



DVV International

Adult Education and Development Conference

7/8 May 2019, Weimar, Germany

“The Power of Adult Learning and Education to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”

Outcome Document and Key Messages

Education and Agenda 2030

In 2015 the United Nations adopted the Agenda 2030 with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Agenda 2030 is of a holistic nature, seeks to realize human rights for all and covers a broad set of issues including, amongst others, hunger, poverty, health and decent work as well as questions of sustainable economies and lifestyles. Crosscutting issues such as peace and justice as well as governance, accountability, financing and corruption are equally addressed. Education is highlighted as a stand-alone goal (SDG4) that is also explicitly referred to under other SDGs.

The global education community is advocating for the paramount importance of education as key for progressing with the Agenda 2030, in particular by analysing and emphasising (reciprocal) interlinkages with other SDGs. This is also to be seen in light of the next UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) that will have the overall theme “empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”. Here, SDG4 will be reviewed for the first time, together with other selected goals, namely SDG8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG10 (reduced inequalities), SDG13 (climate action), SDG16 (peace, justice, strong institutions), SDG17 (partnership for the goals).¹

The educational goal of the Agenda 2030 envisages “ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.” This constitutes a fundamental change with regard to the former Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that focused exclusively on improvements in primary education. SDG4 follows a holistic understanding of education reinforcing the growing importance of previously neglected areas such as Adult Learning and Education (ALE) by explicitly mentioning the concept of lifelong learning.

¹ The HLPF provides UN's central platform for follow-up and review of the Agenda 2030 under auspices of ECOSOC. The next HLPF meeting will take place in New York in July and September 2019. The Global Education Meeting (GEM) organized by UNESCO in Brussels in December 2018 as well as the preparatory contributions of the Education 2030 Steering Committee also followed the idea of stressing interlinkages with other goals.

Adult Learning and Education and Agenda 2030

Adult Learning and Education is an integral part of SDG4 that seeks to promote Lifelong Learning. This is recognized and further substantiated in the corresponding Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action that was adopted by 184 UN Member States and the education community. ALE contributes to SDG4 in a number of fields and targets, such as literacy and numeracy, equal access to education, skills for employment or income-generation, education for sustainable development and the training of teachers.

ALE is not only a key element of lifelong learning and thus instrumental for SDG 4. As a cross-cutting enabler it also supports many others, if not all SDGs of the new development agenda. This is due to its empowering and cross-sectoral nature that allows for substantial contributions in core fields such as health, poverty reduction, local economic development, climate change and, not least, the promotion of (gender) equality. The cross-sectoral approach was also chosen in UNESCO's third Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE III) making a good case by illustrating how ALE measures affect policy fields outside the education sector, particularly health, employment and civic, social and community life.

The implementation of the concept of lifelong learning laid down in SDG4 clearly requires looking beyond formal education. ALE cover the longest phase of people's live preparing learners for fast-changing environments. ALE fosters participation and democratic processes at community level; it empowers people to claim their civil rights and reaches out to the decision-takers of today. Unfortunately, increasing requirements and potential of ALE are by far not matched by political attention and funding. According to GRALE III most countries invest in average only about one percent of their education budget in ALE.

Concept and Main Outcomes of the Conference

The 6th Adult Education and Development Conference (AEDC) organized by DVV International dealt with the specific role of ALE within the Agenda 2030 and its potential to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). More than 150 experts, practitioners and cooperation partners from the global network of DVV International presented good practice examples and discussed the positive effects of ALE on sustainable development. Expert panels and working groups elaborated on strengths and challenges of ALE, in particular as regards its contributions to the overall agenda, its role for the education goal (SDG4) and interlinkages with other goals under review during the next HLPF. A key note presentation by the former Director of UNESCO's Global Monitoring Report, Aaron Benavot, informed participants inter alia about monitoring progress on ALE based international indicators and discussed reasons for the still insufficient visibility of the sub-sector.

The conference participants agreed that the lifelong learning approach of SDG4 provides a potentially broader playing field for ALE. However, they also came to the conclusion that complexity and diverse learning formats (formal, non-formal and informal) of ALE are both an asset and a challenge. It was noted and discussed that concept and scope of adult learning and education, possible interlinkages and promising programme approaches for development are not always well known outside the ALE community. A particular challenge is often the lack of quantifiable data to show effects and impacts on individual learners, communities and the society as a whole.

Participants stressed that the “power” of ALE must be better communicated to governments, donors, citizens and other stakeholders. This should especially consider the potential to be effective across sectors and to fulfil key promises of the Agenda 2030, namely to leave no one behind and to reach the furthest behind first. Furthermore, participants acknowledged that the role civil society and non-formal settings can play to promote the SDGs have to be even better elaborated. Eventually, it was stated that ALE is not a one-size-fits-all solution for development but rather a cross-cutting enabler and a precondition for participation and inclusive processes that allow for broad-based development and pro-poor growth.

The Adult Education and Development Conference was complemented by a number of highly relevant publications. This included, next to the most valuable outcomes resulting from the various activities in the partner countries around the globe, an edition in DVV International’s publication series “International Perspectives on Adult Education” (IPE), an expert paper and a research study commissioned by the Institute.

Key Messages

Participants and stakeholders agreed on a set of key messages that were developed on basis of the aforementioned outputs and with the involvement of the global network of DVV International. The key messages presented in the course of the Conference are divided into six thematic blocks, starting with the overall role of ALE for Agenda 2030, followed by its contributions to the educational goal. Thereafter, interactions and interlinkages with four other SDGs are laid down to highlight the relevance of ALE for reducing inequalities and conflict prevention, promoting climate action and assuring decent work and better employment opportunities for all.

The key messages focus on the added value of ALE and address challenges, requirements, and recommendations. They will need further refinement and adaptation to serve local purposes across the globe.

To this end, the 6th AEDC agreed on the following key messages:

1. Overall Agenda 2030 – ALE as Crosscutting Enabler and Key to Empowerment

- **Overall Benefit to the SDGs:** ALE is closely interlinked with many development fields. It provides for measurable contributions to all Sustainable Development Goals by supporting people to acquire knowledge, skills, competences, values and attitudes most relevant to the Agenda 2030 and its respective targets.
- **Methodological Approach:** ALE is a mobilizing, empowering and transforming process. This inherent methodology is its particular asset producing measurable benefits for individual learners, communities and the wider society, thus supporting Agenda 2030 across the board.
- **Preventing and Reducing Marginalisation:** People most in need are a core target group of ALE. Through its learner-centred approach, ALE addresses and empowers marginalised groups and thereby keeps the promise of leaving no one behind and of reaching the furthest behind first.

- **Poverty Reduction:** There is a close link between adult literacy rates, national wealth indicators and poverty headcount ratios. By increasing the literacy rates of adults and further empowering them with skills and competences through ALE, all dimensions of poverty, including participation, sustainable livelihoods, decent work and the exercising of rights, are addressed.
- **Civil Society:** Using, a human-rights based approach, ALE empowers youths and adults to be citizens of an active civil society. An active civil society is not only a pre-requisite for development but it can also be a constructive and critical dialogue partner of governmental actors.
- **Health Promotion:** There is a large body of evidence that education levels are linked to the status of people's health. High attention should be paid to the education of youths and adults with low levels of education to take advantage of the benefits of ALE in terms of preventive health education, awareness raising, physical and mental health and general well-being.

2. SDG 4 – ALE as a Key Element of the Education Agenda 2030

- **Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All:** ALE is indispensable for securing the human right to education. As it caters for a central and extensive phase of people's lives, it is a key component of the concept of Lifelong Learning. Through its comprehensive nature, ALE can prepare learners across all ages for a fast-changing environment as demanded by the Education 2030 Agenda.
- **Education of Future Generations:** Investing in ALE means preventing children from growing up in an illiterate environment and, thus, ultimately investing in an educated population for the generations to come. Evidence shows that every additional year of their parents' education has a positive effect on the school career of children.
- **Literacy and Numeracy:** As substantial elements of SDG 4, literacy and numeracy are a pre-condition for success of any education initiative. Integrated approaches cater for improvements in fields such as income generation, vocational and life skills and development of democratic values alongside strengthened literacy and numeracy competences.
- **Education for Sustainable Development:** Education for Sustainable Development has a long tradition in the ALE community. In both formal and non-formal settings ALE raises the awareness of sustainable production, consumption and lifestyles of the generation currently in power and it prepares people to be globally responsible citizens.
- **Professionalization of ALE Teachers:** The postulated increase in the supply of qualified teachers must also embrace efforts to professionalise educators in non-formal settings and equip them with a comprehensive set of youth and adult education methodologies including digital and media literacy as well as decent salaries.
- **Equal Access to Education:** ALE makes valuable contributions to ensure equal access for all women and men on various levels. Second chance education programmes support youths and adults who dropped out of the formal system and wish to re-enter it; further, non-formal education and training provide literacy and numeracy as well as vocational skills for the labour market.

3. SDG 8 – ALE Promoting Productive Employment and Decent Work

- **Informal Sector:** In many countries, the informal sector provides more employment than the formal sector. It is a particular strength of ALE to reach this sector. It provides people with vocational as well as entrepreneurial skills, substantially supports micro-enterprises in getting access to and managing financial services and facilitates access to the formal labour market.
- **Decent Work:** On the road to decent work, vocational skills and workers' empowerment are indivisible. ALE reaches out to the most vulnerable and offers learning opportunities that combine vocational training with education on decent work, labour rights and collaborative action.
- **Benefits for the Economy:** ALE benefits the economy as a whole. Microeconomic studies assert that ALE trainings enhance productivity and product value at company level, while macroeconomic analysis finds a positive correlation between training and education and productivity and economic growth.
- **NEET - Addressing People Not in Employment, Education or Training:** ALE reaches the most vulnerable: the working poor, informal sector workers and the unemployed. Through apprenticeships and non-formal training, ALE provides those in need with on-the-job experience and prepares them for the needs of both formal and informal labour markets.
- **Correcting Mismatches:** Despite good qualifications, many graduates fail to find employment due to mismatching qualifications and competencies. ALE substantially contributes to closing the gap between young people's skills and knowledge and the demands of employers and it further supports learners and the job market through validation and recognition of prior learning.

4. SDG 10 – Reducing Inequalities through ALE

- **Human Development:** A higher Human Development Index (HDI) ranking generally positively correlates with higher equality. ALE has the potential to raise all HDI components of a given country - life expectancy, the status of people's health, education level and per capita income and thus ultimately raises this key development indicator.
- **Social Cohesion:** Community and adult education centres are intercultural meeting hubs. They play a vital role for the integration of migrants and the reduction of potential tensions with the host population. A wide range of ALE initiatives such as literacy, language courses, skills training and social activities foster social cohesion and reduce inequalities.
- **Awareness Raising on Discrimination:** SDG 10 aims to ensure equal opportunities for all by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices. Related ALE programmes such as awareness-raising and educational campaigns are instrumental for well-informed citizens to be able to deconstruct the systems that reproduce various kind of inequalities and discrimination.
- **Reducing Gender Gaps:** In the spirit of gender mainstreaming, ALE practitioners systematically reflect the impact of their programmes on the life of all genders. Reducing inequalities also means reducing gender inequalities. Many ALE activities specifically address girls and women with the aim to inform them about their rights, empower them and raise their educational level.

- **Leave No-one Behind:** Key target groups of ALE are those from the poorer strata of the population, including the most disadvantaged and marginalized people. ALE is one of the keys for reducing inequalities and Agenda 2030's principle of leaving no-one behind.

5. SDG 13 – ALE Supporting Climate Action

- **Recognized Relevance:** SDG 13 explicitly mentions education, awareness-raising and the strengthening of human capacities as part of its targets and means of implementation. Concepts such as Lifelong Learning and Education for Sustainable Development will be crucial for taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
- **Disaster Risk Reduction:** Although governments have the overall responsibility for reducing disaster risks, policy frameworks stress the importance of other actors such as civil society and community based organisations. ALE activities contribute to disaster risk reduction, including prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery and resilience.
- **Complementing Technology:** Climate change and disaster risk management need technology based monitoring, early warning mechanisms and further detection and response systems. ALE complements these solutions through awareness raising, public information and active participation as well as in case of technology failure.
- **Climate Skills:** Combating climate change begins with public information, informed citizens and practical action at local level. Non-formal education approaches and methodologies are vital to provide climate change related skill sets needed for intergenerational public engagement and support.
- **Climate Literacy:** Many countries are by now affected by climate change and threatened by natural catastrophes. Community based learning centres are the most convenient settings in these countries for integrated approaches that address literacy gaps and, at the same time, create awareness and familiarise learners with aspects of climate change.

6. SDG 16 – ALE Preventing Conflicts and Strengthening Accountability

- **Community Empowerment:** In the form of community learning centres or other local structures, ALE is a key source of community empowerment and mobilisation. It helps adults to become active citizens who can take part in more transparent, inclusive and effective decision-making processes and supports refugees in their social, cultural and economic integration.
- **Reduction of Violence:** ALE brings people and communities together. Through its sensitive and learner-oriented methodology, it helps to prevent conflicts by focusing on commonalities rather than differences between people, groups and communities, helps in the recovery of conflict affected areas and thereby promotes sustainable peace and conflict transformation.
- **Accountability:** ALE empowers people to hold institutions and political actors accountable who then in turn feel the need to become more trustworthy and responsive to people's needs. Increased accountability, transparency and trustworthiness will contribute to strengthening the rule of law, reduce corruption and enhance people's access to fundamental freedoms.

- **Access to Information:** Information on relevant social, economic and political processes in their direct environment is a dire need for active citizens. ALE provides both citizens as well as institutions with the needed skills and competences to interact, share and interpret information, thereby ensuring constant availability of key knowledge and an exchange on it.
- **Participatory Budgeting:** Participatory budgeting is a (mostly) non-formal adult education and learning process that allows for the active inclusion of (non-elected) citizens in the allocation of public finances. It strengthens citizens' access to public decision making, information on policy making and reduces corruption through enhanced transparency.

The Way Ahead

These key messages lay down core aspects of ALE with regard to the Agenda 2030, in line with the six thematic areas and the findings of the Conference. They are put forward here for further attention and discussion by decision makers, practitioners, stakeholders, and donors at national and international policy levels. They are intended to provide guidance and support advocacy. The next opportunity for this will be the aforementioned High Level Political Forum in July and September 2019 in New York.

Participants and stakeholders are encouraged to support the dissemination of this report and its key messages in a variety of forms by using their own websites, newsletters, journals, and other channels. Appropriate ways and means will be employed to inform national governments, regional and global intergovernmental organizations, donors and funding agencies, as well as civil society, academia and the private sector. DVV International will strengthen this debate through its regional offices, its membership in education networks and committees around the globe. Together with their partners, they will search for opportunities to increase funding and deepen the understanding of the diversity of ALE to contribute to the achievements of the SDGs. Particular attention will be paid to the scope and need for lifelong learning, the potential of integrated, cross sectoral approaches and possibilities to reach out to the most marginalised people, thereby leaving no one behind.

DVV International foresees that conferences and other events at national, regional and global level follow up on the role of ALE in the SDG context by further systematizing its potential, contributions, impacts and good practice examples as well as by analysing possible interlinkages with other sustainable development goals.

DVV International, May 2019