**0424**

**Adult Unlearning in the Unhappiest Country in the World: the Educational, Digital and Happiness Abyss in Zimbabwe**

Jill Jameson

*University of Greenwich, London, Greater London, United Kingdom*

**Background**

A recent Women and Men of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) report on education (2009) observed that education in Zimbabwe was 'a dream shattered': a catastrophic decline had occurred to Zimbabwe's 'once vibrant education system'. WOZA's research report noted that 'along with our children's lives', education 'has been destroyed by political interference', stating that 99.6% of parents reported a complete lack of teachers in schools in 2009 because of industrial action by teachers. During 2008-09, Zimbabwe was also rated third worst in the world for its information communications technology (ICT) capability by the World Economic Forum, ranking 132/134 countries on the global ICT 'networked readiness index'. In the same year, Zimbabwe was ranked by the World Values Subjective Well Being (SWB) Survey as 'the unhappiest country in the world', resonating with earlier Afrobarometer (2002) data which reported that only 18% of adults surveyed were satisfied with Zimbabwean democracy.  In 2009, the New Economics Forum (NEF) Happy Planet Index (HPI), measuring a tripartite combination of health, life satisfaction and ecological responsibility, scored Zimbabwe with the lowest rank (143/143 countries: NEF, 2009). The Zimbabwean economy was on the edge of total collapse for nearly a decade, with incalculable hyperinflation, more than 50% of the population dependent for survival on UN food aid, around 90% unemployed and a cholera epidemic which in 2008-09 killed around 4,000 people. A history of colonial and post-colonial oppression, human rights abuses, economic mismanagement, poverty, disease, corruption, public sector breakdown and population loss has rendered the country almost powerless globally.  Yet, simultaneously, selected leaders in the current government insist that significant progress has been made in national sovereignty and that Zimbabwe's problems stem from and are caused by 'illegal sanctions' applied by Western nations (despite large-scale assistance from those nations in helping Zimbabwe overcome the cholera epidemic). An almost complete failure to learn from the mistakes of past decades signals national 'unlearning': a dearth of adult and professional education and training. Applying a critical social theory methodology and drawing on Freirean conceptions of critical pedagogy to promote emancipation through access to education, e-learning and renewed well-being from economic empowerment and human fulfilment, this paper analyzes grim national statistics and original electronic survey data on education and the digital and happiness 'divide' in Zimbabwe. Access to problem-solving education, publications and ICT facilities in a dialogic process of 'conscientization' are recommended in a theoretical model for a revived adult education system with democratising and liberating opportunities for Zimbabwean adults.

**Research Questions**

This paper analyses a range of available international data on education, ICT and happiness in Zimbabwe to question why little or no learning has taken place for adults in Zimbabwe to empower and develop themselves in the current era. The paper also questions why Zimbabwe, which until 1995 had the highest literacy levels in Africa (around 90%), has fared so badly in education, ICT 'readiness' and subjective well being data during the past decade. The paper also investigates why some 20,000 teachers have left Zimbabwe in the past few years, why around half of the country's children no longer carry on studying beyond primary school level, why the Index of Ecomomic Freedom ranks Zimbabwe 178/179 nations and what has gone so badly wrong in education, ICT and self-reported happiness levels in the country. The paper queries whether an education system that has declined so badly can be reinvigorated through Freirean problem-solving adult education techniques.

**Methods**

International data from the Information and Telecommunications Union (ITU) 'Networked Readiness Index', World Bank and Afrobarometer surveys are analysed against data on Subjective Well Being (SWB), the World Values Survey and New Economics Forum (NEF) Happy Planet Index (HPI), to consider the position of Zimbabwean educational opportunities for adults in relation to the three dimensions of: education, ICT and self-reported levels of happiness. A Freirean critical theory analysis of the potential of critical pedagogy as a liberatory methodology applied in adult education is provided, recommending problem-posing dialogic educational initiatives to develop and empower a new form of adult learning in Zimbabwe. This analysis is then compared with electronic survey results from Zimbabweans in the country and exiles in the Zimbabwean diaspora, in consideration of the three dimensions of adult education, ICT and reported levels of subjective well-being amongst Zimbabwean adults.

**Frame**

Documentary analysis of existing international data sets is carried out. The implications of findings from the literature and news sources reporting on Zimbabwe are analysed. Freirean critical theory is applied to consider the potential for a liberatory praxis in dialogic, problem-posing educational initiatives in Zimbabwe. A new theoretical model for the application of Freirean critical pedagogy in adult education in Zimbabwe is proposed. This analysis is then triangulated against data (n= 200+) from an electronic survey with Zimbabweans in the country and in the Zimbabwean diaspora. Throughout, the three dimensions investigated are adult education, ICT and happiness levels in terms of reported subjective well-being.

**Research findings**

Findings from a meta-analysis of secondary sources of international data are combined with a theoretical analysis of the potential for Freirean conceptions of adult education to change the educational, ICT and reported levels of happiness of adults in Zimbabwe. Recommendations are made regarding the potential for learning about past mistakes so that adult education in Zimbabwe can be renewed. A theoretical model is proposed for the application of Freirean concepts of critical pedagogy to the dire situation for education, ICT and reported unhappiness levels of Zimbabwean adults. Findings from a medium scale electronic survey with Zimbabweans in the country and in the diaspora (n=200+) are reported and analysed. Recommendations are made for improving adult learning, ICT access and use and levels of subjective well-being amongst Zimbabweans.

**References**

Inglehart, R., Foa, R., Peterson, C. and Welzel, C. (2008). Development, Freedom, and Rising Happiness: A Global Perspective (1981-2007). *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3, 4: 264-285.

New Economics Foundation (NEF) (2009) *The (un)Happy Index Planet 2.0.* Research report produced by the New Economics Foundation. Written by Saamah Abdallah, Sam Thompson, Juliet Michaelson, Nic Marks and Nicola Steuer. London, UK. Accessed 18 January, 2010: http://www.happyplanetindex.org/

Women and Men of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) (2009). *The State of Education in Zimbabwe - a Dream Shattered: A Women and Men of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) perspective*, February 2009. Famona, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, accessed 15 January, 2010: http://wozazimbabwe.org/?p=315

WEF (2009). *The Global Information Technology Report 2008-2009*. INSEAD Business School: World Economic Forum, available online at http://www.weforum.org accessed 15 January 2010: http://www.weforum.org/en/initiatives/gcp/Global%20Information%20Technology%20Report/index.htm