

# **Decentralized Management of Adult and Non-Formal Education in Tanzania: Issues and Challenges**

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## **Abstract**

*One of the key milestones within the 50 years of adult education operation in Tanzania is the decision of the government to transfer some of its powers and functions to the local authorities. This includes a shift in the responsibility to finance those systems locally. Implementation of this important decision is not a simple and trouble-free operation. Experience indicates it demands a well-trained management and administrative personnel both at the macro and micro levels capable of mobilizing resources and promoting equitable access to high quality adult and non-formal education. Moreover, it needs personnel with capacity to respond to the current global challenges and opportunities, creation of and sustaining an enabling environment for effective partnerships. The paper makes further argument that having solid well trained personnel alone is not enough but this should be accompanied with equitable allocation of sufficient resources and the capacity to make decision over those resources to realise the expected output of decentralized management. The paper is based on a desk study but corroborated with data obtained from a round table discussion by regional and district adult education coordinators who were invited to attend the Conference to Celebrate 50 Years on of Adult Education in Tanzania convened at the University of Dar es Salaam in June,2021.*

**Keywords:** *adult education, decentralization, non-formal education*

## **Introduction**

In Tanzania today adult education and non-formal education are two terms that are being used interchangeably although they are not necessarily the same. UNESCO (2011) defines adult education specifically targeting individuals who are regarded as adults by the society to which they belong. This also includes what may be referred to as continuing education, recurrent education or second -chance education. Coombs (1974) defines non-formal education as any organized, systematic activity carried outside the framework of the formal education system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population including adults as well as children. He further contends that Non-formal education puts emphasis on needs, situations and cultural diversity of the beneficiaries, and then responds accordingly. Due to

this inherent character, non-formal education as it is for adult education, is wide in its scope and coverage. One of the main distinguishing factors between the two terms is the target population to be served. Whereas adult education serves adults<sup>1</sup> only, NFE serves both adults and children particularly those out of school. At times, adult education may contain programmes that are formal<sup>2</sup> in nature. Such adult education programmes are found in formal accredited institutions like colleges and universities.

Structurally, in Tanzania today adult education is not a standalone concept. Non-formal education has been attached to adult education and the education sub-sector is now known and renamed as Adult and Non-Formal Education (AE/NFE). This is because programmes that cater for overaged children<sup>3</sup> who can no longer begin standard one in a formal school and children and youth who dropped out of the formal school system are taken care of by this education sub-sector.

### **The management of adult education in Tanzania in a historical perspective**

Adult education has a long history and so applies its administrative and management structure. In the pre-colonial Tanganyika, adult education was acquired on the job through the transmission of family knowledge in terms of agricultural skills through apprenticeship. According to Mlekwa (1990) adult education in the form of schooling was established during the colonial period with the aim of consolidating the administrative infrastructure of colonial state. This was spearheaded by Christian missions so as to facilitate Christian and colonial penetration in Tanganyika. Immediately after independence in 1961, the government started to take measures to transform her totally inherited educational system to match it with her own new goals, aspirations and concepts of development. Among the measures taken was the re-positioning of education outside the normal formal school system for children. Although, formal education for children was considered important in stimulating national development in the crucial aftermath of independence, it could not be relied upon to solve the above mentioned problems. The government felt that it would be unwise to concentrate on educating

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<sup>1</sup> Legally, in the Tanzanian context an adult person is anyone from eighteen years and above. This person is regarded mature enough to vote in any public election held in Tanzania (Kanukisya, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> In the formal learning setting, adult learning opportunities are offered under formal institutional context They are well structured and coordinated, lasting for a specified period of time (Mushi, 2016). These opportunities include adult learning programmes organized by tertiary institutions, universities and other institutions of higher learning. Through government and private sponsorship, some employees have been pursuing continuing education programmes through open and distance learning, colleges and universities within and outside the country.

<sup>3</sup> The official school age is seven years. Therefore according to UNICEF (2006), overage children begin at the age of eight and a special NFE programme known Complimentary Basic Education Tanzania (COBET) or its Kiswahili equivalent MEMKWA) was initiated in Tanzania in 1999 to provide them with a second chance.

children, leaving adults in a state of illiteracy for this would imply delaying the country's development for generations. It was for this reason that, in introducing the First Five Year Development Plan (1964–1969) the Late President Mwalimu Nyerere pledged a major commitment to adult education that:

First we must educate adults. Our children will not have an impact on our development for 5, 10, or even 20 years. The attitudes of adults, on the other hand, have an impact now  
(United Republic of Tanzania, 1964: xi)

In this era, adult education was promoted widely under community education which covered literacy, agricultural extension, rural skills and health education. According to Mushi (2010), literacy teaching was a major activity of the community development and perhaps the largest single adult education activity in terms of number of participants involved. Although, tangible activities geared at educating adults could be seen, they were still amorphous in nature since they were organised in a scattered, uncoordinated and limited manner.

A well-established management and administrative machinery to support adult education activities in the country came into effect in 1970 when President Nyerere announced in his 1969's New Year Speech that 1970 would be an adult education year. Several important and notable pronouncements which demonstrated his own personal commitment and political will of his government were made. Coordination and administration of adult education activities were transferred from the Ministry of Rural Development and Regional Administration to the Ministry of Education which was later on renamed as Ministry of National Education. The ministry became a major agency responsible for providing education for the entire youth and adults. By being incorporated within the umbrella of the Ministry of National Education, adult education which was initially amorphously coordinated in scattered and limited manner now received a boost in status in the eyes of the public. A gradual process of diffusion between the hitherto sharply divided formal and non-formal educational systems was set in motion.

As a result of this new assignment of hosting adult education, the Ministry of National Education created a Directorate of Adult Education within its administrative structure. This Directorate was established on the same footing as other directorates dealing with various sectors of formal education such as primary education, secondary education, and teacher training. The directorate refined Nyerere's vision on adult education and outlined its tasks as follows:

- a. To mobilize the rural and urban masses into a better understanding of our national policies of socialism and self-reliance

- b. To provide leadership training in various aspects of life at all levels
- c. To eradicate illiteracy
- d. To give knowledge and skills in agricultural and rural construction, health and home economics that will raise people' productivity
- e. To provide follow-up education for primary and secondary school leavers with a view to setting them in ujamaa village
- f. To provide continuing education to professionals at various stages in the form of seminars, evening classes, in-service training programmes, correspondence courses and vocational training (Ministry of National Education, 1972, p.15 as cited in Hall, 2020).

The creation of a Directorate of Adult Education at ministerial level went concurrently with appointment of a wide administrative network of adult education officers at all administrative levels throughout the country- regional, district, divisional and wards levels. The exercise started with the appointment of District Adult Education Officers in 1970. Before their appointment they underwent a three- month training at Kivukoni College. Their main responsibility was to organize and coordinate adult education programmes and activities in their respective districts, work together with and at the same level as other officers in charge of formal education system. They were also required to function as political officers in their respective districts. It should be noted that by that time Tanzania was a one party state and the party was supreme. In 1971 adult education officers/coordinators were appointed at regional level followed by those at divisional and ward levels. In 1974, each District Adult Education Officer was supported by the appointment of Adult Education Evaluation and Domestic Science Officer.

Kassam (1978, p.23) summarized the main duties of the Adult Education Officer at different levels as follows:

- i. The planning, implementation and supervision of various adult education programmes in their areas and through the adult education centres;
- ii. Recruitment of teachers for adult education classes and the payment of honoraria;
- iii. Mobilising the people for adult education through TANU;
- iv. Cooperating and coordinating with other adult education agencies in promoting and expanding adult education programmes;
- v. Training of adult education teachers, study group leaders, and other adult education educators;

- vi. Distributing adult education materials and stationery to adult education centers;
- vii. To report on adult education activities to the Ministry of National Education and TANU.

In carrying out these tasks, the adult education staffs were provided with various means of transport: a bicycle at ward level, motor-cycle at divisional level and a Land Rover at district and regional levels.

### **The committee structure**

In addition to the network of adult education staff there existed an elaborate committee structure of adult education which was set up in 1970. Such committee structure was an attempt to carry out horizontal coordination between various agencies of adult education at the national, regional and district levels, while at the ward level it attempted to channel the resources of formal education institutions and other organizations for adult education.

The committees at the national, regional, and district levels were chaired by Executive Secretary of the ruling party (TANU) and the respective Adult Education Officer at that level served as Committee Secretary. The Ward Adult Education Committee was chaired by the TANU Branch Chairperson, and was comprised of heads of formal education institutions within the ward, as well as other institutions that existed in the ward. Every school or college which served as an adult education centre had its own adult education committee which provided a vehicle through which the learners participated actively and directly in the planning and decision making of their learning activities. The decision for the committees to be chaired by heads of the Ruling Party was done deliberately to indicate Tanzanian's serious commitment to the cause of adult education.

It should be noted that powers and decision-making within this structure, remained heavily concentrated at the ministerial level. Plans were conceived, initiated and developed by the central authority at the national level. Thereafter, developed plans were disseminated to lower organs for adoption and implementation. Hence the grassroots contributed little, if any, to the development plans and implementation of the same.

Budgeting and financial control was done at the central level and so applied to all issues related to what needs to be learned in the adult classes. One of the main tasks of the Ministry of National Education was to mobilise and coordinate all possible resources for adult education through the committee structure. Within this perspective Mlekwa (2021) observed that, the administrative and organizational structure of adult education, therefore, had a dual

character namely provision for central direction of adult education and peoples participation from the grassroots (class) level to the national level. The Ministry of National Education at the headquarters provided central direction while the National Literacy Centre located in Mwanza region was responsible for training of personnel engaged in literacy work as well as production and publication of literacy and supporting material. It also acted as a reference and research centre.

The recruitment of volunteer teachers, distribution of materials and establishment of advisory committees were handled at the regional, district and ward levels. Budgeting and financial planning and disbursement was centrally done and every year the government allocated not less than ten percent of the total budget of the Ministry of National Education to adult education. The total recurrent expenditure continued to rise in the period 1969/70 to 1979/80. There was also a good amount of financial assistance especially from Sweden, UNESCO, UNDP, Sweden and other developed communities (Mlekwa, 2021). The ambitious literacy campaign aimed to wipe out illiteracy in five years (1971-1975) was launched and managed within this administrative structure.

### **The current administrative and organization structure**

During the 1990s this system changed. Currently, overall operations of adult and non-formal education as it is for other education sub-sectors like primary and secondary education are guided by the Local Government Reforms Programme (LGRP), which was established by the government in 1998 and founded on the principle of Decentralization by Devolution (D by D). The D by D policy was based on the assumption that transferring responsibilities of managing funds and personnel from the central government to the district councils would improve the delivery of social services. With this in mind, Local Government Authorities were made responsible for financing the provision of services such as healthcare and education. The idea was that this would create an incentive for the LGAs to mobilize local resources in order to finance these programs. Within this context therefore, the Local Government Authorities (LGAs) assumed full responsibility for management and delivery of both formal and non-formal education services within their areas of jurisdiction.

Consequently, the education sector was now vested under two ministries-The Ministry of Education<sup>4</sup> and one dealing with Local Government Authorities and Regional Administration

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<sup>4</sup> The name for the Ministry of Education has been changing from time to time starting with Ministry of National Education, then Ministry of Education and Culture, to Ministry of Education and Vocational Training and now Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

under the Prime Minister's Office (now transferred to the President's Office). The roles and functions of the Ministry of Education now remained to be policy formulation, resource mobilization, co-ordination, collaborative planning, monitoring, evaluation and regulating quality assurance standards while the other ministry that hosts the local government authorities assumed the roles of implementation of the policies and management of the education programmes within their specific locations. It is important to note that even before the LGRP of 1998, the Education and Training Policy of 1995 had already decentralized basic education and training by empowering regions, districts, communities and educational institutions to manage and administer education and training.

Although, decentralization is generally advantageous it is not a simple and trouble-free operation. It should not be seen as a universal solution. Experience indicates that it has its own challenges and issues for consideration if tangible positive results are to be seen. In the context of AE/NFE the following have been observed.

#### **The demand for innovative and well trained personnel at the micro level**

Experience indicates that for a decentralized system to function effectively, it demands a well-trained management and administrative personnel both at the macro and micro levels capable of mobilizing resources and promoting equitable access to high quality adult and non-formal education. Moreover, it needs personnel with capacity to respond to the current global challenges and opportunities, creation of and sustaining an enabling environment for effective partnerships. In the light of decentralization policy, AE/NFE professional leaders need to enhance their competences in planning. In particular, they need to have vision through which they will be able to develop their own institutional strategic plans as part or as a translation of the district/macro policies. The complexity of individual plans should differ from one place/level to another depending on local variables.

It was gathered from the round table discussion with regional adult education coordinators that in actual fact, AE/NFE professional leaders especially at lower levels (district, ward and centre level) have a big role to play in the implementation of AE/NFE activities. They are seen as change agents of bottom-up development efforts. Therefore, in addition to competences in planning, they have to be transformative individuals, who are innovative and able to find ways of working with the community. They need to be competent in promoting public relations, fund raising, and community mobilization. This is due to the fact that many efforts in adult basic education have to get support from community leaders, community

groups, and families, local and national politicians. Most of the times these people have proved to be helpful in raising enrolments, sustaining attendance and completion and in mobilizing the resources to pay for class premises, materials, training and even rewards for the facilitators

Experience also demonstrates that adult and non-formal education activities involve a considerable number of players and actors. There are considerable efforts by NGOs in different areas especially in the urban centres addressing the problem of out-of-school children and youth as well as provision of basic education to adults. These efforts need co-ordination. Therefore adult education officers have to possess competences in partnership building and collaboration.

### **Preparation and orientation for district and ward education co-ordinators**

It is clear that the current educational reforms have necessitated district education officers and ward education co-ordinators to play a very crucial role in ensuring smooth running of quality education at the district and ward levels respectively. The Ward Education Officers for example are overall in charge of all matters pertaining to both formal and non-formal education systems in their respective areas including secondary and teacher education. They are expected to play not only a co-coordinating role but also a supervisory role of both formal and non-formal education activities in the ward. They are expected to collect, analyze and provide data from the ward to the district level. Given such great responsibilities, one would expect that the new appointees are given preparation, job description and orientation. The discussion with the District and Regional Adult Education Officers showed that no proper standard orientation or preparation is done to new appointees. Individuals are handed in letters of appointment and they are expected to start on their duties immediately. They are given guidelines, which show their duties, responsibilities and some job description. However, it was also revealed that if given time and resources, the job descriptions and orientation seminars ought to be provided.

### **Unclearly defined roles and responsibilities**

The placement of adult education under the Ministry of Education in the 1970s went concurrently with appointment of adult education personnel at the national, regional and district levels. Their roles and responsibilities were centrally defined, coordinated and supervised. Adult education formed an independent unit with its own budget line at the district level. However, this has also been changed. Presently, at the district level, there are

five adult education officials (as initially prescribed) with specialization in technical education, (for example, carpentry, masonry) home economics, agriculture, audio visual specialist and the District Adult Education Officer. The academic qualifications of these staff range from certificate to first degree. All these officials together with the district adult education officer, report directly to the district education officer and are charged with overall coordination, monitoring and supervision of the various AE/NFE programmes in the district. At the ward level there is a Ward Education Officer who deals with formal, non-formal, and adult education activities. At the lowest point i.e. the village/centre there is a centre coordinator who is also serving as head of a primary school in that locality.

Although the number of personnel is adequate, this structure is not operating effectively. In many places, the structures are dormant and weak because of inadequate funding to run the programmes. According to Mushi (2021), Tanzania spends an average of 0.5% of its education budget for adult education. This is very low and it falls short of the funding benchmark for high quality adult education programmes as proposed by the Global Campaign for Education 2005 that governments should dedicate at least 3% of their education budgets to adult education. In any case, it becomes difficult for these leaders to keep the programmes running. For instance, payment of honoraria has greatly been affected. While the honoraria are very low compared to the current realities, it is also not regularly paid. This has demotivated the facilitators who end up engaging themselves in other income-generating activities to survive.

Instead of staying idle, sometimes these adult education personnel at the district levels are assigned other duties by the District Education Officer and they have proved to be very useful. Technical Officers, for example, have been utilized to supervise construction of classrooms, offices and teachers' houses while the officer in-charge of Home Economic assists in health programmes/activities in primary schools. This demonstrates that within the AE/NFE sub-sector there is a lot of untapped potentials. The skills and knowledge inherent in these officers can be of great use especially for the 14-18 age group as well as for the adult population who have to be equipped with relevant life skills.

### **A missing link between policy planning and implementation**

As previously indicated, adult education activities as it is for other basic education sub-sectors now operate under the umbrella of two ministries. Moreover, there is no clear understanding

of what constitute adult education in its broadest sense. Adult education is misconceived as something to do with persons who have never had the chance to be in the four walls of a formal school (Bhalalusesa, 2006). Since the high numbers of illiterate adults at the time of independence have now been reduced from 85% to 22% as per the last 2012 census (MoEVT, 2016) then the situation is probably seen as no longer alarming. However, from a rights-based perspective even the remaining percentage of illiterate adults is entitled to education. Above all, adult education as indicated at the beginning of this paper is a cross-cutting issue and a lifelong process. Even those who are already literate, they still need follow-up literacy programmes to continue learning so that they do not relapse into illiteracy. During his address for the 1970 New Year Eve, the then President Mwalimu Nyerere reminded the nation that to live is to learn and to learn is to live better. He further emphasized that education was something which never stops. Whatever the level of education one may have reached, he/she can go on since there is always something new to learn (Adult Education Association of Tanzania, 1975). Indeed, Nyerere was quite right because the world we live in is not static. The changes in socio-economic and political realities necessitate us to continue learning to cope with them. Today, Tanzania has decided to build a self-reliant industrial-based economy and totally eliminate poverty among its people by year 2025. One major tool that the country relies on in attaining such aspirations is continuous adult learning as well as adult training and re-training through workers education programmes.

Lack of clear understanding of what constitutes adult education has led to reduction of the status of adult education sub-sector at the micro-level. What used to be a department at the Ministry of Education Science and Technology for example, has now been dissolved and its activities have been placed under basic education department within the Office of the Commissioner for Education. However, adult education as indicated above goes beyond basic education. Apart from that, basic education itself is also very broad encompassing pre-primary, primary and secondary education. In terms of budgeting, priorities have to be set carefully.

### **Lack of centrally developed instructional materials**

It should be noted that during the centralized system even the instructional materials for literacy and post-literacy programmes in the country were centrally designed, developed and produced at the Mwanza National Literacy Centre. Within Functional Literacy Model, primers aiming at improving agricultural production related to cash crop production were designed and sent to the regions depending on the type of crop grown in that area, for example better farming techniques of cotton for the Lake Zone, Cashew nuts production for

Mtwara and Lindi, Tobacco growing for Tabora and Coffee production for Kilimanjaro. However, this was highly criticised as being top-down approach without taking into consideration of specific needs of the learners. Following the Jomtien Conference on Education for All in 1990, and the findings of studies conducted in early 1990s, and the national literacy survey of 1992 (Kater, et al, 1992) Tanzania had to reconsider the functional literacy approach and adopted UNESCO conception of adult basic education as an education approach to meet the basic learning needs. Within the same context the government designed an Integrated Community Based Adult Education (ICBAE) in 1993 along with Regenerated Freirean Literacy Empowering Community Techniques (REFLECT) methodology to promote quality and sustainability of adult education. In principle, ICBAE is integrated and involves participants of different educational levels. This means also that there is no standard and uniform textbook/primer for the adult learners across the country. Using the philosophy of REFLECT each learning centre needs to analyse its own context and the facilitator together with the participants then have to design their own instructional materials. While this sounds theoretically attractive, one question is still lingering: To what extent are the facilitators able to lead the learners to analyse their situation and needs to come out with own quality designed instructional materials? Presently, the Mwanza Literacy Centre is no longer functioning as it was initially conceived. The printing press is now owned by the Institute of Education to print, among others, books for the formal education system. Therefore, the centrally developed textbooks for adult learners are not there anymore. In short there are no instructional materials for the ICBAE programme.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The purpose of this paper was to try to show some of the issues culminating from the goodwill of the government to initiate decentralisation of education system including adult and non-formal education. In the adult education context, the LGRP has not proved to be a panacea of all the problems within the sub-sector. For example, the committee structure which helped to mobilise the communities for participation in adult education programmes has ceased to operate. Accordingly, the denial of adult and non-formal education to form an independent administrative and governance unit both at ministerial and district levels has affected many things especially the capacity to make decisions on matters related to financial control and management. Furthermore, provision of seed money for the learners to initiate and run small-scale income generating projects geared at poverty alleviation is not evident.

Income generating projects in ICBAE are designed to use revolving loan funds for scaling up the projects and literacy training is taken as a necessary ingredient for successful execution and sustainability of the projects. This is not effectively operational at the moment. Adult literacy circles (where they exist) are supposed to be led by facilitators using dialogue discussion techniques of REFLECT. But again this needs innovative, skilled and knowledgeable facilitators who are capable of leading the participants into viable project identification and project proposal write up. Continuous technical and material support is imperative. Unfortunately, locally trained facilitators are not readily available and even if they were available the honoraria to pay them is very little to retain them on the job. Apart from that it is paid irregularly depending on the financial capacity of the local authorities.

Overall, as we sit down and reflect on the past 50 years and the contribution adult education in pushing forward our socio-economic development, there is every reason to argue for a case to revamp the sub-sector. One of the suggestions is an attempt to revisit the current management and administrative structures in both ministries responsible for education so as to reinstate adult education section/unit/desk/department to become a self-governing entity. Capacity building for adult education personnel to handle the tasks specified within the decentralised structure is also imperative for them to be functional and effective.

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