

Adult Education Centres as a key to development:
Responsibilities, Structures and Benefits
11-12 October 2017, Tbilisi, Georgia

Conference documentation

საერთაშორისო კონფერენცია

„ზრდასრულთა განათლების ცენტრები და
განვითარება“

თბილისი, 2017

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The Adult Education and Development Conferences (AEDC) organised by DVV International address topics of global relevance and strategic importance for the further promotion of adult education. The fifth AEDC took place in Tbilisi, Georgia in October 2017, and dealt with the topic “Adult Education Centres as key structures to development” with special attention paid to related responsibilities, structures, wider benefits and impacts. All in all, more than 100 experts, practitioners, researchers and other key stakeholders from DVV's global network came together to share concepts and insights, and discuss challenges.

The conference topic was selected for several reasons. The setting-up of sustainable structures for adult education is at the heart of DVV International's overall mission. The international policy dialogue, as reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals and Education 2030 Agenda, gives more and more importance to the promotion of learning institutions for youth and adults at the local level. Last but not least: Over the past few years DVV International and its local partners have successfully established a well-functioning adult education system in Georgia, so it was clear that participants could also learn about good practices through the site visits organised during the conference.

This documentation is meant to share impressions and inform about the main results of the conference. This also includes the key messages which may be used for awareness-raising and lobbying in order to promote adult education centres as key institutions for development in the future.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the people who were involved in this Adult Education and Development Conference that for the first time shifted its location from Bonn, Germany, to one of our partner countries abroad. Hence, my special thanks go to all the colleagues from DVV International's office in Georgia who organised this most memorable and professionally implemented event.

Christoph Jost
Director, DVV International

November 2017



Programme

WEDNESDAY, October 11th 2017

10.00 Opening ceremony

- Christoph Jost, DVV International, Germany
- Monika Lenhard, Counsellor and Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, Georgia
- Aleksandre Jejelava, Vice Premier of Georgia, Minister of Education and Science
- Prof. Dr. Rita Süßmuth, former president of the German parliament, Germany (Video message)

10.30 Key messages on adult education centres

11.00 Coffee break

11.30 Thematic block 1: Public responsibility in adult and youth education

14.30 Lunch

15.30 Excursion (Koda Adult Education Centre/old Tbilisi)

THURSDAY, October 12th 2017

9.30 Welcome

9.40 Thematic block 2: Adult education centres as key structures

11.00 Coffee break

11.30 Thematic block 2: working groups

13.15 Lunch

14.15 Thematic block 3: Impact and wider benefits of adult education centres

15.45 Coffee break

16.00 Promoting adult education centres in future – key messages

17.00 End of the Conference

20.00 Reception: 15 years of DVV International in Georgia

“Adult Education Centres as key to development – Responsibilities, Structures and Benefits”

11-12 October 2017, Tbilisi, Georgia



“Community learning centre” in Laos



“Centre d'apprentissage” in Morocco

Community-based approaches, learning spaces and centres are part and parcel of international policy agendas such as CONFINTEA and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). They are prominently featured in the UNESCO Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (RALE). Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Global Citizenship Education (GCED) are instrumental for the future of our planet, and their implementation requires an institutional basis at the local level. Institutions for education and training of youth and adults in the community are indispensable for managing social transformation towards the establishment of a learning society.

They are flexible and respond to changing needs and new demands of individuals and society in the era of globalisation, digitalisation, migration, demographic changes and technological development.



“Volkshochschule Bonn” in Germany
Source: Stadt Bonn/Michael Sondermann

On this background, DVV International with the support of its partners decided to dedicate the 5th Adult Education and Development Conference (AEDC) to adult education centres – their roles and functions, the diversity of structures, responsible stakeholders, and their impact and benefits for individuals, communities and the local development of societies. While focusing on similarities, the global and regional perspectives and experiences that were shared provided a substantial variety of examples. Such diversity of approaches was appreciated with a view to their different contexts and purposes, historically and culturally.

The conference took place in Tbilisi, Georgia, where DVV International, jointly with its local partners, has been supporting a well-functioning adult education system for the last 15 years. More than 100 national and international stakeholders and experts, practitioners, researchers and other key stakeholders exchanged information about their approaches, experiences and the various challenges encountered. They shared concepts and insights on the potential of adult education centres for development, with a particular focus on responsibilities, structures, benefits and wider impacts. The meeting was divided into presentations, panel sessions and workshops on important areas relevant to adult education centres and related systems.

“Centro de educación” in Bolivia



“Adult education centre” in Georgia



The first thematic block “Public responsibility in adult and youth education” focused on sharing experiences and discussing roles and functions. Different models and instruments for cooperation and interlinking stakeholders, such as local, regional and national governments, associations, social partners and non-state actors were presented and debated.



The second block “Adult education centres as key structures” fostered exchange and discussion on the structure of adult education centres, with a particular focus on their integration in national education systems and local communities.

The third thematic unit “Impact and wider benefits of adult education centres” presented examples of evidence on the benefits and wider impacts related to investments into adult education centres and their participants, taking societal, economic and cultural aspects in particular into account.

The participants in the conference also had the opportunity to visit an adult education centre in Tbilisi, and had the chance to compare the institution, programmes, courses, participants, and infrastructure with experiences in their own countries.



Impressions from the Conference

Key messages

In the preparatory process and during the conference, a number of issues arose which should be taken forward to strengthen the system and structure of these centres as well as to expand and improve their programmes and activities towards lifelong learning. It was noted and discussed that local centres need service and support structures at the provincial, national, regional and global level for exchange and co-operation, professionalisation and financial sustainability. The existing associations, networks, platforms and umbrella organisations perform important roles and functions in relation to advocacy for quality adult education, whether as formal or non-formal provision, as well as for the recognition of all prior and continuing education, training and learning.

Participants and stakeholders agreed on a set of **key messages** that were developed with the involvement of the global network of DVV International, and validated and refined in the course of the conference. They are structured according to the three interlinked thematic blocks of the conference and meant to enhance the status, provision and impact of the adult education centres/ community learning centres (AEC/ CLC). They focus on strengths, challenges, requirements, and recommendations. However, they may be further refined and adapted to even better serve local purposes and learning needs across the globe.

At the end of this 5th AECD on “Adult Education Centres as a key to development – Responsibilities, Structures and Benefits” formulated the following key messages:



Participants comment on the key messages

Key messages

1. Public responsibility in adult education

- **Lifelong learning as a human right:** The right to education is enshrined as a universal human right. In our age of globalisation, digitalisation, and fundamental demographic and technological changes, public support to learning throughout life is a must.
- **Education is a public good:** AEC/CLC are institutions providing education and lifelong learning for all, leaving no-one behind. They allow for inclusive education through access for people in poverty-stricken areas and for all marginalised groups.
- **International discourse and commitments:** International policy discourse emphasizes the concept of life-long-learning as a paradigm for future education systems, and assigns increasing importance to the setting-up of institutional structures at the local level in related policy papers and development strategies.
- **Community anchoring and public mission:** AEC/CLC are embedded in the community and should be the key public institutions on the local level providing lifelong learning opportunities for adults, and thereby contribute to community development.
- **Roles and functions:** AEC/CLC are multifunctional and innovative institutions. They cater for education and training, provide community information and service provision, and serve as a social and cultural meeting place, as well as a place for community development to respond to global challenges and changes at the local level.

- **General, specific, flexible:** AEC/CLC provide a variety of education opportunities. Priorities vary from region to region, ranging from basic education, literacy and foreign language courses, income generating activities, vocational training and the provision of life skills, to measures supporting social cohesion and conflict prevention.
- **Policy, legislation, and financing:** For AEC/CLC to function well, similar governance and support structures as those available for schools, vocational training and higher education in respect to operational, financial, and human resources are needed.



Katarina Popovic,
International Council for
Adult Education (ICAE)

“Public responsibility in adult education does not mean that the state has to cover for everything. We should aim to achieve as broad funding as possible, coming from a variety of sources. The job of the state is to make sure that citizens are able to realise their human right to lifelong learning, and that adult education is accessible by and affordable for all.”

2. Adult education centres as important structures

- **Demography:** Children and youth should have the best quality education possible. However, adults make up the largest group in society, and adulthood is the longest period during life. AEC/CLC provide qualifications, competencies and skills for adults, even in later life.
- **Expanded learning environments:** The digital trend in the age of globalisation has also reached educational institutions. AEC/CLC will have to cope with digitalisation and fundamental changes in learning environments, timetables, and content. New digital avenues combined with institutional back-up, convenient meeting places and pathways of blended learning will help.
- **Formal, non-formal and informal:** AEC/CLC are able to build on prior learning and provide a bridge between sub-sectors, thus helping to compensate for deficiencies and gaps. They develop their full potential if embedded in an interconnected education system, and when mechanisms for recognition, validation and accreditation exist or are continuously developed.
- **Human and physical resources:** AEC/CLC depend on qualified, well trained full- and part-time staff, and the engagement of volunteers for administration and teaching. Pre- and in-service staff training, including e-learning, should be given the highest priority. The infrastructure must be learner-friendly, and serve the aims of inclusion and diversity.
- **Learning and teaching:** While communities know best what their challenges and requirements are,



Aleksandre Jejelava,
Former Vice Premier of
Georgia and Minister of
Education and Science

With the development of infrastructure, tourism, production and export, vocational jobs are created en masse. Worthwhile academic jobs are in the minority. So we need people with higher education and who have tried to pursue their original career and try to move them to vocational, technical jobs while they may not want to do that. AECs can retrain people en masse to give them the skills needed by employers.”

they often need support translating these into curricula, programmes, and teaching and learning material. Hence, participatory assessments, access to materials and capacity development play a crucial role for the establishment of AEC/CLC.

- **Ownership, management and support:** AEC/CLCs should be institutions primarily owned and run by communities. Governmental stakeholders should support sustainability and professionalisation through training, funding, M&E frameworks and regulations that can be managed by the community.
- **Cooperation, partnerships, networking:** AEC/CLC offer opportunities for information and counselling to learners and potential participants. To respond to expanded learning needs, networking and increased cooperation between providers will help. AEC/CLC run by civil society or private organisations should set-up umbrella bodies such as associations for joint awareness raising, lobbying and advocacy, networking and fundraising.

3. Benefits and wider impact of adult education centres

- **Citizenship, empowerment, sustainability:** AEC/CLC build the backbone for access and participation of adults in learning, promoting democratic values through empowerment, and active citizenship for sustainable development; they can serve as local hubs and convenient meeting places within easy reach for adults and the larger community to engage with ESD and GCED.
- **Migration and inclusion:** AEC/CLC can operate and coordinate as local hubs for managing integration; they support the social and economic integration of refugees and internally displaced people, migrants and returnees. They can help to ensure the right to education for all, including in migration.



Lee Huy Lam,
SEAMEO Regional Centre
for Lifelong Learning, Vietnam

“The term lifelong learning can be problematic as it is very broad and adult education tends to get lost. Many governments reduce the term to childhood education, secondary education and higher education, claiming that with these they already support lifelong learning. So we have to be very specific and make it clear that we promote adult education.”

- **Poverty reduction and local development:** AEC/CLC can offer integrated learning approaches combining literacy with skills training and can thus be important drivers of economic development from below for farmers, workers and self-employed people in the rural or urban informal sector, as well as for small enterprises.
- **Cross- and inter-sectoral:** Next to education, AEC/CLC have significant impacts on other development sectors. Activities, inter alia, contribute to poverty reduction, improved health and well-being, gender equality, reducing inequality, local economic development, conflict prevention and promotion of peace.
- **Achievements and benefits:** Much more research is needed on AEC/CLC to produce robust data and provide evidence on the real accomplishments of adult education within lifelong learning, highlighting the wider benefits for individuals, communities and society in general.
- **Indicators and impact:** The creation of well-designed M&E frameworks is instrumental to document achievements of AEC/CLC. M&E should cover the centres themselves (infrastructure, funding, resources and staff), the relevance of programmes and activities performed, participation and drop-out rates, wider benefits and long-term impacts.
- **Education Agenda 2030 and the SDGs:** Inclusive, equitable, quality education and lifelong learning are at the heart of the attitudes, values, knowledge, competencies, and skills needed for sustainable development; how can AEC/CLC better contribute, and act as local hubs to promote and implement the SDGs?



On the occasion of the Conference, DVV International published a special issue in its IPE series. The contributions provide an insight into the theory and practice of the worldwide work of DVV International and its partners but also in the work of the Volkshochschulen in Germany.

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DVV International is the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association (Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband e.V).

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