



Adult education and the empowerment of civil society: the case of trade unions in Botswana

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The paper examines the potential role of adult education in the empowerment of civil society in Botswana. It shows that adult education can be instrumental in the empowerment of trade unions as organs of civil society in a liberal democracy. It argues that the country's democratic tradition can be sustained by a strong civil society. The paper traces the history of trade unions in Botswana showing that the state has mostly weakened them through legislation. It is contended that individuals participate in trade unions as their mouthpiece when they are in trouble with capital. Most trade union members reported not being aware of adult education activities in Botswana. The paper explores some of the weaknesses of the unions and suggests how adult education provision from adult basic education to adult and continuing education at the university could help to redress the workers' problems. It concludes by mapping out some practical ways in which adult education could empower the unions in Botswana as it has done elsewhere.

The assumption that adult education and civil society are historically interlinked has often been taken for granted. Studies commonly paint a positive picture of the role of adult education in the empowerment and conscientization of civil society. However, they neglect to show that civil society organizations at times might not be aware of adult education provision and its limitations in certain political dispensations. The outcome is a rather unrealistic desire to empower civil society through adult education that overlooks the structural problems faced by both civil society and adult educators. This paper is informed by the fact that the available literature on civil society in Botswana portrays them as weak and apolitical (Molutsi 1995). However, there are no concrete suggestions as to how civil society could be strengthened to help it execute its roles more effectively as an agent of democracy. The purpose of the study is to explore the potential of adult education to empower civil society in Botswana, with a focus on trade unions. In order to accomplish this aim, the concept of civil society is clarified, then the provision of adult education in Botswana is explained through its three major sectors of basic education/literacy, extension and continuing education. The research methodology is then presented to demonstrate how data were collected on the nature of trade unions as seen by those within trade union organizations. This is followed by a presentation of findings which are analysed in relation to the three major sectors of adult education provided in Botswana and comments are made on future directions necessary to enhance the capacity of trade unions. Finally, a brief summary of the paper is provided and a challenge posed to adult educators and trade unionists.

Background of the study

Civil society

The contestation between the state and civil society has received considerable attention during the last two decades. This has involved broader questions from 'what constitutes civil society' to 'how could it be empowered in order for it to play a prominent role in the development of democracy, especially in developing countries?' It has been argued that civil society can be strengthened through the provision of effective adult education designed for empowerment (Youngman 1995, Kaizer 1996, Bhola 1997, Ramirez 1997, Welton 1997). Civil society includes such associations as the church, trade unions, and burial societies. They are voluntary and endure across generations, even though some are formed for a limited purpose and are transitory (Novak 1996). Civil society, therefore, refers to the voluntary associations and organizations to which individuals and groups are affiliated for a common pursuit. While the state represents the broader polity in society, civil society represents identified interests. It is founded on free pursuit of personal and cultural interests located between the family, economy, and the state and helps people to find value in the oppressive structure of society (Else 1993). In a liberal democracy, civil society undertakes to protect the interests of its individual affiliates against state encroachment on their civil liberties, freedoms and rights, which form the foundation for a democracy (Mogalakwe 1995, Molomo 1995). Consequently, it is customary for the elite and the governing institutions to seek to limit the capacity of civil society in developing countries. Novak (1996) observes that 'much of modern government disempowers through regulations, centralization and the displacement of civil society by public power' (p. 62). For example, the state can legislate against demonstrations by dissatisfied workers under the pretext of essential service (Mogalakwe 1995). It is often contended that civil society could and should play a role in the development of the democratic culture in society (Chandhoke 1995, Youngman 1995, Novak 1996, Ramirez 1997). This is sufficient justification for the empowerment of civil society if it is to play its historic role in the democratization of developing nations.

Civil society has been viewed as having been instrumental in the downfall of authoritarian regimes in Africa and the demise of the highly centralized socialist states in Eastern Europe where there was limited participation by the general population (Molutsi 1995, Good 1996, Ihonybere 1996, White, Howell and Xiaoyuans 1996). However, for civil society to carry out this political role, it has to show capacity for separation and independence in relation to the state. The organizations of civil society should demonstrate self-determination in their activities (White, Howell and Xiaoyuans 1996). This shows that a strengthened civil society is a prerequisite to the enhancement of prospects for peace, development and democracy in developing countries. The expanded scope of the operations of civil society is vital for effective realization of a healthy democracy. Macdonald (1997) argues that 'in the Third World societies characterized by histories of repression... some form of popular participation is essential in order to build more durable and legitimate democratic institutions' (p. 2). The above assertion suggests that these societies need to be re-launched into the culture of democracy. It also calls for the strengthening of civil society before it could be expected to face up to the challenges of dealing with a repressive regime.

In Botswana, like some other Third World countries, civil society has been described as weak. This is in spite of Botswana's long history of liberal democracy since Independence, in 1966 (Molutsi 1994, 1995). Some scholars have attributed the

weakness of civil society to repressive legislation which did not allow the organs of civil society (for example, trade unions, churches and women's organizations) to operate outside strict government monitoring over the years. For example, in 1969 the government passed the Trade Union Act, Trade Dispute and the Regulations of Wages and Conditions of Employment Act, which gave the state substantial leverage to restrict and control the activities of trade unions. The state passed the Society's Act 1972, to enable it to manage the activities of the organizations of civil society (Molutsi 1994, Youngman 1995). Youngman (1995), referring to the period from Independence to 1991, concluded that 'state power was used throughout the period to prevent the possibility of dominated classes and social groups using organizations in civil society either to achieve empowerment...or to question legitimacy of the state and the capitalist economic order' (p. 175). The state has used its legislative power to contain all potential opposition based on the strength of well-organized trade unions. This accounts for the relative weakness of civil society in Botswana. However, there have been limited efforts to demonstrate what could be done to strengthen civil society in view of the repression and control from the state. This study attempts to fill this gap by tracing the evolution of trade unions as organs of civil society and their contribution to democracy in Botswana. Issues confronting them will be assessed in order to establish the need for union empowerment. Empowerment as used in this study denotes a process where a group becomes aware of the causes of its problems and is prepared to use its collective efforts, skills and resources to alter the course of events for the better. The following paragraphs provide a brief overview of trade union activities in Botswana.

Trade unionism in Botswana

Trade unionism is a relatively late development in Botswana. The first trade union in the private sector was the Francistown African Employees Union (FAEU) which appeared in 1948 when small-scale industrial development was taking root in some of the towns. The union was open to employees from all sectors except public officers. It collapsed after six years because its administration was too centralized, there was also a lack of effective leadership and funds. Since Independence, the economy has grown rapidly and there has been active formation of trade unions in key industrial centres. However, in 1977, the government employed a former CIA agent to come and help establish 'responsible federation of trade unions' in the country, hence, the establishment of the Botswana Federation of Trade Unions (BFTU). Note that unlike in other countries it was not formed by independent union initiative. This is unique to Botswana and to some extent laid the basis for government control. BFTU aims to integrate all the unions under a single federation; improve the socio-economic conditions of all workers in Botswana and encourage the principle of good industrial relations between employers and employees through collective bargaining.

The BFTU is composed of several member unions. Some unions have broken away from the Federation, namely the National Amalgamated Local and Central Government and Parastatal Manual Workers Union and the Commercial and General Workers; these are the focus of this study. The National Amalgamated Local and Central Government and Parastatal Manual Workers Union's aims are to: regulate the relations between employers and employees; promote the spirit of independence and cooperation among members and other economic ventures; carry out worker education programmes for members. The Commercial and General Workers Union on the other

hand, represents the workers in the commercial sector. It aims among other things: to secure improvements in wages and working conditions for members; to assist members to obtain and retain employment and; to promote the interests of workers in relation to the employers through negotiations and procedural agreements.

The interests of workers seem to be central to the operations of the above unions. There are variations in emphasis, but the basic aim is to secure the welfare of union members against the government or capital. It is against this background that the present study sought to find ways in which adult education provision could empower the union members to enable them to participate fully in the democratic processes. In spite of that, one is aware that adult education has limits in solving structural problems because of lack of means or of ideological commitment on the part of adult educators. It has been noted that the state and trade unions could provide an appropriate trade union education themselves. State-organized education would enable labour to use state resources and gain from the experience of adult educators in dealing with some complex issues (Brown 1980). Trade union education operated by unions would give them the opportunity to go beyond teaching shop stewards collective bargaining. It could also include broader socio-political matters, such as poverty and inequality (Forrester 1995). Education therefore, should give the unionists capacity to participate in decision-making. Adult education would enable workers to organize, protect and advance their interests in view of opposition from management and the state (Devos 1998).

Provision of adult education in Botswana

Botswana attained independence from Britain in 1966. The adult education sector was grossly neglected by the colonial administration. The provision of adult education in Botswana is intended to help bridge the gap between the formal and non-formal education strands, create a learning society and to help people to acquire skills and attitudes to cope with changes in the socio-economic, technical, and political arena. The state provides adult education in three main categories of Adult Basic Education, Extension Education and Continuing Education (Ministry of Education 1993).

Adult basic education

In the Botswana context, Adult Basic Education refers to the learning opportunities organized to enable adults to learn literacy skills and to achieve educational levels equivalent to 10 years of basic schooling (Ministry of Education 1993). The adult literacy process has involved literacy (reading, writing and numeracy) and other post-literacy activities designed to help literates avoid relapsing into illiteracy. The Report of the *National Commission on Education 1977* noted that 'A fully literate population is an important long-term objective if Botswana's other national objectives are to be met' (p. 167). Literacy provision is the portfolio responsibility of the Department of Non-Formal Education. It implements the Botswana National Literacy Programme, which started in 1980, with the following objectives:

Enable 250,000 presently illiterate men, women and youth to become literate in Setswana and numerate over six years, 1980–5.

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

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

However, the Department of Non-Formal Education was unable to complete the eradication of illiteracy in six years as initially proposed, the objectives of the Botswana National Literacy Programme were redefined in the *National Development Plan Six, 1985–1991*. They were to:

Help the learning needs of communities in the rural and remote areas for adult who never had a chance to go to school.

The Department will expand its non-formal activities beyond reading, writing and numeracy. The needs of rural communities in terms of skills required for income generating activities that would form the basis for expansion (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning 1985).

The programme was evaluated in 1987, and the evaluation indicated that there was a need to review the curriculum and reinvigorate the teaching and learning processes (Gaborone, Mutanyatta and Youngman 1987). A second concern was that the effects of the programme on the graduates had not been established. Accordingly, the problem that persisted concerned dropouts and the general low morale of the staff, especially the Literacy Group Leaders who are programme facilitators (Ministry of Education 1993).

The National Literacy Programme is the largest single state-sponsored adult education programme in the country. Initially, the programme focused attention on teaching and learning to the relative exclusion of the post literacy activities but these were given priority from the mid-1980s. The Department of Non-Formal Education (DNFE), also established Village Reading Rooms in conjunction with the Department of National Library Services. The DNFE is currently working on the teaching of English as part of the programme. The most recent innovation has been the provision of workplace literacy.

Extension education

The origins of extension are traced to the late 19th century in the USA where the government wanted to use new knowledge to improve the quality of life of rural people. Extension in the Botswana context should be understood to mean the modes by which knowledge from research centres is transferred to appropriate people in the community to enlarge acceptance and application of relevant methods and techniques. It has sought to transfer information and skills to rural communities. Ideally, extension services are to perform social mobilization and help people identify their needs, as well as to solve their problems either individually or collectively. The extension services have been an important element of the provision of adult education since independence because they are perceived to be essential for other rural development initiatives (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning 1985). The responsibility for extension

monitoring and coordination is carried out by the Rural Extension Coordinating Committee (RECC) under the Rural Development Coordination Division in the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning. RECC links with the Districts and Villages through District Extension Teams and Village Extension Teams. The RECC has undertaken a number of initiatives such as improving the activities of the Village Extension Teams which coordinate development at village level.

These efforts are intended to contribute to the government's goal of raising rural living standards through increasing agricultural productivity and development of farm and off-farm employment opportunities in rural areas (Ministry of Education 1993). Some commentators contend that the government's programmes over the past three decades have not been able to resolve socio-economic problems which have persisted and that the status of vulnerable groups has remained precarious (Fong 1995). Consequently, the effectiveness of extension services is in doubt. One problem is that recipients of extension services remain passive, so there is a one-way flow of information. The use of a 'technology transfer' approach neglects community participation in development and remains a problem (Ministry of Education 1993). However, recently, Youngman and Maruatona (1998) demonstrated the way government and non-governmental organizations extension services are attempting to increase community participation in the rural development process in Botswana.

Continuing education

The third aspect of adult education provision is continuing education. This refers to planned formal and non-formal educational programmes for adults who intend to continue their education beyond the basic level of Junior Certificate. It is viewed as an aspect of lifelong learning. Continuing education preserves the strength of the formal school system because it offers certification at the end of the course. It extends whatever previous education that adults have had beyond basic education within the ambit of adult education (Akinpelu 1995). Continuing education also provides another opportunity for the realization of adult aspirations to meet their professional and utilitarian needs. Akinpelu (1995) notes that 'for continuing education to be adequate and sufficient it must draw its programme objectives on the basis of not just physical and material necessities of life...but also and equally important on spiritual and moral values that guide all those considerations' (p. 51). To that extent, it meets the functional, personal and organizational needs of the adult population. For example, bank employees enrol for Certificate and Diploma courses in Accounting and Business Studies offered by the Centre for Continuing Education at the University of Botswana (Centre for Continuing Education Report 1996).

The Ministry of Education operates continuing education programmes through the Department of Non-Formal Education, which offers correspondence courses at General Certificate level. There have been some private initiatives to provide continuing education, like the Capital Continuation Classes in Gaborone that offered courses up to Ordinary level certificates. At the university, the Centre for Continuing Education started operating in 1987 to expand the provision of formalized continuing education. It has operated a number of courses and workshops and has provided opportunities for Certificates and Diplomas in Accounting and Business Studies offered in the evening across the country. As a result of the increased demand for higher and professional education, the university plans to increase its output in this area. All three forms of

adult education provision help to provide education for citizens from different categories of life. However, none of them has specifically targeted its provision to trade unions. As a result, trade union education in Botswana remains weak and uncoordinated. Hence, this study seeks to establish ways of empowering unions through adult education.

Study design and procedures

The basic purpose of this study was to explore the potential of adult education to empower civil society in Botswana with a focus on trade unions. The following specific questions shaped the study:

- (i) Why do people choose to belong to trade unions in Botswana?
- (ii) How could trade union participation in adult education help to empower the unions?
- (iii) What could hinder unions to participate in the democratic process in Botswana?
- (iv) What do unionists view as solutions to problems of trade unions in Botswana?

Design

A combination of procedures were used in the study. The researcher had prior knowledge of the main trade unions. A preliminary survey of the unions revealed that only a few people were actually involved with education issues. The researcher, therefore, utilized a purposive sampling procedure where union leaders were chosen and interviewed because of their experience in various aspects of trade union mobilization and organization. The 'snowball technique' was also used to identify such participants. In the first instance, the researcher identified the one person to interview because of their position in the union. Later, the participant was asked to direct the researcher to others who could also be interviewed. At the end, almost all officers involved with education in the National Amalgamated Local and Central Government and Parastatal Manual Workers Union, Commercial and General Workers' Union and the Botswana Federation of Trade Unions were interviewed. Following this, the researcher interviewed members of the local union branches of National Amalgamated Local and Central Government and Parastatal Manual Workers Union at the University and the National Museum.

Branches at the University of Botswana and the National Museum were randomly selected for inclusion in the research process from all the local branches of the National Amalgamated Local and Central Government and Parastatal Manual Workers Union in Gaborone. The names of the two were randomly chosen from a list of affiliated branches. At each of the selected branches, membership registers were useful in the selection of some participants. A total of 28 men and women were interviewed. This involved 6 union officials, 2 shop stewards and 9 members of their committees. Eleven members of the general membership of the local branches were randomly selected from the register and interviewed at both sites. This was to get them to verify observations of the local union leadership. No specific sampling was carried out for the identification of the two local leaders or shop stewards. The shop stewards also helped the researcher in organizing committee group interviews, which were conducted in the former's absence.

This gave the committee members the opportunity to reflect critically on the activities of the local union leadership without the interference of the shop stewards. The researcher assured them that their contributions would be handled confidentially. Therefore the branches and a cross-section of membership were interviewed in order to get a balanced view of the union activities from different sources to enhance trustworthiness of the observations. The researcher also had access to registers and other documents on trade union objectives and activities.

Data collection

Two sets of questionnaires were developed for data collection. The researcher designed a questionnaire for union officials who were also responsible for trade union education. Another was designed for shop stewards, committees, and union general membership at the two sites. In addition to the use of questions on the questionnaire, additional questions were asked as follow-up based on the context (Merriam 1995). This enabled the researcher to elicit relevant information from respondents and to allow them to elaborate on some issues. The instruments were validated in three ways. First, they were given to three colleagues in the Department of Adult Education to determine if they sufficiently reflected the purpose and objectives of the study. Second, they were pre-tested on a sample of people consisting of industrial class employees. A focused group meeting with the committee at both sites afforded the researcher a chance to observe some issues such as democratic decision making and discussion of political issues raised during the meeting. Finally, a member check was done, by forwarding preliminary analysis of the results to some respondents for comments, before the final report was written.

The need to conduct observations made the researcher personally administer questionnaires to the participants. The interviewing also reduced chances of questionnaires not being returned. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour among the union officials and 20–30 minutes among the shop stewards, committee members and the general membership, with the latter taking the shortest possible time. The focus group discussion with the committee members involved the researcher in a helpful discussion on issues of union administration by local leadership. The researcher noted the main points and later detailed the notes for producing a description of issues raised during the discussion for purposes of effecting analysis. The process of data coding and analysis was based on the substantive description of the responses from different sections of union structures from officials to general members interviewed. The data collected through observation and document analysis in different locations of the study were used where they helped to give additional and supportive details for the issues discussed.

Respondent characteristics

A total of 28 respondents, 12 men and 16 women, were interviewed. The study involved 2 officials from the Botswana Federation of Trade Unions, 2 men from the Commercial and General Workers Union and 2 men from the National Amalgamated Local and Central Government and Parastatal Manual Workers' Union. The meeting with shop stewards and other members were held at each of the local unions. The local union

branches committee at the University was comprised of 2 women and 3 men and at the Museum it was composed of 2 women and 2 men. A total of 11 respondents (8 women and 3 men) were interviewed at both institutions. Men held leadership positions in the unions even though women outnumbered them. The majority of the general members and indeed shop stewards and committee members were working in fairly low ranking jobs like gardening, cleaning, working as drivers and in maintenance. Two of the Union officials were very experienced trade unionists who had been with the unions for over ten years, while other officers' experience ranged from one to 6 years.

Findings

The analysis of the responses to key issues assisted the researcher in determining the trends concerning reasons for trade union participation, the status of communication in the union, and whether trade unions operated in a democratic and participatory way or not. What possible role could adult education provision play in empowering the unions? What were the problems encountered in the union and possible ways to resolve them in order to strengthen them?

Reasons for participation in trade unions

The main reason given by all respondents for participating in the unions was that it would help them in the event they had problems at work. All interviewed workers saw the primary goal of the union being to intervene on their behalf during difficult times. One woman expressed it like this:

I believe the union will protect me when I encounter problems like being fired from work and when I have conflicts with management. Over the years that I have been a union member it has stood by my side all the time. The union officials have intervened on behalf of a number of my colleagues.

The union is viewed as essential when one has problems at work, such as unfair dismissal and problems of payments and gratuities. The work of union officials and local representatives is based on the regulations and conditions of employment to represent workers against their employers. The issue was elucidated by one shop steward who observed that:

Workers come to us when their employers threaten to dismiss them from work and when fired. We have negotiated with management on their behalf in each case. We only refer cases to union officials after we have tried to resolve the situation with management amicably on behalf of union members.

The men and women in the union see membership as a source of protection against unfair dismissals or unfair treatment by supervisors and higher management at their work places. The general members and the shop stewards were in consensus that union officials can negotiate with their employers on their behalf and viewed this as a sufficient reason for participating in the unions. The union officials, on the other hand, observed that unions represented the workers when they had problems with their employers. They also try to educate workers about unions and their rights and obligations. This was confirmed by one official who indicated that:

Culturally, people associated the union with representing them only in case there is trouble. However, I think unions should improve the lives of members. For example, some people in this union have been subscribing members for the past twenty years without experiencing any problems with their employers. Surely such people must be given education and skills that might improve their socio-economic conditions in future when they retire.

In addition to establishing harmony between union members and their employers unions negotiate conditions of service with the employers on behalf of employees resulting in binding procedural agreement governing both parties. One union official observed that the unions help members to secure recognition and negotiate procedural agreements between them and their employers; 'The agreement explains all the hitherto unclear working conditions, it guides employer-employee relations in companies. We negotiate different agreements with each of commercial establishments where we have members.' It would seem then that workers join unions in order to have support when problems arise, and that unions also assist in leveling the ground between labour and capital. Workers use the negotiated agreement documents when they contest any issue with management. The challenge is to ensure that members are educated about the agreements reached between the union and their employers.

Trade unions, politics and democracy

The respondents were divided when asked whether they discuss political issues at union meetings. All respondents felt strongly that union should not be involved with politics. Political issues can only be addressed as they affect the activities of the union. The members indicated that they were aware of their political differences along partisan lines. They felt this could not be allowed into the union because it would divide the workers. One shop stewards observed that 'as local officials we are not allowed to bring party politics into the union unless, they affect the work of the union directly'. Some officials agreed and one of them emphasized that:

Unions can only deal with politics of the union, for example, we talk against the law that disadvantages the workers, our representation of the workers in invariably lead discussions into politics. As we negotiate for our members we talk about the economy and other factors that have a direct bearing on politics.

However, some felt that it is inevitable for unions to be involved in politics. Workers should not ally themselves with any one political party but put specific demands about their concerns to parties. One union official suggested that 'over time, unions like other pressure groups should actually have a political position in deciding on political representation after careful consideration of party campaign manifestos in Botswana'. The respondents' views range widely but they were in consensus on not making unions explicitly partisan.

The interviewees were asked whether they thought unions in any way improve democracy in Botswana. The general members interviewed felt that their local branch leaders were listening to them, and they participated in decision making which is democratic. The shop stewards felt that the process of leading unions enabled them to use the skills they were taught by union officials, specifically, listening and accepting points of view even if radically different from their own. The internal organization of the

unions enable local branches to practice democracy in that they strive to make collective decisions. One women committee member asserted that 'as committee members, we often make decisions with members not for them. We strive to involve them in decision making processes'.

Union officials were in consensus that the unions further the course of democracy because there is no way government can make decisions affecting the workers they represented without involving them through appropriate committees. One union official noted for example, that unions were in the middle of a consultative process on 'privatization' of some services. They were battling with the government because they believed privatization would disadvantage the workers. Some officials, however, felt that the membership still had a limited capacity to fully get involved with this democratic process. They felt the level of member consciousness was still low and the leadership at the local level still needed to be educated before it could facilitate effective member participation and democracy. One union official stated that:

In order for people to participate meaningfully and democratically there is a need for them to be politicized about unionism in order for them to make decision and not only to wait for union leadership. This can be achieved if the unions intensify the training of shop stewards, committees and to some extent the general membership.

The leadership and membership are in consensus that members of the unions still need to be educated on the role of the union and how they could participate in its activities. The officials are convinced that they still have a challenge ahead to enable members to make decisions on their own and to carry out decisions that are agreed between the union and their respective employers. They argue that the employees should be empowered to make decisions with their employers without union officials intervening all the time.

Trade unions and adult education

The respondents were asked to name any adult education service they were aware of in Botswana. Most of the general members indicated that there were aware of the literacy programme and that extension staff educate the public about government programmes. They were not aware of continuing education programmes. The members noted that they were aware that extension staff taught the public about government assistance policies like the Financial Assistance Policy that provides start-up grants for business. However, the respondents were not familiar with its objectives and what is required to have the grant. The union officials and members indicated that they never had a chance to work with extension staff to help them to gain access to government services as individuals or as a group.

The majority of respondents indicated that literacy services were needed for most of the union members. The union officials observed that some union members had problems reading and writing. The union leadership noted that the newly introduced workplace literacy should involve trade unionism in order for it to be helpful to their members. The membership, on the hand, expressed the desire for their leaders to have access to adult education training, especially in leadership and management, which they need to run the unions in an effective way. One shop steward observed that 'union leaders must attend leadership seminars with government supervisors at the Botswana

National Productivity Centre in order for them to be more knowledgeable about labour issues in Botswana'. Union Officials and shop stewards suggested that trade union education should include job-related content in order to enable workers to use the acquired skills at work and after retirement or retrenchment. The central role of adult education was aptly summarized by one union official who stated that:

Our unions have always been aware of the need for educational services for membership. We thought we would contact the relevant authorities after we have built union structures. Our union intends to explore programmes like poultry, dairy farming, Horticulture and in future introduce a thrift and loan scheme service for members.

The general membership felt that the union should be provided with one form of adult education or another depending on what the target group would view as essential but, regretted that there is no formal arrangement with adult education programmes to educate the unions.

Trade union problems and prospects

The respondents were asked about problems encountered in the unions. Union officials and the local leadership of the unions indicated that there was tension between unions and their employers. Union officials observed that the tension was exacerbated by the fact that the government has for a long time been working closely with the employers federation and not the unions. They are also confronted by external problem, like lack of support from the state that sides with employers against employees and is demonstrated by hostile legislation. They noted that the state has taken a long time before ratifying International Labour Organization conventions that could protect workers. Unionists identified a related problem as being that workers' lack knowledge about ratified conventions. One of the union officials contended that 'the signing of the conventions remains a meaningless formality for union membership and unfortunately, unions have a limited capacity to educate members about their benefits'. Trade unionists identified some internal weaknesses that included poor recruitment strategies and lack operational funds and capacity to educate union members. Therefore members still needed to be educated on the implications of the conventions for their work lives. One official noted the need for adult education to help the unions with educating members about ratified conventions. This would help them to put demands on government and other employers.

The other general problem noted by the respondents was that the unions in Botswana are few and very fragmented. More so, the Botswana Federation of Trade unions and the independent unions have a limited and unclear mandate to work with the government. They remain at 'advisory' level and do not make binding decision on behalf of their members. The union officials noted that the Joint Consultative Council (responsible for advising the government on matters affecting workers) to which the BFTU belonged was weak. Another problem raised by union officials and the local leadership was that Botswana is generally perceived to be peaceful and the unions are reluctant to resort to radical means of confronting the state.

The respondents were agreed that one of the major problems is that the unions have failed to recruit most of the people in the industrial class category in the government and parastatals. In fact, some feel that the National Amalgamated Local and Central

Government and Parastatal Manual Workers' Union has so far attracted only between 10–15 % of the potential followership. Closely related to this was what general members and local leadership described as a problem with officials who occupied more than one job. Some officials are actually involved in active partisan politics as elected councillors in local government. One union official observed that what 'appears to be the problem in most of the unions is that leadership lacks vision about the future of the union and leaders spend time engaged in activities that were not related to the union.'

The respondents were asked how they thought the problems could be solved. Union officials indicated that there was need to educate the members about their rights and obligations as union members. One way of redressing the weakness of the trade unions according to some union officials, was that there was need for the Department of Adult Education and Centre for Continuing Education at the University should provide training for trade union leadership and shop stewards. Training would help to enhance their capacity to articulate trade unionism and provide effective membership representation. There was a felt need to mobilize the rest of the industrial class workforce, the majority of whom are currently not unionized.

Discussion

The study sought to establish insight into ways in which adult education programmes in Botswana could empower organizations of civil society, specifically trade unions. The respondents gave a variety of reasons for being members of unions. The most popular reason was that the general members needed the union to represent them in case they had problems with their employers. The reasons for participation were that the unions were to ensure that members acquired important knowledge about employer–employee issues and conflict resolution. The officials, on the other hand, reported that unions were intended for a broader goal than protection against employers. They were also to educate members on ways of improving their lives, even after retirement. The motive for participation in unions therefore can be viewed as being driven by a sense of insecurity at work on the part of the industrial class workers. Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that unions are seen as safe havens by the membership and perceived as organizations for education and improvement of the workers conditions of service and preparation for retirement by officials. Note that there is a lack of political agenda in their programme contrary to the literature that civil society are an alternative form of government or even that they could pose a challenge to the political status quo (Welton 1995). The findings instead challenge adult educators to prepare workers for that role in this context.

The perception of the role of trade unions in politics and democracy varied between members and the officials. The members felt content with the fact that in union meetings they could freely express their views, fears, and concerns against both union leadership and their employers without fear. The unions are empowering because they foster democracy and a participatory approach in decision-making and they felt that unions should not be involved in partisan politics. The general members suggested that the unions were players in democracy because unions were a forum where people could express their views without fear of being reprimanded. This trained union leaders to be future players in the process of facilitating democracy, because they learn the art of listening to their adversaries and accepting another point of view as they negotiate with management. It could be concluded that in Botswana participation in '*real politik*' and

other democratic structures beyond issues of their members' conditions of service was still limited (Molutsi 1994). The lack of capacity signals the need for the provision of literacy and other forms of adult education to labour unions to enable them to participate in the democratic dispensation. The findings question the assumption that trade unions can challenge the state as alternative political force (Macdonalds 1997, Welton 1997).

The union officials and members felt that democracy in the unions can only be achieved if members are educated more about the role of trade unions and how they relate to broader socio-economic issues in Botswana. It has been observed that there is a degree of internal democracy in the union in so far as there is communication and participation in decision making at the local level. However, the officials felt that there should be efforts to provide empowering adult education in order to facilitate democracy in the unions. The conceptual difference might partly explain why unions are so weak in terms of playing a key role in the democratic process in Botswana (Molutsi 1994). There is a need to organize educational activities for local leadership and general membership to enhance their capacity to participate more effectively in the union and other broad socio-political structures in Botswana. This type of education would have to be provided by both conventional adult education programmes and, more importantly, the unions. Forrester (1995) accepts the role of the state but notes that 'no other organization matches the ability of the trade unions to potentially mobilise working class communities around learning programmes' (p. 179). Hence, one would agree with the suggestion by the union officials that adult education at the university should take responsibility for the training and empowerment of union leadership. Such an experience would not be unique to Botswana because it has been observed that in Latin America, adult education has played a crucial role in contributing towards strengthening of civil society and consolidating democracy (Ambrose 1994).

The respondents indicated that they were aware of some adult education programmes and services except for university based adult and continuing education programmes. The general members noted the need for provision of adult basic literacy for some members. The people interviewed seemed aware of the opportunities offered by the National Literacy Programme. However, while they were aware of some services, they were not aware of how they could access such services. They had limited knowledge of what extension education was offering partly because they felt it was mainly targeted to the rural areas. What also seems problematic was that the union leadership had no working relationships with adult education programmes. Both the union members and leadership felt that there was need for leadership and management skills for their leaders. Extension and continuing education should work hard to strengthen working relationship with the union leadership and membership. This would facilitate the empowerment of trade unions in Botswana.

Adult education elsewhere is recorded to have an historic task in assisting the civil society organs to pressure the state to meet their felt needs and demands (Brown 1980, Tandon 1994, Forrester 1995, Bhola 1997, Welton 1997). Based on the above evidence, there is a need for establishing work places as sites for lifelong learning which would help to enrich the learning culture at the workplace (Forrester *et al.* 1995). In a recent article, Rinne (1998) observes that adult education is also crucial because it would enable the learners to improve their present jobs and also explore new paths in society. The situation in Botswana is not different from other situations where adult education has worked with unions to empower and enable them to articulate their

demands against state oppression and other activities that deprived them of their privileges. Welton (1997) describes their symbiotic relationship thus: 'I believe that the concept of civil society...holds out great promise for the global adult education movement. Adult education's fate is chained to the fate of civil society. But we have to travel some distance to reach the promised land' (p. 1). In Botswana, to the contrary, adult education involvement in training of trade unions is regrettably low and efforts need to be stepped up for adult education to carry out the task.

However, in spite of the demonstration of potential for growth and development trade unions had serious flaws in their internal operations. These included poor recruitment strategies, some of them are weak and lack vision for the future. Trade unions are confronted by external problems such as lack of support from the state that takes side with employers against employees as demonstrated by hostile legislation. This could be because unions were formed because of government legislation not trade unions action (Isamah 1994). Workers are faced with structural problems of poverty and lack of capacity to advocate for their rights. Adult education provision should strengthen the internal operations of the unions in order for the leadership to take responsibility for the training of members. The members should be educated about aspects of the International Labour Organization conventions ratified by the state in order for the unions to further their empowerment. However, these problems are to some extent structural and it is questionable if not simplistic to assume that adult education programmes controlled by the state would resolve them. Hence, there could be need for union leadership and members to be empowered to facilitate union education themselves.

Conclusion

The study has demonstrated that workers became members of trade unions to be protected from unfair treatment and dismissals. They viewed the unions as intended to represent their rights in view of industrial strife. Trade unions became a way to educate them about their rights and obligations as workers. Adult education is viewed by respondents as essential for empowering them, yet paradoxically, workers and union leaders were not aware of adult education programmes. This study suggests that the best type of education should involve both the conventional programmes and union training. The empowerment of workers can be achieved if adult education programmes are targeted at the needs of the learners as workers. It should enable unionists to move beyond collective bargaining in their training. Adult education should train workers to critically analyse their social, economic and political conditions. Finally, some problems facing the unions were outlined, and it is suggested that in spite of its limits adult education should help in redressing some of these problems in order to facilitate the empowerment of trade unions in Botswana.

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