# EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF NIGHT SCHOOL PARTICIPANTS AND THE POTENTIAL OF NIGHT SCHOOLS TO COMPLEMENT THE FORMAL EDUCATION SYSTEM IN BOTSWANA[1]

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**Abstract**

Although the Botswana government generally provides basic education at low to no cost, many learners drop out of the formal education system. Dropping out of school seriously impedes further education and adversely affects life chances, such as gainful employment. This is particularly so because many of those who drop out never re-enter the formal education system, due to the challenges they face in their personal lives. However, as this study reports, night schools in Botswana serve as vehicles for attainment of higher education, through facilitation of re-entry into the formal education system. Moreover, these schools are crucial vehicles for transmission of the knowledge and skills, which directly impact the recipients' overall lives. Influenced by international conceptualizations of non-formal education, this study targeted both current and past participants of night schools to explore the benefits, gender dynamics, challenges and prospects of attending night schools, the operational conditions of night schools, as well as their potential as a complementary approach to formal schooling.

## 1.0 Introduction

Paulston & Leroy (1982) defined non-formal education as "any organized, systematic educational activity outside the framework of the formal school system which is designed to provide selective types of learning to particular sub-groups in the population-adults as well as children. The modal differences between non formal and informal and formal education are in key areas such as instructional methods, costs, structure, linkages with occupational structure and nature of rewards. As a concept, non-formal education presents conceptual challenges, as it tends to be viewed in different ways in various contexts (World Bank, 2003; Rogers, 2004a). There is a general agreement however, that the boundaries between formal, non-formal and informal education are not clear cut. Regarding non-formal education, in some contexts the programs that come under its rubric have been found to contain aspects of what is sometimes regarded as formal and informal types of learning. This has led to increasing calls for refinement of these boundaries in order to inform a uniform perspective on non-formal education (Rogers, 2004b).

Internationally, non-formal education is part of a response to calls for equality of access and equitable distribution of resources to ensure achievement of education for all (EFA Dakar Plan for Action, World Education Forum, 2000). Moreover, the potential of education to transform its participants has been long been recognised internationally with regard to its potential to contribute to overall human development (Delors, 1996). In particular, there is acknowledgment that non-formal basic education has a critical role to

play in the realisation of social development. Furthermore, non-formal education has the potential to transform individuals' lives generally, but it specifically has important implications for achievement of millennium development goals in relation to women's education and empowerment.

This study explores the role of night schools in the Botswana education landscape, and examines the extent to which they enable their participants to improve the quality of life, including the opportunities they accord them to re-enter the formal education system and attain higher education levels.

## 2.0 The Concept and Experience of Non-formal Education

Non-formal education has been operating for many decades, as attested to by the seminal World Bank Study undertaken in the 1970s (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974). However, over the last decade and a half non-formal education has gained increased importance partly due to concerns that the Millenium Development Goals (MDG's) and the 2015 EFA targets would not be met through formal education alone. Despite its importance however, non-formal education programmes are often viewed as second best. The transformation of non-formal education from alternative to complementary has raised the profile of non-formal education as a viable form of education. Whilst some NFE programmes offer informal skills targeted towards fulfilment of specific needs, others offer various forms of formal education under non-formal conditions, in such a way that they enable an interface between formal; and non-formal education, an example of which is the night school program. In this way, some of these forms of education provision have become part of a process of mainstreaming participants into the formal education system (Rose, 2009a:223). Such a scenario relies on the provision of entry and re-entry opportunities, to enable participants to attain higher education levels and to obtain certification for these, which would open up doors that would otherwise have remained closed to them.

In Bangladesh the need to mainstream participants of non-formal programmes into the formal education system has influenced the formulation of an equivalency system, which allows graduates of non-formal programmes to enter the formal education system (De Stefano, 2006, quoted in Rose, 2009a:224). In Ghana, NFE is instrumental in providing entry into the secondary school level. However, insufficient secondary schools keep transition rates down (Akyampong, 2004 quoted in Rose, 2009a: 224). It would also appear that the inability of formal education systems to adapt to the needs of the NFE graduates also affects the transition from non-formal to formal education (Rose, 2009a; 2009b). This could be due to the age requirements as well as the rigid procedures and processes of the formal education system.

Whilst NFE traditionally began as community initiatives, in many parts of the world NFE forms part of a wider process of broadening education opportunities towards achievement of these global education goals. Given this scenario, NGOs and other Non-state actors have become a crucial part of provision of NFE programmes (Rose, 2009a; 2009b). This has generally attracted the extension of assistance to the relevant NGOs and other non-state actors, by governments and international charity organizations, offering assistance in the form of infrastructure and various kinds of other resources that they need to operate. In India, there are many NGO providers offering resources such as teaching materials and related resources, an NGO set up in 2008 to improve the quality of night schools through the Masoom Education initiative. In Botswana there are two forms of NFE programmes. One form is government-run whilst the other constitutes private initiatives. Government provides also regulatory policy for quality monitoring and accreditation of NFE programmes. Night Schools form an important part of the private response to schooling in Botswana.

**3.0 Non-formal Education through Night Schooling in Botswana**

Many governments, including the Botswana government, do not finance private education initiatives within the basic education framework. Yet, many individuals are left out or inadvertently drop out of the formal education system. Hence, alternative and complementary initiatives such as night schools fill an important educational gap, in enabling many to re-enter formal schooling and pursue higher levels of education.

The emergence of night schools is directly related to Botswana's trajectory of educational development in the colonial and post-colonial period. Educational underdevelopment during the colonial period resulted in rapid quantitative expansion of the school system in the immediate post-independence period, without the necessary attention being paid to the qualitative aspects of it. This resulted in a high incidence-normally referred to as "wastage"-of school leavers who could not be absorbed into higher levels of schooling, in the narrowing higher educational pyramid (Government of Botswana, 1976). Night schools began as a result of private efforts to augment government initiative in this regard. The first registered night school began operating in the late 1960s as a response to rapidly growing numbers of students who were leaving school prematurely, some of whom had done poorly in examinations, whilst others left due to family obligations, and others could not afford the high school fees. Amongst girls, a high number of them left due to caretaking responsibilities as well as teenage pregnancy.

Night schools originated as urban-based alternative as well as complementary forms of schooling, amidst the sharp rise in rural-urban migration, particularly to the burgeoning capital city Gaborone. Initially, access to these schools was therefore limited to those whose relatives happened to be residing or working in Gaborone. One of the night schools explored in this study, the Capital Continuation Classes (CCC) was the first night school to be opened in Botswana in 1969. Since then, it has provided opportunities to many learners of all ages, and enabled many of them to complete secondary schooling, with others going on to university, whilst others can be found in various walks of life and in private enterprise, as owners and as workers. Over time, and with the general upward trend and spread of economic development, educational need also increased, and so did private forms of educational provision. There are currently many night schools and study groups which operate in various parts of the country, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas and large villages. Over the years, these initiatives have enabled some to re-enter the formal education system to attain higher levels of education in a formal setting, whilst others have used the opportunity to re-sit examinations they had previously failed, and to be able to augment their grades. The flexibility of night schools has particularly benefited women in their care-taking role, as they are able to work and study at the same time, so that they could also attend to the needs of their families whilst schooling.

The article explores the contribution of night schools as a complementary approach to formal educational in Botswana, their operational conditions, as well as their impact on the individual lives of women and girls. This paper conceptualizes night schools as an aspect of non-formal education. While acknowledging the challenge posed by lack of clarity of consensus on what constitutes non-formal education exclusively, the study has used a working definition of non-formal education in order to inform this discussion.

## 4.0 Gender and Non-formal Education

Non-formal education has important implications for girls and women's access to schooling, as they are often either left out, or drop out due to a variety of socio-economic factors, which are linked to their maternal and caregiving roles. Hence, alternatives to formal schools such as night schools fill this important gap in education provision to this crucial segment of the society. Furthermore, the work of night schools and other non-formal education programmes addresses the Millenium Development Goal (MDG) that is concerned with promotion of gender equity and empowerment of women" (UNDP, http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/: accessed 12/05/2014).

Non-formal education is particularly appealing to women and girls, due to its relative flexibility, in contrast to the rigidity of most formal education programs. For example, studies undertaken in Latin America and Asia show that many positive benefits have accrued from women's participation in both evening and adult literacy classes (World Bank, 2003; Hoppers, 2006). In that context, it was found that community support and convenient time schedules have been necessary ingredients for the reported success of these programs. In this regard, in India, the non-formal evening programs that were "designed to bring school dropouts back into the primary education mainstream", as well as cater for "left-outs" has been particularly successful. Night schools are a popular form of non-formal education, due to their flexibility because they are held after normal working hours and during the times. In this regard, they usually operate in rural and urban areas, and are patronized more by women (Hoppers, 2006). They are complementary, supplementary and alternative to formal education. As supplementary forms of education, non-formal programmes facilitate the entry of learners into the formal education system. In view of the serious challenges that gender disparity poses to the promotion of a knowledge economy, it is necessary to nurture efforts that promote women's and girls' retention and access to higher levels of education, and specifically access to secondary education (World Bank, 2003:15). This is particularly beneficial, as it addresses a longstanding concern that gender inequality in education is still a persistent problem (World Bank, 2003:14-15).

In Peru, non-formal education activities operated in the form of night classes, which were sponsored by voluntary organizations (Hernandez, in Conway & Bourque, 1993). Hernandez further noted that due to various familial obligations, some women still did not attend these, but that a significant number of them do, despite resistance from their spouses, "because once they begin, they do not want to give up" (Hernandez, in Conway & Bourque, 1993:210). In Mexico, the CONAFE NGO initiative operates night schools, which use the same curriculum to prepare learners towards the same national qualifications (Hoppers, 2006:64-65). In Tanzania, the government initiated the COBET (Complementary Basic Education and Training) to offer non-formal education at primary school level, and for those who missed secondary education. The programme operates with community involvement and particularly focuses on girls (Hoppers, 2006:66-67).

## 5.0 Methodology
### 5.1 *Study design*

The study is based on a descriptive survey design and adopted the qualitative approach. According to Creswell, qualitative research enables the researcher to gain intimate knowledge of the research setting, and to take advantage of personal insight, feelings and human perspectives in order to understand social

life more fully (Newman, 2003:141). This methodology enabled the researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the school context from the learners' perspectives. The study also adopted the tracer approach to accessing the past participants of night schools. Tracer studies are follow-up studies to find out what has become of people after a period of time (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995). In order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the past participants' social world, the study also integrated the case study approach. According to Merriam (1998, cited in Jones et al, 2006:55), a particular case study focuses on a very specific phenomenon, which can be a situation, individual, program, or event, and as such is most useful in solving problems that emerge in daily life.

## 6.0 Target Population

The target population consisted of people who were currently enrolled in night schools, and those who had attended non-formal night schools at least three years prior to the study. The past attendants enabled the researchers to explore the outcomes of night schooling, which covered re-entry into the formal school, and participation in the work place, as well as in the wider society.

## 7.0 Research questions

1. What motivated the participants to enroll in night schools?
2. What are the personal and career challenges related to attendance of night schools?
3. What are some of the operational conditions of night schools, which may negatively affect participation?
4. To what extent do night schools facilitate re-entry into the formal education system?
5. How has night schooling impacted the quality of life of the participants?

## 8.0 The Study Sample

The population consisted of the completing classes of currently registered night schools students, and past students. The sample was selected by employing a purposive, non-probability sampling technique. This approach proceeds from the assumption that one wants to discover, understand and gain insight. Therefore, one needs to select a sample from which one can learn most (Merriam, 1998). The questionnaire was used because the postal address was the only form of correspondence that was captured in the students' record for this category of students. Altogether, 500 questionnaires were sent out to the past student list that was secured from the school, which comprised the entire population for the three years covered. A response rate of 75 was registered. This is relatively lower than would be expected with a fairly homogeneous sample (Dillman, 1978). The researchers acknowledge the fact that the low response rate poses a problem of generalizability of the study findings to the population.

A total of 182 questionnaires were administered to current students, where the study only targeted the completing classes. Furthermore, follow-up and in depth interviews were conducted with 15 current participants, while 10 such interviews were conducted with past participants of night schools who were traced through word of mouth. The data gathered from the completing classes of current participants enabled a thorough investigation of the challenges that the non-formal education students experience, and enriched the information gathered from past participants. The added advantage was that current participants could be accessed face to face, and they were relied upon to provide an assessment of currently "lived

experiences". Discussions were also held with 6 teachers of current participants in order to augment the information gathered from the students on the operational challenges of night schools.

**9.0 Study Area**

Current participants of night schools were sampled in Maun, Selibe-Pikwe, Francistown, Kang, Hukuntsi and Gaborone, whilst the Gaborone Capital Continuation Classes (CCC) was sampled for past participants, in order to minimize the challenges of tracing the past participants. This enabled the researchers to trace individuals for in-depth interviews within the city of Gaborone. One of the criteria for selecting night schools was that the school would have been running for at least five years in order to facilitate meaningful assessment of the progression of past students, whether through further education, in employment, or through other means.

**10.0    Data Collection and Analysis**

The data was collected through the use of questionnaires, and in-depth interviews. The questionnaires were self-administered in the case of the current participants, and were sent by post in the case of the past participants. For convenience, the past student sample was drawn from only one institution, the Capital Continuation Classes. For in-depth interviews, the snowballing technique was used with this category of respondents, whereby each person that was traced would be asked about the whereabouts of the others. Data from questionnaires were coded and captured using the SPSS data analysis package. Data analysis procedures used were mainly frequencies and descriptive statistics. Where feasible, data were disaggregated by sex and location and other relevant variables, to investigate if differences exist. Since the study was mainly descriptive, and the sample was a non-probability sample, statistical significant testing was not done. Rather, differences were only reported if they were of significant magnitude. Focus group discussions, qualitative interview data, field notes, and open-ended responses from questionnaires were summarized and analyzed using the thematic coding approach. Thematic coding entailed organizing the data into themes that were identified by the respondents. This information was used to enrich responses participants provided in the forced-choice questions. Current students were interviewed in the school premises while follow-up interviews of current and past students were conducted at their homes.

**11.0    Limitations**

The biggest limitation of the study is that the sample is not nationally representative, and therefore the findings cannot be nationally generalized, but are only indicative of the potential of night schools to complement formal schooling. The other limitation relates to the fact that the majority of the current students were interviewed within the school premises, and this may have affected their ability to freely express themselves in the questionnaires, although they did so anonymously. The past student sample was only drawn from the Capital Continuation Classes, and their responses to some of the items may also not be representative of all night schools in the country.

**12.0    Findings**
   **12.1    *Current Students***

### 12.2 *Background Details of Respondents*

The majority of the respondents (69.4%) were unemployed, but a notable number (30.6%) are employed. Some 62.9% hold a Junior Certificate (JC) while a significant (33.9%) percentage hold a Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC) and 3.2% fall in the "other" category. Most of the respondents (86.5%) were below the age of 30. This testifies to the popularity of this program amongst younger people. Clearly this implies firstly, that most youth that either drop out of the formal education system, or perform poorly in it are likely to be attracted to night schooling.

### 12.3 *Sex and Marital Status of Respondents*

The current student sample is much more representative of the real situation, as the questionnaire was administered to whole classes. In contrast, the past student sample could not be relied on for an accurate representation of the sex and marital status of the respondents, since the response rate was too low for this purpose. The majority of respondents were women (67.3%). Moreover, 89.6% of the respondents were single, and only 10.4% were married. These findings are significant in the sense that firstly, this program is more patronized by women. Secondly, it is much more likely that single women would enroll in the program than married women, mainly due to increased obligations of married life, which often includes children and two extended families-one's own and the husband's.

### 12.4 *Reasons for Attending Night School*

This question was intended to find out the range of reasons for enrollment in the Night School, which could be used to determine the participants' greatest needs, and aspirations regarding whether they aspired for higher education or employment. The majority of respondents (67.9%) attend night school because they failed JC and thus would like to acquire O'Levels. The respondents consider a higher education level to be crucial as it opens up opportunities for higher education. A small (2.2%) percentage of respondents attend night school following expulsion from formal schooling, although the research did not capture the reasons why they were expelled. The reasons for attending night school vary distinctly according to employment status, which tallies well with their priorities and needs. A significant percentage of employed respondents (37.5%) attend night school because they want to have a promotion, while a substantial proportion enroll in order to improve their results, and 20% enrolled because they want to get a better job mobility, either in or outside their current employment.

The majority of unemployed respondents (64.8%) enrolled in night school because they wanted to do well in school, while 24.2% wanted to have a certificate. Since the research did not probe further, the latter reason could be related to the previous one in that the need for a certificate could reflect the link between acquiring a certificate and securing a place for further education. However, need for a certificate could simply be tied to the likelihood of employment.

### 12.5 *Impact of Night Schools on the Quality of Life*

When asked about the night school has improved the quality of their lives, 41.5% of the respondents indicated that it has enabled them to "perform tasks that they were not skilled in before". The past student sample also registered a significant response rate (39.1%) with regard to the fact that they are now able to

perform tasks they could not before, which implies some link between ones attainment of higher education and one's ability to perform tasks better. Some 39% of current students feel that the qualifications that they hope to obtain through attendance of the night school will enable them to get better paying jobs. Some 12.5% believe that they will earn more money, whilst only 4.2% feel that it will not improve the quality of their lives. These perceptions are good indicators of the aspirations of night school students and in turn, reflect the close association that people perceive between academic achievement, employment and a better paying job. Thus, higher academic education is certainly highly desired by those who attend night schools.

This in turn shows the extent to which education raises people's hopes about a better life, and improved self-worth. To this end, 29.7% of respondents stated that they hoped that the quality of their life would improve as a result of acquisition of higher educational qualifications through attendance of the night school.

## 12.6 *Advantages of Attending Night School*

This question was posed to both current and past students in order to capture any differences, which may have accrued from the changed operational or other conditions of this program if any, in the last several years since the past students "completed". There were no significant differences in the disaggregated sample in the perception of men and women regarding advantages of attending night school. Generally, the advantages and disadvantages of attending night schools is mainly determined by one's individual circumstances since the students are a not a homogenous group, and comprise the employed and unemployed for instance. The current night school student population response to this item tallies well with that of past students response, at 49.6% and 66.3%, respectively for appreciation of the fact that they "can study and work" at the same time. To this effect, one student pointed out that:

> *In night schools there is less time taken. If you are breast-feeding you can have a chance to take care of your baby…*

Other advantages include appreciation of the flexibility in subject combination offered by night schools, which captured a response rate of 21.8%, and 16% see no advantage at all, while some 12.6% state that the night school offers them a second chance to acquire a qualification. An added advantage of night school attendance amongst some unemployed students for example, is that:

> *I can have much time during the day to read in libraries to collect information as compared to day schooling.*

Thus, the flexibility of night time attendance does offer some advantages, in the sense that students get time to research, although the extent to which is true would be determined by ones' individual circumstances. For example, the employed students would not necessarily have this sort of time.

## 12.7 *Skills Acquired through Night Schooling*

This is another area where there is a clear convergence between the responses of the current participants and the past participants. For both groups, the subjects of bookkeeping, home economics and agriculture are cited as skills learnt from the program that can be useful in self-employment. Some 9.5% cited "home economics", while 11.2% was registered for book-keeping, and agriculture registered a

significant response of 25.9%. A further 26.7% stated that "everything learnt in the program is essential". Since the program is essentially an academic one, it is however, important to note that the subjects of home economics and agriculture have a practical bent, as many of the concepts taught in them can be directly linked to everyday problems. This indeed reflects and would correctly tally well with the need for "vocational orientation" of the curriculum that was recommended in the last education commission (Government of Botswana, National Commission on Education (NCE), 1993: xi).

There are no significant gender disparities with regard to views of men and women regarding the recognition of the usefulness of home economics with men registering 26.7% for home economics, whilst women registered 34.9% for the same subject. There are however significant differences with regard to agriculture, in which men registered 26.7%, while women registered 15.9% for the subject. The reason for posing this question to both groups was to try to capture any differences, which may have accrued from the changed operational or other conditions of this program if any, in the last several years since the past students "completed". There were no significant differences in the disaggregated sample in the perception of men and women regarding advantages of attending night school. The importance of these subjects in the realization of the envisaged aims of the education system cannot be over-emphasized, especially that the learners themselves also recognize their practical usefulness and actual application. What is worrisome is the fact that due to tight schedules and night time contact, students of night schools, do not have a chance to do any practical work and have to rely solely on written texts and theory. This obviously negatively impacts on the teaching of the subject with regard to practical skills application.

The general problems emanating from the operational conditions of night schools and similar set-ups were noted by the Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE). In particular, the RNPE recommended that:

> *Support (be) given to private night schools offering "O" levels through improved registration procedures and regulations, and regular inspection (Government of Botswana, RNPE, Rec. 85, p37).*

Thus, night schools and similar establishments should be properly seen and acknowledged as partners in the quest for better access and improved equity in educational provision.

## 13.0    The Challenges and Opportunities of Night Schooling

Although a minority of respondents does not have any problems, a significant 34.6% cite lack of school fees, whilst 28.2% point out that night schools lack of equipment and facilities. Some 19.1% are dissatisfied with either the performance or high absenteeism of teachers, which they feel is due to teachers being tired from their full time jobs. Some 9% further report that teachers make them do most of the work on their own, as well as lack of remedial instruction (1.8%).

This not-withstanding, a few students (4.3%) do not have suggestions on how problems can be solved. However, a significant 27.4% of respondents want the teachers to be more serious about their work, whilst 22.2% would like to be given more guidance in their work, and a further 20.5% feel that the government should give loans to those who want to pursue education in non-formal ways. A smaller percentage of respondents (11%) state that their employers should allow them some time off to prepare for examinations. In view of the importance of non-formal education and its potential in enhancing worker

productivity, greater awareness needs to be created amongst employers about the need for financial and moral support to workers who enroll in these programs.

## 14.0    Past Students

Past participants were traced with a view to determining their career paths and life experiences, and to assess the overall impact that the program has had in their lives, in terms of a range of issues encompassing effect on further education, self-worth, and improvement of socio-economic welfare through either self-employment, informal or formal employment.

The ages of respondents ranged between 18 and 43, most of whom (59.3%) are currently employed, which of course attests to the flexibility of the program, and convenience of attending school after working hours. The convenience of "working as one learns" was recognized by 80.8% of respondents.

The Junior Certificate level of education was attained or attempted by a total of 48.1% of respondents, whilst 22.2% had attempted and failed or were going to re-sit the COSC/GCE to improve their results. This again attests to the flexibility of the program, and its viability as an alternative means of attaining a higher level of education. This observation should however, not mask the fact that the majority of those who pursue their (academic) studies in the non-formal mode perform a lot lower than those who are in the formal schooling context. Many factors are responsible for this situation, amongst which are the operational conditions of these programs, as well as the additional responsibilities that the participants have to shoulder.

## 15.0    Time Lapse between Formal Schooling and Registration in a Night School

This item aimed to get an idea of the time lapse between when one dropped out of the formal education system and registration in a night school. Those who registered after seven years accounted for 12.5%, between seven and 13 years after registration accounted for 29.5% of the sample, which indicates that the time lapse is a bit long. This may have a negative effect on one's mental preparedness to continue with formal school. It could also be significant with respect to the fact that the longer the delay in continuing with their education, the more likely they are to be caught up in a vicious cycle of poverty, which could be complicated by childbearing and family-related responsibilities. This underscores the crucial need for adequate provision of affordable out of school opportunities and/or more vigorous attempts to re-admit students into the formal education system.

## 16.0    Experiences of Past Participants of Night Schools

This item sought to determine the differences if any with regard to how learners in this program tended to view themselves vis a vis students in the formal education system, and generally, the nature of their experience in the non-formal school context. The majority (48.0%) of the respondents stated that they were "more serious while attending the night school", compared to attending the formal school. In essence, and from qualitative interviews held with participants it seems that they apply themselves more because they "want to make the best of the second chance they were given". They are also much more aware of the costs involved, which are either borne by themselves individually, or by their relatives.

**17.0     Re-Entry Issues**

This item sought to determine the extent of re-integration into the formal education system, which can be facilitated by night schooling. It is important to note that the re-entrants in any given year are not necessarily the drop-outs of the preceding year. Instead, it would appear that many of those who drop out are more likely to either stay out of school altogether or to enroll in a non-formal education program, which would enable them to either reach a particular terminal level, or return to the formal education system to improve their chances of passing the examinations. Thus, as a non-formal education program, night schooling plays an important complementary role to formal education.

The findings indicated that between 1998 and 2000, some 31% of the participants were able to go back to formal schooling, against a majority of 69% who did not. This shows that in spite of the fact that many of these participants would have wished to attain higher education, they were clearly unable to return to formal schooling. Moreover, some 58.1% of a combined sample indicated related factors such as "do well in school" and "education leads to knowledge" as their motivation for re-entering the formal education system. In spite of the clear benefits of this form of schooling for attainment of higher education, there are also challenges associated with it, as well. For example, one past student of CCC stated that:

> *In our time there were many problems. For example, we had no lighting facilities; we often had to use Coleman lamps or even candles. There was a shortage of teachers, but we did not give up. I personally used to tell myself that I should persevere because that was the only way, having obtained a low grade at Standard Seven.*

On a different note, learning outside the formal school context was considered to provide a second chance to those who could not make it the first time around. This notion is succinctly captured in the following excerpt:

> *Triple C (Capital Continuation classes) has really given many of us a second chance to improve our lives. Actually, yesterday I was thinking about the founders, people such as Mr. Sebotho Modisi, and the principal during my time, Mr. Molewa. I realized that if it was not for schools like CCC, I am not sure where some of us would be…*

Clearly, in spite of the various problems regarding management of night schools, there is a lot of worth that participants derive from attending them. To this end, many of the teachers and past students have intimated that they so much appreciate the value of such schools that they are prepared to volunteer to teach without pay.

At an aesthetic level, some students even suggest that the achievements of these out of school programmes should be celebrated in a formal way. For instance, some of the past students of CCC would like the school to organize a get together for past participants in order to highlight the importance of attending it. In this regard, one respondent wondered:

> *I do not know why the management does not organize a get-together of past students. There are so many of us in all walks of life across the length and breadth of this country…*

Many of the respondents had been able to re-enter the formal education system, albeit in smaller numbers than those who had not (26.2% against 73.8%). Nonetheless, some of those who re-entered the formal school system are found in many walks of life, as indicated above, with some of them even going on to attain postgraduate qualifications. This has enabled them to secure good employment, as well as to uplift their lives and those of their families. The significance of night schooling cannot be overemphasized, which also demonstrates the fact that such opportunities need to be increased, in order to give more youth a second chance in higher educational attainment, so as to enhance their overall life chances.

The beneficiaries of night schooling also expressed concern that government should monitor them for quality. In this regard, a significant number of respondents (47.6%) would like the government to be "more supportive". This is deemed necessary in order to ensure better quality of night school education. There was also reportedly lack of adequate and relevant texts for use in the various subjects. In particular, one instructor lamented that:

> *Some students cannot afford work-books, but these are crucial to their learning, because they emulate closely the nature and content of examination questions.*

The participants also highlighted another problem regarding the (lack of) qualification(s) of some of the teachers who teach in night schools. One respondent analyzed in a nutshell that:

> *It is time-consuming- the teachers are unqualified and feel reluctant (sic) to teach. The school fees are usually high. Individual students have to buy their own stationery. There are no practical subjects. The failure rate is usually very high compared to formal schools.*

Other concerns related to the inadequate time for learning at night school, limited times of attendance of evening classes, and implicitly, the lack of trained teachers, as well. In this regard, there was even acknowledgment by some teachers, past and present that some of their colleagues absented themselves too frequently. As one put it:

> *The school management did not address this problem, or chose to turn a blind eye as the teachers who absented themselves in this way were not penalized, and yet the students suffered greatly as a result.*

The sentiments expressed by both teachers and students, which reflected some detachment on the part of the school management, came up quite a number of times. It would seem that some code of conduct, which encompasses attendance regulations, would need to be put in place so as to address issues of this nature, which reflect negatively on teachers' professionalism. Of course, clearly the enforcement of these would be a big problem, especially that most of the night schools teachers are actually employed part-time and have day jobs elsewhere. It would seem that the management of some of these schools is detached on some of these issues. Some of the teachers may simply be taking advantage of this.

The problem of use of untrained teachers was also identified. In this regard, one respondent stated that "some teachers are not fully trained in night school."

Night school also affords participants the flexibility to take up and write the subject at their own time, when one feels ready to do so, rather than in terms of lesson time. In relation to this issue, one respondent noted that:

*Night school is good because I had to study and work during the day. I can also have a chance to care for my family whereas in formal school, there is no chance for working and taking care of family.*

The case study below demonstrates the potential of non-formal programmes as avenues for attainment of high levels of education, and for improving one's life chances, enabling her to progress from being a maid to becoming a university lecturer.

## 18.0    Case Study: From a House Maid to a University Lecturer

Amongst the most successful alumni of Capital Continuation Classes (CCC) is 46 year-old Dr. Maiteko Magolo, who holds a Bachelor of Arts and a Post Graduate Diploma in Education (University of Botswana), MA and Ph.D. (England). Maiteko passed Standard 7 Examinations (through Grade B) in 1968, but could not proceed to secondary education due to financial constraints.  It was not until 1972 that she got a salaried job, as a maid. Whilst still doing this job, Maiteko came into contact with an American family, who sowed the seed of education in her: they found her a place at CCC, and sponsored her secondary education.  It was through this contact that Maiteko eventually ascended from a housemaid to a university lecturer. Having obtained a Second Class pass from CCC, Maiteko proceeded to pursue 'O' levels and subsequently obtained higher qualifications. According to Maiteko, CCC was a gateway to these higher qualifications and her current post as a university lecturer-holding the highest degree in the academic world. In her own words:

*Before meeting the Americans, my wildest dream was to become a typist. This being the case, I asked my employers to grant me an opportunity to do typing, but in vain. It is CCC, which granted me unseen possibilities, fresh opportunities and new beginnings. Without CCC I could still be a maid.  On the basis of this conviction, it is my desire to conscientize many Batswana of the value of CCC amongst the unfortunate.*

Amongst the challenges of night schooling, she noted financial difficulties, due to which many of her contemporaries dropped out. Amongst the challenges that were associated with night schooling, there were social difficulties as well. In her own words:

*As can be imagined, in order to perform diligently at evening school, one has to deny herself/himself many social activities. Furthermore, some friends and relatives perceive one as a misfit or failure. For instance, according to Maiteko, whereas other people wondered what she was doing when her age mates were attending school others were convinced that she was wasting both her money and time.*

There were also issues of an academic nature, about which she indicated that:

*Not only did some tutors use CCC as a transit to future prospects, but also the actual CCC management did not emphasize employing educators.  Consequently,*

*the teaching staff at CCC was below expectations. Hence, students had to work extremely hard to pass tests and final examinations. At times, in order to compensate for the inadequate quality of instruction, we were forced to seek help elsewhere. I was lucky as my American acquaintances contacted one lecturer at UB who found me English and Geography tutors. I used to share with my classmates all information I had acquired, either on weekends or whenever a teacher was absent. In fact, I can reminisce one particular case when I spent about three hours with my fellow class mates, enthusiastically 'taking them through' the text 'Old Mali and the Boy' after illustriously being taught by one female lecturer in the English Department. Furthermore, being a maid and attending school at CCC constituted very taxing responsibilities. In most cases, I had to concurrently revise for my tests and do housework. I most vividly remember on one occasion during my third year, reading 'Ditlhopha tsa Maina' in the bathroom, whilst doing the laundry. In general, it was the survival of the fittest.*

Indeed the flexibility provided by night schooling is a fundamental positive aspect of this educational approach, which makes night schools to be such viable programs for many people who would otherwise be stuck in a dead end. In recognition of the flexibility another respondent reiterated that "we are able to further our studies without interrupting our daily schedule."

## 19.0    Discussion of findings

Non-formal education gained popularity in order to augment and supplement the formal forms of schooling, which were unequally and inequitably distributed (Lauglo, 2001; Hoppers, 2006). Latterly, non-formal education programs have been noted for their potential role in enabling achievement of the Millenium Development Goals (Rose, 2009a). In particular, those non-formal education programs that enable their participants to re-enter the formal education system also serve to complement it.  In Botswana the participants of night schools derived varied benefits, such as ability to acquire skills needed in the work environment and in their daily lives, as well as enabling them to attain higher levels of education, which improved their overall life conditions, particularly through opportunities provided for re-entry into the formal education system. This echoes findings elsewhere that also indicate that the benefits of non-formal education have accrued not only to the individuals but their families and societies as well (Thompson, 2001; Torres, 2002; World Bank, 2003).

## 20.0    Night Schools and Re-entry into the Formal Education System

The participants of the night schools clearly view them as viable approaches that serve to complement formal schooling in the pursuit of higher education and better life chances. To this end, the participants of Botswana night schools feel they accorded them the opportunity "to do well in school", to "attain higher levels of schooling", and to improve their overall life chances, in the sense that some of the participants were able to re-enter the formal school system. Consequently, many of the past participants of night schools are found in various walks of life, with others having attained postgraduate qualifications. This has enabled them to secure good employment, as well as to uplift their lives and those of their families. This underscores the need to expand avenues for higher educational provision, in order to ensure that one can pursue higher education even outside the formal school context. It also requires granting of subsidies to "private" schools to enable them to admit larger numbers of students, so that they may offer a quality of

education comparable to that of the formal education system. This would ease the burden of shouldering the bulk of formal education borne by government.

While re-entry is not the raison-d-etre for other non-formal programs, this aspect is nevertheless important in relation to night schools, as indicated by studies undertaken elsewhere (World Bank, 2003). However, it would appear that at most only around one third of night school graduates get reintegrated into the formal education system, even though night schooling clearly increases their options for doing so. Hence, the low re-entry rates registered in this study negatively affect the potential of this program to raise girls' higher attainment levels. It also indicates that if re-entry is to be meaningfully facilitated, participants should be targeted when they are still younger, before they get caught up in a cycle of poverty, which is complicated by childbearing and childrearing responsibilities, and or marital and cultural obligations.

### 21.0   Gender and Non-formal Education

Gender is also an important variable in participation in non-formal programs because it affords women and girls a second chance in life, enabling them to attain higher educational levels, as well as to improve their overall life chances. Generally, women's educational experiences are often disrupted by circumstances beyond their control, which are usually related to parental, family, and societal expectations and obligations (Murphy, 2001).

The generally high drop-out rates of girls demonstrate the fact that there is a greater need to cater for women and girls, which means among other things that there should be an expansion of out of private education initiatives such as night schools, which target junior secondary school leavers in particular, which was the level at which many of the participants left the formal education system prior to registering in the night school program.  In particular, night schools provide a forum where women who find themselves in this unenviable situation may be able to redeem themselves.

This makes these schools very crucial alternatives for girls and women as they appear to be the ones who face greater hurdles than men in formal schooling. This is due to a variety of family-related issues, and the wider cultural and socio-economic factors that peculiarly affect them. For example, pregnancy and child-bearing, child-rearing and care-giving, which are more predominantly women's responsibilities, impede women's schooling (Alexander, 1993; Marope, 1994; Mafela, Ramorogo et al, 2000; Chilisa, 2002). Even though these problems persist even in this mode of learning, the flexibility offered by the "after hours" operation of these schools mediates these problems to some extent, as indicated by studies undertaken in Latin America. Night schooling also empowers those who are unemployed, who have to attend to child-minding and house-hold duties during the day, and get assistance from the other members of the family who would be available in the evening. As demonstrated by the profiled Case Study, this arrangement makes it possible for house helpers to get time off to pursue their studies when their employers are home in the evenings.

### 22.0   Non-formal Education and Improvement of Participants' Quality of Life

Globally, the acquisition of literacy and skills enables people to participate in decision-making that affects their lives, and can empower people across a wide spectrum of society (Freire & Macedo, 1995: Stromquist, 1994; Thompson, 2001; Torres, 2002; Ralf St Clair, 2010). Non-formal education can also play

a crucial role in the promotion of peace in post-conflict societies (Biao, 2010). In Botswana non-formal education has enabled some of the participants to attain higher education levels, whilst others have been able to improve the quality of their lives. Some of the participants link the ability to perform tasks better to their participation in night schools because the night school curriculum afforded them the flexibility to put together a subject menu that helped them to address their deficiencies in the workplace. Formal schooling is often decried for lack of this type of flexibility. Other indicators of an improved quality of life include mobility in the job market and increased personal returns in relation to personal emoluments. In this case, those who felt trapped in non-gratifying jobs felt that their added qualifications could enable them to seek better jobs. This in turn may bring along better salaries and/or working conditions. Some needed the qualifications for progression within their work settings. Such progression would normally be accompanied by increased remuneration and hence improved social and personal returns. These perceptions are good indicators of the aspirations of night school students and in turn, reflect the close association that people perceive between academic achievement, employment and a better paying job. In some of the cases therefore, higher academic education was attained by those who attended night schools.

As evidenced by the in-depth Case Study that is profiled in the paper, learning outside the formal school context effectively provides a second chance to those who for one reason or another could not make it the first time around in the formal education system. Clearly, in spite of the various problems regarding management of night schools, there is a lot of worth that accrues to those who attend them. This also serves to demonstrate the extent to which the quest for higher education is linked to people's hopes for a better life, and an improved self-worth. In other contexts it has been found that more than just having the potential to enable attainment of higher educational outcomes, non-formal programs, and adult learning in particular have the potential to provide other benefits of schooling. These benefits are related to the way an individual perceives the purpose of their schooling, in terms of the symbolism that they attach to that education. To this end, Prins (2011) specifically noted that in the case of El Salvador, adult learning enhanced the lives of its recipients in terms of the values and skills that they felt enabled them to become more respectful, expressive, well-mannered, and thereby enhanced their overall social standing. In India, (http://searchjlightsa.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/masoom-education.jpg) many of those who attend night schools are people who hold day jobs as helpers, assistants, vegetable and tea vendors who aspire for more, and wish to "pick up where they left off and complete (the) Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and move on to college - even as they continue to support themselves and their families".

### 23.0    Operational Challenges of Night Schools

Although night schools fill an important education gap, they are faced with many operational problems. This is in line with research carried out elsewhere in Africa and Latin America, which found out that non-formal education programs face resource challenges that tend to tarnish their image in the eyes of those who equate the lack of formality with poor quality education (Thompson, 2001). This study highlighted resource challenges relating to inadequate facilities and equipment, lack of adequately trained personnel, as well as lack of commitment of some of the teachers characterizes at least some of the night schools. The participants also expressed concern about the lack of adequate and relevant texts for use in the various subjects, because this is determined by one's financial circumstances, which in some cases makes it impossible to acquire all the necessary texts. This lack of crucial learning material puts the night school students at a great disadvantage, and is likely to affect their class participation, performance and overall

attainment.  It would appear that subjects like accounting and commerce lack trained teachers, due to the fact that these subjects were for a long time not traditional teaching subjects. Consequently, night schools tended to recruit untrained or poorly trained teachers of these subjects. Overall however, in the midst of all the problems that generally plague night school participants, one respondent actually saw a silver lining in the way the program runs, by observing that "it accords us the time to study the subjects that we find difficult."

The students also expressed sentiments, which indicated some form of indifference on the part of the school management, as well. To this end, it appeared that the enforcement of regulations would be a big problem, since many of the night school teachers were actually employed part-time and held day jobs elsewhere. It would appear that the problems relating to the employment of part-time teachers, which is more pronounced in subjects like accounting and commerce, due to the general shortage of people who are qualified to teach them. It would appear that some of the night schools recruit untrained or poorly trained teachers to teach these subjects.

The participants of night schools also experience other problems of a personal nature that inadvertently affect the quality of their studies. One recurrent problem is that of lack of transport, as well as the high costs incurred to get to school. Indeed due to lack of money to pay for transport, many have to walk to schools and study centers. This tends to leave them tired, which affects their concentration, and also presents a risk to their safety and security, as well as being financially burdensome. This state of affairs negatively does not augur well for the overall quality of learning, and has prompted calls for government to monitor non-formal education for quality in order to ensure better quality of night school education.

In India, night schools providers experience challenges such as lack of premises, which are addressed through leasing of municipal school premises by charitable organizations, whilst the government supports these schools by paying the salaries of teachers and staff. Unfortunately, there is no system of governmental assistance for private initiatives in Botswana, and it is reasonable to assume that this situation negatively affects the ability of night schools to cater adequately and efficiently for those who need them. In spite of the challenges, the night schools accord their participants the necessary flexibility to take up and write the subject at their own time, when they are ready to do so. Indeed, this is one of the fundamental issues that make night schools such viable programs for some because those who attend them are able to further their studies without interrupting their daily schedule.  It is hoped that the envisaged establishment of the Botswana qualifications framework and quality assurance mechanisms would improve the situation to enable these programs to operate at their optimum as complementary forms of education. This would lessen the burden on government as the sole provider of education, particularly in view of the fact that formal schools churn out individuals who either perform poorly or drop out due to a variety of factors.

**24.0    Conclusion**

The participants of the night schools clearly view them as viable and popular alternatives to formal schooling in the pursuit of higher education. In this regard, the beneficiaries of night schooling are found in many spheres of socio-economic activity, such as business, education, where they make important contributions to community life. However, it would appear generally that individuals face many hurdles in pursuit of education through this mode of delivery. Moreover, night schools are patronized by larger numbers of women than men. This makes these schools very crucial alternatives for girls and women, as

they appear to be the ones who face greater hurdles in formal schooling. This is due to a variety of family-related issues, and wider cultural and socio-economic factors that peculiarly affect them. For example, pregnancy and child-bearing, child-rearing and care-giving, which are more predominantly women's responsibilities, greatly impede women's schooling. To a large extent, these problems persist even in this alternative mode of learning. However, the flexibility offered by the "after hours" operation of these schools mediates these problems to some extent. It is important to note that this observation would also refer to those who are unemployed, who have to attend to child-minding and house-hold duties during the day, and get assistance from the other members of the family who would be available in the evening.

Whilst the majority of night school graduates do not get reintegrated into the formal education system, participation in them clearly increases their options to do so, and re-entry is an important aspect of participating in the program as well. Hence, the low re-entry rates registered in this study do not augur well for the potential of this program to raise girls' higher attainment levels. Furthermore, if re-entry is to be meaningfully facilitated, participants should be targeted when they are younger, before they get caught up in childbearing challenges, as well as marital and other cultural obligations. Thus, the longer they spend before educational options become available, the less likely they are to be reintegrated. Re-entry would also benefit from other changes to educational policies, such as raising the age-limit for re-entrants. The newly implemented "back to school" program will go a long way towards affirming the potential of night schooling to be viable as a complementary approach to formal education.

Although they have many benefits, night schools are beset with a variety of "operational" problems that to some extent negatively affect the impact of night schools on the lives of the participants. Given that there is a segment of the population which would potentially benefit from the flexibility of night schooling, there is clearly a need to expand this type of avenue, to enable these individuals to pursue schooling, and possibly to re-enter the formal education system to attain higher educational levels. Similarly, bearing in mind the fact that education is a public good, this decision would have to be coupled with improvements and granting of subsidies to "private" schools to ensure that they admit larger numbers and to offer a quality of education that is comparable to that of the formal education system. It may also be helpful to private providers of this form of education and similar ones such as study groups, if there was a system of shared resources with government, which would enable them to meet in the premises of government schools when they are not in use. Furthermore, there may be other indirect forms of assistance such as tax subventions for private providers of education. All these forms of assistance would ease the burden on government of shouldering the bulk of formal education. This would go a long way towards ensuring the achievement of the MDGs on equity and access, and above all, advancing the course of Education for All.

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