

IE NEWS



National University of Lesotho: Institute of Education Newsletter

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to IE News!

It has been quite some time since the Institute of Education (IE), through its Newsletter, has shared with you what it has been up to regarding some of its activities. As an external arm of the university in educational matters, the IE has been interacting and engaging with several stakeholders through its research studies, training activities, as well as provision of professional services. Through these engagements, the IE has been responding to some of the challenges that are a result of the evolving school context. As we resuscitate the IE News, we decided to launch this issue of the first quarter by sharing with you some good practice stories on how we are responding to our context. Henceforth, we plan to share our news with you on a quarterly basis.

Happy Reading!

Director, IE

Educating for Resilience: Building Community Circles of Care for the OVC in the Roma Valley

By Mrs. Vuyelwa Ntoi

Universities are called upon more and more to exercise their corporate social responsibility by extending and sharing their expertise with communities around them. This inherent responsibility of universities to society is depicted in one of the programmes that the Institute of Education had an opportunity to participate in, under the aegis of the NUL CONSUL.

This programme was aimed to develop a sustainable local government and community capacity in supporting and protecting the rights of vulnerable children. Specifically, the programme sought to develop the capacity of community leaders, children and local government officials on child rights and child protection, enabling them to actively contribute to community enhancement and empowerment. The Institute of Education (IE) got involved

in this programme through the NUL-Roma Valley OVC Project, by managing its psychosocial arm.

The programme employed the following strategies to improve the quality of life of the orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC): capacity building through workshops; sensitization pitsos; promotion of child focus groups (clubs), and life-skills camps. The programme was underpinned by a philosophy that seeks to understand an individual child

and society s/he comes from within an ecosystemic framework - the dialectic between the individual and social construction and reproduction - with a view to challenge the taken-for-granted notions of what it means to be an OVC. All the workshops were highly participatory and experiential to promote consciousness-raising about, and critical reflection on social constructions that perpetuate stigma and the marginalization of the OVC. A variety of psychosocial tools were employed to promote perspective transformation among the participants. Some of the tools are the Journey of Life, Memory Box, Hero Book and Tree of Life. An integral component of the interventions was the development of action plans by the participants in which they spelled out how the new perspective would be used to promote both individual and community change. Following the implementation of the plans (3 – 6 months period) monitoring workshops were held to establish the extent to which individual, group and /or community transformation had taken place.

Promoting OVC resilience by involving different stakeholders in the community was hailed as the best practice by a number of OVC practitioners. The involvement of OVC, non-OVC, chiefs, care-givers, care-facilitators, teachers, and in some cases village community councilors ensured that the major stakeholders in the community sang the same tune as far as OVC rights and their protection are concerned. This approach ensured that the challenges that are

experienced by orphaned and vulnerable children in the community became a joint responsibility. For example, several incidents of child abuse were expeditiously addressed as a result of the cooperation of different parties: the care facilitators, the chief, and the police through the Child and Gender Protection Unit (CGPU).

By linking the children and communities with social institutions that are responsible for providing them with essential services, the programme contributed to the development of resilient children, families and communities. The services of the Office of the Master of the High Court, the Child and Gender Protection Unit, the Bursary Office in the Ministry of Education and Training, and the Department of Social Welfare have been experienced first hand by the families and communities. This has empowered the communities to continue to seek the services from these offices even after the life of the project. The programme has contributed towards filling existential voids in the lives of the children by building on their strengths and assets as well as those of their families and communities. Some of the lessons learned through this programme include the following:

- we tend to undervalue children's assets and strengths in building communities.
- children are more in tune with other children's psychosocial needs than adults and they make

- effective mentors for the younger ones.
- Through their action plans, they demonstrated skills of action research. This supports the call that children should be active participants in issues that affect

them.

Through this project the university contributed, in a modest way, to building resilient children, families and communities. **End.**

Reducing dropout rates and increasing performance among OVCs in a context of high HIV prevalence rates through the use of ODFL approaches

By **Dr. Thabiso Nyabanyaba**

An evaluation of a collaborative project on strengthening open and flexible learning for increased education access in high HIV prevalence SADC countries (SOFIE), suggests that a low-cost school-based ODFL intervention can reduce dropout rates and increase performance among OVCs.

The Institute of Education (IE) recently completed an evaluation of an intervention aimed at strengthening open and flexible learning for increased education access in high HIV prevalence SADC countries (SOFIE). SOFIE was a 3 year research project launched in April 2007 with funding from the Department for International Development (DFID)-Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Joint Scheme. The study was led by researchers at the Institute of Education, University of London working in partnership with researchers

at the Institute of Education (IE), National University of Lesotho (NUL), the Centre for Educational Research and Training (CERT), University of Malawi and the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE). It was envisaged that the study would increase an understanding of how more open, distance and flexible learning (ODFL) can address barriers to educational access and achievement and increase the knowledge skills and empowerment of HIV-affected young people. The project developed and trialed alternative pathways to learning that could complement and enrich conventional schooling and meet learners' needs more effectively.

The intervention was preceded by a literature review aimed at uncovering the background and context of the Lesotho. In the second phase of the project, case studies were developed in contrasting communities (high altitude and low

altitude) employing a variety of approaches including focus group discussions with stakeholders and participatory activities with young people. Data collected during the second stage of the study suggested that a strong association existed between the growing phenomenon of orphans and vulnerable children, mainly as a result of HIV and AIDS, and risks of dropping out of school.

It was also found that despite such government initiatives as the scholarship programme for double orphans and the book rental scheme, many children continue to experience inequalities and disadvantage often resulting in the increased risk of falling behind with school work and eventually dropping out of school. A low cost intervention was set up to complement schooling through more open, distance and flexible approaches aimed at reducing absenteeism and improving attainment. This intervention involved 20 secondary schools in contrasting locations. The intervention involved the training of teachers in the intervention schools in a variety of areas including providing psychosocial support and using more open and flexible curricular delivery in supporting children at the risk of dropping out of school.

The intervention was evaluated qualitatively and quantitatively using an experimental design. All the reports on the findings from the three phases are available on the SOFIE website (<http://sofie.ioe.ac.uk/publications.html>). In one of the first school-based studies to

use a Randomised Control Trial (RCT), the evaluation highlighted various inequalities and disadvantages in the secondary education system in Lesotho. Unlike most developing countries, girls continue to have a better access to school than boys in Lesotho's secondary education. Boys, particularly in rural areas, repeat more frequently and appear to suffer from a variety of interruptions resulting from child labour practices which require that boys look after animals. However, the apparent advantage held by girls in Lesotho, contrary to popular belief, is thin and precarious. While girls continue to perform better than boys in reading comprehension, they begin to miss schools and even drop out of school more than boys by the end of the second year of secondary education (Form B). Qualitative data confirm that at this stage girls are increasingly being called upon to look after family members and many eventually seek an escape from the difficult economic circumstances through early marriage.

Teachers who received training did not often get the support of their colleagues, but too key findings were encouraging in their suggestions for the potential of this model to reduce inequalities and barriers experienced by orphans and vulnerable children. In matching the impact of the model on the learners with those in schools with similar characteristics, it was found that learners in the intervention schools dropped out less and performed significantly better in mathematics than those in schools of similar characteristics when teachers

paid more attention to the attendance rates of such learners and provided regular support in mathematics. Indeed more students in the intervention schools progressed into the next level (Form C) than those in the control schools. In particular, control schools appeared to lose more students than intervention schools.

The findings indicate that monitoring processes and follow-ups on children set up with the intervention were beginning to impact positively on retention and

progression of students. In addition, low-cost materials, particularly wraparound guides developed by volunteers at the Institute of Education, London, worked to very good effect in schools where they were used. Therefore, the study suggests that increased monitoring and support of children and the use of more flexible approaches such as study guides can reduce drop out rates for children at risk of dropping out of school and even increase performance in such critical areas as mathematics. **End**

OVC ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL SERVICES

By Mr. Fritz Ilongo

The provision of essential services to Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC), and scaling up vocational life skills training for registered out-of-school OVC under the domains of education; health; food security and nutrition; protection, care and support, could be rendered more efficient, accessible, and controllable:

By developing an ecosystemic model to integrally address the aforementioned issues, and establish a harmonious and co-operative synergy between all stakeholders of the nationwide ethos to ameliorate the psychosocial conditions of OVC. The preceding intention hinges on the institutionalization of a child-centred deontology, as a philosophical basis for the underpinning of all subsequent programmes aimed at ameliorating the provision of essential services, and the scaling up of vocational

life skills for OVC. This implies the reinforcement and valorisation of peer culture (mentorship system at a horizontal level, but integrated and complementary with vertical traditional and contemporary socio-cultural hierarchy).

The above philosophy will become operative on the basis of a spirit of harmonious co-operation among all stakeholders (government, voluntary sector, service providers, support groups, and OVC), with resources focused on the accomplishment of clearly and precisely stated goals, coined, implemented and evaluated by enthusiastic, decentralized and accountable leadership. Because schools have become the nodal point and unavoidable focus of OVC care and support, it is equally imperative to generally and systematically revalorize

the teaching profession in its domains of social image and status, training and lifelong learning perspectives.

An even more radical interpretation of this idea will be to use OVC as a basis of a nationwide pilot program for talent detection, development and valorisation, for their rapid empowerment, self-sufficiency, and minimization of dependency on donors. In other words,

to avoid resistance, rejection and even distortion of the overall program, special programs should be created for early professionalization of OVCs, in a parallel vocational system with specially trained teachers and equipped institutions. This will effectively scale up vocational and life skills training for both registered in and out-of-school OVC. **End**

NEWS FROM THE B. ED. (PRIMARY) PROGRAMME!!!

By Mrs. Edith Sebatane

The re-structured B. Ed. (Primary) Programme continues to attract many serving primary school teachers who intend to upgrade their educational qualifications. The enrolment figures were 320 learners in 2007/2008 while in 2009/2010, 470 teachers enrolled and in the current academic year, 2010/2011, 250 teachers enrolled. The programme is two-tiered. It consists of a Higher Diploma in Education (HDE) qualification which is obtained after two years of study. The learners who intend to obtain a higher qualification then proceed further to study for a B. Ed. degree.

At the 2010 graduation ceremony of the National University of Lesotho, 224 learners of the B. Ed. (Primary) programme graduated with a Higher Diploma in Education and this marked one of the important milestones for the programme. All the learners who graduated have returned to study for a degree programme.

Teaching and Learning:

The programme is offered on a part time basis. The learners come to the university during winter and summer holidays when schools are on break. During this time, they attend residential studies for a period of two weeks. They have an opportunity to enjoy face-to-face contact with their lecturers and also to meet their colleagues, share ideas and work together in group discussions. Although the off-campus contact sessions have been put on hold due to the increased numbers of learners who have to be accommodated in schools for teaching purposes, the intention is to find other ways to provide learner support to them while they are off-campus.

Another source of support for learners is the NUL Mobile Library service operated by the University Library. The learners benefit from borrowing books in order to do their assignments and also for study purposes. The mobile library

concept still has to be fully internalized by the learners so that they can use the service effectively.

Challenges:

Some of the major challenges include:

Scaling up the programme to admit more aspiring teachers.

Developing study modules for all courses to assist students to learn.

Keep watching this space for more!