



Nowezile Nkunyana enjoys her new 2 bedroom home, a vast improvement on the shack she lived in for almost 10 years.

Credit: David Larsen/Africa Media Online

Timescales are important to frame citizen expectations and to hold governments to account. It may be necessary for the content of each human right to vary between cities, towns and rural locations to ensure relevance to local needs. The specification may be ratcheted up from time to time as progress is achieved.

Another implication is that rights should be defined in a collaborative exercise involving civil society and other stakeholders. Collective agreement on the specific content of a right can test its feasibility and strengthen its legitimacy. Popular involvement can build support and shared responsibility for implementation.

Different parties should hold each other to account. There are limits to state paternalism based on taxation and welfare transfers to a passive citizenry. Empowering communities through a participatory approach can harness energy and know-how that is otherwise unavailable. It can also equip people with practical skills and organising abilities that could improve their livelihood prospects.

A third implication concerns the role of the private sector. Many private enterprises benefit from supporting the right to housing. Employers gain a more productive workforce and developers and landowners enjoy higher land values

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from better planned, more functional cities. Investors gain reassurance from a more stable and cohesive civil society.

Rights to the city should therefore place responsibilities on private enterprises to contribute to urban development through, for example, inclusionary housing schemes that set aside a proportion of market-related housing for social purposes. There are also good reasons for limiting the ability of well-off groups to insulate themselves from shared urban obligations by creating exclusive residential and business precincts.

Finally, it is essential for human rights to incorporate a local, spatial dimension. Localities are where the benefits from aligning sectoral policies are greatest, such as the value of proximity between housing, schools, health facilities and jobs. They are also where glaring mistakes from disjointed actions are most apparent, such as bottlenecks in infrastructure and urban sprawl.

Sustainable urban development depends upon coordinated decisions based on local knowledge and coherent institutions. Pursuing rights-based policies at the local level also encourages active citizenship and stakeholder involvement, thereby increasing accountability and improving outcomes.

Capacitated city governments have a valuable role to play in providing creative leadership and orchestrating alliances among different interests to achieve more equitable and prosperous cities and towns.

In summary, inclusive cities cannot be built by prescribing a particular model of social delivery irrespective of economic conditions, institutional capabilities and community resources. There is a shared responsibility on civil society and private enterprise to support the state in creating better cities.

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Ubuntu as a basis for moral education

The Constitution of Namibia (1990) guarantees the freedom to practise any religion, a sentiment also expressed in the Education Act (2001) for state schools and further emphasised in the National Curriculum for Basic Education, which aims to develop respect for and tolerance of other people’s religions, beliefs and cultures. But how does this manifest in practice? *Olga Bialostocka* conducted a study to find out.



In the curriculum, social sciences, represented by subjects such as environmental studies, social studies, life skills and religious and moral education (RME), are indicated as the main medium of ethics and citizenship education. The approach adopted for religious education is described as inter-faith, promoting ‘the spiritual and religious well-being of the learner with due regard to the diversity and freedom of beliefs’. With this idea in mind RME is meant to revolve around common moral values and shared traditions within the religious diversity of the country and of the world, focusing on life orientation and citizenship education rather than religious instruction.

Policy vs practice

RME is taught throughout the entire primary school – from grades 1 to 7. The RME syllabus states that the teachers’ approach must not be dogmatic but ecumenical in terms of Christian beliefs, and inter-faith in relation to other religions and value systems. Accordingly, teachers are to adapt lessons to the views represented in their classrooms. Looking more closely at the programme, it is quite clear that RME is strongly influenced by Christian religion, while a glimpse at how it functions in practice reveals that some schools promote a hidden curriculum.

African traditions, beliefs and value systems (including the philosophy of *ubuntu*), which the government identified as an important factor in the school programme, form part of RME only in grade 6 (minor references are also made in grades 3 and 4). For the rest, different life oriented topics are most often tackled from the point of view of Christianity or, to a lesser extent, Judaism, while occasionally examples are drawn from Islam.

Study method

A qualitative study in three state primary schools in Kunene, the north-western region of Namibia, hints at the extent to which Christianity pervades schooling. The schools were chosen using cluster sampling, based on the educational cluster-circuit system in place in Namibia.

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The research was designed to understand people’s lived experiences with multiculturalism in the educational setting. Data was collected through observations in classrooms, studying the natural behaviour and reactions of teachers and learners; focus group discussions with learners to obtain a general view of learners’ thinking and realities; and in-depth interviews with teachers and headmasters to understand individual perspectives and experiences.

Prior to the interviews, teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire with open-ended questions. The study established that the current moral education curriculum for primary schools is in some instances implemented as a Christian-focused, inter-faith-‘wrapped’ religious course, instead of being used as a space for discussion on ethical and philosophical dimensions of religious systems globally, the purpose for which the subject was designed.

Educators’ own beliefs influenced the way they taught moral education.

Some of the teachers interviewed did not understand the reasons behind the inclusion of world religions in the school curriculum. The study showed that educators’ own beliefs influenced the way they taught moral education – from complete rejection of religions and value systems other than Christianity, to speaking of God without specifying his characteristics but with a clear preconceived view of who this God is.

Christian faith was shared with learners of two of the schools studied during daily prayers in the classrooms or at an obligatory weekly assembly, where scriptures from the Bible were read

to the gathering without taking into account the children’s beliefs and religious practices.

Teachers’ meetings in two schools also began with group prayer, and Bible references were also used in other non-religious contexts.

Teachers in the third school demonstrated a radically different approach, including neither prayers nor Bible teachings and showing a far more liberal attitude towards other beliefs and traditions.

Considering the multicultural character of the Namibian context, the positioning of Christianity as an overarching principle in the development and teaching of moral education in Namibia is inconsistent with the inter-faith approach prescribed for RME. The African concept of *ubuntu* seems a more relevant tenet for the teaching of ethics.

Moral education for social cohesion

Emile Durkheim, the French sociologist and philosopher, considered education to have a social function of transmitting cultural and societal knowledge to ensure continuity of the society united based on collective consensus. For the scholar, society stood above the individual, whom it shaped according to the agreed moral ideal.

John Dewey, conversely, regarded an individual as an agent who negotiated morality through experience acquired in a particular socio-cultural context. He believed the individual and the society to be two inseparable elements of one entity. The moral self was constructed in relation to others, with whom the individual ‘experienced’ life through dialogue and varied interactions. Both scholars believed that the aim of schooling was to strengthen



social cohesion in the society through moral education; yet each saw the source of morality elsewhere.

Dewey’s suggestion that morality is located in the experience of learners within the social setting of their community (school) seems better suited for pluralistic societies, such as in Namibia, as it recognises social and cultural embeddedness of people and acknowledges social construction of one’s identity. It does not prioritise the self over the society and speaks of ‘social cohesion and mutual understanding of diverse individuals (...) [being] achieved through dialogue and critical engagement’.

Dewey’s model thus advocates for unity in diversity, which is not only more feasible in the Namibian context but also ethically more acceptable. Grounded in dialogue between social individuals, it correlates with the ideals of traditional communitarian societies that prevail on the African continent; as well as with the African communitarian philosophy of *ubuntu*.

Ubuntu as the dialogue with the other

At the core of *ubuntu* lies appreciation and respect for an individual who participates in the creation of self and the others as part of a community (other individuals and the community as a whole), reciprocally. *Ubuntu* does not put the community above an individual, nor does it seek uniformity or consensus. It is founded on dialogue as a mode of interaction between individuals and communities, enriching both sides during the exchange.

The idea of the self being constructed through dialogue with the other also constitutes the very basis of the philosophy of dialogue. Philosopher Martin Buber recognises that all sides to the dialogue are equal, resulting in a mutually beneficial encounter.

Yet *ubuntu* introduces an additional quality to this dialogue, as argued by historian Michael Onyebuchi Eze – it opens up the possibility of a non-consensual approach to difference;

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in other words, an option to agree to disagree.

For the multicultural Namibian context, this approach is particularly important as it enables teachers and learners to participate in the sharing of experiences and views without categorising them into ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, and without the need to establish one as dominant.

As a genuinely African value system, not a religion, based on the social structure of African societies, *ubuntu* seems to represent a suitable foundation for moral education in Namibia. It recognises the internal pluralism of African cultures and, exposed to other value systems, remains open to a creative dialogue with other traditions, religions, beliefs; in this sense, contends Eze, *ubuntu* holds a promise of ‘revitalising African traditions through interculturality’.

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