Nurturing lifelong learning in communities through the National University of Lesotho: prospects and challenges

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Abstract

This paper analyses one aspect of a pan-African action research project called ITMUA (Implementing the Third Mission of Universities in Africa)[1]. This particular paper draws on the data from that project to explore the National University of Lesotho's contribution to lifelong learning in its communities. It provides background information on the ITMUA initiative and analyses interview and focus group responses to two case studies in terms of their contribution to lifelong learning. It uses, as its analytical framework, a modified version of Mbigi's (2005) African perspective on the four De Lors' (1996) 'pillars', by adding a fifth pillar, courtesy of Torres (2003). The paper argues that community engagement is a two way process between universities and their wider constituencies with opportunities for mutual lifelong learning. But there are also challenges of understanding and process which must be addressed if the full range of these lifelong learning pillars is to be accommodated within African contexts.

The paper provides an introduction to the history of community engagement in Africa as a university mission, followed by a brief discussion of lifelong learning within African perspectives. After describing the particular context of Lesotho, the concept of community service and community engagement in contemporary African contexts introduces the action research project and the case studies. The final part of the paper presents and discusses the research findings.

Introduction

The historical context for community engagement in African universities emanates from two main concerns. On the one hand a number of African universities in the 1940s and 1950s developed extra mural departments to service their wider communities. These were established as a result of two British Commissions (Asquith and Elliot in 1943 and 1944 respectively) and the Oxford Delegacy for Extra Mural Studies in 1945 (Omolewa 1975, Okediran and Adpoju 2002, Amedzro 2004, Adoo-Adeku 2007). Extra mural departments were established initially in West Africa and Uganda throughout the 1940s and 1950s but later extended to other nations on the continent, as evidenced by Lesotho's Extra Mural Institute which was established in 1960. These initiatives were supported by various independence governments such as those by Nkrumah in Ghana and Nyerere in Tanzania. Amedzro (2004) highlights for example how, in Ghana, the People's Education Association was established, with a number of community improvement programmes running throughout the 1950s, followed by other community development initiatives during the decolonization era of the 1960s and 1970s.

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[1] The ITMUA project is part of a global initiative – PURE (Pascal Universities and Regional Engagement) which has supported ITMUA and made available PURE resources such as a benchmarking framework and website access, to facilitate ITMUA's objectives. ITMUA is funded by the Association of African Universities

This latter period reflects the second concern of African universities – that they had a specific responsibility towards nation building and development following independence from colonial rule. Thus university education was seen as a 'public good' and received international funding support for this purpose (Sawyerr 2004: 22, AAU 2004, Ade-Ajayi, Lamek and Ampah Johnson 1996).

However, a third context for African universities is that they have never been as autonomous as their European or North American counterparts. They have been subject to the development agendas of international aid, government responses to aid conditionalities and government control over university administration. So, as Ade-Ajayi, et al (1996) and others have highlighted, African universities have experienced subsequent rise and decline of fortunes. While the 1970s demonstrated support for university contribution to rural development and social transformation, the 1980s witnessed a change in aid thinking, primarily influenced by the World Bank which began to view higher education as less an investment for the public good but more a 'private good' (ibid: 86). Subsequent decline in support alongside economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s resulted in severe funding cuts for African universities by their governments and many other agencies, especially for extra mural work (Openjuru 2011, Sawyerr 2004).

The neo-liberal ideology of the 1980s put pressure on universities to become market driven and most extra mural departments have transformed into open and distance learning centres with fee paying students.

Recent trends, supported by a changed World Bank philosophy (WB 2009), have shown a revival of interest in the contribution of universities to national development. The university third mission of community service is being reviewed in this new context (AAU 2004).

This revival of interest reflects ongoing efforts on a global scale by higher education institutions to extend their teaching and research missions to embrace 'community service' or 'community engagement' and link this to the concept of 'learning regions'. Other associated terms include 'service learning' which focuses on assessing university students' analysis of how they learn from community activities and 'regional engagement' which addresses university regional partnerships for development.

The contemporary literature related to this topic comes primarily from countries in Europe, Australia and North America (for example, Soska and Johnson Butterfield 2004, Percy, Zimpher and Brukardt 2006, Inman and Schuetze 2010).

African references come largely from South Africa (for example, Walters 2005 on a lifelong learning higher education institution, Bringle and Hatcher 2007 on service learning and Hall 2010 on community engagement). They have often been influenced by the South Africa White Paper (CHE, 1997) which emphasized the role of community

service in order to redress past imbalances during the South African apartheid era of racial discrimination and segregation.

The process is expanding to other African countries, however. More recently the University of Botswana has developed a memorandum of understanding with its capital city Gaborone to work in partnership towards a 'learning city' (Ntseane 2010); and there have been efforts in Tanzania to revive the university's community service mission (Mwaikokesya 2010).

The above mentioned revival of interest has resulted globally in targeted development initiatives with the aim to integrate this third mission with the traditional core activities of teaching and research in higher education institutions. A benchmarking approach has been trialled by a number of members of the aforementioned PURE initiative in an effort to mainstream community engagement across various structures of the university (addressing, for example, human capital, business development, culture, sustainable development etc) – all of which are relevant to the link between community engagement and lifelong learning.

The premise for repositioning community engagement in this way is grounded in a recognition that universities are under growing pressure to justify their role as knowledge providers in an increasingly globalised world and to justify their research in terms of relevance to societal development needs (Inman and Schuetze 2010). These issues are particularly important for African nations where universities are a major resource for high level government and civil service posts (Sawadago 1994) and for whom 'development' requires research informed policy that is rooted in locally led studies, rather than external consultancies.

The service or community engagement mission therefore is now being viewed as a means for targeted learning initiatives, often in collaboration with other agencies and often as a source of mutual learning (Preece *et al* 2010), in other words, a contribution to lifelong learning. Whilst recognizing this latter concept has many interpretations and has been subject to considerable debate (Coffield 2000, Edwards *et al* 1998), this paper focuses on an adaptation of Mbigi's framework for African contexts. Mbigi's framework refers to the De Lors (1996) four pillars and this adaptation includes Torres' (2003) proposed fifth pillar.

Lifelong learning from African perspectives
African writers draw on African traditional heritages and cultural nuances which influence how lifelong learning in Africa is interpreted. This section briefly summarises those ideas whilst recognising that it is not possible to present one unitary concept of lifelong learning that is purely related to Africa – merely to suggest trends and tendencies that affect approaches to learning in some African contexts.

For instance, it is now widely recognized that the African oral and practice based tradition embraced an essentially holistic, and age-related approach to learning. This included apprenticeship models of learning for young adults who learned trades and

professions within and across different villages and communities. Such learning embraced a multidisciplinary concept of preparing the whole person morally, spiritually, culturally and practically. The learning process was largely practical and oral in nature. Oral learning derived from legends, proverbs, songs, poetry and riddles – all of which served to stimulate analytical thinking and prepare individuals for their contribution to the wider community and society (Preece 2009, Kasjula 2004, McWilliam and Kwamena Poh 1975). But the epistemological emphasis was 'not so much on rationality as on the deeper meaning and the power of words, particularly the names of things' (Ade-Ajayi et al 1996:4).

Whilst not all generations and communities share these views (Preece and Mosweunyane 2004) this epistemological heritage, it is suggested here, still influences how learning for life is perceived by many African societies today. In addition, it is argued by many that the individual in African societies is not encouraged to see him/herself in the individualistic way that western societies tend to encourage individual development. For many Africans the individual 'exists for society and society for the individual' (Fordjor et al 2003: 190, Fasokun et al 2005) where knowledge is a shared, seamless resource and learning is firmly rooted in the African experience of living within one's own society (Lekoko and Modise 2011). There is a much stronger emphasis on the collective, and the interdependence of all humans, including the dead and the yet to be born. Thus, life does not finish when one dies and many people still refer to their ancestors for advice and support for the living. The individual is defined in terms of his or her relationship with others and learning activities must promote the existence of the community and put its interests before the self. The development of collective self reliance means it is the duty of everyone to teach and learn and for the strong to provide for the weak, harmonizing individual interests with community interests (Ntuli 2002).

Lekoko and Modise (2011), in expanding this concept of lifelong learning, distinguish a number of features of learning in terms of dimensions, one of them being the dimension of I/We; 'We' being the term used by Africans and 'I' being the thought concept used by westerners when referring to the self. Thus the individual in this sense is not the same as the western concept of an individual as a separate entity. This issue is best explained through the Sesotho proverb 'motho ke motho ka batho' (A person is a person through other persons).

In support of this distinction Nyamjoh (2002) refers to another proverb 'a child is one person's only in the womb' which explains that traditionally the child belongs to the wider community and its identity is moulded by many. These notions of connectedness, spirituality and the collective nature of being impact on how people interact and what they do with their learning.

Lekoko and Modise offer some practical interpretations of African lifelong learning that privilege unstructured and informal learning, learning by observation and doing and which is related to local situations and 'taps from the social context in which acquisition of relevant skills never stops' (p.16) – a lifewide and non-linear approach to learning.

The four pillars that were cited in the De Lors (1996) report recognize that learning is also a lifelong responsibility and were intended as universal aspirations. Torres in 2003 suggested that a fifth dimension should be added to accommodate contemporary concerns:

> Learning to be, to know, to do and to live together is not enough. Learning to 'adapt to change' is not enough. Learning to change, to proactively direct or re-direct change for human well-being and development, remains a critical challenge and the mission of education and learning systems, especially in today's highly inequitable world (p.34).

These five principles or aspirations are subject to interpretation. Although Mbigi (2005:141) does not pick up on Torres' fifth pillar, he offers an African philosophical interpretation of the four Delors (1996) pillars. He links the pillars to indigenous value systems and traditions through an African lens. So the pillar 'learning to know' is understood as the 'capacity to reflect on one's life experiences, and use the lessons to create and manage opportunities'. Such a position can be supported by proverbs that embrace reflectivity and the wisdom of continued learning or seeking knowledge. 'Learning to do' is then linked to indigenous African apprenticeships which emphasised learning by doing through experience. 'Learning to live together' is identified as the 'heart and soul of the African philosophy of *Ubuntu*'. Through this one learns an appreciation of others and our interdependence on each other. Finally 'Learning to be' is understood within traditional African community based learning to develop character and discipline (Mbigi 2005:145): 'Education should seek to develop not only the full potential of a person but also all the multiple intelligences of a given individual'. Learning to be therefore also relates to the concept of 'ubuntu' and learning to live together.

Torres' additional notion of 'learning to change' invites us to take account of these past as well as future contexts for lifelong learning. The link between lifelong learning for all levels of education and development as a national and human aspiration, in these interpretations, is thus explained by Torres, while Mbigi invites us to examine lifelong learning through an African lens that privileges the collective over the individual, which in turn impacts on reflectivity and learning by doing.

This paper now describes the Lesotho context, followed by a selective review of literature pertaining to community service and engagement, particularly on the African continent before detailing the identified prospects and challenges for nurturing lifelong learning in Lesotho through community engagement.

The Lesotho context
Lesotho is a small mountainous country completely surrounded by South Africa with a resident population of less than two million. It is currently ranked 141 out of 169 countries on the human development index with a population life expectancy of 46 years due partly to the high HIV prevalence rate. It has a fragile and unequal economic relationship with its neighbour. During apartheid years Lesotho was a political haven for

South African dissidents and a source of labour in the mines for Lesotho men. In recent years, many Basotho (Lesotho citizens) have been retrenched from the mines. Furthermore, declining revenues from the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) mean that Lesotho's economic position is worsening. Internal industrial exports derive from a textiles industry largely run by Chinese immigrants, small diamond mine deposits and water which is sold to South Africa, but more than 60% of labour in Lesotho is subsistence farming. The majority of families still live together intergenerationally, practicing traditional, labour intensive, communal farming methods (*matsema*). An additional feature of recent times is that many elderly people care for their grandchildren because parents have died prematurely. In some cases children live alone as orphan headed households.

Physical infrastructure outside of the capital city, Maseru, is limited, compared with advanced, industrialized countries. Tarred roads do not yet run completely through the mountain areas, in 2006 only 11% of all households and 3% of rural households had access to electricity - with a target to increase overall access to 35% by 2015 (Khaketla 2006) and residents in rural areas still obtain their water from rivers, wells or standpipes. While literacy rates are relatively high (around 83%), gross enrolment rates in primary and secondary school combined stands at 61.5% (UNDP 2010) and only 3 - 5% of the population attends higher education or uses the internet. There is one national university although a small, Malaysian private technology university established itself in 2009. In addition there is a teacher training college and polytechnic in Maseru and small, vocational colleges in the larger towns.

The National University of Lesotho (NUL) originates from the establishment of a catholic university college in 1945 which was replaced by a tripartite University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (UBLS) in 1964 (NUL 2007). During the 1970s the university gradually split into three separate universities. In recent years NUL has suffered from depleting financial and infrastructure resources, with student and staff unrest over pay and working conditions.

Nevertheless the university mission and strategic plan (NUL 2007), along with the national Education Sector Strategic Plan (GOL: 2005) are all aligned with a commitment to promoting lifelong learning, community service and education that is relevant to national development needs. The university mission statement (NUL 2007: 4) for instance is:

> To be a leading African university responsive to national socio-economic needs, committed to high quality teaching, lifelong learning, research and community service.

The concept of community service is a fluid concept, particularly in the light of recent discussions on universities, communities and regional engagement as the following, selective literature review shows.

Community engagement and African contexts

Community engagement is an established feature of African universities, with a long history of activity as has already been explained. Community service has been the more traditional term used for such activity.

This notion has been challenged of late. It has been argued that use of the word 'engagement' rather than 'service' opens up possibilities for a more collaborative process between universities and their communities: 'for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity' (Schuetze 2010:25).

Oyewole (2010) supports this conceptual development, emphasizing that community engagement should encourage 'focused and organized partnership … mutually beneficial activities and not philanthropy …' (powerpoint slides). Oyewole elaborates to identify nine different strategies of engagement, ranging from outreach (programmes to address community needs); to speciality activities which involve community expertise in university programmes, to student work experience placements, or community based service learning and cross cultural volunteering between universities, and finally to include community/business research, technological consultancies, or specialized university-government engagements. Furthermore it is seen as a way of contributing to the development of indigenous knowledge systems 'to acquire a better understanding of local knowledge for knowledge production that is relevant to African contexts' Oyewole (2010a: 20).

But African universities also have to contend with another challenge, emanating from their colonial past. This has resulted in a situation whereby African identities, languages and knowledge systems were displaced by western interference and efforts to construe an education system that suited the needs of the colonial masters rather than national priorities. Ongoing conditional aid from international agencies has dictated when and how higher education in African countries expand or contract, with consequent implications for the development of indigenous expertise as well as continuity of growth (Zelesa and Olukoshi 2004, Preece 2011).

Brock-Utne (2003) summarises these challenges in terms of the need to Africanize and globalize African scholarship in a way that ensures Africa contributes to the global knowledge economy whilst preserving local and national identities. This means exploiting local, national and international partnerships while retaining an equal role in those partnerships. The broader challenge is to make universities more responsive to national social and economic development needs whilst securing a competitive place in the global market and building national capacity to find African solutions to African problems.

The current trend by external agencies is to view higher education in Africa as an essential resource for reducing poverty and contributing to international development

targets, including its role in partnership with communities and civil society (World Bank 2000, 2009, UNESCO 2009).

These issues impact on strategic planning options within the higher education system itself. For instance, can higher education use the development challenge of social responsiveness as a lever to re-position the third mission of community service as a mechanism for institutional change; can its community service mission contribute to nurturing lifelong learning for development amongst its neighbouring communities? These are some of the challenges that the ITMUA project sought to address within the various social and policy contexts of the partner universities.

The ITMUA project
Against this backdrop NUL undertook to explore how its community service mission can be enhanced, taking a lifelong learning approach to some of the most deprived and marginalized communities. To this end the Association of African Universities funded a small African partnership of four universities; the Universities of Botswana, Malawi, Calabar in Nigeria and National University of Lesotho (NUL). NUL was the lead partner for the eighteen month action research project .

The project design was a four stage action research process that sought to identify answers to, amongst other questions:
- How is the university's third mission being developed and implemented?
- To what extent and in what ways can universities enhance and integrate their existing activities (research and teaching linked to community service) to accommodate Millennium Development Goal (MDG) priorities in their regions?

The project specifically sought out views from the wider stakeholder community as to the desired role that universities should play in their regions. Each university positioned its activities within existing national policies and university strategic plans as a basis for attracting institutional support and wider stakeholder interest.

Each partner undertook an internal audit of existing community service activities to answer the first question and conducted focus group discussions with external stakeholders to answer the second question. Aspects of the PURE benchmarking tool were used to assess the extent to which community engagement was mainstreamed across the university, but the tool was not used for analyzing lifelong learning.

NUL's internal audit identified a number of activities that qualified as 'community service/' or 'community engagement'. But generally they were either department led research projects or individual initiatives that rarely required involvement from the wider university (NUL 2010).

The stakeholder consultation included government employees, government ministries, civil society, postgraduates and senior academics. There was a general consensus that, whilst there was evidence of community service activity by the university, it was

piecemeal and poorly marketed with only isolated links to research and teaching. In particular projects were rarely evaluated (Preece 2011).

The third phase entailed the evaluation of two community service projects as 'case studies' in order to explore the challenges and prospects of such engagement for addressing their respective lifelong learning and development needs. A small sub committee of academic staff identified two projects that would attract multi-disciplinary involvement by university departments. One of these was an established community project founded by an individual staff member (Dr Mathabo Tsepa) in one of the remote mountain areas, Qacha's Nek. The second was a follow-up idea to earlier research conducted within the institution in relation to Lesotho's pensioners (Croome and Mapetla 2007, Setoi, Mohasi and Lephoto 2011). A needs analysis was conducted with both groups in turn (Mohoma Temeng during January 2010 and Roma pensioners during July 2010) and educational activities were organized according to their identified needs.

The main evaluation methods involved observations of the community service activities, with follow-up interviews and focus group discussions with community participants and providers.

The final stage entailed feedback of the findings to the external stakeholders, policy briefing papers and follow up action plans for further engagement. This paper reports primarily on the learning outcomes of the case studies with a view to analyzing the lifelong learning prospects and challenges for such engagement. The case studies are introduced first and the findings presented collectively.

The case studies
Both case studies focused on the MDG priorities of poverty reduction, reduction of HIV infections and premature deaths and improvement in environmental sustainability.

Mohoma Temeng community project
Mohoma Temeng (translated as 'educating to feed ourselves') is a small organization of women volunteers who cater for orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) and people living with HIV and AIDS in approximately 7 villages in the Qacha's Nek district. The members look after livestock, undertake income generating activities and support small building activities with a view to becoming self sustainable so that they can feed, support and educate vulnerable members of their community about healthy living, the issues surrounding HIV infection, and more effective psychosocial care techniques for those in need. Most participants have received basic education and one or two members are primary school teachers. All speak the national language of Sesotho and a few are also able to communicate in English (the second official national language). During the consultative, needs analysis visit by NUL academic staff a priority training list was identified. This included training in business skills; education in HIV/AIDS awareness and support; plus technological support for building ventilated pit latrines.

A series of three day workshops was organized to accommodate these needs, involving university staff from departments of Health Sciences, Environmental Sciences, Business

Management and Development and Non-formal and Continuing Education. Additional support came from the local hospital in relation to HIV/AIDS matters. A total of 42 community participants attended the workshops. Interactive training workshops introduced basic strategies for marketing, recording income and expenditure, how to package products for sale and how to use profits for business expansion. The health team provided basic information on HIV/AIDS symptoms and ways in which care givers could support HIV/AIDS victims with nutrition, medication and advice on the advantages of knowing one's status in order to preserve life, and reduce stigma associated with the disease.

For the pit latrine building stage, students from NUL and a Canadian University (University of British Columbia) provided practical assistance. An NUL lecturer from the Department of Environmental Health provided basic on-site instruction on the technicalities of building the latrines in Qacha's Nek. This included knowledge of the type of soil, water sources, and where to lay bricks to avoid water contamination from brick erosion. The ensuing six week building activity was supervised by Dr Tsepa from the Science Education Department, with additional support from the local government departments of rural water supply and sanitation.

Following the activities, a total of 8 interviews (with the project coordinator, hospital health visitor, the district chief and community councilor plus four NUL workshop facilitators) and 2 focus groups (16 community members) were conducted in September 2010.

Roma pensioner project
Lesotho is unique amongst low income countries for having an established network of post offices throughout the country. This is because for many years Basotho men between 18 and 40 have migrated to South Africa to work in the Transvaal mines. The post office and the electric telegraph became the means of transmitting some of the miner's earnings back to his wife and family in Lesotho where they managed the land and the family's livestock. Lesotho is also unusual in that it is one of only three such countries to provide a non-contributory pension scheme to its citizens. Since 2004 every Mosotho age 70 or over has been entitled to a small stipend of M300 per month (approximately USD $38). On the first two working days of each month, pensioners come to the post office to collect their pension. They arrive early in the morning from around 8.30 am and wait in small groups, usually sitting on the ground, till the security van arrives, and their names are called out for them to form a collection queue – usually after 10.30 am. Previous studies reveal that the pensioners use this stipend for a variety of purposes, depending on their family circumstances. Usually the funds are used to supplement the family income, buy food or small items for the family. About 20% was used to support the education of children in the household (Croome and Mapetla 2007).

It is never used for savings, or to enhance adult learning. A very recent study of 10 very old pensioners, with an average age of 85, suggests that six were living in households containing OVCs (Setoi, Mohasi and Lephoto 2011). The surveys of the impact of the pension had shown that, while the support it provided was extremely welcome, the

pensioners still had needs. Furthermore, the pensioners receive little or no advice on how best to manage the pension funds, even less, how to make the funds grow.

Just 500 metres from the university in Roma, there is one such post office which services up to 400 pensioners in 47 villages that are embedded in the surrounding valleys and mountain sides. The post office is near to a government hospital and opposite a police station. Two banks are situated by the university gates. The ITMUA core team undertook a random needs analysis survey of pensioners during their waiting time outside the post office in July to ascertain if they would be interested in some educational input on subsequent pension collection days. The survey revealed that they would be interested in information relating to agriculture, savings, income generation, health and social support. The team then planned a timetable of pension day activities for the rest of the year. These included a crime prevention talk from the police, an introduction to savings options from one of the banks, an introduction to income generating ideas from the university department of non-formal education, monthly health checks and a nutrition talk from the Faculty of Health Sciences, with a demonstration on how to build a water-saving 'keyhole garden' designed to cater for the restricted mobility needs of the elderly. In addition eight counseling students from the Department of Theology mingled with pensioners for informal counseling support.

During December 2010, individual interviews were held with 4 academics, 2 members of the public (community councillor and the police inspector) and nine pensioners. Six counselling students also participated in a focus group discussion. Two follow up focus groups with 15 pensioners were made in February 2011. The questions broadly covered the same format – what did people learn, what were the benefits and challenges of the pilot project; and what could be improved from the perspectives of community participants and university staff.

Findings - prospects
The findings relate to learning gained by both community participants and the providers. The time bound nature of the research project meant there was limited time space between providing educational inputs and obtaining outcome interviews. Nevertheless the findings provided insights and indications as to challenges and prospects for lifelong learning in the university as well as in the community as a result of this type of engagement.

Since learning is holistic and relational it was difficult to compartmentalize it into the five pillars. The findings are therefore presented according to the stakeholder categories followed by a reflection on how they relate to the adapted Mbigi framework.

Student learning
The student counseling volunteers emphasized how the project had ensured the university departments worked together as a collective which created a new atmosphere of interdependence:

[there is a] Spirit of oneness within the university departments, that is no one department is seen as better than the others [there is]... division of labour [so that] no department will do everything.

They also highlighted the value of respecting each individual:
We learned that whether one is old or young, s/he is a person; s/he needs special attention.

Academic staff learning
Academic staff also highlighted the value of working together as a strategy for maximizing resources as well as learning from each other, both within the university and from the community itself:

The approach when educating adults is different from when approaching younger people. I learnt from Mr M that there are different strategies to use like singing and providing breaks. Educating people who already have information is good (Mosotho staff member).

[by working together] The university can maximize effective use of its fixed capital... explore a much broader range of issues to respond to [and]... be able to put combined pressure on people who control resources (Ex-pat staff member).

We learnt about the challenges facing those people especially in prevention and taking treatment. This was about family dynamics, about use of condoms where women would be willing to use them while men are unwilling to use them (Mosotho staff member).

I brought engineering knowledge, to train the community concerning the importance and dangers of VIP toilets … I went with expert knowledge but learnt about culture from those people who were engaged including participation as a team, women carrying water with their heads. … I gained a good insight into participatory development when seeing things in action (Ex-pat staff member).

I have learned that working with the old is a real challenge because of their level of education which impacts on the language used and this coupled with their impaired eye sight and hearing senses ... so the question is how the old can be educated to internalize what has been taught, for that matter reading is not their culture (Mosotho staff member).

Pensioner learning
From the pensioners' perspectives they acquired new knowledge that had potential for immediate application for their health and general well-being. The prospect of using their pension both individually and collectively for labour saving projects as well as to save and generate further income was an attractive option, demonstrating reflection on life experiences and use of such learning to manage new opportunities (Mbigi 2005):

We were advised to regularly check on our blood pressure and blood sugar as these diseases may be harmful to our lives. We even had an opportunity of testing blood pressure and blood sugar (pensioners 6 and 7).

We were taught about key hole gardens ... key hole gardens were explained to be user friendly in that even when there is drought, we can use water that we used for washing dishes and bathing our bodies for watering our gardens. It was also said to be user friendly in that we the old can work in the garden seated in our chairs as we cannot afford to stand for a long time (pensioner 1).

I have benefited in that I have gained knowledge on how we can start our small scale businesses. We were advised to work cooperatively in order to be successful. We were told that it becomes easier for us to get assistance from outside when we work together. We can rear pigs and chicken collectively (pensioner 8).

The lecturer even advised us to sell fat cakes and ginger during pension collection days rather than buying them from people who are not pensioners. He said the money that we get should revolve amongst us as pensioners (pensioner 6).

Apart from starting these small businesses, we were advised to at least save M20 to M50 with the nearest bank ... in the past children would take care of their parents but now the situation has changed as our children die because of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and leave behind orphans that we the old have to look after. .. if we have saved we can easily maintain these children without depending much on the pension we receive every month (pensioner 7).

With regard to key hole gardens, we can produce vegetables all year round and eat without necessarily going to the shops and buying vegetables. ... Therefore with vegetables that we have grown from the key hole gardens we are able to have a better diet (pensioner 1).

By the second interview date, this knowledge was being put to good use:

Now we have built key hole gardens, we rear pigs, chicken, we also have started selling small items such as candles, sweets, matches etc. We now have increased our monthly income and we are able to take bigger responsibilities in our families (focus group).

An example of the transformative nature of their learning was cited by one of the counseling students:

For example there was one woman who had a problem with her daughter; she mentioned that her daughter insulted her all the time. We talked with the old

woman about different approaches to this problem. She reported that, since we talked to her, her daughter has changed her behaviour.

Mohoma Temeng learning

Similar understandings were acquired by the Mohoma Temeng community members:

We learnt that anything can make business like used plastic bags (mats, bags), papers or boxes (flower pots) and grass (brooms, hats) (focus group discussion).

We have gained knowledge that we should not give credit to people when selling … we were taught to maintain hygiene by wrapping the items that we sell, so that we cover and protect them from dust by using a plain, see through plastic … we were taught about the market, the customer's needs (focus group discussion).

We are self sufficient and do more things than before – we have been strengthened on self help activities (focus group 1).

At first in business, we could not sell because we were unlicensed, but now we sell vegetables, we now record the money that we have used and determine if we have made profit etc. (focus group 2).

This value of sharing this learning was evident through a number of comments:

I built the church toilet and I have learnt a lot, I encouraged Pheellong Community to work for themselves and dig the toilet holes (village chief).

Working together has benefited the youth, some know how to test others, some work for the clinics and they provide advice and counseling (Mohoma Temeng volunteer).

People disclosed their HIV status, more got tested and some were counseled (focus group).

Learning by other providers

One of the community providers who contributed to the case study activities realized the potential of a collective approach to teaching and learning:

I have learned that police cannot combat crime in isolation. We should unite with other institutions like the university. Now we have had the opportunity of talking to the people from various villages at the same time we are happy that those who received the message will spread the message to others … In these villages members have formed crime prevention committees and as a result not many

crime occurrences are reported because they prevent it before it occurs (senior inspector).

In spite of the above outcomes the stakeholders revealed a number of unresolved issues that mostly related to the short term nature of the case studies.

Findings – challenges
Student observations
The students came to realize there were limitations in relation to how they could help and what they could know about:

> *They said these children steal their money, some of them misuse food that they have bought after getting their pensions … We feel it would be much better if we had been able to go to the villages and talk to family members to get information from both sides and then come up with solutions.*

But also in relation to the erosion of traditional values towards the elderly:

> *We have learned that at the community level the old are not considered as people who have ideas that could be used for problem solving in the villages. There is no mutual care for the old in the community. Hence they were very happy to talk with us.*

These limitations impacted on the extent to which they could provide practical help:

> *We thought we would get more time so as to reach every pensioner … to go to the pensioners' homes for provision of family therapy as the problems they encounter occur at their homes*;

And the extent to which the university as a whole was providing opportunities for ongoing learning:

> *The university should pay visits to the villages as a follow up on education given to the pensioners .. by monitoring and evaluating whether the education brought benefits … by helping the pensioners to build support groups .*

> *The NGOs should become involved and approached to become university partners, to give education and improve the quality of what has been done so far.*

Community member comments
This concern applied equally to the community members. For instance Mohoma Temeng members said:

> *The university should link Mohoma Temeng with tourism, the university should invite more organizations to get involved and do more follow ups to ensure there is no relapse in what we have been taught* (focus group 2).

Another issue was the extent to which the university's involvement was nurturing self-reliance or dependency:

> *We expect to receive more assistance and support for our projects like seeds, materials, orphanage building and incentives for motivation, especially for volunteering, maybe, from the university* (focus group 1)

Some pensioners echoed the same concerns:

> *The university should assist us with funds in order to engage in income generating activities* (Pensioner 1).

> *We never thought of implementing any of the advices given ... we have only come to realize its importance now that you have come to us as a follow up ... The university should ... have follow ups on what they have taught by going to our villages and assist us on implementing what has been taught* (pensioner 7).

There was one pensioner who highlighted a different issue:

> *Among us there were people who possessed skills in handicraft, the university should assist us in sharing those skills* (pensioner 1).

Staff member observations
A key challenge of learning to live together, in terms of Mbigi's reference to appreciatin of others and our interdependence, is to recognise that no-one has a monopoly over information, knowledge or understanding. Staff members highlighted ways in which this could be addresssed:

> *Regional organisations should be allowing the university to use ideas from other universities, that is, Lesotho should know what other universities are doing with regard to community service.*

> *The university should be aware that it cannot deal with community issues without the involvement of the community itself. It has to work in collaboration with the community.*

Discussion
The primarily non-formal, oral and practical nature of this learning sat well with the African tradition for lifelong learning as outlined by Lekoko and Modise (2011) and others. These were small scale case studies conducted over a limited time period. Although there were demonstrable, concrete outcomes the emphasis of the findings has to be on 'prospects' for lifelong learning.

Prospects

The findings demonstrate the potential for community engagement to promote learning to change, to live together, to be, and to do as well as to know, building on an African perspective of communality and interdependence whilst also generating skills for self reliance and ability to contribute to change. Perhaps the most significant aspect of learning, highlighted by the participants was the notion of 'living together' in relation to appreciation of others and recognition of our interdependence. There was a strong recognition of the need for connecting, networking, harmony and collaboration in order to nurture a sense of interdependence. Whilst this is not solely an African position it does reflect Mbigi's (2005: 145) concern with '*ubuntu*' as the 'heart and soul' of African living. Similarly 'learrning to be' as the development of the multiple intelligences of a given individual is evident in the multi-disciplinary experience of learning new skills, ways of interacting and understanding how to maximize minimal resources.

NUL demonstrated that community engagement is a way of enabling universities to see that their institution shares an indigenous vision for development and that students learn to value the cultural relevance of their university knowledge for lifelong learning. In this respect the case studies demonstrated the lifelong learning prospects for Lesotho through university engagement.

As Mbigi (2005) pointed out, living together in African contexts places considerable emphasis on understanding our interrelationships and interdependence. The students and university demonstrated a particular perspective on how this applied to the university environment.

The participants also reflected Mbigi's concept of learning to do in relation to 'doing through experience' by indicating that knowledge alone, without the ability to apply it for practical use, has limited lifelong learning value. The pensioners demonstrated that they had acquired practical knowledge that they could utilize immediately to improve the quality of their lives. This practical aspect was also beneficial for the Mohoma Temeng participants who expressed their appreciation of the benefits of their learning.

Even amongst the university staff the prospect of 'learning to do' by observation was evident; for example one lecturer identified how she had learnt from the non-formal and continuing education department that teaching adults required a different approach from teaching young people, particularly since there was opportunity to build on existing experiences.

There were also tangible gains identified by the wider community. On the one hand involvement in this project was seen by agencies as a more efficient way of reaching many people in order to disseminate messages about their particular concerns. On the other hand learning to live together could also be interpreted as learning to communicate and interact for more effective working practices. It was an opportunity for realizing that we all learn from each other.

Learning to be in African contexts includes learning to be a fully rounded person but it also means learning that one's identity is linked to other people and that therefore it is

important to recognize the worth of every individual. The students who worked with the pensioners seemed to have a gained a deeper understanding of both the value of an older person and the need for all people to have a voice in society.

Similarly, the adults of Mohoma Temeng had a greater sense of purpose as a result of what they had learned. Making connections was a critical issue for all concerned. On the one hand this meant listening to each other, on the other hand it meant cooperating with each other.

Torres' identification of a fifth pillar – learning to change - related to a recognition that development requires pro-active involvement at all levels of society and that we are also, in part at least, responsible for our own destiny. Knowledge requires action but action also requires a direction. Evidence of this kind of learning manifested itself in terms of renewed confidence; ability to apply new understanding and new skills to change behaviour; and also a recognition that change is multidimensional. This was evident for those who worked with the pensioners and was also recognized by some of the pensioners themselves.

There were limitations, however, in the extent to which these lifelong learning pillars had been achieved during these short community interventions. Sustainability of education that is designed for lifelong learning became a critical area of concern for community members and others who took part in the projects.

Challenges
The findings highlighted several challenges if this potential is to be fully realized through community engagement. The reported evidence showed that new learning in the form of knowledge did take place but the contribution of that knowledge to learning application (to do) and development of character and discipline (to be) would need more sustained participation and coordination of a range of actors over an extended period of time. Furthermore, learning to change required mutual listening and awareness creation. Learning to change necessitates a willingness to learn in different ways and from different people. The university has a role to play, not necessarily as the source of learning, but as a facilitator for lifelong learning.

The practical limitations of the university's ability to help related to how far community members were learning to do things independently from those who were providing educational input. For instance, concerns by Mohoma Temeng members showed that learning to do, in terms of learning to be collectively self-reliant, requires long term involvement and greater understanding of roles between all participants.

At times the lack of awareness amongst participants as to the university's role in developing self-reliance was reversed. For instance, one pensioner pointed out that pensioners already had skills that simply needed nurturing.

Arguably, all the above concerns are interlinked and the ultimate goals of lifelong learning hinge upon a deeper understanding of our interconnectedness and our willingness to use what we have learned for positive development purposes.

Finally learning that is not used for the purposes of betterment or change has no lifelong value. It was evident that if the university is to engage with its communities in order to nurture lifelong learning, then this is a responsibility that requires ongoing involvement with regular monitoring. One pensioner, for instance, speaking on behalf of others, emphasized that they had yet to learn how to recognize the value of learning to change.

The PURE benchmarking tools were adapted in this project to refocus engagement for development, particularly in relation to the MDGs. Their applicability for lifelong learning within this framework is relevant in relation to the concept of the university acting as a collective whole and the centrality of the community as a motivational force for learning relevance. The Benchmarking strategy to embed community engagement within the university, in this respect, reflects the need to embed lifelong learning as an integral approach to university activity.

Concluding remarks

What are the implications of these findings for the National University of Lesotho and possibly other African universities? One recommendation would be to re-structure university departments and faculties so that the university curriculum development process becomes more interdisciplinary. The University of Botswana, for instance has recently embarked on such an initiative (UB 2010). A second, and related, recommendation would be to ensure that student courses included 'service learning' elements requiring coordinated involvement that is assessed and regulated within the university itself, as evidence in South Africa (Bringle and Hatcher 2007). Thirdly a participatory inquiry approach is required. Communities must be invited to identify their learning needs to ensure that the community service provided is relevant and useful. The interview comments in this study demonstrated that this is a key element for cooperation and mutual learning.

Finally, for African universities to demonstrate their potential as a resource for contributing to international development targets it is necessary to convince funders (government and international) of the role of community engagement in this process. One of the ITMUA projects' overall policy recommendations in this regard was to encourage 'ring-fenced' funding criteria whereby universities would have to demonstrate, through strategic plans, how they would facilitate the application of African solutions to address some of the above recommendations and concerns.

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