

## **Youth and Adult Education within Lifelong Learning: Claims and Challenges for the Development Agenda**

**Chris Duke, Heribert Hinzen**

### **Instead of an introduction: do we know the way, and are we on track?**

It was exactly 35 years ago that the *Comparative Education Review*, the official journal of the Comparative and International Education Society, printed an article entitled

‘Education – An Obstacle to Development? Reflections on the Political Function of Education in Africa and Asia’. Its general thesis was that ‘formal education in Africa and Asia in its present form tends to impede economic growth and promote political instability; in short, education in Africa and Asia today is an obstacle to development’ (Hanf, 1975: 68).

In other words, education is not an unquestioned and unqualified good in the development agenda. Not only that. In the wealthy North also, there has been a sustained critique of education, both from the radical perspective of writers like Ivan Illich but more seriously also by those who make policy. There is a view that leaves little room for education beyond specific skills thought necessary for national economic (competitive) development. When times get hard, broader including through-life education becomes a luxury that can be cut back or sacrificed.

The memory of this earlier development debate and the wider doubting of education itself occurred to us in looking at the list of prospective authors for this issue of *Development*, and in reviewing the background papers for the 2011 Education for All Global Monitoring Report (EFA GMR) Advisory Board. Here both aspects – political and economic issues – are again apparent, perhaps more dramatically. We have only just survived the toughest financial and economic crisis known for many decades. Its consequences are still unfolding, and it is not clear what the damage is going to be for education generally, and especially in so many of the poorer countries. It is likely that declining investment in education at national levels will be only one of the results, for all nations both rich and poor.

The threat to international aid budgets and the shrinking of aid for education in particular is another side of the coin. The alarming tendency of recent years to widen again the great gulf within and between nations, between richest and poorest, that was beginning to close, looks likely to get worse. It can be said about the global financial crisis that broke in 2008 that it was too good an opportunity to go to waste. As with the idea that a ‘green investment agenda’ was the way to move forward and resolve two problems at once, so with education. There is a great opportunity, but also the risk that short-term calculations will prevail. Education and development are thus a microcosm for even wider issues to do with how we govern ourselves in a sustainable and equitable way in a global setting

The EFA GMR Concept Note on ‘Education and Violent Conflict’ tabled for the Advisory Board further reminds us that

there is growing evidence that education can itself contribute to conflict. The way in which it does so will depend on whether conflict originates in ideology, identity or economic marginalization. Where education reinforces tensions between groups divided by religion or ethnicity, or where there is unequal regional access to education for the poorest groups, it can contribute to instability. Poor education quality, the ideological orientation and values of the curriculum and an alienating language of instruction, together with thwarted aspirations and high levels of unemployment, can create a volatile pool of disaffected young people (EFA GMR, 2010: 2).

Are we back to square one in looking at the role of education in the process of development? Is it like a return of the old and discredited modernisation agenda as the solution to the poverty of poor countries? Are those on the right track who today downplay the importance of education, learning and training? Or, at least, those who stress the dysfunctionality of much of today’s education? Is a minimalist ‘skills agenda’ for some ‘target groups’ all that we need? What about those within the development aid agenda who again and again forget support for lifelong learning in the form of funding literacy and non-formal or out-of-school youth and adult education as a process that continues throughout life?

We put upfront this critical view of education in or for development to remind ourselves also of what has been said often in earlier times: it has been people with the best education who invented the atom bombs, developed deep water oil extraction and the construction of hazardous oil platforms, and conceived plans whereby crops for the poor become fuel substitutes for the rich.

However, in this article we set out to look more positively at education in relation to transformation, and to the national and international development agendas, as well as asking why progress is slow, circular or even thrown into reverse over issues that seem to many in the adult education and development world to be self-evident.

### **MDG and EFA: The official development agenda, and the persisting difficulty over education and lifelong learning**

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were agreed in the year 2000. In respect of education they concentrated on universal access to primary schooling, paying much less attention to education in an all-inclusive perspective. The draft document circulating at the time of writing for the MDG Summit in September 2010 brought forward and took up some of the critique referred to above, currently stating for the MDG 2 on Education in clause 43(e) the need for

giving greater priority to the transition to post-primary, post-basic and secondary education, vocational training and lifelong learning taking into consideration the cost effectiveness, equity and inclusiveness and socioeconomic relevance of post-primary education as well as the transition from post-primary education to work (UN, 2010)

This is however still far away from declaring the importance or even prerequisite of education, learning and training for children, youth and adults in a lifelong perspective in the process of achieving all of the MDGs.

In the Education for All (EFA) Forum in Dakar in April 2000, six goals were set in the EFA agenda. Two of them – three and four – cover much of what we are discussing here:

Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.

Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults (EFA GMR, 2005: 29).

The attempt successfully to implement the Dakar goals has been a huge task for all involved. Real achievements can be seen only in the ambition to increase the schooling rate at primary school level. There can be no doubt that this is due to the top priority set for this via MDG 2. Almost all external aid went into this, to the neglect of almost all the other MDG goals.

In discussing the aims, programmes, and partners of the neglected areas of youth and adult education for lifelong learning in development, let us not be misunderstood or misinterpreted. We most certainly do not want to minimize the importance of high quality schooling at the primary stage, and indeed at any of the other levels. The times when adult educators argued in an either-or sense for adult education to receive support at the expense of schooling are surely now past. Good schooling is recognised as an essential foundation for the capacity to continue learning and adapting throughout life. But we do make the claim that there is no reason, from a political, an economic or a human rights perspective to exclude or marginalise the learning of youth and adults. This, sadly, is almost the regular case in negotiating bilateral and multilateral agreements.

It must be accepted too that setting priorities within the education budget is tough. There is genuine uncertainty still as to what works best and deserves the support that will always be limited. Even in the 'access debate' there are sophisticated arguments about whether universities should make the main effort to widen their intake across social classes, or whether the main effort belongs within schooling, or even beyond that with the family. Once we get into the unbounded worlds of youth and adult education stretching beyond the mandatory schooling years, and we talk about learning throughout life, do we go beyond what policy-makers feel they can understand and manage? Maybe this is why the lifelong learning agenda, set out so clearly by bodies like UNESCO and the OECD almost forty years ago, evaporates when hard choices for aid and development have to be made.

There is no doubt, however, that EFA and the MDGs have provided a framework, a target, and an accountability structure and that these are helping many countries to identify where to focus their attention. Targets can be two-edged if they are for ever and comprehensively missed, so that failure becomes the accepted norm – it is like crying wolf too often. In this case the monitoring and review processes have proved

robust. To be optimistic, we might say that the basis for collaborative learning and a cycle of improvement is now there.

### **CONFINTEA: The entry point for adult education and learning**

For adult educators, the acronym CONFINTEA now signifies a milestone for orientation and learning internationally, and in building a world-wide community, discourse and even movement. Since 1997 at Hamburg it has stood for the International Conferences on Adult Education that are organised and convened by UNESCO every twelve or so years. Each conference constituted a unique landmark. The first took place in 1949 in Helsingør, Denmark, the fifth in Hamburg in 1997, and the most recent at the end of 2009 in Belem, Brazil. As a requirement for CONFINTEA, national reports have to be provided. They are now posted on the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning website, and are a rich source of information. A major effort was the first ever *Global Report on Adult Education and Learning* (GRALE), seen as a key background document for CONFINTEA VI.

Common themes spanning these sixty years include the need for a much more integrated approach between government departments and development policies, and also far better connection and sharing of responsibility and effort between the State or public sector and the private and especially the NGO, civil society, community-based or third sector. There is also an increasingly strongly shared and clear call for the effective setting of targets, and above all for effective data collection and monitoring against these. In several cases this is linked to a sense that governments may be good at creating policies and even legislation, but very poor at exercising sustained political will to implement.

A marked tendency from at least the 4<sup>th</sup> to the recent 6<sup>th</sup> CONFINTEA has been the rising prominence of the civil society sector, which has asserted (especially through ICAE, see below) the right to learn, and pressed governments to embrace adults' learning as a foundation for development. It has mounted a critique of kinds of failure to govern well which are common to all policy arenas. Notable here is the failure to collaborate and connect up policies across the 'silos' of departments committed to different aspects especially of education, economic, and social development. It has argued also for the importance of local and community effort in finding relevant and effective strategies for both education and sustainable development. There is a tension here: between insisting on high priority and adequate resources from governments, and recognising that often governments are not technically good, or even adequately trusted, to do the local development work well themselves.

The *Belem Framework for Action* says in its Preamble that

the education of young people and adults enables individuals, especially women, to cope with multiple social, economic and political crises, and climate change. Therefore we recognise the key role of adult learning and education in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education for All (EFA) and the UN agenda for sustainable human, social, economic, cultural and environmental development, including gender equality (CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action).

And later on, in the section on Financing, it reads:

we commit ourselves to: (a) accelerating progress towards achieving the CONFINTEA V recommendation to seek investment of at least 6% of GNP in education, and working towards increased investment in adult learning and education...

In support of these strategies, we call upon international development partners to: (f) meet their commitment to filling the financial gaps that prevent the achievement of all EFA Goals, in particular Goals 3 and 4 (youth and adult learning, adult literacy)... (UIL, 2010: 5-8).

### **ICAE: United non-governmental adult education effort**

The International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) is the global network of regional and national adult education organisations and networks covering a wide range of activities. Here we concentrate on its recent involvements and efforts leading towards CONFINTEA VI.

ICAE came into existence in 1973, following what we now think of as CONFINTEA III in Tokyo in 1972. It has played an important role globally ever since, including holding its own sequence of World Assemblies. The most recent of these was held in 2007, on Adults' Right to Learn: Convergence, Solidarity, and Action. In preparation, one of the ICAE Commissions had 'Adult Education, Organisation and Financing' as its theme. This was later well documented in *Adult Education and Development* (dv international, 2008).

ICAE was represented on the Consultative Group to prepare the 2009 CONFINTEA world conference. Through its members it worked vigorously for a strong movement basis to CONFINTEA VI. In 2008 the ICAE Secretariat organised a virtual seminar around the four themes of:

- Poverty, economic inequality and adult learning and education;
- The education and learning rights of migrant women and men;
- The absolute priority of adult literacy;
- New policy and legislation, real implementation, real financial allocation.

This seminar attracted hundreds of participants from around the world, who commented and sent in materials. A follow-up seminar synthesised the discussion into a final document, *CONFINTEA VI. Key issues at stake. ICAE public paper*, which was published in a special edition of *Convergence*, together with materials from the virtual seminar (ICAE, 2007). The volume provided substantial input about past CONFINTEA conferences and the current discussion on adult education. As its next step ICAE set up an Advocacy Commission to engage with ongoing CONFINTEA preparation. This resulted in preparation of the International Civil Society Forum (abbreviated as FISC), which was organised back-to-back with CONFINTEA in Belem in order to bring the positions and recommendations of non-governmental organisations into the sector via the formal CONFINTEA discussions. The relevant document stated that 'Youth and Adult Education, as well as literacy, must be clearly prioritised within international frameworks and national state policies' (ICAE, 2010).

## **Lifelong learning: The big paradigm shift still on the waiting list**

The Delors Report to UNESCO on education in the following century claimed that 'learning throughout life' is the key to a better future (Delors, 1996). Educationists it said should do all that is possible to create opportunities to fulfil individuals' learning needs and related capacities. Learning must be associated with all dimensions of life, lifelong, life-wide, and equally deep. Learning happens and should be supported at and in all times, levels, and forms, whether formal, non-formal or informal. Since then the ever more strident discourse about the knowledge society, and more commonly knowledge economy, has amplified the argument for lifelong learning.

Lifelong learning, as a slogan, but much more as a real policy, includes all sorts of training and re-training on all levels. It has a key role to play in all matters related to employability and active citizenship. Bridges are needed between formal and non-formal educational institutions. Each provider has to play its appropriate respective role. This includes schools, colleges and universities, companies and training institutions, and civil society organisations of all kinds. It is not surprising, of course, that governments have problems working out how to put this to practical effect. It tends to get applauded but then stuck in the too-hard basket.

An unfortunate side effect of neo-liberal individualism in the North has been to place responsibility for learning, or failing to learn and to get on, exclusively at the door of the individual, however deprived and excluded they may be. If it is to be more than a rhetorical slogan, lifelong learning means a societal responsibility for creating a learning environment and the necessary resources for all citizens, new and established, young and old.

Once we accept that adults are interested in and need lifelong learning opportunities, then we confront a simple reality. The highest numbers of learners are adults, young and older included. Thus adult learning should logically be numerically the largest part of the education sector. It should receive at least as much attention as the other sectors or pillars of lifelong learning, if not more, even though the quantum of financial support may for good reason be distributed differently. Youth and adult learning and education should foster active citizenship, strengthen personal growth and secure social inclusion. These purposes go far beyond employability. All require education and training in a lifelong perspective. It is not possible to improve the employability of the workforce in a sustainable way without providing good quality in general and vocational training for youth and adults continuously. Nor can one strengthen mobility and support the satisfactory migration of people – an increasingly big and hot issue in recent years for so many countries, both 'importers' and 'exporters' - without training in languages and intercultural skills for young and older adults alike.

On a policy level the lifelong learning debate should centre much more on investing in people and their education: by governments, employers and the learners themselves. For a while the case for education as an investment rather than a cost on the public budget found favour, but with the global financial crisis and the urge to reduce national indebtedness this argument may now carry little weight. Innovative mechanisms like learners accounts, grant schemes, educational lending and savings have to be analysed and valued. What kinds of implications do these insights have for

policy, organisation and the financing of adult education and training? What structural supports do we need – more financial input to the providing institutions, more incentives for the individuals, or what mix of both?

What is quite clear is that, whatever the best particular fiscal mechanisms in each time and place, the same principles underlying lifelong learning, and the same policy implications that the concept generates, apply to peoples in all parts of the world. These should be integral to development strategies universally, and embedded in all policy portfolios, not just those labelled as Education, Training, Human Resource Development, etc. Lifelong learning is almost universally adopted in principle, but as always a mixture of ideological differences and technical problems hampers its implementation.

### **Non-formal education: Complementary or in competition?**

Work at the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000 showed how difficult it was to have non-formal youth and adult education, learning, and training included as priority areas, especially since they were not part of the MDGs. All the EFA GMRs that have appeared since 2002 have provided a wealth of information, and a strong foundation, for the critical debate that has unfolded around these reports. 2006 saw *Literacy for Life*, and according to the Note on 2012 Report *Meeting the Learning Needs of all Young People and Adults through Equitable Access to Appropriate Learning and Life skills Programs* (EFA GMR 2010b), a major attempt will be made to provide insight into this neglected sector. No doubt, to have robust data and to construct reliable indicators poses a difficult issue; many governments especially in poor countries simply are not yet well equipped to achieve this.

Already, from earlier reports, there are several interesting policies, theories, and practices, with many new initiatives, projects, and programmes. All in all they support the assumption that without strong and permanent structures, including policy and legislation, and without coordination and support, non-formal education for children, youth and adults is not an adequate solution. Neither CONFINTEA nor EFA can settle for and recommend this. For all the creativity, motivation, and energy of the people involved, if non-formal education remains under-resourced and insufficiently governed it will not work. Put simply, NFE is not a cheaper or easier solution. It should not be treated as second class. It cannot simply compensate for schooling but with even less resources. It needs structures based on policy, legislation, and finances, much as do schools and universities.

There is scarcely a government that lacks a policy for schools or higher education. Usually there is legislation for both, with (not always adequate) financial provision. It is quite different for non-formal, youth and adult education. Here, most governments fail to do what is necessary. Many countries have no significant youth and adult education policies. They may be without legislation. Even if this exists only meagre finances are available. Special attention must be paid to out-of-school youth who need orientation and qualifications. Not only must they be equipped with life skills, they must also access income-generation skills to survive in an often fragile informal sector. Taking all this into account, a four-pillar approach is needed: *schools, vocational training, universities, and adult education*, all in a lifelong learning perspective, with formal, non-formal and informal education, many bridges that make

permeability possible, and ladders to move upwards. All four pillars are of equal relevance and need equally sound support structures.

To echo a crucial point, it is a common error and a false dichotomy for governments to provide support just for schooling, but leave international donors to take care of non-formal education projects from left-over sector funds or 'basket' funding. Smaller schemes and pilot projects should win recognition and seek sustainability at an early stage. Otherwise, when funding dries up, project activities die out.

### **Achievements and obstacles: Glass half full or half empty?**

The adult education movement around the globe has followed with keen concern recent information about, discussion and now government actions following the deepening of the global economic and financial crisis. To judge by responses so far, this will lead to a decrease rather than the desperately needed increase to the commitments that were made in respect of fulfilment of the agreed development agenda.

Today, far from being seen and seized as an opportunity, the new fiscal and economic crisis overwhelming the world in past months has merely exacerbated the situation. Political and policy interest in adult learning continues to shrink to a job-training and skills agenda. It largely ignores the essential wider underpinnings of prosperity and socio-economic good health without which sustained economic success for all is impossible. Adult education as an urgent social necessity is suffering the same fate as the environmental movement in response to impending ecological disaster: there is rhetorical acknowledgement and token investment when times are better, but it is brushed aside rather than embraced in policy terms as the correct road-to-recovery investment when crisis occurs.

In such circumstances, poverty and the poor, as well as training for literacy and life skills, tend to be marginalised. In the latter part of last century the gap somewhat narrowed between great wealth and deep poverty. More recently and most disturbingly, it has again, often dramatically, widened within and between countries; and the vital and essential role of adult learning in addressing this inequity, along with its personal, social and economic costs, has been brushed aside.

The trend has yet to be reversed: youth and adult education and learning, including literacy, remain all but neglected in the international development agenda. This needs to be changed. Otherwise, two slogans that have been used in advocacy time and again will still serve to dramatise ironically the failure to understand and to act: *Lifelong learning for the North, and basic education for the South*; and *EFA* translated as *Except for Adults*.

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## **Abstract**

The national and international development agenda looks at education as an important tool for transformation and change. Within education most attention is given to schooling and the wider formal sector of colleges and universities. Much less attention and still less resources go to youth and adult learning, and the non-formal education sector. Lifelong learning systems have yet to be implemented. The article describes and analyses major processes, programmes and organisations like EFA, CONFINTEA, ICAE, and discusses them in the context of development issues.

## **Keywords**

Education for all, lifelong learning, learning needs, literacy, livelihoods, skills, financing, civil society

## **Bio Notes**

**Chris Duke** was founding Secretary-General of the Pascal International Observatory and leads its work on universities and regional engagement. He is an honorary professor at four British and Australian universities and has led the adult education and lifelong learning endeavours of the Australian National University, Warwick, Auckland and RMIT. He has worked on education for development over many years especially with ASPBAE, DVV, ICAE, OECD, Unesco also for the EU, World Bank and other bodies. He served as Associate Secretary-General of ICAE and Secretary-General of ASPBAE.

**Heribert Hinzen** studied at the Universities of Bonn and Heidelberg, Germany, gaining a doctorate in comparative studies with a thesis centring on adult education in Tanzania. He has been working with dvv international since 1977 in headquarters and offices in Sierra Leone and Hungary, and is now Director of the Regional Office for South- and Southeast Asia in Lao PDR. He is an Honorary Professor at the Universities of Pecs and Iasi, and holds an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Pecs, Hungary. He has been long-time editor of *Adult Education and Development*, and *International Perspectives in Adult Education*.

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