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**IPE**  
International Perspectives  
in Adult Education

# Agenda 2030 – Education and Lifelong Learning in the Sustainable Development Goals

Heribert Hinzen/Sylvia Schmitt (Editors)

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## International Perspectives in Adult Education – IPE 75

The reports, studies and materials published in this series aim to further the development of theory and practice in adult education. We hope that by providing access to information and a channel for communication and exchange, the series will serve to increase knowledge, deepen insights and improve cooperation in adult education at international level.

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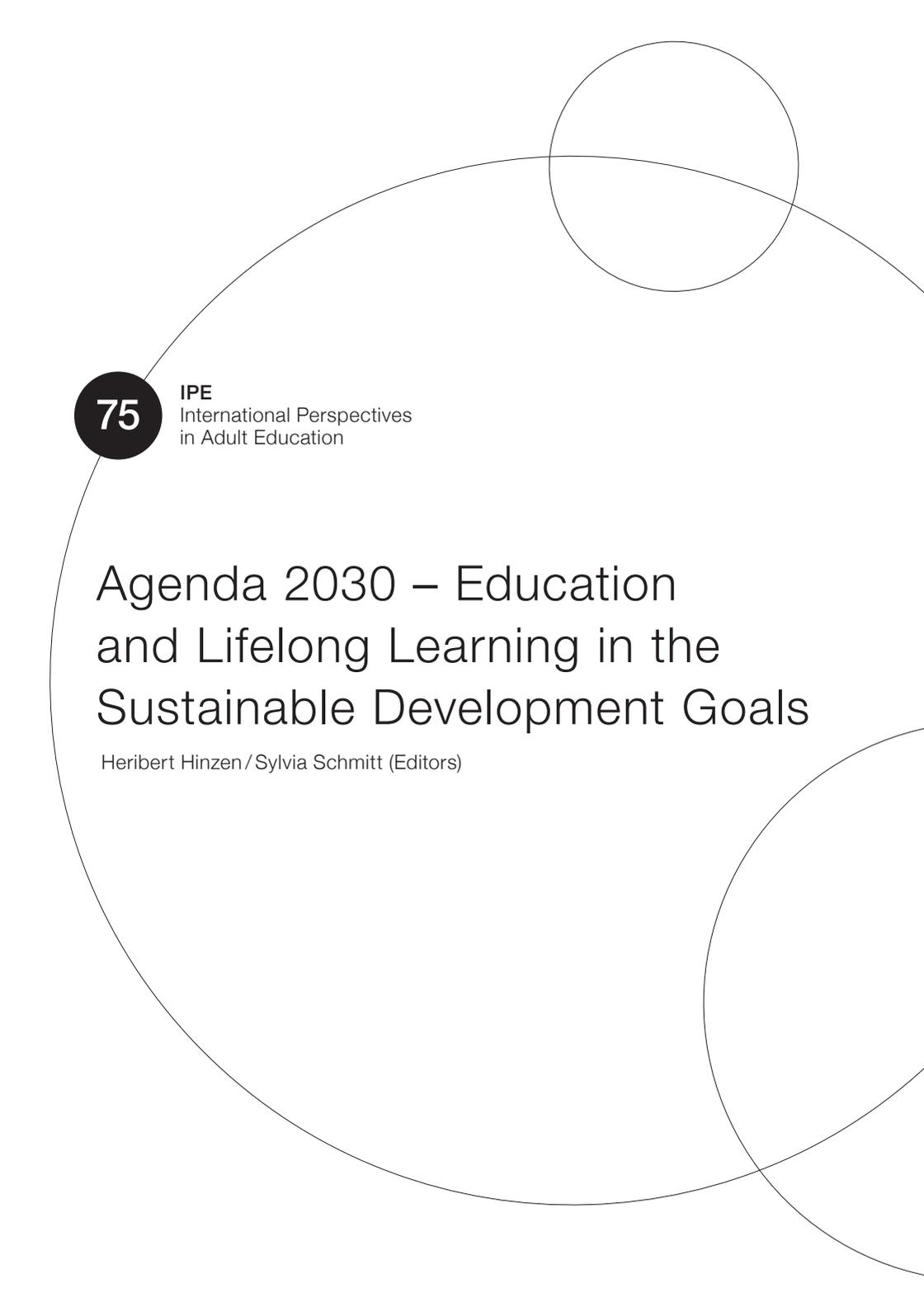
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# Editorial

It is our assumption that Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Education Agenda 2030 will be guiding global, regional and national education, development, and funding policies and practices in the years to come. The UN agreed indicators may have to be included and adapted in proposals and used for monitoring and evaluation purposes. It will also be a requirement to know the goals, targets and indicators very well in the policy discourse that will unfold further in the dialogues on education for development on all levels.

For DVV International and our partners it will be of critical importance to discuss and define what these global goals and targets really mean for the practice of adult education on the micro, meso, and macro levels on which we implement our adult education work. To inform this necessary discussion, these articles on specific areas have been put together to contribute to the debate within the international, regional and national adult education stakeholder scene. The major outcome documents which will be used as reference materials for the coming decade have also been added.

This volume therefore invites one to an in-depth discussion of the early implementation of Education Agenda 2030 and, at the same time, makes a contribution to it. Through the selection of the articles, we would like to draw your attention to the viewpoint of adult education, in the sense of a constructive discourse in regard to the many challenges and opportunities. Important institutional actors of the Education Agenda accepted our invitation with a contribution. Thus Ulrike Hanemann from UIL clarifies the lifelong literacy aspect as an essential tool for the successful implementation of a sustainable development agenda. From the perspective of UNESCO headquarters, Sobhi Tawil draws attention to the complex and challenging future prospects for education in the SDGs. Maria Khan introduced the emphasis on civil society throughout the Education Agenda 2030 process. Here she now makes inquiries about the necessities of practical implementation for our regional partners ASPBAE.

The global players repeatedly stress the importance of all the social forces in the implementation of Agenda 2030 in the next 15 years. This was also robustly reflected in the composition of actors on the HLPF (High

Level Political Forum). However: Where there is light, there is also plenty of shade. We therefore asked Christine Meissler from Brot für die Welt (Bread for the World) to give an assessment of the role and potential of civil society worldwide to be able to assume the mantle of administrator of justice that it has been assigned.

Julia Steffen is the DVV International spokesperson for Global Learning Education in the VHS. She presents the goals and practices of the current activities in this area and asks what the potential implications are for adult education in Germany from the new Education Agenda 2030. Analyses by Aaron Benavot and Ashley Stepanek, both from the Global Education Monitoring Report, issue warnings about the background of neglect during the EFA period and the need for a great deal of attention and care for a highly relevant monitoring process as well as the appropriate selection of indicators for lifelong learning and adult education in the SDGs process.

DVV International has a programme area that aims at information and communication. Important instruments that are used are the website, the annual journal *Adult Education and Development* (AED), and the series *International Perspectives in Adult Education* (IPE). All of them have been used for advocacy and documentation, both now and in the past. The WEF in Dakar was presented intensively in AED 54 and 55, and the preparatory process for the education goal in the SDGs was taken up in AED 80, entirely about preparing and advocating for a better position of adult education in the Post 2015 agenda. AED 82 already covered *Global Citizenship Education* as a key outcome of Goal 4, and AED 83, now being prepared, will deal with knowledge, competencies and skills. IPE 72 looked at *Adult education in an interconnected world. Cooperation in lifelong learning for sustainable development*. Now we want to use this IPE 75 about Agenda 2030 as an advocacy tool for a stronger adult education and lifelong learning contribution toward the world we want.

To all who have cooperated with us on making this publication possible and help further in its dissemination, we are very grateful. If it is widely used to improve our practice in adult education and lifelong learning for sustainable development, and to provide good arguments for the policy dialogue on all levels, then it serves the purpose we had in mind when we worked on it.

**Heribert Hinzen**  
**Sylvia Schmitt**



# Advancing EFA and MDGs to Goal 4 in the Sustainable Development Goals: Will there be wider benefits for adult education and learning in sustainable development?

*Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the new global architecture of the international community up to the year 2030. They were agreed upon by the United Nations in September 2015, following the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which resulted from the UN Summit in the year 2000. Whereas the 8 MDGs were predominantly focusing on the so-called developing countries, the 17 SDGs have a clear global commitment for all nations and their people. DVV International sees, in the support of structurally anchored adult education, substantial opportunities for social development in terms of a sustainable, equitable and equality-directed implementation of the Agenda 2030. Without adequate conditions or the adequate political and financial will, however, the space for social actors and their institutions is narrow.*

## Flashback

Education for All (EFA) was declared by the World Education Forum (WEF) in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000. There were 6 goals that covered education, schooling, training, and learning in a lifelong dimension from early childhood to adult literacy and the continuing education of adults, integrating and mainstreaming gender and quality issues. Unfortunately, the MDGs incorporated only primary schooling as the education goal, and literacy as an indicator. Subsequently our field of youth and adult education in the framework of lifelong learning was hardly to be found in any national policy or budget, nor taken up by international organisations or funding agencies in a relevant way. This narrowed-down view was heavily critiqued in the *Bonn Declaration on Financing Adult Education for Development* (DVV International 2009), suggesting ways forward to national Governments, intergovernmental organisations, and donors.

The *EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR)* was installed in 2002 to provide, on an annual basis, information and reflection, as much as possible based on robust data, and measured against a set of indicators agreed upon in Dakar. However, indicators on youth and adult education, non-formal education and skills were weak. Nevertheless, two of the GMRs in 2006 and 2012 looked at *Literacy for Life*, and *Youth and Skills. Putting education to work*. Subsequently, the 2015 GMRs that covered achievements and failures for the whole EFA period found that our sector of youth and adults in education, learning and training received the least attention, and failed to reach the Dakar goals. The report notes: "...very few countries met the EFA literacy target of halving their 2000 adult literacy rate by 2015", and points at "factors that may help explain this poor record. First of all, global commitment was weak. Calls for action to focus on a more holistic view of literacy at the global level were not matched by a willingness to adequately fund programmes at the national level." (EFA GMR 2015,150)

## From Post 2015 to Agenda 2030

In the year 2012 a process called Post 2015 started to analyse what had worked and what not for the MDGs as well as for EFA. Evaluation reports, strategic documents, and critical reflections started to float around. They were presented in numerous conferences, published widely, and debated face-to-face and online. Important new priorities emerged and paradigm shifts were presented, very much in line with the interests of the diverse range of stakeholders, which can be better understood in the context of

## **SDGs Goal 4: Quality Education**

### **Targets**

**4.1** By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

**4.2** By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education

**4.3** By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university

**4.4** By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship

**4.5** By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

**4.6** By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy

**4.7** By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development

their overall policies and objectives as well as from an historical perspective (Akkari, Lauwerier 2015). But in conclusion there was no serious argument against positioning Post 2015 to deal with an unfinished EFA agenda as well as engaging fully with what is required now and in the nearer future by a fast changing world. Education advocates argued again for a more visible inclusion of youth and adults into the future agenda, and it was stated early that adult education and learning is a key to implement all other development goals. (DVV International 2013)

One of the most important lessons learnt for post 2015 was the full integration of the EFA follow-up into the emerging SDGs. Korea hosted the WEF in May 2015, which in the Incheon Declaration came up with an overarching goal "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". The WEF participants acclaimed this overall goal and its 7 targets and recommended it to New York for inclusion in the SDGs. The UN agreed to have the full outcome of the WEF as Goal 4 for the Agenda 2030. At that time a global process of consultation and decision making on education issues came to an end, which the conveners argued had been the broadest and deepest ever in the policy on education history.

If one takes a comparative look at the 6 EFA goals and the 7 targets of Goal 4 in the SDGs, then

it may be surprising how close they are in many respects. However, there is one area which is completely new, as it goes beyond knowledge, competencies, and skills by bringing important aspects of attitudes and values as aims and outcomes of learning. They are covered by a target having as key words “education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development” and thereby bridging well into the spirit of all other SDGs.

## **Advocacy, development policy and aid**

DVV International has been strongly engaged in the process from Dakar to Incheon, mostly in partnership with the global and regional adult education NGOs like ICAE, ASPBAE, CEAAL and EAEA, advocating the right to education in a lifelong learning perspective. Additionally, in several countries partner governments and stakeholders were part and parcel of national coalitions to strengthen education in the new development agenda. This process has not yet fully come to an end as the consultative process will lead to the finalised set of global, regional, national and thematic indicators on all the 7 education targets which will then be proclaimed by the UN only in autumn 2016. But again, this is not the end of the need to continue advocacy on all levels, eventually up to the end of the SDGs period in 2030.

We may have to take a look again at the world of international development policy related to adult education from the inter-junction of ended but not successfully completed EFA and MDGs. We will also re-evaluate the implementation processes regarding the transformation of global society towards sustainable development and a sustainable educational Goal 4 in which lifelong learning and adult education should be ensured for all. Since the signing of Agenda 2030, education colleagues from assorted regions have reported on how nothing very different can be expected from the various efforts and the current pace in implementing this agenda.

In Germany, for example, a Development Cooperation (DC)<sup>1</sup> budget was adopted which is 0.52% higher. This increase is, for among other things, to finance German language courses for the many refugees who have come to Germany, for their integration, but also to finance literacy courses. The development policy budget for education, for non-formal education and adult education has almost stagnated for years. Despite

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1/ German: Entwicklungszusammenarbeit (EZ)

the agreed and adopted Goal 4 in Agenda 2030 for inclusive and lifelong learning, worldwide so far we see no changes in international or national education budget allocations.

The Ministry of Education in Ethiopia refers to the fulfillment of MDGs Goal 3 on gender parity, EFA and education figures for Ethiopia. However, the country is fighting one of the biggest droughts in over 20 years. Na-

tional short and medium term priorities for the education sector are currently therefore differently prioritised. Overall, the international financial conferences last year – inter alia, in Addis Ababa –

**MDGs Goal 3:** Promote gender equality and empower women

brought clear results: neither additional ODA<sup>2</sup> resources, nor increases in bilateral commitments or other tax collection mechanisms were agreed for financing of the Agenda, including the Education Agenda 2030.

“Aid to education stagnates, jeopardizing global targets” – this the title of a policy paper that the team now called Global Education Monitoring Report produced in April 2016, claiming that even for the usually better financed parts of the formal education sector, especially primary and secondary schooling, not even one seventh of what is required in the form of aid beyond the national contribution have been pledged so far. (GEM 2016 a)

## Indicators and monitoring impact

According to the Unesco Institute for Statistics (UIS)<sup>3</sup>, in half of all countries for which there are statistics, adequate data analysis on funding in education is almost impossible. These states often do not have robust data on all sectors of the national education system, whether it is inclusive or balanced, adequately or fairly funded, nor what amount would be realistically needed for the different education sectors. Therefore it is almost impossible to establish the effectiveness of the (formal) education system. Adult education and non-formal education tends to be even more rarely reflected in the statistics or adequately addressed, neither in the financial requirements nor in the financial expenses.

Ultimately, it was the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDGs Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) of the UN Statistics Commission – specially created for the development and testing of global indicators for the implementation

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2/ Öffentliche Entwicklungszusammenarbeit Mittel – Official Development Assistance (ODA)

3/ <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Pages/default.aspx>

and monitoring of the 17 global goals – which submitted the audit for subsequent adoption by the UN General Assembly (UN GA), including also the set of indicators by the educational stakeholders which have been tested, checked and only marginally changed.

The importance of the creation and development of relevant and measurable indicators is crucial to achieve the educational objective. The indicators at the international level to measure the implementation of the educational objectives for adult education and lifelong learning show once more the political and programmatic significance of this indicator process. In addition, the UN system as well as the international community showed reasonable flexibility in their management responsibility in the development of global indicators, which proved to be politically more important than initially meant by their allocation to statistics professionals.

The current international economic (dis-)order and the Agenda 2030 still must prove themselves to be coherent and compatible. The litmus test is the reconstruction of the global framework for decent life and work for all, a human rights-based approach which integrates everyone. But how will it be done? Who is committed to this agenda? By whom will the monitoring be carried out?

In addition, in the context of Agenda 2030, a self-evident question of power of interpretation and the “right” economic as well as socio-political path also arises. National and international approaches by themselves already point to paths which have been embarked on – flight and migration, or TTIP, or the effects of global economic trade, or selected climate policies. In many countries around the world it is still unknown to what extent the people perceive Government performance in monitoring as well as in the implementation of the sustainable development agenda, or what place it may and must have in the development of national indicators for the sustainable development agenda.

To inform this necessarily critical discussion in Germany and globally, a new instrument by DVV International may help. An *Impact Report 2009-2015* has just been published looking at impact chains on the macro, meso, and micro levels and the necessity of “creating favorable framework conditions for adult education” (DVV International 2016, 10). Thereby strong arguments are presented which are based on a certain level of evidence of practical experiences that the human right to education must mean more than schooling and children, that education and learning for youth and adults is of equal importance, that literacy, knowledge, skills and competencies for work and life need to be continuously up-dated. Thus policy implications for the importance of adult education within lifelong learning as a prerequisite for the implementation of all the SDGs will be getting more and more evident.

## Outlook

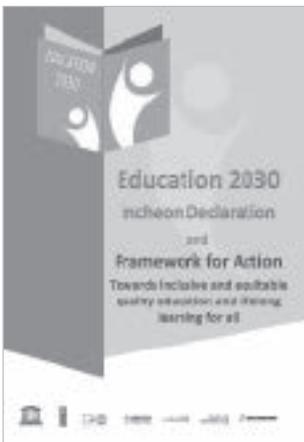
One year after the adoption of the 2030 sustainability agenda, with its 17 global goals and many targets, the global indicators have almost been agreed upon; it is still to be seen how these global indicators will be translated into the regional and national levels. For the education sector, Goal 4 with its targets and means of implementation are somehow the follow-up which the educators developed for the WEF as a completion of the EFA phase and simultaneously as a prelude to the implementation of Agenda 2030. Educators at all levels once again emphasised the importance of education as an “engine” for the rebuilding of the global society and the global economy towards a more sustainable system for the planet Earth.

The relevance of such a UN-run process in its comprehensive non-binding but normative validity as well as its common global dialogue and negotiation has become clearer in the months since the adoption of Agenda 2030. The challenges, however, of such a complex holistic framework to be implemented also became clearer as well, as we saw the limited response to such challenges by the international community, especially when it comes to finances.

CONFINTEA is the other important UNESCO-led international process on adult education. Here every 12 years the global adult education community meets – looking back and forward. Currently the mid-term of CONFINTEA VI is under preparation for early 2017, and how to integrate both responses will spark a decisive debate.

*Education for people and planet: Creating sustainable futures for all* is the title for the next Global Education Monitoring Report. According

to the concept note it will analyse the “complex interrelationships and links between education and key developments sectors”. (GEM 2016 b) The adult education and learning community will be interested to look at the implications this document will provide for the future policy and practice of our field.



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# Education and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

*With the narrower MDGs focus on primary education in lower income countries, the learning needs of youth and adults were somewhat neglected in the global education agenda during the period 2000-2015. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development articulates a much broader vision of the role of education in societal development. While reaffirming the right to basic education and focus areas articulated within EFA, the 2030 Agenda also introduces new features that reflect an ambitious and holistic approach to education and learning in the twenty-first century. Among these, is a renewed new focus on the learning of youth and adults in a lifelong perspective essential for the realisation of most sustainable development goals for 2030.*

Global agendas have served as influential policy frameworks for national and international efforts in education development. The scope and ambition of these agendas, however, have evolved considerably in the past quarter of a century. From a broad vision based on the right to education for all children, youth and adults proposed by the Education for All (EFA) movement as early as 1990, the scope of the global education agenda narrowed with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted in 2000. With the narrower MDGs focus on primary education in lower income countries, the learning needs of youth and adults were somewhat neglected in the global education agenda during the period 2000-2015. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development articulates a much broader vision of the role of education in societal development. While reaffirming the right to basic education and focus areas articulated within EFA, the 2030 Agenda also introduces new features that reflect an ambitious and holistic approach to education and learning in the twenty-first century. Among these is a renewed new focus on the learning of youth and adults in a lifelong perspective essential for the realisation of most sustainable development goals for 2030.

### **From Education for All of 1990 to the Millennium Development Framework of 2000**

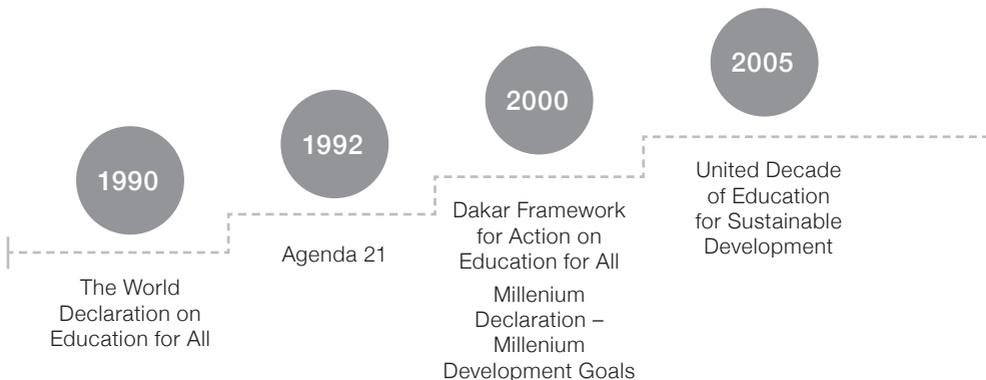
As early as 1990, the international community made a bold commitment to meet the basic learning needs of all children, youth and adults across the world by 2000. Inspired by the principle of the right to basic education for all, Education for All (EFA) was intended to be a universal agenda engaging all societies both in the North and the South. It was grounded in a broad understanding of basic education that encompassed both formal and non-formal education for learners of all ages. This commitment was renewed at the 2000 World Education Forum where six goals were rearticulated relative to early childhood care and development, primary education, literacy and skills for youth and adults, gender equality, and improving the quality of basic education.

Six months after the adoption of the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All (UNESCO 2000), the Millennium Development Framework for 2000-2015 articulated eight goals, among which one was dedicated to achieving universal primary education. As a comprehensive development framework, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) became the key reference for international development efforts, including in the area of education. This overshadowed EFA as the main reference guiding global educational development. With its focus on primary education, the MDGs

narrowed the scope of the global education agenda from a universal agenda aimed at ensuring basic education for all children, youth, and adults in all countries, as proposed by EFA, to one focused essentially on access of children to primary education in lower income countries in the South.

## The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

This, however, changed in the run-up to 2015, recognising the need to broaden the vision of education within the global development agenda. Indeed, consultations on post 2015 development acknowledged that we lived in a world characterised by paradoxical global development trends. Patterns of global economic growth were clearly acknowledged as unsustainable and leading to growing ecological pressure and climate change. Greater wealth was explicitly associated with growing patterns of vulnerability, inequality and exclusion. Finally, while the world was becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent, there was also a perception of growing levels of tension, intolerance, and violence undermining social cohesion (UNESCO 2015a). Recognising this, the global development agenda for 2030 places sustainable human and social development at the centre of its preoccupations (UN 2015). It is a vision of development in which economic growth is to be guided by environmental stewardship and a central concern for social justice. This globally shared concern for sustainability implies a universal agenda relevant to all societies both in the global North and the global South. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has become a globally-shared ambition and a truly collective endeavour. It is an inter-governmental commitment comprised of seventeen aspirational goals that address shared challenges at the global and local levels.



## Consultations on post 2015 education and development

This new universal global commitment results from what is arguably the most inclusive process of consultation in the history of the United Nations, reflecting substantive input from all sectors of society, all actors of the international community and from all parts of the world. All countries, the entire United Nations system, experts and a cross-section of civil society, business and, most importantly, millions of people around the world, have committed themselves to this comprehensive agenda which seeks to address shared global concerns and to promote the common good. In terms of education, as early as 2012, UNESCO and UNICEF jointly initiated broad-based consultations with governments and other partners around the post 2015 education and development agenda. These consultations culminated in the 2014 Global Education for All Meeting and the adoption of the Muscat Agreement which informed the shape and scope of the education goal and targets proposed for the global education agenda beyond 2015. The ambitious proposal served as the foundation for the Incheon Declaration on Education 2030 adopted at the 2015 World Education Forum (2015b). The Incheon Declaration expresses the collective commitment of the global education community to an ambitious education goal within the comprehensive global framework of the sustainable development goals. This broad process of consultation and consensus-building leading up to 2015 strongly influenced the shape of the education goal and targets that found their way into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in New York in September 2015.



## **Key features of Education 2030**

Education is central to the realisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Education within the comprehensive 2030 Agenda is essentially articulated as a stand-alone Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) which aims at ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. It is a global commitment to ensure equitable opportunities to education in a holistic and lifelong learning perspective based on a humanistic approach in which education is seen as a fundamental right and a public good. Beyond this goal, however, there are also a series of explicit education-related targets in other sustainable development goals devoted to health, gender equality, sustainable consumption and production, economic growth and decent work, as well as climate change mitigation. By focusing on enhancing access to effective and relevant learning throughout life for all, the broad global Education 2030 agenda is intended to be aspirational and transformative.

The scope of the education goal in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development builds on and goes beyond the EFA agenda. Recognising that the EFA commitment to meet the basic learning needs of all children, youth and adults had not been achieved, SDG 4 includes commitments to ensure basic education for all children and youth. This includes a commitment to provide at least one year of pre-primary education and a full cycle of primary and secondary education of twelve years for all. It also includes a commitment to ensure universal youth literacy by 2030. In all cases, basic educational opportunities should result in effective and relevant learning outcomes. In addition, SDG 4 also commits to ensuring equal opportunity in access to post-basic learning opportunities whether through vocational skills development at secondary and post-secondary levels, or through higher education.

## **Implications of a more ambitious agenda**

SDG 4 promotes expanded access to all levels of education in a holistic and lifelong learning approach based on the principles of education as a basic right and as a public good. This has a range of implications for the development of national education systems which concern legislation, financing, as well as policy and planning processes.

In terms of legislation, Education 2030 articulates clear commitments to universal youth literacy, to universalizing at least one year of pre-primary education, twelve years of public and free primary and secondary education (of which at least nine years are to be compulsory), and to equal



*World without hunger: Vegetable cultivation in West Africa*

*Source: DVV International*

opportunity in access to post-basic education and training for youth and adults. These commitments may require adaptation of national legislation to ensure the right to learning throughout life. While the right to education is most often explicitly reflected in legislation on compulsory education/ schooling, a broader approach to the right to learning throughout life would also need to encompass labour legislation and potential provisions for training and continuing adult education.

The ambition of the Education 2030 agenda to expand access to learning opportunities for all throughout life also clearly places greater pressure on public funding of education. There is a need to ensure more efficient use of limited resources and to promote greater accountability in use of public resources for education. Moreover, it is necessary to seek ways in which to supplement public education and training budgets through greater fiscal capacity, new partnerships with non-state actors, as well as through advocacy for increased official development assistance.

Moreover, the fact that the Education 2030 agenda concerns all levels of formal and non-formal education, as well as learners of all age groups, requires a truly system-wide approach to education policy, planning, and coordination. Sector coordination mechanisms will have to include the range of departments that are involved in early childhood care and education, primary and secondary education, vocational skills development at secondary and post-secondary levels, as well as literacy and non-formal education. Finally, the lifelong learning approach highlighted in Education 2030 will require effective systems of recognition, validation and accreditation of learning and competencies acquired outside for formal education and training institutions. Such systems are essential for the establishment of pathways between formal and less formal learning opportunities, as well as between education, training and work.

### **New challenges in an increasingly complex world**

The broader and more ambitious scope of the new global education agenda is a welcome development and a necessary condition for grappling with societal development challenges in an increasingly interdependent and complex world. But will it be enough to guide education development in the future. Over the coming years, rising levels of complexity will consolidate a new global landscape of learning which will continue to challenge our traditional approaches to education and development. This new context of learning is characterised by the blurring of boundaries between public and private education, between global and local levels of policy-making, as well as between formal and less formal learning.

Indeed, today's educational landscape is characterised by growing and increasingly diversified non-state engagement in education. The diversification and multiplication of stakeholders involved in education and training at all levels is partly the result of growing demand for voice, accountability and transparency in public affairs. It is also a consequence of the need to ease the growing pressure on public funding resulting from the spectacular expansion of access to formal education witnessed over the past two decades at all levels. Growing non-state engagement in education complements public financing and can provide greater choice, as well as improve the quality and relevance of learning. Yet, non-state engagement in education can also possibly reproduce and exacerbate inequalities, in particular when education is opened to the market and to

profit-making interests. These changes compel us to re-contextualise what is meant by the foundational principle of education as a public good that has guided education policy over the past decades.

Moreover, the nation-state is no longer the only player in education policy. In an increasingly interdependent, interconnected and mobile world, the rationales guiding education policy-making increasingly account for global development trends and are no longer solely focused on local and national level realities. Indeed, the intensification of globalisation, the growing mobility of people, and of the flow of ideas has given way to new spaces for policy dialogue and to new relations between a wide array of state and non-state actors at local, regional, and global levels. This changing landscape has implications for national education policy formulation as it has dislocated the traditional sites and levels of authority from which educational decisions are made.

Finally, the expansion of access to information and knowledge through the rapid development of digital technologies has weakened the monopoly of formal education institutions on the creation and transmission of knowledge. There is now greater recognition of the importance of less formalised learning throughout life and of the need to value and validate the knowledge acquired in non-formal settings. National education systems will increasingly need to be seen as networks of interlinked learning spaces throughout life proposing multiple possible trajectories for individual learning based on comprehensive systems of recognition, validation and accreditation of competencies regardless of the pathways through which they are acquired.

These changes are forging new conditions which require fresh perspectives from which to understand the governance of education and knowledge, and their role in human development. They call for a re-contextualization of normative principles that have guided educational governance over the past few decades, namely; the right to education and education as a public good. In its mandated role to lead and coordinate the new Education 2030 agenda, UNESCO is attempting to contribute to this global debate through its Section on Partnerships, Cooperation and Research within the newly-established Division for Education 2030 Support and Coordination. Forward-looking research through a normative lens is an essential contribution to ensuring the right to education throughout life in the changing global landscape in today's world.

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# ASPBAE Plans 2016 – Priorities towards the Right to Education and Lifelong Learning in the Sustainable Development Goals

*ASPBAE outlines its plans in 2016 to concretise the new, ambitious agenda for education, grounded in human rights and lifelong learning perspectives. ASPBAE will see to the effective contextualisation of the agreed agenda at the country-level and argue strongly for government's prioritisation of quality education for marginalised children, youth and adults; press for the mobilisation of resources needed to strengthen public education systems to deliver on the full, much wider new education agenda; build the capacities needed to meet the agreed goal and targets; and continue to work across countries, regionally, and globally. In this respect, it will remain attentive to its long-standing focus on equity, on the SDG 4 targets related to youth and adult education, especially non-formal education – adult literacy, skills for decent work and life. It will further push for ensuring that ESD and global citizenship education are mainstreamed in overall education policies and systems.*

ASPBAE, like several other civil society organisations, believes the new education agenda, although imperfect, is strong. It upholds the right to education – education as a public good, with states as duty bearers in ensuring education rights. It adopts a lifelong learning framework, and is for universal application in both richer and poorer countries. It has a wider ambition for access to free primary and full secondary education including universal access to Early Child and Care Education (ECCE), is strong on equity, gender equality and inclusion, and recognises the key role education plays in promoting sustainable development, global citizenship and in preventing and mitigating conflicts and in promoting peace.

The Framework for Action of Education 2030 (FfA) underscores a broader appreciation of education quality (beyond measurable learning outcomes through standardised testing); the need for multiple and flexible learning pathways to education for all ages and at all levels through formal, non-formal, informal education opportunities; emphasises the importance of literacy and numeracy proficiencies, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), tertiary education and other skills trainings (formal and non-formal) to better prepare youth and adults for decent work and life and to contribute as active citizens in overall social, economic, ecological development.

### **Successes for civil society**

There were also triumphs of "good process" in defining the new agenda. In the end, the education agenda was developed through a broad-based, consultative process involving a wide cross-section of the education constituency, and with national governments playing leading roles. Civil society was well-represented at different levels of decision-making and was formally part of the agenda-setting processes. Civil society organisations (CSOs) were well-organised. In the education sector, CSOs were able to draw on their wide experience, especially in policy work, and pursued evidence-based advocacy distilled from their practice. They successfully mobilised their deeply-rooted networks to influence the emerging agenda with perspectives from a wide section of education stakeholders such as NGOs, teachers, learners, youth, and students, from the global North and global South, grounded in human rights, pro-poor, social justice perspectives.

Civil society has also emerged strengthened by involvement in the post 2015 processes:

- By offering a credible, competent presence in the debates at national, regional and global levels and arenas – civil society organisations have effectively demonstrated the value of a civil society voice, and the importance of their sustained, institutionalised involvement in ongoing education policy and planning.
- Education advocates strengthened linkages among themselves – bridged divides and united on common priority agendas, recognising that the right to education is indivisible and that ensuring "no one is left behind" in education is as much an imperative in the poor countries as in the richer countries of the world.
- Education advocates also fortified connections with other like-minded civil society networks advancing their own thematic interests, as they coalesced and strategised together in the SDGs policy spaces. These bode well for a strong, coordinated civil society presence in the follow-up processes of the new development and education agenda – and of the ongoing visibility of education issues in the wider civil society discourses.



*Management course in a Community Learning Centre in Vientiane, Laos*

*Source: DVV International South East Asia*

- Education advocates honed their competencies in policy analysis on a wider agenda and in lobbying within inter-governmental policy spaces – at regional and global levels and with policy makers outside of the traditional domains of education, e.g. Ministries of Finance, External Affairs, National Statistics offices.

The architecture for follow up and monitoring envisaged for the new education agenda, as codified in the Framework for Action 2030 (FfA), provides for dedicated spaces for civil society in the governance, monitoring and coordination processes structured planning. The FfA appreciates that civil society can:

- “promote social mobilisation and raise public awareness, enabling the voices of citizens (particularly those who face discrimination) to be heard in policy development;
- develop innovative and complementary approaches that help advance the right to education, especially for the most excluded groups; and
- document and share evidence from practice, from citizens’ assessments and from research to inform structured policy dialogue, holding governments accountable for delivery, tracking progress, undertaking evidence-based advocacy, scrutinising spending, and ensuring transparency in education governance and budgeting.” (Education 2030 Framework for Action)

Civil society is mentioned as one of the constituencies to be represented in the Education 2030 Steering Committee – the multi-stakeholder formation envisaged to steer the follow-up processes for the new education agenda. There is also an intention to build on the successful experience of having a dedicated, institutionalised mechanism for CSO engagement in global education policy processes such as in the UNESCO Collective Consultation of NGOs, recognised as an integral part of the new global architecture. Discussions are also underway to better concretise the processes for multi stakeholders, including civil society engagement with the High level Political Forum (HLPF) – the main body charged with providing high-level political guidance on the new development agenda, and its implementation, review progress and identify emerging challenges and mobilize further actions to accelerate implementation.

### **Challenges for civil society**

There have been and there remain outstanding challenges, however. Financing commitments have not kept in step with the agreements on

wider ambitions for Education 2030. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda – as agreed by the 3rd Financing for Development Conference – completely ignored financing commitments for Target 4.6 on youth and adult literacy and on non-formal education for adults. Donor appetite remains very low, pushing attention to the private sector, South-South cooperation and domestic resource mobilisation to fill funding gaps. CSO advocates fear the misplaced optimism on private finance will significantly undermine education equity and even quality. Campaigners for lifelong learning fear the commitment to a lifelong learning framework will go nowhere with no financial resources committed to back these up.

It also remains to be seen if the global, thematic, regional and country level indicators still under discussion will adequately capture the full intentions of each of the SDG 4 targets – with profound implications on how the new agenda will be concretised and performance tracked in relation to the commitments. Nonetheless, there is much to build on.

Specifically, civil society in the coming period should:

- See to the effective implementation and contextualisation of the agreed agenda at the country-level and argue strongly for government's prioritisation of quality education for marginalised children, youth and adults.
- Press for the mobilisation of resources needed to strengthen public education systems to deliver on the full, much wider new education agenda.
- See to the roll out of the agreed mechanisms and processes for coordination, monitoring, and to mobilise strong political backing and buy-in for the new education and development agenda with the broader publics and decision-makers. These should embed the institutionalised participation of all relevant stakeholders including learners, teachers, and civil society.
- Build the capacities needed to advance the new education agenda and towards meeting the agreed goal and targets.
- Continue to work across countries, regionally, and globally in intergovernmental and inter-agency policy processes, even outside the formal Education 2030 and SDGs architecture to ensure the agreements of Education 2030 inform the discussions/debates and agreements forged herein.
- Strengthen linkages with other sectors and movements advancing a development path that enables all human beings – in this generation and in the future – to live lives free from poverty and hunger, in dignity, peace, in equitable, just, and inclusive societies.

In 2016, ASPBAE will convene its 7th General Assembly. This important occasion in ASPBAE's life and history will offer an important space for CSO consolidation efforts in the region – offering venues for stock-taking, strate-

gising, and capacity building. It is within this understanding that ASPBAE will craft its work and priorities for 2016 along its priority strategic areas.

## **Leadership and capacity building for the right to education and lifelong learning**

ASPBAE's capacity building effort is in the main oriented to two (2) main areas of work – ordained to a large extent by the nature of its constituency – adult education providers, grassroots educators and academics in the field of adult education on the one hand, and education advocates, campaigners on the right to education and lifelong learning on the other.

ASPBAE's capacity building work is thus aligned to (1) building the capacities of adult education providers to enrich adult education practice in the region, and (2) building the capacities of civil society organisations – especially broad fronts of national-level education campaign coalitions – in advocacy on the right to education and lifelong learning to hold governments, donors, multilateral and intergovernmental bodies, and other decision-makers to account.

At this juncture, ASPBAE intends to continue its efforts in building competencies of CSOs involved in adult education (AE) practice and AE policy work to (1) improve, strengthen their AE work and practice and explore scaling these up through (possible) expanded spaces created in the new education agenda which is now guided by a lifelong learning framework, and to (2) harness the rich experience of NGO AE providers, especially those working with marginalised groups, to inform the evolving public policy on equitable, inclusive, quality education, and lifelong learning opportunities for all. ASPBAE also intends to support national education campaign coalitions and other ASPBAE members working on education advocacy to shore up capacities in advancing the wider SDG 4 agenda and to advocate for resources to guarantee all education rights fully.

In this vein and more specifically in 2016, ASPBAE will pursue the following activities:

- Broadening awareness on SDG 4 and the SDGs
- Deepening understanding on SDG 4 and lifelong learning
- Strengthening the youth constituency within ASPBAE
- Customised training support to members and partners
- Reviewing ASPBAE capacity development programme for adult learning and lifelong learning

## Policy advocacy for equitable, inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all

ASPBAE remains committed to advancing equitable access to relevant, quality, and empowering education and learning opportunities for all people, especially the most marginalised groups, within a human rights and lifelong learning framework. This underpins its advocacy efforts.

A major platform for its advocacy efforts would still be the Education 2030 and SDGs processes – although ASPBAE remains committed to advancing its core advocacies in the different regional, sub-regional, and global policy platforms, intergovernmental mechanisms and processes deemed strategic in the period. The CONFINTEA 6 mid-term review process, the ASEAN and SAARC processes on education, human rights mechanisms, are of particular note.

ASPBAE will work to ensure that the internationally agreed goals, targets, indicators, and framework of action are translated into robust education sector plans at the country level; the resources required to meet the full agenda are mobilised and judiciously applied; and that the processes and mechanisms for accountability, coordination, capacity building, and monitoring of Education 2030 are set up, with the institutionalised participation of civil society, including representative organisations of learners, teachers/educators, parents, and youth.

ASPBAE will aim for concrete victories and seek increased budgets to meet the demands of the new, wide agenda, especially in its commitment to equity; in improved allocations, especially to earlier neglected areas such as youth and adult literacy, and skills for work, especially for the informal sector of labour and women; in concrete steps being taken towards increased domestic resource mobilisation, increased and better quality aid, and the adoption of regulatory frameworks and accountability



mechanisms on private engagement in the education sector, thwarting the aggressive privatisation push in education which undermines the right to education.

ASPBAE will also work towards mobilising greater public awareness and political support for education as a right, and on the new global consensus on education and its expression at the country level. Concretely, in 2016 ASPBAE will pursue the following strategies and activities:

- Rolling out SDG 4 at the country level
- Advocacy on SDG 4 Monitoring
- Attention to the SDG 4 Targets on youth and adult education, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Global Citizenship Education (GCED)
- Advocacy and education financing
- Sustained lobbying in regional and global policy processes

### **Strategic partnerships and examples of cooperation**

In the Asia Pacific Meeting Education 2030 (APMED 2030), participating governments and other stakeholders agreed on concrete steps for governments to undertake in 2016 to roll out Education 2030 at the country level (1) Establish or strengthen a national coordination mechanism for SDG 4; (2) Map existing policies and programs that contribute to SDG 4 targets in preparation for national consultations; (3) Organise national and sub-national consultations to analyse the Education 2030 targets and Framework for Action in light of existing plans to identify gaps and to plan actions to implement and monitor SDG 4; and (4) Build or strengthen inter-governmental cooperation to foster synergies and mutual learning for SDG 4.

The APMED 2030 participants also affirmed that SDG 4's focus on lifelong learning, and its contribution towards sustainable development and global citizenship, requires the engagement of and coordination among various sectors and ministries, civil society, and a wide range of actors and stakeholders at all levels. ASPBAE and its partners will track progress in these agreed action points as indicators of good process and seriousness in rolling out Education 2030 at the country level.

ASPBAE anticipates that it will need to shore up efforts and capacities to focus policy attention on the SDG 4 Targets on adult non-formal education especially for poor, marginalised, vulnerable youth and adults as these continue to be at the far fringes of policy attention and discourse. ASPBAE will co-convene with DVV International and UNESCO Bangkok,

a Regional Policy Forum bringing together governments, civil society, and other education stakeholders to deliberate on the implementing strategies that would concretise and advance the SDGs Targets related to youth and adult education. It is anticipated that this be organised towards the end of the year, possibly coinciding with 2 major ASPBAE events planned for the period: a CSEF Regional Consultation of Coalitions and the Regional Workshop Planning the Strategic Directions of ASPBAE.

ASPBAE is also in discussion with ICAE on whether these events will offer a possible space to organise a UNESCO-ICAE-ASPBAE Asia Pacific Regional Dialogue around the UNESCO publication “Rethinking Education: Towards a global common good?” – a report that sought to update and build on the Delors Commission Report “Learning: The Treasure Within.” This report served as a normative reference for the vision and principles outlined in the Education 2030 Framework for Action. ASPBAE will work closely with ICAE in advocacy work on the SDGs and SDG 4 targets related to youth and adult education.

As part of the ongoing effort to help strengthen lifelong learning policy and systems in countries in the region, ASPBAE will work with UNESCO Bangkok in developing 1) Guidelines on the role of Community Learning Centres (CLCs) as facilitators of lifelong learning; and 2) Guidelines on adult skills and competencies for lifelong learning as part of UNESCO Bangkok’s programme on “Transforming Education and Training Systems to Create Lifelong Learning Societies in the Asia-Pacific”. ASPBAE will draft these Guidelines based on the input and feedback obtained from a UNESCO Bangkok Regional Expert meeting on this subject held in November 2015.

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ASPBAE Plans 2016

ASPBAE Edlines, tri-annual

ASPBAE Bulletin, monthly

[www.aspbae.org](http://www.aspbae.org)

# How the shrinking space of civil society affects the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

*The important role civil society organisations can play in supporting the SDGs in the different countries will depend on the space civil society has to operate. Around the world, more and more governments systematically restrict the space in which civil society operates. SDGs Target 16.10 calls for the countries to protect fundamental freedoms such as freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly – all of which are critical to civil society. It provides an additional opportunity for civil society actors in their respective countries to stress the necessity for governments to uphold these freedoms and rights. Most importantly, it also reiterates and stresses the obligation of governments to protect and guarantee these rights.*

Hundreds of millions of people still live in poverty. Many people, particularly girls and women, suffer from violence and human rights violations. Inequality, injustice, corruption and environmental exploitation are often a deadly combination, in particular for indigenous or marginalised people. Horrible armed conflicts kill civilians, destroy communities and whole countries. They have caused the largest refugee crisis since the Second World War. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development — of which the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a part — tries to address the most burning problems of our times and to improve the situation worldwide for everyone. They came into effect on 1 January 2016 and should guide decisions states take over the next fifteen years.

### **SDGs Target 16.10**

Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements

These goals, to which so many aspire, can only be achieved if many actors work together to achieve them. The main responsibility for implementation of the SDGs lies with the different states. However, together with the private sector and the UN system, civil society has a crucial role to play in the implementation of the SDGs. Civil society cannot be limited to professionalised non-governmental organisations (NGOs), it covers a much broader range of pluralist social actors. It is also composed of autonomous associations, social movements, activists, local groups, volunteer organisations, community-based organisations, labour unions, religious and cultural organisations, sport clubs, informal groups, etc. The key feature of civil society is its separation from the state, the market and the family. What makes civil society so important for the SDGs is not only its expertise and performance in governance and development, its proximity to local and marginalised communities, but also its capacity to promote transparency, accountability, openness, effectiveness and human rights.

Civil society's importance and political participation in international processes and national development is widely acknowledged. As critical and innovative development actors, civil society organisations (CSOs) play a vital role in advocating respect for human rights, in shaping development policies and in overseeing their implementation. The international community has recognised CSOs as development actors in their own right (Accra Agenda for Action 2008; Busan Partnership for Effective Development 2011) and the UN Secretary General recently stressed, that "civil society acts as a catalyst for social progress and economic growth. It plays a critical role in keeping Governments accountable, and helps represent the diverse interests of the population, including its most vulnerable groups." (Ban Ki Moon 2015). The Report of the UN Secretary-General's High-level

Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda stresses the role of civil society: “In a new partnership, CSOs will have a crucial role in making sure that government at all levels and businesses act responsibly and create genuine opportunities and sustainable livelihoods in an open-market economy.” The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development itself acknowledges, in several paragraphs, the role of civil society in implementing the SDGs (SDGs 39, 41, 60).

As a provider of social services, education, healthcare, etc., also to vulnerable populations, CSOs are expected to support the implementation of the goals as a development actor by improving the living conditions of all. Civil society in its role as watchdog will critically and constructively accompany the responses to the SDGs on the national level and contribute to

monitoring of their implementation (SDGs 79). It is also foreseen that CSOs will participate in multi-stakeholder partnerships and contribute to their work: Sustainable Development Goal 17 recognises multi-stakeholder partnerships and civil society as part of these processes

## **SDGs Goal 17**

### **Partnerships for the Goals**

Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development

as important vehicles for mobilising and sharing knowledge and expertise to support the achievement of the SDGs in all countries.

Civil society’s achievements for governance and development have been recognised widely and are very broad: CSOs are often at the forefront of law and policy reforms and advance social, political, economic and environmental agendas. Their policy analyses bring important knowledge and facts to the public discussions and to decision makers. CSOs also have a crucial role to play in catalysing transformative social and economic change. They often act as change agents and bring new ideas and strategies to address challenges. Civil society organisations facilitate representation of a wide range of voices in debates, as they enable citizens to identify and articulate their values and rights and struggle for more citizen participation. In particular, by representing and empowering those who are vulnerable and marginalised to voice situations of inequality and injustice, these views cannot be ignored in public affairs and discussions and are an important contribution toward the achievement of more equality and justice. Monitoring state performance, e.g. human rights violations, but also state budgeting, macro-economic policy, national production, employment, etc., promotes transparency and accountability and prevents corruption. This is of benefit to all stakeholders, as it ensures that development benefits reach all.

Accountability and representation are also essential elements in order to achieve the SDGs. Reviewing the progress of the SDGs is crucial. It will ensure that they remain relevant and ambitious, but it also holds the states accountable to their national goals and policies. Citizens need to know what their governments have committed to and have the right to monitor, through independent mechanisms, whether or not the governments are able to fulfil their commitment. Indigenous people, minorities, migrants, persons with disabilities, children and the elderly need to be heard and included. Representation and participation, in particular of these poor and marginalised parts of the population, in local and national development plans and budgets would really ensure that no one would be left behind. In order to achieve this, power structures would have to be challenged, the rule of law enforced and the mechanisms for participation established.

In numerous countries, civil society actors will be able to play the important role that the SDGs inspire them to play. They will be an independent voice, a counterbalance to official statements and bring in the views and concerns of marginalised parts of the population. However, the role civil society organisations can play in supporting the implementation of the SDGs nationally will depend on the space civil society has to operate. While the role and achievements of civil society have been valued in international fora, the actual situation of many activists, social movements, civil society organisations, communities and grass-roots organisations is completely different. Around the world, efforts by various governments to restrict the space in which civil society operates continue to grow:

**Ethiopia** introduced an NGO law in 2009 that makes it impossible for civil society organisations to work on important human rights issues such as the advancement of democratic rights, gender equality, rule of law and the promotion of the rights of children and the disabled or to receive more than 10% of funding for these activities from outside the country. 50-60% of the national budget relies on foreign funding, however financial support to civil society organisations working on issues linked to any independent watchdog role of civil society has been criminalised. This law made independent work on human rights, advocacy and issues like accountability and anticorruption almost impossible. Civil society organisations were reduced to service delivery, and “almost all human rights organisations have died out” (Dupuy, Ron, Prakash 2014). Experts estimate a 90% decline of local groups working on human rights. Most of these organisations worked on training and civic education, monitored human rights and elections, and advocated for marginalised groups (Dupuy, Ron, Prakash 2014).

**Azerbaijan** used to have a large and vibrant community of independent civil society organisations which were devoted to public policy issues like human rights, corruption, democracy promotion, revenue transparency, rule of law, ethnic minorities and religious freedom. However, legislative changes adopted in 2013 made it possible for the government to exercise excessive control over registered groups while at the same time criminalising activities of CSOs, which were denied registration. The Azeri government continued to show determination to stop independent and critical voices in the years that followed. Activities of organisations that were outspoken, challenged government policies, and/or worked on controversial issues were brought to an end. Courts have sentenced leading human rights defenders, activists, political analysts and journalists to long prison terms in politically motivated, unfair trials. Dozens more face harassment and prosecution (HRW 2013/ 2016).

In **Cambodia**, a new law adopted in 2015 requires mandatory registration for all domestic and international associations. For grassroots groups, registration is practically impossible. All associations and organisations are required to be “politically neutral”, without providing a definition. Additionally, the Ministry of Interior enjoys unfettered discretion over registration, as registration can be denied or revoked on the broad grounds of endangering “the security, stability and public order or jeopardise the national security, national unity, cultures, traditions, and customs of the Cambodian national society” (ICNL NGO Monitor 2015).

An unprecedented number of killings of environmental reformers and land defenders have occurred over the past few years in **Peru**. With the global demand for natural resources rising, more and more communities see the need to defend their rights to land and the environment from corporate or state abuse, and are consequently silenced by harassment, intimidation and killings. These gross human rights violations are linked to the conflicts over ownership and use of land, as an estimated 93% of extractive and agricultural projects happen on land that is inhabited (Global Witness 2014).

These country cases stand as examples for what is happening in many more countries: Increasingly, governments are systematically using laws, policies, and practices to limit the ability of CSOs to work for social change. In its State of Civil Society Report 2015, CIVICUS documented significant attacks on the fundamental rights of free association, free assembly and free expression in 96 countries (CIVICUS 2015). During the last three years, in more than 60 countries, repressive NGO laws were



*School for indigenous women, San Cristobal de las Casas, Mexico*

*Source: DVV International*

initiated or passed (Rutzen 2015). In 2015, Pakistan, Tunisia, Egypt, Turkey, Cambodia, China, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and others drafted, enacted, or amended legislation to stifle the free flow of ideas and restrict speech (ICNL 2014/2015). As a study of the ACT Alliance and CIDSE showed, also CSOs working in development sometimes or frequently feel fear of reprisals. The study also revealed that civil society organisations are hardly involved in drafting or implementing development plans, and the low levels of government effort to provide participation opportunities for CSOs and communities<sup>1</sup>. This is in particular worrying, as we know that civil society engagement is vital if development efforts are to produce sustainable outcomes and benefit all (ACT Alliance/CIDSE 2014).

Instead of involving civil society in development plans, authorities in more and more countries worldwide are restricting a CSO's ability to receive foreign funding, introducing burdensome regulations, reporting requirements and tax burdens, criminalising, judicially harassing and imprisoning activists and CSO staff. Often people who may or may not be

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<sup>1/</sup> The study covered four country cases: Colombia, Malawi, Ruanda and Zimbabwe.

linked to the government intimidate, attack and stigmatise activists and civil society organisations and their work in the political discourse. Human rights and democracy are then often presented as a “Western” concept — a concept that supposedly is used as a plot to overthrow regimes. CSOs are presented as being complicit in this plot and, for example, called “foreign agents”, in particular when they receive funding from foreign donors. The term, introduced by Russia some years ago, has been copied by many other countries to restrict or stop foreign funding for domestic civil society actors. Taken together, repressive NGO laws and extra-legal harassment create a powerfully adverse climate for an independent and critical civil society.

CSOs most likely to be affected by repression and shrinking space are those that engage in advocacy, seek policy change, undertake accountability over elites and seek to uphold human rights and social justice. These change-seeking CSOs are also mainly targeted by international funding restrictions and see a significant decrease in their resourcing capacities (CIVICUS 2015).

However, CSOs focusing on service delivery are also affected by the shrinking space of civil society. Barriers exist, for example when citizens want to establish an aid association: In **Turkmenistan**, a national public association working in the field of service delivery needs at least 400 members. In **Eritrea**, citizens engaged in relief and rehabilitation are required to have access to the equivalent of \$1 million U.S. dollars. Bureaucratic burdens can prohibit reaching areas where aid is most needed. In **Uganda**, seven days’ notice is needed for CSOs to contact people in rural parts of the country. Reproductive health, including maternal health and child health services, are one area which is particularly sensitive to restrictions. HIV/AIDS prevention activities were deemed “immoral” and leaders of HIV/AIDS organisations have been imprisoned or killed.

An additional challenge for independent civil society actors are the so called “government-organised non-governmental organisations” (GONGOs). Often GONGOs serve as instruments to suggest a healthy civil society, when in fact independent actors face severe restrictions and harassment. When GONGOs are recognised by the international community as civil society, it undermines the work of independent actors, and sometimes can even pose a security risk, for instance when both are present in confidential meetings between civil society and foreign diplomats. GONGOs often absorb funding that sometimes previously went to genuine representatives of civil society, which are now banned from receiving funding from abroad. In any case, they will not be able to act as independent organisations which monitor transparency, accountability or human rights and to voice violations of human rights or governance failure.

This means that we really have to look carefully at who is speaking for civil society or representing civil society. Important questions are: Where does their legitimacy come from? How independent are they?

Of course, civil society by nature is very diverse. As explained above, it is mostly the change-seeking independent organisations working on issues such as human rights, rule of law, democracy, environment and social justice, which are targeted. This means that in particular the role of civil society in monitoring the implementation of national SDGs will be massively affected in many countries. The repressive measures towards independent voices and civil society actors create a general atmosphere of mistrust and intimidation between civil society and government. Consequently, also the foreseen multi-stakeholder processes with independent civil society actors will be either impossible or are very unlikely to lead to meaningful results.

Although we need to value the achievements and the role civil society can play in development and governance, we also need to acknowledge the shrinking space and the consequences it has on international processes like SDGs. The SDGs require the active and independent contribution of CSOs, which can only fulfil their role if they can act in an enabling legal environment and have access to due process under the law. Sustainable Development Goal 16 is of particular importance for civil society and their space to act independently. Target 16.10 calls for the countries to protect fundamental freedoms such as freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly — all of which are critical to civil society. Next to international human rights treaties and human rights mechanisms, it provides an opportunity for civil society actors in their respective countries to stress the necessity for governments to uphold these freedoms and rights. Most importantly, it also reiterates and stresses the obligation of governments to protect these rights. This also means that they need to repeal and amend all laws that repress civil society and its activities. Furthermore, in order to achieve sustainable development, it is in the interest of all governments to involve CSOs in the design, content and implementation of development plans. In particular, indigenous groups and other marginalised and disadvantaged groups in society should be able to meaningfully participate in policy making and implementation processes and to be consulted regarding decisions that affect them.

**SDGs Goal 16**  
**Peace, justice and**  
**strong institutions**

Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

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## Voices from the regions

# Are the Sustainable Development Goals important for your work in the regions? What are the challenges?

### South East Asia

However, it is my feeling that the interrelation between global and national level is more complex.

Whereas countries like Laos try to meet the objectives, the reality is not always effected deeply. One example: end of August, Lao PDR was declared illiterate free and it was stipulated that all people complete primary education. Voilà, MDGs 2 fulfilled. But, is this the reality?

One doubts it. Actually, sometimes it is a lot about satisfying the international community and the donors, not always about real changes.

### West Africa

From my West African perspective, the way, the SDGs were finally announced and handled in the mass media was very disappointing to me, no big festival, everything was overshadowed by the war in Syria and the showdown between Obama and Putin.

I do not see any step into the new direction. But OK, 15 years have passed now. Awareness creation about the new opportunity has to start from now!

I had prepared our network partners to do something to make the Education 2030 agenda after New York more known to the public, when the time is ripe (expecting that many others also from the other sectors would like to do something too). But all are silent.



*Regional Directors' Meeting 2015 in Bonn  
Source: DVV International*



**Central Asia/Georgia**

Unfortunately, the Goals hardly play a role in the post-Soviet era. In our work, neither the MDGs have played a role, nor can it be assumed that the SDGs will.

**Southern Africa**

The translation of policy into action with the required governance structures and resources is, and we anticipate will remain an ongoing challenge. Part of our strategy is to try to show examples of community relevant learning programmes and processes that might be replicated and up-scaled.

**Morocco**

According to the strategy of the national Ministry of Education, revised according to the strategic proposals of the 2015 report of the Supreme Council, the work will be done differently in order to combat the major scourges of the education system, to know how to improve the quality of the programmes and fight against dropping out of education.

**Middle East**

General challenges?  
Fundraising, especially with the outlook to always bigger programmes ignoring small actors and communities, developing programmes for direct positive changes in the communities, outreach to and integration of marginalised areas, inclusion of critical thinking in training programmes.

Ulrike Hanemann

# Lifelong literacy as a prerequisite for and the key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

*In recognition of the crucial role of learning for sustainable development, lifelong learning has been included as a guiding principle of the Education 2030 Agenda. The new education agenda includes a target for youth and adult literacy which will need to be addressed with an expanded vision of lifelong literacy if it is to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.*

## Introduction

In a fast-changing and highly inequitable world, lifelong learning is becoming increasingly important, not just as a key organising principle for all forms of education and learning, but as an absolute necessity for everyone. It is particularly important for disadvantaged individuals and groups who have been excluded from, or have failed to acquire basic competencies through formal schooling. Within a lifelong learning framework, literacy and numeracy are viewed as foundation skills forming the core of basic education and are indispensable for full participation in society.

The vision of lifelong learning has evolved over the past few decades to become a constant feature in 21st century policy discourse. Based on emancipatory, humanistic and democratic values, the concept of lifelong learning is rooted in the integration of learning and living, covering learning activities for people of all ages, in all life contexts (e.g. at home, at school, in the community and in the workplace) and through formal, non-formal and informal modalities which together meet a wide range of learning needs and demands (UNESCO 2014a: 2).

The lifelong learning concept has found its way into the recently adopted Education 2030 Framework for Action (FFA) – “Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all” – and consequently into SDG 4 on education. The lifelong learning approach supports the idea of building bridges between different actors, institutions, processes, learning spaces (life spheres) and moments (life phases) in order to develop holistically designed learning systems. The ambition of providing lifelong learning opportunities for all emphasises not only the holistic nature of the education agenda for the next 15 years, but also the significance of learning for the achievement of all 17 SDGs.

Advancing the lifelong learning vision of the new 2030 Agenda will be difficult without tackling the issue of literacy and numeracy as the foundational level of further and independent learning. Furthermore, excluding millions of young people and adults from the right to literacy is incompatible with the strong rights-based orientation of the 2030 Agenda and its inclusive development vision.

## Expanding the vision: Lifelong literacy

While there is a general consensus that lifelong learning plays a crucial role “in addressing global educational issues and challenges” (UIL 2010: 5), applying this principle to tackling the literacy challenge appears to be complicated. Firstly, there is still a large gap between policy discourse

and practical reality. Secondly, lifelong learning laws, legal regulations and public policy initiatives tend not to make explicit references to literacy and, thirdly, lifelong learning is frequently understood as something which only starts after somebody has become “literate” or achieved basic education (UIL 2013).

Nonetheless, the recognition that learning never stops over a person’s lifetime also applies to literacy learning: the acquisition and development of literacy takes place before, during and after primary school. The same is true for life-wide learning taking place at home, work, school and other spaces in the community. In other words, the development of reading and writing skills should be closely associated with activities which are relevant – or even essential – for human development. Instead of aiming for the “eradication of illiteracy”, ensuring the achievement of literacy and numeracy for all entails the development of “literate families”, “literate communities” and “literate societies”. This embraces the challenge of moving away from common misconceptions (Torres 2009) and changing the attitudes of entire societies towards literacy: the consideration of what people do or can do with literacy and the creation of literate environments and societies must guide related action, a rationale already reflected in a UNESCO position paper on literacy published over a decade ago (UNESCO 2004).



*Literacy class in Ethiopia*

*Source: DVV International*

Along with its various definitions, the concept of literacy has evolved over time. This evolution reflects changing perspectives and new trends as well as differing meanings of the term “literacy” in various linguistic and cultural contexts. There is tension between the increasing complexity of literacy and the need to use terminology which is clear and intelligible to everybody. The term “literacy” usually refers to the ability to read and write. A more complex definition identifies literacy as the ability to put knowledge, skills, attitudes and values into action effectively when dealing with handwritten, printed or digital texts in the context of ever-changing demands and a range of purposes and meanings.<sup>1</sup> If we unpack this rather holistic vision of literacy, we find an underlying recognition that reading and writing are closely intertwined with language and orality as well as with issues such as personal identity, community belonging, culture, power and aspirations.

The emergence of the notion of literacy as a learning continuum comprising different proficiency levels has been one of the most significant developments in the conceptualisation of literacy over the past decade. This understanding of literacy holds that there is no clear separating line between a “literate” and a “non-literate” person, and that these binary designations merely refer to the two opposite ends of a continuum of proficiency levels spanning a range of different uses. Thus this understanding of literacy rejects the simple dichotomy of “literate” versus “illiterate” which is still used in statistical reports on “literacy rates” or “illiteracy rates”. While the required proficiency levels and how people apply reading and writing skills depend on specific contexts, the minimum literacy threshold to be reached by all citizens of a country needs to be established at the policy level, and it must evolve over time.

At the global level, Target 4.6 of the Education 2030 FFA refers to the priority area of youth and adult literacy (UNESCO et al. 2015: 14).

The explanatory text for this target establishes “proficiency levels of functional literacy and numeracy skills that are equivalent to levels achieved at successful completion of basic education”. This corresponds to the level envisaged in Education for All (EFA) Goal 4 (“improvement in levels of

#### **SDGs Target 4.6**

By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.

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<sup>1</sup>/ Becoming literate involves not only knowledge (e.g. of the alphabet, script and language) and skills (e.g. reading fluency and comprehension), but also attitudes, dispositions and motivations (e.g. confident and self-sufficient learners are more likely to use their literacy skills broadly) as well as values (e.g. in order to critically assess the purpose of a message or to use social media in a responsible way when interacting with different audiences).

adult literacy by 2015 [...] and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults”). However, it is less ambitious with regard to scale by aiming at literacy and numeracy for only a “substantial proportion of” rather than “all” adults. In addition, it no longer places special emphasis on women, but instead explicitly states that literacy and numeracy must be achieved for both men and women. This is obviously due to the fact that there are countries (mainly in Europe and the Americas) where more men than women are affected by low or no literacy skills. At the global level, however, two-thirds of non-literate adults are still women, a proportion which has not changed in decades (UIS 2016a; UIS 2016b).

The accompanying text of Target 4.6 further clarifies that “the principles, strategies and actions for this target are underpinned by a contemporary understanding of literacy not as a simple dichotomy of ‘literate’ versus ‘illiterate’, but as a continuum of proficiency levels” (UNESCO et al. 2015: 14). It also emphasises the necessity to provide literacy programmes which are responsive to the needs and contexts of learners “within the framework of lifelong learning” (ibid.). This implies that learning and using literacy skills can be perceived as a continuous and context-bound process which takes place within and outside of educational settings throughout life. However, it also involves major challenges in developing a common understanding of how to approach literacy (and numeracy) as a continuum, as a lifelong and life-wide learning process, and as a task that will cut across all of the education targets of SDG 4 as well as the other 16 SDGs over the next 15 years.

## **Literacy as a prerequisite for and the key to achieving the SDGs**

The achievement of the ambitious SDGs relies to a large extent on human beings and the degree to which they can fulfil their potential. Full participation in political, economic, social, cultural and environmental developments and people’s ability to shape those developments depend crucially on their capacity to learn independently, critically and continuously. Mastering the foundational levels of reading, writing and numeracy form an indispensable prerequisite for this. Basic literacy and numeracy are also essential for people’s ability to use information and communications technologies, especially mobile devices, which offer further potential to access information, communicate with others and promote innovative solutions to development challenges.

Research evidence shows that people struggling with reading, writing and working with numbers are more vulnerable to poverty, social exclusion, unemployment, exploitation, the social effects of demographic



*Computer class for the elderly in Georgia*

*Source: DVV International*

changes, ageing, displacement and disasters. They have fewer opportunities for gainful employment, entrepreneurial activity and civic participation (e.g. European Commission 2012; Cree et al. 2012). There is ample evidence of the human, social, economic, political and cultural benefits literacy (UNESCO 2005: 137–145) and education (UNESCO 2014b) confer on individuals, families, communities and nations, particularly in low- and medium-income countries (UNESCO 2015; UIL 2013). Literacy and numeracy equip people to increase their income, improve their livelihoods and thereby escape from chronic poverty (SDGs 1, 8 and 9; see p.p. 72 and 73 “Sustainable Development Goals”). Literate parents are in a better position to help their children receive an education (SDG 4) and therefore break the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Education enables mothers to improve their children’s nutrition and health (SDGs 2 and 3). Higher levels of education help women to have a voice and choice with regard to marriage and family size (SDG 5). Educated families are more open to innovation, more likely to use natural resources sustainably and more likely to show environmental concern (SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15). Literacy and education also play a vital role in promoting human rights, tolerance

to diversity and conflict prevention (SDG 16). In addition, adult literacy programmes yield benefits that go beyond those made explicit in the SDGs, such as increased self-esteem, empowerment and resumption of learning careers. In short, literacy and numeracy as the core of basic education are not only a prerequisite for but also the key to achieving the SDGs. However, the international community has yet to fully recognise and translate into related action the important role played by literacy and numeracy (as part of a broader set of general or essential skills) in promoting further learning and sustainable development.

## **Conclusion**

There is no doubt that literacy and numeracy can and must contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. Being a core component of the human right to education, literacy is vital for the pursuit of other human rights, too, including the right to development. However, literacy can only unfold its full potential to “transform our world” if it is conceptualised and operationalised from a lifelong learning perspective. This involves: a) understanding literacy as a continuous learning process which takes place across all ages and generations; b) embedding literacy in or combining it with the development of other skills and integrating it into other development activities; and c) ensuring that literacy is part of national or sub-national development strategies (Hanemann 2015).

The vision of “lifelong literacy” supports integrated approaches to teaching and learning literacy and numeracy, such as family literacy, family learning, and literacy embedded in practical skills training and income-generating activities. Such approaches bring literacy closer to people’s lives and the different purposes for which they need or want to read, write, calculate and communicate. Finally, lifelong literacy supports the aim of making the achievement of literacy and numeracy part of lifelong learning attitudes, habits and systems. Rather than one-shot interventions and quick-fix solutions, this requires taking a long-term view when working towards literate societies.

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# Monitoring the education of youth and adults: from EFA to Sustainable Development Goal 4

*This article examines monitoring challenges in tracking education-related progress among youth and adults during the recent Education for All (EFA) period (2000–2015) to the onset of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda (2015–2030). A history of EFA monitoring of adult education is provided, along with an assessment of progress and challenges. Global ambitions for the formal and non-formal education of youth and adults, specifically in SDG4 and its targets and corresponding indicators, are discussed. Lessons for improved monitoring are also reviewed.*

## EFA approaches to monitoring adult education

In May 2000, 165 governments, together with civil society activists and other stakeholders met in Dakar, Senegal, and agreed on an elaborate Framework for Action. It articulated six concrete goals, two of which pertained directly to adult education, as well as planning strategies and monitoring approaches (GCE, 2015). Goal 3 focused on appropriate learning and life-skills programmes for all; Goal 4 sought to reduce country illiteracy rates by half (UNESCO, 2000).

The EFA goals embodied important international principles. For example, they reflected international accord to the right to education beginning in 1946 with fundamental education, as outlined in Article 26 of *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (United Nations, 1948). Secondly, they operated as an instrument for global policy advocacy in education, including adult education, and focused political aspirations to improve international cooperation and national capacity building.

They also established a basis for monitoring progress until 2015 with timely information provided by Member States (UNESCO, 2010). Monitoring was a key mechanism to identify country needs and donor commitments, and to improve decision making through evidence-based research (UNESCO, 2010).

Some years later (2009) at the sixth meeting of CONFINTEA in Belém, Brazil, international participants shed further light on adult learning and education (ALE). The *Belém Framework for Action* highlighted national and international ALE measures to be implemented. Article 17 specifically called on countries to develop and analyse comparable indicators on ALE participation, establish a monitoring mechanism to assess international commitments and prepare a triennial progress report with regional monitoring benchmarks and indicators (UNESCO, 2010).

International monitoring was meant to include an open-access knowledge management system; the creation of guidelines for recognised and validated learning outcomes; the regular production of a *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE)* prepared by UNESCO's Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) with support from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS); and a review of the *Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education* adopted in Nairobi (1976) (UNESCO, 2010). Important observations on ALE monitoring also emerged at CONFINTEA VI. These included the need for greater specification of ALE targets and objectives, increased civil society involvement in monitoring and more explicit criteria for evaluating results and impact (UNESCO, 2009).

Three GRALE reports (in 2010, 2013 and 2016) have significantly contributed to improved approaches to conceptualising and monitoring

adult learning and education. However, the reliance on country self-reported information partly undermines the reliability, validity and robustness of the monitoring exercise. The *EFA Global Monitoring Reports (GMR)* provided a supplemental accountability mechanism for assessing ALE progress (GCE, 2015).

### **2015: EFA progress and monitoring challenges**

What was achieved by 2015? While credible international progress in education was made, neither the six EFA goals nor the two education MDGs on primary completion and gender parity were met (GMR, 2015). This is believed to have affected progress made in the other MDGs. Retrospective accounts of the two EFA goals pertaining directly to adult education highlighted challenges in monitoring them.

While EFA Goal 3 on learning and life skills was to be achieved through formal and non-formal education in the vein of lifelong learning<sup>1</sup>, there were fundamental challenges in the writing of the goal: a lack of specific measurability and different ways to interpret “life skills” (GMR, 2015). The *GMR* series had identified three kinds of skills—foundational, transferrable and vocational—along with those related to other intended outcomes: “socio-emotional ... non-cognitive”

#### **EFA Goals**

**Goal 1** Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

**Goal 2** Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality.

**Goal 3** Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.

**Goal 4** Achieving a 50 percent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

**Goal 5** Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.

**Goal 6** Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

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<sup>1/</sup> UNESCO’s *Learning to Be: The World of Tomorrow report* (Faure et al, 1972) argued that education should be universal and lifelong, and proposed that Member States adopt this as a meta-concept in their education policies (UNESCO, 2015).

competencies, or “soft skills,” gained through experience and education (GMR, 2015).

Despite attempts to differentiate such skills, they appeared deeply legitimised through the crosscutting objective to improve livelihoods and general societal productivity, as per human capital theory. Since 2000 skills and competencies have become more valued for productivity gains and civic purposes, and thus perceived as necessary aspects of general education (GMR, 2015).

In short, the monitoring challenges of EFA Goal 3 include:

- No global measure for foundational skills
- Gap in information about transferrable skills
- No global storehouse on technical and vocational education and training;
- No clear and systematic evaluation of non-formal education
- Weak international data on youth and adult participation in post-compulsory formal and non-formal education (GMR, 2015)

EFA Goal 4 on adult literacy was designed with international monitoring in mind, given the quantitative 50-percent threshold. Despite this, the goal was not achieved by 2015. In many contexts progress in adult literacy rates was less attributable to ALE provision than to the schooling of younger populations who then become adults. This partly accounts for the limited progress in cutting illiteracy rates by 50 percent (GMR, 2015).

The persistence of high illiteracy rates, based on conventional estimates, undermines calls for social justice and the demonstrated benefits of literacy acquisition to the person and society. “Today, literacy is seen as a continuum of skills that enables individuals to achieve their goals in work and life and participate fully in society, a point confirmed by the *Belém Framework for Action*” (GMR, 2015). Nevertheless, there are still definitional issues and an inability to compare literacy data over time. Many countries have yet to conduct direct literacy assessments, relying instead on indirect assessments, which give a partial and inaccurate picture.

Thus, the key monitoring challenges of EFA Goal 4:

- Too few countries conducting direct assessments of literacy and numeracy
- The inaccuracy of self-declarations or third-party assessments
- The illiteracy-literacy continuum continues to be treated as binary
- Data from different populations at different times limits policy relevance (GMR, 2015)

## Identifying youth and adults in the SDGs

In September 2015, UN Member States agreed on an integrated and transformative post-2015 Sustainable Development agenda, including 17 SDGs and 169 targets. The fourth SDG with 10 targets focuses on education (SDGs, 2015). Where exactly does the education of youth and adults figure in? They feature heavily in the goal itself, which explicitly mentions “lifelong learning opportunities *for all*” and in four of the 10 associated targets: 4.3, 4.4, 4.6, and 4.7.

At the level of global monitoring, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDGs has proposed at least one global indicator for each target. In education these indicators reflect work carried out by the Technical Advisory Group (TAG), which proposed globally comparable indicators for tracking progress in each SDG4 target (UIS, 2015). Indicators for Target 4.3 include the tertiary enrolment ratio and the percentage of youth and adults participating in education and training in the last 12 months. Indicators for Target 4.4 include the percentage of youth/adults with digital literacy and ICT skills as well as attainment rates by age, economic status, and programme. For Target 4.6, indicators focus on adult proficiency in functional literacy and numeracy, youth and adult literacy rates, and ALE programme participation rates (UIS, 2015). Lastly, indicators for Target 4.7 include knowledge on issues related to global citizenship (GCED) and sustainability (ESD) and the extent to which countries are mainstreaming GCED and ESD issues in policies, curricula, teacher education and student assessments (UIS, 2015). All proposed indicators entail formidable monitoring challenges, given the lack of standardised definitions as well as limited data availability, comparability and country coverage.

## Formal and non-formal youth and adult participation

Youth and adult participation can be identified in formal education in several targets. Formal post-secondary education is guaranteed in universities, TVET or higher education institutions as stated in Target 4.3. Formal TVET exists in some places starting at the secondary level (Target 4.4). While literacy and numeracy (Target 4.6) can be offered through formal government provision, civil society organisations, specialised institutes and the private sector serve as critical complementary providers.

Non-formal education frameworks are the most common sources of adult education throughout the world (UIL 2016). This is why adult education is so closely associated with lifelong learning. However, capturing adult participation in such diverse frameworks is difficult since countries

provide incomplete and typically non-standardised data (GMR, 2015). Incentives to inflate participation figures in order to maintain programme funding are also prevalent.

Youth and adults participate in diverse, context-specific non-formal education programmes related to the four targets. These can include, for example, on-the-job training and/or employer funded and outsourced TVET (Targets 4.3 and 4.4), skills development, integrated community initiatives, and literacy/numeracy NGO provision, specialised institutes and the private sector (all four targets) (GMR, 2015). The feasibility of a globally representative picture of participation levels in such activities is severely constrained in the foreseeable future.

### **Lessons for monitoring adult education from EFA to SDGs**

Given the monitoring critiques of EFA Goals 3 and 4, concerted inter-agency and inter-sectoral initiatives are needed to evaluate the parameters and outcomes of ALE in the SDG Framework. Thus far, and despite the integrated nature of the agenda, certain SDG targets are being prioritised, often to the exclusion of those related to ALE. In the absence of sustained efforts to promote indicator development, data compilation and capacity building, it will continue to be difficult if not impossible to compare and interpret adult education patterns over time and place. There are clear gaps between the level of ambition articulated in SDG4 and levels of national and international commitment to develop feasible, robust and representative ALE monitoring tools.

Just like the contested meaning of “life skills” in EFA Goal 3, the lack of a common definition of “relevant skills” in Target 4.4 and of “skills to promote sustainable development” in Target 4.7 also undermines the global monitoring of SDG4. Identifying and using proxy variables for monitoring purposes, an approach used by the GMR, is a flawed strategy (GMR, 2015). Indirect and qualitative monitoring approaches also have their limitations.

For several targets, global information is simply unavailable. For Target 4.7, the data gap regarding ESD and GCED knowledge and skills (values, attitudes and non-academic competencies), whether from international assessments or national reports, is considerable. Similarly, there is no global storehouse on TVET programmes – only education ministry reports on secondary school links to work placement programmes, work-based training and formal TVET – creating monitoring challenges for Targets 4.3 and 4.4. The dearth of systematic evaluations of non-formal education or participation studies of adults beyond the age of formal schooling adversely affects the monitoring of all ALE-related targets in SDG 4.

Given existing data sources, how might the monitoring of Targets 4.3, 4.4, 4.6 and 4.7 proceed? Take, for example, the issue of adult literacy and numeracy (Target 4.6). Many countries used census schedules (based on self-declarations and third party assessments) or national surveys to calculate adult literacy levels, as reported in EFA Goal 4. These indirect assessments of literacy typically underestimate actual adult proficiencies in literacy and numeracy. They also tend to reduce the plural definition of literacy as advanced in *Belém* into binary terms (literate-illiterate). Leading up to and during the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) (2003–2012), some countries began conducting direct assessments of literacy skills. Others participated in comparable assessments, including UNESCO’s Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP), the OECD’s Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) and the World Bank’s Skills Toward Employment and Productivity (STEP). Moreover, certain Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and the Multiplier Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) provide valid information on literacy related skills (GMR, 2015).

In principle, revised versions of the above assessments could serve as a basis for the international monitoring of adult literacy and numeracy in Target 4.6. However, assessing different adult populations at different time points does raise an important policy issue. Since access to formal education among children is increasing over time, so too are adult literacy rates, since more educated children are likely to become literate youth and adults (GMR, 2015). If policy makers wish to identify the conditions under which, or the programs through which, adult literacy is more effectively acquired and retained, more accurate data is needed on literacy levels of the *same* cohort over time (GMR, 2015)

Several new SDG4 targets focus on skills beyond literacy and numeracy (Targets 4.3, 4.4 and 4.7). A key lesson from the monitoring of EFA Goal 3 revolves around the fact that in the absence of a clear definition of “life skills”, international monitoring was stymied. Thus, the precise skills noted in each SDG4 target require careful definition with clear measurement guideposts. In terms of *foundational skills*, existing data sources include surveys conducted by the European Training Foundation, the OECD’s Learning for Jobs study followed by Skills Beyond School, and the ILO’s Recommendation 195 (GMR, 2015). Data sources for monitoring *transferable skills* have also improved: for example, the OECD’s Education for Social Progress project and the “hard” and “soft” skills measured in PIAAC and STEP. If shared definitions of skills can be developed and measured in these projects, policy makers can better identify which types of education, skills and learning increase livelihoods and civic engagement (GMR, 2015).

## Conclusion

The challenge is making surveys of adult education, learning and skill acquisition globally feasible and robust. Reported data need to match international criteria to be comparable and interpretable, and to observe changes over time. In the ALE context, data collection and monitoring are *the* element that must improve; otherwise international and national policy makers will have limited evidence to device effective policies. Unless we move beyond the plethora of international commitments to adult education in *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, CONFINTEA, EFA and now SDGs, progress will continue to be anchored in rhetoric and not reality.

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Julia Steffen

# Global Learning as a cross-sectional task of Agenda 2030? Considerations from the project “Global Learning in the VHS”

*What are some of the building blocks towards sustainable development in the field of development education? The article reflects on how Education for Sustainable Development and Global Learning contribute to this goal and what practical experiences exist within the German VHS.*

This objective 4.7 in the stand-alone Goal 4 on education contains some key elements reflected in the project “Global Learning in the VHS”. The individual educational approaches mentioned and combined in the sum total of “sustainable development”, characterise an interdisciplinary understanding of education, which would enable people to responsibly shape the larger as well as the smaller world, taking into consideration the impact of (development) policies and individual action on people living in the Global South

### **SDGs Target 4.7**

“By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development”.

The following considerations

focus on the educational concepts of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Global Learning or Education (GL). ESD continues to be anchored in formal and non-formal education through the Global Action Programme of UNESCO and in Germany, among other things, through the revision of the guiding principles in education in the area of global development (known as “Orientierungsrahmen für den Lernbereich Globale Entwicklung”<sup>1</sup>). For DVV International as a specialist adult education organisation, Global Learning is the focus of its work within Germany.

## **Education for Sustainable Development and Global Learning – differences and similarities**

ESD, due to the history of its inception, is more environmentally based, while GL focuses on social justice, the reciprocity between local and global level as well as Global North and Global South. Both are close relatives, with educational concepts such as nature and environmental education or intercultural learning in close vicinity. A selective definition for ESD and GL is growing increasingly difficult, as the interconnectedness between developmental and environmental issues tends to be reflected the educational activities offered.

The following basic definitions dating back to the year 2002 help to understand the respective emphases:

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<sup>1/</sup> [http://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen\\_beschluesse/2015/2015\\_06\\_00-Orientierungsrahmen-Globale-Entwicklung.pdf](http://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2015/2015_06_00-Orientierungsrahmen-Globale-Entwicklung.pdf)

“Education for Sustainable Development is more than environmental education. It differs from environmental education as well as from development education through a broader and more inclusive approach, which integrates the environmental, economic and social aspects (“sustainability triangle”). Education for Sustainable Development should contribute to the realisation of the social concept of sustainable development as defined in Agenda 21, and has the aim of empowering people to actively shape an ecologically compatible, economically efficient and socially just environment taking the global perspective into account. With appropriate content, methods and corresponding learning organisation ESD has, in all sectors of education, the task of initiating learning processes that contribute to the acquisition of the analysis, evaluation and capacity building necessary for sustainable development.” (Federal Ministry for Education and Research, 2002)

“Global Education is education that opens people’s eyes and minds to the realities of the world, and awakens them to bring about a world of greater justice, equity and human rights for all. Global Education is understood to encompass Development Education, Human Rights Education, Education for Sustainability, Education for Peace and Conflict Prevention and Intercultural Education; being the global dimensions of Education for Citizenship.” (Maastricht Global Education Declaration, 2002)

Global Learning is based on the fact that people today live and interact in a globalised world. The challenge for education is to provide learners not only with opportunities to learn, but to reflect on their own opinions and roles in this intertwined global society. The prerequisite to sharing and possibly arguing for one’s opinions are skills and tools: information gathering, forming of opinion, contributing to a culture of debate and possibly dispute, forms of political participation and intervention, dealing with media and/or elected representatives. As GL promotes an understanding of the complex relationships between social, environmental, political and economic issues across the globe, it can allow for new modes of thinking and acting. Because complexity is a challenge and a differentiated approach makes simple answers rather impossible – even the choice of glass packaging/returnable plastic packaging and recycled paper/FSC paper is then no longer self-evident – a certain frustration tolerance is helpful. Contradictions, tensions, doubts and different opinions are part of a discursive discussion. Debating controversial aspects and avoiding cliché are part and parcel of educational activities in GL – Fair Trade is an option for action, but by no means the solution to the structures of global trade, reducing consumption by using products collectively or re/upcycling should be included in the discussion. Being able to change one’s perspective, for

example, highlights how the boundaries to other educational concepts such as intercultural learning become easily blurred.

Both – ESD as well as GL – want to create, on the level of personality, an awareness of globalisation and its consequences in different subject areas such as environment, development policies and North-South-relations. The level of action is aimed at providing learners with the opportunity to recognise their own competence and to explore concrete possibilities for action and eventually, to apply them. Thus both educational concepts stand for competency-based education and for innovative, holistic methods.

The above-quoted commitment of Objective 4.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals will also strengthen Global Learning, which contributes to an awareness of the political, economic, environmental and social consequences of globalisation in the general population. The aim is that people recognise themselves as jointly responsible, being citizens and consumers whose individual and political choices shape the world we live in. Without an understanding of how greatly we are all connected in a globalised world (e.g. climate change, displacement and migration, borderless flow of information and money), transformation toward more just systems and societies is hardly imaginable.

## **A synthesis of educational concepts in Agenda 2030?**

At the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015, 193 state and government leaders adopted the declaration on *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*<sup>2</sup>, at its core the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and its 169 objectives. A new feature is the detailed breakdown in different spheres of activity and the target groups, as the SDGs are addressed to all nations, the so-called “developed” countries as well as developing and emerging countries. Thus Germany turns into a developing country. The implementation of the 17 SDGs by 2030 can succeed only through societal rethinking and a change in our political and personal patterns of behaviour. This transformation needs a great deal of education, as moral pleas and knowledge transfer based on facts apparently are not enough. Otherwise telecommunications providers would, for example, not successfully advertise a new smartphone with their contracts every year, given the well-known facts of child labor, extraction of rare earth minerals and working conditions in the factories, to name but a few.

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<sup>2/</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

The SDGs contain a number of environmental (sub-)objectives, especially in the areas of water, energy, oceans, ecosystems, sustainable consumption and modes of production as well as climate change. And they contain development objectives to reduce inequalities within and between countries, on gender equality, on peace and justice. Yet at the same

### **SDGs Goal 8**

#### **Decent Work and Economic Growth**

Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

### **SDGs Goal 13**

#### **Climate Action**

Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

time, Agenda 2030 also accentuates the objective of sustained economic growth. Thus conflicts between goals are pre-programmed: For example, does Goal 13 trump Goal 8? Does the creation of jobs trump protecting the environment?

Education for Sustainable Development and Global Learning are eminently suitable to get us out of the familiar answer-carousel, to develop alternative scenarios and to weigh pros and cons apart from legislative periods, lobby groups and growth paradigms. Both approaches offer the

space to develop educational programmes that accompany and support a transformation to a social, political, economically and ecologically conscious global community. One might argue that little of the SDGs will be realised without a broader and deeper understanding of the relationships in our globalised world. ESD and GL are important building blocks on this constant learning path.

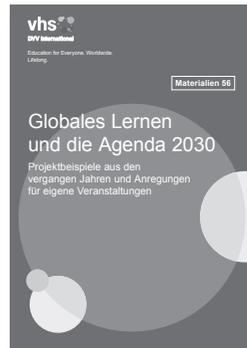
## **Do Global Learning and the VHS fit together?**

Absolutely! Global Learning is an interdisciplinary educational concept which can be understood as a pedagogical response to the sustainable development needs of our global society. At its centre is the interaction between the local and the global level, with action-oriented learning as the aim, the acquisition of skills so that one can orient oneself in this globalised world and live responsibly. Correspondingly broad is its interface with areas such as human rights education, fair trade, environmental education, intercultural learning or sustainability.

Thus GL can be implemented in all VHS departments, as an independent single event or as a series embedded as a unit in an existing format: A series for vegan cooking, including information on the impact of food production on the environment and people in other parts of the

world; a simulation game about international climate negotiations; an input in an IT-course on trash and hardware waste exports and how these affect people in those countries where that waste is dumped; a carousel workshop about the causes of flight, migration and human rights which combines a collection of ideas, what one can do oneself – locally, nationally and internationally.

GL is immensely versatile in content and methodology. Differing views come to expression. Through information (cognition) and reflection (assessment), GL can contribute to civic engagement (action) of the participants. It makes sense to seek complementary thematic expertise from partners in the area of development politics, who can in addition possibly promote the events over their networks. It is one of the ways in which GL can contribute to the visibility and relevance of VHS.



*Global Learning and Agenda 2030*  
Project examples  
[www.dvv-international.de/vhs-kooperationen/globales-lernen/handreichungen/](http://www.dvv-international.de/vhs-kooperationen/globales-lernen/handreichungen/)

## And in practice?

The project “Global Learning in the VHS”, is hosted by DVV International and sponsored by Engagement Global on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The VHS applicants can address their target groups through three lines of funding: young people (including students in second-chance education and vocational schools), adults (from mixed-age groups to special target groups such as senior citizens, volunteers, or local government employees) and multipliers (like VHS employees, employees in NGOs, teachers, social workers).

Within the framework of this project the VHS in Germany create diverse formats and content. Despite the variety of target groups, topics, methods and local settings, there are areas that are reliably mentioned in the applications, for instance “consumption”: We are all citizens and consumers, thus the path is relatively short to put our everyday behaviour – from clothing, to food and travel, to smartphones – into a global context, taking into consideration how people living and working in countries in the Global South are affected. Thus one can approach the topic of “consumption” in various ways, for example, as

- a weekend event (“Global Climate Protection – A Challenge for All”) aimed at senior citizens to reflect on and evaluate the results of the climate negotiations in 2014/2015 and the conclusion of a global climate

agreement. Different methods, such as role-play and planning games allowed abstract topics to come to life, adding different views from politicians, businesspeople to people living in other parts of the world.

- a two-day event (“Our global consumption”) with lectures by, among others, a university instructor of African descent on cotton cultivation, two NGOs on standards, labels and working conditions in regard to raw materials, the environmental officer of a manufacturer of outdoor clothing on the process of certification, the showing of two short films and group work phases. The different approaches allowed the group of adults to acquire new knowledge and created a space for reflection.
- a series at different schools, with 4 one-hour events for children (“Paper consumption in Germany and the implications for developing countries”) with age-appropriate forms of communication: a quiz; an exercise book explaining (the facilitator assumes the role of an exercise book and tells its life story, what the long path from tree to paper product means, with the learners being able to assume the perspective of a tree that loses its life for a short-lived product); an active lecture on the origin of paper and its value in different parts of the world; a paper jungle (with the help of two “ecological rucksacks” the children learned how to distinguish between types of paper and their ecobalance. Toilet paper and exercise books, both from virgin fibre and from ecologically-friendly alternatives were examined. In addition, the various environmental labels and company seals which can be used for orientation were shown and explained).

Flight and migration have increasingly become focal points, starting back in 2014, as VHS act as social seismographs. Because VHS are part of the local and communal setting, their immediate need tends to be for seminars on the subject of flight and migration (routes, causes), intercultural training (for example for volunteers helping refugees) or the building of methodical-didactic competencies for VHS employees due to increasingly ethnically heterogeneous participants. Yet in this context, only proposals can be considered for funding that closely link these issues with development politics and implications for people living in the Global South.

It is important that an exchange with the counterpart is planned for in the project design. So, for example, in a GFL (German as a Foreign Language) course with migrants an exhibition was developed through digital storytelling (“Tell us your story”). This was presented on the premises of a local cultural centre and accompanied by supplementary information. Looking at “the refugees” is unhelpful because they are not an amorphous mass, rather individuals with their own stories, experiences, competencies. To let refugees and migrants speak for themselves on issues that

connect back to the way we live and do business here instead of talking about them should be self-evident, at least in this context.

Global Learning in second-chance education can be (at least) as diverse and complex as for other youth target groups as, for example, a series on “Justice and dignified life. A future without inequality and discrimination” shows. Brainstorming on the definitions and links resulted in topics on which the participants followed up in depth, such as human rights and what happens to the concepts of justice and human dignity when one is a refugee. The theory of human rights was contrasted with life realities of the participants: What do these rights have to do with me? Can I imagine a life without these rights? What do people elsewhere experience? Individual human rights violations were worked on and studied in selected countries (the death penalty, women’s rights, children’s rights). Violations of these rights in certain countries and the “prosperity” in other regions appear, sometimes, in direct proportion to each other, as one group worked out. Models were developed to make these injustices visible: a photo wall, a globe with a production chain, a set table compared to a garbage dump.

## **Using Sustainable Development Goals for Global Learning offers**

Amid all the acronyms – MDGs, SDGs, ESD, WAP, GCE, WAP – that often act uninvitingly on interested laypersons, the Sustainable Development Goals have practical (potential) advantages: They don’t deal with new topics and issues but rather combine various strands, including the question of indicators and development finance. They connect our local realities with the global ones and explicitly mention the responsibilities of cities.

The UN have introduced pictograms that are used worldwide, adding to the (at least visual) perceptibility. By taking up these crosslinks and shaping them with vivid, relevant offers, ESD and GL can act as stimuli.

**SDGs Goal 11**  
**Sustainable Cities and Communities**  
Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable



# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



**1**  
NO POVERTY

## NO POVERTY

End poverty in all its forms everywhere



**2**  
ZERO HUNGER

## ZERO HUNGER

End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculturs



**3**  
GOOD HEALTH  
AND WELL-BEING

## GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages



**4**  
QUALITY  
EDUCATION

## QUALITY EDUCATION

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all



**5**  
GENDER  
EQUALITY

## GENDER EQUALITY

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls



**6**  
CLEAN WATER  
AND SANITATION

## CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all



**7**  
AFFORDABLE AND  
CLEAN ENERGY

## AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all



**8**  
DECENT WORK AND  
ECONOMIC GROWTH

## DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all



**9**  
INDUSTRY, INNOVATION  
AND INFRASTRUCTURE

## INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation



## REDUCED INEQUALITIES

Reduce inequality within and among countries



## SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable



## RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns



## CLIMATE ACTION

Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts\*



## LIFE BELOW WATER

Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development



## LIFE ON LAND

Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss



## PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels



## PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development

\* Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.

# List of Abbreviations

ACT ALLIANCE	Action by Churches Together for Development
AE	Adult Education
AED	Adult Education and Development
AL	Adult Learning
ALE	Adult Learning and Education
APMED	Asia Pacific Meeting Education 2030
ASEAN	Association of the Southeast Asian Nations
ASPBAE	Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CEAAL	Latin American Adult Education Council
CIDSE	International Alliance of Catholic Development Agencies
CIVICUS	World Alliance for Citizenship Participation
CLC	Community Learning Center
CONFINTEA	International Conferences on Adult Education
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DC	Development Cooperation
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
EAEA	European Association for the Education of Adults
ECCE	Early Childhood Education
EFA	Education for All
FFA	Framework for Action
ETF	European Training Foundation
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
FSC	Forest Stewardship Council
GAP	Global Action Programme
GCE	Global Campaign for Education
GCED	Global Citizenship Education
GE	Global Education
GEM	Global Education Monitoring Report
GFL	German as a Foreign Language
GL	Global Learning

GMR	Global Monitoring Report
GONGO	Government-organised non-government Organisation
GRALE	Global Report on Adult Learning and Education
HLPF	High Level Political Forum
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICAE	International Council for Adult Education
ICNL	International Center for Non-for-Profit-Law
ILO	International Labor Organisation
InWEnt / GIZ	Capacity Building International, since 2011 integrated in Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).
IPE	International Perspectives in Adult Education
LAMP	Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme
LLL	Lifelong Learning
MICS	Multiplier Indicator Cluster Survey
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PIAAC	Programme International Assessment of Adult Competencies
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
STEP	Skills Toward Employment and Productivity
TAG	Technical Advisory Group
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UIL	UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Education Culture Science Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNLPD	United Nations Literacy Decade
VHS	Volkshochschule (Community Learning Center)
WEF	World Education Forum
WAP	Weltaktionsprogramm (Global Action Programme)
WHO	World Health Organisation

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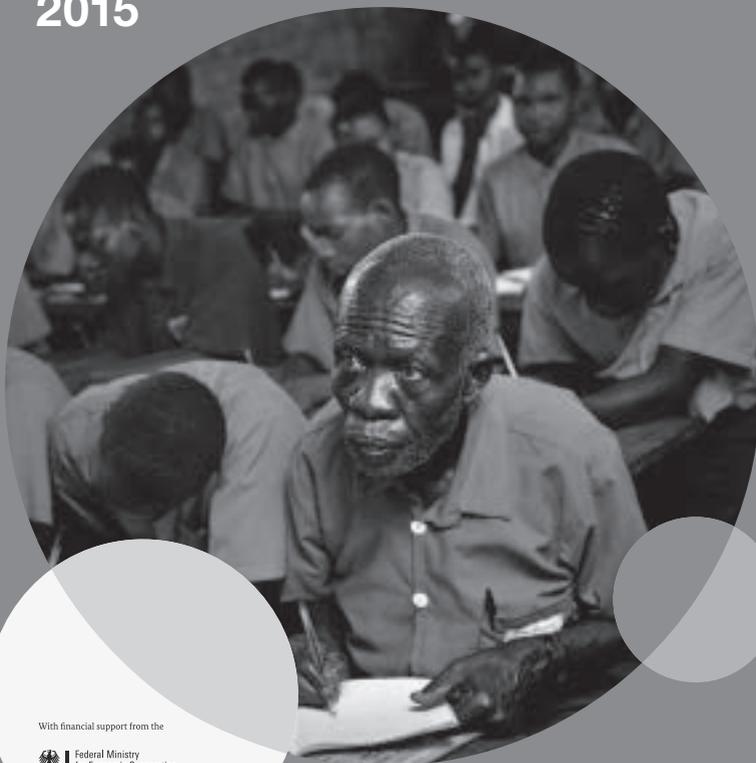
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