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Life Long Learning In Africa: Lessons, Experiences And Opportunities from Cultural and Cognitive Justice

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Preamble

I will open this presentation with a few questions which I would like us to keep in mind as we reflect on the pathways to attaining lifelong learning.

Firstly; lifelong learning is about learning throughout life in formal, non-formal, and informal settings. If this is so, and we really mean what we say, how come that we mention informal and non-formal quickly, and then run to the safe tarmaced highway of formal learning?

Secondly, related to this, 70 percent of African people live in rural areas, and use this rural base as the basis for livelihood, existence, contribution to development, subsidization of the state in the area of social welfare, and care for the old and the young. What is so difficult with premising development for ONCE on what people HAVE, and from this ground, re-link education and lifelong learning with humanity, and prepare for the systematization and integration of these diverse social and knowledge capital into mainstream processes?

Thirdly, the twenty-first century has been called the century of knowledge and of mind. Innovation is no longer contained within the laboratories of formal scientific systems, to innovations from below including knowledge systems of diverse people.

A core need that is emerging is understanding the conditions for the modernization of these knowledge systems in a just and fair manner. How come we are not able to co-join and see the link between democracy and knowledge production; human rights and intellectual property protection; and the link between all the above, the actual FORM and content of LLL, and the building of sustainable societies in Africa????

My core proposition is that for LLL to walk its talk, it must introduce moral salience into its DNA in a different dispensation: **the integrative paradigm shift**.

The testimony from this presentation comes from a continent:

- In which the very existence of society is at stake;
- In which heavy costs will be paid for a long time to come by the exclusion of knowledge systems held by millions of people including substantial capacities for sustaining life and livelihoods and peace cultures
- Which is crying out for pragmatic initiatives that take seriously the full spectrum of LLL –formal, non-formal and informal as real and not rhetorical or hypothetical.

***For the rest, there is an amazing Ugandan quip which says that ‘if I say too much, keep the change, and if I say too little, pay the difference’.

Introduction

Even though we are wired for stability, and the search for ultimate joy and peace, in a land full of milk and honey, human existence continually challenges us to rethink the taken-for-granted in our life.

Globalization, whatever we love or hate in it, is bringing our doorsteps **new, pungent, and ambivalence-filled human situations we can no longer escape** (Ayton Schenker 2005)

With society becoming more varied and culturally diverse, the challenge is especially intensified by the irreversible reality of **physical, civic, cultural, religious and political proximity**.

The practicalities of this global interdependence and the growing interaction among diverse peoples pose **major challenges to old ways of thinking and acting**.

Binde's amazing collection of electrifying contributions in the UNESCO Volume: "The Future of Values" for instance, reminds us of the **inhuman faces of humanism** (i.e. "the ghosts within") -- and of how the **desired futures of human society in their diversity** is what offers to humanity the prospect of a human future.

As societies reel from the impact of a homogenizing globalization totally unequipped to handle the consequences of its actions, we see daily, what is amounting to a groundswell of reactions and responses – "**counterforce**" **that is coming back to haunt globalization in its tracks!**

It is not just the collapse of the modus operandi which we have witnessed with cold horror in the past few weeks and months, but it is also that **culture, diversity, context and difference**, those previously looked like little useless things, all promise to give globalization its money's worth in sleeplessness.

The challenge before us lies not in the fact that this counterforce is emerging, but rather, that we need to work it out that this time, we are **not transfixed or eternally locked into the gaze of the subjugating or dehumanizing force**, but that we **rise from it**, and, in spite of the bruises, **dare to show a way forward**.

We live in a world that appears to be caught in a "social trap" i.e. **a negative cycle of distrust and negative cooperation owing to mutual distrust and lack of social capital**, even where cooperation would benefit all – reflecting a real **tragedy of the commons**.

It is not that there is no trust at all, but the problem is that the trust and loyalty **extends only to fellow members of the particular grouping; and distrust and hostility mark our relations with non members**.

We therefore need to draw a distinction between **bridging social capital** and **bonding social capital**, in which 'bridging social capital' is a broader concept and encompasses people across diverse social cleavages, whereas '**bonding social capital**' is more restrictive and tends to

reinforce exclusive identities within homogeneous groups and to exclude people from other groups.

The education of the future needs to invest in the building of bridging, or generalized trust which can enable us to embrace the “stranger”, and people who are not personally known to us in the first instance.

It was this, that the Delors segment on learning to live together implied.

Because trust is infectious, a person with generalized trust believes that most people can be trusted, and is therefore an asset to the sustenance of democracy, and of the futures we are seeking.

How far, in the interceding years, have we gone with this. How do we assess our performance when conflicts rack our continent and everywhere, there is a crisis of values?

We are already forewarned by Hele Beji, that our resort to the idea of culture as the response to this problem may not be that adequate.

He warned us that the real hazard with using culture as the point of ultimate respite is that **culture, having supplanted every race, is today an apology for itself that is not amenable to rational criticism** since culture **invokes its own rationality**, fixing its own **rules of the game**; and **rights in line with its own convictions**, irrespective of what others think, or feel... **undermining completely the possibility of neutral arbitration.**

It becomes clear that belonging to the same culture or religion is no guarantee for tolerance or political contentment.

However, in calling culture, democracy, human rights etc into the picture, we need to be very alert to instrumentalist and self serving genes in these concepts.

To illustrate this, we definitely do not want to go the route Beji has so starkly forewarned us of: i.e:

- where **human rights for all are turned into inhuman codes**;
- where **sovereignty is replaced by supremacy**;
- where **tolerance**, which in the first place is **the rejection of the intolerable**, becomes the **right to practice the intolerable**; or even
- where **democracy becomes a slogan in support of hegemony**; or
- **cultural difference, which was supposed to diversify peacefully**, converges instead into a **practice of violence**;
- where **antiracism becomes as intolerant as racism**; and
- where the **rights of the weakest are modelled on the abuses of the rights of the strongest** with the result that **victims are turning into a an new force of cruelty in their own right!!!**

These realities impose upon us an obligation to rethink the content and paradigm of learning

itself.

The integrative paradigm shift

Speaking as I do from the perspective of the South, and aware of the tensions between the margin and the mainstream, between the subjugated and those with power, but at the same time, fully cognizant of a world in need of healing, my work has aimed itself at what we are calling the second generation indigenization.

In this **second generation indigenization**, the errors of the past are taken as starting points for new directions.

For instance it is recognized that there has been the usual period in a lot of **social change** where, to establish recognition and strength prerequisite to an effective presence in dialogue and discourse, **there is a polarization or over-reaction against the incumbent** (i.e. defining oneself as ‘different from’ as being important in the process of claiming space to define oneself through self referencing).

The force it takes against established and resistant hegemony to create this space is reflective in **an exaggerated and confrontatory antithesis** (such as radical feminism, the **anti-development** lobby of the green movement, and in the white settler colonies, the **anti-white** elements of the black power movement – each spawning **an equally distorted backlash** (Fatnowna & Pickett 2002, Odora Hoppers 2002).

With this new stream, the integrative paradigm shift recognizes that there is a growing **maturity of dialogue** that is not the result of a paradigm shift, but is the shift itself.

Thus, in the area of knowledge, we move from the ignorance and depreciating ideology along with social theories that claimed *‘terra nullius’* as a convenient rationalization for colonization and ill treatment, **to a need for honest recognition of the existence of indigenous knowledge systems; of indigenous cultures, civilizations, and cosmologies.**

In fact it quickly becomes clear, in the light of disappearing landraces, biodiversity, and the depleting reservoirs of peace cultures, that there is a **need for those knowledge systems themselves, not just the recognition that they exist** (Knudtson & Suzuki 1992).

As has been stated in the UNESCO World Report on Knowledge Societies, **to remain human and liveable, knowledge societies will have to be societies of shared knowledge** (Binde 2005).

Today, we can say that the knowledge paradigms of the future are beginning by reaching out to **those excluded, epistemologically disenfranchised**, to move together towards a new synthesis.

In this synthesis, **‘empowerment’**, it is recognized that shifting of power **without a clear shift of paradigms of understanding that makes new propositions about the use of that power in a new dispensation** leads to **vicarious abuse of power by whoever is holding it – old or new** (Venter 1997).

In this new stream, **modernization proceeds, but without necessarily following Western values** (Huntington 1998) **or sequences**, but rather with a re-strengthening of core values **from different traditions of knowledge and living**.

It is about **equal access as citizens** of a nation and of the world into the mainstream society, with an emphasis on **equality** – i.e. the right to participate on an equal footing in **a negotiating partnership**.

This includes identifying and deconstructing the mechanisms of any form of **assimilation or imposition of other cultures on others** (Fatnowna & Pickett 2002).

Where appropriate, it is about indigenous peoples **reclaiming the custodianship over their knowledge in public spaces** along with the **right to speak** and be determining agents of **cooperative contemporary change** and creative knowledge sharing of these knowledge systems.

Western modernization, progress and thought is seen as a **temporary epoch in human history with both advantages and disadvantages** which must, and is seeking to re-engage with the more holistic integrated conceptualizations of sustainable life held by cultures that have, fortunately, not been down the path of ‘westernization’.

In other words, it is a **rapprochement of modern and older cultures**, including modern culture’s older roots where **each complementing the other** opens up the possibility of a **viable future for humankind** (Huntington 1998, Fatnowna & Pickett 2002).

The generative adult or adults of the future are seen as **standing between the past and the future to be built, and, looking into the future**, thus making that crucial distinction between producing **more offspring**, and producing **offspring that are not crippled**.

The generative adult we contemplate in this new episode not only welcomes change, but **brings something into it**, creating **socially valuable work**.

Tolerance in the new paradigm shift

Tolerance is the collective and individual practice of **not persecuting those who may believe, behave or act in ways that one may not personally approve of** (Gouws 2000). To tolerate something is to **put up with it even though we might be tempted to suppress it** (Odora Hoppers 2007).

But a more profound form of tolerance resides in the **capacity to develop respect, understanding and mutual recognition of others**.

And it is precisely here that Kwenda’s (2003) notion of “**cultural justice**” becomes very instructive. He takes for his analogy; the situation of Africa in which he argues, that social

cohesion does not depend on state sovereignty, liberal democracy, the advance of modernity or the global economy, but upon the **millions of African people willing to sacrifice what they ‘take for granted’, by bearing the uncomfortable burden of speaking and acting in unfamiliar cultural idioms within all areas of everyday life.**

Africans are **not passive victims of cultural imperialism** although they have been subject to coercive interventions, but **active agents in negotiating unfamiliar, strange and alien cultural terrain.**

Social cohesion especially in the southern part of Africa would easily collapse if Africans as the **natural majority**, were not willing to suspend ‘that which is taken for granted’ and **bear the burden of unfamiliar cultural transformations.**

Cultural justice therefore requires at minimum, that **this burden of the unfamiliar needs to be shared more equitably by people from different cultural backgrounds across society** (Kwenda 2003).

In other words, **cultural justice** takes us from **tolerance** to **respect in cultural politics**, arguing that what is needed is **functional respectful co-existence.**

By **respectful** is meant mutuality in paying attention, according regard and recognition as well as taking seriously what the other regards as important.

By **functional** is meant that coexistence is predicated on a degree of **interaction** that invokes the **cultural worlds of the players**, in essence – what they, in their distinctive ways, take for granted.

Cultural injustice occurs when people are forced by coercion or persuasion to submit to the burdensome condition of suspending – or permanently surrendering – what they naturally take for granted. This means that in reality, the subjugated person has no **linguistic or cultural ‘default drive’** – that **critical minimum of ways, customs, manners, gestures and postures that facilitate uninhibited, un-self-conscious action** ((Kwenda 2003, p:70).

By **cultural justice** is meant that the burden of **constant self-consciousness is shared or at the very least recognized, and where possible rewarded.** The sharing part is very important because it is only in the **mutual vulnerability** that this entails that the meaning of **intimacy and reciprocity in community can be discovered.**

It is in this **sharing** that on the one hand, **cultural difference is transcended**, and on the other, **cultural arrogance**, by which is meant **that disposition to see in other cultures not simply difference, but deficiency, is overcome.**

The cultural work that is entailed in constructing **functional tolerance** therefore goes beyond providing equal opportunities in say, education, to the **unclogging of hearts filled with resentment** (Odora Hoppers 2005, 2007).

Cognitive justice

In moving towards: **an ethically sound and ecologically constituted way of thinking, the affirmation of the multiplicity of worlds and forms of life; the creation of a shared paradigm shift, self-reflexive praxis; becoming critical explorers of human and societal possibilities; the establishment of new evaluation and appraisal criteria, and the transformation to new futures** (Odora Hoppers 2001), LLL of the future needs to build a **fraternity between forms of knowledge** (Visvanathan 2001).

This is particularly important in this day and age when **craftsmen, tribal elements, traditional experts and women are not seen as part of the citizenship of knowledge**, and especially when it is still assumed that the **history of knowledge begins with one's entry into the university**.

The imperative to fraternity, therefore, imposes on us the obligation to develop a **fraternity of ecology of knowledges**.

For its part, **science tends to hegemonise other forms of knowledge** either by **museumising them into ghettos**, or by **treating them as occult or oriental or primitive superstition**.

The objective would thus be precisely to **return life to these forms of knowledge and to restore their place in the livelihood of communities** so that **they can, without coercion, determine the nature and pace of the development they require**.

From this point of view, the **absence of bicultural experts** at the epistemological level has made it difficult to create a **systems-level dialogue, to identify and articulate systems difficulties, systems limitations and new possibilities building on combined strategies anchored in multiple knowledge systems**.

The most important criteria of fraternity of knowledge are **cognitive justice** and the **right of different forms of knowledge to survive – and survive creatively and sustainably**. An experiment in cognitive justice, therefore, can **turn this hierarchy into a circle**.

The search becomes not just one for equality, but for a method of dialogue. Fraternity at the cognitive level is born only with a **method for exploring difference, and providing for reciprocity and empathy** (Visvanathan, 2000).

Where does all of this leave Life Long Learning?

From the perspective of what is now known as the Global South, my position is that education systems' chance of survival and renewal of its mandate as the pathway to development and empowerment lies in its ability to renew itself, re-commit itself to new goals and to deal sensitively with the consequences of the practices inherent to it.

As education is the 'pathway to the realization of visions', it is also within the system itself that

fundamental transformation should take place.

Lifelong learning **stands at crossroads** as it seeks to fulfill its role in building skills for life.

With the issues of **cultural and cognitive justice** I have highlighted in this brief presentation, it is clear that the skills we need for the future **goes beyond the skills to survive in the marketplace.**

My proposition is that it is precisely the software – i.e. the **skills to cumulatively cope with the imperatives of co-existence, of solidarity and of human dignity that has been in short supply.** Each cycle of development has only exposed the naked fact of this deficit.

The stakes are high. Given what we have witnessed in the past few weeks in the global markets, we see that even markets are **in need of reconnection with humanity.**

Understanding and recommitting to human dignity entails the understanding of **humiliation, of deprivation, of cognitive justice and related disenfranchisements,** and the very real possibility that democracy, human rights, taken on their own, **may not be enough.**

Lawrence Blum has argued that an agent may reason well in moral situations, uphold the strictest standards of impartiality for testing maxims and principles, and even be adept at deliberation. Yet, unless he/she **perceives moral situations as a moral situations** and unless he/she **perceives their moral character accurately,** their skills at deliberation will be for naught, and may even lead them astray. One of the most important moral differences between people is between those who miss, and those who see various moral features of situations confronting them.

Perception is the setting for action, and salience – i.e. the **adequacy of agent's consciousness** concerning the situation, or ability to **grasp the contours of a problem** prior to being called upon to exercise that agency -- is key in this.

In the past two decades, UNESCO's efforts in deepening our moral salience have been commendable. A powerful example of this is the work of Foresight, and another is the Declaration on Science for the 21st Century spells out that what the world most needs is:

- **a more inclusive, a more responsive, and a more dialogical science;**
- that there is a need for a **vigorous and informed, constructive intercultural and democratic debate** on the production and use of scientific knowledge; and
- that ways must be found to link **modern science to the broader heritage of humankind.**

Can Life Long Learning really find a place to hide from this? If so where?

Cultural diversity, pluralism and democratic citizenship are seen as critical attributes necessary for the survival in a global world that is increasingly interdependent, but in which **billions have suffered from the trauma of large scale psychological, cognitive and cultural abuse and**

massive displacements in the hands of the colonial and later development projects.

We do not want to wait until the millions, if not billions of humiliated hearts clogged with resentment finally burst forth, and take national and global systems to task. It is precisely by taking pre-emptive and forward looking strategies, using new cognitive tools such as **cognitive justice, co-determination, ethical space, and epistemological disenfranchisement** that we can walk WITH humanity, live the empathy we preach, and determine the pathways towards genuine co-existence.

The incorporation of notions of cultural diversity, multiple identities, as well as a broader understanding of what constitutes “knowledge” for global development, sustainable human development, and the strengthening of a human rights culture are invaluable for **fostering co-existence in a world in need of healing.**

Lifelong learning of the future, and lifelong learning for all, must look with the eyes of a chameleon, a full 360 degrees, and embrace humanity where they are, and build upon what they have, not reinforce the deficit and toxic formula that has been endemic to our practice for so long.