Literacy, lifelong learning and sustainable development

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Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 calls on countries to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Sub-goal 4.6 aims to ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults of both genders achieve literacy and numeracy, with literacy being regarded indispensable not only for the achievement of SDG 4 but also for the other 16 SDGs, specifically those relating to health and wellbeing, gender equality, active citizenship, income generation and responsible consumption and production. However, the potential of achieving literacy can only be reached if it is approached from a lifelong learning perspective; therefore literacy learning activities should be offered as part of a lifelong learning framework.

This article describes how the Kha Ri Gude Literacy Campaign in South Africa, conceptualised within a lifelong learning framework, extended its literacy curriculum to engender agency and empowerment among the national target of adult learners who, as a result of the legacy of apartheid in South Africa, had little or no education. It examines how, through conceptualising literacy curricula content around the (local, national and international) development goals, it is possible to use literacy instruction as a catalyst to effect transformation and social change.

The article draws on the mixed methods approach followed by the research to show learners' perceptions of the social, economic and developmental opportunities afforded by literacy acquisition.

Keywords: *South Africa; literacy; Kha Ri Gude campaign; empowerment; sustainable development goals; lifelong learning*

Lifelong learning and sustainable development

The continued prevalence of illiteracy in post-apartheid South Africa was found to have negative effects on development and social transformation, which prompted the government to launch the Kha Ri Gude[1] (Let Us Learn) Adult Literacy Campaign in 2008. The campaign aimed to address the issues of literacy and basic education, which are considered to be essential enablers for developing South Africa's poor, expanding their life choices (Department of Education, 1997, 2000, 2006), enhancing their participation in the social aspects of their lives, providing a foundation for justice and equality, and redressing historical imbalances (McKay, 2012, p. 5). In line with the National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996 (Department of Education, 1996), the campaign plan, which aimed to reach 4,7 million adult illiterates, included strategies for targeting women, rural inhabitants, out-of-school youth, the unemployed, prisoners, and adults with disabilities (McKay, 2015).

This paper aims to show the relationship between literacy as a foundational component of lifelong learning and the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDGs). I argue that through a deliberate effort to embed the teaching of reading, writing and numeracy into themes framed by (local, national and international) development imperatives, it is possible to enhance the impact on the developmental opportunities afforded by literacy.

I used a concurrent multi-method approach that combined obtaining qualitative and quantitative data in the same research enterprise. This entailed a quantitative analysis of the survey responses obtained from a sample of 485 941 literacy learners and a qualitative content analysis

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[1]Kha Ri Gude (pronounced car-ri-goody) is Tshivenda for 'let us learn'.

of 2 032 educators' monthly journals. Both sets of data were used to explore the learners' perceptions of the impact of literacy acquisition on the social, economic and developmental aspects of their lives.

I begin the article by looking at literacy from a lifelong learning perspective and then explore the rationale of using the SDGs to inform the thematic organisation of the learners' literacy materials. In the latter part of the paper, I discuss the survey of 485 941 learners, showing how they perceived the impact of literacy and numeracy on their lives. The survey findings are juxtaposed with the analysis of the narratives contained in the educators' monthly journals. Analsying educators' narratives have given rise to critical information of the campaigns' operations and impact (McKay & Romm, 2015).

In the following section, I explore SDG 4's call for the 'promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all' in relation to SDG sub-goal 4.6, which aims to ensure that 'all youth and a substantial proportion of adults achieve literacy and numeracy' (United Nations, 2015, p. 21).

Literacy in the context of lifelong learning

In a country such as South Africa where there are great inequalities, lifelong learning is regarded not only as a philosophy or an organising framework for learning but as a particularly important process for those who have been excluded from acquiring or have failed to acquire basic competences through formal schooling. In terms of a lifelong learning paradigm, literacy and numeracy are considered essential components of lifelong learning and as critical foundational components for further learning. The expanded remit for literacy in the United Nations post-2015 development agenda makes a case for literacy programmes that are structured in terms of levels of competency that would allow for alternative learning pathways that meet a diversity of formal and non-formal learning needs. It also presupposes that national policies incorporate literacy and basic education into their educational offerings and that these are calibrated in their national qualifications frameworks. Such calibration would require literacy standards and standardised tools to assess literacy proficiency and to monitor and validate learning progress and outcomes.

The lifelong learning tradition has a long history. Hanemann (2015, p. 300) explains that its origins can be traced back to UNESCO's Faure

Report on *Learning to be* (Faure, Herrera, Kaddoura, Lopes, Petrovsky, Rahnema. & Champion Ward, 1972) and the UNESCO Delors Report on *Learning: The treasure within* (Delors et al., 1996) both of which envisage learning as a lifelong process in which all could learn according to their needs and interests, anywhere and at any time.

Hanemann (2015, pp. 295–300), of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, offers an analytical framework for literacy from a lifelong learning perspective, comprising the following three closely interrelated dimensions:

Firstly, she envisages literacy as a lifelong learning process with literacy learning as a continuous activity leading to different proficiency levels. For this reason, she argues, it is meaningless to describe someone as being either 'literate' or 'illiterate' because literacy proficiency levels are part of a learning continuum. In acknowledging the varying levels of proficiency, the literacy and numeracy instruction of the Kha Ri Gude Literacy Campaign was registered as foundational competences on the South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) at a level equivalent to Grade 3 of schooling; with the NQF making provision for subsequent more complex levels of literacy and numeracy.

Secondly, she argues that literacy is a life-wide process, which implies that people use and develop their reading and writing skills in different ways across a wide range of places or spaces—at home or in the broader community. In accordance with this, the literacy campaign offered its formal teaching across a range of non-formal learning sites and drew on a range of generative themes that were life-wide and cut across sectors such as health, work, social security, environment and culture.

Thirdly, she contends that literacy needs to be regarded as part of holistic, sector-wide and cross-sectoral reforms that promote the development of national lifelong learning systems. As she argues, 'within a lifelong learning perspective, literacy and numeracy are viewed as foundation skills which are the core of basic education and indispensable to full participation in society' (Hanemann, 2015, p. 295). The Kha Ri Gude Campaign recognised that literacy and numeracy were critical foundational skills that learners needed to access further learning and that facilitated the transition of learners to Adult Basic Education and Training level 2 (equivalent to Grade 5 of formal schooling) or other areas of education and training (McKay, 2015. p. 383).

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning's (2017b, p.2)) policy brief offers the following succinct explanation of the three-dimensional model for lifelong literacy:

> *Lifelong literacy covers the full spectrum of lifelong and life-wide learning and involves a continuum of proficiency levels that require institutionalized learning systems which are flexible and support integrated approaches at all stages of a person's life and in a diversity of life situations. ... [It] seeks to associate literacy learning with other essential development tasks by making literacy part of national development strategies. ... [It] requires a cross sectoral approach cutting across all development-relevant areas (health, agriculture, labor, social security, environment, culture, etc.), beyond the education sector.*

In this way, UNESCO (2017b) highlights the role that literacy plays in lifelong learning across a range of development areas and as a crucial catalyst in achieving the other 16 SDGs. However, using literacy as a vehicle for the achievement of SDG 4 ('promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all') and sub-goal 4.6 ('all youth and a substantial proportion of adults achieve literacy and numeracy') (United Nations, 2015, p. 21) are not without challenges. UNESCO (2009, p. 67) refers to multiple and structural reasons for the low and inequitable access to adult learning and education of the poor (in the global South), particularly women and rural and minority groups, restricting their participation in adult education programmes. There are various economic, political, social and structural barriers that cause unequal participation, and these are broadly classified into three types of barriers that impact on adult learning, namely institutional, situational and dispositional (UNESCO, 2009).

Institutional barriers include constraints such as the lack of opportunity, and the available time or challenges associated with the place of learning. These constraints impact on the poor and the least educated who do not have the resources or the right to access learning. The South African campaign endeavoured to overcome such barriers by offering classes and learners' support materials at no cost to learners. This was an essential feature of the campaign's mobilisation strategy. In addition, to ensure that the learning sites were accessible to and convenient for learners and that travel costs would be minimal, the learners were asked to determine the learning venues.

Situational barriers arise from and are linked to an individuals' life-stage. These barriers usually relate to having insufficient time for learning due to family or work obligations. In consideration of the absence of childcare facilities, the literacy campaign permitted mothers to bring their children to classes and required the learners to determine the times of classes so as to fit into their daily schedules.

Dispositional barriers refer to socio-psycho factors that may impede an individual's decision to participate in learning. Dispositional barriers are prevalent among those with low levels of literacy and also the elderly. Often these barriers are rooted in ambivalent memories of initial education or previous failure (McKay, 2015). Studies, including those of Street (2014, p. 14) and Aitchison, McKay and Northedge (2015, p. 51), refer to the reluctance of adults to attend literacy classes because of previous negative experiences of failed schooling. In addition, adult learners may be embarrassed about being illiterate or may be afraid of losing their jobs or being overlooked when it comes to considering people for responsible positions in the clubs or committees they belong to. Many illiterate adults reside in rural and informal settlements where the focus is generally not on literacy enrichment (Shrestha & Krolak, 2015); therefore the culture of reading and learning needs to be developed and nurtured.

In an endeavour to mitigate the various barriers to participation, the campaign used targeted community marketing and passing of information by word of mouth to mobilise learners. In addition, the first theme of the learners' materials stimulated learners' interest in that it dealt with situational and dispositional (socio-psycho) barriers to learning. In the latter part of this article, I discuss how the theme *I am learning* assisted in overcoming the many barriers that influence an individual's decision to participate in and continue with learning. In addition, the campaign harnessed the African ethos of ubuntu by encouraging learners to collaborate with and support their learning peers (Biraimah, 2016; Brock-Utne, 2016; Oviawe, 2016). This cooperative approach to learning contributed to high participation rates (McKay, 2015) and gave rise to a range of collaborative learner projects.

The context of literacy and the SDGs

The SDGs and their precursors, the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs), draw attention to the expanded remit for literacy as an

essential development tool to enable people to survive, participate and develop, and to enable active citizenship, improved health and livelihood, and gender equality (UNESCO, 2017a, b, c).

In this respect, Oghenekohwo and Frank-Optu (2017, p. 130) contend that literacy education is central to the achievement of all 17 SDGs, stating that literacy education is essential to decrease the vulnerability of individuals and communities (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10 and 16), as well as to increase people's capacity for participation in a knowledge-driven system (SDGs 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 17). They argue that literacy education, as an investment in human capital, is the first step towards achieving the SDGs, noting that by incorporating learning content into literacy programmes that deal with, for example, the environment, production, income generation and social justice, it will be possible to enhance sustainable development. They therefore recommend that literacy education should form part of all government policies that are aimed at promoting development.

In similar vein, Torres (2004, p. 16) considers the developmental goals of learning:

> *Education and learning are not objectives in themselves. They are means for personal, family and community development, for active citizenship building, for improving the lives of people, and for improving the world in which we live. Thus, they must be explicitly framed within and oriented toward social transformation and human development.*

With a Gini coefficient of 0.64 for males and 0.68 for females and 30% of the population unemployed, South Africa has one of the highest rates of inequality in the world (Statistics South Africa, 2017). The Kha Ri Gude literacy campaign was thus conceived as part of a suite of government interventions targeting inequality and poverty in South Africa, inspired by the commonly held understanding that adult literacy contributes to personal empowerment, economic wellbeing, community cohesion and societal development. It is argued that literacy acquisition contributes to poverty alleviation, mitigates HIV and AIDS, contributes to preserving and sustaining the environment and raises an awareness of human rights and the need to combat racism and xenophobia (UNESCO, 2009, p. 43).

Torres (2004, p. 93) cautions that while promoting literacy is viewed as a key strategy to alleviate poverty, it must be remembered that poverty is not the result of illiteracy but very much the contrary'. Hence she points out that the most effective way to deal with poverty is to deal with the structural, economic and political factors that generate and reproduce it on a national and global scale.

Keeping caution in mind, the campaign nevertheless proceeded with the interest of directing the literacy programme to give effect to the development agenda by framing the teaching of reading, writing and numeracy in accordance with development-related themes in order to optimise the social, economic and developmental opportunities afforded by literacy acquisition. In line with the recommendations of Piper, Zuilkowski, Dubeck, Jepkemei, and King (2018), the campaign opted to use pre-developed literacy materials[2] together with educator notes and the support of a mentor or coach (i.e. one of the campaign supervisors) to present the programme at some 40 000 non-formal adult learning sites across the country. The materials drew on the MDGs and SDGs with the curriculum highlighting the themes of, for example, entrepreneurship, HIV and AIDS, gender, democracy, human rights, environmental awareness (United Nations, 2000, 2015), social justice and redress[3] to encourage learners to think about related matters and to make applications in their everyday lives.

In her evaluation of the campaign, Osman (2009, p. 31) comments on the thematic approach as follows:

> *While teaching the fundamentals of reading, writing and arithmetic ... the materials simultaneously teach a range of life skills such as HIV/AIDS, anti-xenophobia, budgeting, environmental education, nutrition, hygiene and health, and livelihoods, active citizenship and ongoing lifelong learning.*

The literacy campaign also provided an opportunity to heighten learners' awareness of gender-based violence, which is widespread in South African society (Jewkes, Levin, Mbananga, & Bradshaw, 2002;

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[2]It is recognised that proponents of 'new literacy' studies (Prinsloo & Breier, 1996; Rogers, 2006; Street, 1984, 1995, 2014) argue against the use of pre-developed textual material (primers or workbooks) in teaching literacy.

[3]The curriculum included mother-tongue literacy, English as a first additional language and numeracy. The thematic approach was followed to develop the life skills component.

Jewkes, Penn-Kekana, Levin, Ratsaka, & Schrieber, 2001). It attempted to debunk gender stereotypes by encouraging open discussions about the possibilities for women to transcend traditional gender barriers. In discussing the need for education programmes to tackle the alarming statistics of gender violence in South Africa, Mpani and Nsibande (2015, p. 6) draw on the United Nations' (1993) definition of gender violence as 'violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women and girls … whether occurring in public or in private life'. As will be shown subsequently, the campaign materials mainstreamed gender in line with SDGs 3 and 6.

In tackling issues of health and wellbeing (SDG 3/MDG 6) and the empowerment of women in relation to healthcare (SDG 5/MDG 3), the campaign focussed on health in the context of development. The World Health Organization (2016, p. v) refers to the health challenges that persist in developing countries, for example, high maternal and child mortality rates, malnutrition and high incidences of communicable diseases such as HIV and AIDS and tuberculosis. It was necessary for the campaign materials to focus on sexual and reproductive health and HIV and AIDS, as well as on the relationship between and the critical impact on children of poverty and malnutrition (Adams et al., 2018) as well as on the prevalence of malnutrition in urban areas—a phenomenon that is acute in urban areas because of limited agricultural land and rampant food prices (Nenguda, 2018).

Figure 1 shows the residential and settlement patterns of the literacy learners. It was necessary to know the learner contexts in order to ensure that the learner materials dealt with issues that were specific to their living situations.

Figure 1. Distribution of learners by residential type
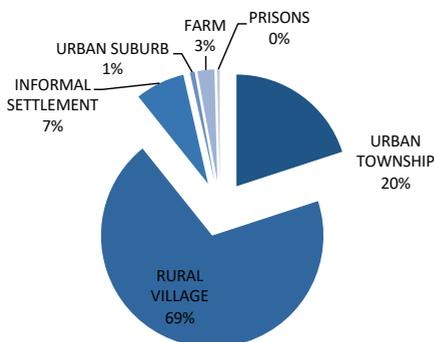
The campaign materials were contextualised around problems of poverty in specifically rural and urban townships and informal settlements, dealing with issues related to poor infrastructure, lack of water, sanitation and electricity, poor health and healthcare, HIV and AIDS, malnutrition, low household income and high migration (Aliber, 2003; Bosworth, 2016; Lehohla, 2017; Lind, 2008). Cognisance was also taken of the prevalence of food insecurity which, while high in rural areas, is more extreme in township and urban informal settlements where the cost of living is higher and food prices are out of the reach of poor households (Nenguda, 2018).

The campaign aimed to empower learners to make purposeful choices while acquiring literacy. Most definitions of empowerment that focus on agency refer to people gaining control over decisions and resources that determine their quality of life, and, as Akter et al. (2017, p. 271) point out, 'translating choices into desired actions and outcomes'. It is akin to what Giddens (1991, p. 223–225) terms 'life politics', or the politics of self-actualisation. It is concerned with reducing exploitation, inequality and oppression and focusses on the imperatives of justice, freedom and participation through collective or intersubjective engagement (McKay & Makhanya, 2008). This is analogous to Freire's (2006) aspirational 'pedagogy of hope' according to which literacy helps to shape the trajectories of people's lives (Hanemann & McKay, 2015; Ghose & Mullick, 2015; UNESCO, 2006; Wagner, 2015).

The remainder of this paper sets out the findings relating to the learners' perceptions about the extent to which the literacy campaign's deliberate focus on the MDGs/SDGs helped shape the trajectories of their lives. In doing this, it focusses on the unfolding of the three dimensions of lifelong learning (institutional, situational and dispositional barriers) as explained by UNESCO (2009).

Research approach

This study used a mixed methods research approach, an approach which is often referred to as a 'third movement' in the evolution of research methodology as a resolution to the quantitative and qualitative paradigm war. Creswell and Garrett (2008) point out that in 'mixing' quantitative and qualitative data, consideration is given to when, where and why methods are mixed and what the added value of 'mixing' methods is. They argue that when a researcher collects 'both quantitative and

qualitative data, merging, linking, or combining of the sources of data, and then conducting research as a single study … the mixed methods research provides more than quantitative or qualitative research alone' (p. 327). The article draws on the complementary strengths of these approaches (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007; McLafferty & Onwuegbuzi, 2006).

The study followed a 'concurrent mixed' or 'multi-method' approach, gathering qualitative and quantitative data (Morse, 2003) and integrating these to offer a more nuanced understanding of the impact of literacy on learners' lives and the extent to which these benefits correlated with the intent of the MDG/SDG-inspired curriculum within a lifelong learning framework. It was believed that the findings would allow for a closer tailoring of basic education programmes that might be incorporated at the foundation phase and along the lifelong learning continuum.

Both the quantitative and qualitative data were obtained from large data sources as discussed below.

Firstly, I used the data I gathered from 2007 to 2012 when I established and managed the literacy campaign in my capacity as its chief executive officer. This study may therefore be regarded as reflective, with my personal roles having been those of a participant observer and a co-active researcher (McKay & Romm, 2008). As leader of the campaign I had access to letters, emails, official data and reports, and I could interact with learners and other field operatives in the course of my daily work. These data sources provided an important backdrop to the study.

Secondly, I drew on the data emanating from a content analysis of a sample of the journals that 2 032 educators[4] (n = 2 032) had to keep to guide their monthly community of practice meetings. While content analysis is often perceived as a quantitative method in which preconceived items are coded and counted, I regarded my analysis of the educators' journals as following an abductive content analysis approach, which Harnett (2016, p. 7) defines as meaning-making through a three-way engagement with text, individuals and the environment. This, Harnett argues, involves hearing and interpreting 'the intermingled voices' in the context or epistemic space, an engagement that moves

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[4]The educators in the campaign were organised into community of practice groupings and were required to maintain journals to be discussed at their meetings. The process is discussed in an article by McKay (2017).

the enterprise from being subjective to being intersubjective. In this way, Harnett contends, content analysis can be transformative in deriving explanations arising from textual analyses that may be used to guide subsequent action. In our managing of the literacy campaign the issues raised in the educators' journals were initially tabled at the meetings between the respective educators and their supervisors and ultimately at the meetings held with the coordinators at which I, as CEO, was present, and at which the issues raised in the journals were indeed used for improving and transforming the campaign strategy at a national level. Moreover, these meetings provided a space for intercoder interpretations of issues through multi-stakeholder engagement.

In analysing the journal content, I followed an innovative abductive approach listening to the intermingled voices of the national coordinators and other stakeholders against the backdrop of my understandings of the context. This enriched my reading and interpretation of the text.

The journals contained a number of themes other than those I had identified, for example, ways of improving teaching or approaching problems associated with absenteeism, but the themes I deal with in this article mainly concern those aspects that I consider to be related to the impact of learning on learners' lives (McKay, 2017). It is, however, possible that other researchers attempting the same exercise might identify other themes as being prominent.

Lastly, I used the quantitative data obtained from the responses of a sample of 485 941 learners' (n = 485 941) assessment portfolios[5] which were captured in 2011[6]. Learners were required to respond to 24 indicators pertaining to how literacy had impacted on their lives (see Table 1 below). The data were processed using the SAS statistical package and various statistical procedures, including Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. The quantitative survey data used were obtained from the responses that

[5]These portfolios contained 10 assessment activities for literacy and 10 for numeracy, which learners completed at various stages in their programme. At the end of the learning programme, the educator surveyed the learners on 24 items that required them to indicate which items resonated with their perception of the impact of the learning on various areas of their lives.

[6]The campaign reached 4.7 million learners in the period 2008–2017. The year 2011 was selected for this study as a stable year with the campaign having overcome initial teething problems or winding down issues, thus providing more reliable data.

the literacy learners gave at the end of the semester when their educator conducted exit interviews to determine which of the 24 indicators (see Table 1) the learners perceived to have improved as a result of their literacy acquisition. The 485 941 learners/respondents were organised into classes of between 12 and 18 learners. They were taught by approximately 32 000 educators, each of whom was responsible for conducting exit interviews with all the learners in their class. In administering the 24-indicator survey during the interviews, the educators were required to read out the following statements to their learners in their mother tongues and tick the aspects with which the learners agreed:

Table 1. Learner survey on the impact of literacy

1	I feel more self-confident.	13	I feel that people treat me better.
2	My life in my family has improved.	14	I feel more respected in my family.
3	I feel more respected in the community.	15	I have more friends.
4	I share what I learn with my family.	16	I ask my family to help me with my learning.
5	I take part in more community issues.	17	I can more easily solve problems.
6	I better understand my child's schooling.	18	I understand the importance of eating correctly.
7	I can help my child with education.	19	I have started growing vegetables.
8	I attend school or other meetings.	20	I have improved my position at work (if he/she works).
9	I better understand health and healthcare.	21	I have started some work that helps me to earn.
10	I can manage money better.	22	I would like to carry on learning.
11	I can use a cellphone or ATM or other device.	23	I have encouraged others to join Kha Ri Gude.
12	I have more books or magazines in my home.	24	Other (fill in)

Note. Reprinted from *I can do it, Learner assessment portfolio.* (DBE, 2011, p. 2).

Research questions

This study sought to answer the following research questions through a mixed methods approach:

- What did learners perceive was the impact of literacy on their lives?
- What areas of impact did the educators refer to in their journals?
- In what way did the areas of impact correlate with the MDG/SDG-related themes contained in the learning materials?
- What do the areas of impact contribute to our understanding of literacy within a lifelong learning paradigm?

Findings

Perceptions of the impact of literacy

In this section, I report on the learners' perceptions of the impact of learning on their lives and interpret these against the backdrop of the data obtained from the educators' journals.

I start this section with Figure 2 that graphically displays the findings of the 24-item survey (shown in Table 1). The survey aimed to establish the learners' perceptions of the impact of the literacy campaign on their lives.

Figure 2: Learners' perceptions (in percentages) of the impact of their learning on various aspects of their lives
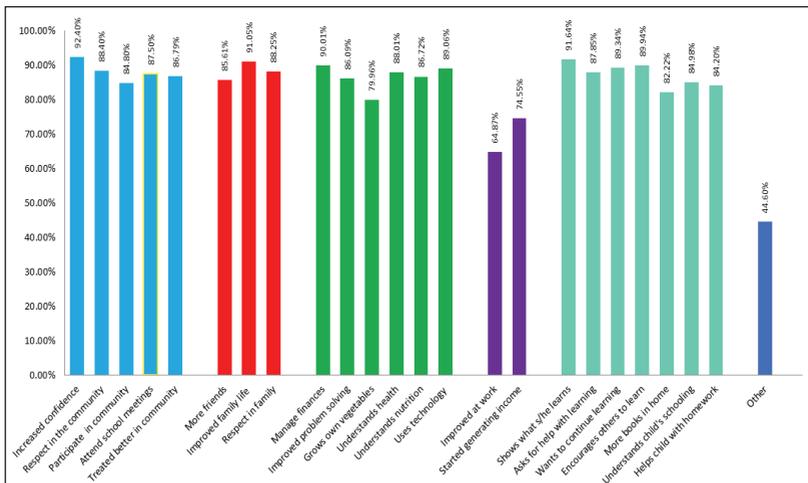
The differently shaded clusters of indicators shown in Figure 2 refer respectively to the following: increased confidence; increased social networks; utility of newly acquired skills; improved income-generation activities; and appreciation of education. The last bar ('Other') refers to additional impacts that are not captured for this study.

The subsequent discussion is arranged according to the themes used to organise the literacy materials (I am learning; My family, my home; Living together, Healthy living; World of work; Our country; The world around us).

Learners' perceptions of the impact of learning

The first theme in the literacy manual *I am learning* links up with the goal of SDG 4 to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'. It aimed to motivate and encourage the newly enrolled adult learners to persevere with their learning, showing basic education as a human right. The literacy programme assisted the learners in setting out on their journey of lifelong learning by requiring them to deal with the various barriers to learning and to discuss their personal reasons for not attending school in childhood and any reservations about learning they might have, and to explore their learning needs and identify possibilities for enhancing their skills. In addition, the theme aimed to inform parents and carers of the importance of their children's schooling. Importantly, the theme aimed to destigmatise literacy learning. The responses shown in Figure 3 suggest that the first theme contributed to establishing a learning culture among the learners, their families and their peers.

Figure 3. Learners' perceptions of the impact of learning
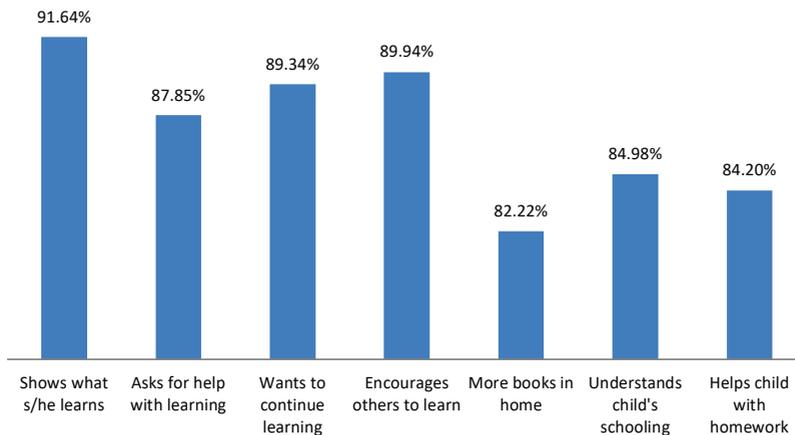
As illustrated in Figure 3, 91.64% of the learners indicated that they showed their books to family members and friends, suggesting that the campaign succeeded in destigmatising literacy learning. A further 89.94% of the learners stated that they encouraged others to learn, with 87.85% of them enlisting the help of friends or family members in completing learning tasks.

The following excerpts taken from the educators' journals suggest that the learners' learning was a shared activity:

> *They share what they are learning with their family at home.*

> *Some learners come to class with their lessons already completed ahead of time.*

> *They learn with their families.*

> *Their family members are eager and interested in coming to classes.*

> *Learners ask to bring additional family members to class. Some want to bring their partners and other family members. I tell them they can only enrol in the next semester.*

The campaign aimed to stimulate learners' appetite for lifelong learning. The findings pointed to the desire of learners (89.34%) to continue learning. In addition, 82.22% indicated that they had more reading materials, books and magazines in their homes. This is notwithstanding the fact that many of the learners resided in rural and informal settlements, where the focus is generally not on literacy enrichment.

The educators' journals referred to the agency and cooperation of learners in establishing class committees, finding convenient learning venues, recruiting new learners and ensuring regular attendance of their peers. This also helped to mitigate structural and institutional challenges that literacy learners often face. Moreover, the role of learners in organising their programmes was significant in narrowing the divide between formal and non-formal learning because this formal programme was presented at non-formal learning sites such as in homes or under trees—at sites and times determined by the learners themselves.

The theme also intended to heighten awareness of parenting techniques and reinforced strategies for supervising children's homework. The

exit survey showed that 84.20% of the learners assisted children with homework and a further 84.98% indicated that they were more knowledgeable about their children's education.

Osman (2009, p. 34), in her review of the literacy campaign, notes that the adult 'learners appeared to be very keen to learn … they indicated that they felt that the programme was beneficial to them in that it assisted them to help the children with their homework, and also provided an opportunity for the children to help the older caregivers with theirs'.

The following notes taken from the educators' journals revealed the impact that literacy learning had on the schooling of the learners' children.

> *They can help their children with their homework because they know how to read.*

> *They can write the minutes of school meetings.*

> *Their children were motivated to share their knowledge with their families and neighbours.*

The converse was also reflected in the educators' journals. The intergenerational nature of the learning meant that it was not unusual for children to visit their parents' literacy classes to obtain information on how they could better assist their parents with their homework. As one educator explained in her journal:

> *Children come to class to check on their parents' marks and to check their answers [to the assessment activities] and to find out what homework they have to do. They regularly check on how well their parents are doing.*

> *Learners are now able to help their children with homework, and their children also help them with their work.*

Learners' perceptions of improved family life and friendships

The second theme *My family, my home* focussed on issues related to families as a social institution, specifically on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (SDG 5/MDG 3), the promotion of

health and wellbeing of family members (SDG 3/MDG 4, 5 and 6), and water and sanitation (SDG 6/MDG 7).

This theme focussed on building relationships with families and friends, and, as indicated in Figure 4, the literacy learners felt more respected in their families (88.25%), that their family lives had improved (91.05%) and that they had more friends (88.61%). Moreover, 90.01% of the learners indicated that they had an increased ability to manage family finances.

Figure 4. Learners' perceptions of improved family life and friendships
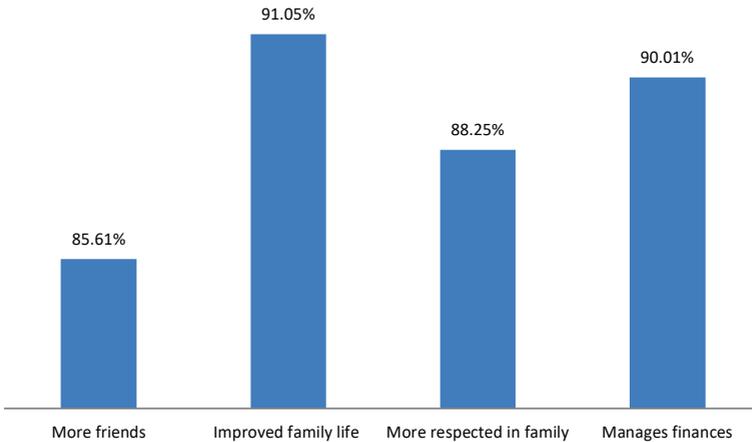
As indicated in Figure 4, 90.01% of learners indicated that they were better able to manage their finances, suggesting improved roles that (predominantly) women learners played in household resource management. These were noted in the educators' journals:

> *Learners bring family problems to class and want to discuss and solve them with each other.*

> *Learners can take better care of their family because of the learning.*

Learners' improved financial management abilities were captured in the following note made in an educator's journal:

> *'Learners now know how to draw money at the post office and how to sign the forms at the post office'.*

The journals also showed that learners were able to interact with officialdom when having to complete official forms and applications for birth certificates, identity documents and social grants.

Learners' perceptions of integration

The third theme *Living together* was considered pertinent in the context of post-apartheid South Africa. It focussed on the importance of community cohesion and settlements that were safe and resilient (SDG 11/MDG 7), peaceful and inclusive (SDG 16). This thematic section provided a foundational understanding of human rights and social justice to enable learners to access social services such as healthcare and social grants. It also encouraged learners to participate in community decision-making processes.

Figure 5. Learners' perceptions of confidence and integration
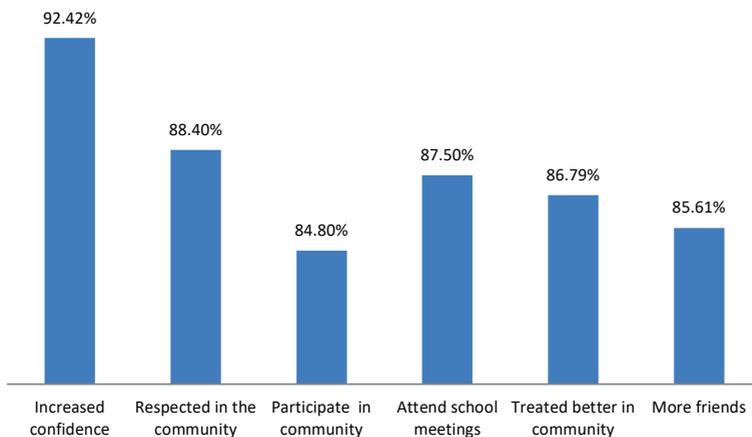
As indicated in Figure 5, 92.42% of the learners stated that they felt more confident at the end of the learning programme. It is noteworthy that, of the 24 indicators, self-confidence was ranked the highest. It was not surprising therefore that a high percentage of learners (88.40%) felt more 'respected by the community', 86.79% felt they were 'treated better in the community', and 85.61% of the learners indicated that they had expanded their social networks, which is an indicator that might contribute to increased confidence.

UNESCO (2016) in fact refers to the way in which the Kha Ri Gude Literacy Campaign fostered community cohesion and peaceful co-existence through its 'implementation model that created learners' groups that bring together people with common goals for themselves and their communities'. In addition, it refers specifically to the learners' expanded social networks, stating that 'besides the actual literacy learning experience, a lot of programme participants come for the social aspect. They meet new friends and the learning groups help to overcome loneliness … establish social groupings which cooperate in a range of socio-economic activities guided by reciprocity'. This view was corroborated in one of the educator's journals: 'Learners now see school as a social activity that has improved their way of living'.

The educators' journals refer to increased participation of learners in communal and specifically school matters:

> *Learners are appointed as secretaries to projects. They assist children with homework and take minutes at meetings.*

> *They are able to sign without using their thumbprints. Mr X signed at a church meeting.*

> *Learners are appointed to committees. They can take minutes at meetings and can communicate with others in meetings.*

> *One mother was able to sign her name when she collected her child's report from school.*

Learners were empowered to even complain about their educator:

> *Learners complained about the teacher. She is always absent and she [needed to] be encouraged to improve her teaching methods.*

As Figure 6 shows, learners experienced improvements in managing their finances (90.01%) and dealing with everyday problems (86.09%), they were empowered to grow vegetables (lamentably only 79.96%) and to acquire improved knowledge of nutrition (86.72%) and health matters (88.01%). Moreover, learners cited their ability to use a cellphone or an ATM (89.06%), which enabled them to connect or transact beyond their immediate contexts.

Figure 6. Learners' perceptions of the utility of newly acquired skills
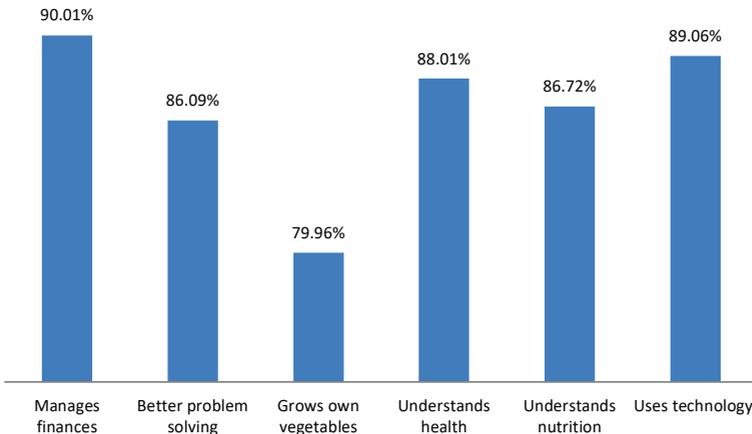
The educators' journals confirmed the learners' improved abilities by relating how they were able to rely on their improved mathematical and financial skills to establish small businesses that generated (survivalist) income, and how they could apply their technology skills in using mobile phones and ATM banking. While the impact of growing vegetables for health and nutrition was the lowest-scoring indicator, the educators' journals reported on a large number of home gardens and household food security initiatives (all requiring the skills taught in the campaign):

> *My learners have started a vegetable garden and their families get vegetables from the garden.*

> *They have formed a group for growing vegetables together and will take them home for their families and to sell.*

Learners' perceptions of improved understanding of health issues

The theme of *Healthy living* focussed on health and wellbeing (SDG 3/ MDG 6) and empowering women in relation to healthcare (SDG 5/MDG 3). Topics included were personal hygiene, health-seeking behaviour, filling in clinic forms, reading a child's immunisation and weight chart, understanding pregnancy, contraception, safe sex, sexual and reproductive health, and HIV and AIDS (SDG 5/MDG 5). There was a special insert on tuberculosis, which is often an opportunistic infection

occurring in people who have HIV and AIDS. In addition, the materials aimed to give information on nutrition, especially for children or family members who were immuno-compromised and receiving treatment for HIV. Educators were encouraged to invite staff from local clinics to address the learners on healthcare and to source additional health-related learning materials.

Given that approximately 70% of the learners were female, the materials dealt with sexual reproductive health in order to increase learners' knowledge on how to plan and space births. The same content broadened the knowledge base of men. While the educators' journals stated that male learners sometimes resisted learning this content, the fact that 88.01% of the learners indicated that they had improved knowledge of health issues showed that most learners (male and female) better understood health messages.

The theme also focussed on aspects of water literacy, including water usage, water purification and, given the high infant mortality rates, the mixing of rehydration formula.

The importance of the campaign's focus on child rearing and children's health was underscored by Osman (2009, p. 34) who pointed out that the classes she visited:

> *... comprised mostly older people with minimal prior education. Most of the female learners were secondary caregivers to children, some of whom were of school-going age or caring for orphans, and the knowledge of children's health and welfare was essential for women in their 'second round' of child rearing.*

Figure 7 shows learners' perceptions of the impact of learning on the relevant three health indicators.

Figure 7. Learners' perceptions of improved understanding of health issues
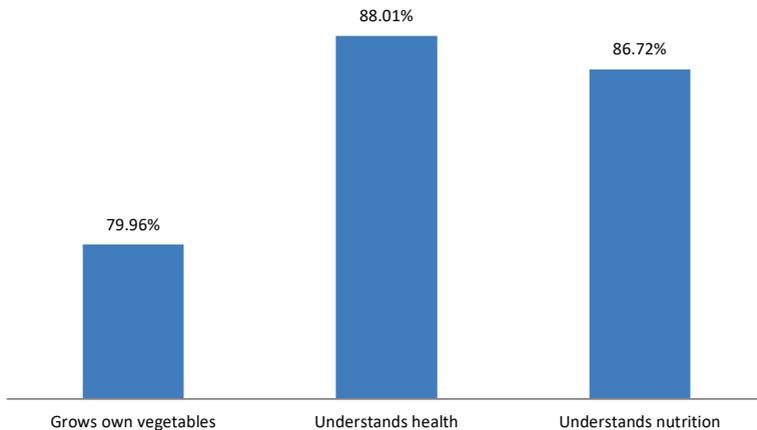
As shown in Figure 7, 88.01% of the learners stated they had an improved understanding of health issues. The educators' journals indicated this as follows:

> *This learning changes their lives because they know how to measure medicine. Learners with chronic illness are able to take their medication.*

> *Learners have received medical health for the first time, testing for diabetes and blood pressure. They are encouraged to clean their homes.*

> *Learners were supplied with reading glasses from the local clinic and they can now read the notice boards.*

> *They are now aware of TB and open the windows of the taxi and toilets for fresh air.*

> *Learners have improved their health support. Two learners received pills for diabetes and high blood pressure.*

Figure 7 also shows that 86.72% learners indicated that they had improved knowledge of nutrition. However, their improved knowledge of health and nutrition did not always translate into learners' growing

their own vegetables as a means to improve health and household food security.

Notwithstanding the low number of learners reporting vegetable growing, the educators' journals included references to projects emanating from cooperation with agricultural NGOs that offered agricultural resources and technical skills. Such projects resulted in communal gardens and cooperatives that improved household food security and benefitted those most vulnerable to malnutrition (infants, young children and, given the prevalence of HIV, the immuno-compromised).

The educators reported that the food gardens played an important role in informal settlements and urban townships which are usually characterised by high population density and little agricultural space. Since most of the learners targeted by the literacy campaign subsisted on social grants, the introduction of the food garden concept promised many benefits, including enabling learners to sell surplus crops.

Learners' perceptions of the impact of learning on income generation

The theme of *World of work* focussed specifically on issues of poverty and identified different survivalist-oriented business activities and productive employment opportunities, which resonated with SDGs 1, 7 and 8 and MDGs 1 and 7. It aimed to increase sustainable work opportunities and an awareness of decent work (SDG 8/MDG 1) by focussing on how to establish small businesses and make use of cooperatives. Recycling as a method of income generation was also described (SDG 12/MDG 7). Learners' perceptions about these issues are reflected in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Learners' perceptions of the impact of learning on income generation
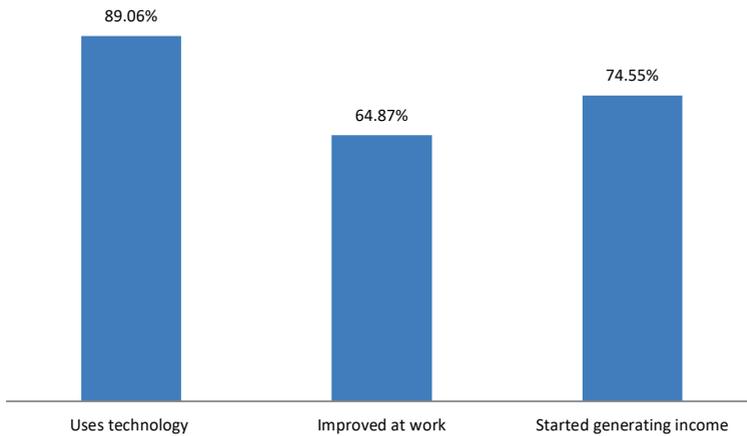
Learners indicated that they were able to use technology (89.06%) to expand their communication or for banking. Although relatively low, the percentages of those who improved their positions at work (63.87%) and those who began to generate an income (74.55%) were promising, especially since the campaign lacked the capacity to teach various crafts and specific work-related skills.

Osman's (2009) statement that social and economic rationales are *inextricably intertwined* is pertinent here. The campaign recognised that literacy and numeracy skills are foundational skills and that developing them is a precursor of skills training; hence they are closely related to social rationale, which is a determiner of what is seen as 'economic' because of the following:

• There is a high correlation between literacy and GDP.

• Each year of schooling/learning contributes to increased income levels.

• Literacy has been linked with livelihoods and basic income generation.

• Basic literacy and numeracy are foundational competences for skills training.

- The literacy materials aimed to enable learners to better understand and manage their household budgets. This skill was expanded on by teaching learners how to set up entrepreneurial cooperatives.

UNESCO (2016) points out that, as a value-add to assist South African adults who had little or no schooling in acquiring literacy,

> *[t]he Kha Ri Gude Campaign enabled learners to acquire basic literacy skills including basic spoken English. This has enabled hitherto illiterate youth and adults to be more independent in conducting daily business including undertaking shopping errands and travelling. ... In addition, program graduates have also been empowered to engage in more profitable income-generating activities or to improve the profitability of their existing projects. Essentially, therefore, the program enables both employees – most of whom had been unemployed – and learners to be self-reliant and to contribute toward their families' well-being and living standards.*

The same sentiments were expressed in the educators' journals, which indicated that learners were using their new technology skills.

> *Learners can use the ATM and also joined the library.*

> *He went to ... [shop] with his calculator and counted his groceries.*

> *Many learners communicate with others using cellphones because of learning.*

> *As a group of educators, we teach learners the skills that we have for business.*

> *Learners are happy to be able to write. They even plan to open spaza [informal] shops because they can count, read and write.*

> *Learners are now able to participate in community projects like farming.*

> *Learners can now count the number of eggs laid each day.*

> *Learners [wanted] to be taught to sew. The supervisor had to explain the importance of learning to read and write first.*

Learners have learned skills like beadwork … they make beads for hands, neck and headwear, and sew. They make things to sell.

Learners bake bread that they sell. I also taught them how to sew clothes to sell.

*Learners help the community by moulding clay pots and sell them to the community.*

They are planning on buying their own materials in order to use their shoe-making skills that I taught them.

Learners' perceptions of the impact of learning on sustaining the environment

This theme focussed on caring for *Mother Earth*. It dealt with exploring possibilities to end hunger by improving household food security and nutrition through sustainable agriculture (SDG 2/MDG 2). Lessons were designed to teach learners about water and sanitation (SDG 6/MDG 7), sustainable consumption, land production and conservation and water resources, topics that linked up with SDGs 6, 14 and 15/MDG 7 but were presented at a level accessible to foundational learners.

The materials encouraged the valuing and conservation of the eco-environment and biodiversity in learners' own communities by getting them to take transect walks to identify green areas, areas with animal life, areas suitable for greening and food growing, as well as areas that are possible sites for selling surplus produce. The perceptions of the learners in this regard are indicated in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Learners' perceptions of the impact of learning on sustainability
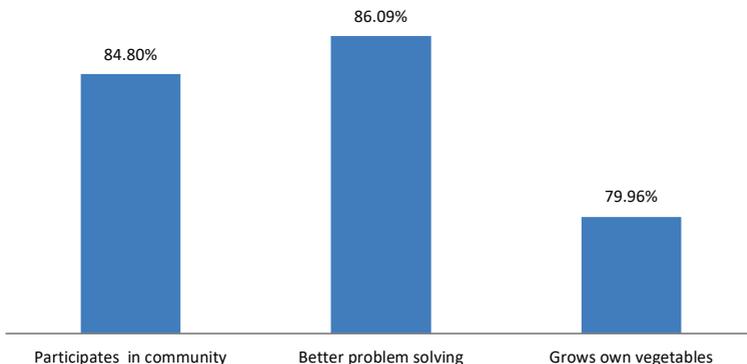
As shown in Figure 9, 84.80% of learners indicated that they participated more in community affairs, with 86.09% stating that they were better able to solve problems. Both of the aforementioned are foundational requisites for the sustainability of Mother Earth. In addition, the theme included lessons on recycling and re-using waste by, for instance, recycling cans and plastic bags to make handbags, trays, hats and mats. The educators' journals reported extensively on learner projects involving such recycling and also reported on learners' collecting glass, paper and plastic to sell to recycle merchants to generate an income.

The importance of vegetable growing mentioned by 79.96% of the learners has a broader impact, which was frequently referred to in the educators' journals. Assuming each learner provides additional food for a family of approximately four, one might argue that the programme that reached approximately 4.5 million literacy learners could impact on 16 million family members who might enjoy improved food security.

Learners' perceptions of the impact of learning on social integration

The last two themes, namely *Our country* and *The world around us*, focussed on social integration, peace and cooperation at a local, national and global level (SDG 17/MDG 8). Roche (2018, p. 13) refers to the participatory role that literacy can play in bringing about peace and transformation in situations of protracted religious and cultural conflict. He highlights the importance of identifying spaces in education for critical dialogue on maintaining peace in conflict-affected societies. In the South African context, it was necessary for the campaign to prioritise addressing conflict arising from residual apartheid racial tensions and xenophobia arising from the high migration rates of foreign nationals from other African countries. This theme aimed to improve social integration in South Africa's multi-ethnic, multilingual and multicultural communities. These two themes endeavoured to promote safer human settlements (SDG 11/MDG 7) and the implementation of the ubuntu principles of peacefulness, care and inclusivity (SDG 10/MDG 1).

Not only the campaign materials but also the campaign's mode of implementation reinforced the message of promoting social cohesion and anti-xenophobia. The implementation of the campaign was such that it offered learning opportunities to learners from across the African

continent. Osman (2009, p. 34) notes that 'the programme was open to refugees and other foreign nationals living in these communities' and that the multicultural and multilingual classes promoted harmony. Additional curriculum approaches were used to heighten awareness of inequality in and among countries (SDG 10/MDG 1) and to encourage inclusiveness and mitigate discrimination on the grounds of race, class, gender, religion, ethnicity and other stereotypes. The learners' perceptions of the theme of social integration are displayed in Figure 10.

Figure 10. Learners' perceptions of the impact of learning on social integration
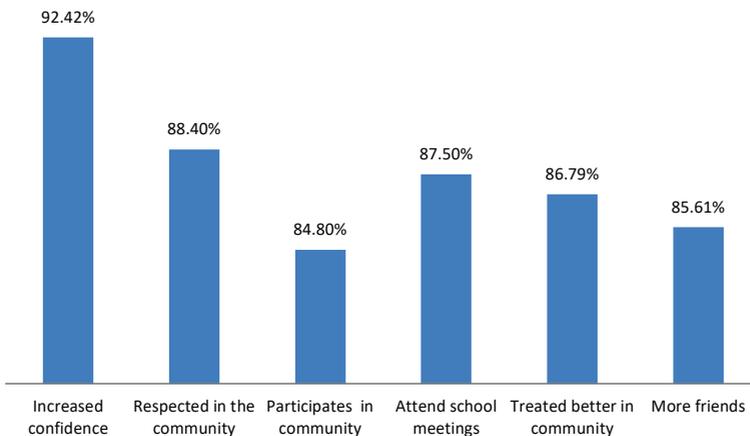
The educators' journals included many records that suggested that the learning materials enhanced learners' feelings of self-confidence (92.42%) and their being respected (88.40%) and better treated in communities (86.79%). Learning also increased their participation in the community (84.80%) and in school meetings (87.50%), and enabled them to expand their social networks (85.61%).

The educators' journals referred extensively to situations of intercultural harmonisation, increased communal support such as visiting sick neighbours and offering care, the establishment of sports and social clubs, and increased participation in community structures:

> *She cares for HIV patients by visiting them at their homes. She even takes them to hospital and she has phoned the ambulance.*

> *My class helped a learner whose house burned down and they gave her groceries and food.*

> *If one learner has a problem at home, they all help at his house.*

> *Learners are free to discuss their family problems in class and say how these affect them.*

> *Positive changes have taken place in the community. Last year two pensioners hung themselves. We told them that it is a year of prosperity because learning reduces stress.*

The following journal extract refers to the role of the educator in promoting social integration:

> *My class is a combination of whites and blacks. There were two groups, but we showed them the importance of group learning. It is easier to help each other and so that we were on the same level. They now work together.*

Indeed, as the following journal entry states:

> *They see school as a social activity and this has improved their way of living.*

Conclusion

It is clear from the discussion in this article that the SDG/MDG-inspired materials of the Kha Ri Gude Adult Literacy Campaign had an impact on various aspects of learners' everyday lives. The learners' responses provided evidence that programme had contributed to increased political participation and participation in community activities, promoted values of ubuntu and inclusion, developed respect for cultural diversity, and facilitated a range of capabilities such as maintaining good health, raising healthy children and educating them. In addition, the literacy learning campaign developed an increased appetite for lifelong learning among both the adult literacy learners and their children. The findings confirm that literacy contributes to:

• self-esteem, confidence and perceptions of empowerment;

• political benefits that result in increased civic participation in community activities and local politics;

- cultural benefits that improve learners' ability to engage with their community and cross-national communities;

- social benefits, a better knowledge of healthcare and childcare and a higher chance of parents educating children; and

- economic benefits through improving chances of income generation.

To conclude, the literacy campaign has made a significant contribution to encouraging learning for development among nearly 4.7 million adults.

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About the author

Veronica McKay is the Executive Dean of the College of Education and the University of South Africa (UNISA). The College offers programmes for the initial and continuous development of teachers, from preschool to post-school, including adult and community education and training. From 2007 to 2011, she was seconded from the university to the South African Department of Basic Education, where she was appointed Chief Executive Officer of the South African Literacy Campaign, *Kha Ri Gude (Let us learn)*, a campaign intended to enable 4.7 million South Africans to break through to literacy. Her responsibilities included setting up the campaign, designing a model for training volunteer educators, developing the core literacy materials which were versioned into all eleven South Africa official languages. She was also involved in designing the monitoring and assessment processes used by the highly successful literacy campaign. Her research interests include gender and development issues, adult learning and literacy and second language teaching. Veronica is also an Honorary Fellow of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.

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