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Original Article

## Lifelong Educational and Decolonization Programs for the Batwa Indigenous People of Southwestern Uganda

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People.

This article is based on a study conducted among the Batwa Indigenous people in southwestern Uganda between 2021 and 2022. The study aimed to explore culturally relevant lifelong education and decolonization programs for the Batwa people. Using indigenous research methodology, 60 participants comprising of elders, parents, children and teachers were recruited from the Batwa community for the study. We used Egalitarian liberalism and justice in education (ELJE) theory as analytical framework. Key findings demonstrate that participants were conscious of the challenges faced by their community and collectively brainstormed practical redress measures. These measures include but are not limited to setting up an entrepreneurship education program, vocational and skilling programs, and promotion of Rutwa language. Besides, some specific Batwa life skills identified by participants are briefly described as imperative for integration in the schooling system to achieve the decolonization mission.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Batwa indigenous people live in Africa's great lakes region covering parts of Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi (Warrilow, 2008; Mukasa, 2017). In Uganda, the population of the Batwa indigenous people is approximately 6,200 (about 0.2 percent) of Uganda's population (National Population and Housing Census, 2014). Their history in the great-lakes region spans thousands of years. They are believed to be the first inhabitants of the Central African forests, also known as the 'domain of the bells', referring to the bells on the collar of the hunting dogs of Batwa (Zaninka, 2001). According to Brubacher *et al.* (2021), the Batwa have endured continued discrimination from other tribes rendering them socially and economically isolated. Batwa are semi-nomadic, dependent on hunting and gathering fruits for food and medicinal herbs (Warrilow, 2008). Out of the estimated 6200 Batwa living in Uganda (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2016), more than half live in 43 villages in the districts neighbouring Mgahinga and Bwindi Impenetrable National Parks (Kakuru, 2016; Kabanankye and Kwagala, 2007). Some of their major concentrations are at Buhoma and Ruguburi villages in the Kisoro District in southwestern Uganda. In the year 1991, the government of Uganda declared the forested zones, covering the traditional homes of the Batwa, a protected area. As a result, the Mgahinga Gorilla National Park covering 33.9 km<sup>2</sup> was established. This led to the Batwa people's eviction from the forests in the same year.

The experience of the Batwa relocation from the Mgahinga Forest Reserve, which was their ancestral home, taught them an unpleasant lesson (Mukasa, 2014). After the eviction, the Batwa became the most endangered people. They lost their source of livelihood (World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, 2018; Mukasa, 2017; UNESCO, 2009b; Mulema, 2022). According to Ramsay (2010), this eviction destroyed their historical heritage and rendered them homeless. It made them live at the "peripherals of society" and run a risk of extinction, left them in the backyard of public

recognition and development. Ramsay's (2010) submission feeds into Adyanga (2014) who states that indigenous knowledge risked being extinct due to the onslaught of modernization. Modernization often brings with it the hegemonic influence over the education approach that does not cater for Indigenous Knowledge Systems.

The problem statement investigated is that Batwa of Uganda are historically poor and illiterate (Mukasa, 2014). Their poverty and peripheral condition degenerated when government deprived them their traditional home. There is panic that even their indigenous knowledge and practices are gradually corroding owing to the marginalization of the Batwa. To bail them out of endemic poverty, Batwa need lifelong education (LLE) to offer them survival and trans-survival skills (Dei, 2011). LLE is important in providing societies the opportunity to lead a decent life, make own life decisions, as well as develop entrepreneurial characteristics (Aylin, 2016; Mosweunyane, 2013). While previous literature examined the marginalization of indigenous peoples (Moore, 2014; May and Aikman, 2003), there is little attempt to examine what LLE and decolonization programs are suitable in the development of the Batwa (United Nations, 2009a; Spier, 2002). The purpose of this study is to explore which LLE and decolonization programs are culturally relevant and suitable for the Batwa of Southwestern Uganda. The uniqueness of this study is that it contributes to a larger social justice debate of identifying ways of curtailing the marginalization of indigenous societies in the face of modernity, in a bid to promote equal opportunities for all humanity as highlighted by UNESCO (2014) and Wane (2006).

## LITERATURE REVIEW OF LIFELONG EDUCATION AND DECOLONIZATION

Existing literature indicates there are numerous benefits of implementing lifelong education. The literature points out that lifelong education for indigenous people provides knowledge and skills to minimize their marginalization and make them socially competitive (Dei, 2008). However, there are also debates to the contrary. While lifelong

education can certainly help to mitigate many of the injustices suffered by indigenous Batwa, it alone is not a lasting panacea. In contemporary Africa, there is still doubt whether the quality of formal education can enable graduates to acquire relevant and competitive skills for development (Mayombe, 2016; Gumbo, 2020). It goes without doubt that contemporary formal education in Africa is principally scholar academic. It focuses vastly on theoretical knowledge transmission but fails to prepare learners to address societal challenges—hence the call to decolonize the curriculum (Akena, 2012; Mosweunyane, 2013; Adyanga and Romm, 2016).

Although LLE is instrumental for empowering people to meaningfully contribute to social and economic development, for the Batwa who were historically hunters and fruit gatherers, they may not easily gain its competitive advantage (Kabanankye and Kwagala, 2007). It is partly on this realization that Adyanga (2014a) and Gumbo (2016) advise that indigenous people empowerment should not only focus on sending them to school, but providing *culturally relevant education* that promotes equitable and inclusive participation in society. Further, LLE provides knowledge and skills required to compete favourably in the employment market (Mukasa, 2017). However, it remains to be proven whether all forms of LLE would guarantee graduate employability. In Africa, the rate of graduate unemployment is high. This means education alone cannot fully enable graduates to access reasonable employment. In terms of youth employability in Africa, Edudzie (2019) notes that the continent has the fastest growing graduate youth population. However, one-third of graduate youth are unemployed. Another third is in vulnerable employment, and only one in six is in wage employment. Millions of elite young men and women are struggling to find jobs and opportunities to escape generational poverty.

This article argues that although LLE is beneficial in empowering people to compete favourably in the wider job-market, it is more sensible to give indigenous Batwa LLE skills for self-employment. The entrepreneurial type of LLE

seems appropriate for the Batwa, to teach them how to start and manage small business enterprises, as well as equip them with life skills in trades such as carpentry and joinery, welding, and many others for self-reliance. Therefore, the quality of LLE must provide skills such as these to Batwa as a replacement for their traditional conservative lifestyle (Datta, 1984).

There is no doubt that education enables people to express their concerns and advocate for fair resource distribution (Armstrong, 2017; Kakuru, 2016). However, for the Batwa people, this has not been the case. They are treated as second-class citizens, and this is perhaps one of the reasons why they have remained regressive. A case in point is when the government of Uganda displaced Batwa from the Mgahinga Forest in 1994 and never gave them land for habitation. It is on this basis that Mason and Smith (2003) challenge Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), government, and community leadership in the area to launch a campaign for the total empowerment and emancipation of Batwa. This is one way of soliciting equal opportunities for indigenous Batwa. Lifelong education access could be a formidable platform to re-echo Batwa concerns for their sustained development.

Further, existing literature demonstrates that lifelong education is vital in the reclamation (or resuscitation) of indigenous traditions. There is need to preserve (as well as expand) indigenous knowledge and traditions for the role they play in the lives of Africans (Mawere, 2015). Indigenous people's knowledge systems are rooted in the expressions, practices, beliefs, understandings, insights, and ideas developed by their forefathers for survival (Kawagley *et al*, 1998). Batwa indigenous practices can be nurtured and strengthened for tourism, academic, and information generation purposes. The contrary debate, however, is that though the revival of indigenous Batwa knowledge is part of lifelong education, the usual fear is that many of these traditions and cultures are often labelled as too backward, too primitive and obsolete to take centre-stage in the fourth industrial revolution,

which is characterized by modern science and technological advancement.

Some scholars have argued that the cultural reclamation of indigenous ways could mean integrating their traditions, ways of knowing (epistemology), and language into the formal education system (Adyanga, 2014; Adyanga and Romm, 2016; Dei, 2008). When adopted, this would help build synergies between Batwa and the government in attempts to recognize Batwa ways of life in the modern education system, which May and Aikman (2003) refer to as decolonizing and indigenizing modern education. Much as this is a positive step in the right direction, it is not clear how gatekeepers of formal education will accept the integration of Batwa epistemologies. This is because the gatekeepers of modern education are the product of colonialism (Glasgow, 2001). The impact of colonial education on indigenous Batwa knowledge production has been debilitating.

Colonialism has imposed an oppressive worldview that saw the gradual dismantling of African indigenous education and cultures (cf. Wane, 2006). This is why there is need to encourage decolonization of Batwa education in order to allow them room for self-empowerment and development (cf. Battiste, 2013). The remedial measure for effective cultural reclamation would be to agitate for the scientific documentation and classification of relevant Batwa cultures, knowledge, and traditions to make them suitable for academic purposes in the global knowledge revolution (cf. Sekiwu *et al*, 2021; Sekiwu, Akena and Rugambwa, 2022; Rugambwa *et al*, 2023). This also would take into account the fact that indigenous knowledge is evolving rather than static; it evolves as people collectively find ways of discussing experiences and ideas in the light of challenges being confronted.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The discussion surrounding the integration of indigenous people's identity in formal education and mainstream society is critical for holistic development. Decolonization of education and

LLE for the Batwa cannot succeed if their proper integration in society is not achieved. Therefore, this study is guided by Brighouse's (2002) Egalitarian liberalism and justice in education (ELJE) theory as analytical framework. As a normative theory, ELJE is concerned not with what is, but what ought to be. With this, the theory advocates for putting in place the principles that should guide the design and reforms of social institutions, which for the context of this article, is the education system. ELJE is both a critical and historical theory that champions two major principles. These are "personal autonomy and educational equality" (Brighouse, 2002: 183). The principle of personal autonomy advocates for each child to be given enough opportunity to become an autonomous person.

The principle of educational equality advocates that every child should have equal access to educational resources regardless of their class, race, gender, belief system, disability and economic status (Brighouse, 2002). The justification for the use of ELJE is that it advocates for every child to have equal right to an education and unrestricted opportunity to be self-reliant member of society. Nonetheless, this is not to say that children cannot form co-operatives as part of their involvement in developing enterprises that support them along with others. Brighouse does not discuss this aspect when he speaks of autonomy as he seems to tie this to an individualistic approach. However, what is relevant is that Brighouse's theory demonstrate the importance of dismantling the negative perception of teachers towards indigenous children in the classroom (cf. Harel and Shabar, 2015). The theory also advocates for sensitization and retooling teachers with skills development to accommodate learners' diversity within their classrooms.

To implement LLE, there is need to understand the practical demands of inclusive education. According to Harel and Shabar (2015:494), inclusive education means the proper equalization of education opportunities for all, irrespective of background, race, creed, and colour which aligns



with ELJE theory. Such inclusion of indigenous peoples in education reduces unequal access to educational opportunities. This is further reiterated by Glasgow (2001) who asserted “We must create for learners of all descents inclusive spaces that foster meaningful transformative learning conditions amidst an increasingly abrasive and polarized global society. Inclusive classrooms have the potential to prepare learners...to deal with alienation dares, which is critical to building strong schools and classrooms...” (p.38).

In conclusion, the review of literature and the engagement with ELJE theory have demonstrated that provision of quality/relevant education for indigenous Batwa people to benefit from LLE require deliberate policy reform. This reform can be achieved through evidenced-based sensitization and advocacy.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used Indigenous Research Methodology (cf. Chilisa, 2012) to recruit participants in three Batwa communities of Rubuguri (Kisoro District), Muko (Rubanda District) and Muleme (Bundibugyo District). This approach of data collection allowed for the co-generation of knowledge with indigenous custodians of knowledge from the researched context (Gumbo, 2016). The study used the qualitative approach where sampling was disproportionately done. In qualitative research, we study fewer people to get at findings. What matters is the depth of the data from the few participants (Creswell, 2017). Participants were sampled using purposive and relational sampling. With relational sampling, we identified study participants purposively, collected data and whenever we realized that we needed more data, we identified more study participants using the relational approach until information saturation (Chilisa, 2012; Purcell, 1998). We used to talk circles where participants mutually shared their experiences and perceptions of potential benefits and challenges of lifelong education and decolonization for indigenous Batwa (a method also used by Adyanga and Romm, 2016). Using

this method, 60 participants were recruited, and they included 10 parents (5 males and 5 females), 10 elders (5 males and 5 females), 20 children (12 males and 8 females) from selected primary schools, and 20 teachers (10 males and 10 females). We organized talking circles during market days at village squares, community meetings, and in close consultation with the Batwa elders. Using these talking circles, we solicited views from the Batwa elders and parents which helped us to strengthen multiple connections with the community (cf. Adyanga and Romm, 2022). Face-to-face interviews were used to collect data from the learners.

For data analysis, the Research Assistants (RAs) first transcribed the raw data from the Rutwa language to English. We then coded the generated responses, categorizing them to attach meaning to these qualitative responses (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser, 1965). For confidentiality, we used pseudonyms in reporting participants' responses to ensure that participants' identity remains anonymous. In line with ELJE theory and Nussbaum's (2006) LLE central capabilities, we empirically assessed these parameters of lifelong education and decolonization: retooling Batwa with entrepreneurial skills for self-reliance, vocationalization, engagement in cultural reclamation of indigenous ways, ubuntuism, social justice, empathy and freedom to build relationships, empowering Batwa with critical reflection and reclamation of Batwa indigenous values for public decision-making.

## PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF MAJOR FINDINGS

The main focus of the talking circles and interviews with learners was premised on examining how LLE and decolonization programs for Batwa indigenous people can be achieved. Participants' responses were categorized into sub themes, as discussed below.

### Entrepreneurship Education

Generally, participants argue that one strategy to get the Batwa people out of poverty is by providing LLE to be able to become

entrepreneurs. As indicated above, the approach to “self-reliance” has a particular tinge in indigenous cultural understandings and implies a sense of connection to the community, rather than a focus on individual success. When speaking about entrepreneurship education participants also stated that although formal education has some merits, the Batwa people need more than formal schooling. Entrepreneurship education for skills acquisition to bolster self-employment was repeatedly pointed out by participants. They argued that few Batwa obtain high academic credentials and therefore skills training is vital to bridge the gap. In an interview session, a male learner stated that

*I find formal school hopeless. I prefer to stop schooling and get a job to look after my aging parents. Yes, I would accept to get life skill training from my school. Having my business enterprise is my future dream. I wish that schooling could train us with the knowledge and skills to start our sources of livelihood.*

The view of the above, the participant seems to reiterate the importance of entrepreneurial education in addition to the formal schooling. Experiences have shown that when learners drop out of school without acquiring any skill training, they cannot meaningfully contribute to societal development. We also note that providing people with entrepreneurial skills alone without supporting them with business start-up capital is generally futile and does not lead to self-reliance (Tuck and Yang, 2012).

Building on the submission from the above young participant, a male elder from one of the talking circles submitted that:

*...our children must receive modern education like children from other tribes. Our wishes are curtailed by the fact that much of modern education does not teach children to be businesspersons. If at all, modern education could at least provide our children with the ability to nurture a business idea, plus offering them the skills to run a business,*

*then as an elder, I would be satisfied that my grandchildren have a future.*

The above views were re-echoed throughout most of the talking circles. The participant's view above replicate the daily life struggles among the Batwa people.

### **Vocational and Skilling Programs**

To have a meaningful LLE program, participants expressed the need to provide vocational skills like carpentry, bricklaying, catering, hotel management, and book-keeping skills as important to children. Reiterating this position, a male elder from Muko avowed”

*Of course, Batwa children need to learn some skills for survival. Most of them do not need education for academic purposes because they may not go far in with schooling. This is evident by continuous absenteeism from formal schools, on the pretext that their parents want them to stay home and do domestic chores. I therefore think that the formal school should teach them a practical skill that will help them earn a living after they have completed the training.*

The above view complements Horn (2014) who championed alternate methods for supporting indigenous people in Africa to overcome socio-economic marginalization. Horn reasoned that since it may be grim for many indigenous people to pursue an academic ladder, a practical solution is to acquire means that can promptly bail them out of ostracization. Extending this viewpoint, Ramsay (2010) contends that indigenous people require life skills to make them productive citizens. With these earlier perspectives, we rejoin that vocational training, technical skilling and entrepreneurial education provide the incentive for the Batwa people to muscle their way out of extreme socio-economic hardship. It is imperative to note that the focus by participants on skills development is indeed vital. Those who want to become engineers and ICT specialists should be supported but at the same time give Batwa vocational skills to become artisans, welders, do

carpentry and engage in many more practical competences.

### Work in Tourism

The tourism sector is a booming industry in southwestern Uganda where indigenous Batwa are located. There are several tourist attractions strewn across such as the mountain ranges and natural forests. Batwa homesteads are located in the mountainous regions making them better suited to join the tourism industry. It is practically viable for Batwa to receive support to enable them gain from the tourism business. Some of the LLE programs for Batwa could be to provide them with knowledge in tourism management as observed by a participant from Kisoro District, thus:

*Batwa homeland is gifted with many natural resources. Mountains and hilly areas surround them; they have the Bwindi National Park that harbours the Mountain Gorillas. They also have many things that can attract tourists to the area. What is bothering me is that much of the revenue that comes from these natural features all goes back to the central government. Batwas do not have a hand in this money.*

To deal with the issue of lack of capital for young Batwa after attaining education, the government would utilize part of the revenue collected in the tourism industry in the Batwa communities to establish a Batwa revolving fund. This fund would provide a source of capital for the Batwa graduates of the LLE programs. Batwa teachers unanimously decry that the richly endowed tourism industry in the Batwa traditional homeland can provide economic shelter to these impoverished people. The mountains with stunning sceneries overseeing the countries of the Great Lakes region have attracted national and foreign tourists for decades. However, the Batwa have not benefited from the revenues generated from the tourism industry in their land. Previously, Nel (2005) expressed similar concern with the assertion that the beauty, dignity and prosperity of indigenous people are being exploited for commercial and tourism gains, consequently disempowering the holders of the

indigenous techniques. To ameliorate this exploitation, an elderly participant suggested the construction of a museum to archive their culture and custom. He asserted”

*We have so much history to document and educate our young ones that will come many years when we are gone. But there is a need for some sort of organization of this... he sighs. A place can be constructed here. The place can be used to keep custody of all the rich heritage of the Batwas and neighbouring tribes.*

The proposal to build a museum to preserve Batwa tradition is a noble one due to its potential to prompt cultural diversity.

### Promoting Rutwa Language

One of the main ideas that emerged from participants was the necessity to promote the Rutwa language in the process of implementing LLE among Batwa. The Rutwa dialect is one of the indigenous identities that keep Batwa united as a people. It is unfeasible for indigenous people to appreciate the importance of lifelong education (LLE) if their native language is undermined.

From the talking circles, it emerged that Batwa parents are already advocating for their children to be taught in Rutwa just like the other languages from dominant groups that are used in formal teaching and learning. Batwa parents and elders are worried that the absence of their language from the formal schooling system will lead to the decimation of the dialect. In agreement, UNESCO (2014) argues that if the language of a people is excluded from the global knowledge revolution, such people face the risk of cultural extinction.

We, therefore, argue that the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) needs to attach significance to the use of the Rutwa dialect in formal schools. This language needs to be given the true value and meaning it deserves through its formal recognition in the school curriculum. This view is, avidly expressed by a female elder from one of the talking circles, thus”

*Our identity is fading because our language is disregarded from schools. Teachers and other children who are not Batwa say our language is difficult to learn, it is primeval. How can we talk about educating Batwa children when our language is disregarded? We need this language to be put on the formal school syllabus just like other languages of other tribes were put on the syllabus.*

The observation by the above participant feeds into the opinion of Adyanga and Romm (2016) who, in their study conducted in Mpumalanga Province in South Africa, denounced the deliberate attempt by the gatekeepers of formal education to exclude indigenous people's language from formal schooling system. Building on the above, a female participant from another talking circle painfully asserted that

*I feel pain in my heart when I see that our children can hardly speak Rutwa. When our children cannot speak proper Rutwa, we are no more. The kind of Lifelong education you are suggesting cannot be materialize if it is not taught in our mother tongue.*

Another participant (a male) argued that the dilution of the Rutwa language by young people is due to a blend with other languages, forming something dissimilar to the original Rutwa.

Nonetheless, preservation of the *Rutwa* dialect is the cornerstone for the successful implementation of the LLE programs among the Batwa. This is because indigenous languages have epistemological domains that may, and/or cannot easily be expressed in an alternative language. However, documentation and integration of *Rutwa* in LLE would entail developing a broad policy on lifelong education that supports use of the indigenous dialect from primary, secondary to post-secondary education, and its eventual inclusion in the Runyakitara<sup>1</sup> orthography.

### **Specific Batwa Indigenous Life Skills Identified**

When asked to identify specific Batwa traditional life skills to be integrated into the formal schooling for the LLE program and decolonization agenda to materialize, participants responded with excitement. They expounded many life skills that they use to practice before eviction from the forests. Some of the life skills are briefly discussed in *Table 1* below.

The below life skills should be resuscitated as the Batwa are gradually forgetting them and additional skills such as carpentry, brick laying, tourism, ICT, among others, are added to this repertoire and taught to the Batwa children.

**Table 1: Traditional life skills among the Batwa people**

Specific skill	Description
Hunting and fruit gathering	<p><i>Historically, the Batwa are known for being hunters and fruit gathers. They use rudimentary hunting tools made from their immediate surroundings., The Batwa made leather bags called 'obukoyo' They from the hunted wild animal skins. Being the main activity, young boys are trained to hunt by adults. They use bows (Imiheto) and arrows (obuta) to hunt and bring home edible game meat.</i></p> <p><i>The animal skins are used by women to carry young children on their backs while moving from place to place. Batwa are taught to respect wildlife and live in harmony with Gorillas and Chimpanzees because they believe that these are their close relatives.</i></p> <p><i>In the hunting expedition, a Mutwa youth is taught that killing a leopard (engwe) is considered a bad portent that would lead to serious skin disease ending in death.</i></p>

<sup>1</sup> Runyakitara is the combination of Runyankore, Rukiga, and Rutooro into one dialect officially integrated and used in the formal school curriculum.

There is complaint among Batwa that Rutwa is not part of the Runyakitara dialect.



Specific skill	Description
	<i>This belief is still being carried forward by Batwa people in their current context. Although hunting stood out as the main occupation of Batwa men, there are several animals that are considered a taboo to kill and therefore, inedible. These include dogs, elephants, monkeys, baboons, foxes, porcupines, lions, golden cats, and leopards.</i>
	<i>Fruit gathering stood out as the main life skill activity carried out by Batwa women, girls and young boys. The major type of fruits/tubers gathered are wild stems and tubers, yams, berries, avocados, papaya and jackfruits, bananas, among others.</i>
Fire making	<i>Batwa make fire by rubbing small dry sticks together and use it to roast bush meat as well as wild yams. Fire making is considered a unique skill that every Mutwa child receives training in. When this skill is perfected, a Mutwa should light fire expressly.</i>
Tracking bees and harvesting honey	<i>Among the Batwa the skill of harvesting honey is considered instrumental for their survival. Young people are trained on the technique of tracking bees, harvesting and preservation of honey. Batwa's skill of tracking honeybees is referred to as 'okutara enjoki nobuhura'.</i>
Making musical instruments	<i>The Batwa are known to make musical instruments from natural vegetation and animal skins. They make different instruments such as drums, harps, and flutes from stems of the <i>Lobelia sp</i> (entonvi) tree. The musical instruments are used in entertainment. The instruments generate unique melodies for entertainment during ceremonies such as traditional marriage, celebrating birth of babies, last funeral rites, among others.</i>
Burial of the dead	<i>The Batwa community has special ceremonies for the dead and preparation of dead bodies for burial. They use special herbs to preserve their dead and to ensure that their people are accorded a decent burial. Some of the herbs used for cleaning and preserving the dead include <i>Rhumex sp.</i> (omufumba), <i>Rubus sp.</i> (incheri) and <i>maesia lanceolata</i> (omuhanga).</i>
Traditional medicinal practices	<i>This was identified by mainly elderly participant as an important aspect of their identity. The elders mentioned that prior to their eviction from the forests, their public health practices relied entirely on nature. From the vegetation, soil, rocks, spiritual connection with the unseen world etc., they derived healing for the community (cf. Akena, 2014b). They suggested that although it is gradually fading away, medicinal practices need to be reinvigorated.</i>

### Challenges of Implementing LLE and Decolonization Programs

The government of Uganda introduced Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1997 and Universal Secondary Education (USE) in 2007. These forms of universal education provided equal opportunity for all children of school-going age to access free education (Jacobs, 2004; Akena, 2008). However, this universal education has been criticized for its failure to address the issue of youth and elite employability. For this reason, it is necessary for the introduction of LLE programs for Batwa to provide Batwa with more skills for self-reliance and self-employment. Despite the need to implement LLE programs among Batwa communities, some Batwa still fear that

implementation of LLE programs is still fraught with teething challenges as elaborated below:

#### **Cultural Misappropriation**

Participation in LLE programs by Batwa through formal education will undoubtedly infuse them with other cultures. Because of certain historical facts that caused pains to indigenous people, some Batwa elders are concerned that formal education, though good, would lead to further cultural misappropriation. Some participants during the talking circles expressed the fear that cultural misappropriation would lead to heavy loss of Batwa culture in the long term and the eventual decimation of their identity as a people. For instance, an elderly male participant observed:

*I am not comfortable with the idea of sending children to school because the schools teach the children to speak foreign language at the expense of Rutwa. Now, if our children cannot express themselves in our language, they will definitely fail to express our culture hence which will affect the way our culture is transmitted.*

Most Batwa participants responded with caution that as much as knowledge integration contributes to children learning from each other and enhances appreciation of cultural diversity, there is a danger of cultural parody and misappropriation. With this, some participants resisted how various indigenous communities have doubted formal education for fear of interfering with their indigenous ways of life and knowing (cf. Romm, 2014). Linking this to Harel and Shabar (2015), cultural misrepresentation leads to profound social inequalities, which later create latent clashes between diverse epistemologies henceforth producing a rift between inferior and superior classes. A male participant argues:

*You see, we are already a small group of people in this country. It is so easy for our knowledge and culture to get lost in the dark when our children mix other children in the course of schooling.*

Subtly, we also observe that other than cultural misappropriation, the existing formal education structures tend to refute the absorption of minority cultural practices. For instance, some participant children complained that their teachers often resist citing examples of skills that originate from Batwa experiences in their lesson. Teachers in Batwa schools rebuke citing examples of Batwa skills such as hunting, fire making, medicinal practices, pottery and knitting mats because they think such skills are outdated. The teachers according to participants argue that citing those examples of skills from Batwa people offers no tangible and transferable competences to the modern learner. Teachers further claim that life skills of the Batwa people have no place in the modern education system. They negate the fact that culture is not static but evolving (Dondolo,

2005). Failure to appreciate the evolutionary aspect of culture is unfortunate. Teachers are supposed to maintain professionalism, receive and nurture every child who enters their classroom and treat them with respect regardless of social and economic background.

To buttress this viewpoint, Gumbo (2016) challenges educational institutions as sites of knowledge production meant to indigenize their curricula to better serve African children even though coming from diverse cultural backgrounds. Elsewhere, Barbero (1993) states that the essence of cultural diversity is also an expression of diverse epistemologies that may produce primeval ways of knowing. This nuance feeds into Romm (2015) who argued that there is scope for people coming from different backgrounds to appreciate alternative epistemologies and to learn new skills in formal education spaces.

### **Poverty**

Widespread community poverty also hinders smooth access to formal education and the rich LLE programs for Batwa. In amplifying this, one of the Batwa children interviewed asserted that some of my friends come to school only during breakfast and lunchtime. As soon as meals is done, they disappear never to come back until the next day around meals time.

This behaviour is driven by the poverty of parents. As a result, children are encouraged to do menial labour instead of being at school. Even the most admirable teacher armed with the best pedagogical skills would fail to ensure effective learning for such children. It is mainly because of this that the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (2030) calls for the development of cross-sector policies to address economic barriers like communal poverty that deprive millions of children from accessing quality education.

### **Early Marriages**

Early marriage is another key challenge to Batwa children's access to formal education and a threat to the effective implementation of the LLE program among this group. Linking this to the

problem of poverty identified earlier, Batwa elders castigated the conduct of some parents marrying off their daughters at a young age for material gains. For instance, a female Mutwa elder lamented that:

*I still cannot come to terms with the fact that my granddaughter was given off in marriage by my daughter and yet she was doing well at school. All my efforts to prevent this early marriage were futile because my daughter was determined to get money, which she claimed was required to feed the family. Forcing my granddaughter into marriage at an early age was a hasty decision she made.*

The problem of child marriage is indeed a major obstacle to the economic development of indigenous communities (Horn, 2014). Drawing traces of pain from the female participant who bemoaned this problem, is demonstrable of the level at which the vice has infiltrated contemporary society. Certainly, as scholars and social justice activists, we cannot bury our faces in the ground and fold our hands and watch this unfortunate practice that severely disadvantages girls' children to prevail unscathed.

### **Child Labor**

Because of endemic poverty, child labour is becoming a common practice in the Batwa community. Branded as a cancerous practice ripping apart all the good efforts by the government and the Civil Society Organization, this vice is a main threat to the provision of formal education and LLE programs to Batwa children. The problem of child labour is partly because Batwa failed to integrate within the agrarian communities that they settled in after eviction from the Bwindi impenetrable forest. Reasons for their failure to settle in are evident. First, they lacked the skills to compete favourably with other tribes. Secondly, Batwa are always scorned and despised by other tribes. Thirdly, because of their economic disadvantage, Batwa could not cope with the agrarian demands of where they settled after being evicted from the forest and National Park areas. In elaborating the problem of child labour, a participant stated that:

*Much as the government has given fertile arable land and quality seedlings to the Batwa as compensation package, some Batwa have failed to utilize all the opportunities given to them. Instead, they sell off the land and agricultural tools to other tribes because they want 'quick money'.*

Consequently, the Batwa have become manual labourers working on other people's gardens to get food and alcohol. This conduct has kept them in endemic poverty hence exacerbating the problem of child labour. The LLE program would therefore provide redress measures since it offers relevant life skills education for self-reliance.

### **CONCLUSION**

This article has demonstrated that liberating the Batwa people out of pervasive poverty and socially orchestrated discrimination requires concerted effort by all stakeholders to provide lifelong education that is culturally suitable to nurture relevant skills. The key strategies for implementing LLE for the Batwa people have been discussed. These include but not limited to formal recognition and integration of *Rutwa* language in the education system, infusion of different indigenous life skills and competences into the curriculum. The promotion of tourism education for the Batwa youth who drop out of school is also another strategy for effective implementation of LLE. Documentation of Batwa customs also emerge as key strategies raised to reinforce survival of the history and culture of Batwa.

The proposed LLE program for Batwa indigenous people is the instrument through which their socio-economic empowerment can materialize. To comprehensively achieve the visioned empowerment for the Batwa people, formal schools must take centre stage as sites of knowledge construction that benefit all learners. We argue that participants are not against formal education but rather they are calling for an open space where both their language and ways of knowing coexist. Although some Batwa elders recognize the importance of formal education, they still argue that cultural diversity should be

respected in formal schools. Learning all sorts of skills including traditional ones like hunting, fire making, and new ones like tourism should be acceptable. We also think that Batwa indigenous children should be trained in soft skills such as ICT so that these children are not left behind in the era of digitization of the global economy.

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The authors reported no conflict of interest.

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