research, and provides a brief literature review. Chapter Three focuses on the problem of illiteracy by clarifying definitions, discussing the extent of the problem and its implications for development. Chapter Four highlights the international policy and trends in the ABE sector and examines the theoretical underpinnings. Chapter Five provides an historical perspective of literacy policy and provisioning in South Africa. These aforementioned chapters set the context for an analysis of the primary research findings of this dissertation included in the latter half of the paper.

Chapter Six identifies and analyzes the findings of a survey of donors, government, academics and NGOs active in the sector. Chapter Seven discusses a case study of the Durban Association for the Aged while Chapter Eight describes a second case study of the Tembalethu Community Education Centre. These case studies serve to elucidate and confirm the broader findings of the survey. Chapter Nine then more closely analyzes the research findings and suggests alternatives and further issues for consideration. Finally, Chapter Ten provides some concluding statements and observations.

Chapter Two

Research Methodology

The research methods adopted in this study were aimed at identifying the broad trends with respect to the impact of funding shifts on NGOs in general, a sectoral focus on ABET NGOs in particular and a more geographical focus on the major ABET NGOs in KwaZulu-Natal. Secondary information was obtained through a literature review of government documents, journals, books, internet sites, annual reports and newsletters. The primary qualitative research methods employed were a small survey, semi-structured interviews and two case studies.

Survey:

The Centres for Adult Education and for Adult and Community Education at the University of Natal had already conducted an extensive national survey and the findings were correlated with the smaller survey contained in this research paper (Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000). The ABET sector appears to be in a constant state of flux and crises. In the time that has elapsed between when this study was conceived and when the research was executed, there have been significant changes in the sector. Amongst NGOs, there has already been a shutdown of an organization and the establishment of a funding conduit. Thus, this study, once completed, will only capture a brief moment in the sector.

A comprehensive list of organizations that were contacted for the survey is included in the appendix (A). The questionnaires that were administered are also attached in the appendix (B). The survey focused on ABE NGOs in the KwaZulu-Natal area. Initial informal discussions with individual role-players within the sector confirmed which were the major NGOs. There were four NGOs with which contact was made by way of questionnaires or interviews. All of them were urban-based. The names of the organizations are as follows:

1. Tembaletu Community Education Centre in Pietermaritzburg

Respondent: Khulekani Mathe, Director

2. Natal Adult Basic Education Support and Assistance (NASA) in Durban

Respondent: Mandla Mtembu, Director

3. Umtapo Centre in Durban

Respondent: Deena Soliar, Director

4. Operation Upgrade in Durban

Respondent: Pinkie Lebajoa, Coordinator

The English Resource Unit (ERU) used to be a major player and was also on the list to contact but subsequently shut down. Project Literacy's KZN branch was excluded from the survey, as it is a regional arm of a national body.

The survey was also administered to donors, government contacts and academics working in the field. Questionnaires were initially emailed but there

was a lack of success for technical reasons (problems with email addresses) and poor response rate for unknown reasons. It then seemed more feasible to establish telephone/fax contact or interview appointments (telephonically and/or in person). Questions to donors had to be kept to a minimum as initial calls made it clear that they lacked the time for in-depth interviews.

Through personal relationships with some NGO personnel, the researcher was able to get cooperation on interviews and completing questionnaires although these people were also extremely busy. In the case of Operation Upgrade, the Director was unavailable for interviews or to fill out questionnaires. As a result, the researcher interviewed another staff member. It was noted that the Director was scrambling about "to improve the funding situation".

Interviews:

Personal semi-structured in-depth Interviews were carried out with the following individuals:

1. Khulekani Mathe, Director of Tembalethu Community Education Centre
2. Mandla Mtembu, Director of NASA
3. Ivor Baatjes, Center for Adult Education UND-Pietermaritzburg
4. Pinkie Lebajoa, ABET Coordinator at Operation Upgrade

The above individuals were targeted for in-depth interviews as they were all influential in the field. The NGO personnel, in particular, had previous

experience with other ABET NGOs, sat on boards and committees, and participated in networks and alliances. Thus, it was expected that their knowledge base about the sector would be broad.

Case Studies:

There are two case studies presented in this paper: The Durban Association for the Aged (DAFTA) and Tembaletu Community Education Centre. Information for the first case study on DAFTA was derived from participant observation. The researcher was closely involved with the organization and the ABET project for a period of four years (1996 to 2000). The researcher was initially employed in the organization in the capacity of Administrator/Coordinator and then went on to serve as a volunteer on the board of management. She was partly responsible for proposal writing, liaising with donors and overseeing the management of projects including the ABET project.

Information for the case study on Tembaletu Community Education Centre was arrived at through two interviews with the Director, Khulekani Mathe and through a review of annual reports, external evaluations and strategic planning reports.

Limitations of the Study:

Considering that the sample size is rather small and limited geographically, it is very difficult to make generalizations about the sector from a national point of

view. It was helpful to consult research done by the University of Natal and others, as well as government documents, to demonstrate that trends and conclusions contained there have been paralleled in ABET NGOs in KwaZulu-Natal. However, the peculiarities of NGOs surveyed for the purposes of this paper were expected to add more nuanced insights to the information already available

Literature Review:

The major documents on ABET in South Africa have been produced by government which, according to some NGO personnel, has milked NGOs for their ideas and inputs (see discussion on survey results below). The Department of Education has produced a document (available on the web) about the state of ABET and progress on objectives thus far (DoE, 2001). As expected, this document appears to provide a glowing report that is not adequately substantiated.

The policy environment for ABET took a while to get off the ground but has since been firmly established with heavy emphasis on formalization processes (Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000). Formalization reflects a shift in values in the sector which will be discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter.

This dissertation, particularly the discussion in this and the next chapter, draws on the three major surveys undertaken by academics to assess the state of the sector. The first is a much-quoted study undertaken by University of Natal academics, Anne Harley, John Aitchison, Elda Lyster and Sandra Land, entitled "A Survey of Adult Basic Education in South Africa in the 90s" (Harley, et. al., 1996). It is a fairly comprehensive empirical commissioned by the Joint Education Trust (JET), which also commissioned another ethnographic study, "The Social Uses of Literacy: Theory and Practice in Contemporary South Africa" (Prinsloo & Breier, 1997).

The second paper is a short review on the state of ABE in South Africa undertaken in 1997 by John Aitchison from the Centre for Adult Education, UND-Pietermaritzburg as part of a project with the Center for Policy Studies, Florida State University, the International Working Group on Non-formal and Adult Education and the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (Aitchison, 1997). While this paper provides more updated information, it is merely a review and so does not include in-depth analysis.

The last paper is the outcome of a project undertaken by the Centre for Adult Education and the Centre for Adult and Community Education at the University of Natal and is entitled "University of Natal Survey of Adult Basic Education and Training" (Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000). It is the most recent survey and contains national and regional/provincial survey information. With such a

mammoth undertaking, it can only be expected that information will be of a more general nature.

Other documents consulted proved useful for information on history and theory of ABE (Lyster, 1992; French, 1992). A study undertaken by Debbie Budlender of the Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE) (for the 1998 Report on Poverty to the Office of the Deputy President) provides an interesting analysis of the state of ABE around 1997 (Budlender, 1997). Other useful and more updated information was sourced from newspaper articles and articles written by NGO personnel.

Overall, there seemed to be a clear gap in terms of assessing the state of ABE from the point of view of NGOs. Their critical voice came to life through interviews conducted as part of the data collection process of this study. Later, this discussion will crystallize some of these views and provide an analysis of key findings. Indeed, based on NGO staff feedback, the future of ABE seems far bleaker than reflected in the literature.

The discussion that follows in chapters three, four and five highlights key issues emerging from an overview of the research, policy and reports relevant to this study. It provides important background information for the purposes of understanding the context and findings of this dissertation.

Chapter Three

Definitions, Scope of the Problem and Implications for Development

Clarity about language and terminology is important in the ABE sector as it has implications for the definition of the problem, the target group and strategies for the alleviation of the problem. Much of the definitional activity in the sector has been undertaken by UNESCO and adapted by national governments. UNESCO has had considerable influence on policy developments as well.

UNESCO defines adults as “people who are not in the regular school and university system and who are fifteen years or older” (Harley, 1996: 17). This has been the target group for ABE activities in South Africa. However, it has become increasingly apparent that some adults who have been through the formal schooling system end up functionally illiterate and appropriate candidates for ABE programmes.

In recent times, documents by COSATU, ANC, Centre for Education Policy and Development (CEPD) and the national Department of Education (DoE) advocate the extension of Adult Basic Education to include training (Aitchison, 1997)). The idea was to view literacy as the first step in a whole skills training programme. Thus, there is a fairly widespread use of the term Adult Basic Education and Training or ABET. The association between ABE and training is hoped to

generate creative opportunities for funding for organizations working in this sector.

The major survey reports on ABE have chosen to adapt the UNESCO definition of illiteracy. The adapted definition takes into account the poor quality of the primary education and the relatively short period of compulsory schooling in South Africa (Harley, et. al., 1996). An illiterate person is therefore described as:

"An adult person...lacking a basic education who is aged 15 years or older and has received no education, or less than 7 years of formal schooling (that is, less than standard five) or its equivalent". (p. 21)

The extent of illiteracy in South Africa has been subject to various different estimates. According to Wydeman & Camper (1990), statistics on illiteracy have to be viewed with caution. They argue that statistics from census surveys are problematic because:

- 1) No test for literacy can be set in a questionnaire as illiterate people obviously cannot read;
- 2) The use of the number of years of schooling as a criterion does not provide a realistic picture as people who were literate a number of years before may have since lapsed into illiteracy or there may be wide quality variations in the schooling system; and,
- 3) Comparative surveys may use different criteria. (p.5)

Harley et. al., (1996) conducted their own estimate of levels of illiteracy based on the CSS October Household Survey in 1994. They included adults over 15 with no education and education up to standard four and arrived at a figure of nearly 7.5 million or roughly 29% of the total population. When looking at implications for a target population, they further refined this figure to exclude the aged and the “ineducable” (people with mental disorders or learning disabilities) and arrived at a figure of 5 268 200 potential learners. The exclusion of the aged rested on the assumption that older people are more likely to be illiterate than younger people but less likely to use ABE services. This is a problematic assumption and is given no further justification by the authors.

The aged, particularly women, play an important role in childcare. In rural areas, they often are the primary caregivers for their grandchildren while their children work in the cities. This responsibility will only intensify with the impact of AIDS. Their role as caregivers will also have a significant influence on the informal education of their grandchildren. Aged women also often supplement their pensions with small-scale income-generating activities. This requires some knowledge of numeracy and literacy to handle money, access credit facilities, market goods and so on. It must also be acknowledged that the illiterate and therefore vulnerable aged are often exploited for their pensions. Thus, an ABE programme targeted at the aged will have important spillover effects and will contribute a great deal to improving the quality of their and their families' lives.

The participation of the aged in ABE services also needs to be further researched. The case study on the Durban Association for the Aged (DAFTA) that forms part of this research study notes that the ABE project had considerable participation from senior citizens. These participants attended classes regularly and participated in exams - in marked contradiction to the assumptions of Harley, et. al.. It seems that Harley, et. al. have focused solely on the economic development value of ABE as this would clearly be a reason for excluding senior citizens (a supposedly economically inactive segment of the population) for not having the potential to be learners.

The most recent estimate of the number of illiterate people in South Africa is found in the study by the Centres for Adult Education and Adult and Community Education at the University of Natal (2000). This estimate suggests that the number of illiterate people is actually growing. The numbers have risen from 7.5 million in the 1995 October Household Survey to 8.5 million (32%) in the 1996 General Population Census. It would be interesting to note what the 2001 Population Census reveals about the growth in the numbers of illiterate people. If one compares actual participation in literacy programmes at well below 430 000 to the millions of illiterate people, then it is more than evident that available services are merely scratching the surface (Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000).

Illiteracy clearly has enormous implications for development. There have been strong arguments for the positive relationship between the level of literacy in a society and the economic, social and political development of that society. According to Harley et. al. (1996), the provision of ABE worldwide is motivated by the international recognition of literacy as a vital human development indicator. Given the reality of global capitalism, developing countries have recognized the importance of ABE for development to the extent that they regard this service as an instrument to improving the skill level and capacity of the workforce. This preoccupation in developing countries de-emphasizes literacy as a universal right and a mode of redistribution. Bhola (1984) argues that the "health of the state must be balanced by a concern for the health of its people" (p. 21). Thus, the state, in elevating production and the "workforce", must not lose sight of the value of literacy for the quality of life of all citizens.

Chapter Four

THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Theoretical Underpinnings of ABE and International Policy:

ABE policy is far from merely a technical or practical matter – it is clearly shaped by ideology, values and assumptions. How ABE is defined and what results are anticipated of ABE provision have determined policy developments internationally and locally.

There are various different views on the underlying purpose of ABE. These range from nation building and modernization to increasing productivity (macroeconomic emphasis) to redressing inequality. The goal of redressing inequality is a noble goal but in practice many developing countries that first emphasized this goal have tended to slip towards an ideology of modernization and productivity rather than freedom and equity (Bhola, 1984). The pressures of global capitalism and international competitiveness have tended to obscure equity goals.

Lyster (1992) has identified three broad ideological approaches that are not mutually exclusive but are useful to understanding the international trends in ABE. The first is the missionary approach or *literacy for salvation* of which Frank Laubach, an international missionary, was a central player. The approach has

been criticized for its evangelizing agenda and its promotion of the idea that literacy by itself can achieve miracles in the lives of individuals (Lyster, 1992).

The second approach is the functional approach or *literacy for modernization and development* and is strongly advocated by UNESCO. The functional approach of UNESCO was based on the premise that individual and national productivity would be increased if literacy levels were improved. Programmes were to be linked with economic priorities and carried out in areas undergoing rapid economic expansion. According to Lyster, "these agendas come as no surprise when one notes that UNESCO is reliant on the ideological and financial support of agencies with primarily western, industrial and technological orientations" (1992: 23). The functional approach began to be widely embraced by various agencies after the late sixties.

The third approach, the radical approach or *literacy for empowerment*, is associated with the ideology of Paulo Freire. Literacy in his view was regarded as a means of liberation from oppression. Through literacy programmes, learners could be conscientized, thereby, bringing about social change (Lyster 1992).

The radical approach has been subject to a few criticisms. One is that it places enormous demands on teachers who may not have the capacity to use the teaching methods to liberate the masses. This makes it difficult to implement on

a large scale. Another criticism is that this approach fails to explain how conscientization or understanding the cause of oppression leads to transformation (Lyster, 1992). In South Africa, the radical approach was the one most suited to transforming the apartheid society and therefore favoured by the liberation movement (Lyster, 1992). However, in the post-apartheid era, the functional approach came to dominate and the few organizations still employing the radical approach have made a small impact.

Recent policy developments emphasize that literacy is necessary for people's participation in civil and economic life and for democracy (WEF, 2000; WEF, 1990; UNESCO, 1997). These views can be said to characterize a fourth approach or model for literacy and that is, *literacy for participation or democracy*. In some respects, this approach overlaps aspects of the radical and functional approach.

Currently, the most influential international ABE policy developments have emerged out of three international conferences held over the last decade. These were declarations of the 1990 World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand, the 1997 International Conference on Adult Education held in Hamburg, Germany and the 2000 World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal (WEF, 2000; WEF, 1990; UNESCO, 1997). These declarations affirmed that ABE was a universal right but also emphasized the ideas of literacy for sustainable development and people's participation. Universal access and equity

were seen to be possible through supportive policies, resources, partnerships and international cooperation. Governments were expected to demonstrate political will and commitment to education for all by backing educational policy reforms with appropriate financial allocations. The World Education Forum in Dakar set target dates and outlined that the expectation of governments would be that they update and adjust their education plans according to the Dakar Framework by 2002, including demonstrating appropriate budgets. This framework will be discussed in more detail later in the paper. It remains to be seen what influence such policy direction will have on South Africa. Currently, South Africa seems to operate in a vacuum such that there is no clear demonstration of a commitment to education for all (particularly those people who were deprived of an education during the apartheid era). ABE appears to be accorded low priority in terms of budget and service provision.

The chosen ideological approach to ABE will underpin the type of policy and hence the type of delivery programme adopted by a country. Harley, et. al. (1996) drawing from the work of H. S. Bhola describe three forms of delivery:

- 1) Project form of delivery: small-scale, local and mostly non-government initiatives;
- 2) Programme form of delivery: the objective is mass provision where the role of government is important but the emphasis shifts to partnership with other players; and,

- 3) Campaign form of delivery: the goal is short-term universal literacy provision. "Conscientization" is the main objective and government is the main agent for change.

Although recent developments and government rhetoric seems to identify with the campaign (SANLI Initiative) and the programme (policy document on ABE) forms of delivery, the reality on the ground is that ABE initiatives are still characterized by the project form of delivery. There needs to be much more of a commitment to elevate current ABE provisions to a wider scale of impact.

Chapter Five

THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

History of ABE in South Africa:

The history of ABE in South Africa is not well documented undoubtedly due to there being no formal ABE policies and services during most of the country's history. Much of the activity was concentrated amongst those organizations and individuals involved in the liberation movement. The government clearly neglected the problem of illiteracy –and in fact, contributed to its growth- as it mainly affected the Black sector of the population.

French (1992), Harley, et. al. (1996) and Aitchison (1997) in their respective publications on ABE in South Africa have provided useful overviews of the history of ABE policy and practice. The following discussion looks at some of the key developments highlighted by these authors.

According to French (1992), the early history of the literacy movement in South Africa followed much of the trend in the rest of colonial Africa. The introduction of the written word to what were traditionally oral societies prior to the 20th century was due to the work of missionaries who, thereby, intended to promote Christianity and biblical literacy (French, 1992).

A further boost to literacy in South Africa occurred in the early 20th century, particularly in the 1920s and the 1930s, when there was a strong drive to establish Afrikaans as an official language across the race groups (French, 1992). There were no other significant developments in the field until the late 1940s.

Emerging from government optimism at the end of the Second World War, an official Committee on Adult Education was established in 1945 to research the issue. One of the Committee's recommendations was that night schools be encouraged by state subsidies. When the National Party government came into power in 1948, support for these night schools was undermined in a number of ways. One such example was that applications for subsidies were often overlooked or refused (French, 1992).

From the 1950s onwards, apartheid policy continued to ensure that Black people were denied their right to education. Teaching literacy to Black people, unless it was through an officially registered night school, became a banned activity under the Bantu Education Act of 1954. This policy, the Group Areas policies and the security legislation of the 1960s, all placed legal constraints and barriers to NGO literacy projects (Aitchison, 1997; French, 1992). In addition, the banning of the Communist Party and later the ANC and PAC in the early 1960s eliminated important sources of organized support for community-based literacy work.

In the 1970s, the Department of Bantu Education – later the Department of Education and Training (DET) - set up divisions of adult education and a night school system. According to French (1992), government had several motives for these initiatives. Firstly, the political costs of illiteracy were on the increase as was evidenced by the increasing activism and protests of the 1970s, particularly around education. Secondly, international efforts to combat illiteracy and efforts by Operation Upgrade, a local NGO, were also important influences on the state. Thirdly, economic pressure, with rising demands for a better-trained work force played a part as well. Finally, international trends in the field had already made the link between literacy and economic development and the South African government began to follow suit (French, 1992). However, the first policy initiative by the National Party government only emerged two decades later.

The Education Renewal Strategy (ERS) was drafted in 1992. However, ABE was not identified as a key problem in the first phase of the development of the ERS. The document proposed no state funding for adult education. After a number of respondents highlighted the lack of ABE discussions in the document, it was given a fleeting mention in the final document (French, 1992).

The initiation and maintenance of the adult literacy drive was kept alive over the latter half of the twentieth century by a diversity of NGOs. NGOs were on a spectrum from progressive/radical, Charterist (Freedom Charter) Movement, Black Consciousness Movement and conservative working with the apartheid

government. Networks of NGOs such as the NLC and the South African Association for Literacy and Adult Education (SAALAE) were set up more to coordinate the activities of their members than for direct service delivery (French, 1992). Although diverse in approaches, the unifying factor for much NGO literacy work at the time was the liberation struggle (Aitchison, 1997).

Much of the ABE policy activity occurred after the ANC was unbanned in 1990. The ANC set up a Centre for Education Policy Development in Johannesburg in July 1993 to inform the party's education policy. Its comprehensive "Implementation Plan for Education and Training" was released for discussion in May 1994 but has never been officially published (French, 1992). A list of the most influential documents in the post 1990 policy-making drive is included in Appendix (C).

After the 1994 elections and the establishment of the new ministries, the pace and commitment of government initiatives in ABE began to wane. NGOs who were able to secure funding continued to be the main providers of ABE along with commercial providers contracted by industry (Aitchison, 1997).

The post 1994 policy work began to increasingly be concerned with assessment issues and the development of a system of outcomes-based education for the field. The White Paper on Education made a clear link between education and national economic development. Although it affirmed that ABE was a right, the

emphasis was on an integrated approach to education and training with the establishment of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The trend in policy thereafter was towards the formalization of ABE and an emphasis on assessment (Aitchison, 1997; Harley, et. al., 1996).

Major policy developments in the field occurred in 1997. These included the "Policy Document on Adult Basic Education and Training" and its accompanying "A National Multi-year Implementation Plan for Adult Education and Training: Provision and Accreditation". The implementation plan gave effect to the recommendations in the policy document and was the guide to formalization for provincial education departments (Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000).

In 1998, the national Directorate initiated the development of a Green Paper on ABE. The final draft was completed by the end of 1999 but there has mysteriously been no further discussion or developments surrounding this document since then (Aitchison, Houghton, & Baatjes, 2000). The most recent policy document, the Adult Basic Education and Training Act 52, was passed in 2000. It was largely concerned with the regulation of the public adult learning centers - formerly the night schools in the apartheid era (Act of Parliament, 2000).

While policy development has been vibrant, service delivery has been lacklustre. Indeed, many stakeholders regard ABET as a victim of government policy

overload and lack of implementation (Cawthra & Kraak, 1999). The discussion that follows examines the issue of service provision including identifying the major providers.

Current ABE Provisioning – Whose Responsibility?:

There can be no disputing that the mass provision of ABE is largely dependent on government funding. This may be supported through loan or grant finance from international donors. The largest proportion of the national budget was allocated to education. Of that 99% goes to formal sector education with negligible (0.83%) support for ABET (Cawthra & Kraak, 1999; Macfarlane, 2000e). This is a considerable disparity when taking into account that schools have approximately 12 million pupils while adults in need of ABET number at least seven million people (Cawthra & Kraak, 1999: 135). How can such a budget allocation be justified? It is particularly disconcerting when one compares it to the debt servicing and defence budget. The goal of ABET as a universal right appears beyond reach when one takes into account the low level of priority accorded it by the financial decision-makers.

It is unclear whether the Skills Development Fund will benefit ABET programmes. People would need to acquire a basic education in order to participate in further skills training. If ABE is not a component of proposed Skills Development programmes, then it is likely that only the literate will have access to such programmes.

Overall, government, business and NGOs are the largest providers of ABE services. The earliest available statistics by sector dates back to 1996 (Harley, et. al., 1996). The following table provides a breakdown of the number of learners by sector and thereby demonstrates the main sources of service provision.

Table One: Service Providers

| <i>Sector</i> | <i>Number</i> |
|----------------------------|----------------------|
| State | 89151 |
| Companies | 29749 |
| NGOs/CBOs/Sec 21 companies | 24735 |
| Parastatals | 10772 |
| Municipalities | 3394 |
| Religious Organizations | 1048 |
| Total | 158 849 |

Source: Harley, et. al., 1996, p. 54

Within government, the primary responsibility for ABE provision lies with the provinces. According to Budlender (1998: 38), provision at this level has been hindered by a “lack of personpower, authority and resources”. She also notes that within provincial budgets, ABE is most vulnerable to cutbacks when funds are low.

The vehicle for delivery at government level has been the public adult learning centers (PALCs). These centers have been criticized for being inefficient and fraught with problems. There are shortfalls in terms of management, monitoring and evaluation systems, innovation, operations and so on (Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000; Budlender, 1998; McGreal, 2000). Given the urgent need, transformation of these centers is proceeding much too slowly.

The running of the centers depends a great deal on retired and unemployed teachers (Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000). This in itself is problematic given that ABE is a highly specialized field and it cannot be assumed that schoolteachers are skilled enough to train adults. It remains to be seen whether the implementation of the Adult Basic Education and Training Act 52 of 2000 will bring about a proper transformation of the centers. Some have suggested that the centers be shutdown altogether and begun afresh to overcome what seem to be intractable problems (Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000).

There also have been two major drives by government to “break the back of illiteracy”. The first was the Ithuteng Campaign launched in 1996/1997. With considerable donor funding (R50 million), the Department of Education aimed to reach 90 000 learners through its public adult learning centers (Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000; Budlender, 1998). The survey by the Centres for Adult Education found that the success of this campaign was grossly overstated as it included students doing further education and training courses (including

matic). Since this blunder, the government has appointed the HSRC to create proper systems for such data collection (Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000). Although the campaign did reach some learners, it was costly, fell far short of its targets and barely addressed the widespread need.

The second campaign began in July 1999 when the Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, initiated a call to action. The South African National Literacy Initiative (SANLI) aimed to train 50 000 teachers to teach 500 000 learners (DoE, 2001). A separate ABET directorate was set up to give the campaign priority. A great deal of international donor funding (approximately R55 million primarily from the European Union and DANIDA) was pledged for the campaign. To date, except for the training of a few teachers, not a single learner has benefited from the campaign (Macfarlane, 2001b).

Speculations surrounding the reasons for the campaign's lack of success include the level of incompetence amongst the SANLI board, an inadequate staff complement in the directorate, the lack of political will and the lack of proper consultation and cooperation with other service providers (Macfarlane, 2001b). Furthermore, some have suggested that an emphasis on formalization processes is antithetical to a campaign approach (Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000). The bureaucracy involved in formalization is viewed as a hindrance and deterrent for mass literacy provision. One of the concerns around this initiative should be what would become of the donor funding that has been pledged to literacy. Will it

merely be redirected to other government priorities more in line with GEAR, its neo-liberal macroeconomic policy?

While the private or business sector was one of the largest role-players in terms of delivery of ABE in the early transition, this is now on the wane. The decline in support from the private sector has been attributed to a "lacklustre economy" and the pressure on the sector to rationalize (Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000). Furthermore, as unemployment continues unabated and, in fact, grows, there is a larger pool of more skilled workers to draw from so there would be little motivation to hire illiterate workers and train them. Some hope seemed to arise from the Skills Development Fund as an incentive to companies to hire and train illiterate workers, however, it seems unrealistic given that a literacy training programme is a long process. Usually "time is money" in the business sector and the emphasis is always on quick results.

The NGO sector was the most promising and experienced agent for delivery but its current role has been considerably diminished. As argued throughout the dissertation, the sector can now be more appropriately characterized as "bruised", "battered", "demoralized" and "floundering".

NGOs in Transition:

The relationship between NGOs and the state in South Africa has always been problematic. ABET NGOs and other civil society organizations that were part of the liberation struggle have historically been antagonistic to the state and vice versa. Civil society organizations have played a vital role in filling gaps in services to Black people who were denied their basic rights during the apartheid era (CASE & SANGOCO, 1999).

With the onset of democracy, NGOs began experiencing serious challenges as the focus shifted to propping up a government for the people. The impact on NGOs has been significant in terms of financial crises, “brain drains” and revised missions. NGOs that were direct beneficiaries of international funding during the apartheid era were thrown into chaos when these funds began to be shifted to government (Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000; Afshar, 2001; Cawthra & Kraak, 1999). According to a study in 1995 by the IDT, most of the 128 organizations surveyed experienced reductions of one to two thirds of their annual operating budgets (Cawthra & Kraak, 1999). The sector also lost many dynamic and key personnel to the government and corporate sectors as brighter opportunities presented themselves there (Habib & Taylor, 1999). The scramble for financial sustainability and to be relevant to government policy has meant that many NGOs had to restructure, retrench and reshape their missions and activities. Some have argued that this has caused them to move further away

from serving the interests of the poor to serving the interests of money sources (Habib & Taylor, 1999).

According to Habib & Taylor (1999), while there is a lack of consistent policy on state-NGO relations from the ANC government, NGOs continue to play a contributory and pivotal role in a transitional South Africa. They identify three ways in which NGOs have contributed resources to the state. The first is by being absorbed into the state through policy, personnel and funding contributions. The second is through partnerships, policies and services. And, the last function of NGOs is keeping government in check by serving as watchdogs. The extent to which NGOs can play these roles is questionable when NGOs have experienced a loss of autonomy and cooption and are too busy trying to raise funds (Bratton & Landsberg, 2000).

NGOs in the ABET sector seem to be hardest hit and it is not difficult to understand why some may feel that there is a conspiracy to shut them down altogether. During the early transition, there was a proliferation of literacy NGOs due to the enormous publicity for the sector. ABET was identified as one of the ten presidential lead projects of the RDP and Nelson Mandela, in his early public addresses, emphasized the importance of eradicating illiteracy to South Africa's development. Funding for literacy activities abounded. By 1998, about sixty adult literacy organizations closed down due to funding crises (Cawthra & Kraak, 1999). In fact, the sector as a whole experienced a drastic reduction from 238

NGOs prior to 1994 to its current number of around 40 (Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000).

Donor Funding Trends:

Donor funding trends and the politics of aid provide a broader understanding of the challenges facing the ABET NGO sector. Donors have considerable influence on recipients through their funding priorities and conditions. Not all donor assistance is humanitarian in nature. According to Okello (2000: 16), there are four rationales for development assistance:

1. The need to ensure the protection of the economic interests of the colonial powers in the colonies
2. An instrument of foreign policy to secure commercial, political and strategic national interests of the donor nations
3. Human internationalism – fulfillment of moral obligations
4. Development role

Habte (1999) notes that commercial and economic considerations are increasingly dominating other aid priorities.

African countries, in particular, have a significant dependence on foreign aid. This dependence on aid and the accompanying conditionalities have influence policy directions of the recipient countries. Okello (2000) cautions that:

“Africa must not delude itself. Development assistance by whichever name it is called is essentially economically motivated...Quite simply, an aid-assisted Africa will develop its skills, market, infrastructure and human resources and therefore it will be a more useful trading partner for the North.” (p. 17)

South Africa's dependence on aid is not as significant as other African countries. Bratton and Landsberg (2000) argue that South Africa has been able to exert more control over aid relations than other African countries, thereby, resisting the influence of donors. By holding bilateral commission meetings, the South African government was able to outline its priorities and specify the assistance required from each donor. Indeed, the trend in donor assistance to South Africa was markedly different from other African countries.

Upholding sanctions against the apartheid government and support for the liberation movement, donors channeled funds directly to civil society organizations and other players in the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. With the onset of democracy, donors began to “normalize” the aid relationship with South Africa in that they began to shift funding to government.

In the early transition to democracy, the new government's Reconstruction and Development Project was the framework for the allocation of aid. Donor funds were shifted from the NGOs involved in development activities during the apartheid era to this new channel. The failure of the RDP led to a revision of the framework and the development of the GEAR macroeconomic policy document in 1996 (Bratton & Landsberg, 2000). Although GEAR significantly compromised

the redistribution goals of the RDP, it went largely unchallenged by the donor community.

Foreign aid currently forms 2% of South Africa's budget. The five largest donors are the European Union, USAID, the European Investment Bank, Sweden and German Development Cooperation. Collectively these five donors account for R12 729 million or 73% of the total ODA committed to South Africa over the period 1994 to 1999 (International Organization Development, 2000: 95).

According to Galvin (2000), the education sector was the largest recipient of aid both before and after 1994. She argues that after the democratic elections, there was a gradual shift in focus to democratic governance and business development. The overall new trend in donor funding was a commitment to fund the development initiatives of central, provincial and local governments and to the private sector for programs to promote trade, investment and small business. Meanwhile, NGOs saw their share of aid shrink rapidly as government cooperation programmes began to define a diminished role for NGOs in the development of the new South Africa.

NGOs not only were subject to the shock of drastic funding cutbacks, but new funding criteria and conditions were tied to the funds allocated to them. In the 1980s and early 1990s, donors had supported NGOs through creative aid programmes that were flexible (less bureaucratic) and consultative (Landsberg &

Hutton, 2000; Galvin, 2000). With the 1994 transition, there were new demands from donors for financial accountability, revised missions and new management practices in keeping with business principles (Landsberg & Hutton, 2000).

According to Galvin (2000), most organizations accept accounting to donors as a valid technical requirement. However, she argues that donors use these conditions of aid to exert control to some degree. NGOs lose their autonomy when their accountability to donors takes precedence over their accountability to beneficiaries, staff and management structures. NGOs tend to compromise themselves in whatever way possible to hold on to existing donor contributions and to attract new sources of funding.

The funding crisis amongst NGOs in 1994 led the democratic government to establish the Transitional National Development Trust (TNDT) as a crisis funder for NGOs and CBOs. After a delay of 2 years, the TNDT set up operations in March 1996. The main sources of its budget were the European Union (R70 million) and the South African government (R50 million) (Habib & Taylor, 1999). The number of applications for funding was overwhelming (Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000). Funds were disbursed to education and training, health and rural development projects (Habib & Taylor, 2000). ABET projects received only 10% of the total number of grants allocated (Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000). The TNDT was an immediate short-term solution while government determined what type of structure should be set up for the long-term.

In 1997, an Advisory Committee recommended to government that a new body be established to facilitate relations with civil society organizations (Habib & Taylor, 1999). The National Development Agency (NDA) was set up as the main state institution responsible for channeling government and local and international donor funding to support NGOs and CBOs (Habib & Taylor, 1999; Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000). The NDA was also meant to assist government with policy formulation and implementation with respect to civil society organizations (Habib & Taylor, 1999).

The NDA has experienced numerous bureaucratic teething problems and operational delays (Macfarlane, 2001a; Macfarlane, 2001d). It has been severely criticized for failing to meet the urgent funding gap in civil society. Disbursement of funds is proceeding much too slowly while frustration amongst potential recipients continues to mount.

Funding trends in the ABET sector to a large extent reflect developments in civil society-donor relationships in general. However, the impact seems to be more severe.

In recent times, the major donors to the ABET NGOs have been as follows:

International: European Union, USAID, SIDA, Embassy of Finland, DVV – German Institute for International Cooperation and Adult Education

National: The Joint Education Trust, The Transitional National Development Trust, The Nedcor Chairman's Fund

Source: Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000

The decline in funding as a whole to the NGOs has been attributed to three factors: mismanagement amongst umbrella organizations serving as funding conduits; bilateral agreements between government and donors; and, transformation of national donors. The National Literacy Cooperation, which funded some 300 NGOs, and the World University Services Organization shutdown in 1996-1997 due to a withdrawal of donor funds as a result of financial mismanagement in these organizations (Glenhill, 1998; Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000). This sudden drying up of funds, in turn, led to the dissolution of several ABET NGOs dependent on these larger institutions. Mismanagement of funds was a severe dent to the credibility of the ABET NGO sector and to a large extent much subsequent effort has been directed at building up that credibility.

Bilateral agreements between government and donors have meant that funds have been re-channeled directly to government (Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000), NGOs have to work in cooperation with government where possible to access these funds.

The transformation of national donors due to restructuring and shifting priorities have significantly depleted the pool of funding available to ABET NGOs. The

Joint Education Trust which was formed to disburse European Union and private sector funding was a major full project funder of ABET NGOs (Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000). It had committed funding to projects for a three-year period. Thereafter, it was expected that the Transitional National Development Trust would fill the gap in funding. After the three-year period, JET shifted its priority to project management and the development of schools. This placed the organizations it had originally supported in a vulnerable position as the TNDT was not able to support all the organizations affected and most of the organizations were unable to source additional funds. As indicated earlier, its successor, the NDA, has yet to fill the funding gap.

Donor funding trends and the ineffectiveness of government in terms of “rescuing” NGOs has resulted in a decimated sector – one where only the strong survive. The dynamism and proliferation of innovative small, medium and large NGOs in the early days has been replaced by a few large formal NGOs – certainly insufficient to address the widespread need.

Chapter Six

Research Findings on the State of ABE NGOs in KwaZulu-Natal

The discussion now shifts to a regional focus. What follows is a discussion of the current state of ABE NGOs in KwaZulu-Natal as evidenced by research findings. These findings seem to be consistent with the national surveys but are alarming when considering that KwaZulu-Natal has the highest level of illiteracy regionally and therefore requires particular attention.

Survey Results:

As mentioned earlier, the list of people contacted for the survey is included in the appendix (A). The response rate was 64.5%. After many efforts to solicit responses from those contacted, the researcher was able to get sufficient data to identify trends and confirm findings in already available research.

Donors

Donors were surveyed telephonically. When attempts were made to conduct a more in-depth telephonic interview with the first few donors contacted, it became abundantly clear that donors, for the most part, were too busy to cooperate.

An earlier discussion identified the previous major donors to ABE NGOs. The situation has changed quite drastically. What follows is a list of current donors:

Donors that fund NGOs directly:

SIDA, Embassy of Finland, Rockefeller Brothers Foundation, DVV (Institute for International Cooperation of German Adult Education Association)

Donors that fund Government directly:

USAID, European Union, SIDA, DANIDA

The findings of the survey confirm what is found in the literature, specifically, that donors for this sector have redirected funds originally targeted to NGOs to government. USAID, the European Union and SIDA have confirmed that they used to fund NGOs directly but since there were bilateral agreements with government, these funds were now directed to government in line with these agreements. NGOs approaching these donors would be directed to Department of Education projects and tenders.

The interview with the contact at Operation Upgrade revealed that the European Union had provided crisis funding for the organization towards salaries for tutors providing community-based ABET services for a period of a year (2001). This finding was not confirmed but raises the issue of how flexible donors are and whether NGOs are indeed able to access funding despite the bilateral agreement blockade.

Some donors appear to be reassessing their policy stance. The contacts from SIDA and the Embassy of France have indicated that there may be a change in policy. These donors are looking at funding the NGO sector directly in the future. SIDA has expressed a commitment to allocate funds to the new ABET funding conduit – the ALBED Foundation. The Embassy of France is looking at setting up a special fund at the end of this year. It would be interesting to find out whether the motivation behind this is the donors' recognition that government is unable to deliver and that the transition is a slower process than originally anticipated.

SIDA, the European Union and DANIDA have pledged considerable funds for the SANLI Campaign. It is unclear how much of these pledged funds are actually disbursed. It also remains to be seen what will happen with the funds already disbursed if the inactivity in the campaign continues and whether funds will be redirected to other "more important" priorities.

Government

The lack of cooperation from government in terms of the survey speaks volumes. Government has been openly criticized by the NGO sector for its lack of cooperation, commitment and consultation. Except for the representative from SARS, the government employees were too busy or disinterested to respond to a student's request for information.

According to the SARS International Relations Manager, government's dependence on international donor funding is minimal. The attitude in the Department of Finance is now one of resisting donor pressure to influence priorities and to instead outline South African priorities to donors and see how they can assist. If this is indeed followed through, it remains to be seen what priority ABET will be accorded; the Department of Finance is guided by its macroeconomic policy (GEAR) and ABET does not feature there.

Academics

The survey of the literature and the interview conducted suggests that academics have played a key role in shaping policy and presenting a critical voice to government. One of the leading academics in the field, John Aitchison, appears to have been vilified by the Department of Education for his critical views (Mseleku, 2001). The survey that his department published has been received with open hostility from the Director General, possibly because it paints government in a rather negative light. The survey highlights that there is much government policy with little implementation. The emphasis on the formalization process is criticized. As well, statistical analysis by the researchers has suggested that government has overstated the successes of its campaigns.

One of the researchers involved in the survey and interviewed for this paper summed up the way his colleagues feel about the politics of ABET:

"GEAR is not friendly to ABET because it (ABET) has no immediate economic returns. Government will only support programmes with economic growth perspective...Programmes have to be credited by SAQA. Only formalized programmes will be fundable. There is no support for a social focus, that is, literacy for literacy sake....

At the international level, donors have specific reasons for giving money. Some have the political aim of influencing policy... They have influenced policy in the sense that their criteria focuses on economic development. For example, SIDA has moved from aid to trade..."

(Ivor Baatjes, Lecturer at the Centre for Adult Education, UND-Pietermaritzburg)

Academics in the field appear to have taken a rather sympathetic and supportive role toward NGOs. This is evidenced in the major surveys conducted by the University of Natal Adult Education Departments in Durban and Pietermaritzburg. Practical support is evidenced by the partnership between the Centre for Adult Education, UND-Pietermaritzburg and the Tembaletu Community Education Centre. This will be discussed in more detail in the case study on Tembaletu.

Ivor Baatjes of the Centre for Adult Education, UND-Pietermaritzburg thinks that hope for a literacy campaign lies with NGOs. He argues that:

"[With regard to NGOs], there is a need for a stronger role and smaller consolidated numbers. The driving force will be committed individuals who are not just motivated by money. If NGOs are smaller, well-organized and well run, they will achieve objectives..."

Government thinks they should drive campaigns. They started the South African National Literacy Initiative. But expertise has always been in the NGO sector. Where does government suddenly get the expertise from to run these campaigns? Government needs the support of a vibrant NGO sector..."

NGOs

Profiles:

With the exception of the Umtapo Centre, NGOs in KwaZulu-Natal have gravitated towards the functional approach to literacy. To a large extent this seems to be a consequence of NGOs becoming donor-oriented or the imposition of formalizing processes through the NQF and SAQA. Also, given the neo-liberal world economic order, many donors may steer away from funding a leftist orientation. The Umtapo Centre is able to solicit funding through ongoing relationship-building trips abroad. The Netherlands is one of the major donors of its anti-racism and peace education projects. While the organization does not have community-based literacy projects, it is engaged in other literacy related activities and responds to training requests. The Director of the Umtapo Centre, Deena Soliar, commented that the organization:

“de-emphasize[s] the sectoral approach. Hence, literacy is important to our peace education, economic justice, etc. programmes... given the extent of illiteracy in South Africa, all educators need to understand and have literacy facilitation skills”.

All of the NGOs surveyed have engaged in some community based literacy training. This includes the NGOs that were formerly solely support agencies that provided training and materials development. The reason for this shift is two-fold:

- 1) Support agencies have helped sustain CBOs by subsuming them within the larger organization to access funding opportunities. For example, Operation Upgrade coordinates over 200 community-

based projects all across KZN (this enormous and impractical task is the responsibility of one coordinator). The larger NGO benefits by being able to access more funding through the broadening of activities. The CBOs benefit from resources and technical support from the NGO, yet, they still appear to retain a great deal of autonomy.

- 2) The support agencies themselves need to become sustainable and find that they need to broaden their mission and activities in order to compete for funds available to direct delivery agencies. NASA is an example of such an agency. It used to provide support services to direct delivery organizations but has now engaged in direct delivery as well.

The NGOs are still the primary site for curriculum innovation and materials development within the sector as a whole. Organizations such as Operation Upgrade and NASA generate funds through these activities and are major contributors to government initiatives in this area.

The profile of the beneficiaries assisted by the agencies is generally the same. The majority of the beneficiaries are unemployed female adults who live in peri-urban or rural settlements. The gender trends described here reflect worldwide trends in the field of literacy (Lind, 1986).

All the organizations experience problems with learner motivation and high absenteeism and drop-out rates. This is a daunting problem irrespective of policy changes or funding. Some of the reasons cited for this include that female learners are discouraged by their husbands or partners from participating, the livelihood needs of learners obviously take precedence over attending classes, learners regard the process of becoming literate as taking too long and are discouraged if it is not linked to employment as quickly as possible, and finally, learners find the whole formalization process and writing of exams intimidating.

The NGOs surveyed are clearly preoccupied with trying to be sustainable and this priority is beginning to dominate their activities. Coordination and consultation amongst NGOs appears to be minimal except with respect to tendering for government contracts, as in the case of the KZN ABET Consortium. Many of the former alliances and networks, including the Forum for the Advancement of Adult Basic Education and Training (FABET) and AETASA, are now defunct. The only representative voice for the sector that offers some hope is the ALBED Foundation (which is still getting off the ground) and the ABET Advisory Board (as far as input at government level goes). The ABET Advisory Board is possibly in a precarious position right now as the person who chairs it, Mandla Mtembu, has left the sector altogether.

Amongst the NGOs, there is a significant dependence on donor funding of at least 40% of operating budget. The impact of shifts in donor funding away from NGOs has been extremely severe. The broad impacts are as follows:

NGOs shut down:

Earlier in the paper, it was noted that the ABET NGO sector has shrunk considerably because of reduced funding. This trend seems to be continuing unabated. One of the major role-players in the ABET NGO sector was the English Resource Unit. In 1997, the organization won the Gilbey's Adult Literacy Award for being the best adult literacy organization. The prize money was R300 000.

Efforts to contact the organization for information were futile. The phone was "temporarily unavailable". It was assumed that the organization, as with many other NGOs, was experiencing a financial crisis and could not pay its bill. Later during an interview of a director from another organization, it was found that ERU had indeed shutdown because of lack of funds for ABET. Further enquiries suggested that the director of ERU, an American, was able to access considerable funds from the States for rural development and was setting up another organization in rural KZN. This was not confirmed.

Operation Upgrade used to have branches in the Eastern Cape but these had to be shutdown because of financial crises. DAFTA has shutdown its ABET

project. The Umtapo Centre used to run literacy projects but has moved away from that role for two reasons: 1) a lack of funding, and 2) the organization's intention to de-emphasize the sectoral approach. Thus, its new funded literacy related activities are the training of community workers and social workers on Paulo Freireian principles. The interesting thing about this project is that it is funded by the Department of Education. The organization regards the Minister's embracing of alternative forms of education provision as creating new opportunities for their work.

NGOs are disillusioned

The context in which ABET NGOs operate is a bleak, problem-ridden one. The lack of commitment in terms of funding and consultation has left NGO staff feeling dejected and disillusioned. Staff stated that the sector is hard hit from all directions. The lack of government support, coordination and consultation has created an atmosphere of mistrust. NGOs feel exploited by government for ideas. They feel particularly alienated from the SANLI Campaign. Also, the shift in donor priorities and the inaction on the part of the NDA has meant that avenues for hope are limited. These feelings are evident from the following quotes:

"What is coming through clearly is that there is an onslaught on literacy NGOs. There is a campaign orchestrated somewhere to completely destroy or leave a few left to more easily control. Hopes were raised with the NDA and the National Lottery for funding. However, the NDA is conceived within a GEAR neo-liberal market-driven framework. It is not meeting the needs of poor people. Government's contribution to ABET is pathetic. You can see the impact of the macro-economic strategy on

development in this sector. "

(Khulekani Mathe, Director of the Tembaletu Community Education Centre)

"Government has not been supportive of NGOs. They have exploited NGOs... NGOs have been put into commissions and working groups to be milked for ideas...

(Mandla Mtembu, Former Director of NASA and Chairperson of the ABET Advisory Board and Chairperson of ALBED Foundation)

NGOs experience a loss of leadership and staff

Several NGOs have been forced to retrench staff because of lack of funding to continue projects. The Tembaletu Community Education Centre is one such example, retrenching many of its senior staff when USAID funding ended in 1997. Operation Upgrade is also a much smaller organization than it used to be in terms of its staff complement.

The sector has also experienced a significant loss of leadership. The former director of NASA moved overseas and his replacement, Mandla Mtembu left his directorship of Operation Upgrade to take up the vacant position at NASA. Subsequently, he left NASA to take up the Directorship of the King Goodwill Zwelethini Trust.

There are a few key individuals in this sector who wear many hats. This has implications for their inputs into developments in the sector.

Researcher: "It seems that there is a core group of people in the ABET sector who always get shifted around in organizations or sit on the same boards? Can you comment on this?"

Khulekani Mathe: There are fewer white led organizations. Most NGOs in the early to mid 90s were white led. Personalities and private lives later came into play. People moved in different directions and others took their place. There are fewer organizations now led by a few new people. There are fewer of the older personalities. The same new people get drawn onto boards so there are a few people doing everything. They sacrifice time from their organizations which is a disadvantage. Another is that the sector gets monopolized by these few individuals."

NGOs experience cooption

It is evident that where NGOs may have started in the apartheid era as promoting the rights based approach to literacy, there has been a shift to literacy for development. This is largely because of the need to be relevant to government policy and donor funding. As well, the thrust to a formalization process and the requirement that organizations conform to the NQF has meant that their independence and innovation has been compromised.

"The [ABET] Bill is too prescriptive. It performs a gate-keeping role and is over regulatory. It seems like we are going back to Bantu education where organizations are not recognized if they are not in keeping with prescriptions. The more you over-regulate, the more it stifles initiative. We are going to see shrinkage in delivery."

(Khulekani Mathe)

Furthermore, NGOs now requesting funding from donors are directed to government programmes. Here, government choose the priorities for ABET programmes and NGOs come on board as the implementation arm of government. In this way, NGOs become co-opted as quasi-government organizations.

NGOs adopt new sustainability strategies

With the decline in funding, NGOs have had to adopt new sustainability strategies. These are as follows:

- Tendering for government contracts

By forming alliances with other NGOs and CBOs, they have been able to win government contracts for training and materials development.

- Fee for service to industry

Some NGOs have been contracted by industry to provide ABET services to employees. However, demand is declining as companies undergo rationalization processes. Also with a larger pool of skilled unemployed people to recruit from, companies were able to get out of their commitment of providing ABET services to “upgrade” employees. A few NGOs expressed optimism about the Skills Development Levy.

- Forming alliances

NGOs have come together under different forums – most recently, KZN ABET Consortium – to solicit donor funding for projects and to cut down on overhead costs. Operation Upgrade was able to pull ten CBOs together and access funding from Rotary International and the British Consulate.

- Fundraising projects.

A great deal of effort and energy is directed at setting up fundraising projects, such as raffles and events, and at selling learning materials or crafts to generate funds. Some NGOs also generate funds through rental of property or equipment. The concern here is that these activities are time-consuming and take away focus from service delivery.

- Crisis funding

Some NGOs like Operation Upgrade and DAFTA were able to access crisis funding or bridging funds from donors in order to keep operations going until alternate funds could be accessed. However, ultimately DAFTA was unable to access alternate funds and had to shut down its ABET project. At the time of the survey, Operation Upgrade had not yet accessed alternate funds for salaries, which would either bring the projects to a halt or require tutors to work in a voluntary capacity.

- Establishment of a funding conduit

The sector has tried to build up its credibility with the international donor community. Support was solicited for the establishment of a funding conduit. It was felt that the disbursement of funds could be done efficiently, appropriately and timeously if there was a sector specific funding conduit. The ALBED Foundation was established in June 2001 with funding from the DVV. SIDA and

the NDA also indicated their support for such an organization, but have made no commitments of funds.

The ALBED Foundation's main aim is:

“...to ensure that literacy NGOs and CBOs receive adequate resources to participate in the new national trends and to complement the South African National Literacy Initiative...”. (1999: 1)

Its functions were proposed as: grant-making, policy, research, capacity building and lobby/advocacy.

The current status of the organization is that its offices are up and running but it is still awaiting funds from SIDA and the NDA to distribute to NGOs. The other factor that may pose a problem is the departure of Mandla Mtembu who is also the Chairperson of the Foundation. As mentioned earlier, a few individuals within the sector do indeed assume many roles.

NGOs stray from mission

By adopting the aforementioned sustainability strategies and moving to a donor or government oriented position, NGOs have strayed from their missions. According to Mandla Mtembu, this represents one of the biggest challenges for NGOs:

“NGOs need to renew their mission. They have gone astray because of lack of funding. They seem to have redirected their services according to where funding is directed, e.g. skills development levy, AIDS. They have

become donor oriented. They need to be more focused and return to their basic vision and mission.”

Given funding constraints, the challenges for ABET NGOs in KwaZulu-Natal are enormous. It is unclear how soon such challenges will begin to abate and the real work of delivering mass literacy services can begin.

What follows is a discussion of two case studies. These case studies serve to create a story around and demonstrate clearly and perhaps more jarringly the above-described impacts of donor funding trends on individual NGOs.

Chapter Seven

Case Study One: The Durban Association for the Aged (DAFTA)

Introduction:

The Durban Association for the Aged (DAFTA) serves as an interesting case study because it is an example of an organization that was involved in a service arena that had nothing to do with literacy provision. However, because of the barriers posed by illiteracy, the organization decided to start a literacy project. The experiences of the organization in the process demonstrate that literacy is no easy terrain.

DAFTA had its roots in the welfare model of delivery but moved in the direction of development activities largely in response to policy developments (for example, the White Paper on Welfare and Development). The organization was essentially an umbrella body for community based organizations and functioned along the lines of an NGO, with funding received by the Department of Welfare for social workers.

Recognizing that illiteracy was a stumbling block to development goals, the organization chose to set up a separate project and infrastructure to provide literacy training although the organization did not have the expertise or experience in that field. To some extent, this organization could be viewed as

an example of one that was responsive to community needs. On the other hand, setting up a literacy project presented an opportunity for the sustainability of the organization as well. Indeed, this case study is a clear example of how NGOs have become donor and government oriented.

Profile of the Organization

The Durban Association for the Aged (DAFTA) had its beginnings as the Durban Indian Association for the Aged during the apartheid era when services were fragmented along racial lines. The organization was formed in 1970 by a group of volunteers who were concerned about the lack of services for senior citizens in the Indian community. The organization served as an umbrella body providing supportive social work services to about 20 senior citizens clubs primarily in the Chatsworth, Merebank and Phoenix areas.

During the transition to the democratic elections and in recognition that the organization had to become relevant to government policy developments in order to be sustainable, the services of the organization were quickly extended to surrounding informal settlements and townships. Within the space of two years, the organization expanded its affiliate base from 20 to 69 clubs. The membership rose to 5000 and the volunteer base was expanded to 300 members. Of that membership, the demographic breakdown was as follows:

- 60% Black; 40% Indian

- 80% Women; 20% Men
- 70% Senior Citizens; 30% Adult

This rapid expansion was fraught with difficulties. It seemed to be an over-ambitious move given that the organization's resource base had remained the same within the transformation period. With only two vehicles, the organization's staff members were expected to reach a catchment area that included all of the Greater Durban Metropolitan Area – from Tongaat in the north to Malakazi in the South and to Molweni in the West. During the transformation, the organization's complement of six social workers were all fired and replaced because they refused to embrace the organization's goal of extending services to the "Black Areas". The volunteer management of the organization was also given an overhaul to bring it on line with the new directions. This included recruiting new members. There were allegations about political agendas amongst management members driving the transformation. Being pulled in different directions continued to plague the stability and effectiveness of the organization.

In that same period, the organization's constitution and therefore its objectives were also changed. Instead of embracing a welfare form of delivery, the organization began to use terminology like capacity-building and development. Thus, the clubs began to be regarded as vehicles for development activities. The management committees in each club were to receive training and support services to initiate and manage development activities. The primary activities of

the social workers at the time were to assist in the set up and training of these clubs, and conduct community profiles and needs assessments.

The Vision and Mission Statement of the Organization used to be as follows:

Vision: The optimal well-being of senior citizens

Mission: To engage senior citizens in self-sustaining initiatives to realize their optimal well-being

The Proposed Vision and Mission in line with transformation is as follows:

Vision: The well-being of individuals and communities

Mission: To eradicate poverty, illiteracy and unemployment to achieve the well-being of individuals and communities.

The DAFTA ABET Project

One of the glaring basic needs in many of the communities profiled by the Social Workers was that of literacy. The extent of illiteracy in the informal settlements and townships was quite high at approximately 63%. The management of the organization decided that to ensure the success of further development activities and services, the organization needed to tackle the problem of illiteracy head-on by setting up a project to provide such services. There was a dearth of services in many of the areas that DAFTA worked in at the time.

The organization realized a prime opportunity at the time with the Joint Education Trust. One of the management members also happened to be a board member at JET, a testament to the fact that it matters who you know in the funding world. A funding application was submitted to JET, which motivated for full funding of a project to provide Mother Tongue, English as a Second Language and Skills Training to over 900 learners. JET agreed to fund the project for a period of three years for a total of R1 million.

The funding enabled the organization to employ Tutors, a Coordinator, and a Financial Administrator. It also purchased furniture, equipment and a vehicle for the project. JET's reporting and financial accounting requirements were detailed and comprehensive. The organization had to keep separate bank accounts and separate books for the project to the extent that the project was run and audited like a separate organization. This placed a great deal of pressure on the organization and also resulted in some duplication and complications with administration.

The initial goals of the project were rather ambitious and difficult to attain given the complexities of the ABET sector. The project was expected to train 900 learners in basic mother tongue and English literacy, numeracy, skills training and how to set up and manage income-generating projects, all within a time frame of three years and with funding of approximately R370 per learner per year.

From the start, the project was beset with difficulties. Most of the problems were due to lack of management. There was a considerable turnover of staff, a lack of expertise and commitment, a lack of proper systems, and problems with coordination as the classes were spread out in terms of geographic distance and accessibility (rural and peri-urban infrastructure was inadequate). The organization never carried out an external evaluation but the shortfalls of the project were glaringly apparent. Also the difficulties experienced with learners were typical of other literacy organizations. Problems with absenteeism, drop-outs, failure to pay fees and so on were rampant. There was heavy reliance on external organizations such as Operation Upgrade, NASA and English Resource Unit for training and support services as the organization lacked internal management expertise.

Funding Problems

The nature of JET funding seemed rather unusual at the time. Whereas most other donors provided part funding or funded certain budget items, the Joint Education Trust funded all aspects of the project. The donor visited the project once a year and required six monthly project reporting and audited financial reports before releasing the next tranche of funds.

By the end of the three year funding period, the project had experienced considerable staff turnover and had only 400 learners remaining (ESL and MTL).

The goals had not been attained and funds were running out. The organization was unsuccessful at raising additional funds to sustain the project and had to terminate the services of staff once funding ended

Through personal contacts with the City of Rotterdam, the organization was able to secure crisis funding for salaries for six months to buy time for the organization to raise other funds. However, the funding was delayed and arrived three months after the tutors' services were terminated. In the meantime, in an effort to keep the project afloat, the tutors and Coordinator joined Operation Upgrade. While the project was still operating at DAFTA, Operation Upgrade had secured funding from Rotary International for materials for a few CBOs as well as DAFTA. The tutors continued to work in a voluntary capacity and eventually Operation Upgrade was able to secure some funds for salaries for a year. At the moment, the position of these tutors and Coordinator is tenuous as this funding has run out. Operation Upgrade itself is fighting for its existence.

Conclusion

DAFTA clearly is an example of an organization that modeled its services according to funding trends. When an opportunity presented itself for accessing funding for literacy services, the organization set up a literacy project without conducting a proper feasibility assessment beforehand. The dynamics and structure of the organization had to change to meet the funding requirements.

When the funding ran out, the project was suspended and DAFTA lost its status as a literacy organization. This trend seemed to be a common one amongst other generalist organizations that set up literacy projects (Smith, 2001).

DAFTA went from being the largest community based organization providing literacy services in Durban to providing no literacy services whatsoever. In the process, the size and might of the organization diminished. However, one bonus of the JET funding was that it added to the organization's resources. DAFTA still enjoys the use of the vehicle, furniture, equipment and computer.

The approach to literacy adopted by this organization was clearly the functional approach. Thus, literacy was regarded as a means to improve livelihoods and for overall economic development. In light of this, the target group was an unusual choice as the organization chose to primarily focus on senior citizens whom are not typically viewed as productive in the formal economy. This was a means whereby the organization upheld its role as an advocate for the recognition of the economic role of senior citizens.

Finally, it seemed that the organization was successful at attracting funds because of personal involvements and relationships with donors. This raises questions about whether donors always evaluate the funding worthiness of organizations based on merit.

Chapter Eight

Case Study Two: Tembaletu Community Education Centre

Introduction

Tembaletu currently enjoys the status of being the largest ABET organization in KwaZulu-Natal. It is an interesting case study because it has had to weather the shocks of funding trends and constraints in its relatively short history. The organization differs a great deal from the previous case study because it is well-resourced and has a very specific focus on education. It is also one of the three remaining major ABET NGOs in KwaZulu-Natal. In many respects, the organization has also become donor-oriented and even government-oriented for that matter.

Profile of the Organization

The sources of the information that follows have been an annual report, external evaluation and interviews with the Director (Tembaletu Community Education Centre, 2000; Wallis, 2000). There was insufficient time and opportunity to conduct participant observation to verify these reports.

The vision and mission statement of the organization are as follows:

Vision: To be a leading and responsive Community Education and Training Organization

Mission: To operate an effective, dedicated and learner-oriented Adult and (out of school) Youth Education and Training Organization towards the qualitative advancement of the lives of communities in which Tembaletu works.

The organization claims to adopt a specific “Tembaletu Approach” which is guided by the principles of:

- *Diversity of activities*
- *Community Development*
- *Open to All*
- *Support for Extension Programmes*
- *Tembaletu as a Development Process*

The organization was established in 1991. It was set up as a response to the high level of illiteracy and unemployment in the Pietermaritzburg area at the time. Its formal status is as a community based educational organization. In line with national policy on the role of community-based educational institutions, Tembaletu engaged in activities such as functional skills training, ABE, and technical and vocational programmes. The organization also provided professional and technical support to other NGOs and CBOs, student support services and support for distance learning. While the approach to education was very much to redress past inequities with a view to improving the economic

status of beneficiaries, the organization cannot be described as adopting only a functional approach. One of its projects also emphasized literacy for participation and democracy.

Tembaletu offers programmes at its head office and at rural satellite centers. Programmes at the head office include ABET, training of ABET educators, soft skills training such as computer literacy, typing and garment-making, and Matric courses for adults and youth. Work in the rural areas such as Muden, Stoffelton, Msinga, Dalton, Trustfeed and Qanda include programmes in ABET, human rights, democracy and development

The Tembaletu ABET Programme

Tembaletu was the winner of the 1999 "Presidential Award for Outstanding ABET Organization". According to the Director, the organization is now the largest ABET organization in KwaZulu-Natal. It was uncertain whether this was in terms of numbers or geography.

ABET programmes are run at the head office and at the six rural satellite centers mentioned above. In the year 2000, the organization assisted roughly 445 learners. The organization has also provided ABET support services to business, industry and government departments. One such successful relationship was with Eskom for a period of four years. Other contract work was

with the KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Service and smaller companies in the Pietermaritzburg area.

Apart from direct literacy training, the organization also provides an Educator Training Course. This training enables educators to facilitate Mother Tongue Literacy (MTL), English Second Language (ESL) and Numeracy at ABET levels 1 and 2. Educators who have been through the training process are then able to acquire jobs either within Tembalethu or at other organizations. During the period 1999-2000, Tembalethu trained 36 educators in the Pietermaritzburg and Durban region. Educators also participate in monthly workshops facilitated at the head office. These workshops discuss developments in the field and serve as refresher courses for newly trained and practicing educators.

With funding from the Finnish Embassy, the organization was able to set up a related programme called the Human Rights, Democracy and Development (HRDD) Programme. This programme was targeted at illiterate and semi-literate ABET learners in the six rural satellite centers. The aim of the HRDD programme was to make people aware of their constitutional rights and the functions of government. The programme was expected to empower learners to approach relevant government structures in their communities to obtain required resources. Another aim of the programme was to integrate ABE with training courses for income-generation purposes and community development.

As part of the programme, 17 literacy educators had to undergo training in facilitating literacy education with HRDD issues. To achieve this, Tembaletu formed a partnership with the Centre for Adult Education at UNDP-Pietermaritzburg, which conducted the initial baseline research on the kind of services communities needed. Other aspects of training were outsourced and Tembaletu conducted the income-generation and project management component.

Tembaletu also runs a resource center that has a range of materials used by learners, educators, external students, community organizations and the general public. As well, the Resource Centre supplies materials for literacy classes held by the organization.

Tembaletu networks with other literacy organizations through its affiliation with the KZN ABET Consortium and through the Ndlovu Partnership for Lifelong Learning. The Director and two other staff were also highly involved ABET policy-making. The Director served on the Adult Educators and Trainers Association of South Africa's (AETASA) Provincial Executive Committee in KZN. He was also elected onto the Executive Committee of the ABET Advisory Board and as Chairperson of its ABET Standing Committee. In this capacity, he contributed to the ABET unit standards generating process and participated in the lobbying of the Minister of Education for the enactment of an ABET legislation. In June 2000, the Director was invited to be part of a task team to

develop a plan for the SANLI campaign. However, he indicated that the plan was later abandoned for “political” reasons. The Director has expressed his criticism of government inaction and lack of commitment through the media. His articles and comments in the Mail & Guardian have generated a great deal of debate (Macfarlane, 2001b; Mathe, 2001).

Funding

Tembaletu relies heavily on donor funding for its operations. The breakdown of funding sources for the financial year ending February 2001 was as follows:

| | |
|-------------------|------|
| Office Rentals | 1.5% |
| Corporate | 1% |
| Contracts/tenders | 7% |
| TNDT | 2% |
| General donations | .5% |
| International | 60% |
| Other | 28% |

Before 1997, USAID funded the organization for R12million. In 1997, this funding terminated as USAID shifted funds to support its bilateral agreements with the South African government. The closure of the NLC at the same time also meant a substantial reduction of donor funding for the organization. The

organization was not affected by the closure of WUS at that time because it was not funded by WUS. However, the impact of the closure of WUS was felt indirectly as the organization experienced a strain and increased demand for services due to the closure of organizations that were funded by WUS.

As a result of the decline in donor funding, the organization plummeted in 1998. Several senior staff members were retrenched and the management scrambled to find other sources of funds. In late 1999, connections with the Finnish Embassy were established. As a result, there was increased support to programmes in the period 2000/2001. Funding was not directly for ABET but was used creatively to fund the organization's ABET projects.

The Finnish Human Rights, Democracy and Development Fund regarded education as a means to advance human rights and democracy. In entering into the funding arrangement with the Finnish Embassy, Tembaletu was steered into emphasizing the approach of *literacy for participation and democracy* – an example of the significant influences donors can have on an NGO's mission and operations. On the other hand, one of the positive conditions of funding was that Tembaletu formed partnerships for this project. Thus, the organization began to work with the Centre for Adult Education at UND-Pietermaritzburg and Youth for Christ.

Up to the end of January 2001, the organization was funded by the TNDT. Although hopes were high for continued funding from the NDA, commitment of funding at the time this case study was done had not been received. Other smaller sources of funding included Rotary clubs and businesses. The organization's attempt at ensuring sustainability by working out a system of fee for service to learners had been fraught with difficulties. Learners in the rural areas were unable to pay. Irrespective of this, the organization continued to provide services in these areas. The organization appeared to be more successful at collecting payment from learners who attended classes at the head office. Most of these learners were employed. However, acknowledging that their income was meager, services to them were heavily subsidized and they were charged a nominal fee.

The pressure to access other avenues for funding has forced the organization to look at alliances and establishing partnerships. It is part of the KwaZulu-Natal ABET Consortium which is an alliance of the major ABET NGOs in the region. As mentioned earlier, the organizations involved in this collaboration have been successful at getting government tenders/contracts.

Conclusion

Although Tembalethu is a smaller organization than it used to be in the days of USAID funding, it is a comparatively strong and stable organization in the current

funding context for ABET NGOs. This is partly because it was able to establish partnerships with other organizations in accessing significant funding from the Embassy of Finland. Interviews with the donor itself revealed a commitment to successfully seeing the Tembaletu project through. The organization's partnership with the Centre for Adult Education at UND-Pietermaritzburg has also proved successful. UND academics assist the organization with training and monitoring and evaluation.

The Director of Tembaletu is an impressive individual in terms of his commitment to ABET. He not only works incredibly long hours to oversee the running of the organization, he sits on numerous boards, writes polemic articles on the state of ABET and is furthering his formal education in ABET. The sector clearly needs more individuals such as him to steer it in the right direction and to make sure it has a voice.

While accessing donor funding is a challenge for the organization, an equally important challenge is maintaining learner motivation. The organization is trying to assess and understand learner motivation. Although considerable funds have been directed towards income-generating projects linked to the ABET programme, learner absenteeism and drop-out levels are high. Thus, Tembaletu is a microcosm of the complexities associated with the field. ABET is clearly a highly specialized field with unique problems that get exacerbated by lack of support and funding.

Chapter Nine

Analysis & Alternatives

The research findings described above seem to generate more questions than answers. It is almost impossible to arrive at crystal clear solutions when the field of ABE is in constant flux and the stakeholders keep pulling in different directions. What may represent a solution for today, may very well be irrelevant for tomorrow.

An analysis of the impact of donor funding trends on ABET NGOs leads to a simple but important question: If the NDA and other donors were to suddenly free up funding for ABET NGOs, how successful would these organizations be at achieving their goals of literacy promotion and training? The survey results and case studies discussed above, clearly demonstrate that literacy is a highly complex field. Teaching learners how to read and write is no easy task, let alone going further to promote democracy education and provide skills training. The process by which adult learners learn, the appropriateness of literacy education in terms of cultural considerations, practicalities, everyday realities, and the motivation of learners all warrant careful attention for the success of any programme strategy. Clearly, only those delivery agents with the necessary expertise, experience, proximity and sensitivity can begin to address some of these issues.

NGOs, with a history of experience, access to learners, ability to innovate, lower overhead/ administrative costs and commitment to the field can begin to make a significant impact on eradicating illiteracy if they are freed from crippling uncertainty about their day to day existence. Government clearly cannot achieve mass literacy drives without close consultation and support of NGOs. Government's expensive and slow bureaucratic machinery, competing priorities, and distance from the needs on the ground render it an ineffective and inefficient medium for delivery. By the time government consolidates and strengthens its current ABET departments and revamps its public adult learning centers, the problem of illiteracy in South Africa will become even more mammoth and unmanageable.

Government, with the input of NGOs and other stakeholders as well as the financial backing of international donors, has made the progressive step of developing policy – that was practically non-existent in the apartheid era - for the ABE sector. However, the policy choice to emphasize formalization, rationalization and regulation was ill-conceived. Perhaps, in the future when South Africa has made great strides in “breaking the back of illiteracy”, these directions will be well-placed. At present, they represent stumbling blocks to rapid delivery and innovative strategies from different stakeholders.

The campaign approach is clearly the best solution for ensuring literacy for all as quick as possible. It is evident that the longer the problem remains untackled,

the more the numbers of illiterate people increase. Such an approach can only be successful if there is a corresponding and realistic budget and if there are true partnerships between government and civil society organizations. There should also be commitment and motivation on a broad front and the campaign must involve a country-wide drive. Perhaps, South Africa could do well by learning from the experiences of other countries that have been able to implement such campaigns successfully, including Cuba and Nicaragua.

The question remains: who should take the lead in a national campaign? Government has proven unsuccessful. Can NGOs play the role when there is so much strife, division and competition amongst them (Macfarlane, 2001c)? NGOs themselves have nominated government to take the lead. A declaration of the regional consultation of NGOs on Education for All signed in Johannesburg in December 1999 has affirmed that "provision of basic education is a core responsibility of the state and not a commodity to be left entirely to the polarizing dynamics of the market forces" (Regional Consultation on EFA, 1999: 135-136).

If government chose to embrace the campaign approach for universal literacy provision and if it was indeed moving in the direction of dictating its own priorities to donors, the future of the ABET sector would be far more optimistic. As well, it would represent an opportunity for donors to the sector to play a more appropriate and supportive role. However, the government's endorsement of the neo-liberal agenda and the primacy of GEAR mean that efforts in ABE will

continue to be fragmented, uncoordinated and piecemeal. As well, provincial ABET departments will continue to be under pressure to cutback and save on budget allocations, thereby, having a depressive effect on the following year's budgets. And, as the NGO sector disappears, the available resources and the extent and depth of services will be that much reduced.

A lack of a consistent and committed focus on ABE by government is short-sighted. The development of South Africa (including a strong democratic foundation) without literate citizens is impossible, unless, off course, the apartheid legacy of a highly stratified South Africa (and separate development) continues to be perpetuated by well-intentioned politicians.

There clearly needs to be more attention directed at improving the institutional capacity of the state and civil society organizations such as NGOs. These organizations cannot be expected to instantaneously shed off the ghosts and legacies of apartheid to effectively tackle a post-apartheid priority. Donors committed to bilateral agreements with the state need to have built-in commitments to enhancing the institutional capacity of state departments. Thus, it is not just a matter of targeting funds for specific projects but revamping management practices and capacity of whole departments. It is uncertain to what extent donors can and will be willing to assist here but it is an important step towards the best use of donor funds.

On the whole donors need to reassess their policy stance if they want to enhance the conditions for literacy provision – in essence, if they want to assist South Africa in redressing the injustices of the past. Firstly, they need to reassess their policy stance of focusing solely on propping up government at the expense of the civil society organizations. It cannot be expected that assistance to government will be filtered down to other civil society players. The state of the ABET sector is proof that this is not happening. A promising development is that donors are now beginning to look at funding civil society organizations directly (probably in recognition that government alone cannot deliver the goods). The other motivating factor is likely ensuring good governance by supporting NGOs and other civil society players to keep government in check. Perhaps, another avenue for donor-recipient cooperation can be partnerships formed between South African NGOs and counterparts in foreign countries in order to develop best practices here as well.

The second area where donors need to reassess their policy is around the issue of conditions of funding. Donors need to revisit their stringent funding criteria and complicated reporting requirements. While NGOs need to be held accountable for donor funds, there are more amenable ways of ensuring this - ways that take into account the practical realities of the NGO world. For example, the written reporting requirements could be simplified so that they are not so time-consuming.

The NGOs surveyed clearly are perilously vulnerable to donor funding priorities, conditions and shifts. Once a major donor withdraws or terminates funding, the NGO either drastically restructures or else shuts down. Why are NGOs unable or unwilling to access other private sources of funding or pursue feasible fundraising drives? Is there too much competition? Will this problem be exacerbated by the NPO Bill where the boundaries for what defines a non-profit organization (and therefore qualifies for formal status and funding) are nebulous? Is the private sector only willing to fund projects that are more tangible (building of schools and so on), publicity-driven or labour market related than literacy projects? How can literacy be emphasized as a moral issue, as a right that every human being is entitled to so that it would be easy to mobilize support for it?

Within civil society, are NGOs (especially the more formal well-established ones) the best vehicle for delivery of literacy services? Surely, it is the case that the larger the organization, the more bureaucratic and expensive the operation. If NGOs are indeed more cost-effective than government, what implications are there for quality of service? How does an organization like Operation Upgrade deliver a quality service practically speaking if one coordinator is responsible for overseeing 200 community-based projects spread out throughout rural KwaZulu-Natal?

An article reflecting the consensus at a workshop organized by MWENGO (2000) entitled "The Time is Nigh – NGOs need to act now" offers some interesting

solutions for NGOs to become more efficient and sustainable. The suggestions (MWENGO, 2000: 20-21) are that NGOs focus on:

- Influencing donor-funding policies in a way that contributes to sustainability.
- Building public image
- Promoting values – build confidence in stakeholders by crafting a leadership role
- Self-regulation and ethics
- Professionalism particularly with financial management
- Creating a sense of ownership or participation from public
- Effective Resource Mobilization
- A United front

The last point is of particular importance. It is questionable how efficient and effective NGOs can be if there are too many of them pulling in different directions. There is a need for a more coordinated and consequently a stronger role for the sector as a whole. The current alliances and networks are too weak and too focused on sustainability.

There needs to be further research and analysis of the successes of the non-formal sector in literacy provision. Surely, while it is not well-documented, there are churches and volunteer-run clubs and other informal networks that are successful in helping people attain functional literacy. Perhaps, these organizations need to be included and consulted in the broader literacy for all

campaign. They represent important and innovative alternatives to the dominant vehicles for delivery. The Umtapo Centre's initiative to set up a Popular Education Network as part of the Paulo Freire African Decade on Literacy for All (1998) signifies that there can be room for alternate ways of doing things and that some people within the sector are not folding their hands in despair (Moodley, 2000, Soliar, 2000).

As well, the whole issue of volunteerism needs to be explored further. Specifically, are there opportunities to mobilize volunteerism to promote literacy campaigns? Government policies have been criticized for unrealistically assuming too much volunteerism in the proposed structures (Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000). What needs to be done to strengthen volunteerism in South Africa given limited resources?

Some further issues for consideration and research are as follows:

- What influence can individuals have on moving literacy to the center of political priority or debate again? Within government, it was hoped that a strong personality in the education portfolio would produce results. However, in Kader Asmal, the sector has a well-intentioned Minister with good ideas but a clear absence of "teeth" and influence in the Department of Finance to implement his department's policies. In the Director General for Education, Thami Mseleku, the sector seems to have a leader on the

defense and one who is more concerned about his and his department's public image than alienating NGOs.

- What hope is there in the skills development fund for financing literacy projects? Will the private sector be committed to seeing literacy training of employees through if they receive these funds?
- How can those working in the sector influence learners and government for that matter to prioritize the value of literacy for its own sake rather than the expectation that literacy training will lead to jobs?

Paulo Freire (1970) cautioned against such an expectation:

“Merely teaching men to read and write does not work miracles; if there are not enough jobs for men able to work, teaching more men to read and write will not create them.” (9)

If the dominant approach to literacy continues to be the functional approach, then ABE policy cannot be viewed as separate from policies related to job creation, welfare and so on. Once again, greater coordination and commitment is needed to move the idea of a multi-sectoral, multi-faceted strategy to development beyond rhetoric.

Finally, an important and immediate avenue of hope to revive universal literacy as an urgent priority is the Dakar Framework that emanated from the World Education Forum held in April 2001. This framework implores governments in

developing countries to act within a time frame and specific framework to ensure literacy for all. This may be an important push factor for the South African government to deliver. Also, the guiding principles emphasize the notion of partnerships, international cooperation and realistic budgets. The Framework states that:

“...all States will be requested to develop or strengthen existing national plans of action by 2002 at the latest. These plans should be integrated into a wider poverty reduction and development framework, and should be developed through more transparent and democratic processes, involving stakeholders, especially people’s representatives, community leaders, parents, learners, NGOs and civil society. The plans will address problems associated with the chronic under-financing of basic education by establishing budget priorities that reflect a commitment to achieving EFA goals and targets at the earliest possible date, and no later than 2015.”

(World Education Forum, 2000: 3)

Chapter Ten

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the field of ABE is filled with exciting developments and tremendous challenges. That the players in such a newly emerging, diverse and fragmented field were able to arrive at some consensus through policy-making within a few years (during the transition to democracy) was a phenomenal achievement. However, the consensus and the united front within the sector were to be short-lived. In the past few years, the sector has been rocked by divisions, disillusionment and decimation. Indeed, there are considerable reparations to be done.

Sadly, it seems that the newly democratic government has missed the opportunity to implement a mass revolutionary campaign to promote literacy for all in South Africa. Essentially ABE has been shelved and efforts by other players have been hampered, as government priorities have shifted to a neo-liberal agenda. No matter what innovative policies and initiatives emerge, they are futile if there is no focus on implementation through political support and proper resource allocation. The commitment to consolidating a fledgling democracy and redressing the injustices of the past seems to have diminished at a rapid pace.

South Africa clearly needs a short-term mass campaign to eradicate illiteracy and to then begin to implement development and democracy objectives. Government, even with massive donor support, cannot be expected to handle this on its own. NGOs within the sector have a great deal to offer in terms of expertise, cost-effective delivery, access to learners and innovative materials and methods.

However, literacy NGOs find themselves in a crisis situation. From enjoying a hive of activity after literacy became the presidential, and therefore the media led project in the early transition, NGOs were sidelined and bypassed. Research into the plight of literacy NGOs in KwaZulu-Natal has revealed that the decline in donor funding has indeed had a devastating impact on these organizations. These NGOs depended heavily on donor funding, and alternative sources of funding, particularly from government, has not been forthcoming. The donor-orientation of these NGOs has shaped much of the organizations' objectives and activities. Furthermore, fighting for an existence has overshadowed all other priorities.

With regards to the ABE sector as a whole, one cannot expect greater coordination, delivery and efficiency when there are competing priorities and mistrust in the field is widespread. As a start, there definitely is a need for strong, committed, passionate, influential and conciliatory individuals in the field in both government and NGOs. From there, attention should be directed to expanding

the support base for literacy through an emphasis on literacy as a right and a moral issue. Indeed, the field of literacy needs an urgent revolution in thinking.

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Appendix A

List of Survey Respondents

| Survey Sent To: | Response |
|--|----------|
| NGOs | |
| 1. Tembaletu Community Education Centre | Yes |
| 2. Natal Adult Basic Education Support and Assistance (NASA) | Yes |
| 3. Umtapo Centre | Yes |
| 4. Operation Upgrade | Yes |
| 5. English Resource Unit | No |
| 6. SANGOCO | No |
| 7. AETASA | No |
| 8. Project Literacy | No |
| Donors | |
| 1. Embassy of Sweden (SIDA) | Yes |
| 2. Embassy of Switzerland | Yes |
| 3. USAID | Yes |
| 4. Australian High Commission (AusAid) | Yes |
| 5. UK Department for International Development (DFID) | Yes |
| 6. Canadian High Commission (CIDA) | Yes |
| 7. Royal Danish Embassy (DANIDA) | Yes |
| 8. European Union | Yes |
| 9. Embassy of Finland | Yes |
| 10. Embassy of France | Yes |
| 11. Embassy of the Republic of Germany | Yes |
| 12. German Development Cooperation – GTZ | Yes |
| 13. Embassy of Japan | No |
| 14. Royal Netherlands Embassy | Yes |
| 15. Royal Norwegian Embassy | No |
| 16. National Development Agency (NDA) | Yes |
| Government: | |
| 2. Dr. Morongwa Ramarumo – Director General of DoE | No |
| 3. Mrs. N. C. Ndlela – KZN Provincial ABET Representative | No |
| 4. Keith Kenneth – International Relations Manager of SARS | Yes |
| Academics: | |
| 1. Dr. Zelda Groener – University of Western Cape | No |
| 2. Veronica McKay – UNISA | No |
| 3. Ivor Baatjes – UND-Pietermaritzburg | Yes |
| 4. Elda Lyster – UND-Natal | No |

Appendix B

Questionnaires

NGOs

1. What activities does your organization undertake in the field of ABET?
2. What proportion of your services is:
 - Community-based _____
 - Provision to Company Employees (Private Sector) _____
 - Provision to Government Employees (Public Sector) _____
 - Training of Practitioners _____
 - Development of Materials _____
3. Are there other services you provide? Please list.
4. How do you fund your programmes? Indicate percentage:
 - Donor funding _____
 - Fee for service _____
 - Local fundraising initiatives _____
 - Government funding/contracts _____
5. Please provide a list of major donors to your organization
6. Has funding from donors declined over time. Please explain by way of examples.
7. What are the reasons for this decline in funding?
8. Does your organization participate in any alliances or networks within the ABET sector?
9. What major sustainability strategies has your organization adopted?
10. What are the major challenges facing your organization?
11. Any other relevant information?

Donors

1. Does your organization fund ABET NGOs, has it done so in the past or does it plan to do so?
2. Please list the ABET NGOs which are funded by your organization
3. Has funding to ABET NGOs declined over time? Please provide examples of this and specify reasons.
4. What are your organization's current funding priorities?
5. Will ABET be a future funding priority of your organization?

Government

1. What services is government providing in the ABET sector?
2. Does government fund NGOs working in the ABET sector?
3. What government activities in this sector are supported by overseas funders?

Academics

1. What is your involvement in the ABET sector?
2. Please comment on whether donor funding for the sector has declined?
3. Are there other major challenges to the sector?
4. What are the current funding sources for ABET NGOs?
5. What sustainability strategies do NGOs adopt in the face of funding constraints?
6. What opportunities are there for government support and funding of ABET NGOs?
7. What capacity does government have for direct delivery?
8. Please comment on the future of the sector.

Appendix C

List of Important Post-1990ABE Policy Documents & Legislation

- The National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) report of 1992 on *Adult Basic Education* [and reports on Adult Education (1993) and Human Resource Development (1992)]
- The Joint Education Trust's 1992 commissioned report *Adult Basic Education: Focus on a Priority Field for Funding*
- The Independent Development Trust's 1992 commissioned report, *Developmental Strategy in Adult Basic Education*
- COSATU's Participatory Research Project's 1993 report, *Participatory Research Project Consolidated Recommendations Adult Basic Education and Training*
- The National Training Board's *National Training Strategy Initiative (NTSI)* draft document of 1991 and the preliminary report of February 1994
- The South African Committee on Adult Basic Education (SACABE) report on its November 1993 Conference
- The African National Congress's *Implementation Plan for Education and Training (IPET)* of April 1994 produced by the Centre for Education Policy and Development (CEPD)
- *The Education White Paper of March 1995*
- The National Department of Education's *A National Adult Basic Education and Training Framework: Interim Guidelines* of September 1995
- The Research Project Report of 1996 on *Adult Basic Education and Development* compiled by a group comprising the Department of Education, Congress of South African Trade Unions, Development Bank of South Africa, Centre for Education Policy Development and National Literacy Cooperation
- The Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology's Language Plan Task Group's Final Report of 1996 *Towards a National Language Plan for South Africa*
- The Department of Education Policy Document of October 1997 *Adult Education and Training in South Africa*
- The Department of Education: Directorate of Adult Education and Training *National Multi-year Implementation Plan for Adult Education and Training – Accreditation and Provision* of October 1997
- Adult Basic Education and Training Act 52 of 2000

(Sources: Aitchison, 1997; DoE, 2001; Act of Parliament, 2001)

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother who dragged me to the library and taught me how to value life-long learning. Thanks Mom!