Issues and Opportunities in the Development of Open and Distance Learning across Socio-Economic Development Sectors of Zambia

Mutale M. Musonda

Executive Director, African Council for Distance Education
(Former Vice-Chancellor, Copperbelt University, Kitwe, Zambia)
P. O. Box 8023-00100, Nairobi, Kenya
mutalel954@gmail.com

&

Overson Shumba
School of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Copperbelt
University,
Kitwe, Zambia
oshumba@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

This paper examines opportunities and challenges in the development of open and distance learning across socio-economic sectors within the context Zambia's Vision 2030. First, higher education institutions must partner with others to expand ODL opportunities for people in local communities. Second, issues undermining effective adoption of ODL technologies and approaches must be interrogated and resolved. The issues include the low value ascribed to ODL approaches and ODL-attained competencies. This suggests the need to see ODL processes through political lens to resolve the question: Who makes choices of ODL technologies, the content and their transactions? This leads to the proposition of the adoption and advancement of a transformative paradigm that enables ODL practitioners and users to see, interrogate and address questions of power and inequalities.

Keywords: Open/distance learning, Zambia's Vision 2030, sustainable development, capability approach.

Introduction

There is an ever-increasing adoption and application of the open and distance learning and multi-skilling approaches in the developing world. Open and

distance learning has been called *a good news story* by the President of the Commonwealth of Learning (Kanwar and Daniel, 2009). The authors forecast that ODL will be an important element of future education and training systems across the world irrespective of their stages of the economic, political and social developments within countries. In their estimate, by 2020, 40% of the global workforce will be knowledge workers who have a need for tertiary qualifications unlikely to be met by conventional face- to- face modes of learning (Kanwar and Daniel, 2009).

This opens opportunities for ODL and its growth in the future. In the developing South, ODL offers the possibility of raising the age participation rate in higher education from less than 10% of the relevant age group in most of South Asia and Sub- Saharan Africa to 40-50%, the World Bank threshold for countries to achieve sustainable economic development. Besides utility for attaining formal education, ODL holds much promise too for more people to build capabilities and enhance capacities for their participation and productivity in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy for sustainable development. Beyond formal education and training, ODL holds the promise of ensuring that the majority of people in developing countries do get equipped with the knowledge, competencies and life skills, and with the attitudes and values needed to face up to the challenges of sustainable development.

Zambia is one country where these opportunities offered by ODL need to be fully exploited to increase participation in higher education as well as empower the majority to participate meaningfully in the informal economy. For example, the higher education participation rate is quite low as can be shown with reference to university education. The Copperbelt University in its current strategic plan covering the period 2009-2013 reports that no more than 2% of Zambia's population completed a Bachelor's degree of studies (Copperbelt University, 2009). Since independence in 1964, Zambia's two main state universities, the University of Zambia and the Copperbelt University produced just over 25,000 graduates for the national economy.

In Zambia, Mwanza (2009) observes that 88% of the estimated 200,000 youths who leave the school system annually remain without any formal opportunities for acquiring technical, vocational, and entrepreneurship skills

and competencies. With respect to the 6.2 million people aged 15 years and above in the labour market, 12% were employed in the formal sector and 88% in the informal sector. These statistics compare well with those of the Ministry of Education (2008). Out of the total population of 12,525,491 only 4.131,531 are employed, with only 619,730 (or 15%) in the formal sector. This means that a vast majority 3,511.801 (85%) are self- employed or unemployed (Ministry of Education, 2008). ODL, therefore, presents real opportunities for people who otherwise would not access formal education and training. The majority of citizens in the informal sector, self-employed or running small businesses cannot rely on formal modes of learning to learn skills that enhance their work. This would take them away from their employment and small businesses.

Given the foregoing context, the paper examines opportunities and challenges in the development of open and distance learning within the context of Zambia's Vision 2030. The Capability Approach of Amartya Sen (Sen, 1985; Clark, 2005; Wikipedia, 2010) is adopted as a transformative paradigm that a developing economy such as Zambia needs to adopt for sustainable development. Noting that "ODL has many more applications than teacher development" (DflD, 2008), we contend that the social investment and human development in Vision 2030 may not be achieved without adequate investment in education and training that reaches the majority of people in the population. This requires new approaches that entail creating partnerships and synergies for development taking advantage of opportunities presented by ODL approaches and technologies.

As shown earlier, ODL makes it possible to increase educational opportunities for people who would otherwise be excluded from tertiary and higher education. Continued exclusion of the masses perpetuates the existence of an elitist education that is highly selective but incapable of satisfactorily advancing the goals of national development. In real life situation, masses who have failed to access tertiary and higher education systems are the ones making a large contribution to the economy through market trading, small and medium scale enterprises and other informal economic and livelihood activities. These masses have to learn the essential life skills for self-sustaining their personal health and relationships at the family and community level and for sustaining their productivity in

agriculture, mining, tourism, business and marketing, and or where ever their source of livelihood is situated. Creating partnerships and networks is essential for synchronised endeavours towards the attainment of Education for All on which achievement of the Millennium Development Goals hinges. These principles and development indicators have been adopted in Zambia's Vision 2030.

Zambia's Vision 2030 and Development of Human Capabilities

The development or adoption of ODL approaches has to be considered in the context of Vision 2030 which aims at making Zambia "a *prosperous middle-income nation by the year 2030" (Government of Zambia, 2006a).* Vision 2030 seeks to balance:

i) economic growth and wealth creation through the agriculture, land, mining, communications and meteorology, infrastructure, natural resources, tourism, manufacturing, commerce and trade, energy and science and technology sectors

ii) social investment and human development to directly improve the lives of the people, and

iii) enabling environment for sustainable social economic development to address the crosscutting issues of governance, HIV/AIDS, environment, gender, food security and nutrition.

The Vision 2030's social investment and human development hinges, among other things, on the provision of innovative and life-long education and the development of skills for all. Given the unsatisfactory situation with limited access to formal education at all levels (Ministry of Education, 2008), an investment into ODL is required. Through it, more people can be empowered so that they are skilled, capable of further learning and adapting to changing environments and technologies, and capable of leading healthy and sustainable lifestyles in a peaceful environment.

Vision 2030's social investment and human development policy goals require the development of capabilities which entail a combination of competencies, values and freedom to achieve social and economic

*dev*elopment. This makes the choice of the Capability Approach appropriate for human and social development. The Capability Approach proffered by Indian guru Amartya Sen (Sen, 1985; Clark, 2005; Wikipedia, 2010) is a sound model to provide the paradigmatic foundation for the effective development of ODL for human and social development (Aderinoye and Ojokheta, 2008). The Capability Approach theory has been instrumental to me development of the Human Development Index used by the United Nations for measuring the quality of life and for discussing equality of opportunity for sustainable development (Clark, 2005). In this article, it is contended that Clark's (2005) review is a comprehensive, analytic, and ralanced review of the development, critiques, and advances of the Sen's Capability Approach. The essential substance of his analysis and thus his review and Sen's (1985) book, *Commodities and Capabilities,* serve the immediate source materials for this study. While not refereed, reference to Wikipedia (2010) is made in the case where we are able to recognise authentic references to known and respected authorities on the subject, for example, Nussbaum (2000).

The Capability Approach is a leading framework for thinking about poverty, inequality and human development generally (Clark, 2005) and about how the development of capability and freedom that enable people to meet their basic needs in life (Sen, 1985). In this approach basic needs are not centred on the possession of commodities but rather are concerned with providing all human beings, particularly the poor and deprived, with the opportunities for a full life. Clark explains that, in this approach neither opulence characterised by one's command of income and commodities nor utility marked by fulfilment of happiness and desire may constitute or adequately represent human well-being or deprivation. Rather, it is the capability to achieve valuable *functioning* that may more directly contribute to well-being. Sen's (1985) thesis is that the expansion of human capabilities and freedom rather than amassing commodities and economic wealth creates possibilities to lead a good quality life. In this regard, Sen (1985) stresses that the quality of life of a people is judged by what they are able to achieve and not necessarily the commodities that they command.

In illustrating the focal point of Sen's thinking, Clark (2005) underscores that in judging the quality of life of people "we must consider how well people are

able to function with the goods and services at their disposal." The Capability Approach thus locates a person's well-being in that individual's ability to achieve their valued *functioning* that are a person's capabilities. A *functioning* represents an achievement of a person, what she/he manages to do or be with commodities or resources available to him/her. A *functioning* relates thus to the capability of a person. Capabilities include such things as being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length, being able to have good health and nutrition, having *bodily integrity secure from violation and abuse,* being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, reason, and create as informed and cultivated by an adequate education, being able to form a conception of the good and others (Nussbaum, 2000 cited at Wikipedia, 2010). The selection and weighting of capabilities depends on personal value judgements and choices, e.g., opting for good health by being able to avoid cholera or malaria. Therefore, freedom in this scheme is related to ability to choose from different sets of *functionings.*

In the Capability Approach, the overriding objective of development is thus the expansion of human capabilities and freedom rather than economic wealth. Expanding one's functional capabilities leads to substantive freedoms people have reason to value. In this way capability becomes a practical choice for a person to function and thus freedom and choice are enabled by development of capabilities or suppressed by the deprivation of capabilities. In the Capability Approach, poverty is understood as capability -deprivation that may be caused by factors such as lack of education, lack of financial resources, or by oppression, i.e., lack of real freedom.

Education as the means of expanding the human capabilities and freedom is at the heart of the Capability Approach. ODL expands access to education and thus enables more people to acquire capabilities in their lives consistent with Aderinoye and Ojokheta's (2004) suggestion that ODL has a critical role to play in personal, community, and national development. It provides the education that is the key to human development and progress by changing and transforming attitudes, values, and behaviour and lifestyles. Education empowers people to make informed choices about their present life and future. A developmental approach to education is promoted by the Capability Approach to develop in people capabilities necessary to break cycles of deprivation with regards to health and nutrition, poverty reduction, cleaner

environment, increasing access to and equality of opportunity, greater individual freedom, and the facilitation of a richer cultural life (Aderinoye and Ojokheta, 2004). Education develops life skills, improves individual choices. and provides vocational and technical competencies necessary for realising a productive livelihood; it empowers people by expanding their real freedom and by capacitating them to have confidence and feelings of choice «d responsibility for the pursuit of things that make for a good quality life e.g health and nutrition. ODL enables the expansion of these capabilities and freedom for more people and hence our adoption of the Sen's (1985) capability Approach.

ODL in the Context of Zambia

Historically, ODL dates back to the early 1700s when it took the form of correspondence education (Ali, 2009; Kawachi, 2008). Since then, it has grown to embrace an increasingly diverse range of education and training activities and learning opportunities where (i) the learner exercises personal autonomy and control of learning and competency development (Ali, 2009) and (ii) where people can build social capital for development (Kawachi, 2008). A report of the Southern Africa Institute of Distance Education (SAIDE, 1999) notes that ODL in Zambia started featuring in the 1940s. From that time many Zambians studied for post primary qualifications Through commercial colleges in South Africa and Britain (SAIDE, 1999). Considerable expansion in the number of programmes offering distance and non-formal education has occurred as noticeable in the national reports i Ministry of Education, 2008; Siaciwena and Lubinda, 2008). In Zambia, the Directorate of Open and Distance Education is mandated to provide quality education, to all, using alternative methodologies and technologies such Interactive Radio Instruction. The University of Zambia has long been recognised as a dual mode university combining ODL and conventional approaches in some of its programmes. Today, Zambia boasts of a private ODL university, the Zambia Open University. Besides these, distance and son-formal programmes have historically flourished, for example, with the establishment of Youth Resources Centres and Community-Based Youth Resources Centres (SAIDE, 1999). They provide skills training in, for example, family life education, environmental sensitising, and democratic leadership.

The *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper* (2002 - 2004) (Government of Zambia, 2002) features use of Information and Communication Technologies at all levels and in all modes of the education delivery systems as one of its strategies. Use of ODL and other modes of delivery are meant to increase access for out-of-school youths and adults, and for improving quality and increasing access to high school education (Siaciwena and Lubinda, 2008). The *Five- Year National Development (FNDP) (2006- 2010),* the first after the pronouncement of the National Vision 2030, promotes alternative modes of delivery through distance education and open learning for education and skills development to combat poverty (Government of Zambia, 2006b). All levels of education are expected to identify and use appropriate ODL methodologies and technologies, if they are to meaningfully contribute to poverty alleviation and to sustainable development.

The theme of the FNDP (2006-2010) is "Broad based wealth and job creation through citizenry participation and technological advancement." The FNDP stresses the importance of education as reflected in the statistics it provides to link household poverty and the level of education attained by the head of the household. Poverty levels are 24% when the head of household has achieved tertiary level education and 56% when the head of household has achieved secondary level education. Poverty balloons to 80% when the head of household has not received any education at all and 76% when the head of household has received primary education level (Government of Zambia, 2006b). This ominous scenario of poverty and poor access requires significant efforts to increase access to education that ODL makes possible. As pointed out in the *Five- Year National Development Plan (2006-2010)* (Government of Zambia, 2006b) and in a review by Siaciwena and Lubinda (2008), an estimated 22 per cent of the population has had no formal education. Only 25 per cent have completed lower primary, 27 per cent upper primary, 13 per cent junior secondary, and 11 per cent senior secondary. Only 2 per cent of Zambia's population has completed a Bachelor's degree or above.

These examples and the statistics point to the serious problem of access but at the same time point to the opportunities for the development of ODL in Zambia. The ODL potential can be harnessed to enhance capacity and

capability of people to function in the informal sectors of the economy, in agriculture, and in family and social life. The challenge is for higher education institutions to partner with others in the private and public sectors to explore ways of working with these communities for their development in the diverse ways enabled by ODL technologies. The case for ODL and earning for sustainable development is shown in the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) experiments with expanding distance education and appropriate technologies for "learning for development" (Daniel, 2008). The COL programme for 2006-2009 focussed on three sectors of activity: earning for livelihoods, human environment and education. Our attention was caught by the related *Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning* (PCF5, 2000) themes for proposed research and development projects. The PCF5 explored how open and distance learning can help achieve international development goals and education for all. The inference theme was "Access to Learning for Development" with a focus on children and young people, health, livelihoods, governance, conflict and social justice suggesting the unlimited potential of ODL to capacitate people m various spheres of life.

The Commonwealth projects presented at PCF5 (COL, 2000) demonstrate how ODL approaches and technologies may be applied in both education and development in formal and informal sectors of the economy. They demonstrate endeavours to achieve Millennium Development Goals involving social engagement with communities and thus model how education serves to eradicate poverty and enhance the people's overall quality of life. Examples range from efforts to address the educational needs of health workers to improving livelihoods of young car guards, enhancing entrepreneurial fingerling production, life skills for sustainable money management, and empowering rural communities through virtual academies in countries far-flung from Nigeria to India to New Zealand (PCF, 2000).

In India, Bist (2006) explains that ODL approaches are utilised to promote positive image, status, and treatment of marginalised minority communities. Unjust and inequitable treatment of these minority communities can be a potential source of tensions leading to breakdown of peace and to conflict situations. This case study from India demonstrates how concerns of access, equity and justice for its marginalised minority communities in spheres of

education, employment and empowerment are addressed. They put together ODL- driven interventions to provide basic and secondary education, to provide vocational education and training, and to provide entrepreneurship training. This process showed that ODL has a role to play to ensure that all citizens become valuable human resources who can contribute fruitfully in the growth of the economy and emergence of a just and equitable society (Bist, 2006). In Zambia, we also see isolated cases of initiatives to use ODL in education and development projects. One example is that of the In-service Training Trust where ODL resources are used by extension workers to keep updated and to transmit relevant information to farmers (Zachman, Chikoye, Siaciwena and Alluri, 2004; Chikoye, 2009).

The examples and themes selected from the PCF (2000) demonstrate the potential for the use of ODL to address not only questions of vocational skills but also the social questions of equity, justice, and tolerance for diversity which are of concern in the multi-cultural context that is Zambia. ODL makes it possible to build social and political consciousness and at the same time promote awareness and tolerance for diversity, creating an enabling environment for growth and development. The experiences from PCF5 (2000) point to the need to develop and utilise ODL across all social and development sectors of the economy. The creative application of ODL approaches to community development efforts entails the development of life skills and vocational competencies for health, agriculture, education, tourism, aquaculture and fisheries, marketing, micro-finance, and so forth. Experiences of PCF5 (2000) are pertinent to the Zambian context where a sizable portion of the population is increasingly gaining access to radio, the internet, and mobile technologies. For example, between 2005 and 2006, the adoption of interactive radio instruction in community schools increased by 44% from 338 schools in 2005 to 497 schools in 2006 (Siaciwena and Lubinda, 2008). The number of out-of-school children in the same period rose from 56233 in 2005 to 81324 in 2006. The suggestion here is that these technologies hold much promise for Zambia in the way education and skills development and social learning programmes are designed and implemented.

Issues, Opportunities and Challenges

The PCF5 (2000) case studies are valuable in that they offer a multilateral and - de range for comparative purposes across developing country contexts of Africa South America, Asia, and the Pacific. They demonstrate the wide access of opportunities made possible through ODL. In spite of the problems is associated with access to ODL technologies, there are opportunities for the development and systemic adoption of ODL approaches in Zambia or in countries with a similar socio-economic environment. In addition to addressing the obstacle of access, there are other challenges and issues that -ermine effective systematic and systemic adoption of ODL technologies and approaches across economic and development sectors. It is suggested mat some of these issues and challenges that must be identified, discussed and resolved as they contribute to the current inertia for adopting and expanding ODL beyond the ambit of teacher education.

Issue 1: Frugal Appreciation of the Transactional Nature of ODL

The rapid expansion of the meanings associated with ODL has contributed to - frugal appreciation of the relevance and implications of the transactional nature of ODL technologies and approaches. The expansion in conceptual meaning has led to it being described as a "blanket term that encompasses blends of learning in different mixes and contexts; it "encompasses e- learning, blended learning, mixed-mode learning, flexible learning, distributed learning..." (DfID, 2008). This expansion of the ODL concept has even been accelerated by the advent of information and communication technologies and the World Wide Web. These have made ODL useful in formal institution- based education and in informal and non-formal non-institutional education for children, youths and adults. In this regard, we should be concerned with understanding how learning is mediated and transacted in ODL and how this understanding may be extended to attaining other capabilities relevant for enhanced productivity and development. The advance of ODL technologies requires us to search for a pragmatic framework to guide us to fully appreciate how they work to transact learning and empowerment in various settings including the formal and informal sectors of the economy. Such a framework would stress transactions that need to occur for learning and development to take place.

This issue was taken up by Garrison (2000) in a paper 'Exploring Theoretical Challenges for Distance Education in the 21st Century.' He proposed a shift from structural to transactional issues. He argued that ODL may be lacking a theoretical foundation to take it into the 21' century and that development of ODL theory may not be able to keep pace with innovations in technology and practice. The author concurred with his assessment that focus should not continue to be on structural and organisation issues but rather on transactional issues. Transactional issues have to do with sustained communication by which ODL occurs, such as facilitating the teaching and learning transaction at a distance. This means that ODL practitioners and researchers have to ''provide an understanding of the opportunities and limitations of facilitating teaching and learning at a distance with a variety of methods and technologies" (Garrison, 2000). The reality is that in Zambia, many ICTs are now available to society. The question arises: how can the power of ODL and the available ICTs for supporting sustainable development of local communities be harnessed?

Issue 2:   Poor   Coordination   and   'Isolated-Sector* Application of ODL

In Zambia, poor coordination exists and networking leads to individual sectors of the economy making use of ODL for isolated endeavours. ODL has to be further unpacked in this context where, in formal education, it is used most extensively for teacher development. It is important to explore how it is also applicable to many other sectors in health, agriculture, business studies, veterinary science, and development studies, amongst others (DflD, 2008). The bias towards application to the education sector at the expense of other development sectors has led to a less clear articulation of the role of ODL in the pursuit of Millennium Development Goals, the Dakar goals of education for all, and the ideals of peace, democracy, good governance and the rule of law. These constitute the vision for sustainable development in the world since the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development and are well connected to the Vision 2030 in Zambia. Pursuit of these sustainable development objectives require a focus on mitigating poverty and vulnerability; without a focus on poverty reduction, sustainable development becomes another *in vacuo* vocabulary.

ODL can contribute to poverty reduction and to the uplifting of quality of life through skills training packages for poor communities (Kanwar and Daniel, 2009). Two questions arise from our concern with poverty, vulnerability, and sustainable development:

i)   To what extent do our universities incorporate poverty reduction strategies as part of the strategic plans?

ii   To what extent is ODL utilised to mitigate poverty and vulnerability and improve the quality of people's lives?

There exists a need to devise strategic plans that target the mitigation of poverty and that ODL has a significant role to play in it. The Commonwealth of Learning's initiative 'Lifelong Learning for Farmers' (L3F) is a good case *study*. The L3F links universities, research institutes, ICT kiosks and banks with rural communities in India, Sri Lanka and Kenya supporting farmers to earn and earn. In Theni District, India, 582 women participants accessed distance learning audio-visual materials through a local ICT kiosk to learn e fundamentals of identifying a good cow, dairy and disease management as well as how to exercise credit and insurance options. Participants successfully learnt the required skills, successfully implemented income venerating projects, started repaying loans, and enjoyed a better quality of life.

> ... after COL completed the project, 50 women farmers continued to access information through the local ICT kiosk and have sold milk worth over USD 100,000, which has contributed to the prosperity of the village. The ICT kiosk vendor encourages the women to use his facility to sustain his own business and the women continue to generate income through ongoing learning. 300 women have bought mobile phones and these devices would become a major feature of their learning and information sharing in the future (Kanwar and Daniel, 2009).

This case study demonstrates that ODL does make a difference in developing knowledge, skills, and values necessary for sustainable pursuit of livelihoods. It is our contention that universities can take a cue from this so

that their teaching and research is adapted to focus on the relevance of their disciplines and ODL content to the development of communities that they serve. As seen from the above cases, ODL approaches and technologies are relevant for all sectors of development: teacher education, health education, agriculture education, and others. The concern in communities is for peaceful and harmonious existence and thus focusing on merely developing vocational and entrepreneurial skills is not adequate. It requires attention to be paid too to the enabling psycho-social environment and hence the importance of questions of equityjustice, and tolerance for diversity and the power relationships on which they depend.

The question that must concern higher education institutions is that of how to bring them to work in and with communities on developmental and social matters that concern them most directly. This requires a re-orientation to their strategic, research and development agendas. Questions that need be asked are: What essential information and learning deriving from the disciplines can universities package and avail to communities? How can this scientific and technical information to be packaged so that it becomes accessible to communities? By which media and technology must it be communicated? These are important questions to tackle if information as stated in Zambia's Vision 2030 is to be "a resource that plays a key role in the development process." These are worthwhile questions given the diversity in languages in Zambia with more than 72 languages. It is important to be concerned with the research, design, and development of appropriate ways of reaching communities with properly packaged information for their development projects.

Issue3:   Ivory Tower Image and the Unresponsive Nature of Higher Education Institutions

Universities have remained ivory towers in the eyes of ordinary citizens as they appear unable to contribute to the development of their communities. Besides, they deal with scientific, technological, and engineering knowledge that are far removed from the indigenous experiences, needs, and knowledge of common people and their communities. Increasingly, it is becoming clear that the best model of development is when scientists, technologists, and engineers work together with ordinary people to address developmental

challenges. This requires universities to adopt social engagement approaches ' Boothroyd and Fryer, 2004) to address the learning needs of communities; be they technical, environmental, educational, or social. Social engagement is a process whereby researchers work with community members to analyse and solve social problems in a spirit of continuous mutual learning. This - approach leads to mobilisation and coupling of scientific and community knowledge to achieve development in ways which neither can achieve when applied alone.

The availability of ODL technologies both opens opportunities and poses challenges as to what higher education may be able to do to transform their ivory tower image. They need to research and develop the content for delivery via various media and technologies available to communities. An important area of research, especially for higher education institutions, is that of designing and packaging learning matter in accessible ways for communities. Making these available at access points such as tele-centres, village knowledge centres, community access points, community radio, "formation kiosks, and community learning and education centres (Pringle and Daniel, 2009) poses another challenge.

Issues 4:   Low Status Ascribed to ODL-Attained Competencies

Issues of relevance and status of universities and other higher education restitutions in the eyes of the public is one matter and the ascribed low status of ODL-attained competencies is another. The low status ascribed to ODL ads to a poor response towards recognition of ODL acquired competencies and skills in society. In a DfID (2008) paper, it is observed that "ODL is perceived by some as second best" and yet "when done well; ODL outcomes bear comparison with outcomes from 'conventional' provision." The elitist nature of education systems in many parts of the world leads to this. For example, in Zambia, people take up the ODL option when opportunities to enter conventional tertiary educational institutions have not been successful. This leads to a negative perception of ODL as cheap and associated with entrants who have inferior credentials compared to those in conventional education. *As observed by Kanwar and Daniel (2009),* ODL degrees and certificates do not always "enjoy the same status and recognition for the purposes of employment and further studies as conventional systems both

within national jurisdictions as well as globally." Further to this, ODL courses face complex challenge of low graduation and completion rates; the perceived low success is "reflected in the outcomes measured in terms of the ratio of graduates to enrollment, the time taken to complete a programme, the ratios of retention and dropout, and the response of the market to the graduates" (Kanwar and Daniel, 2009). In addition to low graduation rates, there is the problem of *recognition of qualifications.* In Zambia this is exacerbated by the absence of a National Qualifications Authority and a National Qualifications and Quality Assurance framework.

It is important to observe too that the open universities in Africa do not achieve the same esteemed status as conventional universities easily and yet they have opened up opportunities for continuing and life-long learning opportunities. While acknowledging the growth in the number of multimodal universities, Kanwar and Daniel (2009) expressed scepticism as to whether or not they would thrive. This is because the faculty naturally put more effort into teaching students in traditional face to face settings rather those who are at a distance. They suggest that it requires three qualities for institutions to balance effectively the use of face-to-face and ODL methodologies: strong institutional will, policy and systems. Kanwar and Daniel (2009) observe that only a relative few dual-mode universities have all three qualities and that this results in poorer quality attention and education to distance students. Open universities are thus, in their view, better placed to effectively attend to distance students than dual mode universities (Kanwar and Daniel, 2009). These views are reflected by Ndong-Jatta (2004) who notes that the matter is compounded by the issue of choice as she explained:

> In my view especially for developing countries one needs to move away from questions of 'either/or' to considerations for 'both/and'. What is required here is reaching out for the best of both worlds, which calls for a definite paradigm shift. Conventional institutions will have to review their internal operations and management to support the "openness" as practiced by many distance-only institutions to becoming blended-learning institutions.

The problem of lower status accorded to ODL programmes in conventional universities is one which merits serious attention. In the two major state universities in Zambia, ODL programmes tend to be provided for as "night" or "vacation" period courses. This leads to perceived lower status of these programmes in the minds of many members of the university community. At the Copperbelt University, besides the problem of perceptions and attitudes, there are structural problems whereby for example, the organisation, administration and coordination of distance learning courses is the responsibility of the Directorate of Distance or Continuing Education but all tuition is given by members of academic staff outside this Directorate. Simukanga and Nkosha (2008) observe the challenge of this structural arrangement at the University of Zambia. In this case, the members of staff of the schools offering distance learning courses prepare all study materials and assignments in accordance with approved course outlines. These materials are centrally dispatched to students by the Directorate for Distance Education and Learning. This Directorate does not have lecturers of its own. It has no direct authority over the academic teaching staff, is answerable to their Heads of Department and Deans in teaching schools. As Simukanga and Nkosha (2008) note that the "same lecturers teach full-time and distance students and this brings about a strain on their ability to deliver. They give priority to full- time students as they consider teaching on the distance education extra duties, or a burden on them."

The foregoing challenges require institutions to reflect both inwardly and, on the status, ascribed to ODL. In our view, the low status ascribed to ODL can be changed when institutions diversify their programmes to include those that target needs of the masses for vocational and social competencies and for development. The traditional focus of ODL courses on the achievement and award of a paper certificate must change as it is linked to the sustenance of the 'Diploma disease'. People need occupational competencies and life skills for their livelihoods and for which certification may not be important or necessary. Higher education institutions need to address themselves to developing ODL capacities to reach this target audience whose needs are not paper qualifications but rather are basic survival needs. It is our contention that higher education and especially universities need to engage communities and the informal sector to provide them with the education they need to address their sustainable developmental challenges

Issue 5: Low Systemic Investment in ODL Infrastructure and Human Resources

ODL is driven by technology and the low investment in technology and in human resources is a major issue. Prof. N. Barney Pityana in a keynote speech to the ICDE World Conference on Open Learning and Distance Education, 7-10 June 2009, drew attention to the fact that ODL is "technology- intensive". It requires a lot of investment in terms of financial resources, human intellectual resources, and in terms of the required hardware platforms, and so forth. In Zambia and other countries like it, the required investment in infrastructure and human resources has not been undertaken (Siaciwena and Lubinda, 2008). Besides, Zambia faces the challenges of her geographical vastness, such that much investment in technology has occurred in urban centres and settlements along major railroads; even there, only a modest infrastructure is in place. The low level of investment in ODL infrastructure relates to the low status ascribed to ODL approaches in formal educational settings.

The potential to raise status and acceptance and thus investment in ODL may lie in engaging communities and refocusing ODL applications towards direct application in education and development projects in local communities. It seems obvious that higher education has a vital role to lead grassroots level innovations that involve implementation of ODL methods beyond traditional modes of teaching and research to which it has been hitherto confined. There will be need for collaboration and linkages with local communities and institutions and organisations in them; it is unlikely that without the diffusion and uptake of scientific and technological knowledge in grassroots communities, sustainable development is going to be easily achieved.

Discussion

Overcoming the challenges requires a fundamental shift in mindset and values concerning the role of ODL in education and capability building for development. Education must be seen and practised as a transformational force that enables people to acquire capabilities and values to more effectively strive to envision and to create a better quality of life today and

tomorrow. In the context of Zambia, attaining Vision 2030 is possible only when masses of people have the education they need to acquire capabilities and freedoms to function as self-reliant and productive citizens. ODL makes this possible and hence our expectation for the adoption of a transformative paradigm.

Sen's capability approach offers powerful guidance towards transformative thinking to build capabilities and freedoms (Sen, 1985; Clark, 2005) which are the social capital of communities (Kawachi, 2008). As proffered by Garrison (2000), a need too exists for paying attention to the transactional aspects of ODL and, in our argument, the best way to build knowledge and competencies of people. Transactional aspects as proposed by Kawachi 2008) must be based on social constructionism theory of knowledge that stresses on relations, interactions, and collaboration to build critical thinking skills. This collaboration presents opportunities for dialogue and reflective thinking and results in the pooling of ideas that have positive impact on community development. Higher education by adopting Boothroyd and Fryer's (2004) social engagement approaches can facilitate these transactions while contributing to community development. The implications are that ODL supported by a new paradigm would fundamentally improve the learning opportunities and enhance the prospects for personal and community development and for an improved quality of life. As the case of *National Development Plan of Zambia (2006-2010)* showed, increased attainment of education by at least the head of household, substantially reduces the poverty level of the household and thus improves the quality of life (Government of Zambia, 2006b).

Given the above scenario, the undervaluing the relevance and quality of education and skills delivered and attained through ODL is a reflection of power and politics as stakeholders express their different values, choices, and interests. The consequence shows in the fact that ODL is ascribed lower status compared to traditional face-to-face education and training. This lower status ascribed to ODL is contributory to the relatively lower systemic investment in ODL across sectors. The doubts and pessimism surrounding the effectiveness and quality of ODL programmes border on the political nature of the issues and of the imbalance in influence among those with less or more power and voice in society. Skolnik (2010) posits that these tendencies, as observed in quality assurance processes in higher education,

are reflective of the underlying politics. In this case, borrowing the views of Skolnik on quality (2010), face-to-face education and training stands privileged over ODL because of the higher status ascribed to it by those with vested interests and greater power and voice, as the case with those in academia.

Seeing ODL processes through Skolnik's (2010) political lens that he applies to the quality assurance process is relevant in the adoption and advancement of the transformative paradigm.

ODL practitioners need to adopt a paradigm in which questions of power and inequalities are seen, interrogated, and addressed. Who makes choices of ODL technologies, the content, and their transactions? This question is pertinent and hence our subscription to Sen's (1985) Capability Approach. ODL has the potential and capacity to enable people access knowledge and acquire the competencies they require to create sustainable livelihoods for themselves. The value added by ODL lies in the social capital it builds (Kawachi, 2008) leading to the transformation of people's lives for the better. As the issues demonstrate, the adoption of ODL is not a neutral process and thus our suggestion of employing Sen's approach to development (Sen, 1985) and Skolnik's (2010) political perspectives are meritorious. The Capability Approach permits not only personal interests but other wider social concerns in making choices.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, it would appear that a developing economy such as Zambia requires a transformative paradigm that will guide her to perceive a greater systematic role for ODL in building capabilities across sectors. As proffered by Pityana (2009) "... there can be no denying that distance education could be the answer to many nations' social problems, in that the unemployed could be engaged in learning, entrepreneurs could grow and could secure the means of social elevation and universities could become the spaces of free engagement which could lift national morale by way of critical, creative and innovative social and cultural activities." Noting that, all sectors of the economy are symbiotically interlinked much in the manner of the spider's ODL technologies must be developed and used creatively to uplift

the quality of life of people and to meaningfully contribute to the Vision 2030. In addition, increased investment in ODL infrastructure and its utilisation for capacity development so that more people feel empowered to effectively strive and achieve a different but better-quality life is envisaged. This requires adoption of a transformative paradigm of which Armatya Sen's Capability Approach offers a pertinent project.

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