

**PROMOTING NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN SWAZILAND: ANY
ROLE FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF SWAZILAND?**

**Paper to be presented at the UNESCO Forum on Higher Education
Research and Knowledge, to be held in Accra, Ghana, from 22-24
March, 2007.**

By

**Dr. Walter Samukelo C. Sukati
Institute of Distance Education
University of Swaziland
P/B Kwaluseni
Swaziland.**

Tel.: (268) 518 7083

Fax: (268) 518 7083

Email: sukati@uniswacc.uniswa.sz

Theme: Non-Formal Education

Date: 6 February, 2007.

PROMOTING NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN SWAZILAND: ANY ROLE FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF SWAZILAND?

Introduction

This paper is concerned with the degree of interaction and the nature of the interaction between the University of Swaziland with the surrounding Swazi community and environment. It looks at the role that UNISWA staff members play in promoting and supporting non-formal education in the country as their community service. It delves on whether this linkage is effective and satisfactory, and if not, what could be done to ensure that UNISWA improves its community service and its contribution to non-formal education in the country.

Universities the World over, have repeatedly underscored and jealously guarded what they have termed their three core functions, i.e. those of teaching and learning, research, and community service (CS). They have gone further to base their criteria for the promotion of staff to senior ranks on the staff member's performance in these three core areas. In fulfilment of the teaching and learning function, students are assessed using assignments, tests and examinations, and graduation ceremonies held to award certificates, diplomas and degrees to successful students – this indicating success in teaching and learning. On the research function, peer reviewed articles and books are published, and papers presented at several academic gatherings – this indicating success in research. But, what outputs have been witnessed or identified to demonstrate success on the community service core function? It has been difficult to quantify the community service aspect output and thus it is believed that Universities have not pursued this function with as much vigour as they have pursued the other two, i.e. Teaching and Learning, and Research.

In fact, according to Fourie (2003, p. 31) whereas stronger emphasis on one or more of these functions has characterized the development of the university at different times, individual institutions have seldom succeeded in maintaining an acceptable balance between the three functions, with either research or teaching usually superseding the service function. Concern has therefore been expressed as to why the Universities have failed to pursue this function, despite their staff's expertise and enormous potential for promoting non-formal education (NFE) (as it is in their core business) through their community service function.

This study plans to fill this gap by addressing the following questions:

1. Have the University of Swaziland staff played any role in non-formal education in the country?
2. If so, what role have the staff members played, and has the linkage been well organized, effective and satisfactory?

3. And if not, why have the staff members not been actively involved in non-formal education, and how can they be prompted and encouraged to improve community service delivery?

Importance of Non-Formal Education and the role of Universities in Community Service

Within the current social, economic, cultural and political context, Universities and their academic staff have been under increasing pressure to demonstrate their usefulness or relevance to the needs and development of their societies. The concomitant increase in public expenditure on this sector, together with the changed social and economic conditions which necessitated expansion in the first place, have had the effect of making higher education a more obvious object of political scrutiny, both in terms of its use of public funds and its more general purpose in a contemporary context (Bond & Paterson, 2005, p. 332). The Universities are expected to demonstrate this relevance through their teaching and learning, research and community service.

As the core business and expertise of universities is creation and passing on knowledge, they therefore have an enormous advantage and potential for promoting non-formal education through their community service function. Non-formal education is defined here as referring to organized learning outside the formal education framework, which does not usually lead to national qualifications. This would include almost all educational programmes offered to adults, out of school children and adolescent drop-outs, and could perhaps cover leisure courses, vocational training and literacy classes. However, it appears that the community service function of the universities has suffered as the institutions have failed to come down from their ivory towers to work with their communities in offering and promoting non-formal education. Perhaps the call for putting particular emphasis on meeting identified community needs as a primary component of community service, particularly in developing countries, made by several authors, like Fourie (op. cit.) has not been adhered to.

Non-formal education is very important for sub-Saharan countries like Swaziland that have very high illiteracy rates, high poverty rates, high levels of unemployment, practical skills shortages, high HIV/AIDS prevalence rates, etc. The importance of NFE in solving development problems was identified a long time ago by Sheffield and Diejomaoh, who came out in 1972 with a book titled “Non-Formal Education in African Development”. This book detailed several case studies from numerous African countries which showed how non-formal education had contributed to the development of those countries. Writing on the context in Africa, they indicated:

“In Africa, as in other parts of the world, most people have traditionally acquired their skills, knowledge and attitudes from institutions other than formal schools. Even where formal school systems have been established, a relatively recent phenomenon, it is still difficult to separate the impact of schooling from that of one’s family, community, cultural and social institutions, and training on-the-job. But it has become increasingly apparent in all countries that learning acquired in a life-long process is of far greater importance than the more specific knowledge transmitted in schools” (Sheffield & Diejomaoh, 1972, p. IX).

Hence, non-formal education would give the nationals the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes that they can use to develop themselves and improve their quality of life. In offering non-formal education therefore, universities would be aiding their communities to develop and reduce poverty, and in this regard they could prove their relevance and usefulness to their society. Non-formal programmes are supposed to serve several needs: as an alternative for those who lack the opportunity to acquire formal schooling; as an extension of formal schooling for those who need further training to get them into productive employment; and as a means of upgrading the skills for those already employed (Sheffield and Diejomaoh, 1972, p. XI).

The core business of universities on the other hand has, since earliest times, been regarded to be that of teaching and learning, research and community service (Hill, 2000; Fourie, 2003). Hill has even gone further to argue that Universities must ensure excellence in teaching, learning, research and community service, and that this excellence may only be achieved through the creation of an enabling environment for both students and academics. The importance of community service in universities arises from a number of vintage points (cf. Bond & Paterson, 2005):

1. The increase in public expenditure on higher education have had the effect of making higher education an object of political scrutiny, and thus the importance of seeing the university as a useful institution to the community.
2. The increase in the notion that a detached, privatised academic mindset (ivory tower) was no longer sustainable, and that universities had to become more responsive to their communities and the social and economic needs of the wider society.

A lot has therefore been said, in a normative sense, about the needs and possible ways that universities and their academic staff should be engaging with their communities, and utilizing their expertise for the good of their societies. One such study, done by Bond and Paterson (2005) focusing on Scotland and the United Kingdom, with the title : “Coming down from the ivory tower: Academics’ civic and economic engagement with the community”, found that many of their respondents demonstrated their engagement with their communities (be they local, regional and national) and that they also did so through a wide variety of civic activity which they undertook over and above their more routine teaching and research roles. They further found that this activity often attracted little or no financial incentive, and infact was frequently undertaken despite a number of professional and personal disincentives. How about in Africa, are there any engagements between the academics and the communities that the institutions are located in, or are the institutions still the so called Ivory Towers? Bond and Paterson point out that there is a comparative dearth of empirical evidence relating to this issue, and thus this study shall assist and make a contribution by investigating the role of the University of Swaziland in promoting non-formal education as part of its community service, and hence find out if there is engagement between UNISWA and the Swazi community the university is supposed to serve.

Current UNISWA Policies on Community Service

The Mission statement of the University of Swaziland underscores the universal three core functions of a university. It reads:

The University of Swaziland reaffirms its faith in the principles of academic freedom and autonomy and endeavours to provide a congenial learning environment, accessible to the people of Swaziland and beyond. Such an environment shall facilitate excellence in teaching and learning, research, community service, and provide opportunity for consultancy, professional leadership and enterprise development, with a view to nurturing men and women who are well equipped for service to the changing and dynamic society through the job market and self employment (University of Swaziland, 2002, 2).

To promote these core values and core functions the university has certain policies and programmes that it has put in place. For the community service core function that is the subject of this paper, the university has the following in place:

1. A Centre for Community Services (CCS) to address the identified need for excellence in the provision of community services. The university notes that it has a pool of ‘knowledge, expertise and resources’ that should be transformed into services for the development of people in their communities (University of Swaziland, 2006, p. 30). The key functions of the CCS are: to promote the development of academic based community programmes; support volunteerism and extra-curricular community involvement by students and staff; promote

corporate partnership with communities and service sectors; promote community service-oriented research aimed at solving national development problems; formulate and implement community service guidelines and policy; document and disseminate information arising from teaching and research for the benefit of the University's community service clientele; collaborate with relevant organs of the University to integrate teaching, research and community service (UNISWA, 2006, p. 30; Centre for Community Services, undated, p. 4).

2. A promotion criteria for academic staff that provides that promotion is determined by scholarship, teaching experience and effectiveness, administrative/University duties, and community (local, regional, national and international) contributions (UNISWA Guidelines for the promotion of Academic Staff, undated, p. 1). On community service the Guidelines (p. 2) read:

“An important mission of the university is to provide a public service. In promoting academic staff therefore, it is appropriate that due recognition should be given to the actual high quality contribution of the staff member to the community (local and international)”.

Despite this statement, the guidelines continue to indicate how many points a staff member should get to be promoted. To be promoted from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer one needs 20 points, 15 of which must be scholarship (research) and teaching. Further, promotion from Senior Lecturer to Associate Professor requires a minimum of 20 points, 15 of which should be in scholarship and teaching. Looking at the point system used by the University, it appears that there is no ceiling to the number of points one can accumulate under scholarship. Under Teaching the maximum that one can accumulate is 17. However, under community service, the maximum number of points that can be accumulated is only 8, perhaps indicating the university's downgrading of community service.

Methodology

The target population for the study constituted all the academic staff in all the three campuses of the University of Swaziland. However, because of time and other resources needed to cover all the four hundred staff members, the researcher decided to pick a representative sample. A stratified random sampling design was employed to ensure that there were academic staff members from each of the 3 campuses. In each campus, the staff members included in the sample were randomly selected from all the staff members in that campus.

Data was largely collected through a survey method. A questionnaire was designed and prepared by the researcher, and was pre-tested on some members of staff at the university. These staff members were not the ones who had been selected to be in the sample. Following the pre-testing, the questionnaire was revised accordingly before it was posted to all the staff members who were included in the sample. A total of 60 staff

members were in the sample and were sent the questionnaire. The number of completed questionnaires that were returned was 24, indicating a 40% return rate. The questionnaire covered several points like: the staff member's involvement in community service and in non-formal education, the reasons for no involvement or involvement, encouragement of staff to participate in community service, adequacy of compensation by promotion criteria for involvement, and how staff members' involvement could be encouraged and promoted.

The survey data was coded, verified and cleaned up and then entered in the computer and analysed using the SPSS programme.

Research Results

Following the analysis of the questionnaires, the findings on the descriptive statistics sought were:

1. On the question of whether the staff members have been involved in non-formal education or not, it was found that 67% of the respondents had been involved and 33% had not been involved. Interestingly and intriguingly though, all the male respondents said that they had been involved with non-formal education while all the female respondents, except 1, indicated that they were not involved. Why this huge gender difference? Is it related to the benefits to be acquired from this activity, or related to the culture of the society (e.g. in that females cannot stand in front of adults and thus are not asked to teach) or what?
2. When asked on the role that the respondents played in non-formal education, it was noted that there were several roles played by the respondents. Almost all the staff members indicated that they were involved as teachers, facilitators, or they were resource persons in these gatherings. Some of the respondents mentioned that they were organisers of these events as well, and one mentioned that he was an evaluator of the education programme.
3. When asked how long that the staff member had played that role in NFE, it was noted that this activity occurred occasionally when it was necessary or when the individual staff member was requested. As such therefore, it was not a continuous activity, although some respondents had been doing it since 1979.
4. It was found that a number of the respondents had taught in non-formal education classes. Fifty six percent of the staff indicated that they had taught, and 44% had not taught any NFE classes. Again the gender influence comes in here, all those that had taught were the males, and all those that had not taught were the females.
5. One of the questions asked the respondents if UNISWA encouraged its staff to actively participate in community services. Fifty six percent of the respondents

agreed that UNISWA does encourage staff and 44% indicated that the university does not encourage staff to participate in community service.

Those who said that the university does encourage staff indicated that this was the case because community service is part of the staffs performance appraisal, it is also part of UNISWA Mission, and is also included in the promotion criteria. The respondents who said no, indicated that they were saying so because: no one took the initiative to invite staff to engage in community service activities; there was insufficient time for staff to engage in CS as most of the lecturer's time was spent on preparing for lectures, marking and teaching; there was no formal time allocated to CS, no structure in place and channels of communication on how one can get involved, and no recognition given to staff foatr

- That staff should be adequately compensated financially and also with increased points in the promotion criteria for CS work rendered.
- That Faculties and Departments should be encouraged and urged to undertake CS, and that the role of CCS had to be increased in the Faculty and Institute Boards.
- Establish a mechanism to assess and evaluate the staff members' involvement in CS, and staff members to report in writing on the CS that they conduct.
- That the various available CS projects should be publicised through workshops, brochures, posters, etc., so that the staff members would know where they could assist.
- Identify areas where UNISWA resources could be pulled together to work in teams to have maximum impact, and maybe have competitions among the campuses.

Recommendations

Despite the limitations of this study in that there were only 24 academic staff members that responded and the fact that the return rate for the questionnaire was only 40%, the results of the study however do point to certain policy issues that need to be addressed. From the results of the study the following recommendations can be made:

1. The university needs to revise its promotion criteria with a view to increasing the number of promotion points allocated to CS, so that its status is elevated to equal that of teaching and research.
2. A structure needs to be set up within the institution on how to find the CS possibilities and how to go about doing this. Perhaps the already existing Centre for Community Services could consider putting such a structure in place, and also include appropriate channels of communication within this structure.
3. As CS is an equal to the other core functions of the university, it should also be allocated some time, and staff members given some time during the week day to undertake their CS activities. When all the time is taken up by teaching and research, there will be none for CS and this activity will suffer.
4. The aspect of supporting staff members in their CS activities need to be reviewed. With the low salaries for staff members, they cannot afford to pay for the CS activities like transport, supplies, communication, etc. from their own pockets. The result will be that no CS activities will be undertaken. To encourage CS therefore, some budgetary provision needs to be made.

5. From this study, it is apparent that the varied problems related by the staff members prevent them from actively pursuing CS activities, and thus one can safely conclude that the university's interaction with the community is weak and the linkage between the two not satisfactory. There is a great need to improve this linkage and create a good rapport between UNISWA and the Swazi people.

Operational Aspects

To make the above recommendations operational, the starting point would be for the university to include CS on an equal footing as teaching and research in the strategic plan. This would make sure that a proper structure is designed and put in place to deal with CS activities, and that financial provisions are made to enable staff to undertake it. The punitive nature of undertaking CS (which was also found by Bond and Paterson in Scotland and the United Kingdom) as at present, needs to be changed. Instead of suffering, staff members should benefit from doing CS as this will increase the relevance, image and the usefulness of the university within its society and community. If the institution is actively involved in CS, it will not be seen as an Ivory Tower that is foreign in the community, but shall be seen as one of the important organizations supporting the development of the community, and hence deserving the support of the Swazi people.

References

- Bond, R. and Paterson, L. 2005. Coming down from the ivory tower: Academics' civic and economic engagement with the community. *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 31, No. 3, pp. 331-351.
- Centre For Community Services. Undated. *Information Brochure*. Kwaluseni, University of Swaziland.
- Fourie, M. 2003. Beyond the ivory tower: service learning for sustainable community development. *South African Journal for Higher Education*, Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 31-38.
- Hill, G. 2000. The Role of Traditional Universities. *Zimbabwe Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. 12, No. 3, pp. 27-37.
- Sheffield, J. R. and Diejomaoh, V. P. 1972. *Non-Formal Education in African Development*. New York, N. Y., African-American Institute.
- University of Swaziland. 2006. *University of Swaziland Calendar 2006/2007*. Kwaluseni, UNISWA.

University of Swaziland. 2002. *UNISWA'S Commitment to Self-Renewal : Strategic Plan 1999/2000 – 2004/2005*. Kwaluseni, UNISWA.

University of Swaziland. Undated. *Guidelines Related to the Promotion of Academic Staff*. Kwaluseni, UNISWA.