

# **The tragedy of misconception of adult education in Zambia**

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## **Abstract**

The tragedy of Adult Education is that the majority of Zambians confine it to the narrow premise of functional literacy and attendance of academic evening classes at various centre of continuing education. Worse still, the government, knowingly and unknowingly, allocates a tiny fraction of its budget to continuing education. The poor funding of open learning has made adult education to wallow in the muddy waters of stagnation and deprivation. Many non-government organizations (NGOs) are also oblivious of the fact that they are conveyors and purveyors of adult education. Adult education is embrative of Environmental Education, Peace Education, Civic Education, Development Studies, Social Work, Project Planning, Human Resource Development and Training.

Adult Education in Zambia suffers from a crisis of perception. It is the most neglected area as it is not funded adequately by the state on account of its breadth and depth. It has been locked up in the prison of negligence and utter destitution. (Mwansa, 1994). The term `adult' clearly raises a storm of misconception and arouses academic debate in the circles of education. (Townsend-Coles, 1998: 5). Not withstanding the misinterpretations of the term `adult education' the discipline or field of adult education is development oriented and embrative of the interests of diverse needs of people across the globe. Zambia is not an exception.

Adult Education denotes the entire body of organized education processes, whatever the content level, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools and colleges and universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adults (16 years and above) by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge to improve their technical as well as professional qualifications and bring about changes in their attitude or behaviour in the two-fold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social economic and cultural development. (UNESCO), 1975).

The tragedy of Adult Education in Zambia is that the majority of Zambians do not know what it is and confine it to a narrow premise of functional literacy and attendance of evening classes at centres of continuing education and skills training. Worse still, the government allocates to adult learners very little resources. Poor funding of open and distance education has made adult education to wallow in the muddy waters of stagnation, degradation and deprivation. Many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are oblivious of the fact that they are conveyors and purveyors of adult education. Misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the concept has resulted in lack of direction and foresight among multitudes of adults in the tangle web of an economic crisis.

Millions of adults in Zambia suffer from a dependency syndrome and do not know that education is the key to development. They load all their hopes on government shoulders as a way out of starvation, deprivation, abuse, and oppression. The dependency syndrome has been inclined to make adults prefer illiteracy and ignorance to knowledge and intelligence. (Chakanika, 1999).

Over the years Zambia has faced the problem of voter apathy as very few education providers have seriously addressed this cancerous growth worsened by mass illiteracy. The majority of Zambians do not even understand the value of their republican constitution neither can they define a constitution. They regard the constitution as an absolute privilege of government and they have no right over it. Civic illiteracy has bred bribery of voters by some parliamentary and local government candidates. Corruption bordering on electoral malpractices is very rampant and will remain so until the

government and the Electoral Commission of Zambia recognizes Adult Education as an agent of transformation.

The vehicle of adult education can be used to sensitise people that through education, formal and informal, they can transform the Zambian society from a poverty-driven dependency syndrome to that prosperity and self-reliance. Excessive reliance on government on anything and everything stifles creativity and is a pass-key to underdevelopment. Growing economies such as those in Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and Brazil have set adult education priorities.

The UNESCO report on the Second World Conference on Adult Education held in Montreal, Canada, in 1960 declares that Adult Education has become of such great significance that humanity's survival, peace and happiness depend on it.

In 1976, UNESCO referred to Adult Education as a fundamental aspect of the right to education. The 1990 Jomtien Conference on Education (EFA) gave renewed appreciation, recognition and respectability to out-of-school education. (Townsend-Coles, 1996: 6).

Poor funding of education for adults has adversely affected the performance of the national economy. Many citizens tend to think that Zambia's economic recovery can only be realized by the government and they have excluded themselves from the process of economic emancipation. Basic education is good but cannot be a very effective tool for economic development. Basic education is mainly banking education where the teacher is 'omniscient' and deposits 'indisputable' knowledge into his/her students. Adult Education is transformative and encourages self-directed learning.

Open and distance education are but a component of adult education as an interdisciplinary field of study. They have a bigger advantage of reaching more people than conventional classroom learning commonplace in Zambia. Open and distance education can reach unreachable and change unchangeable for their own good. Levels of illiteracy in Zambia are quite high and open and distance education can help reduce on such. This is reflected in massive spoils of ballot papers when national elections are held to elect a president, parliamentarians and local government leaders (councillors).

In rural Zambia, there has been rampant spoil of ballot papers due to the problems of ignorance of symbols and illiteracy combined. (Chakanika, 1999).

Illiteracy has made citizens fearful of leaders and prone to manipulation and exploitation. Hero-worship of particulars and reverencing them as people larger than life itself. The very ignoramus have contributed to making leaders tin-pot dictators and have brought underdevelopment to Zambia.

The state should set priorities for adult education and ensure that it gets highly funded. Adult education should not be the preserve of few volunteers who lack support from the government. Government has a fundamental obligation to promote, uphold and preserve adult education.

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