

REDUCING POVERTY: EDUCATION PLANNING AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR SWAZILAND

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ABSTRACT

Poverty is a global problem that affects multitudes of people around the globe and leads to illiteracy, hunger, disease and death, and hence needs to be eradicated. This article examines the role that education plays in poverty reduction, and how the education system in Swaziland should be planned to assist in alleviating poverty in that country. This article compares previously published information on the relationship between education and poverty reduction with current plans, policies, and practices in education in Swaziland, to reveal the shortcomings and the necessary transformations required for the current system to play a key role in poverty reduction. The analysis points to the need for systemic education reform to ensure that access to a quality education is increased; the curriculum, teaching methods, teacher quality and motivation is improved; relevant technical, practical and health education is offered; and courses on research, innovation and entrepreneurship are introduced.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty is a global problem that affects multitudes of people around the world, and leads to illiteracy, hunger, disease and death. It is therefore a threat to national and world peace and stability as the poor cannot meet their basic needs. Hence, the first goal of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agreed by the World Community in 2000 is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. The target and commitment on this goal is to reduce poverty by half by 2015 (UNDP, 2005a). This set target however represents a formidable challenge to developing countries in general, and to Swaziland in particular, where poverty is widespread and is at an alarming rate of 69% (one of the highest in the world) (Central Bank of Swaziland (CBS), 2008; Ministry of Economic Planning and Development (MOEPD), 2005a; UNDP, 2008).

Alleviation and in fact eradication of poverty is therefore at the top of many governments' agendas (Nhamo & Nhamo, 2006), and perhaps that is the reason former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, speaking at the opening of the sixth session of the Pan African Parliament in Midrand, South Africa, urged African Parliamentarians to be the voice of the poor in the continent (World News, 2006). "Poverty is one of the greatest moral challenges that we face", said United Kingdom's Tony Blair (quoted in Dorward, 2006, p.11). Dorward (2006) further added that global poverty is not just a moral challenge, but also a great political and policy challenge. "All in all, poverty is at the centre of all the country's problems" (Zwane, 2006, p.1); "We are not doing enough to fight poverty" (Masuku, 2007, p.1), are some of the headlines that have appeared in Swaziland's newspapers.

The Swaziland government has therefore spelled out its central objective to substantially reduce levels of poverty through the adoption of policies that mainstream poverty reduction in all development programmes, with the specific objective being to reduce it from 69% to no more than 30% by 2015 and eradicate poverty completely by 2022 (Sande, 2008; MOEPD, 2005b). The critical question that arises is: Can the country half the poverty rate by 2015, and further eradicate it by 2022? The stark reality is that in many sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries, poverty has not abated, despite many adopted policies, solutions and strategies for poverty eradication (Gaventa, 2004; Meth and Dias, 2004; UNDP, 2003; UNDP, 2005a). In fact, in a number of the countries, such as Swaziland, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Kenya and Zimbabwe, it is increasing (Arimah, 2004; Mualuko, 2007; Polelo, 2003; Sithole, 2005). This raises questions regarding the adequacy and relevance of the policies and strategies proposed, adopted and implemented, and on the commitment of the nations to the full implementation of these.

A great deal of literature shows that education plays a major role in poverty reduction, but very few studies have been carried out to compare this body of knowledge to actual education plans, policies and practices in developing countries, to determine where there are shortcomings and what should be done. Further, no such study has been carried out in Swaziland. This situation is surprising and disturbing, given the plight of many people in the World who languish in poverty and the urgency to address this scourge.

This study is an attempt to fill this gap, and reports on an analysis conducted to explore links between education and poverty, and how the education system should be planned, organized and transformed to combat poverty and achieve the MDGs. The study starts by describing the Swaziland context and this is followed by a description of the education policies of the country. The next section presents a review of literature which serves as the conceptual framework for the evaluation of the education policies. This is followed by an evaluation of the current plans, policies and practices in the Swaziland education system to reveal areas of agreement, contradictions and shortcomings with framework, and thereby enable the writer to make conclusions and recommend necessary changes on the system to redress poverty.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF POVERTY DIMENSIONS, PERSPECTIVES AND IMPLICATIONS IN SWAZILAND

Swaziland is classified as a lower middle income developing country. Long-term per capita growth declined from 4.7 percent in the 1980s, to 1.7 percent in the 1990s, and to only 0.9 percent since 1995. The country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate fell to 2.1 percent in 2004 and further to 1.8 percent in 2005 (World Bank, 2006a). In 1985, about 62% of the Swazi population lived below the poverty line, in 1999 the rate had increased to 66%, and currently it is estimated at 69% (MOEPD, 2005a). As a result, the poverty situation has worsened, notwithstanding the Government's poverty alleviation programmes that are supposedly in place. The Swaziland Minister of Finance in his Budget Speech for 2005 confirmed this and stated that it saddened him to report that despite their efforts, poverty seemed to have increased (Sithole, 2005).

The country's Gini coefficient, (which measures the degree of distribution of income in a country) is one of the highest in the World at 0.609 (World Bank 2006b). Hence only a small share of the population benefits from the national income, as the richest 10% of the population controls over 50% of the total income of the country (Crouch, 2005; Government of the Kingdom of Swaziland, 2002; World Bank, 2006b). Considering that economic growth generally reduces poverty at different rates in different contexts, with the greatest reduction in those countries with the most equitable income distribution (Downing and Campbell, 2006; USAID, 2006), it follows that this high rate of inequality in Swaziland will slow down the influences of economic growth on poverty reduction.

Swaziland has a very high level of unemployment, estimated at about 29% (CBS, 2008; UNDP, 2008; World Bank, 2006a), and further, the number of those in formal employment has declined from 93,213 in 1999 to 62,600 in 2004 (CBS, 2006; CBS, 2000). The Swaziland economy has therefore performed poorly and very few employment opportunities have been created. Unemployment has therefore escalated and many people have become poor. As Sukati (1994) reported, the people who tend to be unemployed in Swaziland are females, children from rural areas, public school, and from parents who were not well known. If this pattern continues, more of the poor people (who need jobs and income the most) would be unemployed and the few available jobs would be disproportionately given to the upper class children, and this would aggravate inequality, jeopardize peace and stability, and prevent the country from achieving the MDGs.

The country further has high rates of child mortality and malnutrition, high numbers of orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC), high rate of HIV/AIDS (the highest adult HIV infection rate in the world at 42.6%) and tuberculosis (UNDP, 2008; World Bank, 2006b). In addition, it has been ravaged by several natural disasters such as droughts, storms, floods, changing weather patterns and poor soils, and though these factors affect all the people in the country, they hit especially hard on the rural poor. As the majority of people who live in rural areas depend on agriculture, these natural disasters affect their crops and livestock, and they do not produce enough for their own consumption and for sale, and thus they become poorer.

These dimensions and perspectives point to a country in crisis. They pose a threat to peace and stability, and a great political challenge to the country as studies elsewhere have pointed out to links between poverty, inequality and political instability (Government of South Africa, 2000). Hence, Swaziland needs to overcome abject poverty and to have strategies for growth with redistribution to uplift those who are in the poorest groups. To this end, the country has come up with an Action Programme for the Reduction of Poverty. The Action Programme (see Government of the Kingdom of Swaziland, 2002)

revealed that the poverty reduction philosophy of the country incorporated a three pronged strategy:

1. rapid acceleration of economic growth based on broad participation;
2. empowering the poor to generate income through economic restructuring; and
3. fair and equitable distribution of the benefits of growth through public spending.

Such a three pronged strategy is common among countries (Craig and Porter, 2003). However, as the poverty rate has continued to rise in Swaziland, it means that the above three-pronged strategy has failed to produce the desired results. This could mean that there has been no commitment in implementing the strategy, or that perhaps, some other important factor or factors have been overlooked. Rather than three, perhaps it should have been four pronged. Craig and Porter (2003) report that poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) tend to reproduce three or four pronged approaches to poverty reduction, and that one of these is “enhancing security” especially involving investments in human capital. In support to this, a Department for International Development (DFID) report (2001) clearly articulates that the elimination of poverty and progress towards sustainable development will only take place with increased and improved levels of education. This article presents the critical role that education plays in poverty alleviation and as a cross cutting issue for all other MDGs, and argues that it should be linked to the poverty reduction strategies, and hence that it should be added as the fourth prong.

DESCRIPTION OF EDUCATION POLICIES UNDER REVIEW

The vision of the Ministry of Education is to provide “relevant and affordable education and training opportunities for all age groups of the entire populace of the Kingdom of Swaziland in order to develop all positive aspects of life for self-reliance, social and economic development and global competitiveness” (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 19) To achieve this vision, the Ministry pursues a number of policies.

Increased access to education

To realize its vision, Swaziland has aligned itself with global initiatives on education, notably the Education For All (EFA) agenda and the MDGs. In pursuing the EFA agenda, the country aims at ensuring efficient and equitable distribution of educational resources; guaranteeing that all citizens, irrespective of status, gender, geographical location, political affiliation, colour, religion, disability, social class and race, have access to a basic education of high quality (Kingdom of Swaziland, 1999; Ministry of Education, 2009). The Ministry’s policy therefore has been spelt out as expansion of participation in education, particularly at the primary/basic school level to achieve universal primary education. This was to focus mainly at children from rural settings, in peri-urban poor areas, those with disabilities and those affected by HIV/AIDS (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Diversification of the curriculum

Policy on the curriculum is to provide a diversified school curriculum that would enable the pupils to change their attitudes towards practical subjects and develop intellectual, moral, aesthetic, emotional, physical and practical capacities that are needed to enable them to take advantage of all opportunities available and adapt to a fast-changing complex and uncertain socio-economic environment (Ministry of Education, 2009; Kingdom of Swaziland, 1999). To do this, the Ministry policy is to strengthen and expand the provision of practical subjects, such as agriculture, metalwork, woodwork, home economics, technical drawing, business studies, etc. in schools, and in addition strengthen the pre-vocational education programme in the schools.

Teaching methods, assessment, and evaluation

One major teaching method to be adopted, according to the policy of the Ministry, was continuous assessment, which would reduce the repetition and drop-out rates (Ministry of Education, 2009). This was to be followed because this method recognizes that individual pupils have different abilities and learning capabilities, and hence this program emphasizes remediation and provision of enrichment materials to help and support weak students. Further, the education system was changed from offering the Cambridge O-Level examination at the end of high school to using the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE). This was to ensure that students were rewarded for positive

achievement on the basis of what they know, understand and can do, rather than being penalized for an accumulation of errors. This curriculum assessment further encouraged the development of oral and practical skills; an investigative approach to learning; use of initiative to solve problems; application of skills, knowledge and understanding; ability to undertake individual projects; and aptitude to work collaboratively with others (Kingdom of Swaziland, 1999; Ministry of Education, 2009).

Funding education

The cost of education in Swaziland has continued to be a major cause of concern and conflict to the Government and to the parents. These costs have traditionally been shared between the Government, the parents, various Christian missionaries and donors. This policy still stands, but in an effort to meet targets set for the realization of the equity-driven reforms, the Ministry is implementing programs aimed at removing cost barriers at the primary school level. These include the provision of free primary school textbooks and stationery, bursaries to the needy pupils and the OVCs, some school infrastructure, primary school capitation grants, teachers, and equipment and machinery (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Teacher numbers, quality, and motivation

As the education system has continued to have untrained and under-qualified teachers, particularly in rural areas and in science and mathematics, the major policy here therefore has been to expand teacher education and training so that all schools are provided with appropriately qualified teachers (Ministry of Education, 2009). In addition, in-service courses would be held regularly to keep teachers up to date with the latest teaching methodologies to ensure that there is quality teaching. The policy statements however do not indicate the defined set of knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes that teachers should possess to teach at each level, and does not state how the motivation of the teachers will be maintained so that good teaching takes place.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN POVERTY REDUCTION

This topic has an extensive literature base, which is used in this study to provide a conceptual framework for the evaluation of the Swaziland education plans and policies. Klees (2002) has argued that the relationship between education, poverty and development needs to be exposed and discussed, to give an idea of how education needs to be reformed to contribute to poverty alleviation and development. All agree that the single most important key to development and to poverty alleviation is education (Wolfensohn quoted in Klees, 2002, p. 457). Prioritizing education to overcome poverty should therefore become a legitimate and necessary goal, hence investment in human capital features in all agencies' strategies (Asian Development Bank (ADB), 2006; Benzeval, Judge, Johnson, & Taylor, 2000; Bonal, 2004; Cox and Healey, 2003; Kemper, 2001; Morrison, 2002;).

Using a dynamic microsimulation model to analyze the distributional effects of educational policies in Cote d'Ivoire, Grimm (2005) found that even if the most optimistic policy considered was actually set up, the effects on poverty would be very modest. Despite this modest effect, the education policies do have an effect on poverty. DFID (2001) reveals that education is at the heart of development and that countries which have made the greatest progress in reducing poverty are those which have combined effective and equitable investment in education with sound economic policies. Caillods (1998) adds that education and training can do a great deal to break the vicious circle of marginalization, exclusion and poverty, in that better educated people are more productive. Buarque, Spolar, and Zhang (2006) as a result, calls for a 21st century plan, that should be social rather than economic, and should focus on education rather than infrastructure. Education therefore plays the following roles in poverty reduction.

It is a human right

The importance of education to individual, community and national development is reflected in its recognition as a human right, and this is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Avalos, 1992; DFID, 2001), and also in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Swaziland (Government of the Kingdom of Swaziland, 2005). Spreen and Vally (2006) recognize the link between education rights and human rights in that education operates as a multiplier, enhancing the enjoyment of all individual

rights and freedoms where the right to education is effectively guaranteed, while depriving people the enjoyment of many rights and freedoms where the right is denied or violated.

Education enables people to increase their capacity to think, reflect on issues and reason to reach correct conclusions, encourages initiative, flexibility and adaptability, necessary behavioural changes and access to a wider range of livelihood possibilities and life skills (DFID, 2001). This encourages people to take charge of their future and reduce poverty as it allows for the promotion of transparency, good governance, democracy and the achievement of other fundamental human rights. Tomasevski (2003) contends that denial of the right to education triggers exclusion from the labour market, accompanied by exclusion from social security schemes, and hence that a large number of problems cannot be solved unless the right to education is addressed as the key to unlock other human rights. Making education accessible and affordable contributes to the realisation of other rights like gender equality for women. Investment in girls education has shown to be one of the most important determinants of development, and further empowers them, and all other members of the society, to participate in decision making and in the transformation of their own lives and societies (Deiningner & Okidi, 2003; DFID, 2001; UNDP, 2005b).

It improves the quality of the labour force and reduces inequalities

Getting children to attend school, on its own, is not enough for poverty reduction; the quality of the education that is offered plays an important part as well. Writing on Tanzania, Wedgwood (2007) indicated that the quality of the labour force had been so poor that many of the potential benefits of education had not been realised. Quality education develops skills, knowledge, new values, attitudes and perspectives, increases choices and professional competences, and one can become more efficient, innovative, productive, competitive in the labour market, and increase his/her earning potential and improve his livelihood (Durstun and Nashire, 2001; Harvey, 2005; Ishchenko & Sazonova, 2007; Literacy Watch Committee of Nepal, 1997; UNESCO, 2006). It has been observed therefore, that many programmes and projects aimed at poverty reduction had not succeeded mainly because they had no inbuilt quality education component (Walingo, 2006).

Speaking in Swaziland, the Director of the UNESCO Cluster Office in Windhoek, Namibia, Dr. Claudia Harvey (2005) pointed out that education can be the road out of poverty, that it is a catalyst for human development and provides people with the necessary skills and knowledge that enables them to participate in society. A report entitled *Promoting relevant education and training for employment – Youth development and employment in South Africa; further education and training (FET) college sector*, for example, indicated that a vocationally-oriented level of secondary-tertiary education had the potential to play a significant role in the “skills revolution” (USAID, 2007). Horn (2006) and Vakalisa (2005) writing on the new skills required in South Africa indicated that these new skills included proficiency in mathematics, computing, reading, writing and reasoning, the ability to use resources and information constructively, interpersonal skills, the ability to understand systems and to master technology, as well as the flexibility to cope with change in the workplace. Njikam, Binam, and Tachi, (2006) attest that for SSA, the variation in the level of education embodied in the labour force is one of the primary reasons for the observed differences in productivity among countries. Enhancement of the quality of education is thus necessary as there is a strong and robust inverse relationship between poverty and level of higher education, economic growth and poverty, and as poor education is negatively related to economic growth (Morrison, 2002; Moser & Ichida, 2001; Njikam et al., 2006; Tilak, 2007; Wedgwood, 2007).

It improves people's health

There is a relationship between education, health and poverty as poor health and HIV/AIDS have been found to have a profound effect on poverty outcomes in Africa (Christiaensen et al., 2002; UNDP, 2008, Whiteside, 2002). Research studies (e.g. by Arimah, 2004) have shown that improvements in health leads to a reduction in poverty. Accumulation of human capital in education and health, with the availability of public health services, is essential to fight poverty (Kerapeletswe & Moremi, 2001; Olavarria-Gambi, 2003). Studies have shown that higher levels of education are associated with the likelihood of women choosing to have smaller families, sending their children to school, reduced fertility,

decreased infant and child mortality, increased labour force participation, and relatively higher incomes (Caillods, 1998; James, 1995; Nhamo & Nhamo, 2006; Rowe, Thapa, Levine, Levine, & Tuladhar, 2005). Malherbe (as cited in Christie & Gordon, 1992) found that the effects of ill-health, malnutrition, destitution, and physical and mental defects manifested in poor school performance, failure and leaving school, all of which lead to poverty. Education contributes significantly to the improvement of health by enhancing people's capacities to care for their own health, that of their next of kin, and further enables them to utilize the health services.

It increases and improves research and development skills

Education, and in particular higher education, enables people to use and extend their capacities, and provide, promote and improve the research and development skills which help improve processes and products and allows for innovation (DFID, 2001). This helps in increasing the number and variety of products produced for the market and results in increased revenues for all to benefit (in terms of employment and tax revenues) and in economic growth and development.

EVALUATION OF EDUCATION PLANS AND POLICIES TO ADDRESS POVERTY IN SWAZILAND

An evaluation of the current plans, policies, and practises in education in Swaziland, using the conceptual framework indicated above, reveals certain shortcomings in the system.

Inadequate access to education at all levels

The net enrolment rates of 84% at primary, 39% at secondary, and 4% at tertiary (Kingdom of Swaziland, 2005) schools are too low, particularly at the higher levels, and do not demonstrate that education has been made a human right. Increasing access to only primary education will have little impact because, as some authors have argued, it is secondary, higher and adult and lifelong education that provide the skills that have proven to be useful in the labour market and that can keep the people above the poverty line (Avalos, 1992; Bhola, 2005, 2006; Nhamo & Nhamo, 2006; Tilak, 2007; Tomasevski, 2003; van der Veen & Preece, 2005). This is essential as illiteracy and poverty have been found to be connected (Tilak, 2007) and as children of illiterate parents tend to be less healthy, enrol in school later and leave at an early age, and perform less well in school, all of which lowers their future earning potential and leads them to poverty (Morrison, 2002). Without rapid and substantial improvements in education access and quality, broader poverty reduction efforts in SSA and the achievement of the MDGs, will be thwarted (Lawin, 2005). In Swaziland, increasing access to education would entail adding more school places at all levels in the system, expanding distance learning programmes and enrolments (particularly at the higher levels), and adding adult and lifelong training programmes in practical skills, numeracy, and entrepreneurial knowledge. The provision of free and compulsory primary education, and a highly subsidized secondary and higher education (with necessary targeted bursaries for the needy) and an adult lifelong education programme would go a long way in increasing access, making education a human right, improving literacy and supplying required knowledge and skills, which would lead to reducing the poverty rate in the country.

Inappropriate school curriculum

As early as 1970, renowned education planners like Coombs (1970) had written about the problem of many students in developing nations receiving the wrong type of education for the world of work they would live in, and seemingly, this has not changed in many countries, including Swaziland. The Swaziland school curriculum has to be improved. While teaching the three R's (Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic) is still important, and should be done, the curriculum should however include other important and relevant subjects in science and practical arts to ensure that it also provides skills that are necessary for employment and self employment (Tilak, 2007; Zhang & Minxia, 2006; Vakalisa, 2005). Stressing the importance of technical and vocational education, Quisumbing (2005) has declared that while education is a key to any development strategy, technical and vocational education and training is the master key that can transform the world of work and the economy, alleviate poverty, save the

environment and improve the quality of life. These skills and credentials are linked to growth and access to better jobs (Relave, 2000). Skills development has however been neglected in developing countries and does not appear in the MDGs or in much poverty reduction strategies (Palmer, 2006; Palmer, 2007).

The current situation in Swaziland is that only a few secondary schools offer practical subjects. These subjects are optional and degree qualifications on practical, vocational and technology subjects are not available. Such degrees could go a long way in ensuring the practical stream is not seen as inferior and a dead end, and hence taken by the less capable students only. It is known that if one wants to attain a high level of education and get a degree, and earn a good salary, one should pursue the academic stream. The result then is that students either take academic subjects (if they are smart) or practical subjects (if weak). The practical skills, which are mostly needed by the employers and are also critical for employment creation and self-employment are then downgraded and overlooked, and thus unemployment and poverty escalates.

The author further doubts that the introduction of pre-vocational programmes in the 16 secondary schools that offer vocational and technology subjects will address the problem as only the weak students take the pre-vocational stream. It is thus recommended that streaming, should stop, and all students should take both academic and practical subjects. This does not necessarily have to increase the number of subjects that students take as some of them could be combined, such as carpentry with metalwork, fabrication and welding, and bookkeeping with commerce and entrepreneurship.

Poor teaching methods

The lecture method is the norm for teaching in the country's schools. Other teaching methods such as discussions, practical work, online, audio/video tapes and video conferencing need to be explored and utilized to catch the students' attention and retention of the content. While teaching of theory is important, practical work (not demonstrations) is equally important and must also be done. The students should be afforded hands-on experience in all their subjects. This provides them with necessary knowledge, experience, expertise and hands-on skills to be able to practice for the world of work, even if they are unable to complete school.

Swazi schools should be appropriately equipped and given adequate time to do practical work, and these should be connected with the production of useful products.. An effective education should integrate education with the world of work, and pupils should come out of school with adaptable skills and be disposed to working with their hands and minds to gain employment or be self employed. Njikam et al. (2006) is correct therefore in concluding that SSA countries should implement policies aimed at training and improving the skill of the labour force.

Lack of courses on research, innovation, entrepreneurship and development

School graduates need to improve existing products to add value and/or come up with new products that the market requires. This calls for innovative minds, high level research skills and good production and entrepreneurial skills. Mabumada, (as cited in Vakalisa, 2005) suggests training for entrepreneurship as the solution to unemployment in South Africa as it equips the students who leave the system, whether as a result of dropping out or graduating,. with skills needed not only to employ themselves, but also to create jobs for others. With improved production and innovation, companies become more competitive in the market, their revenues increase, and the workers' incomes increase. The author's views are that innovations are lacking in Swaziland . Perhaps this could be a result of the Swazi culture, where one is expected to conform to societal norms and do what others do and never be different. Emeagwali (2006) has articulated the need for innovations in Africa:

Unless Africa significantly increases its intellectual capital, the continent will remain irrelevant in the 21st. century and even beyond. Africa needs innovators, producers of knowledge, and wise men and women who can discover, propose, and then implement progressive ideas. Africa's fate lies in the hands of Africans and the solution to poverty must come from its people. (p. 3)

Courses on research, innovation, entrepreneurship and development should be offered to all students, but with varying difficulty and complexity depending on the grade the student is doing. Added to this is the need to provide funds for development research, research parks and incubator industries.

Attachments to industry, providing tools and equipment, capital and other logistical support to enable school leavers to start their own businesses rather than only providing them with paper certificates on completion would greatly promote self employment and reduce poverty.

Lack of health education

The introduction of health education would help arrest the devastation by HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and other diseases, and improve the wellness of the Swazi people. The HIV/AIDS pandemic, as many (UNDP, 2008; Whiteside, 2002; World Bank, 2006a;), have pointed out, is a serious threat to development, economic growth, poverty alleviation, achieving the MDGs and to making substantial progress in education. In Swaziland there are no courses on health education in the schools. Yet, the good health status of the people would ensure they remain healthy and productive in the workplace and keep their companies competitive. It would further mean the highly trained and skilled personnel do not die early before they make a contribution to the country and the investment made in their education and training is recouped. Health education is critical for prevention purposes and to ensure people get medical help as soon as they realise they are unwell.

Shortage of qualified teachers

When there are adequate numbers of qualified and motivated teachers in the schools, the quality of instruction and learning will improve. Various studies have shown that pupils' performance at school tends to improve when teachers have participated in training courses, have more years of experience in teaching and undergo more frequent teacher evaluations (Morrisson, 2002). Swaziland does not have adequate numbers of qualified teachers and has some inequities in the deployment of the teachers as rural schools tend to have less qualified teachers (Ministry of Education, 2009). Furthermore, there are no effective teacher monitoring and evaluation systems that are in place to ensure that quality is maintained. Judging by the high number of teacher protests and strikes often reported in the media, the author would say that teacher motivation is at its lowest level as well, and that the teachers experience very little job satisfaction. There is a need to provide appropriate monitoring and evaluation systems and incentives to attract and retain quality teachers, as well as motivate them to remain productive.

Inequities in financing education

There is a need to change the way education is funded in Swaziland to ensure that the poor can equally access education. Policies are needed that target the poor, transfer resources from the rich to the poor, and increase the resources of the poor to thereby facilitate their education, social integration and general well-being. Writing on four countries in Southern Africa, Avenstrup, Liang, and Nellemann (2004) indicated that the removal of school fees contributed to poverty reduction by ensuring universal access to basic education, which in turn could help break the cycle of poverty; and yet in Swaziland all schools still charge fees. Zhang and Minxia (2006), writing on China, also recommended the establishment and improvement of the stipend system to support poor students and enable them to access education. Swaziland needs to implement its policy of free primary education immediately if it is to address these inequities. This will help, but not solve all the problems, and hence the Ministry of Education has to further ensure that bursaries are offered to the OVC and all other children from poor families. These bursaries would have to cover fees, stationery, uniforms, transportation, and other necessities to facilitate schooling. This is currently not the case. Hence, although some of the school fees for the OVCs are provided by the Government, many of the students still drop out because of lack of funds. Unless this is done, the required fees and other school needs shall remain a prohibiting factor, as the poor cannot afford them. This leads to poor students not enrolling in school, and if enrolled, not completing their schooling (ADB, 2006).

Lack of integration of education plans with those of other key sectors

Education alone cannot solve all the poverty problems, and hence education plans need to be integrated with those of other sectors, (e.g. economic planning, health, agriculture, social security, enterprise and employment, etc.) to ensure they all work in tandem towards reducing poverty. As Phillip

Coombs (1970) state, educational policy should be integrated with the plans of broader economic and social development as it cannot go its own way, ignoring the realities of the world around it. In the National Policy Statement on Education (Kingdom of Swaziland, 1999), there is no mention of integrating the education policies with that of other sectors. This is puzzling, given that education plans and policies need to work in tandem and be integrated with those of other sectors to achieve maximal efficiency and effectiveness in the system.

Lack of commitment to the cause of poverty alleviation

Political commitment to education needs to be strong, and a favourable environment for the participation of other stakeholders like the private sector, civil society and communities should be created and maintained in policy/strategy formulation and programme implementation. Providing lip service to this task, to get more votes during elections and to look good to donors and international development agencies will not achieve the required results. For example, although reducing inequalities is often indicated as an objective of the Swaziland government, it is however noted that very little action has been taken on this, and hence the high Gini coefficient (World Bank, 2006b). Looking at the measures to empower the poor and reduce inequalities that are reflected in the Action Plan (MOEPD, 2005b), it is noticed there are no clear policies, timelines, procedures and/or actions indicated that would shift resources from the rich to the poor.

There is a great need in Swaziland for a supportive macro-economic environment, good governance, political commitment, openness, stability, accountability and the country's commitment to "action". Governance has for example been found to be an important factor in poverty alleviation (Arimah, 2004; Grindle, 2004; Harber, 2002; Nayyar, 2000; Oyen, 1999). Harber (2002), after listing a number of ways that authoritarian rule has exacerbated levels of poverty in Africa concluded that democracy would be a better option than authoritarianism in helping to reduce poverty in Africa. Hence, democratic rule is one of the necessary factors for success in poverty eradication. Nyanchama (2006) supports this view by declaring there is a correlation between freedom, democracy and economic development. Nayyar (2000) found that improvement in governance brought about by constitutional reform assisted in the task of poverty alleviation. Jan Sithole, Secretary General of the Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions is quoted by Mordaunt (2006) to have in fact gone further to declare that "Governments inflict poverty on citizens through bad policies and governance" (p. 15).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Poverty is a major problem and challenge faced by Swaziland and many other developing nations, and needs to be urgently addressed. Education plays a key role in poverty reduction. However, the relationship between education and poverty is very complex, and may be place and time bound, and the education system cannot perform an act of magic and "go it alone" to solve the country's poverty crises. Education's role depends greatly on other enabling sectors and factors. This study suggests the Swaziland education system needs to be appropriately transformed and planned to: increase access to formal and non-formal schooling; improve the quality and content of education offered; use suitable and effective teaching methods; offer relevant technical and practical subjects at all school grades; offer new courses on health education, research, innovation and entrepreneurship; and increase the number, quality, and motivation of the teachers.

It is recommended therefore that Swaziland should take action and develop a blueprint for its education system, so that it can make a maximum contribution towards alleviating poverty and enable the country to achieve the MDGs. The people living in poverty should be included in the design, planning and implementation of the policies, strategies, and reforms devised to address their plight. No one knows their problems and needs better than the individuals themselves, and hence they should be part of the solution. What might seem good policies imported from elsewhere and imposed on them, without consultation and their consent and input, can potentially fail.

It is also recommended that further studies be undertaken on the following issues: First, what are the most important skills, knowledge and attitudes that are necessary for children to find employment, be self employed, or be creators of employment, and how should these be taught? Second, how best

should available resources and aid be targeted to poor children to enable them to attend school and succeed in their studies? Third, how should each of the proposed policies and reforms be organized and implemented? Fourth, why does the government fail to implement its policies and what should be done to make sure policies and strategies that have been designed are fully implemented? Last, how can the commitment of the government and the Swazi leaders towards poverty eradication be increased and the appropriate actions undertaken?

Education plays a critical role in poverty reduction, is a cross cutting issue and is key to the achievement of the MDGs. Swaziland should not neglect education and should incorporate it in its strategies so that these become four- rather than the current three-pronged strategies. As the DFID report (2001) correctly articulated, a more strategic approach is required, one which recognises the centrality of education with the wider development policies, and gives it strong political backing with appropriate resource priority. If this is not done, and if the country continues to give only lip service and not tackle these issues with the urgency that they deserve, reducing poverty and achieving the MDGs shall always remain a mirage, and peace and stability that has been enjoyed by the country for decades jeopardised.

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