

Mobilisation, Popular Participation and Sustainable Development: Themes in the Recent History of Adult Education in Poor Countries

Lalage Bown

Starting points

The systematic study of adult education history has profited considerably from the regular international conferences of the past decade and the publications flowing from them. Their achievements in content and process make an initial launching pad for this paper, which is then propelled by the unfinished forward agenda developed at these meetings.

First, what Prof Franz Poggeler has called the 'internationality' of the group of scholars involved has been fruitful, with an excellent record of participation, especially from Europe. There is as yet, however, no strategy to bring in more scholars and more perspectives from the world's poorer countries. To underline the need for such a strategy, this paper focuses on adult education in 'the South'. In my contention, many of the seminal ideas and innovations in twentieth century adult education came from the South and we have much to learn from them. Northern adult educationists also need to ponder on relationships with counterparts in the poorer world. Assumptions about globalisation need to be questioned, in the light of for example, the arresting comment by Thabo Mbeki, Deputy President of South Africa, that 50% of the world's population have never made a telephone call - and probably never will (Fouche 1998).

Secondly, the landmark conference on the history of adult education held at Aachen in 1990 prepared a research agenda. Some of the topics have been well covered since, but among those outstanding is the inter-relation between the evolution of adult education and changing social and political ideologies. My theme of mobilisation addresses this. Another topic suggested at Aachen was the history of changes in adult education discourse. My other themes, of participation and development, are connected to the rise and fall of certain types of discourse.

Thirdly, our interest, in the past few conferences, in twentieth century adult education has led to an emphasis on oral history. This has encouraged me to write of events which I witnessed, so here I am sometimes giving personal testimony.

The paper will be in three parts: a brief conceptual comment on history as a tool for studying adult education; an outline of three historical themes from the South - mobilisation and its decline, participation and its survival, sustainable development and its continuing rise in popularity; and finally some of the applica-

tions, acknowledged and unacknowledged, to the situation and practice of adult education in the North.

A conceptual basis for historical study of Adult Education

Savicky (1990) suggested that there was a renewed interest in the discipline of history, with the recession in popularity of structuralism and post-structuralism. Now we have moved into the era of post-modernism, with its extreme relativism, the notion that all histories are at bottom just another sort of fiction and the implication that all historical interpretations are equally valid. This is a philosophical problem for all historians and too broad to be tackled here; but even against such a background it can be argued that history is still a useful discipline in itself and still has value for the study of adult education.

Prof Roger Fieldhouse of the University of Exeter has made the case for the history of adult education and concluded:

Over and over again I have been impressed by how the adult educationists of the past tackled many of the same problems that face us today: not so much the small technical problems which change with changing contexts, but the big questions. What is adult education for?...how does adult education best respond to society's needs?...These and many more are not new questions and we can learn from the way they have been tackled in the past.

(Fieldhouse 1996, 17)

For this paper, the cue is taken from a professional historian who was also a professional philosopher: RG Collingwood, who taught in Oxford but also had a connection with St Andrews, Scotland's oldest university. His two texts on the nature of history were his *Autobiography* and *The Idea of History*; and his theory has resonances with some adult education theory, as well as providing a possible accommodation with post-modern thinking.

For Collingwood, 'all knowledge is historical knowledge' and his rationale is: 'We study history in order to see more clearly the situation in which we are called upon to act.' Following from this:

The past which the historian studies is not a dead past, but a past which in some sense is still living in the present. I expressed this [in the *Autobiography*] by saying that history is concerned not with events, but with processes.

He saw the discipline of history as reflective thought and reflective action. He connected the two in a way which can illuminate the adult education theory of Paulo Freire a generation later:

The difference between conceiving and executing a purpose was not correctly described as the difference between a theoretical act and a practical one. To conceive a purpose or form an intention is already a practical activity. It is not thought forming an ante-room to action; it is action itself in its initial stages.

This framework is relevant to our current project. Our subject matter is not events but processes, themselves a continuum of active thought and thoughtful action. In such a framework it is easy to see a linking between episodes of rise and fall of institutions and social movements.

Mobilisation and Adult Education

Political sociologists apply the term mobilisation to the forward drive of regimes attempting social transformation, usually after they have gained power in an initial political change. It could apply to the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s, but is used more particularly for post-colonial countries in the 1960s and 1970s and their efforts to develop socially and economically after regaining independence. It has been well described by a famous Indian development specialist, Rajni Kothari, in a recent book:

In the first fifteen or twenty years after independence, the vision of spreading the benefits of development, providing a regime of economic security and self-reliance for all, and of creating a just social system, energised the nation.

(Kothari 1995, 141)

This description is also true of Africa in the 1960s and 1970s. It encompasses a political project of nation-building and of reclaiming and establishing a cultural identity. Sometimes an official ideology was promoted, such as *Ujamaa* (or self-help through community) in Tanzania or *Zambian Humanism*.

Adult education was crucial to the mobilisation process. Some of the components involved were:

- A drive for literacy and basic education. Lenin in the 1920s and many post-colonial political leaders in the 1960s and 1970s saw literacy as a first step towards political awareness. Among classic literacy drives were those in Cuba and Nicaragua;
- The enlistment of young people in various forms of public service, through youth corps, sometimes trained by Israelis who also had experience of creating a new state and new allegiances. Some of these corps also had the purpose of taking unemployed teenagers off city and village streets (for example, Zambia); others were confined to university students with the object

of accustoming them to using their skills in the countryside (for example, Ethiopia and Nigeria);

- The encouragement of women's movements, as wings of the ruling party or as separate organisations overtly involved in economic activity to increase women's earning power. One such organisation was the 31st December movement in Ghana, led by the wife of the Head of State and successful in, for instance, providing bakeries to generate income for poor women and setting up nursery schools for the children of market-women;
- Residential institutions to foster ideological commitment among key activists, such as trade unionists, co-operative officials and women's leaders. Kivukoni College in Tanzania was modelled on Ruskin College, Oxford and had an entirely educational curriculum, but based on the assumptions of *Ujamaa*. At the opposite end of the spectrum was the Ideological College at Winneba in Nkrumah's Ghana, which was heavily propagandist rather than educational.

In addition to such educational activities and institutions, mobilisation societies often displayed innovative methods in public education. New uses were found for folk media, so that in Botswana, villagers were encouraged to devise their own dramas focusing on problems of importance to them, such as cattle-stealing. In Nigeria, the brilliant actor-director of folk-opera, Duro Ladipo, turned his attention from legendary and folk history subject matter to tackling questions of family planning. The opera was so successful that it made a cross-over to a modern medium, being turned into a popular film.

The most useful twentieth century vehicle for adult education proved to be the radio, being cheap and more accessible than television and video. An impressively creative radio education venture was *Mtu ni Afya* (Man is Health) in Tanzania. The radio programmes were linked into study centres with facilitators on hand and discussions were pitched to encourage rural people to take action on their own initiative to improve public health. There were nearly two million listeners organised in 75,000 study centres. Evaluations showed that many communities undertook practical projects after talking over the radio lessons and the whole scheme was cost effective, since it cost less than one Tanzanian shilling per listener.

A wide range of adult education programmes were associated with the post colonial mobilisation period, and then, at different times in different countries, the impetus died away. As Kothari (1995, 141) says: "The dream began to rum sour." Enthusiasm wilted and budgets dwindled, so that many development activities, including adult education, also wilted and dwindled. But even as mobilisation and its ideologies and methods declined, there were survivals and lasting effects of the adult education associated with it. As RG Collingwood would have interpreted it, one historical process moved into others.

One continuing move has been the overall increase in basic literacy. The statistics below may be rough and ready, but the trend is clear.

Table 1: World literacy trends, by socio-economic category (UNDP 1998).

	% of adult population	
	1970	1995
All developing countries	48	71
Least developed	30	50
Medium human development	54	82
High human development	77	91

Table 2: World literacy trends, by geographical area (UNDP 1998).

	% of adult population	
	1970	1995
Sub-Saharan Africa	31	57
Arab States	31	56
South Asia	32	51
East Asia	53	82
SE Asia & Pacific	66	87
Latin America & the Caribbean	74	87
Industrial countries	-	99

Countries in all categories of development and in all geographical areas gained in literacy over the quarter century from 1975 to 1990. Some of the changes were the result of expansion in schooling, but some were undoubtedly the result of adult mobilisation programmes. There are still great differences between richer and poorer countries and approximately one billion non-literate adults in the world, so there remains a challenge to be met.

A second survival from the mobilisation era in many developing countries is the greater awareness among women of their situation. Having been organised by political leaders (mainly men) for their purposes, the women themselves have often taken hold, sometimes after disillusionment with male leadership. They have promoted their own economic and community activities and become more articulate in carrying them out. The rhetoric and processes of mobilisation helped women towards empowerment and other forces have since been involved in education for that empowerment.

A third, more fragmentary survival from the mobilisation era has been that of some institutions. While some of the colleges have disappeared or been converted to other uses, some of them are still engaged in adult education programmes. The curricula have, however, largely changed from civic and leadership education to economic and vocational courses.

Popular participation

Kothari (1995, 145) wrote of his own country:

India's great poverty is not a poverty of resources. It is a poverty of justice.

The visible poverty of justice in the world's poorer countries was an important spur to the spread of ideas of popular participation (although its origins go further back). Parallel with official mobilisation organisations and activities were others emanating from the people themselves, sometimes oppositional, sometimes simply autonomous. Often they had links with traditional agencies of decisionmaking and they were about community effort and ownership. Some of the participatory programmes were local, such as the building in a small Ghanaian village of the Awudome Residential Adult College, now over forty years old. Some were connected with a particular interest group, such as the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in Ahmedabad, India. These women, in the course of trying to better themselves economically, were motivated to educate themselves when they found that literacy was a requisite for access to banks.

There are also examples of larger scale participatory organisations with an educational purpose, such as the People's Educational Association of Ghana. This has evolved over half a century as a membership body, with branches around the country, organising formal classes and engaging in a range of development activities, such as improving water supplies, rabbit breeding for family nutrition or the market and soap-making for income generation.

In a number of countries, especially in Africa, the vehicle for participation is a church. The churches have always had a role in education, but in a paternalistic mode. Now, in a country such as Uganda, the parishes, choirs and women's organisations (for example, The Mothers' Union) are in the hands of the people themselves and the churches have been the main persisting instruments of civil society in periods of unrest and political instability. This may sound odd to readers in the North, but a picture of popular participation in (especially) Africa would be incomplete without a mention of the basic literacy, functional literacy and community development work sustained by church congregations.

What is regarded as the more radical contribution to the ideas and practice of popular participation, however, came from Latin America, with the discourse of liberation and empowerment emanating from both religious and secular sources. A key figure was of course Paulo Freire of Brazil who died in 1997. Looking back, historians now believe that his appearance on the adult education scene was not as dramatic as was claimed by some of his followers, and the principles behind his participatory literacy methodology were not entirely new. Nevertheless, he produced a new adult education discourse, based on such ideas as the validity of popular culture and the linking of reflection to action in communities. He also

gave prominence to the need for educators to respect the learners' knowledge and never to impose a fixed set of ideas.

Freire as a practitioner never really solved the issue of leadership in a participatory education programme or of the relationship between an educator/facilitator from outside a community and the people of the community with whom she or he is working. The earlier Italian thinker, Antonio Gramsci, had the apposite concept of 'organic intellectuals', but Gramsci's own educational views were authoritarian rather than about participation.

The impact of Freire and similar advocates of popular participation on international thinking about adult education has been powerful. In countries of the South, the character of major literacy campaigns has been influenced. To take another Ghanaian example, the Mass Literacy Programme, in spite of its large scale, has included Freirean workshops for codification and de-codification of vocabulary in all the languages used. South African popular organisations too have employed Freirean methodology.

The discourse of participation has sometimes led to exclusiveness in adult education programmes, which may have the consequence of attempts at totally autonomous action. Participation as a concept implies sharing and experience seems to show that the most sustainable adult education is based on partnership between a community and some agent from outside the community, whether an individual with ties of ancestry or an organisation which can bring in resources. In the early 1980s I worked with two colleagues, Kevin Lillis and John Oxenham, to study how non-formal education programmes could bring women into social, political and technical decision making and enable them to be active participants. We looked at 27 cases in ten African countries and collected some data on three more. We found that the greatest empowerment for women (and thus their most effective participation) resulted when women themselves took an initiative but brought in some outside agency to mitigate their isolation and also to provide new knowledge and technical skills. At the very least a local education initiative can benefit from some non-educational support external to the community - maybe books or an electric generator or transport.

Sustainable development

Adult education in poor countries (and poor communities in rich countries) is generally linked to development. Earlier in this paper, we associated mobilisation with visions of development. Much participatory learning has been motivated too by ideas of development, seen as social and economic change for the better.

There is a very long history around the idea of community development. As a practice, it was consciously embarked on in India and the USA early in this century. In India it was propagated by a British administrator in the District of Gurgaon, FL Brayne and in the USA it emanated from such institutions as Tuskegee,

founded to empower Black Americans, under the leadership of Booker Washington. Its components were literacy, health and nutrition education, agricultural innovation and domestic crafts. Community development was an early 'big idea' of UNESCO in the 1950s. After various vicissitudes, it has resurfaced at the end of the century. The context now is one of both academic and political interest in concepts of social and economic development which have evolved since the 1960s. Other interests have emerged because of the Freirean emphasis on action as an outcome of reflection and because popular participation threw up community concerns for health, education, communications and other social goods, as well as for better incomes and markets.

Community development has now become influenced by the rhetoric of sustainable development. This includes a concern for the human environment, so that a new component of community development is about environmental maintenance through such practices as sustainable forestry.

Sustainability carries an implication that a development initiative should be long-term and this has been valuable in turning minds away from the very short-term adult education community development projects which were a feature of international aid policies in the 1980s. On the negative side, if the criterion for sustainability is seen as the capacity for a community to continue a programme without public or international support, then it can be used as an excuse for whittling down funding in ways which can be damaging. As posited earlier, the best prescription for success in adult education programmes is continuing partnership.

One element in sustainability which has been a feature of the last two decades has been the emergence of new agencies for adult learning and development or of old agencies in new roles. These are the bodies known as NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations). They may be local or national, emerging from a voluntary organisation of some kind. Many are based in rich countries, such as Oxfam in Britain. Those in the South, indigenous or affiliated with ones in the North, are currently regarded as major elements of civil society and necessary for democracy. NGOs have in fact often become major intermediaries between local communities and the outside world, including the state. Not all have a directly educational purpose and not many have education as their primary purpose, but most have some educational concern, whether literacy, health education, gender education, agricultural extension, community development. If we are looking for the rise of new adult education agencies in the world, the NGOs constitute the major recent phenomenon. Tables 3 and 4 give some indication of the quantitative rise of NGOs.

Whether NGOs are external to the poor country concerned or are indigenous, they are not obviously accountable. Their programmes depend on successful bargaining for funds, so they become part of a contract culture. This often means a change in their character; as economists put it, they have moved from the supply side to the demand side. This may put them in a false position. As has been

pointed out on several occasions, NGOs often use the rhetoric of participation and sustainability, but are non-participatory and dependent on others themselves.

We are here confronted with an irony. Adult education in countries which saw it emerge from mobilisation, popular participation and sustainable community development, is now quite heavily dependent on agencies which subscribe to those ideas and practices but in reality are quite distant from them.

Table 3: NGOs in four Arab countries (Marzouk *in* Hulme & Edwards 1997).

<i>Country</i>	<i>No in 1980s</i>	<i>No in 1990s</i>
West Bank & Gaza	272(1987)	444(1992)
Jordan	221(1986)	587(1992)
Egypt	11,471(1985)	13,239(1991)
Tunisia	1,886(1988)	5,186(1991)

Table 4: Number of Norwegian NGOs attracting government support in selected years (Tvedt 1998).

<i>Year</i>	<i>No of NGOs</i>
1963	7
1975	20
1981	54
1986	77
1991	98
1993	82

Impact on Adult Education in rich countries

This very broad-brush picture has deliberately been about adult education in the South, particularly the poorer countries. Does it have reference to the North?

There are lessons to be drawn for adult education anywhere in the world from the three themes and the historical movements and events with which they have been linked. The mobilisation era gives an impetus to us to conceptualise adult learning environments more broadly. Valuable learning can take place in a women's meeting or a credit and savings society or a church choir or an open air theatre performance just as well as in a formal classroom; and it can be enhanced by less formal methods such as radio.

A study of popular participation will bring Northern adult educators to acknowledge their debt to Freirean methodologies. Industrialised countries failed for a long time to recognise that they had populations with less than survival level literacy, but when they accepted it, much of the teaching was, and continues to be, influenced by Freire. Further, in the broader perspective of popular participa-

tion, there is a strong message about adult learners as responsible beings negotiating their own curriculum. At the end of the century, when technology makes it economic to homogenise courses and learning programmes and offer them to very large numbers of people, it is salutary to stand back and remember that active participation motivates learners and passive reception is not only not liberating, it is also less effective.

Thirdly, the story of the ways in which sustainable development has become a specialisation for NGOs is a powerful warning for countries where membership based adult education organisations also seem to be changing their character. The Workers' Educational Association in Britain for example has been transmogrified into an educational contractor. It is obviously good that such an organisation can acquire the resources to apply its educational skills and experience, but the danger is that it will become distanced from its heritage as a social movement.

These are some of the lessons for adult education in the North, which will continue to be a challenge. This is not, however, to imply that adult education in the North has not responded at all to ideas emerging from the South. Scotland, the site of the present conference, has certainly felt their impact; and it would be appropriate to conclude with a reference to that impact.

In Britain, a legacy of the colonial past was that many adult educators had some experience in the South. In the post-colonial era there have been continuing connections through the English language and other factors. In particular there has been an interest in the UK, including Scotland, in the bundle of ideas surrounding community development - participation, learning linked with social and economic change, communities' quality of life. From this bundle Scotland evolved in the 1970s and 1980s a publicly provided service based on the theory of an alliance between youth work, adult learning and community development. This is known as Community Education. It is managed by local authorities, but supported and regulated in a Scotland-wide framework through a government-appointed Scottish Community Education Council (SCEC).

Recent changes in the local government structure have affected the capacity of Community Education and there have always been criticisms of its operation. But such criticisms are not levelled at the underpinning philosophy, rather at failures to produce sufficient popular participation.

For our purposes here, Scotland can show, in however flawed a fashion, that some of the processes, events and concepts in adult education evolved in Africa, Asia and Latin America had an influence not only on ideas but also in creating a new institutional structure.

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