

Distance and Open Learning as a way to improve the livelihoods of young car guards in Namibia

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INTRODUCTION

At the 1990 World Conference on Education held in Jomtien representatives of 155 different governments, donor agencies, researchers and specialists adopted a declaration on Education for All. In this Declaration the concept of Education for All is associated with learning and life skills of every person – child, youth and adult. Education for All reflects a basic that is also enshrined in the national constitution of the Republic of Namibia. Although education is a basic right access to it is not guaranteed. Despite efforts to cope with educational demands the Namibian Government lags behind in the fulfillment of Education for All. Daily, unemployed young adults roaming the streets of Windhoek (capital city of Namibia) looking for work. These people are dependent on cash for their livelihood. One way to earn money is to work as a car guard (mainly men).

Crime is a serious concern in Namibia. Robbery, mugging and theft occur frequently, especially in shopping areas and locations where foreign visitors tend to congregate. Vehicle theft (343 vehicles in 2005, 405 vehicles during 2006 and 321 vehicles during 2007) and vehicle break-in are of the most common crimes. Due to this type of crime a system is in place where by guards will watch vehicles while the owners are shopping. Theses guards do not receive salaries, but are dependent on the voluntary donations from vehicle owners. They are not employees of security companies; they operate on their own. They do not have any training relating to this service. The amounts of money they take home after a day's work depend on the time of year, location and the donations they receive.

In the light of the aforementioned explanation this article tends to describe these guards' socio-economic situations, level of education, interest in further studies, as well as recommend ways/programmes to improve their livelihoods.

LIVELIHOOD

Academics and development practitioners (Batterbury 2001, Chambers and Conway 1992, Francis 2002 and Radoki 2002) discuss 'livelihood' intensively. They are in consensus that livelihood is about the ways and means of 'making a living'. The different definitions and interpretations about livelihood have one common feature in common and that is that 'livelihood' deals with people, their resources and what they do with these. Livelihoods are also about creating new opportunities. In the attempt to gain a livelihood, people may have to cope with risks and uncertainties, such as erratic rainfall, increasing food prices, inflation and the attitude of people (in the case of car guards).

For the purpose of this study the term 'livelihood' is treated in its traditional restricted sense of making a living. In this study 'livelihood' restricts itself to knowledge, skills and methods used to earn money necessary for survival and well-being.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to gain information from car guards in Windhoek in order to develop a programme to improve their services to vehicle owners. The assumption is that they will receive more money if their services are to the expectations of vehicle owners. The ultimate

goal is to improve the livelihoods of these car guards. If this skills training programme (that includes literacy training) is successful it could be extended to other towns in Namibia.

POPULATION

In Namibia there are different types of car guards, namely:

- Those who are employed by security companies
- Guards who operate on their own in streets as well as at designated parking areas
- Guards who operate under the supervision of a private person (not necessarily somebody in the security sector).

The population of this study is the guards who operate under the supervision of a private person. These guards operate in designated parking areas at the most popular shopping centres in Windhoek., operate under supervision, are easy recognizable by the orange jacket they have to wear and they are easy reachable.

INSTRUMENTATION AND PROCEDURE OF ADMINISTRATION

The instrument consisted of a one page questionnaire. The questions relate to biographical details of the research subjects. The questionnaire was completed by the researcher himself. The reason to complete the questionnaire by the researcher is the assumption that these guards are illiterate, as well as the fact that these guards have no physical addresses to mail the questionnaire to.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study derive from evidence collected through the use of a questionnaire. To enable the University of Namibia (UNAM) to provide a focused service, directed at the circumstances of the subjects of this study, the author researched the profile of these subjects in February 2008. To follow the readers are provided with a brief outline of biographical details of the subjects.

All the subjects of this study were men. In this specific group of car guards there were no women. The reason for this situation could be due to the nature of the work. Since these guards are not armed, women may regard the work unsafe.

Namibia has eleven ethnic groups of which the Ovambo tribe is the largest (85,7 percent of the Namibian population). The subjects of this study belong to the Ovambo-, Rukwangali and Herero groups as indicated in Figure 1.

Figure1: Ethnic group

Ethnic Group	N = 26
Herero	3
Ovambo	22
Rukwangali	1

Most of the respondents (22) were from the Ovambo tribe, three from the Herero tribe and only one from the Rukwangali group. The Ovambo and Rukwangali groups are from the far northern parts of Namibia, while the Herero group is from the eastern part of Namibia.

According to the age distribution of the respondents it is clear that all of them are adults. Figure 2 provides a clear distribution of the different age groups.

Figure 2: Respondents' age

Age	N = 26
20- 25 years	7
26- 31 years	13
32- 37 years	3
Older tha 37 years	3

Most (13) of the respondents are in the category 26 – 31 years. The respondents (3) who are older than 37 years are 40, 44 and 60 years old. According to the data all respondents are adults.

Twenty students are married and only 6 are single. This does not mean that being single responsibilities are less than being married, seeing that the single respondents have children and women (in some cases more than one woman) to take care of.

All the respondents have dependants to be taken care of. The number of dependants varies from one to more than five. Most of the respondents (25) take care of one to five persons. Only one take care of more than five persons. The dependents include own children, wives, children of relatives, as well as relatives (brother/sister).

Important for this study is to have an idea of the type of housing the respondents are living in. From the author's own experience it can be mentioned that these respondents live in very meager circumstances. Although 17 respondents living in brick houses it is no guarantee that the housing is acceptable for a comfortable living. Eight respondents live in corrugated iron houses where the circumstances are even worse than is the case with the brick houses. One respondent is living in a caravan where it is very insecure. The type of housing in this study is regarded as improvised housing (National Population and Housing Census 2003) whereby houses (brick and/or corrugated iron) are merely more than shacks. The 2001 Population and Housing Census shows that 24 percent of Namibia's population live in improvised housing.

Literature on livelihoods is clear that literacy is connected to livelihood. To improve livelihood it is vital that people should be able to read and write (Maclure 1997, Easton 1998, Leach 2000, Daniel 2004). English is the official language in Namibia and Afrikaans is the lingua franca. For the purpose of this study it was important to determine the level of command in these two languages. These are the main languages car owners communicate with the car guards. The following table indicates the state of affairs regarding English and Afrikaans.

Figure 3 (a)

AFRIKAANS		N= 26			
	Good	Poor	Very poor	Not at all	
Read	3	2	7	14	
Talk	5	5	6	10	
Write	3		6	17	
Understand	5	3	7	11	

Figure 3 (b)

ENGLISH

	Good	Poor	Very poor	Not at all
Read	4	4	3	15
Talk	4	6	5	11
Write	2	4	5	15
Understand	5	5	4	12

Clearly language is a problem if training for these guards is considered. In both languages all areas (reading to understanding) are problematic and should need much attention in a training programme.

In relation to the languages the level of education was addressed. The results regarding the level of education may shed light on the poor command on English and Afrikaans.

Figure 4: Education Level

Grade	N = 16
0	16
3	1
4	1
8	1
9	1
10	4
11	2

Most of the respondents (16) did not attend school. Respondents who passed Grades 3 and 6 did so many years ago.

With respect to the above information the subjects were asked to indicate whether they would like to study further. Twenty five respondents indicated that they wish to study further. Only one respondent (the one who was already sixty years old) said that he does not want to study further.

The respondents, who wish to study further, indicated the following areas of interest:

Figure 5: Areas of interest for further studies

Area of interest	N = 26
Afrikaans Language	6
English language	5
Afrikaans and English languages	7
Grade 10	1
Other	7

Most of the respondents (6 + 5 + 7) wish to study further in languages, seeing that it will improve their communication with other people, especially vehicle owners. Obviously improved language skills will benefit them when they want to study further.

The last question to the subjects addressed the issue of money. All the respondents indicated that the money they earn as car guards is not enough to take care of themselves and their dependents.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

On the basis of the evidence obtained for this study, it would appear that there is justification to train these car guards. Clearly they are in need of further study/training to enhance their chances to be employed in better jobs where they can earn more money to improve their livelihoods.

It is not a surprise that most (22) of the respondents are from the Ovambo ethnic group, seeing that the Ovambo speaking group is the largest in Namibia. Due to limited job opportunities (especially in northern Namibia where the biggest part of Namibia's population live), the tendency is to go to Windhoek (capital city) to look for work. Some of these job seekers take the opportunity to care of vehicles while the owners have businesses to attend to. From the collected data it is clear that they live in poor circumstances and that the money they receive is not enough to live a reasonable live.

Most vehicle owners communicate with the respondents in Afrikaans and/or English. Clearly these guards experience communication problems when talking to vehicle owners (this could be a reason why people do not ask them to watch their vehicles, and that results in less money at the end of the day). Since language is a problem the respondents sometime whistle at people to attract attention. This kind of behavior annoys people and turn them negative towards these car guards and again results in less money at the end of the day.

It needs to be mentioned that Windhoek is in the Khomas region of Namibia. What education is concerned it is clear that most of the respondents (61 percent) did not attend school and this situation is not favorable in comparison with the Khomas region's 24 percent and the national figure if 15 percent (National Population and Housing Census 2005). This state of affairs could be one reason why the respondents are jobless and have to find ways (act as car guards) to earn money. These low educational levels (together with the unemployment rate of 30 percent) could be reasons why 25 (96 percent) of the respondents wish to study further.

According to the 2001 Population and Housing Census (2005) the main languages in Namibian households are as follows:

- Oshiwambo 37%
- Afrikaans 24%
- English 6%
- Othiherero 9%

(These languages are the concerned ones of this study).

Interestingly most of the respondents (18) wish to study further in languages (Afrikaans and English). During the interviews the respondents were clear that a sound command these languages will open doors to further studies. This view of the respondents correlates with the views of Daniel (2004) and Easton (1998) that the meaningful acquisition, development and use of the written language and training of skills to improve livelihoods should be entwined. The remaining group wishes to study further in other courses (traffic officers, building industry, truck drivers and Grade Ten).

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the study conducted it is possible to make the following recommendations:

- In order to improve the livelihoods of these car guards they need skills in livelihood and literacy training.
- The training programme should include income-generating skills, skills to cope with livelihood and development requirements, training in savings, credit and access to credit, as well as training in ethics to communicate respectably with vehicle owners.
- Training should be by means of the distance education mode (in consultation with guards)
- Training should be extended to other Namibian towns too.

CONCLUSION

There is sufficient evidence to prove that these car guards need training to improve their livelihoods, as well as to improve their communication with their clients (vehicle owners). Their current situation is essentially the culmination of poor education and communication with their clients. It can be concluded that that poor education is hindering and will continue to hinder these car guards to improve their livelihoods. The key to a better livelihood is in a distance education programme that will cater for the needs of these guards.

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