

ADEA Working Group on Non-Formal Education

The Dynamics of Non-Formal Education

Volume II

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FOREWORD

This collection of papers attempts to reflect the process and present the outcome of a three-day symposium on the Dynamics of Non-formal Education (NFE) held in Johannesburg in December 1999.

This Symposium was called by the Working Group on Non-Formal Education (WG-NFE) of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) to create an open forum for a range of key actors actively involved in non-formal education (NFE). A major task the ADEA WG-NFE assigned to itself was creating an institutional framework for an integrated, holistic learning system rehabilitating, recognising or simply valuing the learning acquired through whatever means or modes. The failure to achieve the Education for All (EFA) goals forces us to have a hard look at all learning activities, especially those outside the school compound or influence.

The proposed Symposium was an effort to launch a systematic debate and review thoroughly policies, research and action that not only advocate but also demonstrate an integrative approach truly activating the interface between different education delivery systems and learning modalities. As strongly emphasised by the participants, this is not to arrive at a compromise of uniformity, but rather a recognition – in policy and practice – of a wide diversity of learning situations, reflecting not only alternative modes of participation but also a greater variety of potential mixtures of such modes.

The learning activities labelled NFE are multi-varied and multipurpose. They are tailor-made responses to diverging and diversifying needs and demands. The ambitious goal set forth by NFE, some will say its pretentious agenda, is at the heart of the underlining controversies persisting on the theme. The usefulness of these programmes, their real or supposed contribution to the overall system performance are bones of contention between those promoting these activities as innovative responses to learning demands and their opponents. The issues raised are related to supply and demand. They focused on policy dimensions and their institutional characteristics. They addressed concerns for quality and obligation for justice and equality. A special attention was given to their relation to the formal system and to the overall call for basic education for all.

A merit of this Symposium was to get away from the self-congratulatory monologue of the NFE militants or apostles and convey rather an interactive confrontation of practice and ideas on the subject among diverse groups and partners. It attracted representatives of groups with conflicting views and expectations on the matter such as policy-makers, researchers, practitioners/activists as well as representatives from the private sector, NGOs and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). This interest from such a broad spectrum of stakeholders could be interpreted as a clear demonstration of the potential intrinsically inherent to these programmes. It could certainly be attributed to their main distinction in addressing diversity. Looking at the range of activities in their contexts and their inter-connection within NFE itself but also in relation to formal education was a worthwhile challenge.

The keen interest shown by many participants in this Symposium was partly due to its refusal to oppose NFE to the formal system, to look at it as a complementary or alternative learning component of a dominant, more correct or simply better formal learning standard. As Wim Hoppers forcefully put it, in this time of worldwide debate on lifelong learning (LLL), attention

needs to focus on the increasing redundancy of the very idea of compartmentalisation. In a context of greater recognition of multiple and diverse learning needs, multiple arrangements and technologies for "creating learning experiences" and for a system-wide accreditation of learning outcomes, the boundaries between formal and non-formal education, face to face and distance education, in-school and out-of-school education, are rapidly becoming obsolete. The overall debate thus centred around the key processes, actors/institutions involved in the creating or unfolding of learning societies.

All together 13 papers were commissioned and grouped under the following three categories. The contributions by Roger Avenstrup, Wim Hoppers, Jeanne Moulton and Roy Williams are chiefly concerned with overall policy and planning/management issues of NFE in relation to formal education and basic education on one hand, and the overall challenge of lifelong learning on the other hand. A second set of papers prepared by Mamadou Aliou Sow, François Niada, Ehsanur Rahman and Muhammed Ibrahim dwell on concrete examples of NFE programmes, with emphasis on context-specific learning needs and demands emanating mainly from young people and out-of-school youth. The last category of presentations by Catherine O. Hoppers, J.D. Thompson, CLUSA and Kazi Rafiqul Alam are chiefly concerned with conceptual and practical issues of basic literacy and NFE programmes and development for adults.

The key question raised by all presenters remain how to bring to the centre, the large and diverse education schemes at the margin of the societies catering for the needs of various groups and striving for recognition. Very little of the insights gained through these learning initiatives have found their way into the mainstream in spite of the limitations disclosed by formal education and its inability to reach EFA goals. While some of the papers analyse the alternative education provision for various groups, they all share a common agenda for an integrated action leading to a holistic learning system inclusive of all learning modalities.

The ADEA WG-NFE wishes to thank all the authors for their valuable contribution to this debate. In particular, the Working Group is grateful to Wim Hoppers (Dutch Embassy) and Jeanne Moulton (USAID) for executing the difficult task of academic editing so efficiently. This is a demonstration of the key contribution that partner agencies can make to the Working Group, besides providing funding support.

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