

Suwon-Osan CONFINTEA VI Mid-Term Review Statement

The Power of Adult Learning and Education: A Vision Towards 2030

Preamble

We, the representatives of governments, international agencies, universities and civil-society organizations from 95 countries, have gathered in Suwon, Republic of Korea, from 25 to 27 October 2017 for the Mid-Term Review of the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI). Our purpose is to assess and examine actions taken in adult learning and education (ALE) since CONFINTA VI in Belém, Brazil, in 2009, and to discuss the way forward in light of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

We recall the recommendations adopted by CONFINTA VI as laid down in the *Belém Framework for Action (BFA)*, which is instrumental in affirming the fundamental role of ALE and its indispensable inclusion in education provision in UNESCO Member States.

We acknowledge that education and learning throughout life is a fundamental human right, a precondition for the realization of all other human rights, and a public good of which the state is the duty bearer.

We recall the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 2015, and are committed to achieving sustainable development in all its dimensions according to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

We reaffirm our commitment to SDG 4, through which Member States have committed to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'.

We recognize that education and lifelong learning (LLL) are at the heart of the SDGs and fundamental to their achievement. We affirm that ALE has a structural, enabling and pivotal role in promoting the implementation of the entire 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The provision and acquisition of knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes and values in all the fields of education and LLL are key to achieving this agenda and, in particular, SDG 4.

We recognize the great value of UNESCO's *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE)* for the international ALE community and beyond, and appreciate the sustained efforts of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) to produce it at regular intervals.

We call attention to the revised *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (RALE)*, adopted by UNESCO's General Conference in 2015, which identifies three key fields of learning: (1) literacy and basic skills, (2) continuing training and professional development, and (3) active citizenship. We recognize the *RALE* as an important normative tool to implement ALE's five areas of action, as articulated at CONFINTA VI; these are: (1) policy; (2) governance; (3) financing; (4) participation, inclusion and equity; and (5) quality. We also acknowledge the *Recommendation concerning Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET)*, also revised in 2015, as another normative instrument to guide related work.

We acknowledge the importance of the Global Alliance for Literacy in the Framework of Lifelong Learning (GAL) to advance the literacy agenda (SDG 4.6) and ALE with a lifelong learning perspective.

We call attention to the *UNESCO Guidelines for the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation [RVA] of the Outcomes of Non-formal and Informal Learning* and strongly recommend their implementation. RVA mechanisms should be linked to National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) and recognized at the regional/sub-regional level.

Progress made

The CONFINTEA VI follow-up process and its series of regional and sub-regional conferences have helped to reinforce the position of ALE within educational agendas of Member States. Events took place in 2011 in Mexico City, Mexico (for Latin America and the Caribbean); in 2012 in Seoul, Republic of Korea (for Asia and the Pacific), and Praia, Cabo Verde (for sub-Saharan Africa); in 2013 in Vilnius, Lithuania (for Europe and North America); and concluded in 2015 in Alexandria, Egypt (for the Arab States), and Montego Bay, Jamaica (for the Caribbean). The regional action plans developed by these meetings were useful for identifying and implementing necessary next steps for supporting the implementation of the *BFA* on regional, national and sub-national levels according to the specificities of each region.

Using the five areas of action defined in the *BFA*, we can identify substantial achievements across the regions. For example, more countries have adopted ALE policies, new partnerships have been founded between ALE players on national and sub-national levels, commitments to increased funding have been made in some countries, participation in ALE is slowly growing, and useful instruments have been put into place to improve the quality of ALE.

Nevertheless, a number of challenges remain, such as the lack of adequate ALE policies and legislation in many countries, and the absence of basic coordination mechanisms at the national level. Funding from governments and development partners is still below what it should be (42 per cent of countries spend less than 1 per cent of their education budgets on ALE), and participation in ALE by many target groups – especially marginalized and vulnerable communities and, in particular, women – is low.

Additionally, the lack of training and support for ALE facilitators and key personnel continues to undermine the quality of programmes, and only a few countries have established RVA of outcomes of non-formal learning. Of particular concern is the slow increase in rates of youth and adult literacy and, importantly, of proficiency levels of functional literacy and numeracy and digital skills on a continuum of learning. The gender gap also continues to be an issue and, despite notable progress in monitoring and evaluation since 2009, basic data on ALE remain insufficient.

The way forward

Many factors influence sustainable development, such as rapidly changing social and economic developments and labour markets, growing unemployment, and demographic change characterized by population growth and a high proportion of youth in some countries and ageing populations in others. Large-scale migration, which has a major impact on communities – for those left behind, for those migrating and for receiving communities – also has an effect, as does unbridled urban growth, climate change and other environmental challenges, violent conflicts and shrinking democratic space. Seen through a lifelong learning perspective, which includes the provision of literacy and the language it is taught in, intercultural understanding and skills acquisition has an important role to play in tackling these issues.

To this end, we recommend the following with respect to the five areas of action identified by the *BFA* and the fields of learning identified by the *RALE*:

The Belém Framework for Action (BFA)

Policy

- Policy for ALE should ensure local, national, regional and intersectoral cooperation. ALE should be acknowledged as a means to realize the right to education and therefore be embedded in legislation. Member States are encouraged to use the *RALE* guidelines adapted to their level of development.
- Legislative mechanisms and policies for life-wide and lifelong learning should involve learners, and should centre on their needs and aspirations. Learners' cultural and linguistic diversity and experiences should be taken into account.
- ALE in a lifelong learning perspective should be an integral part of education-sector plans.

Governance

- ALE needs participatory decision-making: all stakeholders, including educators, learners and civil society, should engage in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- Networking between all relevant ministries, local governments and other stakeholders involved in ALE should be strengthened in order to develop national qualifications frameworks, certification and RVA mechanisms at the national and sub-national level.
- All ministries should collaborate in developing meaningful, relevant and robust data systems at the national level in order to inform good policy and monitoring.

Financing

- Following the *Incheon Declaration and Education 2030 Framework for Action*, which calls for countries to allocate at least 4 to 6 per cent of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and/or at least 15 to 20 per cent of their total public expenditure to education, we recommend that countries prioritize ALE and allocate an increasing percentage of their education budget to it. Given that ALE provision is also supplied by different sectors, other ministries should also contribute funds to the implementation of a proposed ALE budget.
- Development partners should recognize the importance of ALE in a lifelong learning perspective and therefore provide funding for it. The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and other influential global funding partners should include this sub-sector in their overall strategy for education and invest in and be made accountable for funding the whole ALE agenda as a part of lifelong learning.
- Domestic resource mobilization should be increased through tax-justice mechanisms.

Participation

- Barriers to participation (psychological, social, economic and institutional) should be removed, the joy of learning promoted, and the use of ICTs fully harnessed. Adopting an intercultural approach, and fostering close partnerships with civil society organizations (CSOs), can help ensure that this happens.
- We must increase the diversity of ALE programmes to improve access for different target groups, including older people. Developing networks of adult education and community learning centres and spaces can help engage marginalized and disadvantaged people.

Quality

- We strongly recommend the development of quality-assurance mechanisms for all programme components. This includes ensuring that professional and certified adult educators have good working conditions, relevant curricula, efficient and learner-centred pedagogical approaches, rich learning environments including materials, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.
- ALE depends on qualified, well-trained full- and part-time staff and the engagement of volunteers for administration and teaching; pre- and in-service training should therefore be given priority. Likewise, availability of adequate teaching and learning materials should be ensured.
- The quality of ALE from a lifelong learning perspective needs to be developed in association with higher education, based on research and development work. Quality ALE will further be enhanced through support to institutions and associations of ALE professionals.
- All of the above requires sufficient funding; therefore, increased investment in all these areas is necessary.

The Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (RALE)

Literacy and basic skills

- Literacy must be understood as an indispensable foundation for lifelong learning. Literacy is not a stand-alone set of skills that can be acquired and completed within a short time frame; rather, it is a component of a set of core competencies that require sustained learning and updating on a continuous basis. What is considered as the relevant and required proficiency levels to be reached in literacy and numeracy is context-specific and should be clearly defined and measurable. Depending on the need of the learner and the context, adult literacy programmes provide basic and/or higher levels of literacy skills.
- Political will needs to be generated and strengthened, backed by adequate and sustainable funding, to ensure equitable provision of ALE and literacy. Attention must be paid to the use of mother tongue in literacy programmes as well as to learning the official language(s) of the country in relevant contexts.
- Intersectoral approaches to literacy are necessary to respond to the diverse needs of the learners.
- ICTs have great potential to improve access and promote equity and inclusion.

Continuing training and professional development

- The provision and investment in continuing education, professional development and TVET needs to be increased, and more so through non-formal approaches, to enable educational agents to offer quality training for livelihoods in informal economies, paying particular attention to women and girls, youth and older persons, migrants and refugees, and to provide credit for self-employment and entrepreneurship.
- Beyond work-related skills, it is important to support the development of capabilities such as problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, the ability to work in a team, and the ability to continue learning and be resilient to rapid change.
- Literacy and ALE programmes should be linked to non-formal TVET/income-generation training, and TVET should include literacy components. Literacy skills and higher-level skills are increasingly required for decent work, active citizenship and lifelong learning.

Active citizenship through community, popular or liberal education

- ALE should be truly transformational, critical, empowering, participative and inclusive and address the needs of all citizens, in particular those who participate the least. Opportunities for open dialogue need to be developed.
- ALE should ensure the participation of adults in learning, thereby promoting democratic values, peace and human rights through empowerment and active citizenship. Education for sustainable development (ESD) and global citizenship education (GCED) should therefore be fostered.
- 'Popular education' as referred to in the *RALE* should be an underlying concept of ALE and inform education policies and practices.

Additional key areas for ALE

Health, well-being and environmental sustainability

- ALE is a crucial dimension of health promotion and essential for enabling youth and adults to take responsibility for their own health and to move from a predominantly curative to a preventive model that allows people to be in charge of their own health and well-being.
- The relevance of different knowledge systems should be acknowledged in order to encourage the adoption of alternative ways of relating to the environment that address the use and preservation of resources in times of accelerated climate change as well as issues concerning health, including reproductive health, and well-being.

ALE in conflict, post-conflict and disaster contexts

- Initiatives, successful experiments and existing research need to be capitalized on and results disseminated and new research supported to promote the crucial role of ALE in conflict and post-conflict situations, and in dealing with migrants, refugees and displaced people.
- Governments, development partners and local community agencies should allocate sufficient funds to ALE programmes in conflict and post-conflict situations, and develop partnerships with stakeholders to ensure sustainability of funds.
- Consideration should be given to providing ALE for disaster preparedness, disaster alleviation and recuperation.

ALE and the Sustainable Development Agenda

ALE as a key component of education and lifelong learning is critical for the achievement of the SDGs. Therefore, putting ALE and lifelong learning into practice remains critical in addressing global education issues and challenges. However, ALE is not sufficiently articulated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and is the least supported link in the lifelong learning chain.

Further efforts are needed to raise awareness of the potential of ALE among all relevant stakeholders, i.e., policy-makers, researchers, and practitioners beyond education, particularly in labour, health, community development, agriculture, peace promotion and conflict prevention, social cohesion, defence and military services, internal or homeland security, in ministries and agencies of international cooperation, in faith-based organizations, unions, political parties and the full breadth of civil society.

Against this background, we call upon

- Member States to take the necessary steps to fully and urgently implement the *BFA* and the *RALE* in the coming years and prepare for CONFINTEA VII in 2021;
- all stakeholders within the international ALE community to contribute to a global effort to advocate for learning at all ages as the key means to achieve sustainable development;
- UNESCO and its specialized institutes, specifically the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and UIL, to take the necessary steps for continued monitoring of the *BFA* and the *RALE* and to produce further *GRALE*s at regular intervals (at least every three years);
- Member States to reinforce UNESCO, including its institutes, particularly UIL and UIS, to ensure appropriate monitoring of organized learning activities in relation to the targets of SDG 4;
- Member States to work intersectorally and increase policy dialogue that includes all stakeholders, including civil society and learners, to create lifelong learning systems and societies;
- Member States to strengthen the implementation of ALE at the local level using, *inter alia*, the learning cities approach;
- UNESCO, in particular UIS and UIL, to continue to support Member States in building high-quality and sustainable monitoring and assessment systems and ensuring reporting for SDG 4 indicators;
- Member States to set up efficient monitoring and measurement mechanisms for adult literacy and ALE;
- the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to reinstate adult literacy in the Human Development Index;
- the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity (Education Commission), the Global Partnership for Education, Education Cannot Wait and other development partners, as well as national and sub-national governments, to restore attention to and provide adequate funding to the full ALE agenda to achieve SDG 4; and
- UNESCO to incorporate the *BFA* and the *RALE* within the SDG 4 implementation processes and architecture, such as the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee and regional SDG 4 coordination mechanisms, as well as within the wider United Nations structures. They must be used as reference for voluntary national reviews (VNRs) and high-level political forums (HLPFs) on sustainable development, as well as to guide the work of the Global Alliance for Literacy.

Finally, we call upon

- UNESCO, Member States, UN agencies and non-governmental and civil-society organizations, as well as social and private partners, to organize the Seventh International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VII) in 2021, and to undertake relevant preparatory work. CONFINTEA VII should highlight the contribution of ALE to sustainable development. For this to happen, it is crucial to have the necessary data to report on the progress being made and to support implementation. Therefore, we call upon Member States and partners to provide all relevant information and data on progress made for the preparation of CONFINTEA VII.