

Accessibility and Affordability of Higher Education in the 21st Century in Lesotho

Role of Social Workers in the 21st Century

CHRISTOPHER CHITEREKA

Developing countries face new challenges in the 21st century, especially in the higher education sector. Both opportunities and threats are arising out of these new challenges. Higher education, therefore, seems central to the creation of intellectual capacity on which knowledge, production and a country's social and economic development depend. Chefa (2004) notes that higher education is a multi-purpose project that contributes to production and application of knowledge, training of a highly skilled labour force, social development, educational up-grading and generation and transmission of ideology. Utilising Lesotho as a case study, this paper will argue that because of its importance, the majority of Basotho are now seeking higher education. While higher education is growing in size and importance for Lesotho, it is also becoming more competitive, more global in nature and more influenced by the impact of technology. Most significantly, it is more and more functioning as a market rather than a regulated public sector. The article further argues that the majority of Basotho are no longer able to access and afford higher education because of a variety of reasons. The article begins by conceptualising education in general and higher education situation in Lesotho highlighting the challenges being faced by the nation in this sector. Finally, the role of social workers in this scenario will be examined.

Mr. Christopher Chitereka is Senior Lecturer, the National University of Lesotho, Department of Anthropology, Sociology and Social Work, P.O. Roma, Lesotho.

INTRODUCTION

Lesotho, formerly Basutoland, attained political independence from Britain in 1966. The country occupies an area of 30,355 square kilometres, of which less than one-fifth is arable. It is a landlocked country completely surrounded by the Republic of South Africa. About two-third of Lesotho consists of rugged, mountainous terrain that is difficult to reach (Gill, 1993). The country is composed of ten administrative districts, with Maseru as the capital and sixty constituencies.

Mba (2003) argues that although Lesotho is politically free, it is economically dependent on South Africa, perhaps due to historical, geographical and physical reasons. South Africa determines Lesotho's wages and prices, its interest rates and customs receipts and the exchange rate of its monetary unit as well as controlling all trade and communication links between Lesotho and the rest of the world.

Lesotho is divided into four major ecological zones, namely, the lowlands, the foothills, the mountains and the Senqu River Valley. It has also distinct seasons: the spring planting season occurs between August and October; the summer months of November to January experiencing the heaviest rainfall; autumn extends from February to April and the winter months of May to July bring frost and sometimes much snow (Stevens, 1967). The country is relatively homogeneous in terms of linguistic and cultural affiliation. SeSotho is the national language, while English language is the medium of instruction in tertiary institutions, and it is used in government and business transactions. However, there is bilingual education at the junior levels. Both English and SeSotho are used in primary and secondary schools.

The country's population has been estimated to be 2.2 million in 2000 and is projected to be 3.2 million by 2020 (United Nations, 1999). However, a census has recently been conducted in April 2006 and the results are still pending. But in terms of size and density, Lesotho is small. However, the population growth rate has not been small. World Bank (2000) estimates suggests that life expectancy at birth is 55 years for Lesotho, while the infant mortality rate is 93 deaths per 1,000 live births. Of late, however, many Basotho have been dying of HIV/AIDS- related illnesses.

About 49 per cent of the population lives below the national poverty line, while the gross national product per capita is currently US \$560. Only 25 per cent of the population lives in urban areas (United Nations, 1998) and just about 17 per cent of the populations aged 15 and over are literate, as compared with 39 per cent for the Sub-Sahara Africa (World Bank, 2000). It is remarkable that in Lesotho both literacy and educational levels are higher for women than men. This is because more uneducated adult men migrate to South Africa as unskilled labourers in the country's diamond mines (Sembajwe and Makajane, 1992). Furthermore, the predominantly rural-cattle rearers are composed of more males than females. So, in a nutshell, Lesotho can generally be described as an underdeveloped and poor country. The purpose of this article, therefore, is to discuss the accessibility and affordability of higher education utilising Lesotho as a case example. The article is divided into 4 parts. The first part gives an explanation of the concept of education in general. This part also explains the concept of higher education. The second part provides a general background of education in Lesotho. The third part discusses the accessibility and affordability of higher education in Lesotho including the various challenges faced by this sector. The forth and final part provides suggestions on the possible roles of social workers in this scenario. A conclusion follows.

THE CONCEPTS OF EDUCATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION DEFINED

Education is regarded as a vehicle of passing on information skills from one party to the other. The aim is to develop the individual so that

he/she becomes productive, or that he/she understands issues better. Education is, therefore, both a means to an end and an end in itself. A means to an end in that people hope to function more meaningfully, efficiently and to obtain jobs after they have been educated, or are able to become self-reliant because of the education gained. Education is largely a broad preparation for future manpower needs of a nation and a linchpin of development. An end in itself because education helps people to understand development issues. The right form of education is the precursor of all consciousness (Madzokere, 1995).

Education can be divided into: formal, informal and non-formal. All the three forms of education are necessary. Formal education is provided in formal institutions, mainly as a means to an end. Informal education is passed on through socialisation — usually as knowledge, which must be known by all in order to speak or behave in a socially desirable way. Non-formal education on the other hand, is an organised form of imparting new knowledge, skills or attitudes, but is carried on outside the formal system (Mupedzisa, 1993).

Education is difficult to define because the concept entails varied aspects of knowledge, which can be passed on in various forms, including oral, written and behavioural. It also includes various forms of passing on the information. However, education has been defined as: ‘training and instruction designed to give knowledge and develop skills (Hornby, 1990:385).

Underlying the definition of education is the idea of deliberate direction and training, which means that those who effect education are themselves educated or experienced. The definition also denotes and attempt to shape the development of those who are educated: this may be through formal, informal or non-formal strategies.

Higher education, on the other hand, is considered throughout the world to be the key to both individual and societal aspirations. For individuals, education beyond the secondary level is assumed to be the way to social esteem, better paying jobs, expanded life options, intellectual stimulation and frequently a good time in the pursuit of any or all of the above. For societies, higher education is assumed to be the key to technology, productivity, and the other ingredients of international competitiveness and economic growth. Higher education also shapes and preserves the values that define a culture. And it is believed to be a major engine of social justice, equal opportunity and democracy (Johnstone, 1993). In many countries, higher education courses are generally above the standard of GCE A-level or National Vocational Qualification (NVO) Level 3. They include degree courses, post-graduate courses and Higher National Diplomas. Higher education takes place in universities and higher education colleges, and in some further education colleges. However, UNESCO gave a more comprehensive definition of higher education, and it is this definition that will be adopted for the purposes of this paper. UNESCO (1998)

notes that higher education includes ‘all types of studies, training or training for research at the post-secondary level, provided by universities or other educational establishments that are approved as institutions of higher education by the competent State authorities.’

EDUCATION IN LESOTHO

French missionaries of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society first introduced Western formal education to Lesotho during the 1830s. The schools were few in number and in enrolment, Schools concentrated on teaching reading and writing at a very elementary level and also taught simple vocational skills for boys, and house crafts for girls. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Roman Catholic missionaries settled in Lesotho and also opened schools. During the 1930s, Catholicism expanded, and by the middle of the 1980s the Roman Catholic Church and the Lesotho Evangelical Church, the successor of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, each enrolled the country’s primary school student population. The focus in the early days was on religious and economic necessity. Secondary schools only came into being in 1948. Examinations for junior and senior secondary schools were, however, set and marked in South Africa until 1961 when the senior schools switched from the South African Matriculation to the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC).

Thus, for more than a century, education was almost exclusively the domain of the missionaries and even though Lesotho was a Protectorate, the British had no real interest in the education of the Basotho. Until after Independence in 1966, the missionaries were responsible for most aspects of educational organisation, curriculum provision, payment of teachers’ salaries, and provision of facilities. Much of the time, church halls were used as classrooms, and often teaching was conducted in the open air. As time went on though the Government of Lesotho became much more involved in educational matters especially on policy issues.

Poor as it is, Lesotho is committed to quality education provision for its people. The Lesotho third five-year development plan indicated that Lesotho’s primary resource is its people whom the national effort is designed to benefit. The education system, which includes both formal and non-formal activities is the basic means by which the quality and productive capacity of the population is affected. Literate, trained manpower is the end product of educational activities, and turn the driving force in successful development.

Gill (1994) indicates that the policy of Lesotho government is basic education for all, and the provision of sufficient numbers of people with appropriate qualifications and technical and managerial skills to ensure the development of the modern sector of the economy. This is all clearly captured in the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) of 2005. The Education Sector Strategic Plan’s vision is to ensure that all Basotho should be functionally literate with well — grounded moral

and ethical values, adequate social, scientific and technical knowledge and skills by the year 2020. The mission is to develop and implement policies, which ensure acquisition of functional literacy among all Basotho and development of a productive, quality human resource base through education and training. Its major objective is therefore to improve access, efficiency and equity of education and training at all levels.

The government has ratified international agreements relating to education such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education and UNESCO Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding. Cooperation, Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

Provision of education in Lesotho is offered by the government, the churches and the community, and it is, therefore, concentrated in five areas, namely, pre-school provision, primary schools, secondary schools, university and various technical and vocational schools, and schools catering for children with special needs. However, for the purposes of this article, emphasis will be on higher/tertiary education.

BRIEF HISTORY OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN LESOTHO

According to Ntimo-Makara (2008), the origins of higher education in Lesotho go back to April 8, 1945, when the National University of Lesotho was born out of the small Catholic University College (later known as Pius XII University College), which was founded by the Roman Catholic Hierarchy of Southern Africa at Roma. In 1954, the college was granted associate college status by the University of South Africa (UNISA), giving it more responsibility for tuition and examinations. From the late 1950s, well into the 1960s, the college experienced very serious financial problems. By the early 1960s, Pius XII turned into the University of Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate, and Swaziland (UBBS). UBBS came into being in 1964. At this time, the student body had grown to about 190 and was just about 20 per cent female. With the three high commission territories' attainment of Independence in 1966, UBBS became the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (UBLS). The tri-national character of UBLS disintegrated in 1975. The National University of Lesotho was established as an independent entity on the Lesotho campus of the UBLS on October 20, 1975, by the National Assembly through Act No. 13 of 1975 and remains the only university in the country.

Originally, teacher training was done in colleges governed by the missions. In 1947 there were three colleges, and this number was increased to seven by 1959. In 1975 the National Teacher Training College was established. This was later transformed into the Lesotho College of education. Missions were equally concerned with vocational training, and industrial schools were founded to teach students

relevant technical skills. The Lerotholi Technical Institute was founded after the people of Lesotho, in honour of Paramount Chief Lerotholi, contributed money toward the building costs. During the late 1970s, Lerotholi Polytechnic was expanded, and vocational subjects were introduced in a number of schools.

So in a nutshell, higher education in Lesotho is offered at the following institutions: the National University of Lesotho (NUL), the Lesotho College of Education (LCE), and Lerotholi Polytechnic and other technical schools. Teacher training is offered at the Lesotho College of Education and at the National University of Lesotho. Other government ministries and churches also offer training programmes at tertiary level. For example, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare runs the National Health Training College (NHTC) and three nursing colleges, while the Ministry of Agriculture runs the Lesotho Agricultural College (LAC). The Roman Catholic Church also runs St. Joseph's School of Nursing at Roma. Ntimo-Makara (2008) also notes that Lesotho has close to 15 private tertiary institutions. She observes that most of these private institutions are distance education institutions based mainly in South Africa. Currently, enrolment in these institutions stands at around 700. A second category is composed of South African institutions that do not have agencies in Lesotho, but are in direct contact with students who study part-time and go for block residential periods on the main South Africa campus.

It is against the above background that the next section of this paper is to discuss the accessibility and affordability of higher education in Lesotho.

ACCESSIBILITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN LESOTHO

According to UNESCO (1998), in keeping with Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, admission to higher education should be based on merit, capacity, efforts, perseverance and devotion showed by those seeking to access it, and can take place in a life-long scheme, at any time with due recognition of previously acquired skills. As a consequence, no discrimination can be accepted in granting access to higher education on grounds of race, gender, language or religion or economic, cultural or social distinctions, or physical disabilities.

Educational institutions must be physically accessible to everyone. Physical accessibility means that education has to be within safe physical reach, either by attendance at some reasonably convenient geographical location or via modern technology. Therefore, when discussing the issue of accessibility, this should be taken into account. In Lesotho, higher education is generally non-discriminatory because each and everyone has a right to go to any institution of higher learning provided they meet the entry requirements. Access to higher education in Lesotho is based on Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC) obtained after seven years of primary and five years of secondary

education. Holders of the General Certificate of Education (GCE) and adults over twenty-five having successfully passed the special entrance examination also gain entrance to university under certain conditions. However, Lesotho's curriculum remains rooted in the Westminster inspired curriculum. For instance, English remains the most important subject that pupils are expected to pass before proceeding to tertiary education. In order to be admitted at the National University of Lesotho in a Bachelor of Arts Programme, one has to have at least a second-class pass with credit in English. This then means that those who do not meet these entry requirements will not be able to access higher education.

On the issue of physical accessibility, looking at Lesotho's topography, one may argue that higher education is generally not accessible to all Basotho. This is because tertiary, technical and vocational institutions are not evenly distributed throughout the country. Most of these higher education institutions are found in the lowlands of the country particularly in Maseru where there is better infrastructure. This then makes it difficult for people from other parts of the country (especially the mountainous rural areas) to physically access higher education. For instance, Lesotho College of Education is located in Maseru while the National University of Lesotho is located in Roma Valley.

Furthermore, institutions of higher education in Lesotho are very limited in number and, as a result, many Basotho have to go to neighbouring countries in search of higher education, which is very expensive for the country. This also means some potential students do not have access to higher education, since there is only one university in the country. This negatively affects the country's development. As UNESCO (1998) rightly observes, without adequate higher education and research institutions providing a critical mass of skilled and educated people, no country can ensure genuine endogenous and sustainable development, and in particular, developing countries cannot reduce the gap separating them from the industrially developed ones.

Access to higher education is limited for children with special needs in Lesotho. This is particularly true in respect of deaf people. There are no facilities to cater for these people in the country's institutions of higher learning. Again this disadvantage the individuals concerned as well as the country. UNESCO (1998) observes that access to higher education for members of some special target groups, such as women and those who suffer from disabilities, must be actively facilitated, since these groups as collectivities and as individuals may have both experience and talent that can be of great value for the development of societies and nations. Special material help and educational solutions can help overcome the obstacles that these groups face, both in accessing and in continuing higher education. However, it should be

mentioned that in Lesotho, women more than men access higher education. Actually, they are more educated than their male counterparts — which make their situation unique in the world. This is mainly because most Basotho men do not normally pursue further education, as they prefer to work in the mines in neighbouring South Africa. Other disabled people, for instance, the blind, have access to higher education in Lesotho. The current Student Representative Council President at the National University of Lesotho is a blind man.

There is also lack of technology in Lesotho. This prevents those people who would want to enrol in the institutions of higher learning which still working to further their studies. If technology like computers were accessible and affordable to every Mosotho, it would be possible for institutions to provide on-line education for those working full time. UNESCO (1998) notes that higher education is being challenged by new opportunities relating to technologies that are improving the ways, in which knowledge can be produced, managed, disseminated, accessed and controlled. Equitable access to these technologies should be ensured at all levels of education system if development is to be realised.

Diversifying higher education and recruitment methods and criteria is essential both to meet increasing international demand and to provide access to various delivery modes and to extend access to an ever-wide public, in a life-long perspective, based on flexible entry and exit points to and from the system of higher education. UNESCO (1998) rightly observes that institutions should be able to offer a wide variety of education and training opportunities: traditional degrees, short courses, part-time study, flexible schedules, modularised courses, and supporting learning at a distance. The concept of bridging programmes should also be promoted to allow those entering the job market to return to studies at a later date.

AFFORDABILITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN LESOTHO

Nowadays education is in greater demand, both from individual students and their families, for the occupational and social status and greater earnings. It is also presumed to bring social, cultural, political, and economic well-being of countries. However, the fees and other expenses that a student has to incur for getting higher education have increased to such a high level that good, higher and technical education have reached outside the budget of most middle and lower income families.

Johnstone (1993) observed that for all its importance, higher education throughout the world is increasingly troubled by costs that are high and rapidly rising and that seems to be outrunning available revenues. Governments are cutting outlays to universities and other institutions with consequent loss of staff, deterioration of plant and equipment, erosion of salaries, and loss of capacity to expand to meet

student demand. Where costs are passed on to students and parents, debt levels are increasing and access is being threatened, if not outright curtailed. Todaro (1999) also notes that due primarily to cost-cutting measures under economic reform programmes, there is a danger that levels of education expenditure will decline and that parents and communities will continue to take on more of the funding responsibility for higher education. Only the wealthy can afford to pay for higher education. For instance, in Zimbabwe, the government recently increased fees to be paid by university students dramatically, and a lot of students have dropped out as they cannot afford the high fees.

In the case of Lesotho, ever since the adoption by the government of the IMF/World Bank induced Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in 1987/88, the country has experienced pressing problems of unemployment, crime, poverty and increased socio-economic vulnerability for the poor. Due to ESAP, massive budgetary cuts have been experienced in the social sectors, particularly in health and education. In fact, there has been a curtailment of investment in education. As a result many people, especially the poor cannot afford educational fees. According to Gill (1994:109), secondary schooling, which is the pre-requisite for higher education in Lesotho, is regarded by parents and students as expensive. The average fee is around M600 but with uniforms and books, it normally costs around M1000 per year to send a child to school. In addition there are examination fees to be paid. There has been reported to be a big wastage in terms of school dropouts because of the increasing costs of education per child. At the National University of Lesotho, an individual has to pay close to ten thousand Maloti per academic year. Therefore, enrolling in a programme that takes four years means paying close to forty thousand Maloti. Not every person in the country, who wants to further his or her studies at the National University of Lesotho, can afford this amount of money. It is even more expensive for students who repeat, as they do not get assistance from the government.

Nevertheless, since the cost of education is very high for individuals and parents, the government of Lesotho assists Basotho with funding. The Minister of Finance and Development Planning, Hon. Tim Thahane, in his 2004–2005 budget speech to parliament, indicated that the government of Lesotho puts education high on its priority list and would assist students entering higher education. However, he noted that due to spiralling costs of higher education, the government had to reduce its funding. This clearly shows some potential students were be affected by this policy. Through the National Manpower Development Secretariat (NMDS), Basotho, who want to further their studies, are offered bursary loans with low interests. Unfortunately, not everyone can automatically access these loans. Those who want to embark on post-graduate or graduate studies cannot proceed with their studies

before clearing their previous loans. Students studying part-time are also not sponsored by NMDS. Those who are repeating their degree courses have to find their own funding. Over the years, NMDS sponsorship has been declining. However, Pitso (1985) notes that overseas scholarship, financial and technical assistance and pilot programmes have helped to meet the costs of education in Lesotho, and have been significant factors in improving the quality of education. Students who would never have the opportunity to further their education due to poverty have been assisted by countries like Cuba, China, Malaysia and Singapore as well as Australia to name a few.

There are also some private financial lending institutions/organisations which provide educational loans to those who cannot access government loans. For instance, an organisation known as EducLoan is assisting many Basotho to further their education through its loan scheme. The loan scheme operates on the basis of lending money to students and they repay it over a period of time with some interest. A few NGOs also assist students from poor families to pay their tuition fees, but they are limited in number and very few people know about them since they do not normally advertise their services. This is mainly for tactical reasons, because if they advertise their services they would not be able to cope with the numbers.

THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION AND POSSIBLE ROLES OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN LESOTHO

Higher education has given ample proof of its viability over the centuries and of its ability to change and to induce change and progress in society. Owing to the scope and pace of change, today's society has increasingly become knowledge-based so that higher learning and research now act as essential components of cultural, socioeconomic and environmentally sustainable development of individuals, communities and nations. Higher education itself is confronted, therefore, with formidable challenges and must process to the most radical change and renewal, it has ever been required to undertake, so that a society, which is currently undergoing a profound crisis of values, can transcend mere economic considerations and incorporate deeper dimensions of morality and spirituality.

It is against the above background that the next section of this paper will discuss the social work profession and the possible roles of social workers in higher education in Lesotho. But before these possible roles are discussed, the concept of social work will be explained. Social work is a helping profession focused on social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment of people to enhance well-being. It is a profession characterised by variety and diversity. Social workers usually work with people viewed as having special disadvantages, such as persons with low incomes, persons with

disabilities, elders and persons diagnosed with mental illness. Some social workers also provide counselling services to middle and upper-class clients who experience problems in living. Social work practitioners are found in a variety of settings such as schools, prisons, rural and urban communities, hospitals, industry, welfare agencies and new human settlements.

The International Federation of Social Workers and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (2002) came up with a comprehensive international definition of social work. They defined it thus:

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance their well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environment. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.

The work undertaken by social workers vary between countries as the aims and values of social workers reflect the cultural and social norms of the society in which they operate, in order to cater appropriately for the needs of the people they serve.

Like in many other developing countries, the social work profession is a relatively recent phenomenon in Lesotho. Social work practice was introduced during the colonial era by the British. It was mainly introduced to deal with the problems of the minority white population at the expense of the black majority. The Department of Social Welfare was formed to deal with the various social problems. To exacerbate the situation was the fact that there was not social work training in Lesotho until the early 1990s. Prior to the introduction of social work training in Lesotho, professional social work students were trained outside the country mainly in Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Zambia, Namibia and South Africa, and overseas. This was very expensive for the country. Furthermore, these social work graduates were not enough to cope with various social problems, which were on the increase in the country such as rural–urban migration, street kids, juvenile delinquency, poverty, unemployment child abuse, alcohol and drug abuse as well as the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

A survey carried out by the Department of Social Welfare in 1994 revealed that there were only 24 qualified and semi-qualified social workers in Lesotho. These were invariably employed by the Department of Social Welfare, the Probation Service, Prison Service and Non-governmental Organisations (Nyanguru, 2003). Social work training was introduced at the National University of Lesotho in 1991 under the Department of Social Anthropology and Sociology. Initially a two-year Master of Social Work programme was introduced, and an under-graduate social work programme was introduced at the same university in 2002. Over a hundred students have since graduated with social work degrees.

Currently, most social work graduates are employed by the Department of Social Welfare where they mainly use the casework method of social work. They mainly deal with the poor who come to seek assistance. The Department of Social Welfare assists children from poor families to pay school fees. Unfortunately, this department, in the author's view, does not really empower people to be self-reliant. Actually, it can safely be argued that it encourages dependency among its clients.

Some social workers especially those employed by Non-Governmental Organisations mainly utilise the group work and community work methods of social work. They are engaged in developmental social work. They encourage their clients to be self-reliant by engaging them in income-generation projects. This, to a certain extent, empowers the poor economically, and it also enables the poor to send their children to school. Furthermore, these social workers link poor, but talented students with organisations which provide scholarships both locally and abroad.

In spite of the above, social workers would play a variety of roles in higher education especially in the context of Lesotho. Firstly, social work as a profession is committed to universal access to education, and as such, is generally opposed to any fee-paying system. Nevertheless, social workers recognise the constraints faced by government in meeting basic needs to all Basotho. Their role in this regard, therefore, could be to lobby government to subsidise the educational fees of the disadvantaged groups such as the disabled and the poor. Since social workers are front-line workers who are close to these target groups, they can vet them and recommend to government the deserving poor and disabled who might need help. They could appeal for tuition waiver for the most desperate cases. Furthermore, social workers could also assist these people to apply for educational scholarships from international organisations.

Secondly, as mentioned earlier on, there are no facilities for deaf people in Lesotho. Social workers could lobby government to consider opening institutions, which could cater for the needs of this target groups. In the meantime, they could assist deaf people to get bursaries to study outside the country.

Another important role for social workers in Lesotho could be that of raising awareness on the importance of education in general among the Basotho. Mobilisation of society to support higher education is crucial. Mobilisation for this purpose depends on public awareness and involvement of the public and private sectors of the economy, parliament, the media, government and non-governmental organisations as well as institutions, families and all the social actors involved with higher education. In most cases young boys drop out of school to become herd boys. They never have the opportunity to complete primary education, let alone higher education. The nation might be losing a lot on talent, hence there is need to harness this talent especially at an early age.

Social workers in Lesotho could also lobby with the government to consider opening another university so that more people can have

access to higher learning. If a conventional university is considered to be too expensive, an Open University could be another option. This would facilitate distance education thereby benefiting a greater part of the population. The people in the rural areas might benefit from this. Related to this point, computers can also be used for learning purposes-on-line education.

Another important role, social workers could play, is in guidance and counselling. They could develop guidance and counselling services in cooperation with student organisations, in order to assist students in the transition to higher education at whatever age and to take account of the needs of ever more diversified categories of learners. Apart from those entering higher education from schools, further education colleges, they should also take account of the needs of those leaving and returning in a life-long process. Such support is important in ensuring a good match between student and course, reducing drop out. Students who drop out should have opportunities to return to higher education if and when appropriate (UNESCO, 1998).

Social workers in Lesotho could also provide information about the dangers of HIV/AIDS. Many people are dying because of this pandemic countrywide, and it is sad to lose highly intelligent young people to this disease. Social workers could also provide counselling services to both the infected and affected especially at institutions of higher learning.

Finally, social workers could influence policy makers to formulate policies that are pro-poor especially in the education sector. Education is a human right; hence everyone must at least have access to and afford it.

CONCLUSION

This article has explained the concepts of education and higher education. It has also given a general background of education in Lesotho. Furthermore, the article has discussed the accessibility and the affordability of higher education in Lesotho. The social work profession and the possible roles, social workers could play, in higher education were also highlighted. In conclusion, it can be argued that although the Lesotho government's policy is to provide education to all its citizens, it has resource constraints. As a result, some Basotho do not have access to higher education and cannot afford it. There is, therefore, need for government, the private sector, families as well as individuals to work together and come up with viable solutions if education for all is to be realised in Lesotho.

REFERENCES

- Gill, S.J. : *A Short History of Lesotho: From the Stone Age until the 1993 Elections*, Morija: Morija Museum and Archives.
1994 : *The Situation of Children and Women in Lesotho*, Maseru: Government of Lesotho and UNICEF.

- Hornby, A.S. 1990 : Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, London: Oxford University Press.
- International Federation of Social Workers and International Association of School of Social Work 2000 : *International Definition of Social Work*, Berne: IFSW and IASSW.
- Johnstone, A. 1993 : *Funding of Higher Education: International Perspective*, New York: Garland Publishing.
- Madzokere, C. 1995 : 'Education' in Social Policy and Administration in Zimbabwe, *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, Harare.
- Mba, C.J. 2003 : 'Assessing the Reliability of 1986 and 1996 Lesotho Census Data,' *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, Harare: 18(1), 111–1127.
- Mupedziswa, R. 1993 : Uprooted: Refugees and Social Work in Africa, *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, Harare.
- Ntimo-Makara, K. 2008 : Country Higher Education Profiles–Lesotho, INHEA.
- Nyanguru, A.C. 2003 : 'The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Department of Social Welfare in Lesotho', in *Child Legislation and Reform Project*. Maseru: Lesotho Law Reform Commission.
- Pitso, P. 1995 : 'The Historical Development of Higher Education: Lesotho' in Tembo, L; Pitso, P and Khalifi, M.D. (Eds.), *The Development of Higher Education in Eastern and Southern Africa*, Nairobi: Hedaya Educational Book Ltd.
- Sembajwe, I. and Makajane, T. 1992 : Migration and Rural Crisis in a Labour Reserve Economy. In Toure, M. and Fadayomi, T.O. (Eds.), *Migration, Development and Urbanisation Policies in Southern Africa*, Abijan: Center for the Development of Science Research, 236–276.
- Stevens, R.J. 1967 : Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland: The Former High Commission Territories in Southern Africa, London: Pall Mall Press.
- Thahane, T. 2004 : Budget Speech to Parliament for 2004–2005 Fiscal Year, Maseru: Parliament of Lesotho.
- Todaro, M.P. 1999 : *Economics for a Developing World: An Introduction to Principles, Problems and Policies for Development*, London: Longmans.
- UNESCO 1998 : *World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st Century: Vision and Action*, Paris: UNESCO Press.
- United Nations 1999 : *World Population Prospects: The 1998 Revision: Comprehensive Tables*, New York: Population Division.
- World Bank 2000 : *World Development Indicators Data Base*, New York: The World Bank Group.