

The Arab House for Adult Education and Development "AHAED"

Policy Paper for CONFINTEA VII

"The seventh conference on adult education and the endeavor to highlight and discuss regional trends, challenges and practices in the field of adult education and learning in the region"

Preface

If education is the gateway to development and a guarantee of its sustainability, then civil society is the true echo of the quality of education and the payoff of its added values, and education is linked to civil society through direct developmental entrances represented in the dimensions of knowledge, culture, values, building of citizenship and participation in practice, the relationship of education to the labor market, and the rooting of the concept of lifelong learning, hence the legitimacy of civil society interventions in education in terms of: the trends of the education/learning system (its skills and knowledge, educational/learning content, spending on education), reform and development of educational methods, programs and curricula in line with technological developments and accelerating knowledge revolutions.

The Arab House for Adult Education and Development (AHAED) has held several specialized meetings to come up with this report in the presence of representatives of the four networks (the names of the member associations are listed below) that include more than 475 NGO's, and they are:

- Arab Network for Literacy and Adult Education (ANLAE)
- Arab Network for Popular Education (ANPE)
- Arab Network for Civic Education (ANHRE)
- Arab Campaign for Education for All (ACEA)

And in partnership with the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association (DVV International).

This paper came to express a common vision and reality for those interested in education/learning issues in the Arab region.

First - Regional background, context and characteristics (who are we?)

The Arab House for Adult Education and Development "AHAED": a renaissance, educational, and enlightening project, based in the Lebanese capital Beirut, which adopts a regional innovation initiative; resulted from continuous and long-term partnership and efforts between all the networks mentioned above, whose vision stems from the right of individuals to learn for life without discrimination, and in line with the fourth goal of the sustainable development goals. It is a platform for exchange and dialogue between educators, experts, institutions and policy makers, in order to renew the thinking and approaches of adult education, and is based on general principles of work that include renewing visions, building capabilities and development, developing researches, supporting adult education development, contributing to the process of setting and developing policies, developing best practices, and building partnerships and networking regionally and internationally. It also promotes the production of

knowledge in the Arab world, and consolidates the slogan of "one voice for adult learning and education for development" on the ground. The Arab House for Adult Education and Development (AHAED) conducts international and regional cooperation; to support Arab monitoring reports of progress in adult learning and education and lifelong learning in collaboration between the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) and the DVV International. A virtual webinar was organized on 11 August 2020, bringing together national coordinating bodies and civil society groups concerned with adult learning and education. This symposium is considered an initiative to launch joint action to support national coordinating bodies in monitoring reports of progress in adult learning and education and lifelong learning, which will feed into the Global Report to monitor progress in Adult Learning and Education and lifelong learning (GRALE). Two initiatives were implemented (in the year 2020) to strengthen the partnership between civil society and the bodies concerned with adult learning and education in (Egypt and Lebanon) by participating in filling out the Fifth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education questionnaire.

As part of its 2021-2022 plan, AHAED will continue to provide more support and capacity-building for civil society and the national coordinating bodies in all the Arab countries, with the aim of preparing for an effective influential Arab Civil Societies participation in the Seventh International Conference on Adult Education CONFINTEA to be held in 2022 in Morocco.

Second - The general situation of Adult Learning and Education (ALE) within the perspective of lifelong learning in the region

Despite the remarkable development in our Arab region in the field of education / learning, there are still great challenges and gaps that threaten lifelong learning, including:

1. The cost of education is an obstacle to the continuation of lifelong education / learning, especially for the poor and low-income people
2. ALE is no longer a priority for decision-makers and policy makers in many of our Arab countries
3. ALE is marginalized or underestimated, with the absence of rooting the concept of lifelong learning, and adult education is treated with traditional methods that lack creativity and innovation
4. Marginalization of the values of tolerance and peace, acceptance of difference, and citizenship, limiting them to a theoretical framework without practice and application
5. The absence of policies and future visions to deal with emergencies and pandemics, and the consequent displacement, asylum, further marginalization, and the absence of psychological and social security
6. Fragility of partnership and networking between governments, civil society, and the private sector, particularly in the field of ALE
7. The unavailability and lack of clear, specific and accurate data with regard to education in general and ALE in particular
8. Most adult education activities are limited to literacy and the ability to read, write and do arithmetic
9. Weak evaluation mechanisms and tools by bodies concerned with ALE, and reliance on quantitative rather than qualitative performance and evaluation

Third - Achievements and Challenges

By analyzing the context in the Arab region and monitoring the achievements and challenges related to ALE issues, many achievements were monitored:

1. The emergence of unified and participatory initiatives and visions to support ALE in the region through networking and partnership between civil society organizations, the government sector, as well as the private sector
2. The existence of successful models and experiences. It is necessary to look at this accumulation and circulate these experiences and successful expertise, especially the field initiatives and interventions by AHAED members that have been developed to face the Corona crisis
3. Recently, many studies and researches have appeared that are concerned with education / learning issues
4. There is an attempt to unify visions and concepts and develop curricula that take into account the needs of adults and start from their reality and are interested in linking education / learning and the labor market
5. There are attempts to integrate the private sector and soft forces to embrace ALE issues

Despite all these efforts and the progress made, there are many challenges facing ALE in the region, the most important of which are:

1. The lack of educational innovation and the weakness of new methods that enhance the added values of teaching / learning
2. The lack of government policies that support ALE
3. Poor funding and allocations by governments or donors to support ALE
4. The governments' preoccupation with the security and political challenges facing the Arab region
5. Weakness and deficiencies in curricula, experiences, qualifications and training centers concerned with ALE and lifelong learning
6. The weakness of the link between the levels of knowledge and skills provided by education and learning programs for adults on the one hand, and qualification for the labor market on the other hand/ Recognition/ Validation of Prior Learning
7. The weakness of programs that promote and entrench human rights and active citizenship
8. Lack of interest in education and nurturing from a human value perspective, social restructuring and psychological security, especially in areas that suffer from armed political unrest in some places of conflict in our Arab countries
9. There is no common and clear understanding about ALE in the Arab region. ALE is taking place in urban and rural communities. It is implemented by civil society as well as public and private institutions. It is taking place through literacy education, personal and skills development, civic and cultural education. However, there are no holistic policy frameworks representing ALE in countries of the Arab region.
10. Weak employment of technology in the field of ALE, especially in times of crisis
11. The existence of a gap between teaching and learning in practice with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals as a basic input to reducing poverty, destitution and marginalization

Fourth - Changes in adult education and learning due to the epidemic (positive and negative aspects)

The Corona pandemic stormed the world by surprise, and revealed many shortcomings and negatives in adult education / learning issues:

1. It disrupted ALE activities in Arab countries as a result of distancing and precaution, which affected readability
2. It revealed the limitations of distance learning and its ability to constitute a useful and effective alternative to ALE activities, particularly in the poorest and most needy areas
3. It has blatantly highlighted the poor preparation of teachers and ALE personnel in the field of technology
4. It helped widen the gap between education and the eradication of everything that was built at the level of educational or cultural outputs, such as human rights and citizenship with all their values

It also had many positive aspects in working to review policies and legislation related to education, particularly ALE, in terms of:

1. Refining and building the capabilities of the teacher and the learner in new learning patterns compatible with the requirements of working in pandemic conditions, and establishing a new culture of learning within these patterns for life
2. Working on a new, modern definition of ALE in light of cognitive and digital variables
3. Allowing civil society, with its organizations, to play influential roles in policies, and to promote partnership and networking at all levels
4. The need to find legislative amendments that give spaces for civil society to stand by with governments for ALE
5. Continuing lifelong education and learning to ensure preventing relapses and increasing in educational waste rates

Fifth - Main topics and priorities related to ALE policies and practices:

1. Building a common vision and concepts about the concepts of ALE
2. Developing curriculum as well as the tools and methods used in evaluation and monitoring to ensure effectiveness
3. Training and qualification of those in charge of ALE, including facilitators, supervisors, curriculum developers, and monitoring and evaluation officials
4. Empowering women / girls and preparing them for quality of life
5. The concept of citizenship and linking it to global citizenship, human and women's rights, and its inclusion in ALE curricula and practices
6. Pressuring policy makers and implementers to adopt and develop public policies supportive of ALE
7. Funding and how to procure it for the benefit and support of ALE
8. Building partnerships between the civil, private, and governmental sectors
9. Confronting educational waste (regression to illiteracy)
10. Promoting lifelong learning
11. Self-learning in the digital age

12. Awareness of the universe's issues, especially the environmental ones
13. Education and learning of the displaced and the importance of psychological security for integration
14. Investing technological advances in ALE

Sixth - Way Forward and Recommendations:

1. Building a common vision and unifying concepts about ALE, and valuing and disseminating successful experiences
2. Developing evaluation, follow-up and monitoring tools, and paying attention to databases, developing them, updating them and making them available
3. Paying attention to training and rehabilitation at all levels
4. Adopting participatory action plans and curricula based on the needs of the learners and take into account their peculiarities, cultural backgrounds and social context, as well as the values of citizenship
5. Developing interventions and action plans that include sustainable development values, the application of citizenship and human rights
6. Adopting development as an entry point for adult education, which includes "building awareness / teaching a craft / literacy / family empowerment ... etc." in one system
7. Working on forming public opinion to press for effective policies and educational reform that provides education for all, and takes into account the knowledge and digital developments of the age, qualification for the labor market, and global competitiveness
8. Organizing solidarity, support and advocacy campaigns to finance and create policies supportive of ALE
9. Supporting partnership-building activities between governments, civil society and the private sector to provide a supportive environment for the education / learning process
10. Establishing an experience house to collect, analyze and document information, statistics, experiences and initiatives

Conclusion

Based on what has been presented in the paper, it is evident that the human rights and development portals are the only guarantee for achieving sustainable development, and this will only be achieved by taking into account life issues, particularly promoting peace values, rejecting violence, promoting the values of citizenship, paying attention to women's issues, the health and the environment as well, introducing integrated education and paying attention to technology, especially in emergencies and crises.

Thus, civil society remains the playing field for advancing adult education / learning. This is done through genuine partnership and networking with the concerned government agencies, civil society, and the private sector. **“Adult education remains a sign of humanness and civilization of the human being, and a basic starting point for the progress and advancement of peoples.”**