

Endogenous development and bio-cultural diversity in Africa

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Introduction

Africa as a continent is endowed with unique bio-cultural diversity and we are happy to share our experiences of endogenous development that aim at enhancing this diversity. Our lessons learnt in the COMPAS initiative specifically relate to acquisition of knowledge, skills and value systems that can enhance self-reliance and self-determination. Collaboration of universities and local communities has enriched the education, training, research and policy-making processes. Community engagement in formulating policy guidelines in higher education has resulted in increased relevance of programmes and enhanced appropriate skills to serve communities. Endogenous development has given all partners reality-based education.

We see the African continent as unique because of its history. During the process of reconfiguration for the 21st century, we have grown as Africans and our experiences have made us ready to serve our multicultural and diverse communities. Africa is the second-largest of the five continents. Although it has been labelled as a developing region, it is endowed with a lot of minerals, such as gold, and has a rich natural heritage, impressive landscapes and wildlife. It is endowed with unique languages such as French, Portuguese, English and a multitude of African languages and dialects.

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) is a regional organization comprised of 14 Southern African countries. The member states are Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. The SADC protocol has endorsed the partnership between the 14 countries in Sub-Sahara based on the policy parameters (SADC, 2006). The new initiative called New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), endorses the utilization of the expertise within Africa (NEPAD, 2001). Endogenous development will promote the interactive process as we embark on the road to positive empowerment of our people, which reflects the uniqueness of this continent.

Endogenous development

According to Rist (2004), endogenous development is a social learning process, which is constructed by all sectors involved. His paper shows that energies generated through collective learning can trigger important technical, social and political changes that take into account the multiple dimensions of local reality. This approach supports participation of all actors who become students as well as teachers. There are inter-

relationships between the development of cognitive, social and emotional competencies, as well as the values and ethics being used. The policy-making process in a country must adopt this model as it promotes the principles of participatory decision-making and that 'the people shall govern'.

The sharing of information in this regard should take into cognizance the diverse value systems that are unique in each particular area and should identify the strong and weak points. For instance, Africans are known to be very patient people, hence their abuse by some colonial masters in history. They have also proven to show a lot of empathy and sometimes certain foreigners easily exploit them. Their social network makes them unique.

The SADC region can boast of the value system called *Ubuntu*, the essence of caring. Care for neighbors, concern about people's needs and the commitment to serve the group rather than being individualistic, are of paramount importance to African people. It is for this reason that in this region no stranger can go to bed with an empty belly, as every family makes provision for unexpected visitors. This is not seen as waste but as a way of reaching out to the greater community.

The richness of Africans is shared knowledge transmitted from generation to generation that has emerged into good practice. In addition to explicit knowledge there is also tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge allows meaning to be given to natural or social phenomena. For an example, the rituals of the African people are linked both to the Christian doctrine and the ancestral African belief system.

Higher education institutions in the African region have acquired new insight into communal living and related practices, through their research and interaction with the different communities. Innovative programmes have been designed and introduced. This has resulted in knowledge transfer between different generations and groups. One of the prime examples of this is that agrarian rural communities have unique skills to make the environment fertile for a variety of crops and scientists and students must learn how to utilize these strategies for promoting sustainable development that serves the needs of both subsistence and commercial communities. The scientists should not impose their external ideas on these communities as the cultural methods and practices of one community could differ from the knowledge of the scientists. Rather, there is a need for sharing of the experiences and expertise.

This methodology simulates active participation of the community and the experts, and it also promotes intercultural dialogue throughout the process. All partners are actively involved in the definition and analysis of problems. This collaboration is done by a team that acknowledges the contributing factors towards development; the evaluation tools for short, medium and long terms become the responsibility of the team.

Biological and cultural diversity in Africa

Africa is endowed with a lot of knowledge, practices and attributes that can be used as stepping stones towards endogenous development, for example, musicology and art. Africans have realized the need to support and protect diversity. By valuing the specifics of each individual and group we can reduce prejudice and bias. It fosters respect and dignity and caring for the community. Partners are able to draw

intellectual strength from active exchange and this can result in innovative practices due to the partnership and synergy of the individuals.

The 21st century challenges institutions of higher education to enhance human potential by accepting community engagement in education, utilization of appropriate teaching strategies and by providing community service that is based on needs within the multicultural model. African universities are learning not to see themselves as ivory towers, but as partners. The institutions are focusing on community engagement as part of their social responsibility. Participatory research has produced positive results in bio-cultural development as the professionals learn from the community members. Policy-making is based on partnership and responsiveness to the community needs and endorses the principle of democracy.

Culture

Culture may simply be defined as the way people or a society live. According to the Institute of Social Health Sciences (2000), culture is the mode of political, economic, artistic, spiritual, scientific, technological industrial life. Culture encompasses all the fields of human activity, hence it is neither closed nor static. The culture of a human community evolves, develops and gets enriched with time. It can be enriched through contact with other cultures while maintaining its own originality. Culture applies to an array of a people's attributes, their lifestyles and livelihoods, anchored in and influenced by their local natural, spiritual and human worldviews. It is critical for policy-makers and researchers to understand the fundamental cultural practices of people to be served, especially rural people.

People's lifestyles also encompass the appropriate natural expertise and technical skills for sustainable survival. The local people's routine way of life includes conduct or behavior, mindset and approach to life, values, material substances and knowledge, which are mutual and passed on through generations. The people's lifestyles and livelihoods incorporate their perceptions about health delivery services and food production and thus can provide a basis for initiatives to combat disease, hunger and malnutrition through endogenous development.

Africans have a specific protocol regarding development, hence all partners must understand the fundamental philosophy of *Ubuntu* and its value system if they are going to make bio-cultural diversity optimally functional in this continent. Endogenous development must accommodate and address cultural beliefs. These beliefs can have strong and weak points, and therefore some beliefs can be supported and others need to be questioned.

Some rural groups believe that during specific cycles a young lady should not be given milk during her menstruation, whereas in scientific knowledge, milk contains essential nutrients. Some rural communities do not eat fish because they take it as some kind of reptile, whereas in reality fish would be an ideal source of protein to counterbalance malnutrition and to combat disease. Old African family spacing methods dictated no coitus for a minimum of six months after a delivery, and this played a role in the spacing of births and also prevented infection of the mother's reproductive system.

In a certain area, men are socialized to endure pain, hence in the initiation schools when circumcision is performed they have to show manhood. During bereavement men cannot show their true emotions as they would be ridiculed as men who behave as women. This practice has psycho-social effects: the inability of men to openly grieve a death may lead to depression later even to depressive psychosis. Also, in the traditional African society men were accepted as polygamous and, in spite the current challenges of sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/Aids, some are resistant to change.

Africa is facing a variety of socio-cultural challenges. Lack of skills to improve economic productivity in the pre- and post-colonial era has lead to abject poverty. Some countries have a per capita income that is approximately US\$2 or less per day and the process of development is slow. This makes the people of this continent vulnerable to preventable diseases. We have a high prevalence of diseases such as HIV/Aids. Although political emancipation has been attained in Africa, some of the socio-cultural practices reflect a western model that may be detrimental to the African people. Africans in the historic era practiced communal living that involved sharing of resources with the extended family, neighbours and friends. Exposure to western culture has resulted in individualism, which in some areas has hindered progress as there is a low rate of sharing expertise and resources. With the endogenous development approach, the African continent will be revitalized, including its value system. The transformation process will enhance socio-economic development resulting in self-reliance and optimal utilization of existing skills for improvement of the economic base to meet both the subsistence and commercial needs of the people.

Until all nations in Southern Africa and the whole continent make the African society's values, attributes and practices compatible with their mainstream educational systems development and empowerment initiatives, Africa will remain trapped in perpetual poverty.

NEPAD of the African Union is seen as a vehicle for partnerships in Africa to utilize natural resources as a pillar for partnerships for trade and industry. The African Renaissance stresses the need for innovation, creativity and restoration of indigenous African traditional values.

Southern African Endogenous Development Programme

We are greatly encouraged by the inception of the Southern African Endogenous Development Programme (SAEDP) whose steady growth into maturity as an international NGO in the Southern African region is influencing some universities in Lesotho, South Africa and Zimbabwe. On 26 August 2005, four vice- chancellors and five chiefs representing their universities and rural communities agreed to launch a University Consortium on Endogenous Development (UCED) for SAEDP. Fostering such cooperation by the nine leaders of SAEDP has led to the formation of the SAEDP Regional Council, and the programme has resulted in a legal entity with an operating mandate from the government.

The council has sanctioned SAEDP to extend its wings to other countries in Southern Africa and also to facilitate forums to enable chiefs and vice-chancellors to share knowledge and exchange experiences in order to learn endogenous development together. The learning of endogenous development as a process occurs alongside ongoing joint community-university action research and experimentation with indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) as a baseline for endogenous development.

The vice-chancellors have embarked on a process of enhancing the integration the IKS into university learning, teaching, research and development activities. For the chiefs, the SAEDP-UCED pillar heralds an appreciation from the universities for the significance of their knowledge paradigm and wisdom in the process of re-education. The universities are also acknowledging the chiefs and their rural communities as major stakeholders in conserving and managing bio-cultural diversity and their pivotal role in the development and review of curricula for certificates, diplomas and degrees, as they have the relevant knowledge and expertise.

These leaders are also a pillar for sustainable livelihoods, reduction of poverty, prevention of some diseases and also contribute to interventions for fighting disease. The ultimate objective is to eliminate hunger and malnutrition for improving the quality of life and empowerment of the African people. It is our hope that the two pillars of the SAEDP will form a strong relationship for community empowerment with the ultimate elimination of dependency on foreign aid because acquisition of skills related to appropriate technology will result in self-reliance

Challenges for SAEDP

The following are considered critical challenges:

- SAEDP should, through its community participatory development projects, reduce poverty, hunger and malnutrition among the rural populace in Southern Africa.
- IKS, culture and cosmovision should be used as a principal approach in endogenous development, while integrating the relevant conventional approaches. The IKS journal, *Indilinga*, was accredited in March 2006, hence the people of the African region can utilize this as a base for sharing knowledge, expertise and empowerment.
- SAEDP should lobby and advocate for policy reform in recognizing the role of local knowledge systems and practices in socio-cultural development resulting in economic empowerment with the use of appropriate technology, for example, income generation from African art.
- Universities working with SAEDP should work in partnership with rural communities in research, experimentation, documentation and validation of community development practices.
- Universities in Southern Africa should mainstream endogenous development practices into their education curricula at undergraduate and postgraduate levels to equip students with appropriate skills and knowledge.
- Traditional institutions (spirit media and chiefs) should be accorded their custodial responsibilities in the processes of implementing endogenous development

initiatives. These are key decision-makers and if utilized optimally they can also act as change-agents for the process of liberation of people and development. Women are the major actors in rural development activities, hence they should be empowered in the processes of project planning, designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluation in response to their needs.

It is important that the inter-linkage of the spiritual, natural and human worlds be recognized and translated into real practice. This should be realized through the sustainable management of ecosystems, profound conservation of natural resources and food production using local knowledge systems, and combating endemic diseases like HIV/Aids, malaria and tuberculosis through traditional health delivery practices.

Way forward

It has been decided that:

- SAEDP shall foster a global partnership with like-minded networks, development organizations, governments and the donor community.
- SAEDP shall thrive to eradicate poverty, hunger, malnutrition and disease through maximizing locally available resources with ongoing empowerment to equip people with skills and to generate sufficient resources to eliminate these obstacles.
- SAEDP will work hard towards integrating endogenous development into higher education curricula development processes through participatory research, experimentation and systematic documentation of IKS.
- SAEDP will foster cooperation with development-related organizations such as NEPAD, International COMPAS including COMPAS Africa, relevant organs of the UN and others.
- SAEDP will further expand the scope for endogenous development to other countries in Southern Africa. Altogether communities and universities will be encouraged to partner in order to learn, share and grow together in 14 countries. A challenge in the African continent is the issue related to languages for educational activities, for example, Portuguese, French, English plus African languages – Shona, Indebele in Zimbabwe, Sisutu in Lesotho and other languages within SADC and the greater Africa.

We realise that this implies a lot of resources for outreach and ongoing projects in various countries. SAEDP Council has decided to set up a central administration and coordinating office, which will also act as the secretariat to operationalize and implement the whole programme for the benefit of people we serve in Africa.

For the process of endogenous development to become a reality in both rural and urban Africa, the researchers, policy-makers, academics and relevant partners must understand the pillars of ongoing dialogue with the fundamental principles of respect, resilience, humility and confidentiality. This way we maximize the potential of all the partners with a final objective of self-reliance and self-determination based on the bio-cultural diversity model in Africa.

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