

# **Adult Non-formal Education\***

**By**

**Dr. Adama Ouane**

**Director, UNESCO Institute for Education**

**Hamburg**

*\*Text of a paper delivered at the London Conference on Adult Non- formal Education, June 22-24, 2003 organised by the British Association for Literacy in Development (BALID) at the London College of Fashion.*

## ***Introduction***

The notion of adult non-formal education has been a significant feature of policy debates around education in southern countries for many decades. It has drawn attention to the importance and potential of education, learning and training that takes place outside recognised educational institutions. It is termed adult non-formal education because it is systematic learning, including self-directed learning, which may be undertaken in the home, the workplace or elsewhere, through media, open and distance learning.

Adult non-formal education, which has a close relationship with lifelong learning, is usually any organised educational activity outside the established formal educational system. It is essentially about acknowledging the importance of education, learning and training which takes place outside recognised educational institutions. It may operate separately or as an important feature of some broader activity intended to serve identifiable learning clienteles and learning objectives (Coombs, 1973). It offers opportunities to out-of-school children and to adults denied access to education as children.

From the foregoing, adult non-formal education covers all education inputs which fall outside official or formal education systems. This includes parallel education systems run by communities or NGOs and adult literacy classes, delivered in places and at times which suit the needs of participants. They also overlap with various examples of both state and private vocational training programmes channelled towards specific groups, particularly women and other socially and economically marginalised groups. It is also geared towards the immediate improvement of people's lives, towards poverty reduction and giving people a greater sense of control over their lives and giving them information and insights which enable them to make better use of their resources. It can increase people's awareness of their human rights and empower them to act constructively to achieve the implementation of those rights. This can be through problem solving abilities, communication skills, flexibility, self-awareness personal self-discipline, relationship management, self-management skills, community leadership and negotiation skills. What these have in common is that people learn them by experiencing and practising them in life and not through textbooks as such.

Fordham (1993) asserts that the education provided through an adult non-formal system should be in the interests of the learners and that the learners themselves should preferably undertake the organisation and curriculum planning. In essence, it should be 'bottom up' rather than 'top down' in order to empower learners to understand and, if necessary, change the social structure around them.

## ***Opportunities for non-formal education***

There is growing concern over whether the conventional classroom approach is successful in achieving educational goals and objectives. Our society is changing very rapidly and is becoming more complex than ever before. People have to be much more mobile - occupationally, socially and geographically - than in the past. This requires enormous flexibility and social skills, which we can achieve through adult non-formal education.

Out-of-school programmes enable young people to be involved in social learning. They acquire lifeskills and competencies through organising activities, solving problems or volunteering in their community. These skills and competencies are essential for their future and should be recognised as such. Social competence is a prerequisite for social participation.

Adult non-formal education programmes are generally successful and in high demand when they promote and result in a high level of participation by the people themselves. It is easier to be involved in activities in which one can have some responsibility and sense of ownership. This raises the important element of commitment or engagement. There is not the same pressure to learn as there is in school for example. This type of active learning is also less exclusive than the formal education system. Success or failure in school mostly depends on the cognitive and intellectual capacities of a young person where he or she can fail or pass an examination. These are not the same criteria as in adult non-formal learning. In principle, everyone is encouraged to participate the activities are based on the needs of those involved.

All adults need the opportunity to continue to learn in life and work, to be a creative citizen, a family member, to bring their qualifications up to date and, where necessary, to train for a different job. Adult non-formal education also aims to achieve broader benefits. It encourages and supports active citizenship, helps communities help themselves, and opens up new opportunities such as the chance to explore art, music and literature. It helps strengthen families and encourages independence. This means that everyone must have access to high quality, relevant learning at a time, pace and place that suits them.

### ***Desirable outcomes of adult non-formal education***

Desirable outcomes of adult non-formal education are a form of qualitative performance indicators that learners set for themselves as motivating and worth their investment of time and resources. They also enable organisations to plan what learners will understand and be able to do as a result of an input. Desirable outcomes enable the measurement of anticipated and unanticipated learning that has taken place. By making desirable outcomes explicit, learners are informed of their learning entitlements and at the same time receive the benchmarks against which unanticipated learning can be gauged.

Adult non-formal education proposes a set of desirable outcomes composed of a number of specific skills and competencies and expected changes in self-confidence and empowerment. Some of these are achievable and observable through various means such as jobs, welfare, economic growth, clean environment, sustainable use of natural resources, reduced crime, better health and food security. Others such as self-esteem, autonomy and empowerment are to be observed and detected through narrative and assertive actions.

This could involve communication through essay and analytical writing, scientific and technical report writing, presenting ideas professionally and counselling, listening, and advising. It could also involve problem-solving – learning what questions to ask, analytical and critical reasoning, developing integrated solutions and personal time management.

Desirable outcomes of adult non-formal education could be understanding context through recognising cultural diversity, learning the impact of social, economic and

political forces and experience with exercise, sport and allied health issues. Other desirable skills include managing information through interacting with internet- and web-based technology, familiarity with laboratory equipment and instrumentation, data and knowledge collection and presentation.

### ***Intended outcomes of adult non-formal education compared with actual outcomes***

Intended outcomes give details of programmes to be executed by the participants. They can be expressed in terms of the objectives which participants should be able to show that they have achieved, in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills and even attitudes. They are written as descriptors of ways that participants will be expected to demonstrate the results of their learning. Well-expressed statements of intended outcomes help participants to identify their own targets, and work systematically towards demonstrating their achievement of these targets.

In designing intended outcomes, it is desirable to work out exactly what participants will be able to do by the end of each defined adult non-formal education programme. The intended outcomes should serve as a map and should be relevant to their needs or intentions. The level and standards associated with the programme will be judged by reference to the stated intended outcomes. When introducing the intended outcomes, we must give credit for existing experience, and confirm that it is useful if some members of the group already have experience and expertise that they can share with others. We must also be ready for the question ‘why’? It is only natural for participants to want to know why a particular intended outcome is being addressed. We must be prepared to illustrate each outcome with some words about its purpose. Participants should see both the short-term and long-term benefits of gaining a particular skill or competence.

A well-designed set of intended outcomes should automatically become the framework for the design of assessed tasks. It is worth asking how to measure each of the tasks leading to the intended outcome. If it is easy to think of how it will be measured, one can normally go ahead and design the outcome. If it is much harder to think of how it could be measured, it is usually a signal that one may need to think further about the outcome, and try to relate it more firmly to tangible evidence that could be assessed.

Intended outcomes can be formally assessed to determine the actual outcomes of adult non-formal education programmes through tests, examinations and coursework, as well as such processes as:

- Focus groups
- Group tasks
- Recorded discussions
- Quizzes and
- Learning diaries
- Interviews

It is important to find the right words when writing both the intended and actual outcomes of any programme. Useful words include: analyse, appraise, apply, calculate, choose, compare, contrast, create, criticise, demonstrate, derive, describe, design, develop, differentiate, discuss, explain, evaluate, extrapolate, formulate, identify, list, measure, name, plan, plot, postulate, predict, present, propose, recall,

recognise, use, utilise and so on. By articulating the intended and actual outcomes in this way it becomes clearer to participants what they should expect to be able to do at the end of any programme.

### ***Needs assessments and impact studies***

A review of research into needs assessments and impact has shown that this depends on a number of factors such as:

- the provision of feedback to participants;
- the active involvement of participants in their own programmes;
- adjusting activities to take account of the results of assessment;
- a recognition of the profound influence assessment has on the motivation and self-esteem of participants;
- the need for participants to be able to assess themselves and understand how to improve.

Adult non-formal education that is useful is process-oriented and based on learning lifeskills, which are more difficult to assess. Learning takes place through experience and through reflections on this experience. There are several examples of award and certification schemes for out-of-school based programmes. Most organisations give participants some proof that they have participated in an activity or training programme. Some take this a step further by describing the activities in which the person has been involved.

The award is not based on factual knowledge alone but also organised around key skills. The participants are highly involved in their own learning through:

- Self-assessment;
- The setting of clear and achievable goals;
- Identifying, expressing and reflecting on their own view of progress and the development of new opportunities;
- Summarising achievements and compiling a portfolio of supporting evidence.

Participants should be encouraged to reflect, describe, analyse and communicate what they experience in the activities in which they participate.

### ***Livelihood skills for economic development***

Sustainable livelihood skills involve the creation of conditions that support development in human, natural and economic systems whilst safeguarding resources and opportunities for future generations. They also offer individuals the means to provide themselves with food, shelter, critical voice and self-confidence, and acceptable quality of life in dignity and in a suitable manner.

It is a means of living or of supporting life and meeting individual and community needs in diverse ways. It is concerned with people's capacities to generate and maintain their means of living and enhance their well being, and that of future generations. These capacities are contingent upon the availability and accessibility of options which are ecological, socio-cultural, economic and political and are predicated on equity, ownership of resources and participatory decision making.

Livelihoods have five basic capital assets. These are natural, social, human, physical and financial capital.

- Natural Capital - nature's goods and services;
- Social Capital - the cohesiveness of people and societies;
- Human Capital - the status of individuals;
- Physical Capital - local infrastructure;
- Financial Capital - stocks of money, savings, pensions.

These five assets have common features. They are linked to encourage holistic thinking. In practice, they are traded-off and against each other. They are dynamic over time and different for different households and communities. And access to these assets is a vital part of sustainability and resilience.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) differentiates between a job and a livelihood, which are often used interchangeably. A livelihood skill is essentially based on an engagement in a number of activities which, at times, neither require a formal agreement nor are limited to a particular trade. Livelihoods may or may not involve money. Jobs invariably do.

Sustainable livelihoods therefore provide meaningful work that fulfils the social, economic, cultural and spiritual needs of all members of a community. Policies are presently geared toward economic growth based on over-consumption by the few while the needs of many people are unmet. Instead, socio-economic security and equity, meeting the needs of all and promoting authentic human development should be the overall goals of policy formulation.

The overall objective of sustainable livelihood approaches is poverty elimination. To this end, sustainable livelihood should be guided by the principle that intervention should be: people-centred; participatory; based on holistic analysis (focused intervention); multi-level (recognising micro-, meso-, macro-linkages); building on people's existing strengths; flexible and responsive. Initiatives promoting sustainable livelihoods and poverty alleviation are critical for the world's developing and transitional economy countries - and talented individuals who have skills and experience in these areas are sought after and valued in today's global marketplace.

### ***Functional knowledge for social, civic and cultural developments***

There is an urgent need to resolve conflicts and counter forces which militate against inclusion and unity. There is the need to adjust to a range of social contexts by appropriate and sensitive behaviour, relate well to other people's social skills and personal qualities, work successfully as a member of a group or team, share views and opinions with others, and work towards consensus.

Efforts must be made to enable individuals to reflect on their own contribution to society and to the world of work. They need to show respect for people, living things, property and the environment. They should benefit from advice offered by those in authority or counselling roles; exercise responsibility and appreciate the rights and responsibilities of individuals within the wider social setting. They should understand how societies function and are organised in structures such as the family and local and wider communities. Above all, they should participate in activities relevant to the

community and understand the notion of interdependence in an increasingly complex society. These skills can be developed through:

- identifying key values and principles on which community life is based;
- fostering a sense of community/with common, inclusive values;
- promoting racial, religious and other forms of equality;
- encouraging people to work co-operatively;
- encouraging people to recognise and respect social differences and similarities;
- providing positive corporate experiences — for example, through assemblies, team activities, residential experiences;
- helping people develop personal qualities which are valued in a civilised society, for example, thoughtfulness, honesty, respect for difference, moral principles, independence, interdependence, self-respect;
- helping people resolve tensions between their own aspirations and those of the group or wider society;
- providing a conceptual and linguistic framework within which to understand and debate social issues;
- providing opportunities for engaging in the democratic process and participating in community life;
- providing opportunities for people to exercise leadership and responsibility;
- providing positive and effective links with the world of work and the wider community;
- monitoring in simple, pragmatic ways, the success of what is provided.
- recognise and understand their own cultural assumptions and values;
- understanding of the influences which have shaped their own cultural heritage;
- understanding of the dynamic, evolutionary nature of cultures;
- appreciate cultural diversity and accord dignity to other people's values and beliefs, thereby challenging racism and valuing racial equality;
- willingness to modify cultural values in the light of experience;
- using language and understand images and icons, for example, in music, art and literature which have significance and meaning in a culture;
- willingness to participate in, and respond to, artistic and cultural enterprises;
- appreciating the heights of human achievement in all cultures and societies;
- appreciating the diversity and interdependence of cultures
- providing opportunities for people to explore their own cultural assumptions and values

### ***Impact assessment***

In its broadest sense, impact assessment is the process of identifying the anticipated or actual impacts of a development intervention, on those social, economic and environmental factors which the intervention is designed to affect or may inadvertently affect.

In any impact assessment balancing the priorities of the participants and those of different stakeholders is an important consideration. A decision needs to be made in terms of who should be involved in the process: clients, non-clients in target communities, field staff, management, board, donors? This will affect how the impact assessment objectives and questions are defined, and how the results are interpreted and used.

An impact assessment may include statistical quantitative methods as well as qualitative, analytical and descriptive approaches.

Whatever techniques are used, consideration should be given to:

- transparency and public accountability
- participant involvement
- stakeholder involvement
- reliability of information obtained
- reliability of inference for policy improvement
- cost and skill requirements
- mid-term review

The starting point for any impact assessment must be an understanding of the context in which an organisation is working, and the outcomes and impacts that the organisation is seeking to achieve (its mission). By thinking this through, it is possible to define what is to be learnt from the impact assessment, and develop a conceptual framework and hypotheses for the impacts that are expected.

The selection of tools is a balancing act, choosing something that will reliably collect the data needed, whilst meeting other objectives of the impact assessment. A practical starting point for most organisations should be to examine where it is starting from, the information currently being collected, how the existing information can be made more rigorous or comprehensive, and how data collection can be built into existing work patterns. In addition, what external sources of information are useful? It is necessary to be aware of the costs and benefits of different methods, and accept that trade-offs have to be made to create something that is manageable and cost-effective. Each methodology has its advantages and disadvantages, and therefore informed choices need to be made about what approach will generate the information needed in the most cost-effective way, whilst fitting with the objectives of the impact assessment.

### ***Bibliography***

Coombs, P. (1968) *The World Educational crisis*, New York, Oxford University Press

Coombs, P. (1985) *The World Crisis in Education*, New York: Oxford University Press

Coombs, P. with Ahmed, M, (1974) *Attacking Rural Poverty*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

Fordham, P. E. (1993) 'Informal, non-formal and formal education programmes' in *YMCA George*

Simkins, T. (1977) *Non-Formal Education and Development - some critical issues*, Manchester. Department of Adult and Higher Education, University of Manchester

Torres, C. A. (1990) *The Politics of Nonformal Education in Latin America*, New York: Praeger