

Power dynamics among PWDs during adult learning processes: Motivator or demotivator?

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Abstract

People with disabilities (PWDs) need knowledge and skills to engage in livelihood activities and to lead meaningful lives. Unfortunately, they are not or are underserved by the formal and non-formal education system. Improving PWDs' adult learning opportunities requires understanding of the factors that influence their learning. This paper is based on a study that investigated adult learning practices of PWDs regarding microfinance. It focuses on the kinds of power dynamics that operated among (PWDs) and between them and the non-PWDs and how these affected PWDs' learning. We argue that power and powerlessness is not homogenously distributed among categories of PWDs and that representation, leadership, decision-making and status as measures of power can be a source of motivation or de-motivation, depending on how they are handled.

Key words: Adult learning, disability, microfinance, power relations

Introduction

This article is derived from a PhD study “Ugandan case studies of adult learning practices of persons with disabilities regarding microfinance” (Nuwagaba, 2013). One of the research questions was “What kinds of power dynamics operated among persons with disabilities (PWDs) and between them and the non-PWDs and how did they affect PWDs' learning about Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisations (SACCOs)? SACCOs are microfinance institutions that Uganda government is using as a vehicle for poverty reduction (Lwanga Ntale, 2003). SACCOs provide financial services (such as savings and credit) and non financial services (such as education) to the poor (including PWDs) so as to enable them improve their economic activities. The non formal education provided by SAACOs focuses on financial literacy such as the importance of and processes involved in saving and borrowing on individual and group basis, moral values in financial matters (for example honesty and trustworthiness), types of loans provided by SACCOs, repayment terms and available investment options among others. As they engage in learning about SACCO services and livelihoods, there are power relations that are at play and these were investigated and are the subject of this article.

The article provides a synthesis of patterns of power relations that existed among a person with hearing disabilities, another with visual disabilities, those with physical disabilities and one with both hearing and speech disabilities, as well as those between them as PWDs and the non-PWDs. The power relations among PWDs and between them and non-PWDs were interrogated using the themes of representation, leadership, decision-making and status as measures of power. The four themes were evident as the PWDs engaged in learning informally and non-formally about their livelihood and utilization of microfinance services provided by (SACCOs). Rogers (2003) describes informal learning as learning that occurs as a result of interaction of people as they engage in activities in their everyday lives and non-formal learning as learning that is structured in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support and is intentional from the learner's perspective. Non-formal learning often occurs in settings outside state education structures and does not lead to certification.

The power dynamics among PWDs were investigated because it was necessary to determine whether PWDs who are generally classified as powerless fit this description or if there were some who were more powerful than others and, if so, in what ways. Understanding and addressing injustices and powerlessness can go along way to creating learning opportunities and building the confidence of PWDs thus creating what Freire called a “pedagogy of hope” (Brookfield 2005, p.8). In addition, there is limited research in the area of adult education and disability (Aitchison & Alidou, 2009; Belanger & Blaise, 1995; Omolewa, 1995; Clark 2006).

The adult learning occurred individually and in groups in the communities and SACCOs and in this study, it is framed within critical theory and the social model of disability. In addition to the above theories, the ideas of Foucault shaped our understanding of power relations generally while those of Paulo Freire and Stephen Brookfield were instrumental in interpreting and theorizing the power relationships between adult learners during learning processes. However, the analysis of power based on Foucault’s ideas did not include discourse as a feature of power and future researchers could use this as a framework for understanding power dynamics. The power dynamics are discussed in four cross-cutting themes, namely representation, leadership, decision making and status. These themes are a manifestation of power and were derived from the transcripts of the responses from the participants. They were therefore derived inductively from the data. Rather than identifying the power dynamics among the PWDs and thereafter their effect on learning, the power dynamics and their effects are discussed together.

Power can be understood as comprising three interrelated dimensions: control, influence and authority (Hornby, 2010) all of which are explained below. Control is explained by Hornby (2010) as power to make decisions about how something, such as an organization or group, is run. According to Hornby, having control over people means you can decide what those people should do or not do as well as how they should do it. It involves setting limits on what is acceptable. As for influence, Hornby describes it as the effect that a person has regarding the way that another person thinks, behaves or works. Influence is sometimes exerted by a person setting an example. Authority, on the other hand, is “the power to give orders to people” (Hornby, 2010, 83). Authority means someone has a right to do something. Another definition is provided by Rocco (2002, p. 51), who describes power as “the control, use, and protection of economic, political, and social resources and the use of these resources against others”. A definition by WHO (2010a, p. 31) explains power as “the ability to make informed choices and the freedom to take action”. The definition by Rocco introduces the repressive nature of power.

In the context of this study, control entails the ability of a person to make another person do what the former wants to be done. Control may involve some assertiveness to effect compliance. Control is usually exercised by those in leadership positions or those who supervise others, for example the chairman of a PWD community group can decide to allow a member to make a contribution in a meeting or can tell him to sit down. Influence means having an effect on the way someone acts or the way a particular situation or activity develops. Some of this influence may be indirect, in which case a person’s action may make another person behave in a particular way. In many cases where influence is involved, compliance is voluntary.

Authority in the context of this study means what Hornby (2010, p. 83) calls “the power to give orders to people”. Some of this power is derived from organizations or groups and is therefore exercised on behalf of others, and could be related to particular assigned positions of authority within an organization. Although leaders of groups in this study may have had this element of power which they could exercise on behalf of others, this was not common because the groups were loosely structured and voluntary. Much of the authority exercised was that derived from being in leadership positions.

The analysis focuses on the power relations among PWDs in loose groups rather than institutional power. We include different categories of PWDs and their groups for differentiation because of Foucault's (1983) arguments that power relations are influenced by differences due to status, wealth, know-how, economic capacity, processes of production, and culture, among others. In the study, the differentiations are that, compared to the non-disabled, PWDs, due to their impairments, are accorded low status by traditions, are disadvantaged economically and in terms of education, and thus have fewer and less developed competencies.

Understanding power relations within theoretical frames of critical theory and the social model of disability

The synthesis of power dynamics that existed among the PWDs and between them and the non-PWDs was contextualized within critical theory and the social model of disability. According to Brookfield (2005, p. 2), critical theory can help us explain “a world characterized by massive inequalities and the systematic exploitation ...” Referring specifically to adult learning, Brookfield uses the concept of praxis which originates from critical theory to link theory to practice. He reiterates that the desire of critical pedagogy is “to challenge dominant ideology, unmask power, contest hegemony, overcome alienation, pursue liberation, reclaim reason, and practice democracy” (p. 2).

Critical theorists have an interest in power relations and how the imbalances therein can be addressed (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit 2004). As Tregaskis (2004) argues, there should be justice for all and especially for PWDs who have lived in oppression and marginalization. Critical theory was used to clarify how power relates to the oppression, dependence, independence, interdependence and resilience of PWDs. The relationships between power and barriers to learning and development need to be understood in order to create opportunities that are favourable to PWDs' participation in learning. Critical theory is best suited for addressing issues revolving around the position of PWDs in society in terms of power.

On the other hand, the social model of disability sees the power of PWDs as a function of the relations between impairment and society. Society turns impairments into disabilities, or reinforces them as disabilities which, according to Oliver (1996), is disempowering to PWDs. Oliver (1996) further asserts that PWDs are generally marginalized by society and therefore are less powerful than those in the mainstream. Society and the environment constrain people with impairments from participating effectively in societal activities including learning. In terms of power relations, the social model views social structures as disempowering persons with impairments. Conversely, transformed disability-friendly structures could empower them. (Dis)empowerment is thus a function of social

structuring. The social model also recognizes the power of agency among persons with disabilities to challenge oppression and advocate for change.

It has been argued that adult learners with disabilities are conceptualized as a minority group whose voices are often silenced (Clark, 2006). In addition, Rocco (2002) argues that, because they are denied access to economic, political and educational resources and their participation in social, civic, and political life of the community is restricted, they face segregation and discrimination, thus compounding their marginalization. She therefore affirms that conceptualising PWDs as a minority group “pushes for disability to be seen as a form of social oppression and a matter of civil rights” (Rocco, 2002, p.52). Drawing from Williams (2001), she argues that this oppression is due to barriers that perpetuate discrimination. This positioning makes their participation in decision-making regarding learning and participation in other development processes difficult. As WHO (2010a, p. 231) notes, “decisions are made by people with power...” and this category often excludes persons with disabilities.

In addition to marginalization, adult learners with disabilities often lack self-esteem and self-confidence (WHO, 2010a). This makes them vulnerable when seeking learning opportunities or participating in learning activities as they cannot assert themselves. Lack of self-esteem and confidence may be seen as the psychological corollaries of structural marginalization and become internalized forms of disempowerment. As Tregaskis (2004) claims, impairment is an excuse for oppressive practices and society’s rewards for conformity hinder PWDs’ struggle against society’s accepted practices. Lack of self- esteem and confidence can be huge obstacles in fighting oppression.

On the other hand, PWDs are not always powerless and there are situations, instances and cases where PWDs are powerful. That is why Tregaskis (2004, p. 77) advises that “it may be a mistake to assume that disabled people are always without power in their interactions with non-disabled others”. PWDs are capable of, for example, mobilizing and organizing themselves in order to challenge and change structures of oppression, as the disability movement has demonstrated. She contends that power is important to PWDs because they have lived in unequal power relations for a long time despite the need for social justice for all.

It can be argued, as indeed Prince (2004) does, that disability is contested in terms of identity politics and social policy. He clarifies that “the notion of contestation is challenging the construction of persons with disabilities ... as passive victims ...” (p. 3) when they should be enjoying their rights. Contestation implies challenging power relations. This, contestation, according to the social model of disability, requires the transformation of social structures and systems that maintain the hegemony of the able- bodied. Adult learning practices of PWDs should play a role in facilitating this transformation.

In the context of microfinance, Kamdar (2007) and Thekkekara (2007) state that society disempowers PWDs by failing to cater for them in terms of issues such as access to and control of land, property, business, markets, mobility, participation, representation and decision-making. An empowered PWD would be one whom society does not disable through restrictive barriers. However, the social model of disability does not sufficiently take

into account personal and psychological factors relating to empowerment and disempowerment, despite the fact that individuals' dispositions and actions can empower or disempower them.

Study Methodology

Since PWDs are usually regarded as marginalised and microfinance was being used as a tool for economic empowerment, the critical paradigm (Simons, 2009; Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit) was thought to be appropriate. The case study approach (Rule & John, 2011; Yin, 2003; Simons, 2009) was employed due to its ability to generate a rich description of what was learned, how it was learned and the contextual factors at play. In addition, case studies can investigate phenomena within a real life context. Although the whole study involved six persons with disabilities (three with physical disabilities, one with visual disabilities, one with hearing disabilities and one with multiple disabilities [hearing and speech]), two guides and five development workers, making a total of 13 participants, the data for the research question for this article were from PWDs only. This was because the power relations focused on PWDs' perspectives of power and the guides and development workers were not asked to respond to this research question. The PWD participants included a 29 year old female with a physical disabilities who owned a shop, a male with physical disabilities who engaged in brick making (he declined to give his age), a young woman engaged in tailoring, a 65 year old man engaged in poultry keeping and other agricultural activities, a 38 year old male who had hearing disabilities and had a brick-making project and ran a small kiosk serving tea, and, a 62 year old male market vendor who had both hearing and speech disabilities.

Purposive sampling was used to identify the SACCOs serving the PWDs. As SACCOs, do not easily release information about their clients, snowball sampling (Chilisa & Preece, 2005) was used to generate the PWD sample. A PWD leader was contacted and she helped identify some PWDs involved in SACCOs and these in turn identified others until the sample was realised. Data used for this article were collected using in-depth and semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion (FGD) and triangulation helped improve trustworthiness and dependability. Data analysis involved initial and axial coding as well as discourse analysis. The unit of analysis for this article were all the PWDs. In regard to generalisability, we recognise that the sample was small because PWDs are a small population in the area of study but argue that it was carefully selected. Additionally, case studies are known for understanding the case itself (Simons, 2009) and for analytical rather than statistical generalisations (Rule & John, 2011).

Findings

The power dynamics among PWDs and those between them and non-PWDs were investigated focusing on representation, leadership positions, decision-making and status. In addition, we included one critical incident covering the power dynamics relating to gender. The findings are discussed in that order.

Representation

Representation as a form of participation was investigated because, in such situations, the majority's view is usually taken as correct. Representation in this context concerned the actual numbers of persons with particular categories of disability who were present during learning.

Findings suggest that in many community-learning activities, those with physical disabilities were more numerous, followed by those with visual disabilities and lastly those with hearing disabilities. During the FGD, the opinion of the person with visual disabilities which was supported by others was that;

In the groups comprising PWDs, the committees have more members with physical impairments compared to other impairments, meaning those with physical impairments have more representatives. Being a committee member requires one to deal with written documents and to convince others. The people with visual disabilities find this challenging as they cannot read and those living with hearing or speech disabilities cannot easily communicate with others.

During interviews, the participant with hearing and speech disabilities confirmed the power of those with physical disabilities noting;

In our community groups, different categories of PWDs sometimes do not agree amongst themselves. This is because people with visual, hearing and physical disabilities have different needs and decisions made by a group may affect each category differently. Those with physical impairments often prevail because they are more numerous than the other categories of disability.

Based on the above discussion, it can be assumed that those with physical disabilities wielded greater influence as they were more numerous represented than other PWD categories at committee level (1st response) and group level (2nd response).

However, one of the participants (female) who had physical disabilities argued that less representation did not necessarily translate into powerlessness, saying;

All categories of PWDs are equally powerful and none is looked down upon. Sometimes, those who are fewer in number form cliques based on disability types which result in solidarity among the group which motivates that clique to "fight" for learning opportunities so as not to be left behind.

One may therefore argue that large numbers may not necessarily translate into more learning as those with less representation may struggle more and ultimately benefit more from learning than those in large numbers. In the majority of cases, however, the less represented are usually less powerful as their opportunities to participate in decision-making are limited and decisions that are not in their best interest may be made.

The findings seem to suggest that the reason given for more representation by those with physical disabilities was that they faced fewer and less acute challenges during learning than those with visual and/or hearing disabilities. This, it was argued, bestowed power on them. From the social model of disability's point of view, analysis of these community groups clearly reveals the dominance of those with physical disabilities and the disempowerment of people with visual disabilities and those with hearing disabilities.

The findings suggest that PWDs who were believed to be more powerful than others included those with physical disabilities (due to their large numbers compared to the other categories). The findings therefore reveal that power in terms of representation was not homogenous among disability types as those with physical disabilities seemed powerful when judged on the variable of representation only. This did not, however, necessarily translate into more learning, as already explained. Another category of those believed to wield more power were those who had more money. The data suggested that those who were well off financially were more powerful than those who were not. They were sought for positions of leadership. There were PWDs who were more powerful than non-PWDs in this respect.

Leadership

The second aspect investigated was leadership. As the study was carried out among loosely structured rather than tightly structured institutions, we opt for the definition of leadership as “an everyday way of acting and thinking that has little to do with a title or formal position in an organization” (Daft, 2005 cited in Lam, 2010, p. 27). Lam adds that leadership entails having power and also influence over others (p. 29) and Northouse (2007) goes a step further to add that the purpose of this power and influence over individuals is to achieve a common goal. In the context of this study, leadership refers to being in a position of influence in the community groups that included disability-only groups and mixed groups comprising both PWDs and non-PWDs. It also includes taking a leading role in decision-making processes. Although PWDs were in leadership positions in various structures, the study focused on leadership within their community groups and the effect it had on their learning about SACCOs and their services.

The study found that people in leadership positions were elected by the members according to the capacities they had. As alluded to in the previous section on representation, those elected into leadership positions were there to represent those who elected them, thus suggesting a relationship between leadership and representation. This representation was in a way a form of leadership. One of the community groups of PWDs had a committee on which persons from the three categories of disability were members. One of them (with physical disabilities) argued:

We elect people with good money on the committee because we fear that if a poor person is in leadership and loses the money, such a person cannot afford to replace it. If this happens, we lose our money and I don't want to lose my money.

The fact that it was recognized that having money was an advantage when choosing leaders could imply that PWDs may be motivated to acquire financial capacity so that they compete favourably for leadership positions. Those contestants who have much money can afford to give money directly or use it to provide others with favours in return for votes. In this case, wealth is a form of power that is exerted by those with it to change other people's decisions in their favour. Since Ugandans are aware that many PWDs lack financial capacity, they will be constricted into a position of political powerlessness. Those influenced by the social model of disability may argue that Ugandan society is erecting barriers to stop PWDs from participating in political leadership since they emphasise finances

rather than other abilities while making choices. As political decisions influence access to opportunities, political powerlessness may ultimately result in a lack of adult learning opportunities for PWDs.

As those in leadership were elected because of their financial capacities, according to this particular research participant, it may also suggest that ownership of financial resources rather than presence of large numbers of the same category of impairment could put someone into a position of power. The findings also suggest that those who are poor and with disabilities have less power than those who are wealthy and with disabilities. So it may be argued that financial capacity makes some wealthier PWDs powerful although PWDs are generally subject to oppression within this society. This confirms the argument that, although PWDs are generally known to be powerless and subject to oppressive societal structures (WHO, 2010b), this condition is not homogenous for all PWDs.

The other individuals categorized as powerful were those who were in positions of leadership. The findings suggest that PWDs in positions of leadership were elected not based on disability type but on their capacity, especially financial. The study revealed further that another category of powerful people were those who were involved in decision-making processes. The decision-making among PWDs was judged to be largely based on a position of responsibility rather than disability type. This means that the PWDs were aware that capacity was an important aspect in group leadership and management and their reported practices show that they applied that knowledge. The dynamic of power also revolved around status. The positions of power provided many opportunities for learning, but there were also cases where those who were marginalized benefited more; for example, instances where the minorities formed a clique to fight the marginalization, showed that they were motivated to learn and to outperform the others.

Although PWDs are often perceived by society as powerless (WHO, 2010c, Lwanga-Ntale, 2003), the data suggested that some were indeed powerful, especially those with financial resources, those in leadership positions, those who were decision makers and those who had some status in the community. Again, some of the PWDs were more powerful than the non-PWDs in this respect.

In terms of leadership positions in groups formed in their communities, PWDs held some positions in such groups. Within some of the groups, group decision-making was practiced rather than the top leadership making the decisions. This is consistent with African philosophies of communalism (Ocitti, 1988) as opposed to individualism of the Western world. This practice minimized conflicts and enhanced learning and engagement.

Decision-making

The third aspect that was investigated was decision-making. Decision-making is closely linked to leadership because those in positions of leadership make the majority of the decisions in groups. It is through decision-making that power as control, authority and influence is exercised. According to Merriam-Webster Online dictionary, decision-making can be described as the selection of a course of action from many alternatives.

The participants shared their views regarding decision-making during learning activities in SACCOs. The participant with visual disabilities summed up the PWDs' view of the relationship between decision-making and power

by referring to those who make decisions as “powerful”. Having been in various positions of leadership for a long time, it was easy for this participant to recognise decision-making as exercising power. All the participants were aware that some decisions are made by a small group (committee) on behalf of others while other decisions are made by all the members.

There was agreement that decision-making largely happened through their committees. They singled out Chairmen, Treasurers and Secretaries as members of the committees who made many of the decisions, irrespective of the type of disability these committee members had. As it was the committee that made many of the decisions, it can be argued that those who were committee members exercised more power than the ordinary members. Additionally, since financial capacity was sometimes a consideration in electing committee members, it can also be argued that those with financial capacity exercised more power than the rest of the members of the groups.

Findings also reveal that, although suggestions of individuals were welcome, decision-making was collective. The participant with visual disabilities revealed that:

Anybody can bring an idea or proposal and, once it is accepted by the majority, it is implemented. The decision-making process follows guidelines and is through consensus-building in meetings and, where there is no consensus, through voting. When a vote is taken, the idea supported by the majority is what is accepted as the valid group decision. It is through this process that agreement on who of the members should host the learning session, the time and duration of learning activities, and other issues is reached.

Group decision-making is consistent with African philosophies of communalism (collective responsibility, joint decision-making and respecting everyone’s opinion) (Preece, 2009). It is this group decision-making that contributed to sustaining harmony between people with different disabilities. Harmonious relationships strengthened group cohesion which ultimately enhanced PWD participation in learning. The collective decision-making, it would appear, makes mobilization for learning activities easier and more effective as people will have participated in making the decisions regarding that activity.

The findings further revealed that, when it came to exercising influence, control and authority, there were close connections between representation, leadership positions, decision-making and status. Each was reinforcing the other. For example, PWDs were in leadership positions because they represented others. Because of being in leadership positions, they were making decisions.

Interestingly, findings revealed that PWDs who usually feel marginalised can create barriers to non-PWDs who wanted to become members in their groups. In a group where adult learning occurred and PWDs were in the majority, they had decided that PWDs could freely join the group without scrutiny but that the non-disabled have to be scrutinized by the committee which then submitted the applications to the general meeting for approval. This seems to suggest that the PWDs create enabling conditions within their own structures regarding the admission of PWDs. Making it easy for PWDs to become members was due to their removal of barriers to their access, such as putting in place less stringent application processes. This fits in well with the social model of disability. However, it also raises questions as to why PWDs, who feel uncomfortable with being discriminated against, would put in place processes

that were unfavourable to non-PWDs. It could be interpreted to mean that they were discriminating against those without disabilities. It could also be interpreted to mean that it was a form of affirmative action in favour of PWDs. What is certain is the power of numbers. The PWDs were able to make the decisions favourable for themselves because they were in the majority. This might indicate that PWDs wished to maintain control over these structures. This links back to the issue of representation as relative numerical advantage.

Status

The fourth and last aspect investigated was status. Status has been explained as the prestige attached to one's position in society (Northouse, 2007). Northouse distinguishes between achieved status (a position that can be assumed on merit) and ascribed status (a position assigned at birth or assumed involuntarily later in life). He clarifies that achieved status reflects personal skills, abilities and efforts. The explanations in this section refer to achieved status and focus on status within disability types, gender and the socio-economic context because the study had no participants with ascribed status.

The response of the person with physical disabilities sums up what PWDs think are attitudes of the non-PWDs towards them; *"you know when you become impaired, you are looked at as a curse in the family, they see you as an abuse, just like a liability. Even when you are talking to people, they do not consider you to have any intelligence."* The response of the participant with hearing disabilities; *"PWDs are taken as people of very low status"* was not any different. Their view is echoed by the meanings of Ugandan local language names given to PWDs such as *isegya* in Lusoga and *jok* in Alur which mean 'evil spirit', *ekiragi* in Rukiga, which sometimes is used to refer to 'silly', *ekirema*, a Runyankore/Rukiga word which means 'old useless pot' (MoFPED, 2008). The Runyankore-Rukiga dictionary describes *ekirema* as *'omuntu otari mu buteeka obu yakubaire arimu'* (Oriikiriza, 2007, p.108). Translated into English, the last sentence, which is in the language of the participants, means a person who is abnormal. These names, in addition to identifying PWDs as people of low status, also suggest that they are discriminated against. Calling PWDs such names causes emotional hurt during adult learning and engagement in livelihood activities. Contextualized in Zembylas' (2004) assertion that the emotions of adult learners who have faced discrimination and inequality can support or hinder learning, it can be argued that the PWDs in this study were supported by their emotions not only to learn but also to strive for success in all they were doing. Their responses suggested that they were dealing with the emotions of being called PWDs positively. The participant with hearing disability revealed that: *"I also come to disprove those who think that those who cannot hear cannot learn"* and the one with physical impairment said *"I have confidence speaking about PWDs' contributions to the learning activities"*. The participant with hearings and speech disabilities indicated that:

I am highly motivated to make it in life. I like very good things. I don't want anybody to think that because I am a PWD, I cannot manage... It is the strong motivation to succeed which drives me and this sometimes surprises many people. Some people who attend meetings and workshops with me get surprised that I can follow what is going on. ... My wife has told me that some people have appreciated careful observation as a learning strategy after finding out that I learn largely through observation and not listening.

On the other hand, a participant with physical disabilities revealed both positive and negative reactions resulted from being called a PWD. He said that:

But we have other people with disabilities, they became impaired; it is done, it is done ... it is the end, it is finished! Even when you want to give such people a push, they cannot move. Such people do not adopt advice.

The arguments advanced are that PWDs who accepted their conditions worked hard and became successful thus achieving high status. On the other hand, those who could not deal with their emotions positively ended up resigned with no hope at all, and remained of low status. This psychological state has implications for adult learning.

The power dynamics among the three categories of PWDs can be discerned by analyzing what transpired during the FGD. The participant with hearing disabilities continued speaking although interrupted by the one with physical disabilities. It is unlikely that the one with hearing disabilities did not know that the one with physical disability had started talking as they were seated directly opposite each other and could do lip-reading. This could suggest that the one with hearing disabilities did not accord higher status than himself to the one who had a physical disabilities . Usually in Kinyankore culture, one does not interrupt senior people while they are still talking.

During the FGD, no disability type dominated another. The FGD was designed to be participatory and there was no interference with who spoke first or more frequently and the interruptions during the discussions were spontaneous. The FGD therefore provided an opportunity to analyse power relations among PWDs.

Status as reflected in gender was also investigated through analysis of a critical incident (Brookfield, 2005) that exhibited power dynamics. All throughout the focus group discussion, it was evident that the female's gender did not disadvantage her in any way. In some cases she was the first to respond. In other cases, the others responded first. In other instances, she interjected when other participants were making their contributions. She would chip in during the discussions just like everyone else. In cases where they chorused agreement with an issue mentioned by one of the participants in the FGD, she was as much a choruser as the rest of the participants. She was a participant in her own right like the others. It was noted that she was assertive and would not allow men to interrupt or submerge her contributions to the discussion. These are signs that she did not allow herself to be marginalized as a woman. This finding is in tandem with the findings of a study of women engaged in microfinance in India. In that study, Kamdar (2007, p. 40) reports that "women sit along with men and talk without hesitation". One may conclude that such women were thus empowered. Although women's talking without interruption is common in Western cultures, it is significant in Africa which is largely a patriarchal society.

Being in leadership positions, representatives of others and decision makers accorded one more status than one who was not playing such roles. Someone's status could also earn one a leadership position, or being a representative or enable him or her to make decisions. Someone who had all of them had more power and was as well accorded more respect by the PWDs and the community. For example, the participant with visual disability had

more power and respect than the rest because of his knowledge, position of leadership, age, links with a disability movement, and other experiences, among other factors. It is, however, important to note that even those who were not in leadership positions were also making decisions and also had status.

From the above discussions, it is evident that power dynamics in terms of representation, leadership, decision-making and status had both positive and negative effects on learning. On the positive side, representation enabled PWDs' voices to be listened to, good leadership kept group cohesion, collective decision-making helped to regulate borrowing by group members, promoted rapport, unity and solidarity, and improved chances of getting support during learning. On the negative side, no representation in leadership meant limited participation which negatively affected group performance and decision-making.

It appears therefore that the low status accorded to PWDs by society sometimes affected them negatively during the learning process and at other times motivated them to learn and strive as much as they could to improve their status.

Conclusion

The power dynamics that existed among the PWDs and between them and non-PWDs during adult learning processes revolved around representation, leadership, decision-making and status. It was established that not all PWDs are powerless and power is not homogeneously distributed. This confirms Tregaskis' (2004) argument that PWDs are not always without power in their interaction with the non-disabled. Those with physical disabilities had more representation as they were many in number and also due to the more numerous roles they played compared to other disability types. This was attributed to their having fewer limitations on their functionings. Similarly, those who were knowledgeable and those with more money were more powerful. Also, the power wielded by individuals or disability types were not the same in all situations. Powerlessness, depending on how it was handled by a particular PWD or PWD category, could be a motivator or de-motivator to learning.

Recommendations

As power and powerlessness was found not to be homogeneously distributed amongst the different categories of PWDs, it is recommended that the unique characteristics of each category need to be factored in while designing non-formal education policies and interventions for PWDs. Additionally, the different categories of PWDs should be given opportunities to experience representation and status and to participate in leadership and decision making so as to empower them. Policy makers and education practitioners should develop strategies for utilising these aspects of power to enhance PWDs' learning.

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