

**Report on Nonformal Education
within the context of an
evaluation of the Lesotho
Distance Teaching Center**

by

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Concept of Nonformal Education/NFE Methodology-Materials-Resources

Lesotho has only existed as a nation since 1966 and it is ranked as one of the (25 or so) least developed countries in the world. On the one hand, this means that Lesotho is still feeling its way in the various areas of development and does not yet have either a firmly established set of policies/plans or institutions within or through which to operate. On the other, this means that there is perhaps more room for experimentation and innovation less fettered than in larger, older more established societies. But at the same time, what can be thought of as a kind of systemic openness on the part of Lesotho is something into which there is massive donor input. As much as 90 per cent of Lesotho's national budget comes from funds of donor organizations. The real question is then, whose agenda is being followed--that of Lesotho? of the donor organizations? with what degree of coherence?

Both its poorness and its newness are bases for Lesotho's need/willingness to give serious attention to NFE and official documents recognize it as an important program area. It is not so easy, however, to say what NFE means and in what specific ways the government of Lesotho might be prepared, with or without donor assistance, to provide programmatic support for NFE.

In the specific case of the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre, the concept of NFE, largely due to USAID influence, is changing from an emphasis on developing and disseminating print materials to rural people to an emphasis on identifying grass roots groups which can become involved in income generation endeavors and providing them with the necessary financial and educational inputs to make both their economic undertakings and their individual and group development a success. Because LDTC is still involved in its original activity of extending formal education into rural areas through correspondence courses and some limited face-to-face interaction, it does provide an institutional context which lends itself to serving clients through either or both formal and nonformal education. To date, however, formal education activities remain separated from nonformal ones with different personnel working exclusively in each area and with no apparent vision of working across the two systems in reaching out to a particular clientele group. LDTC has just received a Literacy Award from UNESCO and with UNICEF funds is expanding its Learning Post system in rural areas. However, as yet, there has been only sporadic and case-specific collaboration between LDTC personnel engaged in Literacy-Numeracy work and those engaged in NFE Service Agency work, i.e., that section of LDTC which under the USAID Structuring NFE Project has become most fully absorbed with testing and strengthening NFE capacity in LDTC itself and for Lesotho as a whole (although this latter is more really a goal of USAID than of the LDTC).

Because of its new involvement with income generation activities, the Service Agency staff are developing methodologies based in group dynamics and development, but apart from this new dimension of interpersonal interaction, the educational materials are almost without exception, print materials, including small booklets and more recently flip charts. LDTC is equipped with a radio production studio, but this has been used to support the correspondence courses offered through LDTC and to some extent to develop short informational spots in

areas of interest (agriculture, health, nutrition). There is no well thought out plan as to how radio could be more fully utilized to support/promote systematic NFE activities.

In brief, LDTC in less than a decade of existence has proved itself a capable institution with regard to extending formal education into out-of-school settings, has an institutional infrastructure suitable for supporting and expanding NFE activities and has, to some extent, begun to move in that direction. At the same time, LDTC has not yet developed its own long range vision of NFE nor really mobilized its own resources in that direction. If indeed and through the influence of this project, LDTC does decide to make its push in NFE, its track record suggests that it will do so effectively, although not perhaps with the scale or intensity which USAID might hope.

Ownership/Auspices

Since the Structuring NFE Resources is specifically concerned with finding appropriate ways to "institutionalize" NFE, the area of ownership/auspices is particularly relevant. LDTC is formally part of the Ministry of Education, but by an Act of Parliament, has fiscal autonomy in the use of funds received from outside donors and through its own activities. In an imperfect world, this arrangement is optimal: LDTC can set its own pace with relative autonomy, something which is likely to keep it attractive to outside donors and with the right inputs make it a significantly stronger institution. Relationship with the Ministry, however, does bring some real constraints and introduces an element of fragility into predictions about LDTC's future. The bulk of LDTC's 60-person staff (excluding 6 expatriates) is either employed through the Ministry or on the way to becoming so. While this provides a certain amount of security to individuals and to the institution, this has come at the expense of LDTC's right to do its own hiring. If the Ministry does not maintain a commitment to recruiting staff who can be good NFE workers, the prospects for LDTC to become a leading NFE institution are greatly dimmed. Ironically, it is LDTC's good work which has made the Ministry more jealous about LDTC. In any case, given Lesotho's dire budgetary circumstances, LDTC's attractiveness to outside donors might continue to mean that the latter can help preserve and strengthen the institution's semi-autonomy (as has been done to some extent with the current USAID project).

At the same time, it is important that a careful analysis of LDTC's own capacity to generate income be made. The Printing and Production Section has been able to generate the equivalent of some 4-5 annual salaries, but equipment is wearing down and plans are tending towards dropping this section. However, if LDTC (and hopefully other Lesotho institutions) expand their NFE activities significantly, there would be an increased (and unmet) need for greater rather than lesser or no production from this section. Expanding LDTC's own capacity to generate income would be a step to preserving its autonomy. In addition, LDTC's printing service has to date been the point of linkage to other institutions with which greater collaboration/networking might be done in the future. A better strategy than dropping this linkage and trying to build new and qualitatively different ones through the Service Agency would seem to be to keep this linkage and use it.

At this stage in the project, there is room to question--apart from LDTC's autonomy, sponsorship, support--to whom does the concept/experiment known as the Service Agency really belong? As might be expected, each party to the project agreement--LDTC and USAID--have their separate understandings of what is/how should function a Service Agency. Hopefully, this evaluation will help push each party to clarify its own goals and make them mutually explicit.

USAID's ROLE

The project through which LDTC is currently receiving USAID funding is jointly managed from the AID side by both Washington and Lesotho offices. Relationships all around are quite positive. Apart from the specific project in which LDTC is involved, USAID is also currently funding the Institute for Extra-Rural Studies and the Lesotho Cooperative Credit Union League (LCCUL). Both LDTC and IEMS are recognized as Lesotho's primary NFE institutions and there is promise that as both projects continue, relationships between the two institutions will be strengthened. Moreover, AID is currently planning to begin a new Basic and Rural Education project and USAID expects that LDTC will be one of the local institutions to play a key role in its implementation.

USAID does not seem to have paid much attention to the desirability/possibility for closer working relationships between LDTC (and IEMS) and the LCCUL. Given LDTC's involvement in establishing a credit fund, it would seem that USAID should examine the feasibility of closer collaboration and possibly better utilization of resources between LDTC and LCCUL.

It was said above that there is some difference in the way LDTC and USAID perceive this project. The visions are not contradictory and there has not been any pressure by USAID to make LDTC alter its vision. LDTC is rooted in a specific experience (that of providing correspondence education) and USAID is interested in the issue of appropriate institutionalization of NFE activities, including building a national network of NFE organizations. LDTC is presently preoccupied with its own development as an NFE institution and, during the life of this project, will probably take only initial steps in network-building which is a main goal for USAID.

Beneficiaries

LDTC is currently in transition from correspondence to an outreach institution. This change is occurring largely because of the influx of USAID resources (which is not to say that the goal is not shared by LDTC) and therefore according to some of the conditions set by the project. Besides experimenting with institutionalization/network-building, the project also aims to combine financial assistance with NFE. As it is working out in practice, the implementation of the assistance fund has been such a major undertaking for LDTC, that Service Agency Section has become virtually absorbed in dealing with applications received from potential loan groups and assessing, providing and evaluating the training designed for each of the seven groups (recently expanded from four) which have been selected and approved for the credit-training program. In effect, WHO is benefitting from the project has been reduced to who qualifies for a loan according to the criteria which have

been worked out. While the Service Agency section is doing an admirable job with these select groups (and discovering at the same time the difficulties of grass roots development) this strategy has limited the number and kind of beneficiaries from the ones which the project had expected to reach.

As designed, the project would benefit not only specific grass roots organizations, but other NFE organizations. The assistance fund was intended to be used for making grants as well as loans, thus making it possible to reach clients who were not "creditworthy" in addition to those who were.

In the conceptualization of this project, emphasis was placed on the importance of combining training and access to (financial) resources. The case for this is strong from either side, i.e., it is important that as people learn new skills they have the means to follow through with development actions they may want to undertake. Conversely, groups which obtain some special resources for development purposes have shown repeatedly that some basic skills (bookkeeping, decisionmaking, dealing with institutions) are necessary to the success of their project and their group. However, a great deal of difficulty and failure has been encountered in the implementation of credit programs. In this particular project, there is need to take a hard look at what larger conditions and institutional supports may be needed to achieve the goal of income generation.

NFE IN LESOTHO
LESSONS FROM A CONSULTANCY

LEONEL A. VALDIVIA

I have recently returned from a short assignment in Lesotho. I was a member of the team sent to conduct the fourth annual evaluation of the USAID Project 931-1054 being implemented by the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre.

In my opinion this project is of crucial importance to the field of non-formal education because it aims at establishing a coordinating and support mechanism for the large variety of agencies providing NFE services in the country. This coordinating mechanism has been termed the "Service Agency" (S.A.) and its functions include:

- 1) Inventory and mapping of NFE
- 2) Technical support and coordination
- 3) Financial support for expansion.

These three functions respond to the needs of NFE in most countries of the world but in few countries these are performed by any one agency. The lack of such an agency generally leads to duplication of efforts, concentration of services in a few regions, and population groups while leaving others underserved.

The Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre was chosen as the right place to establish the Service Agency for NFE. The LDTC is a governmental agency but with a fair degree of autonomy within the Ministry of Education. The fact that the GOL is prepared to allow autonomy to LDTC is an indication that NFE enjoys a favorable status in the country. Although there is no evidence of a major policy commitment to NFE, in practice the LDTC and other government and private agencies are operating significant programs.

My main responsibility within the team was to assess the "Financial Support" function of the Service Agency. This task meant a fairly detailed examination of the operation of the Assistance Fund (AF) component of the project. The A.F. was conceived as a mechanism to provide financial support through loans and grants to NFE agencies and grassroots organizations to expand their field of action and engage in production activities. At present the A.F. was being used mainly to fund production projects of community organizations.

The following is a list of the main lessons drawn from the assessment.

1. NFE is widely recognized in Lesotho by agencies in most development fields such as agriculture, health, family planning and industry and commerce. This commitment is an effective basis for the work of an NFE Service Agency.
2. NFE is being used as an instrument to prepare various population groups to undertake development activities and as a supplement to formal education.
3. The inventory and mapping function of the S.A. still needs improvement. A survey was carried out and the information has been used but it needs updating and organizing in line with the forthcoming plans of the S.A. to become a more functional instrument. Both in Ecuador and in Lesotho the NFE survey has been an academic exercise rather than a practical tool for NFE action.
4. The LDTC is involved in several grassroots level NFE activities. This is important for LDTC to gain credibility vis-a-vis other agencies and for assuring its leadership role in the field. Any agency aiming at becoming a S.A. needs to gain this credibility through field work.

5. The A.F. is a powerful instrument to achieve an impact in NFE development. The use of the fund needs to be more diversified than the current use in Lesotho. The support to grassroot groups is a useful starting point which now should be diversified towards supporting other NFE agencies.
6. LDTC does not have a strong enough presence at field level to constitute itself as a full fledged NFE Service Agency. Monitoring and support of field level activities requires a stronger network and infrastructure in the districts. LDTC has been advised to consider ways of expanding its presence in the field.
7. USAID is significantly contributing to the development of NFE, perhaps more than any other international agency, by experimenting with the S.A. concept in Ecuador and Lesotho. The progress of these projects should be closely monitored and its lessons registered for future duplication of this approach in other countries.