Education in Namibia under the illegal colonial regime (was) characterized by inequality, segregation and other apartheid conditions. Schools for various population groups are segregated along racial and ethnic lines. Ethnicity is promoted at the cost of national unity by the provision of segregated schools, linguistic segregation, and curricula that attempt to promote the special status of whites. While education is compulsory for whites, there are not enough schools for Africans. The schools for Africans are staffed with unqualified or inadequately qualified teachers. Pupil to teacher ratios in the African schools are much higher than those in the white schools. Funds allocated for the education of the white pupils are many times higher. The education system in Namibia thus works against promoting national unity and the creation of an egalitarian society.

The new education system in independent Namibia will need to correct these wrongs. An alternative education policy must therefore view the need for change as its central theme. Toward achieving this change the Liberation Movement has identified the following areas of action: 1) Urgent training of technical and professional cadres; 2) Provision for work-oriented, comprehensive education and training for illiterate and semi-literate adults; 3) Laying the foundation of a free and universal education for all Namibians from primary, through secondary to university level by training many teachers and educationists now; and 4) Developing the people's cultural creativeness. These areas of action emphasize that any meaningful development depends on the development of human resources through education and that education must embody the ethos of total liberation of man from the humiliations of the past, ignorance, superstition, and exploitation.

(The) objectives outlined above cannot be viewed as day one conditions but should be considered long term guidelines because their implementation would require significant structural changes, enormous resources, and, above all, favourable attitudes. Implementation of these guidelines would therefore need to be synchronised with the overall national policies of independent Namibia. (UNIN, 1984, p. 20-23)

These quotations from SWAPO's basic policy document on education set the context and the challenge faced by Namibia in the field of human resource development. The challenge is twofold: dismantling a fragmented system based on racial and ethnic lines and encompassing no less than eleven representative authorities; and, building a new, unified system which reflects the beliefs and the goals of a newly independent Namibia.

The task before us, specifically in regard to human resource development, is to raise questions, to examine carefully currently accepted beliefs and priorities, to learn from past experience in other African countries, and to set forth alternatives processes to support the development of the educational system of Namibia. Because Namibia comes late to independence, there are several decades worth of experience of other African countries to learn from. Our purpose is to use this experience as a basis for developing a different and more effective pattern of interaction between Namibian citizens, NGOs...
and Government and those outside Namibia who seek to assist in constructive ways the process of building a new educational structure and process in Namibia.

What should be the role of outside NGOs and Universities? How can we examine and then reconceptualize past experience to establish new values and attitudes, new procedures, and new patterns of relationship between inside and outside groups? How do we create an atmosphere of dialogue and partnership and the needed degree of humility on the part of outside 'experts' who may feel they have the answers? How can a balance be struck between the perceptions and values of newly independent Namibia and the policies, beliefs, and procedures of outside agencies that answer to other agents, with often widely differing criteria and goals. What process and structures will allow Namibian institutions and organizations to have access to needed external resources without endangering their own internal development and adherence to their own self-defined goals for human resource development?

Outside agencies and individuals bring Western technical knowledge to the partnership. Namibians bring indispensable inside knowledge of the kind of society they wish to build, understanding of the cultural norms and practices of their society, and knowledge of the ways in which Namibia can or cannot make use of particular technologies. Outsiders need very much to learn how to listen and to respect these latter kinds knowledge, without which external technical knowledge is often ineffective or even destructive in its consequences.

Those of us associated with the Center for International Education (CIE) here at the University of Massachusetts have wrestled with similar issues throughout our twenty-three year history as a training and implementing agency working throughout the developing world. Two concepts have permeated all our efforts: participation and collaboration. Participation is the belief that any activity should be done with meaningful and ongoing involvement of those we are trying to assist throughout all phases of the effort. Collaboration refers to a set of values embodied in certain patterns of working together with others. Both concepts are difficult to apply, especially when operating within larger, hierarchical structures which neither understand nor support participative and collaborative working relationships. Ten years ago we held a small working conference at the University of Massachusetts to reflect on the meaning of collaboration and the conditions needed for it to flourish. From that and our direct experiences of trying to work collaboratively in Ghana, Guatemala, and Thailand, to name of few settings, we have arrived at a set of guidelines for collaboration which may be relevant in our efforts in this symposium.

(1) The larger context must be supportive of collaboration. Conditions of suspicion, hostility, domination or oppression will not support a collaborative working relationship.

(2) Cooperating groups must share a set of values regarding the program.

(3) The most important phase is the beginning when full sharing of information on both sides is essential. Partners must decide to collaborate on a voluntary, self-selection basis.

(4) There must be a goal which both organizations hold in common and which motivates them to collaborate. The greater the importance of the goal to the organizations, the greater the likelihood of effective collaboration.

(5) Resources must be jointly contributed with both risks and rewards shared.

(6) Both organizations must be able to delegate authority to those managing the collaborative activity.

(7) Unequal power relationships detract from collaboration. If the two organizations are very different in size and power, then it is wise to set up third party arrangements to resolve disputes. (Bing, 1979, p. 245)
I think these criteria, growing out of twenty years of our experience, provide a helpful set of questions to keep in mind as we proceed to explore questions and assumptions about how we have worked in development settings in the past and how we might better collaborate in the future.

Literacy

The overall literacy rate in Namibia is estimated to be around 30%, with widespread disparities across the various ethnic/racial groups. Twelve years ago SWAPO held a literacy seminar and recommended that after independence a comprehensive adult education and literacy campaign be launched. More recently a national literacy conference was held in Namibia in the Fall of 1989. Current literacy programs are estimated to involve no more than 6000 people with programs suffering from high drop-out rates which are often characteristic of literacy programs. (UNDP, 1989, p. 18)

What can be learned from others’ experiences? Literacy is clearly a priority for the people of independent Namibia, yet the challenge is great in a large, thinly populated country where provision of human services is difficult and expensive. Some questions that must be addressed are - Should Namibia launch a national mobilization for literacy campaign or gradually expand literacy and adult education through a slower institution-based strategy? What language should be the basis for literacy? How will Namibia make literacy a useful tool in the development process? Literacy needs to be linked to the participation in the development process, probably through linkages to community development, income generation, and a variety of non-formal education (NFE) activities.

Schooling

The current inequities and the challenge to provide effective services for the African population are nowhere more apparent than in formal education. SWAPO policy endorses the provision of nine years of basic education as a free, compulsory and universal service. While statistical data is incomplete, it suggests that achieving this goal will be a significant challenge, particularly in the under-serviced areas of the north where nearly half the population of Namibia lives.

For the majority of the population, the current education system is limited, of poor quality, and is such that the majority drop out well before completing primary school. UNDP statistics suggest that nearly half (40%) of the total student population in Namibia are enrolled in the first three grades of primary school, and an additional one-third are enrolled in the upper primary (grades 4-6). In other words, 77% of all the enrollment is in primary school. (UNDP, 1989, p. 14)

What can Namibia learn from the experience of other African countries in facing the challenge of providing mass schooling for its population? Several key questions are worth asking as a starting point.

(a) What kind of balance between the three levels of education should be sought in the short term and in the longer term? Current thinking places heavy emphasis on shifting resources from higher and upper secondary education to basic education. Enrollments in Namibia already match this pattern, but what about the allocation of resources to the three levels?

Unit costs of higher education are often as much as 100 times those of primary education, so even relatively small tertiary institutions may eat up large portions of the education budget. Namibia faces the added challenge of dismantling the apartheid education system inherited from the colonial South African regime.

(b) The linchpin in any education system is its teachers. How can Namibia train the quality and quantity of new teachers required by rapid educational system expansion? Distance education, crash in-service training programs, teaching while learning models, and use of a wide variety of uncertified staff have been used in various other countries.
Curricular reform and replacing the colonial Cape Curriculum used in most schools is an immediate need. How can Namibia achieve most effectively its goal of merging work and study in ways that produce attitudes and skills needed to build a new Namibia?

Nonformal Education

Nonformal education is a relatively newcomer on the Namibian scene, with much of its activities being the provision of formal education services to those who do not have access to schools. There are some community based programs concentrating on health and income-generating activities which serve between 5,000 and 10,000 people according to the UNDP estimates. SWAPO’s goals for NFE go well beyond its current limited forms to encompass Freirean style consciousness raising and integrated, community-based development efforts which join activities in health, agriculture and education into meaningful unified approaches. There are several issues worthy of discussion in realizing community-based, nonformal education programming.

(a) What kind of organizational structures will best serve the evolution of nonformal education in Namibia? On the one hand there is need for coordination and avoidance of duplication, yet more importantly whatever is done needs to provide flexibility and freedom for local initiatives of many kinds to flourish in response to local needs.

(b) How should NFE activities and structures link to programs for literacy and for women’s development?

(c) How can NFE get sufficient resources from government sources while at the same time effectively generating community support and involvement in its efforts?

Nonformal education has the potential of playing a major role in helping independent Namibia meet the development needs of its people.

Women’s Education

Women are a major, potential resource for Namibia, a fact recognized when the SWAPO Women’s Council was formed to help make the voice of Namibian women heard. UNDP estimated that between 60% and 70% of households were headed by women. Several NFE organizations have programs which focus on women or seek to include women in their activities, but there is no larger coordination of efforts to serve women’s needs. There are many issues to be addressed in regard to meeting the needs of women.

(a) Can women’s issues be dealt with separately from other aspects of development? Must we not only integrate them into development, but perhaps also change the nature of development so it works for them on their terms. What mechanisms are needed so that Namibian women themselves can work out their own solutions to these questions?

(b) There is also the need to recognize that women’s issues operate on many levels, not just in the public policy domain of education or income equality. Women’s involvement in development will require changes at all levels starting with basic male/female roles within the family unit.

The challenge to a new nation to make the fullest use of the potential which resides in the female half of their population is a daunting one which requires careful negotiation between traditional and newer values, beliefs and behaviors. Failure to effectively address these needs, however, will have a high cost which Namibia can ill afford.
The Challenge

If there is one overarching theme that should inform us, perhaps it should be humility, particularly on the part of those of us who are often labelled 'experts.' In the past thirty years, we have seen a long list of development strategies come and go. Yesterday's solution is today's example of what to avoid. If there is anything we should have learned from experience, it is that we really don't have the answers to the development challenge. We do have technical knowledge about how to do certain things. But, we don't know what the results will be in a specific situation and especially, we aren't aware of the many unintended consequences which regularly occur. Perhaps no one can know the outcomes in detail ahead of time. But those with the insiders' perspective have essential knowledge about what is likely to happen, along with the moral right to self-determination.

Genuine dialogue with those who are the only true experts, the people of the communities and institutions of Namibia, can provide the basis for a real partnership between outside knowledge and inside knowledge. Freire's conditions for dialogue included respect, love, and a belief in the humanity of the others. Let us try to achieve these.

References

