

# Educating and training out of poverty? Adult provision and the informal sector in fishing communities, South Africa

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## Abstract

This paper looks at access to adult education and vocational education and training (VET) provision in fishing communities in the Western Cape, South Africa. Fishing communities are being disadvantaged due to geographical and socio-political marginalisation, and the predominance of informal sector employment in the context of worldwide marine resource depletion. Neither public nor private provision is adequately serving rural areas or the informal sector in this context. Using the sustainable livelihoods approach as a tool of analysis, this paper argues that a more cross-sectoral approach is needed to tackle equity and poverty concerns in adult education and training provision.

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## 1. Introduction

Adult education and training has become the poor neighbour of formal schooling. Despite their initial claims, international literacy and Education for All (EFA) initiatives under the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have effectively come to mean purely formal schooling, usually at primary level (Rogers, 2004). Adult training and literacy provision have therefore become marginalised—leading some to dub EFA as ‘Except for Adults’ (Hildebrand and Hinzen, 2004). In South Africa, despite the promises made and the implementation of a national programme of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) provision as well as the National Qualifications

Framework (NQF), which is supposed to integrate all aspects of education and training, adult literacy and skills/vocational education and training (VET) has found itself largely sidelined politically and financially (see McGrath, 2005a). Training for the informal micro- and small-enterprise (MSE) sector, which the majority of small-scale fishing fits into in South Africa, has been further marginalised both internationally and in South Africa (King, 2005; Palmer, 2005; McGrath, 2004a; Devey et al., 2003, 2006). The lack of attention paid by adult education and training to informal sector/MSE employment/livelihoods sits uneasily with the fact that given the high level of unemployment in South Africa (40% for the expanded definition) (Daniel et al., 2005), the majority of school leavers are likely to be faced with finding work in this category (McGrath, 2005b).

Analysis of access to adult education and VET using the sustainable livelihoods framework (detailed below) raises some already heard but still very

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pertinent debates around how we judge the results of educational and training interventions—whether through purely educational attainment or through more general socio-economic (or poverty reduction) outcomes. Countering the trends noted in EFA, the last decade has seen a resurgence of interest linking adult education and training with livelihoods/employment and poverty reduction outcomes, particularly in the literature around literacy and vocational education (DFID, 2002; World Bank, 2001; Rogers, 2005; Akoojee and McGrath, 2005).

This paper is based on qualitative fieldwork carried out over a period of 13 months in the West Coast area of the Western Cape, South Africa. The data were gathered predominantly using participant observation and interviews, both formal and informal, with a range of people including fishworkers and other local people, public and private vocational/further education and training (VET/FET) providers, local and provincial government officials, staff at non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs), and local leaders. These were complemented by analysis of secondary sources including statistical information. The sustainable livelihoods framework was used for the purposes of analysis. For this paper I draw the findings from a group of small rural settlements, Doring Bay and Ebenhaeser/Papendorp, in a predominantly ‘coloured’ (see Goldin, 1987, Afrikaans-speaking fishing and farming area situated about four hours’ drive north of Cape Town. Participant observation was carried out predominantly in the smaller settlement of Papendorp because of its centrality to local informal sector fishing activity. This group of sites was chosen because of its ‘telling’ status in terms of the inequalities of access to educational and training provision and to natural resources in South Africa, as well as its clear illustration of the intersecting nature and influence of international, national and local structures and processes. Furthermore, it illustrates these processes against a backdrop of changes in a globalised formal fishing industry and growing informal sector employment.

In order to understand the contribution of adult education and training to poverty reduction and livelihoods outcomes we must first look at the livelihoods and institutional context in which educational interventions are operating, in this case, fishing communities.

### *1.1. The context of livelihoods in fishing communities in the West Coast, South Africa*

Fishing communities in the West Coast area are operating in a difficult institutional environment. New national fishing legislation and policies have produced new requirements that fishworkers must fulfil in order to gain access to fishing rights. The new policies, implemented progressively since 1998, are heavily influenced by current neo-liberal international models, and have led to a tendency towards polarisation (Castells, 1998) or inequalities in the industry and in fishing communities (Isaacs, 2006). They view fishing as a specialised full-time activity, rather than as a part-time, seasonal activity or one of several diverse livelihood strategies which is the reality in many developing countries (Allison and Ellis, 2001). Allocation of fishing rights is often made in the form of single-species quotas rather than allowing fishers to respond to seasonal changes or depletion of stocks. The combined effects of the changes have been damaging to local fishing livelihoods. The number of fishers who have legal access to marine resources has been reduced, as well as the range of species they have access to (Isaacs, 2003, 2006). Some of those people excluded from catching high-value resources are faced with at best reduced access to low-value resources. Many others who have traditionally fished have been left out of access to marine resources altogether, while large companies continue to fish in large quantities and make huge profits. Furthermore, the activities of industrial companies have led to global resource depletion (Copes, 1997), negatively affecting small-scale fishers’ livelihoods.

The process of allotting fishing rights as quotas to small-scale fishers has meant that those catching high-value resources destined for international export such as west coast rock lobster must run businesses (MSEs/small, medium and micro-enterprises (SMMEs)), competing with and/or selling to large companies. Obtaining and managing a fishing quota now requires a high level of business, marketing and accounting knowledge, as well as the ability to negotiate complex application procedures in English. The government department responsible also disseminates much of the necessary information on the internet, a medium to which few in these fishing communities have adequate access. SMME development and skills training are therefore particularly pertinent. Arguably such skills also relate to the category of ‘functional literacy’

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