



**CSO Recommendations on Adult Learning and Education (ALE) in Asia Pacific
Position Paper Submitted by ASPBAE
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The centrality of ALE in the Asia Pacific contexts

There is a diversity of contexts in the Asia Pacific where adult learning and education (ALE) plays a strategic role in addressing the realities and shifts that make people's lives vulnerable. The Asia-Pacific is one of the most disaster-prone and vulnerable regions to climate change. Communities face the adverse impacts of climate change, loss of livelihoods, migration, the challenges posed by a high proportion of young or ageing populations, gender violence, identity-based discrimination, weakening and possible loss of indigenous knowledge systems, resources and identities, armed conflicts and political instability.

In the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the lockdowns took a heavy toll on the economy as a whole but has been most damaging to the work and income of informal laborers, low- and medium-skilled workers and those in vulnerable employment. Women endure the compounded impacts of the pandemic as they struggle with greater unpaid care work, income and livelihood losses, and increased domestic violence. The pandemic has caused reversals in gains in poverty eradication. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) estimates that 75 million to 80 million more people in Asia and the Pacific have been pushed into extreme poverty by COVID-19 related economic disruptions since 2020. Learners from marginalised and disadvantaged backgrounds, including those from rural and remote areas, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities, women, Dalits, learners with disabilities and migrants continue to face steeper obstacles in accessing and continuing their learning. Wide-scale lockdowns have shut down many of the Community Learning Centres (CLCs) and other ALE programmes that cater to these learners. The shift to online and remote learning solutions has further widened the digital divide between urban and rural areas, the rich and the poor, and the privileged and vulnerable.

It is also alarming to note that there are governments taking advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic to institute authoritarian measures that curtail democratic rights and citizens' participation, silence dissent, advance narrow political agendas above wider public interest, weaken democratic institutions and processes, and violate human rights. Youth and adults bear witness to these violations in their everyday life and face challenges in reporting and exacting accountability as organized actions have also been affected by repressive rules under the lockdown.

Hate and intolerance, extremisms of various types have fanned violence and conflict, pitting countries and communities against each other at the cost of many lives and massive

displacement. Social media has been systematically employed to fuel fake news, conspiracy theories, pseudoscience and fomented fear and divisions.

Rapid technological advances including the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and expanding digitalization will continue to shape and re-shape the world of work, living and learning. The risks and opportunities need further appreciation, but set within the reality of wide disparities in access to technology and huge power imbalances in the ownership of these technologies and digital environments.

Given these contexts, there is an urgent need to rethink ALE. Beyond teaching and learning, ALE means giving space and voice to youth and adult learners, to enable them to cope with their constantly rapidly changing context, and meaningfully contribute to shaping a vision for the future that is more sustainable, peaceful and just - where “no one is left behind”. Informed decision-making should be part of the lifelong learning process. Learning, therefore, should be a processing of analyzing, confronting, transforming, connecting and owning.

Education systems must go beyond the Western academic development of education and ALE. It is important for ALE to take root in the diverse education systems in the region which should include, amongst others, context-responsive pedagogies and curriculum, traditional knowledge, upholding of indigenous knowledge systems, and with a strong recognition of the role of non-formal and informal education in ALE provisioning. Governments must recognize the centrality of communities and the role of youth and adults in ALE. Asia Pacific women, in their diversity, should be at the front and center of the regional and national ALE policy and programmes where their issues of education and development are addressed.

Asia Pacific CSO Recommendations for ALE

The CONFINTEA is convened every 12 years and the seventh CONFINTEA (Morocco in 2022) will be organized at a juncture replete with complex challenges and opportunities requiring urgent responses and decisive action. As governments, international partners, CSOs and other stakeholders gather in CONFINTEA VII to shape the global agenda and guidance for ALE, there should be greater ambition and commitments for ALE. CONFINTEA VII should deliver on the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals: Agenda 2030’s commitment to **lifelong learning for all** and to “leave no one behind.” It should catalyze greater action to meet the ALE targets within SDG4 and the wider SDGs, reversing decades of neglect of the ALE sector, and building sustainable and viable lifelong learning systems that address the learning needs of marginalized youth and adults all over the world. Going beyond the SDGs, CONFINTEA VII should also contribute to the current rethinking on the futures of education, locating ALE at the center of this visioning exercise, grounded on people’s aspirations for equitable, inclusive and sustainable societies and planet.

Recognising the strategic importance of CONFINTEA VII to strengthen country level ALE policy and provisioning, ASPBAE organized subregional CSO preparatory meetings¹ in 2021

¹ In 2021, ASPBAE organized CSO meetings to build consensus on their ALE recommendations that will be advocated in the UNESCO organized subregional consultations on CONFINTEA VII. Central Asia meeting was on 22 February, South Asia on 23 March, Southeast Asia on 30 March and Pacific on 22 July in partnership with

to build consensus on an ALE agenda and recommendations that were put forward in the formal CONFINTEA VII subregional consultations organized by UNESCO in the region. These ALE recommendations were generated from CSOs' effective ALE practices and advocacy working especially with marginalized communities. On 22 August, the ASPBAE members reviewed and built on the discussions in the subregional CSO consultations and agreed on the priority agenda and ALE recommendations that will be advocated during the Asia Pacific Regional CONFINTEA VII Conference on 22 September 2022.

Policy and Financing

1. Governments and education policymakers must develop and implement comprehensive, robust, and concrete policies promoting culturally appropriate and gender responsive ALE within a lifelong learning framework.

Adult literacy remains an outstanding issue in the Asia Pacific region as it remains home to 46% of the world's youth and 61% of the world's adults who are denied their right to literacy. In recognizing this challenge, ALE policies and implementation must rethink the notion of literacy. It must recognize the different literacies and knowledge systems, employ lifelong learning approaches, linking formal, non-formal and informal learning with skills and work, environmental and climate literacy, digital literacy, gender education and ALE for responsible citizenship, tolerance, peace, justice and human rights and social cohesion. Adequate and predictable resources should be allocated to adult literacy efforts going beyond sustaining pilots, and financing strategies that ensure the use, retention and advancement of literacy skills acquired. This should include financing and sustaining supportive learning environments such as wider access to libraries, magazines, newspapers, internet-based material and others.

2. Build disaggregated data systems to inform ALE policy and programs. Further, governments need to strengthen data gathering and analysis around social cohesion measures that can be used to influence adult education policy and funding debate. There should be equal weighting of social cohesion measures with those of economic drivers.
3. Governments must address the massive financing gap for ALE by increasing and allocating public funding to the development, implementation, and monitoring of ALE policies, plans, and programmes that cater to the learning needs of all learners, especially the most marginalised and vulnerable groups. Education systems must invest in strengthening the non-formal and informal education for ALE and strengthen the capacities of community learning centers in delivering education programmes especially on health, re-skilling, livelihoods, critical thinking, gender, environmental and climate literacy, media literacy, responsible citizenship, tolerance and peace-building.

Governments and the international community should seriously commit to and undertake tax justice measures to generate the necessary resources for education and ALE, following agreement in the Incheon Framework for Action for SDG4 in 2015,

which observed that: *‘this requires widening the tax base (in particular, by ending harmful tax incentives), preventing tax evasion and increasing the share of the national budget allocated to education’*.

4. International cooperation and development partners must increase Official Development Aid (ODA) for ALE towards helping least developed countries and low-middle income countries in achieving universal literacy, especially accelerating cooperation for women’s literacy and education on specific themes such as skills education for decent work and digital literacy for marginalised youth and women, citizenship and environmental and climate literacy. The impact on development and social cohesion of ALE has been proven time and again and is urgent for sustained recovery from emergencies. ODA and international cooperation must give equal commitment and attention to ALE.

We need to give greater visibility to ALE in the SDG 4 Cooperation architecture and in the different multilateral education financing mechanisms including GPE and ECW, to lobby for attention to ALE as this remains largely absent in these mechanisms.

Equity and Inclusion

5. Countries must address the learning losses of youth and adults on account of the COVID-19 pandemic and institute new learning programmes that will enable people to combat the impacts of this crisis . Ensure digital equity by providing free and open access to appropriate technologies and tools and build the capacities of youth and adults in using the online learning platforms. At the same time, develop and facilitate blended learning opportunities combining online with offline learning and community-based adult learning programmes, especially to reach the most vulnerable and excluded groups such as women, people with disabilities, and indigenous peoples.
6. Enhance the capacities of teachers and educators for ALE in facilitating blended learning through training on developing materials for online platforms, skills in using digital technology and education apps for teaching as well as in developing modules and materials for offline learning sessions, especially for learners in remote areas where there is no internet infrastructure.
7. Governments must offer multilingual ALE. ALE offered in indigenous languages are critical for all learning and education and must be delivered with consideration to culturally responsive worldviews, models, paradigms and epistemologies.” We strongly recommend that all information must be translated into the local languages of both ALE learners and the workforce (community educators, indigenous teachers, youth mentors, etc). Revitalization and language strategies must be part of ALE.
8. Countries need to institute robust Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) systems that will recognize and accredit quality ALE programmes implemented by CSOs and NGOs working with youth and adults in marginalised communities. This will provide learners pathways towards further education and/or decent work. At the

same time, RVA must be developed towards integrating traditional knowledge and intergenerational learning into TVET and community learning programs. In the Pacific, for example, women and artisans have much knowledge to offer such as in weaving, crafts making, canoe building, and construction of disaster-resilient houses.

Governance and Participation

9. Institutionalise close cooperation among all relevant stakeholders of ALE, including Ministries of Education and other government agencies, civil society organisations, development assistance agencies, academia, unions, adult education providers, and the media for scaled-up convergence efforts.
10. Strengthen the role and capacities of local governments in local policy development for ALE and in financing and provision of relevant education programmes for youth and adults, especially to marginalised constituencies.
11. Recognise the crucial role that civil society organisations play in ALE policy development, planning, monitoring, evaluation, and even the provision of ALE programmes by putting in place institutionalised processes and platforms for meaningful participation and collaboration of CSOs with governments.
12. Increase transparency and accountability in the budget process and use of the funds for ALE by making information on budget plans, decisions, and allocations available to general public.

Little attention towards ALE meant many years of neglect and insufficient funding thereby relegating it to a 'subordinate' identity when it deserves increased financing priorities and a high standing alongside the formal education system due to its power to create social transformation and empower adults, women, migrants, indigenous people, ethnic minorities, vulnerable groups, and communities at large. CONFINTEA VII in 2022 must be decisive in changing this reality across countries. It must be action-oriented and go beyond the rhetoric. Member States must agree on concrete agenda and commitments, for example, deliberate on how to integrate ALE into the SDGs implementation and deliver on the commitments to ensure "no one is left behind" in ALE until the next CONFINTEA.