

State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2009
EXCLUSIVE ONLINE MATERIAL

Adult literacy, vocational and tertiary education: why it matters to minorities and states by Fay Warrilow



'Education for all' does not just refer to formal primary and secondary schooling – among other things it may also mean tertiary, vocational and technical education, and adult literacy. The main campaigning efforts in the realm of minority education are rightly directed towards universal primary education, but tertiary education is also needed if minority communities are to have their own representatives on the national and international stage and are to have equal economic chances. Vocational education is needed for members of minority communities to take best advantage of job opportunities and not to be consigned to unskilled labour. Adult literacy is necessary for parents to enjoy independence and appreciate the value that reading and writing can bring to them and their children. The many forms of adult and post-basic education and training have value in civil in terms of civil and political participation, economic development, and conflict prevention. They are also important in redressing gender imbalances.

Minority communities have the right to provision of education at the same level as other members of society. Below are some examples of successes and of challenges, and stories and opinions directly from these communities. The paper is intended to be a starting point – a sample of the reasons why adult and post-basic education and training should not be overlooked. The simple principle underlying it is that that education providers – donors, charities and implementing governments – should not be guilty of what Katerina Tomasevski UN Expert on Education called the, 'proverbial double standard, whereby we apply to the poor much lower standards than we would accept for ourselves'. Adult and post-basic education and training are not

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just instrumentally important for minorities: they are their right, as are the opportunities for participation and self-esteem that they can bring. And they must be treated as such in policymaking.

Conflict prevention

Tertiary education has played a major role in conflict prevention/resolution, as have (perhaps less predictably) adult literacy programmes. Two examples are examined here: the first in Nicaragua, the second in Macedonia.

The Sandinista rebellion of the 1980s led to the formation of the state of Nicaragua. The Sandinistas promised social integration on coming to power as a way of benefiting all Nicaraguans, and duly embarked on regional development programmes. These included Spanish-language adult literacy programmes for indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples on the previously neglected North Atlantic Coast, which the Sandinistas also attempted to open up for trade and resource exploitation.

The Sandinistas, however, did not take into account the particular culture and identity of the coastal population, who in response mobilised a resistance movement. Realising the political strength of this movement, central government entered into dialogue with the indigenous MISURASATA lobby group. The result was changes in policy for the region to include literacy instruction in indigenous languages alongside Spanish. At the end of the conflict a new constitution was instituted which 'recognised the diversity of cultures and identities in the country', and an autonomy statute was introduced in the coastal region which for the first time provided for universities there. Experts have noted that these universities promote minority and indigenous cultures, including languages, among other courses.

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Reconciliatory steps and engagement in broad public participation can therefore be to the benefit of the state as well as the minority groups it targets: in the Nicaragua case the government's eventual respect for indigenous culture and language contributed to what will hopefully be lasting peace.

When a series of conflicts began in Macedonia in 2001, tertiary education was firstly a point of contention yet subsequently a tool to prevent the outbreak of potentially regional war. More money for the Albanian university in Macedonia's second city, Tetovo, was one of the terms pressed for by Nato, the UN and the EU to resolve conflict between members of the country's minority ethnic Albanian population (fighting, at least ostensibly, to protect other ethnic Albanians in Serbia and/or for a greater Kosovo) and Serb/Macedonian forces along the country's border with Serbia.

The failure of the Macedonian government to provide Albanian-language teaching in state schools had led seven years' previously to the establishment of a private Albanian university in Tetovo. Students claimed that the government undercounted ethnic Albanians and failed to provide equal access to education and jobs. Unveiled in November 2001, the South East European University of Tetovo was designed in concept by then OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Max van der Stoel, bolstered by a 33-million-euro pledge by EU countries and set to teach in both Albanian and Macedonian. It was seen by ethnic Albanians as a significant conciliatory step on the part of the Macedonian government.

The South East European University has subsequently seen a degree of controversy, including an ongoing dispute over the premises of the University, and the raising of concerns that young ethnic Albanians are not learning Macedonian to a high enough standard to participate in mainstream society. But its initial role in preventing the escalation of what might have become a new Balkans war remains indisputable.

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In these two cases, the level of educational provision (tertiary and adult literacy) and its linguistic delivery, combined first to be a source of conflict, then a resource to resolve it. Linguistically appropriate tertiary education can also be of economic significance, as the next case demonstrates.

Economic development

South Tyrol is a mountainous region in north western Italy in which three languages are spoken – Italian, German and Ladin (a form of modern Latin). Formerly Austrian, South Tyrol only became part of Italy at the end of World War I. Shortly afterwards, Italy's Fascist government began a programme of Italianisation which saw place names and even family names translated. Under Mussolini, the process became even more energetic, with Italian speakers from other parts of Italy sent to settle in the region and German speakers encouraged to emigrate to Austria during World War II under the South Tyrolean Option Agreement (though most returned at the end of the war).

Language in South Tyrol, then, is a matter of great historical significance. During the rise of fascism when teaching in German was illegal, South Tyroleans endeavoured to keep their Austrian heritage alive by means of 'catacomb schools' – underground German language schools using schoolbooks and other materials smuggled over the border with Austria. The main organiser of these schools, chairman of the Tyrolean People's Party Canon Michael Gamper, wrote in his diary of the rationale behind them:

'What should be done now? In addition to the loss of German schools, are we to lose our national customs and traditions as well? Those who hold power today would like that. A high administration official justified this measure with the explanation that the government must make the effort to raise the young generation of Italians in

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our land as quickly as possible. Could they possibly succeed? Let's hope that our people are capable of preventing it!

Today, South Tyrol is a semi-autonomous region in Italy. According to the census of 2001, 69.38% of South Tyroleans were German-speakers, 26.30% were Italian speaking, and 4.32% spoke Ladin as a first language. Language has remained a sensitive issue. In 1997 a law was introduced in Italy to empower regional governments to design administrative functions and social programmes protecting the interests of local communities. The Bassanini Law opened the way for the establishment in Bozen/Bolzano of a tri-lingual university. The Bozen/Bolzano Trilingual University, now some ten years old, has weathered criticism from parts of the community and the Italian political scene to become a model for cross-cultural understanding and integration in the region. Professor Oswin Maurer, Vice-Rector of the university explained the advantages of a tri-lingual education at a 2006 international discussion in Kosovo on the importance of appropriate tertiary education for minorities:

'After the Bassanini Law came into force, the responsible people could have said we are now starting to think about this and that, but they put the focus of attention on: What do we want from the future? Education is undividable and it is creating value for our province, despite the language discussion of will this be Italian or will it be German [...previously] the 18-25 year old young, bright and motivated people had to go to other provinces or even other countries for studying and many of them were not coming back to Bolzano after graduating. This led to a lack of skills, expertise and competencies in a wide range of professional fields resulting in problems when top positions in companies or public administrations had to be filled.'

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A ubiquitous problem in minority communities is the risk that children educated to a high level away from their community – geographically and/or linguistically – will not be willing to return. According to the vice-rector, the possibility of learning in German and Italian has not only been useful for social cohesion, but has addressed a brain drain from the region of promising young professionals. A direct study on the subject would be needed to verify the full effect of the establishment of the university, but the proportion of South Tyroleans with a university education is at least rising – though it remained relatively low in 2001 at 5%, it had increased from 3.2% in 1991, and the number of women educated to degree level had almost doubled (2.2% to 4.2%). A 2005 study of the economic impact of education generally in South Tyrol and the Free University of Bolzano (FUB) specifically found that the contribution of the university to the education sector in terms of value added had risen between 2001 and 2005 from 3.4% to 7.6%, with an increase in absolute terms of approximately 18 million euros. The study also examined the expansion of the FUB between 2001 and 2005 and concluded that its impact on the economy of the province amounted to more than 60 million euros and 2,300 more employed people. 'The future development/expansion of the University will certainly boost in the next years to come not only economic growth but also qualifications in the area and the provincial economy', it stated.

Yet while higher academic education is important, it does not always automatically lead to high-level professional jobs. Highly educated ethnic minority members in Britain have a greater mismatch between their level of education and their job, the journal the Economics of Education Review (EER) said in 2008. And in her article, *The Over-education of UK Immigrants and Minority Ethnic Groups: Evidence from the Labour Force Survey* scholar Joanne Lindley recommended that, 'minority ethnic groups and immigrants (including whites) could benefit more than native born

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workers if their university or college UK education was accompanied with occupational specific training for jobs commensurate with their education level.'

The provision of vocational education is also not sufficient in itself to guarantee better jobs and better wages. An Institute of Development Studies (IDS) supported 2004 study of vocational education for minorities in Israel noted that, 'few Israeli Arabs have been able to benefit from vocational education's potential benefits because of the small size of the network of Arab vocational secondary schools (about half that of the Jewish sector). Moreover, student performance in Arab secondary schools is not high.' The study recommends that 'vocational education for Israeli Arabs should be extended, in parallel with better resourcing for Arab academic secondary schools'.

In short, education per se is not enough – quality of education and the context within which education is delivered, as demonstrated by other papers in *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2009*) is also vital

Civil and political participation

The best defenders of minority rights on the national and international stage are often spokespeople from the minority in question. The importance of high-level formal education and professional expertise in increasing political and civil participation for minorities is commented on by many grassroots activists, and the need is particularly clear in the case of the Batwa communities of the Great Lakes Region of Africa, one of the poorest and most marginalized minorities on the continent. Formerly hunter-gatherers, they were largely evicted from their forest homes during and after the colonial era. In many areas, even secondary-level education is a rarity and literacy levels among Batwa adults are extremely low. Innocent Mawikizi, a Batwa activist,

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stresses the importance of higher education to civil and political participation in their societies:

'We need an education that is complete (infant, primary, secondary/college, technical and technological and university) and efficient, which gives us the capacity needed to confront the difficulties of life – an education which develops in the Batwa a system of thought which doesn't make them feel inferior, and gives them initiative and creativity. There is no socio-economic integration or self determination without sufficient, or even superior, intellectual, technical and technological capacity.'

'What must be understood is that despite the existence of movements to defend the rights of minorities, that will not stop their disappearance if there are not adequate and durable strategies to guarantee their right to exist. And the only effective strategy is to put in place education institutions which permit them to advance and realise their value. All the strategies which are put in place for the defence of the rights of minorities prepare us to become good citizens who submit in a passive way to all the directives which they can impose on us. Even the Batwa who manage to access education today do not discover their value because they learn in an inferior education system.'

'In other words, we the Batwa and other minorities should not give up our power to others, rather we should actively participate in the organisation and transformation of society. That is what will free up possibilities for our education. Without that we are condemned to disappear, because it is not just matter of how we are maltreated or killed, but that we have to submit to a system which teaches us not to live full lives – to assimilate.'

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Adult literacy is also identified as important for civil and political participation. It is difficult to imagine how different the world is when one cannot read. People from poor communities say that they would like to be literate so that they can, at the simplest level, read a signpost and not be beholden to someone else for directions. They would like to read and write letters, understand signs on village noticeboards, be independent. Literacy affords confidence, a sense of participation in public life, and it helps parents to have a sense of identification with their own children's education, because 'more literate parents (particularly mothers) usually keep their children in school longer, which is of crucial importance in countries where primary school completion rates are very low' [review comment]. Lifelong learning, the opportunity to still acquire skills when one is no longer a child or a youth, is also something that communities ask for.

Discrimination

In Mauritania, members of the Hratin community remain in bonded labour, and even when freed experience a sense of marginalisation within wider society (see Africa chapter). Activists cite adult learning as one of the ways in which feelings of marginalisation can be combated within the Hratin:

Adult literacy is extremely important for the Hratin population since it is the only recourse they have to combat the ignorance which goes to the heart of this oppressed group and prevents an end to the alienation they suffer vis-à-vis the majority population. To read and write is an important step towards the enfranchisement of adults who are still chained up in their heads because of the slave mentality which is taught to them.

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Gender issues

Where education is a service that the very poor are directly or indirectly forced to pay for, some children will always lose out. Women and girls are often the marginalized within the marginalized; tertiary education is seen by activists to be particularly important for them.

There are many obstacles for women minority communities to achieving high level education, not all to do with money. Somali pastoralists of Kenya's North Eastern region have much to contend with. Drought, periodic famine, and marginalizing laws imposed by the Kenyan government including the need for an extra ID card, put the pastoralists at great remove to the developed, modern city of Nairobi. As a Somali pastoralist woman, Hubbie Hussein Al-Haji experienced many obstacles to achieving tertiary (and indeed primary and secondary) education.

As a young girl, Hubbie decided to try to go to school because she was so fascinated at seeing other children in their uniforms:

'Somali culture can be very discriminatory against women – pastoralist communities don't appreciate the part of the women, and when they are taking a child to school it's always the boys. I stayed hiding in the classroom and the teacher would ask "Who is this?" Finally the teacher decided to leave me alone because he could see I was working hard.'

But despite her teacher's discretion, family pressures made it difficult to remain in school.

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'When I went to class my brother chased me away, they think that girls going to school encourages prostitution. I was very interested in school and very bright, all the teachers liked me. But when I was eleven years old my older brother beat me. He cut my hair, he was so determined to discourage me. The headmaster looked for my mother and told her that I had been beaten. She felt so bad that she bought me a uniform and then I went back to school.'

Hubbie finished primary school, and went on to attend the Alliance Girls High School, the best secondary school in the region, to the reluctant pride of her family. 'The father who had abandoned me was now telling everyone about me. I went to school, and never looked back. Then I went to college, decided to professionally educate myself and get a higher degree. I wanted to go and do something different, veterinary science and animal health.'

Finally Hubbie won a government scholarship to go to Nova Scotia Technical College in Canada to study. But family responsibilities made it impossible to finish the course. She had dissolved an abusive marriage (something very difficult to do in Somali society), but her two daughters from the marriage remained with their father's family when she travelled to Canada. After only a short time in Canada, Hubbie heard that her daughters were being mistreated, so quit the course and returned to Kenya.

But the chance to go to school, and particularly to travel abroad to study, was extremely important to Hubbie, who now co-runs Womankind, a grassroots NGO seeking to educate and empower other women and girls. Womankind Kenya is an indigenous NGO based in Garissa municipality, North Eastern province. The

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organisation was founded in 1989 by Somali pastoralist women, with the self professed aim of 'improving the living standards and the level of decision making of their fellow pastoral women and the girl child in the North Eastern province'.

Meanwhile, Kenya's Garba Tulla Development Organisation (GTDO) Girl Child Education Project works to provide secondary school scholarships for girl children. But, reports Borana pastoralist Molu Koropu Tepo of the GTDO,

Girls who finish secondary level are not absorbed into the next level of education. There is no doubt that secondary education has had impact on the lives of these girls, however, the impact would have a multiplier effect if they go to colleges and attain some professional qualifications. They will be quite useful to the community as local professionals. This project will be used to mentor the girls so that they are not pulled into marriage before professional training. Such projects will be a big motivation for women to do better in their academic performances and their view of the world and their future.

The project should explore the possibility of providing scholarships to pastoralist young women, lobby the CDF bursary to give poor girls who have gone through the project some level of affirmative action and the 10% bursary support for post secondary should be lobbied so that the girls benefit.

Conclusion

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The Millennium Development Goals do not refer to adult literacy and lifelong learning. But UNESCO's Education For All (EFA) programme names them among its goals. In its 2009 report, it states that 'Governments are not giving priority to youth and adult learning needs in their education policies. Meeting the lifelong needs of youth and adults needs stronger political commitment and more public funding. It will also require more clearly defined concepts and better data for effective monitoring'.

776 million adults, it is estimated, cannot read and write at a basic level, and two thirds of these are women. In 2015, the year that primary education should be universal according to the MDGs, 'there will be over 700 million adults lacking literacy skills' if current trends continue. The EFA report figures for poor communities in general are striking: 'Between 1985–1994 and 2000–2006, the global adult literacy rate increased from 76% to 84%. However, forty-five countries have adult literacy rates below the developing country average of 79%, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa, and South and West Asia. Nearly all of them are off track to meet the adult literacy target by 2015. Nineteen of these countries have literacy rates of less than 55%. Major disparities in literacy levels within countries are often linked with poverty and other forms of disadvantage. In seven sub-Saharan African countries with low overall adult literacy rates, the literacy gap between the poorest and wealthiest households is more than forty percentage points.'

In poor societies, where even the majority has low access to services and resources, minority groups are very often the poorest of the poor. Universal primary education, the second millennium development goal, has itself been neglected by donors and implementing partners to the extent that it will be difficult or impossible to achieve in reality by 2015. Though the first goal of education programmes is to ensure primary

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schooling for all children, in an era of global economic downturn, it is important that funding limitations are not used as an excuse to discount other education programmes. For minority communities to enjoy their full rights, adult and post-basic education and training also have their place in education systems, and they are something that community members themselves ask for.

Research and consultation is important, since there are pitfalls in adult and post-basic education and training just as there are in other forms of education. Theories of social reproduction outline how education systems can be a perfect hothouse for cultivating a sense of inferiority in the poor and marginalized – from generation to generation the oppressed are taught, quite literally, to believe this is their lot. And it may exist in subtler guises than overt discrimination. A development programme may encourage minority community members to train only in blue-collar professions: something that they may even ask for since skills as a mechanic or farmer have a more immediate return than years spent studying for a degree in law or medicine. A young person from a poor community who does choose to study for that law degree may be forced or enticed by family obligations to abandon studies to earn ready cash as an office worker in a business or an NGO. A minority university graduate may find the only way to succeed in her career is to distance herself from the community she was born in. Parents, lacking basic reading skills and pressed by the demands of poverty, may be sceptical of the value of schooling and keep their children at home to work. There is no one answer to how tertiary, vocational and adult learning programmes should be formulated: or if there is, it is that each context is different and policymakers must research carefully, paying attention to the voices of the communities in question.

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The responsibility to provide tertiary, vocational and adult education programmes is multiple: donors must recognise their importance and fund them; NGOs and governments must make suitable efforts to successfully implement them. Community consultation in education provision is important at all levels. It makes education aid more efficient, more directed, and more sustainable. This is a key point when questions of funding come in to play, as they do when the possibilities for adult and post-basic education provision are examined. From a governance point of view funding could be freed partly by the better governance procedures which also need to be applied to the administering of primary and secondary education services – more efficiency and reduced corruption, less decentralization, and UNESCO has highlighted this. From the donor point of view it requires careful examination of the humanitarian and developmental importance of extra-primary forms of education and training. They should be taken into consideration at policy level, for example in the monitoring of the MDGs, the poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) consultation process.

Free UPE should be a manageable goal for developing countries – this is why it has been included in the MDGs. But free post-basic and adult education and training is not provided even by many developed countries, including the UK. It would therefore not be fair to demand its immediate provision by developing nation governments without support from the international community. Bursaries and support should be made available for bright minority children, and gender sensitization should play a part in ensuring that bright girls are as able to access further education as boys. INGOs and funding bodies should recognise the holistic nature of education provision, why adult literacy also contributes to sustained primary enrollment, why tertiary education can empower minority communities by providing spokespeople.

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There will never be enough money for endeavours viewed as worthy but non-essential; but if minority communities are themselves consulted, the message is that adult literacy and post-basic forms of education and training are of great importance. Those who shape the educational policies of governments, intra- and internationally, must not find themselves guilty of that 'double standard' which considers the possibility of a university education, of skills training, of new reading and writing skills for those well beyond school age, as the preserve of the lucky few. Samples of the practical reasons for this have been given in this chapter, but underpinning these is the simplest principle of all in human rights: that of equity. Because if it is the right of anyone to aspire to a skilled job, to a university degree, to a place among society's decision-makers - or simply to learning to read and write in middle age - it is the right of everyone.