Educating Communities for Survival:
Building, Resilience, Sustainability, and a Healthy Society

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Abstract

Complexities and challenges in the world around food security and poverty are bringing communities to the near brink of collapse. This paper explores how social learning, education, and management skills can enable communities to actively participate in their development and sustain resources. The aim is to develop desirable traits amongst communities to create resilience and change through social learning, self-management, and resource management. Qualitative data were generated from literature, a case study of Nog community in the Free state and a purposively sampled respondent group of six lecturers using interviews and reflections. Data were categorised and analysed into themes. It was found that higher education lays the foundation for knowledge and management skills that are replicated through social learning which result in the acquisition and application of sustainable principles. The study is underpinned by (Bandura and Walters, 1977) social learning theory essential for modelling desirable traits and management skills for people to learn and change from self-defeating tendencies. This study proposes an ongoing partnership and engagement between higher education and communities for the development of resilient, resourceful, capable, and healthy communities. The implication is that government is unable to curb the increasing population and to cater for the increased needs of communities. It is thus concluded that social learning, education, and management skills can influence positive results that contribute towards communities managing change and adopting sustainable strategies that enables resilience, self-sufficiency to create a sustainable and a healthy society.

Keywords: Communities, Social Learning, Sustainability

Introduction

One of the goals of the Sustainable Development Goals is to eliminate poverty and hunger. In the same breath, the South African National Development Plan's priority also place emphasis on eliminating poverty and inequalities. Yet, according to Statistics South Africa, (2022) about (2,6 million) and 6 percent (1,1 million) are experiencing severe inadequate access to food, respectively. To exacerbate the problem unemployment also adds to the demise of households' food security. According to Brown and Hermes (2019) the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) indicates that world hunger has increased, to a figure of about 150 million since 2019. Even though unemployment, lack of income, lack of education and poor morale are seemingly contributing factors. However, more food consumption than production is a challenge that can bring communities to a brink of collapse. This suggests that communities need to learn ways of sustaining themselves to survive the onslaught of food security by unlearning certain traits but learn positive traits that can help them to sustain themselves because food shortage is also linked to health problems. Besides other socio-economic and environmental issues, the other challenge is that some of the community members lack education significant in changing people's mindsets including motivation and management skills that can help them to transform their personal lives and conditions. It is thus critical to rethink of ways of building resilient and healthy communities that can cope with complexities. To that effect, responsible investment on people's education is important in enhancing food security. It is against this backdrop that education, management skills and social learning strategies are needed to build collaborative initiatives to change the direction of lack but build a resilient capable and a healthy society. Also important is to foster learning of various skills that are necessary in the changing world therefore, education is necessary including the management of production and consumption to help communities to survive.

Although South Africa is known to be food secure, however, lately the level of food insecurity rates has risen in most parts of the country (Trefry, Parkins and Cundill, 2014). Without ruling out the safety net provided by government grants. It seems like they are not sufficient to cater for all the people's needs. Also, high food price is a major barrier to food security particularly to those living in poverty. Seemingly a participatory two-way learning approach that links both scientific knowledge and indigenous knowledge as stimulated in social learning operations can be an ideal intervention that can create some trade-offs and an integrated approach that can best benefit rural dwellers because it is two-way reciprocal strategy which can create an equilibrium that can benefit poor communities and remedy the situation of lack. Social learning is more than a participatory strategy, it embeds education which capacitate people towards accessing and promoting sustainable development (Davids and Theron, 2014). At the same time, it involves them in the identification and implementation of a solution to their challenges Fenster and Misgav (2014). Work Integrated Learning (WIL) in integrating communities and the university can be an enabler for social learning opportunities to enable engagement with communities to educate, exchange knowledge and skills as well as creating collaborations that can produce resilient, healthy communities who can manage personal barriers and cope with global complexities. It is within this backdrop that collaborative initiatives between the university and the community were formed to exchange knowledge and skills.

Literature Review

Within the quest to reduce poverty and food shortage along with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)s Higher Education Institutions (HEI)s need to play a leading role

in using curriculum to integrate principles of self-management, and management of resources for sustainability and for the survival of communities. Bell (2016) points out that the world population is increasing, and this has an impact on sustaining communities, therefore, education and management skills are greatly needed. The projection of population increases as posited by (Ibid) will reach a level of 9,7 billion by 2050.This brings a concern to all about the development of communities within the ambit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)s to build capacity that can contribute towards reducing hunger and poverty. To that effect, higher institutions, and the broader community need to rethink ways of rebuilding communities to bring change. Freire (1970) indicates that poor communities need to think and understand their social conditions so that they can develop and overcome some of their barriers. Arguably, this means that within the educational and management discourse, the focus is to link knowledge with practical initiatives accompanied by knowledge and skills that will not only change communities thinking patterns but, to change and replace traits that do not yield productivity.

A multifaceted approach that embraces different stakeholders in establishing an educational foundation, and preparing people to acquire skills to enable them to cope with the changing world is needed. This makes social learning a relevant approach because it stimulates a deeper understanding between the learned with scholarly knowledge, and those who possess indigenous knowledge, who best understand their territory and their needs. It is thus prudent to co-construct, co-create, and share knowledge collectively with others to sustain humanity and restore a sense of identity (Wiziack et al., 2013). This brings the relevance of education and management skills in enabling communities to reciprocate knowledge and skills through active participation, teamwork and collective decision making. Yukawa (2015) recommends that communities must be prepared for the complexity and the problems arising from the world's adversities by employing learning transformation approaches. On the other hand, Kegan and Lahey (2016) points to collaborative efforts that are developmental, and practices where everyone is supported, where personal learning is targeted, where negative personal traits are identified, and strategies are devised to overcome them. This is the kind of learning which according to Freire's (1970) perspective, addresses people as a collective and for them to become critically literate about their circumstance. Since social learning does not confine communities to a mere passive participation but involves ownership of the process of development by communities as beneficiaries of development (Munzer and Shaw, 2015) it becomes a befitting intervention strategy to be used. This means that social learning can bring communities to a point of self-reflection and management of the environment through teamwork, active participation, and effective communication.

Social learning places an increasing demand in HEIs to promote education that does not leave communities behind but build a conscious society (Björkman, 2018). Thus, use is made of different mechanisms to embrace and capacitate communities to enable them to manage their lives and cope with challenges by applying management and sustainable principles (Peter and Wals, 2013). The implication is that communities are actively involved in the process of learning which involves an exchange of values and collaboration. Social learning thus serves as one of the elements of a participatory bottom-up approach which brings communities in the centre of development (Therron and Mchunu, 2014) to learn, manage, improve, and sustain their environment. Furthermore, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), have taken steps to promote a campaign that puts weight towards an increased recognition of the cognitive and socio-emotional features of learning about Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)s education (UNESCO, 2017). This can indirectly contribute towards the realisation of the link between education, food security and

poverty reduction. A major question around food security has been to capacitate and empower people to understand their potentials and believe in themselves that they can manage change. Notably, management skills that are applied in different organisations, companies or institutions are also applicable in the collaborative effort of changing needs of the community (Smit et al., 2011). In essence management principles fit anywhere. This means management skills such as planning, organisation, leading and control, communication, decision making, and interpersonal skills are in alignment to the social learning theory and can be applied and be used by individuals to manage themselves and resources to ensure survival and sustainability. According to Wamsler (2020) most of research findings revealed that research on sustainability and education concentrate more on external factors such as environmental aspects, socio-economic and governance issues rather also looking at inner personal challenges faced by individual community members. Nasibulina (2015) adds that education promotes lifelong learning which brings change in action and outlook towards life by laying the foundation of good morals, knowledge and skills enable communities to tackle complex problems in their development journey. To Brink and Wamsler (2019) engagement with others stimulate motivation and stimulate sensitivity and recognition for sustainable values.

Theoretical Framework

Social learning is a concept derived from Bandura (1977) learning theory as an adaptive management approach showing a change in understanding when a group of people learn from each other. According to (Bandura and Walters, 1977) learning is based on the observation of the behaviour of others including a form of social interaction within a group. Following (Bandura and Walters, 1977), such an interaction between people and the environment including other factors at their exposition influence the interchange of knowledge and skills, values, attitude, and the modelling of behavior to reciprocate and impact on transformation and educational development of people. Even though some of the negative elements demonstrated by others are not desirable, social learning can contribute towards the reshaping of good qualities and roles of different role players in the quest for development (Ibid). Green and Peil (2015) add that social learning is a theory which influences people's learning and development of certain traits whereas (Lave and Wenger, 1991) refers to it as an active social participation which reflect activities of a community in the process of learning and developing. It can thus be interpreted as a change resulting from educational foundation that is laid including the adoption of skills gained through interaction with others wherein people learn better traits and adopt new skills that can change their lives for the better. This implies that access to sound knowledge can lead towards producing better outcomes that educate and equip communities with knowledge and management skills that can instil desirable values and traits such as maturity, self-motivation, and self-management. Therefore, it becomes pertinent that, universities must engage and educate communities by laying foundational principles around sound traits, knowledge, and management skills using WIL to promote social learning.

Aim of the Study

The aim was to investigate the impact of social learning and education as facilitated through the Work Integrated Learning (WIL) module to help communities to thrive and secure food.

Research Objectives

1. To determine the extent to which education and social learning promote resilience and change in mindset.
2. To explore ways on how education can develop positive traits that contribute towards communities sustaining food.

Research Questions

1. Towards extent does education and social learning promote lifelong learning, personal development and change in mindset?
2. How can communities sustain food security through education, social learning, and management skills?

Methodology

Research Design
A qualitative research design, guided by an interpretive paradigm, was adopted. Through this paradigm, rich data were collected through a case study which is social sciences research and through a semi-structured interview schedule coded manually into themes (Devare, 2015; Creswell & Clarke, 2014).

Sample and Sampling
The population to which the study aimed at generalising its findings was limited to a sample of few purposefully selected cases, comprising of the Nog community, students, and lecturers.

Methods
To collect get rich qualitative data, use was made of a case study, and semi-structured interviews. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth within a real-life context.

Case Description
Permission to do the study was sought. Data used in this study included a case of Nog community in the Free state province who together with students and lecturers were part of an educational and social learning session aimed at making participants lifelong learners who can use their land resources to produce food. Log is a rural area in the Free state province and has a small population of plus or minus sixty households. There is no school, no transport and learners must walk many kilometres to a nearby school at a nearby small town, and during rainy days or adverse weather conditions they do not go to school. The university through the office of the Community Engagement in collaboration with lecturers and students initiated an educative empowering social learning session for the Log community. Although the Log community has a vast land with the opportunity of planting and little resources but most of the members were idling, lost hope, negative, uncooperative, lack motivation and management skills. The first session was held in the university where lecturers, students and community members collaborated and learned together. The session was facilitated by lecturers and students were helping community members in interpreting certain difficult words in their mother tongue language and both students and lecturers seated together with community members in each table. The session was a conglomeration of an educational

information, personal skills, management skills and soft skills on problem solving, teamwork, human rights including participatory and sustainability principles.

After an introductory theory all the participants were given themes in groups to identify, discuss and reflect on them, followed by the identification of each one's strength and weaknesses. The session paved the way for the unlearning of undesirable traits and the learning of desirable ones to bring awareness and to help participants to identify resources they have and solve some of their barriers. In practising social learning principles, the first session was about sharing of ideas and best practices. The second session was about the formation of teams consisting of community members and one lecturer. It was followed by the third session which was hosted in the community big storage where they place their farming equipment to undertake a practical work and reflecting further on the application of what was learned which the community had to do independently and reflect orally and in a written form. The last session was the submission of files which included reflections and a some of the practical activities that communities undertook accompanied by photos. Vu and Feinstein (2017) posit that reflective writing within qualitative research qualifies as a data source tool which becomes part of the analytical processes. At the end of the four consecutive sessions there were positive outcomes that emerged such as a motivated community, change of behavioural patterns and a community that was willing to work diligently, produce food and sustain themselves. After completion of all the sessions certificates were issued, follow-ups, monitoring and support were also done by lecturers and students.

Data Analysis
Data were recorded, transcribed, and analysed systematically from content to codes, patterns and to emerging themes using content analysis (Creswell and Poth, 2016). Data used in this study included interviews, oral and written reflections of participants indicating personal development, adoption of new traits. change in outlook towards life and management skills.

Ethical Considerations
In the process of data collection participants were treated with respect, dignity, and sensitivity and were informed of the confidentiality and anonymity of the process.

Findings and Discussions

The findings revealed that through social learning different groups can work together, help each other, and share knowledge and skills that inspire mindset change.

"*Social learning sessions motivated me to remove false beliefs to embrace the belief that I can change my situation for the better,*" said one of the participants.

This reveals the importance of education in laying foundational principles and values that help people to manage their personal lives and their situation of lack. As indicated by (cf. Brink and Wamsler, 2019) motivation is an intrinsic attribute which stimulate positive and sound traits values needed for healthy living and sustainable living. This further validate Bandura (1977) learning theory as an adaptive management approach that brings a change in understanding when a group of people learn from each other.

"*Social learning educational sessions opened a reciprocal process of lifelong learning which considers the significance of different types of knowledge*", reported one of the participants.

This reveals the significance of creating a broader space for knowledge sharing that embraces a bottom-up participatory approach where both communities, students and lecturers were operating as equal partners and were free to work on their weaknesses and build their strengths towards using the resources at their disposable to grow food. According to (cf. Brink and Wamsler, 2019) engagement with others stimulate motivation and awareness of good practices and sound values. The idea articulated by (Wiziack et al., 2013) becomes relevant here in making social learning a tool to be used to acquire knowledge and skills that inspire people to realise the importance of food security and sustainability as one of the goals of sessions held the Nog community.

The case study showed that poverty, and unemployment brought low morale which made people to be motivated and not idle. However, the learning session, whereby ideas were shared, help and support given by lecturers ignited hope, positivity, responsibility, activism, and the realisation by the Nog community to use their land as a valuable resource to plough food to reduce poverty and lack. According to (cf. Freire, 1970) the assertion is that the poor must have an understanding about their social conditions to be able to work on some of the weaknesses and overcome some barriers. Similarly, (cf. Yukawa, 2015) recommends that communities must be prepared for the complexity and the problems arising from the world's adversities by employing learning transformation approaches.

Another participant added that, *"Learning together and reflecting on outcomes about managing weaknesses contributed to my personal development and the ability to use resources we have to produce food and live healthy"*.

Reflections revealed that, "Time management, planning and setting of objectives helped participants to improve on their weaknesses and build on their strengths.

"Discussions emanating from the educational sessions brought a whole new level of enlightenment of that made me to start planning, setting goals and started having interest in growing food and using resources at my disposable sustainably", reflected.

Another participant, whilst another said, *"Working on my weaknesses and building on my strengths made me to become resilient and to think of ways of improving my life and that of others"*.

This suggest that education and social learning are supportive process that can stimulates individuals' interest to change their perspective about life, to become lifelong learners who build new habits and values.

"I also learned that not only western education matters but there is also wealth of knowledge that comes from indigenous knowledge", said another participant.

This showed the value of each knowledge type and values that are embraced within each knowledge type that society can tap into to develop healthy traits that lead to progress and sustainability.

Another participant said*, "Social learning sessions made me to realise that I can cope with complexities"*.

This suggests that education and motivation enrich individuals with sound values and principles that enable communities to rise from poverty mindsets and handle complexities.

Another discovery was that management techniques such as planning, time management, motivation, decision making, conflict management that arose from the sharing of management skills motivated many people to join hands in the project of growing and selling food to sustain themselves, move out of the poverty trap and sustain a healthy lifestyle.

The case study and reflections further revealed the importance of education in contributing towards personal development. The view is supported by (cf. Nasibulina, 2015) who indicates that education promotes lifelong learning by laying the foundation of sound virtues, knowledge, and skills. Also revealed was the idea that social learning sessions stimulated self-belief and trust in one's abilities and change people's perspectives from being mere consumers to producers. This suggests that education and shared knowledge around issues of sustainability and management help to build a transformed society that is driven by sound knowledge and skills as well as building resilient communities who turns into producers that are involved in the food security drive. A critical finding was the significant relationship between education, management, and social learning which made people to move out of their comfort zones but to think of ways of dealing with their situation of lack and destitute.

Conclusion

It is evident that education, social learning, and motivation plays a significant role in broadening people's knowledge and bringing change in mindset to focus on strengths and work on their weaknesses to sustain their lives. Social learning laid the foundation for the survival of communities and for them to unlearn and learn traits and techniques that contributes towards better standards of living. This paper investigated how social learning and education promote lifelong learning and contribute towards a stimulus for self-management skills to change negative behavioral traits and practices. Education self-management skills and motivation forms part of lifelong learning contributing to personal development and the ability to use resources effectively and secure food because communities with sound values and an educational foundation are likely to be food secure than those without. This paper concludes that HEIs engagement with communities though the WIL module should follow strategies that do not subscribe to passive participation. Rather, they must engage in reflective, participatory social learning initiatives that motivate people to change their mindsets and gather knowledge and skills that enable them to manage their personal lives and resources. Knowledge and skills that were shared through WIL activities and a social learning approach where people shared knowledge and skills on an equal basis platform enabled a sense of taking charge, independence, responsibility, and the will to live better. It is thus concluded that social learning and education can bring positive results of self-management and sustainable living that can change a society from a downturn and collapse to an informed, a healthy resilient society that is able to secure food and reduce poverty.

Implications

The implication is that social learning allows equal status and recognition of different knowledge types. This is indicative of recognition of human centred approaches and the creation of balance between scientific and indigenous knowledge significant in developing informed, resilient, and a healthy society that can survive the onslaught of food security and poverty to decrease dependency on government with its limited resources in servicing a

growing population. Higher Education thus needs to use Work Integrated Learning (WIL) as an enabler for community engagement in the curriculum, to equip communities with knowledge and skills to be able to manage food security and poverty. This study proposes an ongoing educational support and engagement between higher education and communities with the implication of bringing change and sustaining communities. Since government cannot curb the increasing population and cater for their increased needs. It becomes mandatory for higher education to engage with communities and assist with continuous capacity building, whilst government provides agricultural resources.

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