

The Role of Tonga Language and Culture Committee (TOLACCO), Roman Catholic and Community Leadership in the Promotion of Literacy in Binga Community in Zimbabwe

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Abstract: Zimbabwe has for a long time been characterised by varied and skewed levels of literacy across her regions. This scenario has left some regions more advantaged and developed than others. Binga District in Matabeleland North, mainly habited by the Tonga speaking people has been one such community where underdevelopment has been tied to the low levels of literacy. It is in this light that this study therefore aimed to investigate the role of Tonga Language and Culture Committee (TOLACCO), Roman Catholic and Community leadership in the promotion of literacy in Binga Community of Zimbabwe. Data was collected from the TOLACCO, Roman Catholic Parishioners, District Administrator, Councillors and the community leaders who included two Chiefs and their Headman. Structured interview schedule and questionnaire were used in data collection. The results revealed that low literacy level tied to the cultural beliefs of the baTonga people has hindered human resources and infrastructure development within Binga. One Chief bemoaned the situation where pupils at primary school were being taught not in their mother language and some teachers from outside the region predominantly Ndebele and Shona speaking were not interested in learning the Tonga language. There is urgent need to upscale the production of teaching and learning material in Chitonga at both primary and secondary school levels. The results amplified the need for a multi-stakeholder approach in the promotion of high literacy levels in community development.

Keywords: Literacy, illiteracy, human development index, marginalisation

1. Introduction

The question of literacy has been at the heart of various spheres of development within Zimbabwe in particular, the African communities in General and the world at large. Perceived differently, this concept has meant various things to various people and communities. For example, debates have centred broadly around literacy as an autonomous set of skills; literacy as applied, practised and situated; literacy as a learning process; and literacy as text. The crux of the literacy programmes as rolled out by Tonga Language and Culture Committee (TOLACCO); Roman Catholic and Community Leadership, in Binga, which is the main focus of this study, has been the move towards total eradication of illiteracy in the road to socio-economic and political development.

2. Background to the Problem

Literacy as a concept has proved to be both complex and dynamic, both in terms of interpretation and definition. As argued by UNESCO (2006) people's notions of what it means to be literate or illiterate are influenced by academic research, institutional agendas, national context, cultural values and personal experiences. Of great interest is an understanding that in the academic community, theories of literacy have evolved from those focussed solely on changes in individuals to more complex views encompassing the broader social contexts (the 'literate environment' and the 'literate society') that encourage and enable literacy activities and practices to occur. Enshrined within the foregoing is an attempt to view literacy in a holistic manner while avoiding a singular and exclusive traditional definition

that has wholly focussed on literacy as being synonymous with reading and writing skills.

2.1 Defining and Conceptualising Literacy

For most of its history in English, the word 'literate' meant to be 'familiar with literature' or, more generally, 'well educated, learned'. Only since the late nineteenth century has it also come to refer to the abilities to read and write text, while maintaining its broader meaning of being 'knowledgeable or educated in a particular field or fields'. As perceived by Fransman cited in UNESCO (2006), attempts at defining literacy since the mid-twentieth century has had direct implications for approaches to practice and policy. Evolving debates among various academics in their fields of speciality have problematised literacy vis-a-vis notions of education and knowledge. Evolving debates have resulted in four discrete understandings of literacy earlier stated, that is, literacy as an autonomous set of skills; literacy as applied, practised and situated; literacy as a learning process; and literacy as text (UNESCO, 2006).

Literacy as skills encompasses reading, writing and oral skills. The prevailing notion under this debate is that the most common understanding of literacy is that it is a set of tangible skills – particularly the cognitive skills of reading and writing- that are independent of the context in which they are acquired and the background of the person who acquires them (Ibid). The cognitive argument has been linked to broader societal development, so that literacy becomes a condition or instrument for economic growth, 'progress' and the transition from 'oral' to 'literate' cultures (Goody cited in UNESCO, 2006).

Numeracy and the competences it comprises are usually understood either as a supplement to the set of skills encompassed by 'literacy' or as a component of literacy itself. More recently, numeracy has been used to refer to the ability to process, interpret and communicate numerical, quantitative, spatial, statistical and even mathematical information in ways that are appropriate for a variety of contexts. Gal (2000) cited in UNESCO (2006) has referred to different types of 'numeracy situations' which are: generative situations, interpretive situations and decision situations. Generative situations require people to comment, quantify, compute and otherwise manipulate numbers, quantities, items or visual elements- all of which involve language skills to varying degrees. Interpretive situations require people to make sense of verbal or text-based messages that, while based on quantitative data, require no manipulation of numbers. Decision situations demand that people find and consider multiple pieces of information in order to determine a course of action, typically in the presence of conflicting goals, constraints or uncertainty.

Literacy has also been understood in the context of skills enabling access to knowledge and information. In this sense, the word 'literacy' has begun to be used in a much broader, metaphorical sense, to refer to other skills and competencies, for example, 'information literacy', 'visual literacy', 'media literacy' and 'scientific literacy'. For instance, 'information literacy' broadly refers to the ability to access and use a variety of information sources to solve an information need. Yet, it can also be defined as the development of a complex set of critical skills that allow people to express, explore, question, communicate and understand the flow of ideas among individuals and groups in quickly changing technological environments (Ibid).

Another evolving debate around literacy has focussed on literacy as applied, practised and situated. Acknowledging the limitations of a skills-based approach to literacy, some scholars have tried to focus on the application of these skills in 'relevant' ways. One of the first coordinated efforts to do so was through the development of the notion of 'functional literacy'. The literacy as applied, practised and situated approach questions the validity of designations of individuals as 'literate' or 'illiterate', as many who are labelled illiterate are found to make significant use of literacy practices for specific purposes in their everyday lives (Doronilla cited in UNESCO, 2006). Yet, this approach has been criticised by some scholars, who claim it overemphasises local exigencies and insufficiently recognises how external forces, for example, colonial administrators, missionaries, international communication and economic globalisation, have impinged upon the 'local' experiences of specific communities.

Literacy as a learning process is benchmarked on the understanding that as individuals learn, they become literate. This idea is at the core of a third approach which views literacy as an active and broad-based learning process, rather than as a product of a more limited and focussed educational intervention. Paulo Freire one of the adult literacy educators integrated the notions of active learning within socio-cultural settings. He emphasised the importance of bringing the learner's socio-cultural realities into the learning process

to challenge these social processes. Central to his pedagogy is the notion of 'critical literacy', a goal to be attained in part through engaging with books and other written texts, but, more profoundly, through 'reading', (that is, interpreting, reflecting on, interrogating, theorising, investigating, exploring, probing and questioning) and 'writing' (that is, through acting on and dialogically transforming) the social life.

A fourth way of understanding literacy is to look at it in terms of the 'subject matter' (Bhola, 1994) and the nature of the texts that are produced and consumed by literate individuals. Texts vary by subject and genre, for example, textbooks, technical or professional publications and fiction, by complexity of the language used and by ideological content (explicit or hidden). In this context, language represents one of several modes through which communication is conducted (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001).

The four approaches broadly reflect the evolution of the meaning of 'literacy' in different disciplinary traditions. These approaches invariably apply to the applications of literacy among the Tonga people situated within Binga District. UNESCO in particular has played a leading role in developing international policies on literacy and has influenced the changing policy discourse among stakeholders in the international community.

In 2002, the United Nations declared 2003- 2012 the United Nations Literacy Decade. Resolution 56/116 acknowledged the place of literacy at the heart of lifelong learning, affirming that: 'literacy is crucial to the acquisition, by every child, youth and adult, of essential life skills that enable them to address the challenges they can face in life, and represents an essential step in basic education, which is an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century' (United Nations, 2002). The Resolution also embraced the social dimension of literacy, recognising that 'creating literate environments and societies is essential for achieving the goals of eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, curbing population growth, achieving gender equality and ensuring, sustainable development, peace and democracy'. UNESCO emphasises the goal of universal literacy under the motto 'Literacy as Freedom,' reflecting the evolution of the conception of literacy.

2.2 Importance of Literacy

Literacy, which should be the ultimate objective of the reading process, is of importance at two levels: at the personal level, since to be unable to read and write in a literate society will give rise to deep-seated feelings of inadequacy and failure. It is also imperative at the societal level where reading, writing and critical application skills have been considered an essential accomplishment in normal society and mastery of skilled reading a pre-requisite for academic success. Literacy is now demanded of everyone and in fact desired by everyone. It is perhaps also the case that a certain stigma is attached to those who suffer inadequacies in literacy skills, in that they tend to be looked down on by others who have more fortune in this respect.

With the quickening pace of life and rapid advances in computer technology and other areas of communication, it is hard to live a reasonably normal and happy life despite one's illiteracy. The computer has become an indispensable factor in the business and commercial world. Today's adults cannot have a satisfactory self-image if they are unable to read, nor make a reasonable personal contribution to society without reading. In developing countries, the development of literate societies is taking over from the older and more established oral traditions.

2.3 The Zimbabwean Literacy Scenario

The Human Development Index (HDI) is one measure that has been used to determine literacy levels in Zimbabwe. According to the findings in the Zimbabwe Human Development Report (2009) the Human Development Index by province in Zimbabwe carried out in 1995, Matabeleland North Province where Binga District is located, was reported to have an Adult literacy rate of 79.8 percent whereas the neighbouring urban province such as Bulawayo was pegged at 93.7 percent.

The Human Development Index by districts and urban areas 1995 has a revealing effect on the state of adult literacy rate and average years of schooling. The foregoing measures have been taken as key in substantiating the focus of the study on the literacy levels and development within Binga District. Out of a total of 83 districts surveyed in Zimbabwe, Binga recorded the lowest adult literacy rate of 63.4 percent, whereas average years of schooling were pegged at 3.5 percent. Within the same category is Kariba Rural District with adult literacy rate of 56.0 percent and average years of schooling at 3.4 percent. Significantly, Binga District and Kariba Rural share similarities in terms of the displaced population of the BaTonga people who were moved to pave way for the construction of the Kariba Dam. This displacement has added to the marginalisation of the Tonga speaking people, otherwise referred to as, 'The People of the Great River' (Tremmel, 1994).

By 2003, the survey that was carried out revealed marked change in terms of adult literacy rate and average years of schooling. For example, Binga District had an adult literacy rate of 85.0 percent and average years of schooling at 5.8 percent. On the other hand, Kariba Rural District (under Mashonaland West Province) had an adult literacy rate of 83.0 percent and average years of schooling at 7.1 percent. The gender disaggregated data seemed to be skewed in favour of the males in terms of both adult literacy rate and average years of schooling. This scenario has posed a challenge thereby calling for an urgent redress of the literacy-based-gender disparities.

From the Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey 2010-11, one of the key findings related to literacy is that 'literacy rates are high in Zimbabwe: 94 percent of women and 96 percent of men are literate. Given the high overall rate, variations in literacy across subgroups of the population are generally small. The rate is lower among women age 45-49 (97 percent) than among both women in younger age cohorts (90 percent or higher) and men in the same age cohort (94 percent). Women and men in urban areas have slightly

higher literacy rates (98 percent and 99 percent, respectively) than their rural counterparts (91 percent and 94 percent, respectively). Mashonaland Central has the lowest literacy rate for women (86 percent), while Matabeleland North (where Binga is located) has the lowest rate for men (84 percent). As with educational attainment, literacy is directly associated with wealth status.

In the 2010-11 Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey, literacy status was determined by respondents' ability to read all or part of a sentence. Respondents who had not attended school or had attended only primary school were asked to demonstrate their ability to read. Those with a secondary education or higher were assumed to be literate. Rural respondents are less educated than their urban counterparts. For example, 59 percent of rural women have attended secondary school or higher, as compared with 86 percent of urban women. Similarly, 92 percent of urban men have attended secondary school or higher, compared with 70 percent of rural men (Zimbabwe Demographic Health Survey, 2010, p.31).

2.4 Brief Historical Background about the Tonga People

The Tonga people, living in the north-west of Zimbabwe near the Zambezi river are one of the country's smaller ethnic groups. An account by Tremmel (1994) has revealed that they lived largely without interference from the colonial rulers until 1957, when tens of thousands from fifteen chiefdoms who lived along the banks of the river, were removed. The Zambezi valley was then flooded to make way for a huge dam and an electricity generating station at Kariba.

The Tonga people, in Binga and Kariba Districts, were displaced from their riverbank homes and had to resettle. Their life has been characterised by the following pain and suffering: the separation of families, the flooding of farms and ancestral burial grounds and the removal of people in truckloads without compensation, to infertile land with little water, where they struggle to live today (Ibid). Lessing (1992), on her travels in 1989 visited the Tonga and describes their lives and struggles thus:

It is true the rivers Tonga are as poor as any people I saw in Zimbabwe... The lives of the Tonga since they were taken from their land, their shrines, and the graves of their ancestors, have been hard, have been painful, a struggle year in, year out, and from season to season....Electricity was soon to arrive in Binga: the great power lines were in place, ready to come to life....But this electricity will not benefit the villagers. The great dam which deprived the Tonga of their homes has not benefited them. The lake does not irrigate the land along its long shoreline: Kariba is a vast lake, like a sea.

Today the Kariba Dam is a lifeline of the Zimbabwean and Zambian economies. Yet the project has left a legacy of increased vulnerability, impoverishment amongst the displaced communities due to entitlement losses (Basilwizi Strategic Plan, 2010-2015). Exclusion and marginalisation of these communities by the colonial and successive governments is the major root cause of the vulnerability of

the Zambezi valley communities. Prohibitive legal and policy frameworks have been used to exclude the communities to access both internal and external resources to meet their basic needs. Over the years, there have been a number of interventions by church based organisations and Non-government organisations (NGOs). These were mainly relief efforts that addressed the results of the problem rather than the problem itself.

In what Tremmel (1994) has labelled as 'splendid isolation', the River Tonga were basically isolated from the rest of the people of Southern Rhodesia and lived a very traditional way of life. But the River Tonga also suffered from isolation. Left alone and basically neglected by the colonial government, there were no schools, clinics and hospitals, even as late as 1957. Infant mortality rates were extremely high, partly because there were no vaccinations made available to them. The Tonga relied on their traditional medicinal herbs for healing illnesses. While effective in treating many cases of illness, traditional healing was inadequate to respond to some major diseases.

2.5 State of Education in the Zambezi Valley and Zimbabwe in General

The Zambezi valley is largely inhabited by the Tonga people estimated at a population of 500 000 who form part of the indigenous ethnic groups in Zimbabwe, living in the remote and least developed parts of the Zambezi region. As earlier alluded, involuntary displacement of the Tonga ethnic group has led to their incessant predicament. For example, as reported by Basilwizi Trust in their Strategic Plan (2010-2015), upon relocation the Tonga people's education infrastructure in these newly resettled areas was quite limited characterised by very few schools. To make matters worse, the teaching of Tonga was halted in mid 1970s upon the escalation of the liberation struggle coupled by the economic sanctions imposed on the then Rhodesian government for its Unilateral Declaration of Independence. The teaching of the Tonga language ceased. The cessation of the learning and teaching of Tonga language has since then been a thorny issue among the group dating back to the colonial period.

As presented by Tremmel (1994), at the time of displacement of the River Tonga in 1957, there were a total of 3 primary schools. These were located at Saba, Mumpande and Siabuwa. In the years preceding Zimbabwean independence of 1980, 24 primary schools were constructed under the colonialist government. As of the year 2013 the Ministry of Education, Arts, Sports and Culture has it that a total of 110 Primary Schools are functional in Binga District against a total of 28 Secondary Schools. The number for secondary schools also includes the satellite schools that have been set as a way of reducing the distance travelled by pupils to access their secondary education. Due to poverty in the area and the expense of school fees, there is a low enrolment rate in secondary schools throughout the District. In addition, children often live too far from the schools, or they are needed at home to help with farming and domestic work. The foregoing are some of the stunning examples as to why literacy has

remained a perennial challenge for Binga district and the Tonga people.

Indigenous languages including Tonga are fast vanishing throughout the world as their last speakers die, or as dominant languages push them out of common usage. According to UNESCO (2008) about 2500 languages are threatened with extinction by 2020. Zimbabwe, linguists say has up to 16 African languages or dialects spoken in the country of which ChiShona and IsiNdebele are the only recognised 'official' languages apart from English yet there are many languages such as ChiTonga, which are not recognised at all even though these languages are dominant in the areas where they are commonly spoken. Government documents, signs and television programmes are still being produced in Shona, Ndebele and English and little or none in the other languages.

Year 2008 came as a huge sigh of relief after Zimbabwe Publishing House (ZPH), assisted sons and daughters from Binga published a full course of ChiTonga books (Grade 1-7) in November thereby overcoming the previously insurmountable challenge of lack of teaching and learning material for the Tonga language. The next step to take is the actual implementation of the national policy on minority languages.

The Herald (17 October 2012) reported that in her speech while receiving 30 000 exercise books for 100 schools in Binga donated by a book company, Cablemail, Vice President Joice Mujuru lamented the disheartening state of illiteracy in Binga, "It is disheartening to learn what other children are going through, especially 32 years after independence. We have 97 percent literacy rate in Zimbabwe and that remaining 3 percent is part of Binga". It appears that the issue of illiteracy in Binga has remained a thorny one calling for multi-stakeholder approach, that is, government and private sector.

3. Research Objectives

- To map the literacy levels in Binga;
- To investigate the roles played by Tonga Language and Culture Committee (TOLACCO), Roman Catholic and Community Leadership in promoting literacy in Binga;
- To determine the obstacles to literacy improvement in Binga; and
- To recommend the way forward in terms of promoting high literacy levels in Binga.

4. Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative approach. This was because most of the data gathered required more of descriptions as the literacy related issues were being explored. The population consisted of three notable key stakeholders to literacy: Tonga Language and Culture Committee (TOLACCO); Roman Catholic and Community Leadership purposively sampled because of their involvement in literacy and community development affiliations within Binga District. Notably, the community leadership target group consisted of the traditional leadership (the Chiefs) and the

House of Assembly member. A questionnaire was designed and distributed to the key respondents as a data gathering tool from the aforementioned stakeholders. Responses from the questionnaire were then collated and analysed in a descriptive approach. Data were also sourced from the secondary sources of literature to complement the primary data while broadening the analysis. In observance of research protocol, informed consent of the stakeholders was sought. Also, the questionnaire assured the respondents of strict confidentiality and anonymity in analysis of findings.

5. Statement of the Problem

The Human Development Index of the years 1995, 2003, 2006 including the Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey of 2010-2011 have tragically revealed that the literacy rate and average years of schooling have remained rather suppressed for Binga District in Matabeleland North Province, Zimbabwe. Various contributory factors to low literacy levels have been cited as being historically determined since the displacement of the Tonga people from the Zambezi valley thereby stalling infrastructure, educational and development initiatives among the Tonga people. Compounded with the foregoing, the government has not played its mandated role in uplifting literacy levels in Binga thereby leaving every initiative to the community-generated initiatives. Literacy has therefore remained an elusive concept for most Tonga people in Binga.

6. Purpose of the Study

This study is meant to show the extent to which literacy has remained a critical issue within Zimbabwe and among the Tonga people of Binga in particular. With the glaring statistics still showing Binga and the Tonga people as lagging behind in terms of literacy and average years of schooling, the government should take a precautionary measure and act on socially, politically and economically uplifting the otherwise labelled 'marginalised' Binga community and its Tonga speaking people. At the same time, the study aims at recommending the way forward in terms of improving literacy in Binga. A mapping of literacy shortcomings in Binga will enlighten the policy makers and other stakeholders on the tragedy of continuously ignoring Binga community, including the reasons for underdevelopment characterising the area.

7. Findings

The key stakeholders to literacy development in Binga who included: Tonga Language and Culture Committee (TOLACCO); Roman Catholic and Community Leaders were issued with a questionnaire of which one of the questions required them to give their definition of literacy. Arising definitions were only constrained to literacy as referring to the ability to read, write and interpret documents. Other elaborations referred to literacy as being associated with schooling and the ability to read numbers (numeracy). These definitions are consistent with the UNESCO (2006) definition of basic understanding of literacy as skills based.

7.1 Tonga Language and Culture Committee (TOLACCO)

The conception of literacy has been benchmarked on the ability to read and write. These skills were identified by TOLACCO as basic in any move towards a literate Binga community. The approach to conceptualising literacy as skills based was argued against the background of grave marginalisation in terms of education that has characterised the Tonga people and Binga District in general.

Responding to the specific roles that have been played by the TOLACCO in the promotion of literacy in Binga, the Programme Officer stated that the roles of TOLACCO include: advocating for the promotion of Tonga, engaging authorities over policy change, mobilising locals in mass production of reading materials for teaching, mobilising potential applicants for teacher training. This is consistent with the realisation by the chiefs that the children in Binga are being taught by teachers who are not conversant in Tonga, hence they fail to fully engage pupils in learning and critical thinking.

As a Committee that has been involved in advocacy and lobbying the government of Zimbabwe through the Ministry of Education, Arts, Sport and Culture to have Tonga Language officially recognised, TOLACCO has been credited with the advancement of literacy in Binga. For example, it emerged that the Tonga community scored a first for the minority languages in Zimbabwe following the formalisation of the Tonga language in schools in the Zambezi valley basin that borders Zimbabwe and Zambia. The Tonga language was in October 2011 officially tested at Grade seven levels for the first time in history of Zimbabwe. Since language is a vehicle of creativity, innovation and development of a people, this move by TOLACCO and other stakeholders is highly applauded. The main argument by TOLACCO has been that the introduction of the Tonga language in schools would help restore their cultural rights, pride and dignity of the Tonga community as equal citizens in Zimbabwe. As argued by Maathai (2010) language is an important component of culture and an essential means of binding the micro-nation together. It is therefore in this pretext that Tonga language once taught in schools will help bind the Tonga people and their culture together. One of the TOLACCO members said in an interview:

The teaching of Tonga language and getting it examined at grade seven is like a dream come true for us the Tonga people after a long struggle that dates back to 1976 when the effort to get Tonga language taught in school began. However, the biggest challenge (in formalisation of Tonga at secondary level) has been to take lobby efforts outside Binga where "ChiTonga" is not taught and recognised.

The foregoing efforts at examining Tonga testify to the debate that focuses on taking literacy beyond the oral skills. TOLACCO have also been working with other marginalised languages such as Nambya, Kalanga, Venda, Shangani, and Sesotho to promote the recognition of their languages and together they have formed the Zimbabwe Indigenous Languages Promotion Association (ZILPA) to lobby together for the effective teaching of their marginalised

languages. However, efforts at promoting literacy at both reading and writing skills level may be dealt a heavy blow drawing from a revelation by Actionaid in their article “Tonga Community in Language Breakthrough” in which one Grade 6 pupil (for 2011) at Binga Primary School said: “At home we speak Tonga language at Grade 7 next year (2012) because I am afraid I won’t find a Form 1 place outside Binga district “ChiTonga” is not formalised”. As much as literacy in one’s language is celebrated, there is a larger view to academic success that has to be borne in mind vis-a-vis localised indigenous minority languages.

A Programme Officer with TOLACCO highlighted that policy changes regarding Tonga as “minority” language has taken rather too long to come by due to the unyielding political will. However, he expressed optimism that “now that the current Zimbabwean constitution allows for the promotion of all languages, Tonga will be fully promoted. Earlier on, as presented by UNESCO (2005) sidelining of the so-called ‘minority languages’ like Tonga was said to be based on numerical considerations, with speakers of big languages maintaining that investing in small languages is not cost effective because these languages only have small numbers of speakers. This intuition has had a negative bearing on the promotion of literacy in Binga, particularly where Tonga literature and textbooks were supposed to have been authored.

Commenting on the availability of textbooks and other literature for the learners at various levels of their education, the education Programmes Officer highlighted that textbooks for Tonga have been produced from Grade One up to Form 2. Form three and four are currently under point with Zimbabwe Publishing House (ZPH). “We are finalising four literature novels for “O” Level examinations in 2015 as required by Zimsec [Zimbabwe Schools Examinations Council]”. TOLACCO in partnership with Basilwizi Trust has also provided funding for school fees to vulnerable children in Binga District. They have collaborated with book publishers to publish Tonga literature.

7.2 The Role of the Roman Catholic Church in Zimbabwe

The Roman Catholic Church parish in Binga has been instrumental in promoting literacy in Binga. Kariyangwe Parish based Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) partnered with Councillors, Traditional leaders, and Parish Priest in appealing for relevant support to renovate Detema Bridge.

CCJP Parish Committee led a social research which randomly targeted and interviewed 138 households. More than 90 percent of the respondents said the current state of Detema Bridge is a development barrier and a major cause of death. In 2009, a Zimbabwe Schools Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) vehicle was nearly washed away when it tried to cross the flooded bridge. Sick people staying on the other side of the river will not be able to cross the flooded bridge to come to Kariyangwe Mission, the nearest health centre. During the rainy season, the bridge can be flooded for one or two weeks, completely cutting off services for communities on the other side of the bridge. According to

statistics from Kariyangwe Mission Hospital, more than twenty pregnant women had miscarriages whilst forty died of malaria since 2009, not because there were no services, but because they could not get to hospital on time after being delayed by a flooded Detema bridge.

According to statistics from Kariyangwe High School, about 15 pupils missed their final examinations because they failed to cross a flooded bridge. Whilst the status of the bridge has affected both the girl and the boy child, it has been the girl child that has suffered most because she cannot ‘improvise’ to cross a flooded river or a bridge and therefore forced out of school for long periods, especially in the rainy season, consequently losing interest in education and forced into early marriage. In addition, one respondent highlighted that ‘the girl-child is still a beast of burden as she does a greater part of household work and this impacts very seriously in her performance in learning’. In the last quarter of 2011, ECONET (mobile phone operator) vehicles carrying communication network booster materials failed to pass, derailing the construction of the booster for Cellphone network in Kariyangwe. Lack of proper communication mediums has exacerbated literacy challenges in Binga. As argued by UNESCO (2006), information literacy is essential for development in any community. This is consistent with the conceptualisation of literacy in the context of skills enabling access to knowledge and information. Development of information literacy would enable the Tonga people to develop a complex set of critical skills that allow them to express, explore, question, communicate and understand the flow of ideas among individuals and groups in quickly changing technological environments across Zimbabwe.

Reporting on what the community tried, CCJP reported that in early 2010, the local Catholic Priest, the political and traditional leaders mobilised the community to contribute US\$0.50 per family to renovate the bridge. The business community, local Catholic Priest, the hospital and the Safari Operators assisted with transport. Unfortunately, there was no technical advice and adequate building material. Thus community members mixed cement with concrete stones, moulded a slab which was however completely washed away by the rains. The exposition by the CCJP testifies to the low literacy in terms of technical skills in Binga District. There is need therefore to have the community trained in technical skills for the good and development of community needs.

CCJP as a civil society arm has also been involved in language lobbying. They also joined the Tonga speaking people in celebrating the official recognition of their mother tongue through its public testing at Grade 7 level. In this regard, Zindoga (2012) reported that CCJP Zimbabwe has acknowledged the efforts of Silveira House and other organisations such as Basilwizi (People of the Great River) Trust that have contributed to the translation and development of the curriculum and literature for Tonga language. This is consistent with the approach to the understanding of literacy that focuses on literacy in terms of the subject matter. Texts that are produced and consumed by literate individuals vary by complexity of language used and by ideological content, explicit or hidden (UNESCO, 2006).

Silveira House, an organ of the Roman Catholic Church requires a special mention in this regard for their enormous contribution to literacy development through production and funding of critical Tonga literature in various languages and in Tonga for appreciation by both the Tonga and larger community in and outside Zimbabwe. The Silveira House Social Series has grown out of daily contact with people and is an attempt to let the situation of the poor and powerless in Zimbabwe known to others. The series analyses different socio-economic concerns and political policies, and reflects on them in the light of the Christian vision (Tremmel, 1994). One of the Series compiled by Michael Tremmel and the River Tonga People is entitled: *The People of the Great River: The Tonga Hoped the Water Would Follow Them*. As he compiled an account of the lives of the Tonga people as a way of preserving Tonga traditions and culture, Fr. Michael Tremmel has argued that, 'The message of their [River Tonga People] story may empower the Tonga to raise a much louder clearer and more unified voice' (Tremmel, 1994, p.10).

The church has played a pivotal role on the advocacy for the inclusion of Tonga in formal learning. They have also been involved in materials development such as books. They have also sponsored those with the ability to author Tonga books. Roman Catholic, Binga Parish has also been sponsoring children to attend school at both primary and secondary school levels. The support has been in the form of fees, clothing and exercise books. This move has added significantly to the development of literacy in Binga particularly among the young generation. Roman Catholic has also established schools such as Kariyangwe Mission Primary School which is one of the oldest schools in the community of Binga.

7.3 The Role of Community Leaders and Government

Community leaders such as Chiefs who constitute the traditional leadership in Binga have been quite instrumental in promotion of literacy in Binga. Since the first school in the area in 1924 Tonga was never taught in schools until 2005. The gap in years shows the dominance that Tonga language experienced. It also emerged that Chiefs have been instrumental in lobbying for policy change in the teaching of Tonga in schools. They also sourced funds for the procurement of primary series textbooks in 1998.

One Chief Mola of Binga said, "Since 1924 when the first school was built we never learnt the language in schools and Ndebele was proposed once as a substitute". The Chief explained that the situation was such that pupils in primary schools were being taught not in their mother language and some teachers from outside the region were not interested in learning the language. The teachers were predominantly Shona-speaking from Hurungwe and some from as far as Mutare and Masvingo.

It is a lamentable scenario that some people from other speech communities have been quick to label the Chief's counsel as being motivated by tribalism. In response, the Chief said, 'we are not tribalist but we wish our language to be recognised and respected. Shonas are many here but we want our children to be taught in their language.

Trivialisation of good efforts proposed by the Chief has negatively impacted on promotion of literacy in Binga. Lauded counsel by one teacher from Binga, a trained teacher at Negande Primary School, also involved in development of Tonga literature and culture. He said "Tonga is our L1 (first language) and if we introduce Tonga concepts first it will be very easy for the acquisition of knowledge in any discipline because you will have provoked his eagerness to learn. You have to move from the known to the unknown". Literacy, through language acquisition entails an appreciation of one's culture and that of others in the same community and beyond. Language spells the lives of any ethnic group and lays the foundation for respect, acceptance, understanding and even interaction with other societies. In the same vein, undermining Tonga, far from doing injustice to it, also deprives other societies of a chance to learn about the Tonga people and humanity in general. Other community leaders like Members of Parliament (MPs) were noted as not having played any significant role at all as they all failed to table motions in parliament or chambers during their tenure. In a few instances, Members of Parliament were mentioned as having sponsored some pupils with school fees.

8. Conclusion

It has emerged from the efforts made by all the shortlisted stakeholders that literacy is the key to development of any nation because one is capacitated to read; calculate numbers; make wise decisions and be a responsible and productive citizen. While advocacy and activity have increased in the international arena, literacy efforts as well as definitions and measures of literacy, and beneficiaries vary across organisations. Factors such as language, gender, HIV/AIDS, and emergency and conflict situations complicate and intensify the need for understanding, promoting and securing literacy for all. They also reflect the difficulty of formulating a unified international policy approach to literacy.

Indeed, literacy is no longer exclusively understood as an individual transformation, but as a contextual and societal one. Increasingly, reference is made to the importance of rich literate environments, public or private milieu with abundant written documents, for example, books, magazines and newspapers or communication and electronic media, for example, radios, televisions, computers and mobile phones. Whether in households, communities, schools or workplaces, the quality of literate environments affects how literacy skills are practised and how literacy is understood as described in the case of Binga community.

Also deriving from the main findings and the discussion it would be prudent to conclude by way of reference to one of the Tonga proverbs, "Simweenda alikke kakamulya kalonga" (The one who walks alone by the stream, gets eaten). Because of the possibility of encountering dangerous animals, for example, crocodiles by the streams, the Tonga appreciate the importance of walking with another for companionship and protection. This is very pertinent in their life now when they face present realities of exploitation and poverty. In cooperative action with others, the Tonga people have the potential to shape their own future through strong political action. Partnership in literacy development, that is, in reading, writing, information technology and livelihood

transformation requires multi-stakeholder participation for its success.

The Tonga people are not a totally illiterate people, they have some of their traditions and customs that have been passed down to posterity through proverbs, riddles and stories which possess deep, human values can empower the Tonga themselves, and those of other cultures. Examples of proverbs include: “Mweenzu wamuntu ulasiya cisisi” (A visitor leaves the gift of firewood”). Faithful to the African value of hospitality, this Tonga proverb reflects the joy of the Tonga in receiving visitors, as well as their anticipation of gifts the visitor may share with the villagers as they offer their farewell. One other Tonga proverb is, “Kabuca uleta tunji” (The dawn brings many things). This proverb speaks of the mystery and great unknown of life. As each new day dawns, the Tonga remind us that we may have an encounter with tragedy or we may be surprised by something very special and good. In the light of the availability of the stated proverbs among the Tonga texts, it is tangential to say that the Tonga are a totally illiterate people. In terms of literacy as applied, practical and situated approach stated by Doronilla cited in UNESCO (2006) one could conclude that the Tonga make significant use of literacy practices embedded within their proverbs for specific purposes in their everyday lives to transmit moral values. Chimhundu (1998, p. 2) has argued that ‘through language, which is a cultural asset, we transmit knowledge; we articulate values, beliefs, and traditions and even past achievements.’

9. Recommendations

In a quest to see that their children be taught in their own language, thus growing in appreciation of their culture and tradition, Tonga elders need to join together with elders of other minority language groups in Zimbabwe so that their common voice might be heard by the Ministry of Education, Arts, Sports and Culture.

In this time of independence and political freedom in Zimbabwe, the Tonga need to invest in literacy development, be it in reading, writing, educational or academic advancement, information and communication technologies growth and innovative utilisation of locally available resources which should also be branded for external markets. This move will help to stop poverty and the present crisis of exploitation in their lives, while opening opportunities for their worldwide visibility. In this regard, new and honest dialogue is required between local authorities, elected officials and the Tonga themselves so that the literacy programmes are wholly owned by Binga community.

There is urgent need to promote literacy among the Tonga people. For example, the government in partnership with other key stakeholders in education related field like non-governmental organisations and civil society should consider building more schools and improving available infrastructure. At the same time, great strides should be taken in establishing training institutions for school leavers, particularly in skills development programmes with bias towards community needs.

Seeing that the schools are reported to be far apart in Binga, there is need to build more schools particularly in remote areas such as Kabuba, Mbelele and Simuchembu to reduce the distance travelled by pupils to and from school. In the same vein, since there are very few trained teachers both at primary and secondary schools, training of teachers particularly from Binga who may consider going back to work in their communities should be considered.

Coupled with the foregoing issues related to education, poverty has been noted as one critical hindrance to literacy in Binga. Most parents do not afford fees even at primary school level. In this light then, the government in partnership with non-governmental organisations should consider setting up development projects or helping in value- addition to some products from the area such as basketry work, clay pots, sculptures, fish products, among others so as to improve income levels for villagers to enable them to send their children to school. Ultimately, government should consider rolling out a free primary education programme to ensure that illiteracy is totally eradicated among the younger generation even as they grow into adulthood their analysis skills would have improved. Having set up schools and equipped them with qualified staff, there is need to furnish the schools with teachers resource materials to ease delivery of lessons and facilitate standardised evaluation of student work

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Author Profile

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