

# Integrating Lifelong Learning in the Namibia Veterans Welfare Programme: A Comprehensive Analysis

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**ABSTRACT :** Lifelong learning includes transitions across education, work, and life contexts, which bring about transformational changes in individuals at various levels, such as knowledge, competencies, and identity. In an attempt to determine how integrating lifelong learning into the Veterans Welfare Programme can ensure that veterans reintegrate fully, this study employed a systematic review methodology informed by the military transition theory and the notion of lifelong learning. The study's results indicated that the Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs offers a range of benefits to veterans through the Veterans Welfare Programme to help veterans with job creation, income generation and gain acceptance back into societal life. The study found that delays in counselling, adult basic education, and the acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills are factors impeding veterans from fully capitalizing on the benefits provided by the Veterans Welfare Programme. Pursuing lifelong learning plays a crucial role in fostering ongoing personal development, addressing deficiencies in literacy across multiple domains, promoting the advancement of skills, combating poverty, and improving the well-being of veterans. Therefore, this study recommends that the Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs collaborate with relevant stakeholders to develop training and development interventions that conform to adult education and lifelong learning principles to address the identified skills gap and further the human capacity of the veterans.

**KEYWORDS** –adult education, ex-PLAN combatants, lifelong learning, reintegration, transition, veterans

## I. INTRODUCTION

Namibia attained independence in 1990 after a protracted liberation struggle against the South African apartheid regime after a fruitful effort by the ex-PLAN combatants who were exiled from Namibia since the 1960s. After gaining its independence, the Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN), with the assistance of the United Nations (UN), undertook the responsibility of disarming, demobilizing, and reintegrating (DDR) the ex-People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) combatant and returnees into social life (Ndjadila, 2016). However, studies by Heinecken & Bwalya (2013) and Matshoba (2019) on ex-PLAN Combatants reported that most received no basic education or training and had limited skills and qualifications that prevented them from competitive employment and improved livelihood opportunities. These studies further highlighted that most veterans had no post-secondary education. However, they had military qualifications that did not make their position in the post-independence country untenable. These facts were also supported by Brown's (2011) assertion that most ex-PLAN combatants had no opportunities for formal education as they spent most of their

time participating in the liberation struggle activities. Worth noting is that at the time of Namibia's independence, all ex-PLAN combatants were over 18 years old, which exceeded the entry requirement for the formal education system in Namibia. As a result, many were left destitute due to a lack of basic education, marketable skills, and other physical, mental and social well-being factors, such as physical and psychological disabilities, that prevented them from finding meaningful employment or better-paid jobs.

The GRN initiated several projects for the Ex-PLAN combatant reintegration under the Veterans Welfare Programme, namely, the Development Brigade Corporation (DBC) initiated as per the Development Bridge Corporation Act no 32 of 1992, the Socio-economic Integration Programme for ex-PLAN Combatants (SIPE), and the Peace Project. The Development Brigade Cooperation (DBC) is a government-initiated project that aims to improve the abilities of ex-PLAN combatants by providing training and skills development opportunities (Republic of Namibia, 1992). The SIPE offers training opportunities and educates veterans with the skills they need to find work, develop small enterprises, and create jobs (Metsola, 2006; 2015, Ndjadila, 2016). In 1998, the Peace Project intended to reintegrate many unemployed ex-PLAN Combatant returnees into the public sector, including defence, police, correctional services, and state-owned industries (Preston, 1997; McMullin, 2006; Metsola, 2006). Research conducted by Metsola (2006) revealed that some of these programmes were unsuccessful due to inadequate implementation structures, poor corporate governance, and ill-prepared staff to handle the programmes and their scope. McMullin (2006) supported this finding, reporting that the DBC had failed dramatically. While some veterans with specific qualifications were successfully integrated into public service, unfortunately, most of those requiring additional professional qualifications were unemployed or underemployed (Lamb, 2013; Ndjadila, 2016).

To ensure a smooth reintegration for veterans, the GRN created the Ministry of Veterans Affairs in 2006. Later on, the Ministry of Veterans Affairs was merged with the Ministry of Defence and renamed the Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs due to government restructuring. In 2008 the Ministry passed the Veterans Act, Act No 2. The Namibia Veterans Act No.2 (2008) defines a veteran as someone who has consistently engaged in political, diplomatic, or underground activities for liberation struggles or has been arrested for such activities. As all veterans of the liberation struggle during Namibia's independence in 1990 were over 18 years old, this study defines veterans as adults who engage in lifelong learning, which Kapur (2015) supports.

Hunter-Johnson (2020) describes veterans as adult learners with a range of soft and technical skills acquired through formal, non-formal, and informal military training. These skills include planning, leadership, risk mitigation, decision-making, communication, critical thinking, infantry, medical, artillery, reconnaissance, anti-air defence, security and intelligence, political commissariat, maintenance, and engineering. In Namibia, individuals can be granted veteran status in three categories: those who participated in liberation activities within the country, those who participated outside the country (returnees), and those who underwent military training in specified fields and were deployed to operational areas.

The Namibia Veterans Act obligated the Ministry responsible for veterans' affairs to establish a Veterans Fund, which would register and grant veteran status to eligible individuals, create projects for veterans, and establish the constitution and functions of the Veterans Board and Veterans Appeal Board. The Veterans Fund also provided financial assistance to veterans and their dependents, including support for income-generating activities. In addition, the Ministry has developed several programs to address veterans' integration and improve their quality of life, including preserving the history of the liberation struggle (Mushelenga, 2016). These programs include the Veterans Welfare Development Programme, established to coordinate the design, monitoring, and evaluation of activities aimed at reintegrating veterans into the socio-economic mainstream.

## **II. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs has been providing various benefits to veterans of the liberation struggle through its Veterans Welfare Programme. The Veterans Welfare Programme was introduced for the coordination, the designing, monitoring, and evaluation of activities aimed at reintegrating veterans into the socio-economic mainstream. However, the Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs continues to receive complaints and demands from veterans due to a lack of requisite skills, which has resulted in many veterans

failing to benefit fully from these programmes. A Veterans Affairs Departmental Annual Report (2021) report highlighted this dissatisfaction. The Ministerial Socio-Economic Impact Assessment on Veterans Benefits Reports for 2018 and 2019 also identified several barriers that prevented most veterans from accessing the services and benefits they deserved. These barriers included a lack of welfare services, marketable knowledge and life skills. Notably, the Development Brigade Cooperation, a government-initiated skills development project, failed remarkably (Metsola, 2006). After that, most veterans receive no education or training and have limited skills and qualifications, preventing them from competitive employment and livelihood opportunities (Ndjadila, 2016; Brown, 2011; Metsola, 2006). Most veterans had no post-secondary education and had basic military qualifications that were not recognized or advanced enough, making their position in the post-independence country untenable. Additionally, during reintegration, veterans with specific qualifications were integrated into the civil services, while the majority of veterans who still needed qualifications were left unemployed or underemployed. As a result, several veterans find themselves in destitute conditions due to a lack of primary education and social skills needed for better-paid jobs (Heinecken & Bwalya, 2013; Matshoba, 2019). This dilemma of qualifying for jobs is not unique to Namibia, but a widespread phenomenon in post-war African states, which after political independence, often faced the harsh realities of living in poverty with no employment (Mazarire, 2019). Therefore, providing adult education and training was necessary to equip veterans with skills, knowledge, and competencies to get employment opportunities and enhance their interactions with the community (Silva, 2015). Furthermore, Masumoto (2008) claims that providing veterans with adult and technical vocational training is essential to reorientation and demilitarisation. Based on these identified barriers and gaps, this study attempts to bridge the gap between veterans' welfare programme and lifelong learning as a tool for integration and professional development. Furthermore, the study attempts to document the benefits initiated by the Government of the Republic of Namibia for the veterans of the liberation struggle, highlight the successes and challenges encountered in implementing the Veterans Welfare Programme and explore the integration of continuous lifelong learning programmes

### **III. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The study aims to thoroughly examine the context of the Veterans Welfare Programme in Namibia. In addition, the study attempts to investigate the essence of lifelong learning in enabling veterans to benefit fully from the Veterans Welfare Programme. Therefore, the objectives of this study are:

1. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the benefits that veterans can receive through the Veterans Welfare Programme and,
2. To determine how integrating lifelong learning programmes can enhance the effective implementation of the Veterans Welfare Programme in Namibia and ensure that veterans can fully benefit from them.

### **IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### ***4.1. Military transition and reintegration***

This study focuses on the role of lifelong learning in implementing the Veterans Welfare Programme in Namibia to ensure that veterans benefit fully from the programme's benefits. The Veterans Welfare Programme was established to coordinate the design, monitoring, and evaluation of activities aimed at reintegrating veterans into the socio-economic mainstream. The study adopted Schlossberg's military transition and the theory of lifelong learning views to understand the relevance of lifelong learning in implementing the Veterans Welfare Programme. In general, transition refers to any event or non-event that results in a change in relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles, and these changes associated with transition are transformational (Poquet et al., 2021). In the military discipline, transition summarizes the change military personnel necessarily go through at the end of a military career (Cooper et al., 2018). Transitioning from military to civilian life is a complex process that requires veterans to adapt to new norms and practices outside of the military culture (Shepherd et al. 2021). This transition involves multiple decisions across various aspects of life, such as employment, education, and social relationships (Hunter-Johnson, 2021). Cooper et al. (2018) define military transition as the

reintegration of veterans into civilian life after their military service. This process can be exciting and distressing and may involve medical challenges, family conflicts, unemployment, financial problems, and mental health concerns (Greer, 2020).

The reintegration of veterans is a multifaceted process that includes education, occupational training, psycho-social counselling, and financial support to help them become functioning members of society. It is a holistic process that encompasses political and socio-economic dimensions. Reintegration is a comprehensive process that is an integral part of war and its aftermath and does not have a separate end (Legowo-Oda & White, 2011). It involves assimilating former combatants and their families into communities' societal and economic lives (Bowd & Ozerdem, 2013). Torjesen (2013) further explains that reintegration is a process in which fighters transition from combatants to civilians, abandoning violent means and increasing their participation in activities sanctioned by the mainstream community. The military transition theory asserts that a veteran's transition is successful when they have adapted to societal expectations of a productive citizen, such as attaining employment, adjusting to family roles, attaining a sense of well-being and contentment, maintaining physical and psychological health, and actively engaging in the community (Greer, 2020). This theory has helped this paper understand the context of the Veterans Welfare Programme as a strategic approach established for veterans' integration into society.

#### ***4.2. Lifelong learning, skill development and reintegration***

Lifelong learning theory involves a holistic transformation of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and identities in transitions between educational systems from primary education to employment and throughout an individual's lifetime (Poquet et al., 2021). Lifelong learning and adult education are often used interchangeably, although they differ in policies and practices. Lifelong learning is a broader term encompassing many activities beyond adult education. It involves formal and informal education activities that individuals engage in throughout their lives to improve their knowledge, skills, and abilities. This kind of learning helps to transform personal and professional development (Senturk & Duran, 2020). Lifelong learning is integrated into all stages of the education system, catering to people of all ages and creating connections between different levels of learning. It includes transitions between education, training, and work life to ensure that educational paths remain open and flexible (UNESCO, 2016). Lifelong learning is not limited to formal education but encompasses the skills, knowledge, values, attitudes, and behaviours people acquire in their day-to-day experiences (Laal & Salamati, 2011). The four-pillar principle of holistic education underpins lifelong learning, which includes learning to know, do, live together, and be. Lifelong learning possibilities are linked to working effectively, running a business, and building a career based on the self-acquisition of additional necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities (Eppler-Hattab, 2021). It includes transitions across education, work, and life contexts, which bring about transformational changes in individuals at various levels, such as knowledge, competencies, and identity (Poquet et al., 2021). Both economic and non-economic benefits come with lifelong learning. Economic returns include acquiring employability skills and qualifications, while non-economic returns include improved health, life satisfaction, empowerment, and community participation (UNESCO, 2016).

On the other hand, adult education refers to educational programmes designed for adults that aim to improve their technical or professional qualifications, develop new skills, and broaden their knowledge. The United Nations recognizes the importance of providing veterans with adult literacy, basic education, and technical skills to help them gain skills and competencies relevant to living and aid in their reorientation and demilitarisation (Silva, 2015). According to Kapur (2019), adult education denotes the entire formal, non-formal, and informal learning processes aimed at developing the abilities of adults, enriching their knowledge, and improving their technical skills or professional qualifications or turning them in a new direction to meet their own needs and those of their society. Literacy, continuing education and professional development are fundamental elements of adult education and allow adults to engage in lifelong learning, participate fully in the community and workplace, and equip adults with knowledge, skills, and competencies to adapt to the changing world and generate awareness on various subjects and promoting functionality (UNESCO, 2015). Adult education can help illiterate and unskilled citizens acquire skills and knowledge to enhance their access to community resources,

public goods, and services for a better life (Mayombe, 2018). This is especially important for veterans who may struggle to find employment post-military due to the demand for college-educated employees at many civilian employment organizations. Adult education programmes, including adult training, continuing education, and vocational programmes, can help veterans gain skills and knowledge to compete for better employment opportunities. In addition to employment benefits, community participation is an essential variable of adult education associated with social cohesion and citizenship (Ruber et al., 2018). Providing adult education and training to veterans can enhance their interactions with the community and aid in their reorientation and demilitarisation (Masumoto, 2008; Silva, 2015).

The lifelong learning theory emphasizes embracing a mindset transformation to improve self-knowledge and skills (Eppler-Hattab, 2022). From a lifelong learning perspective, veterans' transition focuses on learning needs related to their future well-being after leaving the military services. According to UNESCO's pillars of education, veterans should learn to know, do, live together, be, and transform themselves and society (UNESCO, 2015). Therefore, the theory of lifelong learning advocates for Veterans Welfare Programmes to be holistic, inclusive, and considerate of individual cultural backgrounds and differences (UNESCO, 2015). Lifelong learning scholars view transitions as restructuring processes that involve forming new relationships, routines, roles, and identities while separating from old ones (Poquet et al., 2021). Barnett et al. (2022) note that transitioning to civilian life is one of the most stressful times for veterans due to changes in identity, occupation, social network, status, support, and culture. Shepherd et al. (2021) add that institutional and cultural differences between the military and civilian context, such as trauma, loss and grief, and moral injury, can make the transition even more challenging. To support veterans' transition to civilian life, Daniels (2017) notes that the process takes time and requires a range of support to help veterans learn new ways of life outside the military. Adult education and lifelong learning can be considered strategies for veterans' health services to promote social well-being.

Both theories call for lifelong learning programmes to consider the impact of military service on an individual veteran's identity development and to be conscious of mental health and personal development issues. Veterans' transition is a lifelong journey that requires lifelong learning interventions, such as mentorship, counselling, psycho-social support, and training to ensure better well-being for individual veterans. Furthermore, welfare services, adult education, technical vocational education and training, and lifelong learning programmes for veterans can be regarded as tools for acculturation, enabling veterans to absorb valuable life and employability skills while adapting to mainstream societal customs. Therefore, the authors found that Schlossberg's military transition theory and lifelong learning theory fit for understanding the urgency of integrating lifelong learning programmes in implementing the Veterans Welfare Programme in Namibia.

## V. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a systematic literature review method to thoroughly examine the context of the Veterans Welfare Programme in Namibia and to investigate the significance of including lifelong learning programmes to help veterans fully utilise the programme's benefits. The study begins with defining the following review question: *How does integrating lifelong learning enhance the effective implementation of the Veterans Welfare Programmes in Namibia?* To ensure that this review question is focused and structured in a way that allows a comprehensive search and synthesis, the PICo (Population, Interest and Context) format was adopted. Additionally, a scoping search was conducted to ensure that no previous study was conducted on the above review question.

A comprehensive literature searches for published and unpublished studies on veteran welfare programmes in Namibia and worldwide was conducted. The PICo comprehensive literature search strategy was employed in this study, combining terms such as veteran ex-PLAN combatants, veterans' welfare benefits, adult education, lifelong learning, transition, and reintegration. Electronic databases and registries such as Google Scholar, SCOPUS, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, Springer Link, Taylor & Francis Online, Emerald and Wiley Online Library were used as some of the data sources. Furthermore, grey literature was searched extensively to complement the



electronic data source. Based on the purpose of this study, the authors considered several studies that focus on veteran welfare development, transition, integration and lifelong learning-related topics. In addition, only studies published in the English language between January 2006 and August 2023 to coincide with the establishment of the Ministry of Veterans Affairs in 2006 were considered.

Data extraction: PRISMA flow chart

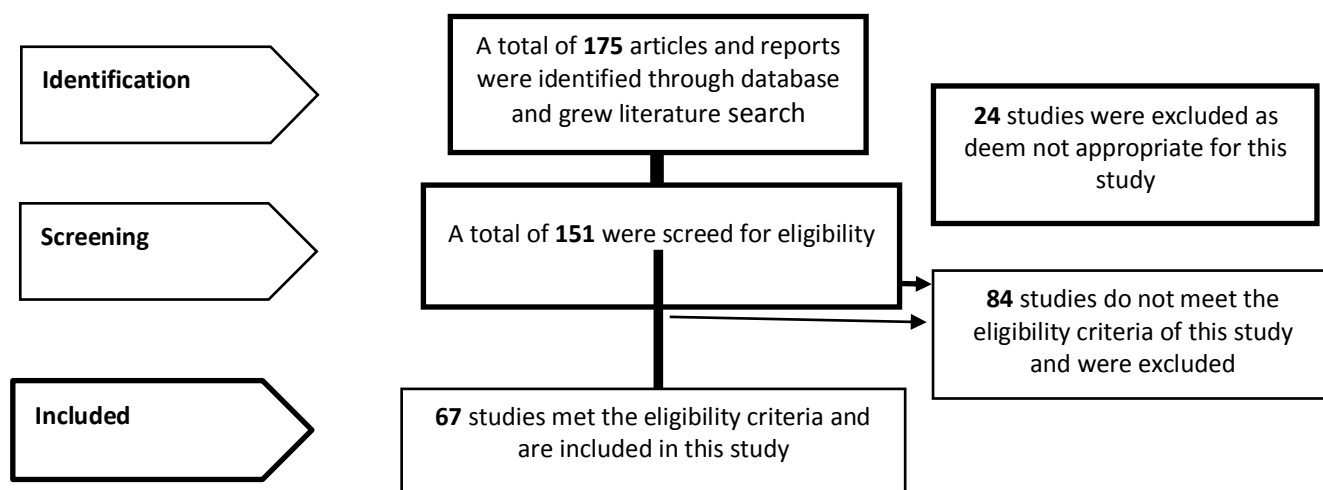


Figure 1: Flow chart of searching and selecting relevant studies for the review

Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) protocol informed the data search and extraction processes of this study. The search yielded 175 studies and after the removal of duplication and filtering of the studies, a total of 67 studies are included in this study. The authors independently reviewed the selected studies by assessing their titles and screening their abstracts. Other critically appraised techniques were considered to ensure quality appraisal, such as filtering types of studies to be included, technical appraisal through rigorous data collection, and theoretical appraisal by systematically checking and confirming the fit between the data gathered and the conceptual work of analysis. The study provides a comprehensive and contemporary appraisal report using transparent methods while reducing bias in the study. Overall, the review identified 64 relevant reports and studies that shed light on the benefits and challenges of implementing military transition. The thematic synthesis method was used for data analysis and synthesizing. The results from synthesized literature were coded line by line. Codes were organized into descriptive themes and further interpreted to develop analytical themes. The analytical themes developed are presented in narrative form.

## VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 6.1. Benefits available to veterans under the Veterans Welfare Programme in Namibia.

#### 6.1.1. Veterans' registration

The study findings indicate that enrolling veterans and their dependents is the first step to accessing the Veterans Welfare Programme. This means that veterans and their dependents can only receive benefits after registering. Registration is an ongoing process, and the Ministry continuously registers veterans, especially those with repatriation documents. It is the process by which prospective veterans are recognized as veterans, and the national veterans' register is created (Republic of Namibia, 2008; Ministry of Veterans Affairs, 2013). Additionally, registration allows the Ministry to gather and analyze each veteran's demographic, training

history, civic education, and socio-economic information. This data helps the Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs, policymakers, and stakeholders to identify the number of veterans and categories them based on their contribution to the liberation struggle. Once the applicants are enrolled and granted veteran status, they become eligible for benefits meant to improve their livelihood, as per guidelines of the Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs (2017).

### **6.1.2. Financial Assistance**

Financial assistance is intended to improve veterans' and dependents' social and economic well-being. The financial support is granted in three types: a once-off gratuity, monthly subvention, and improvement welfare grant. The once-off gratuity or lump sum is paid to veterans as a token of appreciation for contributing to Namibia's liberation struggle. This gratuity aims to help veterans integrate into Namibian society and improve their livelihoods. The once-off lump sum is paid to all registered veterans of the liberation struggle regardless of their employment status but based on the length of participation in the liberation struggle activities. Veterans who participated between 1959- 1987 receive a lump sum of N\$50 000.00, while those who participated between 1988-1989 receive an amount of N\$ 20 000.00.

The second financial assistance is the monthly subvention assistance. The monthly subvention assistance of N\$ 2200.00 is paid to unemployed registered veterans and those whose salary is below the prescribed amount of N\$ 36 000.00 per annum (Ministry of Veterans Affairs, 2013). The financial assistance supports veterans to afford the daily necessities and sustain themselves and their families. This financial assistance is inherited by the deceased veteran's dependents and or spouse. The Veterans Act (2008) defined a dependent of a deceased veteran as children under twenty-one years in the formal education system, a widow or widower of such veterans, and persons other than children and spouses who were statutory dependents at the time of the veteran's death. This inheritance helps pay for dependents' education, food, medical services, and training (Mbathera, 2017).

The third financial assistance is an improvement welfare grant paid to ex-PLAN combatant veterans. The improvement welfare grant is an additional monthly allowance for veterans who, during the liberation struggle, received military training and were deployed in military-related settings and to the former Robben Island and Kai// Ganaxab political prisoners. The grant is paid based on the year of participation and deployment in the following categories: 1960-1970 =N\$ 5 000.00, 1971-1981= N\$ 4 000.00, and 1982- 1989 = N\$ 3 000.00.

The provision of financial assistance aimed at addressing any form of financial deprivation experienced by the veterans. During the liberation struggle period, most veterans missed out on economic opportunities and social activities such as proper education and training. In addition, after independence, most veterans took lower-paying jobs, and their age was close to the retirement age of sixty. Financial assistance helps to improve the financial situation of veterans, provides them with financial stability, and brings economic balance while improving their standard of living. Additionally, it allows veterans to develop a sense of citizenship, actively participate in community engagements and contribute to the betterment of their community. Veterans also used the fund to access social services such as health care, education for themselves and their children, decent housing, and mortgage payments. One could confidently state that financial assistance improved the veterans' quality of life and protected them from financial challenges that led to stress and anxiety, which might trigger post-traumatic stress disorder and severe mood disorders.

The mismanagement of money by some veterans and family members caring for veterans with different ailments is the Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs' setback. Due to a lack of adequate financial education and financial counselling, some veterans irresponsibly spend their money, mainly on alcohol, which sometimes incurs and accumulates debts, leading to veterans suffering financial stress. Financial stress is having insufficient financial resources to meet the basic needs to maintain a decent standard of living. It encompasses many financial circumstances, including income, debt, assets and money management (Steen & MacKenzie, 2013). This challenge is precipitated by a lack of financial literacy, budgeting and balance difficulties, material security, and poor judgment when making prudish money decisions. It was noted that veterans have limited financial management skills, and their military training does not empower them, leaving them vulnerable to

social manipulation. Most veterans lived in military bases during the liberation struggle, and their organizations cared for their basic needs. Therefore, they could not learn the skills needed for financial independence and money management (Preston, 1997). They are not accustomed to having such responsibilities. Similarly, aged and unwell veterans are abused and threatened by family members and caretakers over their veterans' grants, who spend it on their own needs instead of veterans (Shinana, 2022).

This study also revealed that some veterans do not use financial assistance to help their dependents or family members, preferring to spend it on the comrades they suffered together in the war. This phenomenon can be explained from an anthropological and sociological point of view. One can point out that veterans are regarded as a community, a group of people who share the same veteran status as an identity, experience, military culture, and the same ways of thinking and acting due to the process of acculturation to military life. In this community, veterans find conformity as it provides a sense of belonging and encourages them to participate in civic affairs. According to Barnett *et al.* (2022), this kind of social grouping may benefit individual veterans because they have a greater chance of maintaining those relationships, promoting the continuity of social identity and increasing subjective well-being.

### **6.1.3. Individual Veterans Project (IVP)**

The Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs is responsible for providing technical assistance to individual veterans to develop profitable and sustainable business activities, also known as individual veterans' projects. The individual veteran's project enables veterans to start small and medium businesses to generate income and create employment opportunities for the local people, especially youth in various economic sectors. These sectors include accommodation, tent hire, catering and restaurants, transport services, information and educational centres, livestock farming, tailoring, tourism, arts and crafts production, agriculture, including hammer mills and threshing projects, brick production, aquaculture, timber production, and processing to mentioned the few (Office of the Vice-President-Veterans Affairs, 2017). Initially, the programme was implemented by requiring veterans to submit business proposals with bids for project materials from suppliers of their choice, and the Government then pays those suppliers. The veterans submit a quotation of project materials costing from any minimal amount to a maximum not exceeding N\$200,000.00. This method was heavily criticized by the veterans, who argued that the Ministry should have consulted them regarding this method of project payment. In addition, the veterans claimed that some suppliers provided half of the materials paid for and poor-quality materials. The veterans were also dissatisfied with the income-generating activities that were decided and listed by the Ministry that they had to consider when applying for the projects. At the same time, they argued that they were not involved or consulted in identifying these activities in the region and that the governors represented them. Although the payment method was criticized, some of the funded projects are reported to be successful. According to the Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs' Monitoring and Evaluation Reports (2019, 2020, 2022), some of the projects have created employment opportunities at a community level.

Furthermore, the reports indicated that some veterans have made a profit, enabling them to be financially free while affording necessities such as food, clothing, medical care, decent shelters, and education for their children while making savings. Here, too, the veterans individual project contributes to the growth of the local economy and improves the people's living standards. Although such achievements were reported, the veterans reported some business challenges. The challenges include not having the skills and money to maintain the project's equipment, some spare parts for tractors and cars are not available in the Namibian market, those who have applied for livestock production projects reported that their cattle died due to drought, lack of financial management and accounting skills to run the project.

After reviewing several project monitoring and evaluation reports recommendations and engaging with relevant stakeholders in 2020, the Namibian Cabinet decided and issued a resolution for the Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs to start paying cash to the remaining unpaid veteran projects. The Cabinet also resolved to peg the amount at N\$ 170 000.00 per project, which the Ministry began to pay out on a first-in-first-out basis (Shikololo, 2022; Nakale, 2022; Tlhage, 2023). The amount has been set at N\$ 170,000.00 to accommodate



more beneficiaries. This decision was applauded by many veterans, who pointed out that receiving cash gives them the freedom to decide what to buy and when. While the veterans are pleased with the decision, they bemoan the long backlog of unpaid projects. In 2022, approximately 11000 veterans' approved projects still needed to be paid out. Simultaneously, the department continues to receive and accept new applications.

#### **6.1.4. *Psycho-social support***

Namibia's struggle for independence was long and bitter, and the aftermath of the war left many veterans with economic, health, and psychological issues (Melber, 2003). Although it is commonly asserted in the literature on veterans that the majority make a smooth transition into civilian life, many veterans happen to experience mental, physical, and social problems after leaving the military (Torjesen, 2013; Cooper et al., 2018; Barnett et al., 2022). Veterans also faced many stressors and life-threatening events during the war as they went on to experience difficulties in such areas as finding suitable employment, maintaining good mental health, homelessness, excessive alcohol use, and crime (Daniels, 2017). In addition, most of those who returned from exile suffered secondary trauma due to unexpected changes in their family and social settings. They have to face danger during the war and disapproval and rejection by family members, friends, communities, and collective society (Torjesen, 2013). The Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs clearly understands veteran's mental health, well-being and the challenges it presents. The Ministry also acknowledges that several veterans have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after exposure to horrific events, including physical injury (Shipanga, 2012; Hilukilwa, 2018). Therefore, through the Veterans Welfare Programme, veterans and dependents of the liberation struggle receive voluntary counselling services and medical assistance (David, 2016). The counselling includes spiritual counselling for self-healing and recovery, family adaptation counselling, and psycho-social rehabilitation for social reintegration into family and society. Also, medical assistance is provided to veterans suffering from different ailments, mainly due to the war.

It is worth mentioning that the implementation of psycho-social support, especially counselling services, faced challenges due to societal beliefs and cultural norms. Veterans are reluctant to go to counselling services as they fear being stigmatized because counselling is often associated with mental illness shunned in society (Shinana, 2022). On the same note, most cultures do not encourage men to share their problems, making individual veterans suffer in silence. Furthermore, veterans often remark that their military training prohibited them from sharing information, including their feelings. This study also noted that many of the available social workers were not in exile, and veterans lacked trust in the "civilians" and were concerned about privacy and confidentiality. They were not in exile to understand their issues. Another concern in this regard was the age of social workers responsible for veterans in the Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs. Veterans argued that the social workers responsible for their psycho-social support services were too young to counsel and be trusted by them. Therefore, the Ministry should leave the counselling services to be done by fellow veterans because they better understand their condition or the counsellors of their choice. Another barrier faced with implementing this project is that counselling is given voluntarily, and the need for counselling services should intrinsically develop in the veteran self.

#### **6.1.5. *Veterans Housing Project***

The Veterans Housing Project aims to provide decent homes to qualifying veterans, primarily the elderly and disabled veterans living in deplorable accommodations and shelters. So far, the Government has built approximately 294 three-bedroom houses nationwide, underscoring the Government's commitment to integrating veterans into mainstream society (Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs, 2021). The Government donated all the completed houses to the veterans, and the deeds of house ownership were transferred to them. No homes were given on a lease basis. Each house has three bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen, a bathroom, a toilet and a porch. Having received the house donation, the veterans are responsible for maintaining and paying for water and electricity. Houses outside the electric grid are electrified with solar power panels. Due to budget constraints, the Veterans Housing Project is currently on hold. The Minister of Defence and Veterans, by that time, Hon. Admiral Peter Vilho, was quoted by the New Era Newspaper explaining the state of affairs as follows: "*Due to budgetary constraints which lead to the non-allocation of funds to the project for the budget*

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years 2020/2021 to 2022/2023 in the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework period, the programme is on hold until funds are available” (Ndjaveru, 2020)”.

#### **6.1.6. Educational and Training Grant**

Education and Training grants allow veterans and their dependents below the age of 21 who intend to pursue academic or vocational training at any accredited institutions of higher learning in Namibia and within the SADC Region. Unfortunately, this programme was discontinued due to a lack of funding. Kakuja (2023) states that the total number of veterans and their dependents funded under this program since its inception in 2011 is 1092.

#### **6.2. Integration of Adult Basic Education and Lifelong Learning Programmes in the Veterans Welfare Programmes in Namibia for effective implementation**

Brown (2011) found that most veterans lacked formal education opportunities and basic literacy skills. This is because they spent most of their time participating in the liberation struggle activities. Adult education can be a vehicle for the provision of basic literacy to veterans. Veterans can acquire essential reading, writing, and functional literacy skills through adult education programmes such as the National Literacy Programme in Namibia (NLPN) and Adult Upper Primary Education (AUPE). Furthermore, adult education can increase their possibilities for active participation in society and train them to be self-sufficient in career achievements.

The veterans are part of the community. Through community health education, they can also benefit their health and well-being by preventing diseases that may be dangerous to the community. Mayfield-Johnson (2011) indicates that community health education addresses issues that affect community members, where community health workers educate members of the community on how to access health services delivery and reduce community diseases. Hence, the district has to own the responsibility related to their health and that of the community so that they can live a hygienic lifestyle. Community health education incorporates information about disease prevention and health systems into culture, language, and value systems (Mayfield-Johnson, 2011). Health literacy benefits include applying literacy skills to improve veterans' ability to engage and adhere to health-related messages and instructions, such as taking prescribed medications, following instructions on medicine levels, reading appointments and follow-up cards and understanding guidelines for home care. As such, a lack of health literacy can threaten veterans, particularly those with chronic illnesses (Lopes & Mckay, 2020)

Literature acknowledged the relevance of adult education and lifelong learning in veteran transition and reintegration (Poquet et al., 2021; Daniels, 2017) by asserting that veteran transition is a lifelong journey that requires lifelong learning interventions such as mentorship, counselling, skills development to ensure better well-being for individual veterans. Zacharakis et al. (2012) stressed that Adult education has never aligned itself with just one group of educational programs but has embedded itself into various disciplines. This affirms that the scope of Adult Education is vast as it covers all fields of human endeavor. Hence, adults who did not have the opportunity to receive formal education during their school-age days and adults who want to veer into different areas of knowledge are urged to integrate lifelong learning programmes in their projects, for example, the Veterans Welfare Programmes in Namibia.

Adult basic education and lifelong learning can be a medium tool for veterans' economic empowerment and social integration. This claim proposes integrating the National Literacy Programme in Namibia, the Adults Skills (ASDE), the Let Us Speak English Radio Programmes, and the Adult Upper Primary Education (AUPE) into the Veterans Welfare Programme in Namibia. This view is supported by the fact that many veterans are considered disadvantaged and marginalized because they have been deprived of education, employment and training during wartime. It can be a tool for individual veterans' activation, capacity building and adaptation to societal changes and the labour market. Furthermore, Lifelong learning can allow veterans to continue learning through life and participate in programmes and activities leading to community development projects. Lifelong learning opportunities can give them access to income-generating activities and create job opportunities by creating small businesses independently.

The findings of this study established that due to a lack of adequate financial literacy and financial counselling, veterans are found to spend money irresponsibly and sometimes incur and accumulate debts, which leads them to suffer from financial stress. The key to curbing this issue is providing financial literacy, including entrepreneurial skills and counselling through lifelong learning. Elbogen (2015) defined financial literacy as possessing both a working knowledge of financial concepts and the tools to make effective decisions regarding the management of money. Through adult education programmes such as ASDSE, veterans can be retrained to learn various entrepreneurial skills appropriate for financial management and behaviours change. Financial education can help prevent economic loss due to a lack of financial recycling, eliminate financial literacy among veterans and their dependents and help promote efficient and effective utilisation of all sorts of financial benefits received through the Veterans Welfare Programme. Furthermore, through adult education, veterans can be guided through credit counselling. Credit counselling can be defined as counselling that explores the possibility of repaying debts outside bankruptcy and educates the debtor about credit, budgeting, and financial management (Aryna, 2018). Credit counselling examines the ways to solve current financial problems, educates about the costs of misusing credit, improves financial management and encourages distressed people to access the formal financial system.

## **VII. CONCLUSIONS**

The study found that through the Veterans Welfare Programme, the Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs provides various benefits to veterans and their dependents. These benefits include financial assistance, funds to start businesses and income-generating activities, known as individual veterans' projects, voluntary counselling services, medical assistance, housing provision, and education and training grants. The paper sheds light on how these benefits are administered to the veterans. The findings of the study point out that the implementation of the Veterans Welfare Programme faces a diverse range of functional challenges and ongoing adversities. For instance, challenges related to lack of knowledge, and skills, mental health issues and mismanagement of veterans' finances were highlighted as some of the barriers hindering some veterans from fully benefiting from the Veterans Welfare Programme. Therefore, the paper significantly contributes to the existing military transition of fighters by extending the scope of reintegration to include training and development through the lifelong learning approach. This advocacy is perceived as addressing pressing economic, social and environmental challenges. Additionally, with a holistic approach to military transition and reintegration into civil life through lifelong learning, the veterans can be encouraged to reject stereotypes and biased views of civilians as they reintegrate to become one.

## **VIII RECOMMENDATIONS**

Given the findings of this study, the following recommendations are shared on how the Veterans Welfare Programme can be improved to better respond to the needs of the veterans of the liberation struggle.

The Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs needs to develop tailored training and development interventions that conform to adult education and lifelong learning principles, such as human development, relevance, flexibility, and participation, to address the identified skills gap and further the human capacity of the veterans. These interventions provide veterans with the necessary skills, knowledge, and competencies to sustain a well-rounded life. The recommended educational approaches are globally acknowledged as practical means of fostering human development.

On the same note, the Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs and higher education institutions need to develop short courses to empower and capacitate veterans with livelihood-related skills, entrepreneurship, financial literacy, information communication and technology and mainly those related to the regional economic opportunities for individual veterans' projects identified by the Ministry and stakeholders. The study also recommended that veterans lacking essential reading and writing skills be enrolled in various literacy programmes, such as workplace and functional literacy.

The study further suggested that due to societal norms, culture and illiteracy, veterans are not benefiting fully from psycho-social support such as counselling and medical services. To mitigate this, the Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs must propose strategies to intensify voluntary counselling and encourage veterans to seek counselling to benefit from the programme fully. The study recommends that the veterans be encouraged to form a social support group. Also, there is a need to expand mental health and well-being through awareness programmes to create platforms for both genders to speak openly about mental health issues. Therefore, there is a need to initiate community health education coupled with literacy health education content that promotes healthy living styles to improve veterans' quality of life.

Finally, without proper coordination from the Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs, some veterans may not receive all the benefits and services available to them through the Veterans Welfare Programme. Therefore, there is a need for the formulation of legal frameworks, including national policies, standards and guidelines for implementing and administering veterans' benefits. The legal documents should highlight strategies to meet veterans' expectations and respond to their needs, including socio-economic empowerment while addressing barriers to adequately providing veteran welfare benefits.

#### **DISCLOSURE STATEMENT:**

The viewpoints expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not represent the views of the Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs. In addition, the authors have no relevant financial or non-financial competing interests to report.

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