

# State hegemony and the planning and implementation of literacy education in Botswana

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## **Abstract**

Planning adult literacy education in developing nations is largely viewed as a technical process reserved for government officials at the Ministry of Education. This empirical study argues that in Botswana, state sponsored adult literacy asserts its hegemony and stifles learner participation and district initiatives. The paper provides an overview of the socio-economic and political situation in Botswana arguing that in spite of being a liberal democracy, the planning and implementation of adult literacy education is driven by central government officials and views learners as having similar experiences and treats them as passive consumers. It fails to employ literacy education to address social disparities based on ethnicity and gender. Finally, the paper suggests that the planning should be decentralized and use a participatory approach.

*Keywords:* Centralisation; Decentralisation; Literacy; Transformation; Hegemony; Resistance

## **1. Introduction**

This paper contends that the planning and implementation of the Botswana National Literacy Programme (BNLP) is largely driven by Ministry of Education officials and has aided the state to control the planning and implementation of adult literacy education over the past two decades. First, the paper provides the Botswana context and argues that planning the BNLP has not served any transformative purposes with respect to social disparities based on ethnicity and gender. Second, it outlines various conceptions of literacy to demonstrate how state hegemony is perpetuated by state

control in planning adult literacy education. The study then shows how state functionaries failed to consult learners in planning the literacy programme because they assumed that learners had common realities and were passive consumers. The paper demonstrates how planning and implementation ignored gender and minority issues. Finally, it suggests decentralization and devolution of power as strategies to challenge state hegemony and facilitate democratic planning.

## **2. The Botswana context**

At Independence from Britain in 1966, Botswana was deemed to be in the ten poorest nations in the world. The colonizers had neglected education and left the country with a dispro-

proportionately high rate of illiteracy. Today, Botswana has a population of 1.7 million inhabitants. Currently, 49% are defined as living in the rural areas and survive on different types of agricultural activities. The population includes the economically and politically powerful Tswana ethnic groups and minority communities who speak languages other than Setswana, which is designated the national language. There are 20 other languages, which are not recognized for educational and official communication. Politically, the country is a multiparty democracy. However, the ruling Botswana Democratic Party has won all the successive elections since Independence, which renders the state a de facto one party system. The ruling bloc has taken advantage of the weak opposition to concentrate on improving its economic interests, resulting in the advancement of a private enterprise system and foreign investment (Youngman, 2000).

Another feature of governmental practice is the reduction of popular participation in all aspects of life, leading to bureaucratic dominance by non-elected officials (Molomo, 1989). Sen (1999) has noted that democracy in theory presents opportunities to citizens through enhancing their participation and oppositional dialogue. However, this depends on the opposition's capacity to force the state to work to reduce oppositional appeal among the voting population. In Botswana, oppositional docility enabled a basic shift from welfare state policies to neo-liberal free market capitalism in the 1990s with an emphasis on increased expenditure on health and education. Botswana is a modernist developmental state in which most of the power for decision-making is left to professionals.

Botswana's economy was one of the weakest in the world during the 1960s but it has expanded rapidly reaching a GNP per capita of \$3700 by 1998 (World Bank, 2000). In the 1980s it recorded a phenomenal growth of 9.9%, which made it one of the fastest growing economies in the world (Patterson and Bozeman, 1999). The growth has been based on the discovery and exploitation of mineral wealth, especially diamonds. However, the growth has been accompanied by high rates of income inequality and persistent poverty in urban and especially in rural areas. The Household Income and Expenditure Survey of 1993/94

showed that the distribution of disposable income among persons was such that the poorest 40% earned only 11.6% of the total national income, whilst the next 40% and the top 20% earned 29.1% and 59.3% of the national income respectively (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, 1997). Poverty was more prevalent in rural areas, where 60% of the poor and 70% of the very poor female households live. Paradoxically, the state's social services such as adult education serve to legitimate such inequalities in a capitalist socio-economic formation rather than promote social transformation (Youngman, 2000).

### *2.1. Conceptualization of adult literacy education*

There are different perspectives on the conception of adult literacy. The major contrasting conceptions are the conventional, critical and social literacies approaches. According to Bhola (1999), the conventional literacy conception is a programme approach, which is generally associated with governments engaged in planned development change emphasizing growth with efficiency. Literacy is often anticipated to facilitate orderly personal and national development. The literacy programme is often centralized and is not treated as a priority by the state. In these cases, literacy stresses elite ideologies and serves to solidify social hierarchies (Gee, 1996). A conventional literacy programme is driven by a general perception that literacy is intended for a generic good and should cater for different groups. UNESCO's *Hamburg Declaration* notes, 'Literacy should be a gateway to a fuller participation in social, cultural, political and economic life... it must be relevant to people's socio-economic and cultural contexts' (UNESCO, 1997, p. 7). Gough (1995) indicates that conventional literacy contributes to personal improvement and mobility, social progress, better health, and cognitive development and it is not political. In spite of the rhetoric to serve different interest groups, the curriculum is carefully defined in terms of what is to be taught, and methods and materials to be used are centrally developed.

Other scholars view adult literacy from a critical perspective. Critical literacy is viewed as intended

for the empowerment of participants to enable them to become agents of social transformation. The process gives the subjectivities and experiences of the oppressed a central place in articulating their realities and aims to enable them to take control of their destinies (Freire, 1990). Literacy education provides an opportunity for human agency and action (Giroux, 1995; Hernández, 1997). However, in a class society, according to Giroux (1995), the state uses its hegemony to enable education to reproduce and legitimate the dominant culture, knowledge, values and language, and renders other realities non-existent. The state attempts to universalize certain ruling class ideas while simultaneously shaping and limiting oppositional discourses and practices (Giroux, 1997). It secures conditions for capital accumulation and the reproduction of unequal relationships between labour and capital thereby creating conditions for hegemonic control. Hegemony cannot just be implanted, it has to be nurtured and maintained. It represents power used by the civil organizations to mobilize, and, is negative when used by the state to dominate alternative worldviews (Apple, 1999). Therefore resistance to state hegemony can either create a basis for new power relations or involve a struggle to escape from power (Crowther, 2000). Adult literacy education in this perspective is viewed as part of the politics of knowledge production, dissemination and resistance by both the powerful and the dominated. Apple (1999) contends that educators needed to make recourse to a neo-Marxist view to hold 'dominant perspectives and practices-in curriculum, in teaching, in evaluation, in policy... up to the spotlight of honest, intense, and scorching social and cultural criticism' (p. 19).

Critical literacy can be transformative if it uses participatory approaches that allow for learner participation in the development of materials and teaching. Currently, some adult literacy planners in developing nations use the Regenerated Freirean Literacy Empowering Community Techniques (REFLECT). This approach combines the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) technique and the Freirean approach to generate literacy curricula jointly with the learners to transform their worldviews and enable them to challenge an oppressive

status quo. It combines literacy and development issues in order to engage facilitators and learners in dialogue leading to empowerment (Archer, 2000).

The third conception of adult literacy is that of the social literacies perspective, which views literacy as ideological and contends that it should incorporate cultural realities of the learners (Street, 2001). This perspective urges literacy planners and implementers to recognize a range of literacies that feature in different contexts and demonstrates that literacy experiences are embedded in social cultural contexts (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Cairney, 1995; Street, 2001). The view argues that literacy should raise consciousness in specific contexts and urge teachers to create a learning community to facilitate social change. Education should address personal and social transformation over and above epistemological, technical, and social skill provision (Street, 2001). These differing perspectives have a bearing on the planning and implementation of literacy education.

Planning can be viewed as either a technical or a critical process. In the technical approach, planners assume that educational decision-making is an objective process and can be made by experts with specialized knowledge. They view politics as noises that should be kept out of planning (Caffarella, 1994). For them, educational experiences are to produce learning outcomes based on a means-ends formula and they do not perceive programme planning to be political (Posner, 1998). Viewing planning as critical on the other hand, involves negotiating the interests of stakeholders with different power relations in society. Planners in this context need to represent the interests of the disadvantaged learners in order to forge a link between learning and development (Archer, 2000). Such planners are cognisant of how planning is influenced by factors such as gender, ethnicity and the cultural identities of planners, teachers and learners, in a given context, and they attempt to negotiate competing choices at the planning table (Cervero and Wilson, 1994). The present study argues that throughout its history, the Botswana National Literacy Programme (BNLP) has been operated as a technical process rooted in the conventional view of literacy education.

## 2.2. Adult literacy education in independent Botswana

Following its Independence from Britain, Botswana like other African states recognized the need for the provision of education if its development objectives were to be met. In 1975, the Government appointed a Commission to assess the state of education in the country and to suggest ways to improve it. The National Commission on Education (1977) indicated: 'A fully literate population is an important long term objective if Botswana's other national objectives are to be met... literacy should not be pursued in isolation from other development programmes' (p. 67). The contention that adult literacy was crucial for national development has not been made evident in official practice. The Report of the National Commission on Education did not have a specific recommendation on adult literacy. The accompanying White Paper promised that a paper would be written in which 'consideration will be given to literacy programmes' (Ministry of Education, 1977, p. 12). However, such a policy paper was never written.

In 1979, Government accepted a working document entitled the *National Initiative Consultation Document*, which laid the foundation for the Botswana National Literacy Programme. Its major objective was to enable 250,000 illiterate men, women and youths to become literate in Setswana and numerate over six years from 1980 to 1985. It also stipulated that literacy was to be understood in the context of development issues relevant to the respective districts and nation. Finally, it was decided that literacy was 'to be interpreted to imply that a person can comprehend those written communications and simple computations which are part of their daily life' (Ministry of Education, 1979, p. 1). The Department of Non- Formal Education (DNFE) was not able to eradicate illiteracy in six years as envisaged in the objectives because the programme was insufficiently funded, it largely depended on foreign donors with minimal state support (Meissenhelder, 1992).

In 1985 the State redefined the objectives of the programme in order to meet the learning needs of communities in the rural and remote areas, and for adults who never had a chance to go to school and

for children who are living in villages without schools. The programme had to meet the needs of rural communities in terms of skills required for income generating activities as this formed the basis for expansion (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, 1985). The redefined objectives stated that the Department would expand its non-formal activities beyond reading, writing and numeracy.

In 1987 the BNLP was evaluated mainly through the use of a test administered to a representative sample of learners, which revealed that about 81% of the respondents scored at an equivalent of Grade Four in the formal school system. The test focussed mainly on recording the learners' ability to memorize items and not on establishing the use of literacy in their daily lives. These outcomes fell short of demonstrating how learners applied the acquired skills in their districts and the nation as stipulated above in the programme's objectives. The high level of performance was therefore limited in its scope and the evaluators acknowledged that the content needed to be reviewed in order to reinvigorate the curriculum (Gaborone et al., 1987).

In 1993, the Government published the findings of the Second National Commission on Education. The report had a chapter devoted to out-of-school education with specific recommendations for the DNFE. It recommended that the DNFE should provide education for out-of-school children in both urban and rural areas, in addition to adult literacy education. DNFE was to review the terms and conditions of service for literacy teachers, commission a national evaluation of the literacy programme, and set up an adult basic education course equivalent to Standard Seven in primary school (Ministry of Education, 1993). The implementation of these recommendations is still on going having been unduly delayed.

In 1993, the state conducted a national household literacy survey, which revealed that currently the overall literacy rate is 68.9%, with 66.9% for men and 70.3% for women (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, 1997). The survey showed that only 12% of the participants reported acquiring literacy through the Botswana National Literacy Programme and the survey indicated that the BNLP was not reaching 81% of the eligible

population it is supposed to serve (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, 1997). This indicates a low level of achievement for a programme that has been in operation since 1980.

The organizational structures of the DNFF are hierarchical and heavily centralized, leaving limited opportunity for local innovations (Maruatona, 2001; Mporfu and Youngman, 2001). As Mporfu and Youngman (2001) note, 'it provides a standardized national framework in which there is little discretion at district level, for example, the budget is controlled from the headquarters' (p. 582). However, recently, five positions of Regional Adult Education Officer (RAEO) were introduced, who oversee the activities of district adult education officers and junior staff in their respective regions. At district level, the department has various cadres ranging from the Literacy Group Leader, who are volunteer teachers, through Adult Education Assistants to District Adult Education Officers (DAEOs) and Senior District Adult Education Officers (SDAEOs) who supervise districts and sub-districts throughout the country. Country wide, there are fifteen DAEOs under the five RAEOs. In 1997, the Department had 948 LGLs and 132 adult education officers and they oversaw 1640 literacy groups (DNFF, 1998). The introduction of RAEOs was intended to enhance the capacity of the programme to effectively serve learners from different geographical regions in Botswana.

### 3. Study design and procedures

The study used an interpretive qualitative research inquiry to establish a holistic understanding of how the planning and implementation of the Botswana National Literacy Programme (BNLP) has enabled the state to maintain its control over issues such as ethnicity and gender. Central to qualitative research is its emphasis on eliciting understanding and documenting meaning from the participants' perspective (Patton, 1990). Glesne (1999) observes 'qualitative research looks at the specific to understand it in the particular and to understand something of it in the general' (p. 153). The qualitative approach emphasizes getting close to the people and their situations to understand the

realities of their lives without being obtrusive (Woods, 1999). This approach was appropriate for this study because it enabled literacy programme planners to reflect on their experiences.

#### 3.1. Sample selection

A combination of purposive sampling and the networking technique were used for the selection of participants in this study. I used purposive sampling because I wanted to involve individuals who would help me to discover, understand and gain insights into how adult literacy education was planned and implemented. Furthermore, I used the networking technique to enable participants to identify others who had similar experiences to be interviewed. The individuals contacted were those who were willing to talk to me about their extensive work experiences (Krathwohl, 1998).

A total of 16 former and current literacy education planners were interviewed. All these officers played differing roles in the planning and implementation of literacy education over the past 20 years. Each had served in an administrative position for 10 years or more, which was considered to be sufficient experience. Also I included participants from different cultural backgrounds, who had worked in a district where the majority of literacy participants were members of minority groups. This was done in order to understand how socio-political and cultural differences affected decision-making in planning and implementation literacy education.

The 16 participants comprised as follows: I interviewed three former planners who had been involved in the initial planning of the programme in the 1970s to give a historical perspective. Two of them were expatriates who were involved in the experimental literacy projects of the 1970s conducted by the Botswana Extension College. One was among the few people who pioneered the current programme. I also interviewed two senior management team members in the capital and three Regional Adult Education Officers in the Northern, Southern and Western regions. Also I interviewed three District Adult Education Officers in Southern and Northern regions and two District Adult Education Officers in the Western region. These three

regions were selected out of the five national regions because they represented the cultural, linguistic and geographical diversity that exists in the country. For example, the Western region is where most of the indigenous Basarwa/San people live. Finally, I interviewed senior management officers at the headquarters because district and regional officers made references to the key role they played in the planning of adult literacy education.

### *3.2. Data collection*

Data were obtained through interviews, and this was complemented with archival documents obtained from former and current literacy education planners and the official archives. I used an in depth semi-structured interview schedule with open-ended questions, which enabled the discussions to be conducted at length without being restricted. On average, interviews lasted for approximately 60 min while interviews with senior officials lasted for up to two hours. I gave them the choice to use English or Setswana because I am fluent in both languages, but almost all of them opted to use English. In addition to interviews, I examined documents or archives because they represent a written record of the actions of participants and therefore supplemented gaps in their verbal interview submissions.

## **4. Findings**

In developing the adult literacy education curriculum, the planners assumed that learners shared common concerns, universal realities, and were passive consumers. They ignored gender and ethnic differences among the participants in generating literacy materials and developed a conventional literacy programme. The establishment of the DNFE in 1979 enabled the state to reproduce its power by developing a tight control over most of the policy and operational features of the BNLP from its inception in 1980. This was confirmed by the fact that planners had conflicting perceptions of planning. Senior staff felt that everybody was involved in the planning process and that it rep-

resented a common voice. In contrast, the majority of the interviewed district staff argued that planning was part of a routine exercise intended to generate standard plans throughout the country. They noted that funding was only available for routine activities. For example, they when they tried to start income generating projects they were told that there were no funds, which stifled their innovation. It appeared that those in management were content with the current consultation process, whereas district staff felt that centralized planning frustrated their innovative efforts. Literacy officials controlled both the process and outcomes of literacy education through excluding learners from such crucial activities such as the development of primers, post-literacy booklets, and through imposing materials for the adult basic education course on them.

### *4.1. Developing primers*

One of the most critical hegemonic processes carried out by the DNFE was the development of the DNFE primers. The primers are five Setswana booklets that serve as reading materials for learners at different levels. They contain topics such as learning to read, the importance of time, and fetching firewood, but most focus on the mechanics of reading and writing rather than analysing the topics in terms of their social implications. Primer writing was confined to the senior staff and excluded the direct input of the learners and acknowledged only limited input from district staff. District staff members were asked to make editorial comments on draft primers but not to make substantive changes. A female District Officer recalled, 'Our contributions were not rejected because we were not expected to introduce new issues and concepts.' The major concern raised by most participants was that the primer materials were only based on life in the eastern part of Botswana, while other communities were excluded. As one female Senior Management Team members put it, 'The research done to write the primers was of a limited scale and not of a magnitude that would justify the establishment of a national literacy programme.' In spite of limited learner participation in curriculum development, the primers have not been reviewed

since the program started in 1980. A male Regional Adult Education Officer indicated, 'They have not seen the need to change the primers... they just see the primers as revered sacred cows.' Teaching in the DNFE is restricted to the use of primers as the sole source of information for learners all over the country.

In addition, DNFE staff unilaterally developed post-literacy materials based on their expertise and experience without identifying the needs of the learners. One Regional Adult Education Officer observed, 'In writing post-literacy materials, the assumption was that we understood the contexts in which the materials were going to be used but it was not backed by research on the learners' needs.' While it could be argued that officials can generate legitimate materials, the planners' failure to involve the learners and district staff in a substantive way, failed to enable the programme to respond to the needs of the learners. This in turn led to learners dropping out from the programme in large numbers. The programme therefore provided knowledge to be used within the structures of the state without challenging its hegemony.

#### *4.2. Provision of the adult basic education course*

In 1993 the state published the Report of the Second National Commission on Education, which had recommendations for all sectors of the national education system. One of the recommendations was to introduce an Adult Basic Education Course (ABEC) equivalent to Standard Seven in formal school. The DNFE initiated some planning activities to realize the recommendation. ABEC is divided into ABEC One, Two and Three and each has a taskforce looking into how to plan for its activities. ABEC One is equivalent to the current national literacy programme and it continues to be based on its activities. While the study participants welcomed the introduction of the course, they observed that the ABEC One pilot project ignored the much needed revisions of the current literacy programme. One male Senior District Adult Education Officer criticized planners for by-passing ABEC One and piloting ABEC Two content. He stated, 'The process of piloting ABEC materials is

already problematic in that they are trying materials for ABEC Two, which would not be useful unless we could deal effectively with reforming the BNLP, which is ABEC One.' In addition to the failure to review ABEC One, the participants noted that in 1998 the state conducted a national wide needs assessment intended to determine the adult basic education needs of the population. However, after conducting a pilot study on the feasibility of the ABEC, DNFE instead imported materials from South Africa to trial test the programme instead of using locally generated ones. In spite of the geographical proximity of South Africa, the materials were not relevant to the context of Botswana in terms of language and other key concepts in the South Africa curriculum. A member of the senior management observed, 'One has to pilot the materials that are going to be used in the actual course.' Most participants felt that the materials from South Africa were not in tune with the needs of their learners. Planners generally seem to have assumed that learners had the same realities and were passive consumers, so that the planning process did not take into account issues of gender and the minorities in different geographical locations in Botswana.

#### *4.3. Same realities and universal materials*

The participants shared a consensus view that the current literacy programme does not provide learners with skills they can apply immediately in their contexts. The planning process and the subsequent materials were not context specific, and the skills provided are of a general nature driven by personal experiences of the planners as opposed to the contextual needs of the learners. One female Senior District Adult Education Officer maintained, 'We do not provide learners with the skills they need.' In particular, participants felt that the programme does not take the needs of the minorities into account. One female District Adult Education Officer indicated, 'We do not understand how the Basarwa/San feel about what they learn in the programme. They told me that they were never actually given a chance to share with us what would be best for them.' Another Senior District Adult Education Officer added that the

programme uses what are viewed as universal materials but these do not respond to the needs of the learners in some contexts and they drop out. He emphasized, 'Primers do not include issues related to their life situation. One would not know how other communities live from the primers... Literacy becomes a luxury for these people it does not relate to their bread and butter issues.' In view of these problems, a male Regional Adult Education Officer suggested, 'We could have developed quite a number of other primers that could have been much more relevant to learners in different contexts rather than using one set of primers all over the country.' Part of the reason why the planners of the Botswana National Literacy Programme ignored the specific needs of the learners was because the learners were presumed to be passive consumers.

#### *4.3.1. Learners as passive consumers*

A number of participants argued that the programme reproduced the interests of the powerful because there was no needs assessment, which would have enabled learners to provide an input on what they would like to learn. Some participants felt that the programme was preoccupied with issues of national development and ignored local contexts. The planning and implementation of the BNLP demonstrated that the state did not solicit the views of the learners and assumed that they would passively learn whatever was offered. A female Senior District Adult Education Officer illustrated this point: 'I believe the programme has excluded the learners in decision-making about what literacy they need... literacy was planned for and not with the learners, they are treated as passive consumers.' Therefore, as presently organized, the programme is based on predetermined content and the needs of the learners. The exclusion of learners enables the state to exercise considerable control over the process and outcomes of literacy education. A male Senior District Adult Education Officer elucidated, 'We don't appreciate the strength of the experiences of people who come to our programme ... These are unique groups with unique life styles but we always look down upon them.' Over and above this, the programme reinforces cultural and gender stereotypes.

#### *4.3.2. Gender and minorities issues*

One way to establish how the planning and implementation of literacy education enabled the state to assert its hegemony is to examine how issues of gender and ethnicity were addressed in planning the BNLP. Junior planners argued that the programme was organized as a technical process and did not respond to the cultural contexts and gender concerns of the learners. The programme does not reflect the lives of minorities in the western and northern parts of the country because material development was heavily centralized and did not reflect local situations. Planners generally agreed that issues affecting women were not addressed. One female Senior District Adult Education Officer commented, 'In spite of their numbers we do not talk about things that are immediately relevant to the lives of women in the programme.' Women who attend the literacy programme were often denied a chance to attend or complete schooling by cultural practices such as early marriages and teenage pregnancies. Some parents still consider investing in the education of girls as a loss because they would be married away to a husband who is expected to take care of them. As one female District Adult Education Officer observed, 'Women who come to the programme were initially denied a chance to go to school... Some of them were withdrawn from school to be married away to men from South African mines.' One male Senior District Adult Education Officer indicated that even the programme itself disadvantaged women because the primers emphasize their domestic roles without questioning such practices. He stated,

The [topics] on women are about fetching firewood, cooking and giving children medication, nothing outside the house...what worries me is that in discussions, these issues are not raised to challenge our gender beliefs and values. I think they do not question cultural practices that are potentially oppressive to women.

The programme does not critically address issues affecting women and some topics actually demean their status. For example, the topic of marriage, in Primer Four prescribes what married



women should do and wear and emphasizes obedience to their husbands. In Primer Two, women are portrayed as the ones who should collect firewood and cook for the family. There is no effort to challenge these stereotyped gender roles.

The content of the programme also excludes issues of critical importance to the minorities. One Female District Adult Education Officer argued, 'The minorities and women's issues were not made prominent in the programme in spite of the fact that they constitute the majority in the programme.' Another District Adult Education Officer noted that based only on the content of the primers one cannot tell that there are many ethnic groups in Botswana. He explained, 'Primers do not include issues related to the lives of minority groups... Topics are built around the life of Setswana-speaking groups.' Also a female District Adult Education Officer observed that the programme 'attempts to integrate minorities into the mainstream society.' This demonstrates the intention of adult literacy education in Botswana to assimilate ethnic minorities rather than to cater for their contextual needs. When I asked the participants to suggest what could be done about this situation, a male Senior District Adult Education Officer noted, 'I think what we should be having are "multiple literacies" for different groups and not a single literacy programme for all categories of people.' The point is that while it is important for literacy to facilitate national unity, it should also address the specific needs of women and learners from minority communities.

## 5. Discussion

The study sought to demonstrate how the planning and implementation of the BNLP enabled the state to maintain its control over the literacy programme and failed to address social differences derived from ethnicity and gender. Planners in senior management viewed planning as facilitating a sense of belonging while district staff felt that it was a routine exercise they undertook each year as part of their work. Senior management officers believed that whatever is agreed upon at planning meetings represented the common voice of all

officers at all levels of the bureaucracy. It could be concluded that they viewed planning as an objectified technical process geared towards creating consensus (Pratt, 1994). Senior planners at headquarters perceived literacy as transmitting knowledge that was beneficial to the learners thereby legitimating dominant cultural values in Botswana.

Most district level participants on the other hand argued that the planning process was a regular administrative exercise that excluded the learners. It ignored innovative ideas such as providing funds to assist learners to establish income-generating projects. They observed that though it seemed to involve district level staff, there are many obstacles negating the intended outcomes because the plans failed to respond to the contexts of the learners. Planning is centred on routine activities such as the supply of stationery, training of literacy teachers on how to teach adults using the non-critical approach, keeping the attendance register, and making monthly reports. Lack of support for innovative ideas indicates that planning is not a value free but a political process, which needs to be negotiated. District staff members attempted to negotiate the use of minority languages in the programme and the inclusion of locally relevant issues but were instructed by senior management to follow the centralized syllabus. One District Adult Education Officer attempted to introduce functional literacy projects into the programme, and was discouraged on the grounds that there were no funds. District level planners struggled to represent the interests of their learners but they attempted to negotiate the interests of literacy participants in the context of unequal power relations at the planning table (Forester, 1993).

District planners conducted planning within a complex set of personal, organizational and social power relationships. Cervero and Wilson (1994) argue that planning is a political process that requires planners to exercise a high degree of astuteness in negotiating conflicting interests. District level planners attempted to negotiate with these unequal power relations in order to address the felt needs of the learners but met resistance from senior staff who only readily fund routine activities. Proceeding from the above, it can be

argued that there are conflicting perceptions among state bureaucrats at senior and junior levels, which results in senior management stifling the innovative ideas of those working at district level.

Planners in the BNLP indicated that they worked with other extension officers to write primers, post-literacy materials and recently, piloted an adult basic education course, which was based on reading materials imported from South Africa. All these activities excluded the learners who are the intended beneficiaries. The activities of the planners therefore enabled the powerful few to prescribe for the less informed but affected majority. In each of these cases, planners used only their own experience to develop programme materials without conducting needs assessment. Giroux (1997) proceeding from a critical literacy perspective stated that in general, state-produced primer materials impede critical thinking, and the texts are stripped of any critical edge. In the case of Botswana, claims by senior management staff that planning was intended to create a sense of belonging are not convincing when critically examined in the context of the grounded realities of the planning and implementation of the BNLP.

The study also demonstrates that the planning of literacy education enabled central government officers to take issues that are not in the dominant Setswana culture off the planning table. As a result, the programme failed to respond to the socio-cultural contexts of the learners. The programme reinforced the dominant worldview by using the same primer materials developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s for different categories of learners for over twenty years without being challenged. The failure to include learners in planning enabled the state to engage in hegemonic activities, because it limited the potential for oppositional discourses by deliberately ignoring the needs of different categories of learners through planning for and not with them. However, this experience confirms the need to involve learners in the planning of adult literacy educational programmes in order to address issues that affect learners in their contexts (Quigley, 1997; Weil, 1998). Weil (1998) argued that in order to develop effective and responsive materials for literacy, both teachers and learners

should be involved or else planners would develop inadequate materials. The social literacies approach argues that materials should reflect the repertoire of experiences of learners in their social contexts (Street, 2001). Adult literacy education in Botswana is therefore regulating instead of liberating the learners, thereby reinforcing the interests of the most powerful groups in society.

The study concludes that curriculum materials in the BNLP did not reflect issues related to the specific needs of women and the minorities. The learners were taught contents that were incompatible with their everyday realities and experiences (Kanpol, 1995). Furthermore, the literacy programme did not respond to gender concerns and reinforced stereotypical views about women. The study documented that women are in the majority in the programme, the programme failed to meet their needs. The exclusion of the needs of women is not unique to Botswana. Elsewhere, most participants in adult literacy programmes are women but their aspirations do not influence the curriculum. Hence, Stromquist (1997) argues that literacy essentializes women and teaches them about reproductive and not productive aspects of their lives. This supports the argument made here that literacy education in Botswana does not empower women because it does not respond to their needs, which are subordinated to those of the state and the expertise of bureaucrats. As Sleeter (1999) submitted, the poverty and inequality of women prevents them from challenging issues but rather they are made to affirm oppressive values. Stromquist (1997) concluded that conventional literacy programmes are centred on the stereotyped roles of women such as the provision of nutrition, health, childcare and family planning. Literacy in developing countries does not help women to engage in a critique of their everyday life (Torres, 1998). In Botswana, both senior management and the district staff confessed that they excluded women in the planning of the national literacy programme. The programme reinforced domestic roles rather than empowering women. Literacy planning took out controversial issues from the planning agenda in order to facilitate state hegemony.

## 6. Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, this paper concludes that in the literacy programme in Botswana the development of primers, and importation of materials for the piloting of the Adult Basic Education Course neglected the needs of the learners, rendering the content irrelevant. Senior management officials felt that planning created a sense of belonging and gave junior officers a voice while district officers dismissed it as a routine exercise that stifled their innovative ideas under the pretext of consultation and scarce resources. Central government officers presumed that learners shared common realities and were passive consumers and planned a single monolithic literacy program for all categories of learners. They failed to address issues specific to the learners' socio-cultural contexts.

Finally, the paper contends that the most critical challenge facing literacy planners in Botswana is that decision-making is heavily centralized with minimal opportunity for local innovations and responsiveness to the needs of different social groups (Maruatona, 2001). While the introduction of Regional Adult Education Officers in the BNLDP helped to decentralize decision-making, it did not devolve the power to the regions. All evidence points to the need to devolve power to develop materials to local levels in order to give district planners more authority. District supervisors will have to work with teachers and local literacy committees to decide on locally appropriate content. In addition, there should be networking with learners from different regions, and district staff should be given latitude to work with local committees to generate materials. Working together would counteract the negative effects of depending entirely on the experiences and 'expertise' of literacy planners. However, planners should continue to play a role in order for the process to remain stable but also reflect the experiences of the learners.

It also argues that adult literacy education in Botswana has failed to address issues affecting the majority of participants in the programme who are mostly women and members of the minority ethnic groups. It suggests that planning should be

decentralized to devolve power to the district and local level. Planners need to pay more attention to the contexts of women and minority communities to ensure that their literacy and development needs are identified and incorporated in the programme. It should be admitted that learner participation does not guarantee that literacy would be transformative, could instill a new way of looking at their lives as individuals, family and community members. It could increase their self-confidence through exposing them to essential practical skills. For example, literacy planners could use participatory planning approaches such as the Regenerated Freirean Literacy Empowering Community Technique (REFLECT). This technique relates literacy education to development issues identified by the learners and helps learner to challenge dominant worldviews. REFLECT has been used with potentially empowering outcomes among poor communities in Bangladesh, El Salvador and Uganda between 1993 and 1995. It has since been tried in a number of African, Asian and Latin American states by both Governments and Non-Government Organizations and was reported to have increased health awareness and also led to effective resource utilization among participants. It exposed learners to income generating activities but it has had its share of problems such as lack of markets for their produce (Archer, 2000).

The pioneers of REFLECT realized that conventional literacy programmes such as the one offered in Botswana failed to address issues of social inequality but served to perpetuate social and economic inequality. It is suggested that REFLECT would help curriculum developers in Botswana to develop the content jointly with the learners instead of being pre-packaged by senior Government officials, which failed to reflect socio-economic activities in other parts of the country, thereby rendering literacy ineffective in transforming lives. REFLECT would enable them to use such Participatory Rural Approach tools as local maps, trees, venn diagrams and seasonal calendars to collectively identify relevant issues to be included in the curriculum in the rural areas of Botswana to generate curriculum materials that could capture local experiences. It could work well in Botswana because its citizens have a history of participating

in a directed democracy and therefore would not have problems addressing social issues collectively to hopefully contest state hegemony through adult literacy education.

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