PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION & TRAINING | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Capacity building in small business management for new literates through action research

Akwasi Arko-Achemfuor*

Abstract: This article reports on a community engagement project by the University of South Africa's Department of Adult Basic Education to address the challenges faced by new literates in establishing and managing projects and small businesses. The main objective of the article was to assess how capacity and training workshops have been used as tools to empower individuals and groups who have just completed basic education to start and run successful business. In assessing the impact of the Kha Ri Gude Mass Literacy Campaign (KMLC) on the lives of graduates, it came to the attention of the Department that the graduates have taken initiatives to start SMMEs and other projects in their communities but the lack of business and project management skills was causing failures in a number of the initiatives. The qualitative method of enquiry using multiple case studies was applied in the article. The main instruments applied for data collection were individual and focus group interviews and observations. The initial data collection in three provinces in 2013 served as the baseline where the requests were made and the need analysis conducted. The finding indicates that the interventions have now helped the graduates to start and run SMMEs effectively, access markets for their products, form networks, register individual businesses and cooperatives and writing funding proposals among other skills. The articles recommend for the initiative to be rolled out across the country as it has proven to be successful in the areas it has been piloted.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This article reports on a community engagement project by the University of South Africa’s Department of Adult Basic Education to address challenges faced by new literates in establishing and managing projects and small businesses. The graduates had taken initiatives to start SMMEs and other projects in their communities but the lack of business and project management skills was causing failures in most of the initiatives. Requests were made by individuals and project groups for interventions which the department embarked upon. Three training sessions were conducted in small business and project management for individuals, project and community members in three provinces in 2014 and 2015. The interventions have been very successful. Subsequently, the articles recommend for the initiative to be rolled out across the country as it has proven to be successful in the areas it has been piloted.
1. Introduction
This article reports on a community engagement project by the University of South Africa’s Department of Adult Basic Education and Youth Development’s in addressing the challenges faced by new literates in establishing and managing (SMMEs). The role of adult basic education in development is widely acknowledged across the world. Adult and community learning, for example, provides opportunities for people to develop new interests, improve their confidence and wellbeing, support their children’s learning and interact positively with people from desperate backgrounds. Ramirez (1990) points out that adult education processes provide communities with the necessary tools and prerequisite learning that enable them to participate in their own development. Kha Ri Gude (KRG) (Let us Read in Tshivenda) Mass Literacy Campaign according to the Catholic Institute of Education (CIE) (2014:2) was instituted in 2008 with the intention of enabling the then 4.7 million illiterate adults above the age of 15 to become numerate and literate. KRG’s aim was for South Africa to realise the UNESCO’s Education for All commitment to halve the country’s illiteracy by 2015. After going through the six months at KRG, the learners should be able to read, write and calculate in their mother tongue in line with the Unit Standards for ABET level 1 and also to learn spoken English. Govender (2016) intimates that about 2.5 million learners had benefited from the campaign by 2016. Many of the Kha Ri Gude graduates have capitalised on the basic education they have received from KRG to initiate various projects, businesses and activities in their communities. During the assessment of the impact of the Kha Ri Gude Mass Literacy Campaign (KMLC) on the lives of graduates, it was reported and observed by the researchers that the graduates have taken initiatives to start SMMEs in their communities but the lack of business management skills was causing failures in a number of the SMMEs they had established. Citing the Small Enterprises Development Agency, Marivate (2014, p. 56) intimates that 60% of SMMEs that are started in South Africa fail in the first year of operation and 75% fail within three years of operation. The objective of the research was to address the challenges reported by the graduates to the researchers, through action research. The research is a multiple case study design. The non-probability sample method was applied in this research to ascertain the lived experiences of the respondents on how they have been capacitated through the capacity building workshops to establish and run SMMEs. The main instruments employed for data collection in this research are document analysis, individual and focus interviews and observations. Nine training sessions were conducted in small business management for individuals, project and community members in Kwa-Zulu Natal, Eastern Cape and Limpopo provinces in 2014 and 2015. The initial data collection in the three provinces in 2013 served as the baseline where the requests were made and the need analysis conducted. The interventions have now helped the graduates to start and run SMMEs effectively, access markets for their products, form networks, register individual businesses and cooperatives and writing funding proposal among other skills. The article recommends for the initiative to be rolled out in all the other provinces as it has proven to be successful in the areas it has been piloted.

2. Theoretical framework
The need to use methodologies and approaches that allow individuals and communities to reflect on challenges and solution is critical for adult learners as advocated for by the Brazilian activist and theorist in his concept of literacy for empowerment. This article is underpinned by social action and human capital theories. Social action theory is credited to Max Weber which examines the actions of people in the context of the meaning they assign to them and relationships these actions have with the actions of others. Weber argues that social action occurs as a result of cooperation and struggle with the individual and the wider society. There are a number of social action theories but a few of them will be examined. Some of the
Theorists whose perspectives are discussed here include Paolo Freire, Mezirow and Newman. Social action theory places emphasis on the role of community education as an arena for social change. For Freire, education was primarily about supporting communities to move from oppression to liberation. The objective of the learning process is to liberate the participants from their external and internal oppression; to facilitate learners becoming capable of changing their lives and the society they live in (Freire, 1970). Mezirow (1981) on the other hand refers to the “journey” of the learner from a position of disorientating dilemma and ending at transformation which he named as personal, relationship or societal. Transformational learning is defined as the type of learning that induces a more far-reaching change in the learner than other kinds of learning, especially learning experiences which shape the learner and produce a significant impact, or paradigm shift, which has impact on the learner’s future experiences (Clark, 1993). Newman (2006) requests educators to move from being a “neutral agent” to be an agent of social defiance and challenge for change which involves taking the side of the marginalised in society. Newman draws his vision of adult education from people such as Marx, Sartre, Camus and other critical theorists and advocated for a contemporary project of activist educators to help people to “take control of their moment”. “Our job is to actually help people to become truly conscious, understand the different worlds we live in, and develop a morality in the face of the evident amorality of our universe. It is to teach people how to make up their own minds, and how to take control of their moment. It is to teach choice … our job is to teach defiance” (Newman, 2006, p. 10).

The human capital theory according to Patron (2008) is an investment which facilitates in generating future income for individuals that lead to economic development in a society. Individuals decide to attend or drop out of schooling for certain anticipated benefits. Some of the benefits according to McMahon (1998) can be for pecuniary or non-pecuniary motives as well as private and social. The monetary or pecuniary motives emanate from income or wages that one receives from the returns from their education. On the other hand Patron (2008) is of the view that the non-pecuniary motives comprise health effects, household management, motivational attributes and non-job satisfaction among others. Education according to Carlson (2002) associates the two monetary social benefits as the effects on gross domestic product (GDP) growth and is in relationship with the earnings of others regarding them to be more productive. On the social front, the non-pecuniary motives are related to certain altruistic characteristics such as the benefits from living in an educated society (lower crime rates, poverty reduction, high skills level, democracy, and better citizenship). The two theories applied in this article are relevant for this article as they shed light on how through a research project involving the evaluation of the impact of a mass literacy campaign (the Kha Ri Gude Mass Literacy Campaign in South Africa), the participants managed to put across the areas they needed capacity building in. Through a participatory action research with the stakeholders (Kha Ri Gude graduates, Unisa academics, coordinators, supervisors and the supervisors), a needs analysis was compiled and the needed capacities in starting and running SMMEs, project management, proposal writing among others were offered to the participants. The proponent of social action theory such as Weber for example is of the view that social action occurs as a result of cooperation and struggle the individual and the wider society. Social action theory as indicated in the theoretical framework places emphasis on the role of community education as an arena for social change. In the case under study, social action has taken place where the Kha Ri Gude graduates and the University of South Africa’s have through capacity building training and training equipped themselves to overcome their vulnerabilities leading to them improving their lives and that of their communities as suggested by Freire (1971). The human capital theory according to Patron (2008) similarly shows how an investment human capital development through education capacitates them to be able to generate future income for individuals that lead to economic development in a society. Various capacity building workshops and training sections were organised for the Kha Ri Gude Graduates who have equipped them with the skills to start and run projects and SMMEs.
3. Research questions

- What motivated you to start projects and establish your own businesses? (e.g. to provide self-employment and employment for others; to meet community needs; to make and save money).
- What kinds of training and workshops did you attend which have helped you to start and run individual businesses and projects?
- How have the capacity and training workshops empowered of as individuals and groups?

The main objective of the article was to assess how capacity and training workshops have been used as tools to empower individuals and groups who have just completed basic education to start and run successful businesses.

4. Research design and methodology

Research design provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data (Ballara (2012, p. 40)). The choice of a research design they maintain reflects the priority given to a range of the research process which includes:

- expressing causal connections between variables;
- generalising to larger groups of individuals than those actually forming part of the investigation;
- understanding behaviour and meaning of that behaviour in its specific social context; and
- having a temporal (i.e. over time) appreciation of social phenomena and their interconnections.

In effect, research design refers to the procedures for conducting a study, including when, from whom, and under what conditions the data are obtained. McMillan and Schumacher (2010, p. 20) add that “research design is about the general plan of how the research is set up, what happens to the subjects and what methods of data collection are used.” For Flick (2015), the main aim of a research design is to create a platform or situation where it will be possible to answer the research questions such that differences in data do not result from variations in the process, but from the inherent differences of the respondents. The research design is important in research as there are certain limitations and cautions when interpreting results which will be related to a specific design. The research design chosen for this research is the multiple case studies which is an approach in which a particular instance or a few carefully selected cases are studied intensively (Rule and John, 2011). The main reason behind choosing the multiple-case study design is that it helps in making an in-depth analysis of the interventions made in nine centres across three provinces in South Africa.

The non-probability sample method was applied in this research using the convenience sampling technique. The reasons for choosing the convenience sampling technique were to obtain the lived experiences of the respondents on how they have been capacitated through the capacity building workshops to establish and run SMEs.

The population comprised all the Kha Ri Gude graduates who have established and run SMEs after their after completing the programme.

The qualitative method of enquiry using multiple case studies was applied in the article. The main instruments applied for data collection were individual and focus group interviews, document analysis and observations. The documents analysed included the Kha Ri Gude materials for learners and facilitators, training materials used for the capacity workshops and trainings, sample proposals submitted and the books of accounts of the businesses the respondents had established. Arrangements were made with the coordinators and volunteer educators for the three focus
groups in three areas in the three provinces. The supervisors arranged with the respondents for the
individuals' interviews as well. The time, date and venues of the individual and focus were
arranged as per the convenience of the respondents in order not to inconvenience them.

5. The process
The process involved The Department of ABET & Youth Development at Unisa obtaining permission
from the College of Education and the Department of Basic Education in 2013 to evaluate the
impact of the Kha Ri Gude Mass Literacy Campaign in the lives of the beneficiaries. A decision was
taken to conduct the evaluations in the three provinces with the highest number of participating
learners which happened to be Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN), the Eastern Cape and Limpopo. The monitors
and coordinators in the three provinces were contacted to identify the graduates and venues for
the evaluations which they did where three areas in each province were identified. Research teams
were sent to the three provinces in 2013 with a follow-up in the first semester of 2014 where the
preliminary findings were shared with the participants. It was during the data collection process
that the graduates made pleas with the research teams to assist and intervene in challenges they
faced in establishing and running projects, registration of their businesses, writing project propo-
sals and identifying stakeholders, sourcing funds, etc.

The Department on the basis of the pleas for intervention conducted a needs analysis with the
graduates where it emerged that their pressing needs revolved around opportunity identification,
establishing and running small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs), sources of funding for
start-ups and working capital, project management and networking. The Department asked its
experts in business and project management to do the interventions. The team then arranged
a three-day training workshop in small each for each of the graduates in the three provinces where
the trainees were transported to a central point for the training sessions. The major stakeholders
who could help in assisting the groups in farming, small business and financing were invited to the
training sessions which most of them willingly did. Some of the structures and organisations that
were invited to the sessions include traditional leaders, the Small Enterprise Developing Agency
(SEDA), The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), The Department of Public Works, the
Department of Basic Education, small business funding organisations and local municipal officials.

6. The capacity building workshops and training
The trainings took the form of workshops involving hands-on approach with discussions and activities
and sharing of experiences in the third quarter of 2014. The activities focused on the basics of entrepre-
nuership, opportunity identification, registration of businesses, marketing, basic bookkeeping, preparing
project proposals, applying for tenders and basic project management on the last day. The stakeholders
were given slots to explain the services and activities on how they could assist those who wanted to start
businesses as well as those who had already started their businesses. Three team members were sent to
assess the impact of the capacity building workshops in the third quarter of 2016. The main tools that
were used for evaluations were observations, individual and focus groups. From the observations,
individual interviews and the focus groups it emerged that some the graduates have been able to
establish various projects and SMMEs which they attribute to the education they received through Kha
Ri Gude and the capacity building from Unisa confirming Shultz (1961) and Becker (1964) (Human capital
theory) and Freire’s (1971) transformational learning.

7. Data analysis and discussion of findings

7.1. Businesses established by Kha Ri Gude graduates
This section reports on the different SMMEs and projects started by the Kha Ri Gude graduates in
the three provinces which were included in the evaluation.

7.1.1. Limpopo businesses
The team was taken by the coordinator in the region to three different towns and villages where
some businesses and projects have been established by the Kha Ri Gude graduates which included
(vegetable farms and gardens, formation of cooperatives, Moringa plantation, stokvels for saving and investment, beadwork, sewing).

The projects and businesses that had been established were many but we were taken to three communities where the former learners had initiated (three cooperatives, poultry farms, sewing and knitting, vegetable farms and gardens, shoe making from shopping bags, stokvels, beadwork, belt and bag manufacturing).

In the Eastern Cape Province, the Kha Ri Gude graduates had established among others (Bakeries, livestock and crop farming, tuck and spaza shops, vegetable farming, formation of cooperatives and stokvels, sewing, and a preschool). We were shown the books by some of the project leaders which indicated that they were making good progress by being able to run the projects and SMMEs they had established successfully.

At one of the focus groups in the Eastern Cape Province, it was reported that,

We supply over 200 loaves to two school in the area and another 200 to the community and spaza shops daily. We also make muffins and cakes for the whole area. Before we initiated this project, we were buying these fro far and we used to eat stale bread and cakes and muffins which we were buying at higher prices. We are now eating good and fresh bread which we bake here and are able to sell bread for eight rand which we used to buy around ten rand. (EC)

In another focus group, it was echoed that,

We are having a contract with SPAR to supply vegetables for this whole area. The workshops and training sections Unisa provided for us made us to understand how we could prepare proposals, business plans and basic bookkeeping. They also provided us with information on how we can tap into government support programmes for our businesses and cooperatives. This is what has brought us this far. (EC)

The views expressed in the focus groups clearly confirm that the Kha Ri Gude graduates have been empowered through the capacity building workshops and training sections to be able to establish and run successful SMEs where they are now able to prepare their own books of accounts, prepare proposals for funding and markets for their products.

It was again reiterated by one respondent that,

Before Kha Ri Gude and the training provided by the Unisa staff, we just depended on social grants and on our husbands for survival but we are now business women who are able to stand on our own. (KZN)

How the graduates had been empowered to help themselves and others was again reported at one of the focus groups in the Limpopo Province that,

We are employing ourselves and give casuals work to community members from time to time during planting, weeding and harvesting of our crops and vegetables from our own individual gardens and the cooperative. Besides that, the incidence of high levels of poverty and malnutrition has reduced considerably in our community. Before we joined the Kha Ri Gude programme and the training we had from Unisa, we had no hope but our lives and that of our families and community has changed for the better. (Limpopo)

At the end of last year we were able to save R25,000 from our vegetable project and shared R18000 among ourselves. (EC)

We now have a stokvel that helps us to save to get capital to start our own business. (KZN)
The Moringa plantation we started two years ago is going to make us rich. We started with 0.5 hectares but see there we are increasing it to two now.

We are have planted 2 hectares of different vegetables and supplying Tshwane Market on contract. (Limpopo).

7.1.2. Motives for starting SMMEs
From the individual and focus group interviews, it emerged that survival, the quest to be their own bosses and helping their communities were some of the main motives assigned by the respondents for venturing into entrepreneurship.

From one of the focus groups, it was reported that,

We were actually very desperate in our community as we saw that our inability to read and write had put us into serious difficulty as we could not access any job opportunities. We were almost all unemployed but as we started the programme, the volunteer educators, coordinators and monitors and the people they called from time to time to talk to us from sectors made us to see what we could do with our lives. So basically, it was necessity that pushed us into businesses and the formation of projects. Thank God, they have paid off for us.

From another focus group, it was put bluntly that,

It was poverty, hunger and unemployment which forced most of us to venture into entrepreneurship as we depended mostly on social grants and remittances which were not sufficient to support us and our families. The exposure through Kha Ri Gude and the training from Unisa made us to realise that we could start our own businesses which we did.

During one of the individual interviews, one sixty-two-year-old woman said:

We learned during some of the life skill sections on some of the challenges our communities face which we identified as poverty, unemployment, malnutrition, communicable and non-communicable diseases among others. We were asked to find ways by which we could address these problems in our communities by helping the communities which making money for ourselves so it was survival and serving our communities that prompted us to act.

The views and experiences shared by the respondents clearly confirm that the motives that prompted them to venture into the establishment of SMEs were mainly necessity and helping their communities to address some of the challenges they face.

7.1.3. Impact of the project in communities and the lives of trainees
Most of the projects and SMMEs of the graduates had improved as per some of the comments by the KG graduates.

One respondent said

Kha Ri Gude opened our eyes for us to be able to move forward and the training sessions from Unisa has help us to establish and run our projects well.

We were able to prepare proposals to organisations and business which sponsored a pumping machine which helps us to water our vegetables. Another company through the proposal we prepared with the guidance of Unisa gave us the money to fence the two hectare plot as you can see. We are very grateful to Unisa. We are now able to produce fresh vegetables and raise chicken which we sell to our communities at reasonable prices. We even supply some orphanages and old people’s homes to support their activities. (Limpopo)
We also observed at first hand the different individual projects that have been established and run by the graduates which include poultry farming, stokvels (saving and credit unions), vegetable farming, growing Moringa and beadwork just to name a few. We also were given the opportunity to examine some of the books of accounts and documents on the businesses and projects.

We prepared proposals as groups to organisations which have helped us to buy three 10,000 litre Jojo tanks for our vegetable gardens and another company has supplied us with garden tools and protective clothing. Through the training we had from Unisa, we are able to market our products to stable markets on contract. (KZN)

The group reported at the focus group in the Eastern Cape that,

The training from Unisa is helping us to manage our preschool and bakery project effectively and profitably.

The impact of the capacity and skills training workshops as per the respondents and the observations show evidence that the graduates have been capacitated to improve their lives and that of their communities.

According to Johanson and Adams (2004, p. 8), “the informal sector is where most of the non-farm poor work and where investments in skills development along with other complementary inputs such as access to secure workplaces, credit, and technology can play an important role in poverty reduction, particularly for women and vulnerable groups.” They add that training interventions can have an added benefit in raising productivity and incomes in micro and small enterprises by acting as an entry point for upgrading the technology of enterprises. The capacity building workshops and training for the Kha Ri Gude graduates are therefore in line with the views expressed by Johanson and Adams above. The themes discussed below emerged from the data gathered and analysed in the research.

7.1.4. Motives for starting and running SMMEs

Different theories have been used by researchers to explain entrepreneurship for marginalised and ethnic groups. These include the cultural, enclave and structural theories. Motives feature prominently in the explanation of why people from certain backgrounds venture into business. As expressed by most of the respondents in this research, the main motives which drove them into the establishment of SMMEs are survival and serving their communities to address some of the socioeconomics they face. Citing Light (1980), Arko-Achemfuor (2013, p. 101) confirms that the cultural argument of entrepreneurship also referred to as the “reactive cultural theory”, argues that the alienation status of immigrant groups and marginalisation of minority groups prompts social solidarity and mutual co-operation in forming and supporting ethnic and other businesses. Similarly, the structural perspective focuses on opportunities and constraints on ethnic entrepreneurship. According to Bonacich (1973), the structural perspective suggests that the development of ethnic enterprises is normally attributed to fill status gap created by dominant groups in society. Arko-Achemfuor (2013) confirms some of the motives for individuals and groups for venturing into entrepreneurship in his study that, some of the motives which drive individuals and groups into entrepreneurship include gaining recognition and influence in one's community, promoting the welfare of community or ethnic group, survival, having greater flexibility and having freedom to adapt one's approach to work among others. From this research, the two main motives for the Kha Ri Gude graduates venturing into the establishment of SMEs were survival and promoting the interests and welfare of their communities. It appears that the survival motive help in addressing some of the community challenges such as alleviating poverty, malnutrition, unemployment in their marginalised communities.
7.1.5. Opportunities identification and exploitation

Opportunities emerge as perceptions of what individuals believe can be exploited to earn profit in business or in the environment. Opportunities are therefore both real and subjective (Lewin, 2012). Opportunities are almost invariably created by human activity, in part by economic activity within markets which is often where opportunities are discovered. “The discovery of opportunities perspective is made up of active and passive search as well as fortuitous discovery, since all three regard opportunities as already existing out there” (Turton & Herrington, 2012, p. 25). The former illiterate people saw how they could be empowered through basic education and training which they seized, leading to the positive outcomes they are experiencing now. The initiative taken by the graduates fulfils some of the objectives Department of Education (2008) which envisaged that KRG to: address the challenges poverty, stimulating local economic activity and social cohesion. The opportunity identified and exploited by the KRG graduates fulfils some of the stated objectives of the campaign.

7.1.6. Education and employment

Regarding the access to employment, it was confirmed once again in this study that the participation of women in the labour market has a lot to do with their level of education and training for the labour market. This is evident in the rural sector where new jobs require skill levels that go beyond simple literacy and in many cases also require knowledge of ICT (Ballara, 2012). World Bank (2012, p. 5) asserts that empowerment essentially:

- addresses the plight of marginalised people who generally lack self-sufficiency and self-confidence as a result of being denied opportunities and/or due to discrimination based on their disability, race, ethnicity, religion, age or gender;
- provides opportunities for marginalised people, either directly or through the assistance of non-marginalised others who share their own access to these opportunities; and
- thwarts attempts to deny those opportunities, and encourages and develops the skills for self-sufficiency.

In effect, empowered people and groups have freedom of choice and action which enables them to better influence the course of their lives and the decisions which affect them.

Commenting on the expectations of policymakers on adult learning and human capital development, Knippraath and De Rick (2014) note that learning can increase the probability to be employed which is derived from the assumption that within the innovation- and knowledge-based economy, continuous investment in human capital becomes increasingly important. OECD (2001) adds that investment in human capital through schooling also enables adult learners over the lifecycle to update skills or to attain a qualification by means of a second chance which is considered to be essential to raise one’s employment prospects.

7.1.7. Networking and collaborations

This research shed light on how the Kha Ri Gude graduates have used their cultural tradition of Ubuntu to help them to help themselves and their communities. Kamwangamalu (1999, p. 25–26) notes that ubuntu is a Nguni term and a “multidimensional concept which represents the core values of African ontologies: respect for any human being, for human dignity and for human life, collective shared-ness, obedience, humility, solidarity, caring, hospitality, interdependence, communalism, to list but a few.” He is of the view that its core values include communalism and interdependence, in contrast with the high value placed on independence in Western societies. Arko-Achemfuor (2013) confirmed that people of African descent often resort to their communal and group solidarity to address social and community issues. Through the KRG programme and the other training pursued, the graduates have been able to establish stokvels, cooperatives and individual businesses through collaborations and networking.
7.1.8. The application of basic numeracy, literacy and life skills in businesses

The Kha Ri Gude graduates shared their views and experiences on how they are applying the literacy, numeracy and life skills in their business from the Kha Ri Gude programme they completed followed by the capacity and skills development training they had received.

At one of the individual interviews, a respondent expressed how she was applying numeracy, literacy and other life skills in her baking project which she started in her kitchen. She said:

I have a big customer base now and supply cakes, muffins and cater for weddings. We were taught basic numeracy but now I use that to do my budget and calculate my profit and expenditure. We were taught these at the entrepreneurship and project management trainings. We also learned customer relationships and marketing among others. I now employ three people from my community full-time and employ people around the community on part-time basis when I have a lot of orders. I feel so grateful for the education and training.

At one of the focus groups, it was expressed that,

We used to grow some few vegetables around our homes where we used to plant anyhow and not yielding much but you saw our vegetable farms in our yards and at the project site. We measure the plots properly and grow the crops and vegetables in proper roles and columns which enable us to optimise the space we have. We write letters, memos and minutes about our projects to state and other agencies without fear.

The findings from this study are in line with another study by Arko and Addison (2009) which confirmed the functionality of the functional literacy classes. They confirm that beneficiaries of the functional literacy classes were able to read, write and calculate, and these were used to improve their social and economic lives. The finding of Arko and Addison confirms the observation of Addo-Adeku (1992), Dorvlo (1992), Freire (1992) and Merril (1988) that functional literacy could be used to improve social, economic and environmental problems.

The discussion above points to how the graduates are applying the basic literacy and numeracy skills they acquired from Kha Ri Gude in their socio-economic lives.

7.1.9. Cooperative learning and networking

Another important theme which emerged from the individual and focus group discussion was on how the graduates from different areas have been able to share ideas, formed individual and group projects and learned collaboratively. The respondent who spoke earlier on about setting up a successful catering and baking business told us that she was taught the baking skills by one of the Kha Ri Gude graduates. She indicated that,

I owe my business to sister X (Name withheld as permission had not been sought to mention her name). She taught me baking from the start and showed me all the processes about this business. When we were exposed to entrepreneurship and project management, the idea came and the rest is history.

It was also mentioned at one of the focus groups that,

Two of our Kha Ri Gude colleagues got their training from Operation Upgrade and they offered to teach us the skills in beadwork, belt making and making of these beautiful plastic shoes and slippers which are sold to groups and individuals. Sometimes we are not able to meet the demand from our customers. All of us are now skilled in making these items and formed a cooperative where we make the items which are sold mostly in Durban.

The value of networking and cooperative learning in adult learning environment is exhibited in this study where the Kha Ri Gude graduates learned collaboratively and taped into their networks.
to advance their socio-economic lives. The experiences share above are in line with the observation of Kong, Shi, Bian, and Jiang (2016) who point out that cooperative learning network is the most commonly used way where each learner can under the teacher’s organisation and guidance to express their views and opinions. They add that the network chat can also get group members to be interested in topic of interest by group members where everybody to speak freely, pool our ideas. Zolfaghari, Sabran, and Zolfaghari (2009) add that Community Learning Center Program (CLCP) has been launched in various communities across the world to achieve higher levels of literacy which in turn allows for them to build their capabilities for sustainable livelihoods.

7.2. Conclusions and recommendations

The article reported on how a mass literacy campaign initiated by the South African government has opened up opportunities for former illiterate people to establish SMMEs in their communities. Although one of the objectives of the campaign was to promote economic development, the materials used did not teach SMME and entrepreneurship. Evidence from this study however proves that some of the officials involved in the project have managed to encourage the graduates to apply the literacy and numeracy skills they acquired to start and run SMMES. The research found out that most of the businesses were failing due to the lack of skills and technical knowledge in the sector. An action research was jointly initiated by the graduates and the Department of Adult Education and Youth Development at the University of South Africa to build capacity for the graduates through workshops and trainings. This research makes a valuable contribution to the dearth of knowledge and skills in the SMME sector in South Africa and the agriculture in particular through action research to address the challenge. Based on the success of the capacity building workshops and skills development endeavours which have made a considerable impact on the lives of the graduates and communities, it is recommended that:

- Governments and the private sector should support illiterate adults in their countries and communities to provide illiterate people with basic education and training and skills development such as horticulture, entrepreneurship and project management to enable them to participate in the socio-economic lives of their countries.
- Government should support such initiatives, projects and SMMEs to access markets through its procurement system such as supplying bread, vegetables to the school feeding schemes and hospitals.
- Encourage members to form cooperatives to tap into government support structures so that they can produce and render services on economies of scale.
- The campaign should continue with basic business and project management training after Kha Ri Gude or SMME, entrepreneurship and project management are integral part of such future endeavours.

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