

**A Multi-Sectorial Approach in Education for Equity, Social Inclusion and Empowerment in Botswana**

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**Abstract**

Social ills, including but by no means limited to HIV/AIDS, poverty, political instability, substance abuse, home based violence, school drop outs, teenage pregnancy, child neglect and abuse have destabilised hitherto existing social networks, leading to an increase in vulnerable groups in many developing nations. These have necessitated national, international and global responses to mitigate these threats. One of the initiatives, which is of interest in this paper, is the Community Based Work with Children and Youth (CBWCY) Programme that was developed by the Regional Psycho-Social Support Initiative (REPSSI) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in 2004. CBWCY is a certificate programme aimed at upgrading the knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviours and abilities of caregivers who look after vulnerable children and youth at the community level. This programme has been rolled out in eleven countries in the SADC region. In Botswana, the programme started in 2012 and it is being offered by the Botswana Open University (BOU). Using desktop research and authors experience, this paper has looked at how multi sectorial approach to education necessitated equity, social inclusion and empowered the marginalized communities in Botswana. The approach includes the development of need based curriculum by REPSSI and UNICEF, quality assurance of the programme by the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the adoption of the program by BOU as a community service initiative. BOU lowered entry requirements to accommodate candidates who did not qualify to study at a university level and provided multiple learner support initiatives to assist students cope with studying. The government of Botswana appreciated the value of psychosocial support by volunteers at community level and found it fitting to professionalise the service. To this end, the government has provided funding for child care takers in hostels for children in remote areas to enrol for the programme.

**Key words:** Multi-Sectorial, Education, Equity, Social Inclusion, Empowerment, Botswana

## **Introduction**

Using desktop research and authors experience, this paper discusses the multi-sectorial approach to education in Botswana. The authors are lecturers at the Botswana Open University and are directly involved in the delivery of the Community Based Work with Children and Youth (CBWCY) Programme. The aim of the paper is to show how the multi-sectorial approach has necessitated education for equity, social inclusion and empowerment in Botswana. To achieve its objective, the paper largely focuses on the collaboration between the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the Regional Psycho-Social Support Initiative (REPSSI), the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Botswana Open University (BOU), Government of Botswana, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) and the private sector in Botswana. This collaboration is on the development and the delivery of the CBWCY programme. CBWCY is a certificate programme aimed at upgrading the skills, knowledge, behaviour, abilities and attitudes of caregivers who provide care for vulnerable youth and children at the community level. The programme has been rolled out in eleven countries in the SADC region including, Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, South Africa, Swaziland, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In Botswana, the programme started in 2012 and it is being offered by the Botswana Open University (BOU). The programme was developed as part of the national and regional responses to social ills brought by HIV/AIDS, poverty, political instability, substance abuse, home based violence, teenage pregnancy, child neglect, destabilised social networks, and an increase in vulnerable groups. It was specifically developed for the countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Multi-Sectorial Approach to Education**

Multi-sectorial approach (MSA) refers to deliberate collaboration among different stakeholder groups and sectors to jointly achieve a policy outcome. The stakeholders may include, but by no means limited to, the government, the private sector and the civil society. Through the engagement of multiple sectors, partners can leverage knowledge, expertise, reach, and resources and benefit from their combined and varied strengths as they work towards the shared goal of producing better policy outcomes (Salunke, & Lal, 2017). In Botswana the multi-sectorial approach was introduced in the National Development Plan 10 (NDP 10), 2009/2010-2015/2016, to address the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), (MOFDP, 2009). The provision of sustainable, equitable, accessible and inclusive education is one of the initiatives for which Botswana has adopted a multi-sectorial collaborative approach.

MSA encourages participatory and inclusiveness approaches. It helps in strengthening holistic program planning and implementation, thereby optimizing usage of resources to improve program effectiveness and efficiency for better results (Salunke, & Lal, 2017). Using the CBWCY programme as an example, this paper therefore explores the multiple arenas in which a multi-sectorial collaborative approach to education has contributed to the realisation of equity, social inclusion and empowerment.

### **Equity, Social Inclusion and Empowerment**

Posited as an antidote to the global phenomena of social exclusion, social inclusion encompasses ideas of equity, empowerment, as well as economic, social and civic participation and the proactive protection of human rights. The notion of social inclusion in contemporary higher education is multifaceted. Earlier theories of social inclusion focused on human rights and justice. Seen from the lens of neoliberal ideologies of the 1980s, increasing social inclusion through education meant investing in human capital in order to promote nationalist agendas of economic growth (Gidley, et al 2010: 6). The focus was more on the stimulation of local economies and increased competitiveness in the global market than on empowerment (Steger 2005:8-9). In addition, the neoliberal notion of social inclusion narrowly focused on the provision of skills that could improve peoples' access to services and products and thus foster their active participation in economic development. The converse of this neoliberal idealic of social inclusion was the perspective of exclusion which to all intents and purposes was about "restriction of access to opportunities and limitations of the capabilities required to capitalise on" available opportunities (Hayes, Gray & Edwards 2008: 9). This perspective is, however, inadequate as it reduces social explanation of inclusion to accountancy or economic factors.

Following right on the footsteps of the neoliberal interpretation of social inclusion was the social justice theory wherein social inclusion professed the promotion of human rights, equality of opportunities, human dignity and fairness. From the vantage point of social justice ideologies, for people to be defined as socially included they should be dignified human beings who possess capacity to participate in societal development (Langworthy 2008; Eisler 2002). The academy was seen to be a key player in this form of participatory social inclusion as it partnered with the community under the rubric of academic service, research and teaching (Gidley, et al 2010).

There is, however, a reverberating weakness about the neoliberal and social justice perspectives of inclusion. Both treated human beings as undifferentiated. The needs of the state were seen as primary to those of the individual. As a result, social inclusion basically meant individuals being subjected to the whims of the state, and with little regard to their diversity. In the words of Singh (2016:123):

Inclusive education occurs when the culture, policies and practices in the education system are expected to fit in with the diversity of the students. Inclusion is a broad social model of adapting organisational or community facilities and processes to persons with disability and other vulnerable or oppressed groups. It seeks to address the learning needs of all children, youth and adults with specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion. It implies all school provisions, schools and community educational setting with an appropriate network of support services.

This idea of diversity as an ingredient of inclusivity resonates across the literature on social inclusion. We learn from Zamojska, (2016: 660) that

“equity is considered as one of the fundamental organizational principles of contemporary democratic societies. It is a political principle, all citizens have equal rights and are equal before the law; it is also a principle of social relations, all individuals, irrespective of their personal characteristics, must be treated equally; finally, it is a moral principle, all people are equal in their human dignity, have the right to be respected, no-one may be treated instrumentally”

But the focus on diversity is hardly new. More than three decades earlier scholars were already positing definitions of education as a socially inclusive process with the express purpose of empowering diverse individuals and communities. For instance, Freire, cited in Cefai et.al. (2015:124), posited in 1972 that

“education provides a unique opportunity to promote the inclusion of marginalised communities, empowering the individual to make their own decisions and take responsibility for their own life. The European Commission (2012) argued that education can help to promote equity, social justice and social inclusion by providing inclusive, caring and culturally responsive learning communities. In such communities, schools provide a nurturing, secure environment for all learners, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, reducing the stress of discrimination and rejection and providing opportunities for positive participation in learning and social activities and for social connectedness at school.

Education is a critical channel for inclusion as it connects individuals and communities with information and opportunities that may otherwise be difficult to access. It is a service that empowers people to live better lives. It plays an important role of increasing accessibility to products and services that may improve people’s lives. Broadly an inclusive education system ensures eligibility for the deprived, promotes inclusive discourses that resonate across policy, governance structures and processes, as well as developing a curriculum approach wherein teaching and learning are aligned to the philosophy of inclusive education (Sayed, et al 2007). For these reasons, a more encompassing perspective of social inclusion as it relates to education is the idea and practice of maximisation of human potential. The human potential theory of social inclusion goes beyond justice and the protection of human rights to profess a model that opens up opportunities for empowerment. Humanity is complex and speaks to the differentiation and diversity of human beings. This approach of human potential centres on the interpretation of social inclusion as that which valorises diversity and difference. As we learn from Abbott et al (2017), social inclusion has multiple dimensions as it capacitates people to be visible in society, promotes equity and equal rights, ensures that individual and collective needs are taken into account by policy and provides access to resources for all individuals and social groups. The sum of all these dimensions is empowerment and this is what the CBWCY programme at BOU seeks to achieve.

The CBCWY programme at BOU does not discriminate students on the basis of their marginality, gender, intellectual development and a host of other socio-economic factors. Understood from the perspective of education as a transformative process, the delivery and organisation of this programme plays a crucial role in the process of social inclusion and nurtures individual potential, thus promoting positive development. The curriculum for this programme draws from diverse discourses that inspire the human potential perspective, such as developmental psychology theories and transformative pedagogies, to promote positive development and empowerment through lifelong learning (Bassett 2005). For this reason, it promotes justice, solidarity and equity

for a diverse group of students. It provides access to education for all social groups and covers the geographical extent of the country, focusing primarily on those people and areas excluded by the conventional educational system in the country.

### **CBWCY Programme Background**

The CBWCY is a programme that was designed to address a gap in skills building for caregivers, most of who are volunteers working with children and youth, particularly in peri-urban and rural settings. The Certificate was conceived and designed in 2004 as a Regional Programme, by the Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative (REPSSI) in collaboration with UNICEF Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa, the University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal (UKZN) and the African Centre for Childhood (ACC) in South Africa, (REPSSI Concept paper for BOCODOL, 2011-unpublished). In Botswana the programme started to be offered by the Botswana Open University (by then Botswana College of Distance and Pen Learning (BOCODOL) in 2012 within a partnership arrangement with REPSSI. The programme is an innovative response to a regional demand for quality training in child and youth work, especially social and emotional (psycho-social) support, child protection and promotion of children's rights (REPSSI programme brochure – UKZN). It helps to ensure that vulnerable (disadvantaged) populations receive the professional care and support they are entitled to.

### **The CBWCY programme, specifically aims to:**

- Provide frontline practitioners in the Orphan and Vulnerable Children (OVC) sector with access to an accredited professional certificate which will enhance relevant skills and knowledge in order to enhance their daily performance in working with communities, families, youth and children.
- Strengthen their understanding and practice of psychosocial care and support, and promote a child rights approach
- Provide access to education and training for frontline workers, who are traditionally marginalized and do not receive professional and educational opportunities, without removing them from their valuable work with children
- Provide frontline child and youth workers with a theoretical framework within which to base their existing knowledge and practice (*Program Regulations – Aims and Objectives: 2014 – Revised version*)

It was against this background that the Certificate programme was designed for people working with children and youth. It is meant to open up educational opportunities for community workers, community care givers, programme officers, teachers, police, social workers and health care providers within an age range from 22 to 65 years and a minimum qualification of a junior certificate in secondary education. The programme focuses on providing a coherent theoretical framework and on enhancing the skills and practice of volunteers and programme officers working in the support of vulnerable children, (REPSSI, 2011). It offers learners an overview of the sector pertaining to working with vulnerable children, youth, families and their communities. The programme focuses on knowledge creation through describing key trends, theories and approaches as well as building practical skills through experiential learning, creating a workforce of reflective Practitioners in psychosocial support for children and youth. To this end, the CBWCY programme in Botswana has helped nurture graduates skills, knowledge and abilities in the provision of care and support for the OVC's. Amongst other things, the graduates were introduced to children's laws, rights and responsibilities. The graduates are also able to enrol for other programmes at Diploma level and others were being employed in the formal sector.

### **Enrolments**

In 2012 when the programme was introduced it was delivered in the three regional centres of the college being, Gaborone, Francistown and Palapye regions. A total number of 76 students were enrolled. For the second cohort, the college enrolled 89 students. This time around the programme was rolled out to the fourth regional centre of Maun in northern Botswana. This was meant to increase accessibility of the programme to the Orphan Vulnerable Children officers in the far remote areas of the country. These are some of the most remote areas in the country with relatively limited resources and difficult to reach. In the third cohort, the programme was rolled out to the fifth (remote) regional centre of the college, Kang Regional Centre, in the Kgalagadi District, western Botswana. This time around 107 students in all the five regional centres of the college were enrolled. The fourth and present cohort of 2018/19 enrolled 85 students mostly students from the Remote Area Dwellers Programme (RADP). These students are the workers (mothers, caretakers and cooks) from the RADP hostels.

### **Multi-Sectorial Approach in Education for Equity, Social Inclusion and Empowerment in Botswana**

The CBWCY programme has attracted a number of stakeholders in its design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation. This is attributed to the programme's impact in rural communities more especially on issues of equity, social inclusion and empowerment. The programme has proved to be of value for both the learners and

the community that learners would in turn serve after completing the programme. As alluded to by SAIDE (2010), the programme provides a rich environment for the acquisition of new skills and knowledge around community based care and support for vulnerable children and youth. For this reason, a number of stakeholders were and/or are attracted to participate in this programme on different dimensions ranging from programme design, delivery, monitoring, evaluation and sponsorships for students to enrol for the programme. The stakeholders include but are not limited to the public sector (government), the private sector, higher education institutions (colleges, universities) non-governmental organisations and individuals. This collaboration has led to the programme gaining momentum and support throughout the SADC region. Stakeholders appreciated the value of psychosocial support (PSS) brought by the programme at community level and the graduates who had started to professionalise their work from being volunteers in a number of non-governmental organizations. This section presents a narrative of a collaborative approach to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the CBWCY programme to showcase how the multi-sectorial approach to education has led to the realisation of education for equity, social inclusion and empowerment in Botswana.

### **Programme Design and Material Development**

The programme was conceived and designed in 2004 as a regional programme, by the Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative (REPSSI) in collaboration with UNICEF Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa, the University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal and the African Centre for Childhood (ACC) in South Africa. REPSSI, UNICEF and the ACC participated in the development of the need based curriculum for the programme whereas the University of KwaZulu-Natal developed learning materials and quality assured the programme. The students' assessment and moderation is also done by the University of KwaZulu Natal.

### **Programme Delivery, Monitoring and Evaluation**

The Open and Distance Learning (ODL) newsletter (April-June 2013) posits that the Southern African Development Countries – Centre for Distance Education (SADC-CDE), has been formally recognised as a SADC institution through principle of subsidiary, to contribute towards improving and strengthening distance education and training systems in the region through collaborative efforts, hence its collaboration with REPSSI and the UNICEF Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa for the running of the CBWCY programme in some SADC countries. To date, the programme has been rolled out in eleven countries in the SADC region including, Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, South Africa, Swaziland, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In Botswana, the programme started in 2012 and it is being offered by the Botswana Open University (BOU). The programme is delivered through a Situated Supported Distance Learning (SSDL) mode. Students learn at a *distance* are *situated* in their work environments, where they are already working with children and or youth. The students do not have to stop working in order to learn and they apply their learning immediately within their work environments. Students are *supported* by given self-explanatory learning materials and through scheduled face-to face tutorials on weekends.

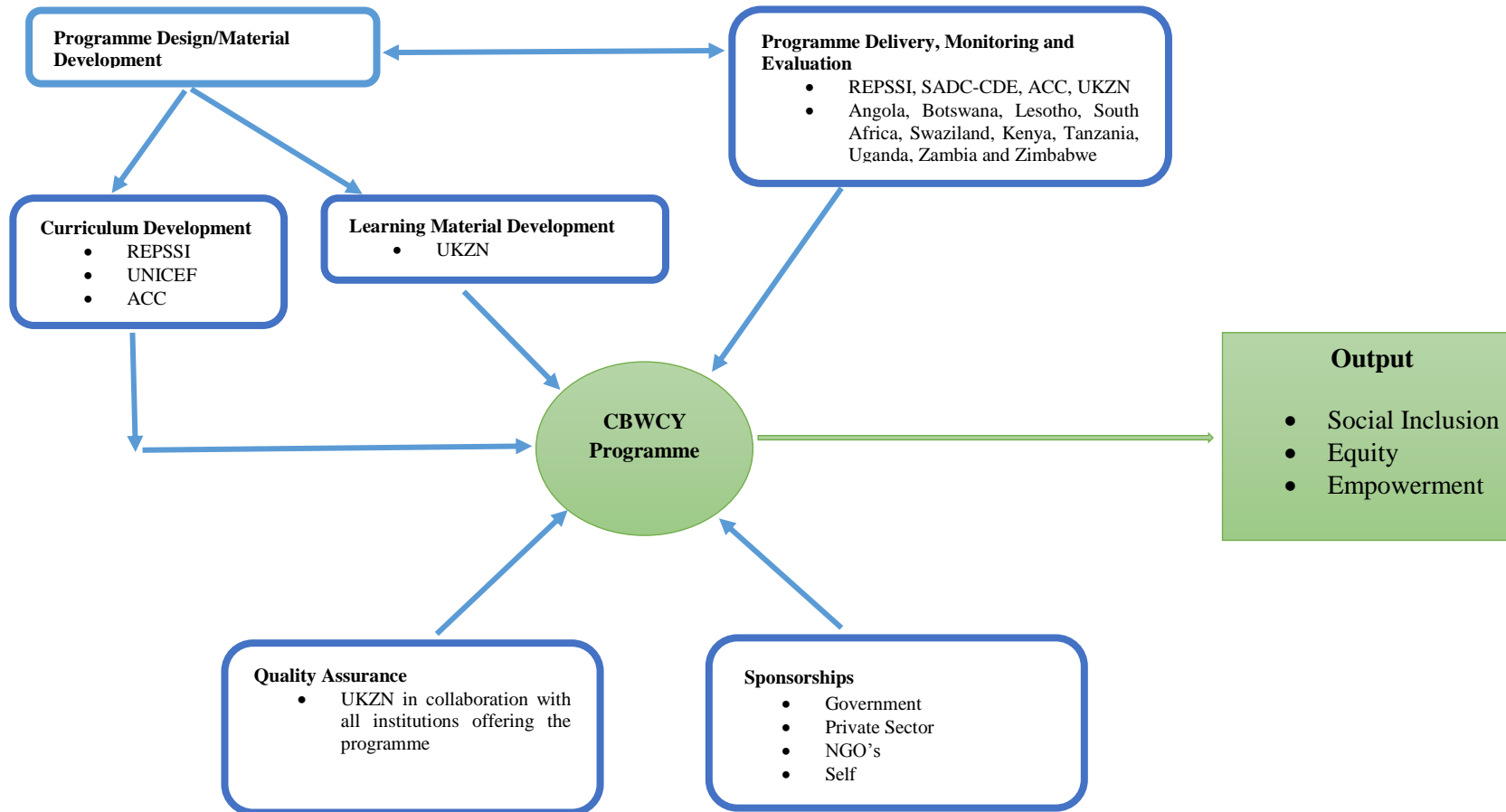
To address issues of access, inclusiveness and equity, Botswana Open University made special dispensation for the program by lowering the university entry requirements specifically for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) caretakers. Secondly, the university also decided to intensify learner support activities for these learners since most of them had a minimum of standard 7 as their highest level of education. Learner support services included increasing face to face tutorial sessions, providing tutorial sessions where it was convenient for students and intensifying support visits to learners in their work places. The programme monitoring, evaluation and revision is done by all consortium universities in consultation with other stakeholders being REPSSI and UNICEF. The University of Kwazulu Natal is also responsible for setting the assessments and moderation of assignments, examinations and projects marking as well as grading.

### **Sponsorships**

The value of the programme to the rural livelihoods and to the learners has attracted a number of stakeholders in Botswana to sponsor students to enrol for the programme. The sponsors include the Government of Botswana, the private sector, non-governmental organisations and individual sponsorships. Stanbic Bank sponsored 20 students in the academic year 2014/2015 and 2015/2016. The Government of Botswana sponsored 55 students in the academic year 2018/2019. The government has also pledged to sponsor another 50 students for the academic year 2019/2020. The Camphill Community Trust sponsored 15 students for the year 2018/2019. Other students were and/or are self-sponsored.

The following diagram shows an illustration of the multi-sectoral approach model and the contributions made by each sector towards achieving equity, social inclusion and empowerment through education:

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Multi-Sectoral Approach to Education**



Source: Authors

## **Conclusion**

This paper has looked at the multi-sectorial approach to education and how the approach has necessitated education for equity, social inclusion and empowerment in Botswana. The Focus of the paper was on the collaboration between the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the Regional Psycho-Social Support Initiative (REPSSI), the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Botswana Open University (BOU), Government of Botswana, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) and the private sector in Botswana. The collaboration is on the development and the delivery of the Community Based Work with Children and Youth (CBWCY) Programme. The paper argues that through the engagement of multiple sectors, partners can leverage knowledge, expertise, reach, and resources and benefit from their combined and varied strengths as they work towards the shared goal of producing better policy outcomes. This approach has necessitated equity, social inclusion and empowerment because through this approach, the marginalised and excluded groups were able to be given the opportunity to learn thereby empowering them. Graduates of the programme were able to enrol for diploma programmes and others were absorbed as employees in the formal sector. It is also through the multi-sectoral approach that the programme has helped nurture graduates skills, knowledge and abilities in the provision of care and support for the orphans and vulnerable children. This paper therefore recommends this approach as one of the measures that can be utilised towards achieving equity, social inclusion and empowerment in education.

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