



Unlocking the transformative potential
of education: the alliance between

Lifelong Learning

and SDG Target 4.7

Written by Chris Millora



BRIDGE 47

The Bridge 47 Network brings people of various backgrounds together to learn from each other and collaborate for advancing transformative learning and SDG Target 4.7. Bridge 47 – Building Global Citizenship Education is a project co-created by 14 European and global partner organisations, co-funded by the European Union. The project mobilises civil society to take action for global justice through Global Citizenship Education.

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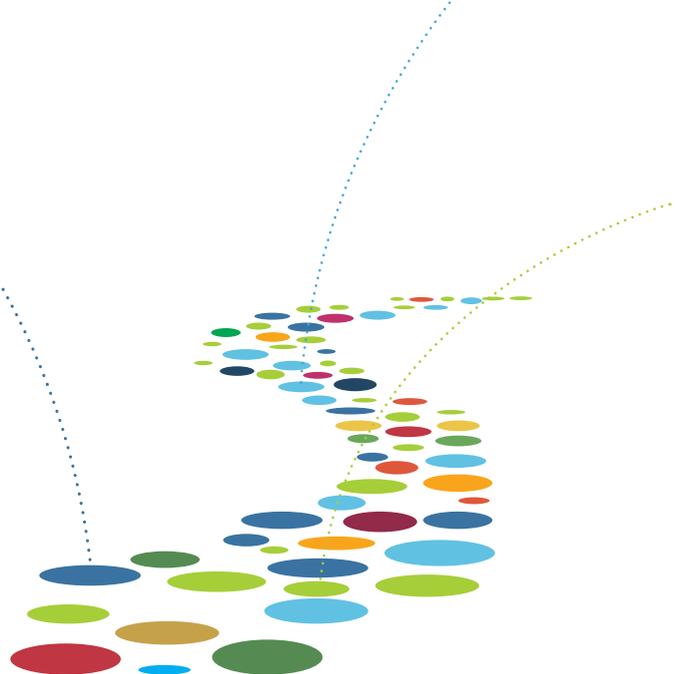


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Summary



Lifelong learning has been recognised as a vital component in achieving sustainability and quality education promoted through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Approaches to SDG Target 4.7 policies (for instance in Global Citizenship Education and Education for Sustainable Development) have mainly focused on formal education systems often engaging young people. This tends to sideline significant needs and contributions of adults – particularly women – in sustainable development.

Against this backdrop, this advocacy paper aims to gather evidence and best practice examples to advocate for the need to integrate lifelong learning approaches into strategies and actions to fulfil SDG Target 4.7. It draws from case studies in the contrasting contexts of Kenya, Canada, Germany and Egypt, as well as policy and programme documents from regional and global actors. It does so to demonstrate how lifelong learning approaches have been integrated into national and local policies – taking a step forward towards the aim of reaching SDG Target 4.7.

This paper has found that Lifelong learning as a spectrum of formal, informal and non-formal learning, offers a framework to embrace different forms of learning people gain in various spaces across their lifespan. While several lifelong learning policies emphasise economic benefits, evidence shows that lifelong learning also facilitates active citizenship, tolerance to diversity, empathy, learning to live together, leadership, intergenerational learning, and awareness of social injustices. This paper demonstrated the impact of ALE provisions that bring to

centre stage the needs of adults – particularly women – in resource-poor contexts. These programmes recognise the ‘funds of knowledge’ and ‘banks of skills’ already existing in these communities – challenging the deficit discourse that is dominant particularly in development circles even today.

Based on these findings, this paper puts forward seven interrelated policy recommendations: (1) acknowledgement, within SDG 4.7 policies, that learning occurs in all life stages, forms and spaces; (2) prioritisation of lifelong learning and transformative approaches to education into local, national, regional and global level policies, including provisions of funding; (3) a focus on the transformative competencies and outcomes of lifelong learning; (4) positioning lifelong learning as a cross-cutting (rather than separate) approach to achieving the SDGs; (5) increased attention to recognising, validating and accrediting (RVA) non-formal and informal learning; (6) involving marginalised groups as stakeholders that can shape policy and not only recipients; (7) increased government support and financing to adult educators and literacy facilitators.

Bridge 47 positions lifelong learning as an ‘overarching approach’ to promoting sustainable development. In the same way that the SDG Target 4.7 has expanded the aims and possibilities of education, lifelong learning, as a concept, also recognises and promotes a more holistic view of education. Together, embedding lifelong learning strategies in the achievement of the SDG Target 4.7 (and other SDGs as well) could unlock the transformative potential of education.



Introduction

Lifelong learning has been recognised as a vital component in achieving sustainability and quality education, both promoted through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Within educational policy and practice, this has been supported by an increased focus on education's role in 'sustainable development' – a global aim that cuts across sectors and is embedded in various spaces in society. Parallel to this, there is a shift from a discourse of 'education' towards a discourse of 'learning' (Rogers, 2014; Jarvis, Holford and Griffin, 2003). Teaching is seen as facilitation of learning exchange and 'education' is framed as a diversity of learning opportunities and experiences in various domains of life.

Lifelong learning's contribution has particularly strong links with SDG Target 4.7 that aims to "ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development (ESD) and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship (GCED), and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development". For this aim to be achieved, Lifelong learning offers a framework for policymakers, practitioners, and civil society organisations (CSOs) to expand their vantage point from simply looking at education as a formal, structured process towards embracing different forms of learning people gain in various spaces across one's lifespan.

Bridge 47's Envision 4.7 Roadmap echoes such calls. The future-oriented document stresses the need to equally

value all kinds of education and learning – covering the spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning throughout the life course. Bridge 47 positions lifelong learning as an 'overarching approach' to promoting sustainable development. In the same way that the SDG Target 4.7 has expanded the aims and possibilities of education, lifelong learning, as a concept, also recognises and promotes a more holistic view of education. Through lifelong learning and the SDG Target 4.7, education goes beyond being 'narrowly' seen as a means of achieving 'technical' and 'instrumental' skills such as reading and writing. Rather, and more importantly, education is framed as a pathway for sustainability, peace, gender equality and active global citizenship. Social inclusion is also at the heart of both lifelong learning and the SDG Target 4.7. When brought together, they bring to light a myriad of challenges faced by the most marginalised sectors of the society – be that in terms of access, inequalities or uneven outcomes.

Despite the importance of lifelong learning in achieving sustainable development, it has not been given due attention in several policy discourses. A review of resourcing for ALE programmes have found that the sector has been underfunded in many countries (UIL, 2019). Low-income countries were also more likely to report a decrease than an increase in public spending on ALE (UIL, 2019) – limiting ALE opportunities for the most marginalised adults and young people. During the pandemic, most policy responses to issues on education have largely focused on getting students back to school and how to better navigate shifts to online learning. Against this backdrop, there is a risk that the post-

pandemic policy landscape will be a ‘perilous time for adult education’ (Baril, 2020) despite evidence of lifelong learning’s contribution to post-pandemic community building. To galvanise ALE’s position in development, a global alliance of international actors on ALE¹ have recently launched an urgent campaign for ‘greater involvement and investment in ALE by governments, donors, private sector, international organizations and social movements.’

What Fischer (2000) argued two decades ago rings true today:

“Lifelong learning is an essential challenge for inventing the future of our societies; it is a necessity rather than a possibility or a luxury to be considered. Lifelong learning is more than adult education and/or training – it is a mindset and a habit for people to acquire.”

Lifelong learning focuses on transformation and change for social good – in a similar way that the SDG Target 4.7 sees education (in a wider sense) as contributory to inclusive sustainable development. With these in mind, this advocacy paper aims to gather evidence and best practice examples to advocate for the need to integrate

lifelong learning approaches into strategies and actions towards the fulfilment of SDG Target 4.7.

The goals of this advocacy paper are threefold: first, to examine and unpack definitions and understandings of lifelong learning – along the spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning – and how these have been framed within policy and practice. This will be the focus of Section 2. Second, to identify best practice examples of how lifelong learning approaches has been integrated in the SDG Target 4.7 initiatives (and vice versa). Case studies from contrasting contexts of Kenya, Canada, Egypt, and Germany will be used as illustrative examples to show how lifelong learning approaches could contribute towards active citizenship and environmental sustainability efforts (Sections 3), and towards inclusion, gender equality and peace education (Section 4). Third, to develop policy recommendations and guiding principles on how to embed lifelong learning in all its forms in the context of SDG Target 4.7. Drawing from Sections 2-4, this will be the focus of the final section (Section 5).

¹ The ‘We-are-ALE’ campaign was launched in 2019 by 15 founding partners. See more at: <https://www.we-are-ale.org/the-ale-campaign/>



2

Lifelong learning and the SDG Target 4.7: unpacking the concepts

Lifelong learning is a complex concept that carries several assumptions, expressions, and processes. Lifelong learning – and associated terms such as lifelong education, adult learning, adult education – are ‘entangled’ activities and ‘slippery terms’ that could mean many things in different contexts (Webb, et. al., 2019). Therefore, the aim of this section is not to provide an all-inclusive definition of the term. However, it is important to go into the heart of what lifelong learning is (or, at the very least, how it is understood in this report), its potential towards social change and transformative education, and its many expressions in daily life. Doing so is vital to be able to advocate for the importance of embedding lifelong learning in strategies to achieve SDG Target 4.7.

Lifelong learning has been traditionally described as “all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective” (European Commission [EC], 2000, p. 9). Valuable learning happens throughout one’s life course – from ‘womb to tomb’ – and beyond formal educational institutions to include those gained at work, in communities or through volunteering, among others. Learning neither ends nor is contained in certain life stages or institutions. Lifelong learning challenges dominant policy headlines such as “students no longer learn when they ‘drop-out’ of school” (see for instance Rogers 2015) by recognising that they engage in a host of

learning activities at home and in other places. Lifelong learning also dispels the more common narrative that adults who were not able to finish schooling are ‘illiterate’ even though they can read, write and calculate. Individuals, no matter their educational achievement or socioeconomic status, have ‘funds of knowledge’ (cf. Moll 2019) and ‘banks of skills’ (cf. Rogers 2014) that they can draw from to participate effectively in society.

Jarvis (2006:10) proposes a more expanded view of lifelong learning. It is

“the combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person—body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses)—experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person’s biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person.”

Such definition broadens the impact of lifelong learning from the individual to encompass a variety of transformations from the physical to the personal and the emotional. Therefore, lifelong learning is an ongoing process rather than a defined end goal.

2.2. Lifelong learning and the SDG Target 4.7: exploring the links

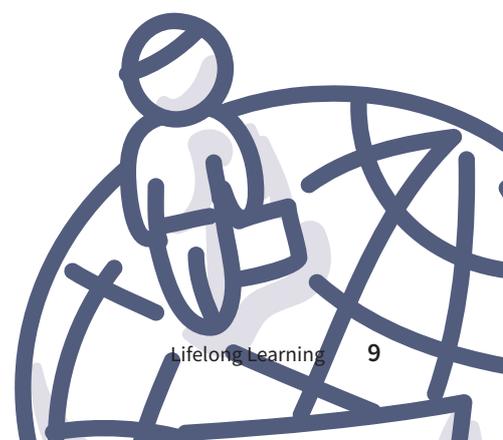


Expanding what lifelong learning could accomplish runs parallel with how SDG Target 4.7 expands what quality education is. One way to look at the links between these two areas is to explore how elements of lifelong learning could potentially help frame understandings on the topics and areas within the SDG Target 4.7. The Delor’s report offers some useful starting points in broadening understanding on what education and lifelong learning could become. These learning domains could be seen to correspond to key topics and areas within SDG Target 4.7, as suggested below.

Table 1. Linking Delor’s report and SDG Target 4.7

Delor’s Report	SDG Target 4.7
Four pillars of education	Topics and areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning to know • Learning to be 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human rights • Gender equality • Global citizenship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning to live together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture of peace and non-violence • Appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning to do 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education for sustainable development and lifestyles

Adapted from Nikolitsa-Winter, Mauch and Maalouf (2019)





Beyond these potential complementarities, lifelong learning and the SDG Target 4.7 also share several elements. First, SDG Target 4.7 (for instance, Global Citizenship Education [GCE]) applies to individuals across ages, genders, and backgrounds (Nikolitsa-Winter, 2019). The same could be said about lifelong learning. However, there have been observations (see later sections) that citizenship education programmes focus predominantly on young people in formal education systems. Therefore, lifelong learning supports SDG Target 4.7 by expanding our view to include those outside and beyond this age group and learning context.

Second, both lifelong learning and the SDG Target 4.7 recognise that learning does not occur in a social vacuum. Learning practices influence and are being influenced by a myriad of critical social issues – making way for initiatives such as peace education, refugee education, climate action and learning, and civic education.

Third, both the SDG Target 4.7 and lifelong learning draws on peoples’ diverse viewpoints and practices (cf. Wals and Benavot 2017). This means that both concepts recognise the power relationships involved in critical questions such as ‘what counts as knowledge’ and ‘who is an expert’. Against the backdrop of often Western-

centric conceptions of development, indigenous and local knowledges are being given the spotlight for their valuable contribution towards sustainable development.

For Fischer (2000), “lifelong learning includes training approaches and also transcends them by supporting learning in the context of realistic, open-ended, ill-defined problems”. Such a statement encapsulates what lies at the heart of the overlap between lifelong learning and the topics and areas of the SDG Target 4.7 – they facilitate learners’ and educators’ awareness of and potential action towards solving social and environmental issues and challenges. Both lifelong learning and the SDG Target 4.7 focus on change and transformation. It may be useful to consider what Rogers (2014) describes as the four domains of change in/through learning: change in knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes, which could lead to change in behaviours. While these often refer to internal and personal change, SDG Target 4.7 strongly signals the role of lifelong learning in changing *societies*, especially in response to 21st century needs.

Together, embedding lifelong learning strategies in the achievement of the SDG Target 4.7 (and other SDGs as well) could unlock the transformative potential of education.

2.3. The spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning

The shift from a focus on education to that of learning signals that there is no single form or kind of learning. Recognising that learning can occur in various spaces and situations also suggests that learning processes are not always intentional, structured, or conscious. Similar to what Rogers (2014) said about informal learning, lifelong learning could be instigated when:

1. individuals enter new roles (for example, being considered or considering oneself as an ‘adolescent’, ‘retiree’, ‘parent’) or interpret old roles in new ways.
2. when our socio-cultural context changes, for example when experiencing a destructive natural disaster, war or moving from one country to another and/or
3. when our individual interests change over time.

To this end, distinctions among formal, non-formal and informal learning may be useful. These three forms of learning have been popularly described as:

Table 2: Three forms of learning

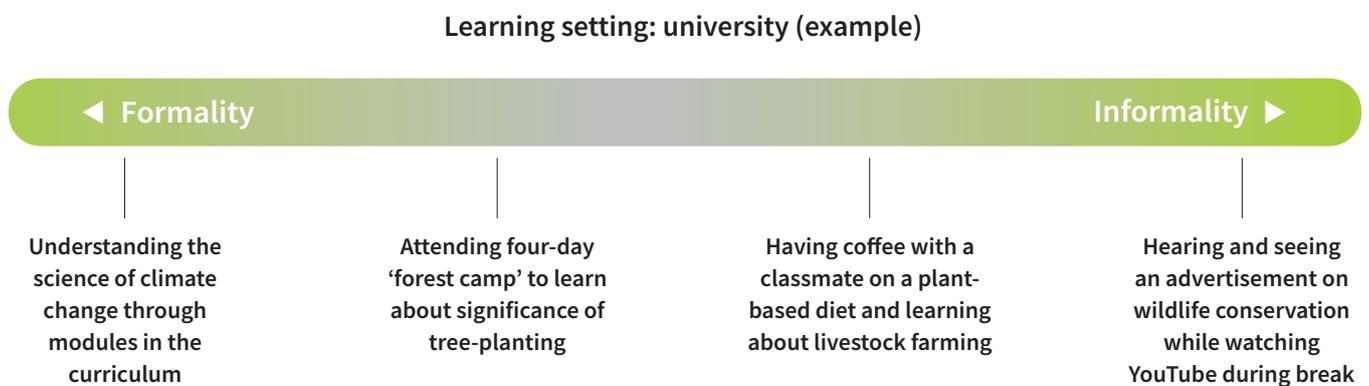
Forms of learning	Definition (UNESCO 2009 p. 27)	Examples in relation to Target 4.7	Examples/case studies
Formal learning	Formal learning occurs because of experiences in an education or training institution, with structured learning objectives, learning time and support which leads to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner’s perspective.	Learning in school, for example, through an ESD or GCED topic embedded in the formal curriculum.	GCED concepts integrated in the formal curriculum in Cambodia, Colombia, Mongolia and Uganda (see Browes 2017).
Non-formal learning	Non-formal learning is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner’s perspective.	Learning through environmental camps for young people to learn about conservation. Education on human rights through service-learning programmes.	Amnesty international’s adult learning programme on human rights education (see Hernandez, 2011).
Informal learning³	Informal learning results from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and typically does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but, in most cases, it is non-intentional.	Learning about another’s culture through travelling. Hearing about gender equality through TV shows, advertisements and social media.	The various informal learning opportunities involved in <i>Ball parlat dels moros i cristians</i> programme in Lleida Spain (see Cortellesi and Kernan 2016)

³ Rogers (2014, see particularly 17-18) further distinguishes between three types of informal learning (1) self-directed learning (where the individual plans and controls their own learning activities) (2) incidental learning (learning that happens when people engage on some purposeful activity such as learning a new task at work) (3) unintentional learning (mostly accidental and unconscious – ie we are learning but we are not conscious that we are!)

While these three forms of learning are often framed as distinct, it seems to be more accurate to think of “formality’ and ‘informality’ as attributes present in all circumstances of learning” (Colley et al 2003, p. 1 as cited in Rogers 2014). This means that lifelong learning activities and settings could have elements of formality and informality (see Figure 1 below). For example, while participants in a youth camp might learn about climate change and conservation in a non-formal setting, there

are also many informal learning exchanges happening that may not be part of the learning design or structure. Participants might share experiences during break times, learn about environmental campaigning while watching television or listening to the radio and/or hone leadership skills by designing and implementing a climate change project.

Figure 1. The spectrum of formality and informality in learning and an example



Lifelong and life-wide learning also means that various individuals we encounter could become our ‘educators’. For instance, learning at work is often task-oriented and is facilitated when a more experienced employee orients a newcomer, so they become a member of a community of practice (Wenger 1998). Lifelong learning could also be about an engagement in the social world that may be through people’s informal engagements with our workmates, families or through activities such as social movements and volunteering. Peer-to-peer and collaborative learning also occur often. The role of the ‘expert’ is shared with local community members whose indigenous and local experiences are extremely valuable. Certainly, learning could also be an individual, self-directed task whereby the individual draws from a host of resources – books, television, radio, social media, etc. – to accomplish the desired task or master a particular skill⁴.

– is happening outside and beyond formal institutions and through people’s varied activities in everyday life and livelihoods. Informal lifelong learning is natural, like breathing, we do it all the time, even though we are not conscious of it (Rogers 2014). While informal learning is not always visible, it is a significant part of the picture, especially in achieving the SDG Target 4.7 and other SDGs.

It is now becoming clearer that significant and powerful learning – including that linked with the SDG Target 4.7

⁴ This could then be further concretised in policy through developing competencies and indicators that make these learning more visible. See further discussion on the Competencies and Indicators paper as part of this advocacy series.

3

Lifelong Learning, Active Citizenship and Climate Action

A key aspect of lifelong learning that was emphasised in the previous section is that lifelong learning is social. It is a pathway for individuals to participate in and contribute to their communities at the local, national or even global levels. This section will look in detail at the role of lifelong learning policies and initiatives in facilitating people's active participation in society, especially in the social, political, environmental and cultural sense.

3.1. Learning to become active, global citizens

According to UNESCO (2016, p. 3), adult learning and education include supporting youths and adults in becoming active citizens and

“empowers people to actively engage with social issues such as poverty, gender, intergenerational solidarity, social mobility, justice, equity, exclusion, violence, unemployment, environmental protection and climate change”.

As discussed earlier, lifelong learning does not exist in a social vacuum – the way people of all ages learn formally and informally influences and/or are influenced by social values, relationships and needs. Through lifelong learning, people become more aware of societal problems

CASE STUDY 1: KENYA

Uraia: Kenya National Civic Education Programme

Since 2001, Uraia (a Kiswahili term meaning ‘citizenship’) has been implemented in various communities in Kenya with the goal of expanding civic education to Kenyans of various ages. Over 50,000 informal and non-formal civic learning activities have been implemented in the form of workshops, lectures, theatre plays, poetry and drama events, cultural activities, puppet shows, and community meetings. These lifelong learning activities aimed to promote democratic values, nation building and political engagement among Kenyan citizens during the 2002 elections. Later, more activities followed during the run-up to the divisive 2007 national elections and focused on conflict resolution, inter-ethnic relations, and human rights. During the first three years of implementation, the programme reached over 17 percent of the adult Kenyan population, which made it one of the largest adult civic education programme in the country. An evaluation of the programme revealed that individuals who attended the workshops reported increased awareness of the constitution and higher engagement with constitutional documents and debates. Significantly, some 60 percent of individuals that attended these workshops have reported increase in general political knowledge.

Source: Finkel 2014

and, by gaining skills and values needed, are able to effectively devise actions that respond to these problems in various ways.

Several studies and policy pronouncements have identified how lifelong learning approaches can contribute towards active citizenship, political and community participation (UIL 2016). An evaluative study of projects in the Dominican Republic, Poland, South Africa, Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo showed that adult learning programmes that focused on civic education had large effects on local-level political participation (Finkel 2014). In India, there is also strong evidence that women's literacy could lead to increased political participation, including running for local government offices (Bhalotra, Clots and Iyer 2018).

The Uraia Civic Education programme in Kenya (see Case Study Box 1) provides strong evidence of how a lifelong learning approach to active citizenship education programming can increase participation of youths and adults of in important political issues. Implemented at a time of significant political changes in Kenya's history, this lifelong learning initiative also paved a way for conflict resolution and increased inter-ethnic understanding. Programmes such as these increase adults' knowledge of civic and political issues, as well as a more enhanced sense of empowerment and political efficacy – believing that as individuals, they are able to change the political processes in their communities.

3.2. Lifelong learning and climate action

Lifelong learning approaches can also significantly contribute to environmental literacy – an essential component of any country's efforts towards sustainable development. Lifelong learning's promotion of deep, reflective and experiential learning encourages people of all ages to think critically about the current climate emergency and the role that they can play in responding to such challenges. This strong focus on 'action' means that environmental literacy, as St. Clair (2003) puts it, is not just about knowledge accumulation (for example, the ability to read a bus timetable) but also an "awareness

CASE STUDY 1: CANADA

Intergenerational Landed Learning Programme

Based in British Columbia, Canada, the Intergenerational Landed Learning Programme "promotes garden-based intergenerational collaboration and interdisciplinary hands-on learning... to teach about and promote environmental stewardship, healthy diets and lifestyles, and social development." Their approach "involves bringing together a group of students and community elders who are retired farmers to explore values of environmental concern and care for the land and engage in an intergenerational learning process." Its pilot programme was a 6-month period where 18 students met and interviewed "Farm Friends" – most of whom are retired farmers. Together, the students and the retirees worked together on a variety of tasks from planning and cultivating to maintaining plans in raised beds at the farm. According to Li and Kaplan (2004), the experience contributed to students' knowledge and concern about the environment and their decision-making, critical thinking and reasoning skills.

Sources: Liu and Kaplan 2004 and <https://landedlearning.educ.ubc.ca/>

of the implications of varying transport policies upon atmospheric degradation."

Approaching environmental literacy through the lens of lifelong learning could be seen as a response to the ever-changing environmental challenges the world faces today and to the expectation that all people – regardless of age – should take responsibility for addressing climate change (Lovren and Popovic 2017). Since lifelong learning recognises the diversity of knowledges in a community, it encourages drawing from indigenous and local knowledge and practices towards environmental resilience (Wals and Benavot, 2017). These traditional

knowledges “have long been the basis of sustainable agriculture, food preparation, health care, socialisation and conservation in indigenous communities” (ibid, p. 408). However, it would be difficult to harness these valuable knowledges without the participation of adults in environmental programmes (cf. Lovren and Popovic 2017).

Despite the recognition that environmental concerns are of everyone, many environmental education efforts have often been targeted towards children and young people (St. Clair, 2003), which seemingly eclipses the potential role of adults and older people. The climate crisis needs urgent action from everyone – not just young people. Therefore, adults who are in position need to make decisions and actions in addressing this problem. Evidence shows, for example, that older people volunteering on issues surrounding the environment and climate contributed to over 2,000 hours of community service and a number of innovative projects (e.g. a drug disposal awareness programme) in one city in the US (Pillemer, et. al. 2017). The RISE (Retirees in Service to the Environment) programme has an intensive non-formal learning component, where older people are given information sessions on environmental conservation as well as leadership training workshops to further improve their campaigning and programme management skills.

Other impactful strategies are so-called ‘intergenerational environmental education programmes’ (see Case Study Box 2) defined as “social vehicles that create a purposeful and ongoing exchange of resources and learning [on environmental awareness and action] among older and younger generations” (Liu and Kaplan 2016). These programmes foster collaboration among various stakeholders as they “tend to involve a broad spectrum of organizational partners and collaborators, thereby extending the reach and influence of environmental education and action messages across cities.”

The examples in the subsection illustrate how lifelong learning approaches, that take into account learning processes outside schools (e.g. in communities), drawing from informal and non-formal learning strategies (e.g. through creative, artistic and collaborative activities) with individuals across ages (e.g. intergenerational learning activities), contribute to active global citizenship and climate action – both important aspects of the SDG Target 4.7. However, despite lifelong learning and the SDG Target 4.7’s emphasis on a holistic approach to learning and education, the challenges of inequalities in access and participation, especially for the most marginalised in a community, remain. We will discuss these challenges – and lifelong learning’s promise – in the next section.



4

Lifelong learning and the SGD4.7: issues of inclusion and voice

Inclusion is at the heart of SDG Target 4.7. It aims to “ensure that by 2030, all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development” (SDGs, target 4.7, UN 2015a). While lifelong learning opportunities are often framed as a pathway for widening participation, certain sectors of the society continue to have limited access to formal and non-formal learning spaces. Inequalities in different forms and magnitudes are pervasive in every society – exacerbated by factors such as gender inequalities, poverty, war, crises, forced migration and recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. This section will explore issues of inclusion and voice – particularly those surrounding gender inequalities, conflict resolution and human rights – and their importance in ensuring that progress towards SDG Target 4.7 is met through lifelong learning policies.

4.1. A focus on women and girls

Taking literacy as a starting point, women and girls have been impacted disproportionately by inequalities in provision and access. There are an estimated 773 million ‘illiterate’ individuals – most of them are women (UIS, n.d.). This is despite clear evidence that women’s and girls’ education and literacy are essential to social and economic development (see for instance, Unterhalter & North, 2011, Robinson-Pant, 2004). Within Target 4.7, education for gender equality is one of the priority areas

and is also emphasised by UNESCO (2015) when speaking about Global Citizenship Education (GCE). GCE can support gender equality

“through the development of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that promote the equal value of women and men, engender respect and enable young people to critically question gendered roles and expectations that are harmful and/or encourage gender-based discrimination and stereotyping”
(UNESCO 2015, p. 16).



CASE STUDY 3: EGYPT

Egyptian Governorate of Ismailia's Females for Families literacy programme

Initiated by the Ismailia Government in Egypt, the Females for Families literacy development programme was underpinned by the understanding that families, as an association of trust and interaction, was an important factor in developing societies. The programme started in Abu-Ashura where 120 girls from the community underwent an intensive six-month programme to train them as development leaders by learning about topics such as literacy, health, human rights, income generation and administrative and communication skills. The girls then returned home to establish home literacy classes sharing information with families on health, hygiene, and family planning. They have also taken on the roles of literacy mediators, helping community members navigate bureaucratic processes such as obtaining identity cards and election cards. The programme received the 2010 UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy. Their citation said: "Females for Families is a genuine social and cultural breakthrough which goes beyond reading and writing or even integrating literacy as a part of everyday life. Perhaps the most striking feature is that it has transformed local girls into leaders in their community and swept away its prejudices about women in public life."

Source: UNESCO 2010 and Wetheridge 2016

Taking a lifelong learning approach could help SDG Target 4.7 contribute towards gender equality. One approach is through family learning programmes. Family learning offers opportunities for parents, children, and wider community to engage in non-formal and informal learning activities such as reading a book together, sharing stories or preparing meals through a recipe (Hanemann, et. al. 2017). While much focus of family literacy programmes is in supporting the learning of children in school, there is also evidence to show that adults – including women members of the family – are learning as well. More recent research has also uncovered how families learn together in engaging with livelihoods and other indigenous practices.

In a way, family literacy programmes challenge the dominant notion that learning only happens in school. It sees the home and familial relationships as important resources for everyone's learning. The government programme in Egypt (see Case Study Box 3), also illustrates how women and girls play important leadership roles in the state's promotion of lifelong learning at home and their community. Once marginalised, women and girls – through lifelong learning opportunities – now take on central roles in the efforts towards gender equality. For Wetheridge (2016), the programme "highlights the ways in which community-focused programmes can create virtuous circles, and a focus on families can spread through communities, shifting both skills and attitudes to gender equality, literacy and interlinking development processes".

4.2. Learning to live together

Another aspect where lifelong learning and SDG Target 4.7 overlap is the importance of learning to live together – an umbrella term for themes such as "tolerance and appreciation of diversity, conflict resolution and peace, humanitarian action" (Sinclair 2013, p. 13). Lifelong learning has been linked with social cohesion, integration and inclusion. According to UIL (2019), "higher levels of adult literacy are linked with greater tolerance to diversity and increased capacity to a fair, objective and permissive attitude toward beliefs and practices that differ from one's own." Lifelong learning, particularly adult education, also contributes to greater self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy, which are particularly important for assisting disadvantaged groups as they navigate multiple challenges (UIL 2019).



CASE STUDY 4: GERMANY

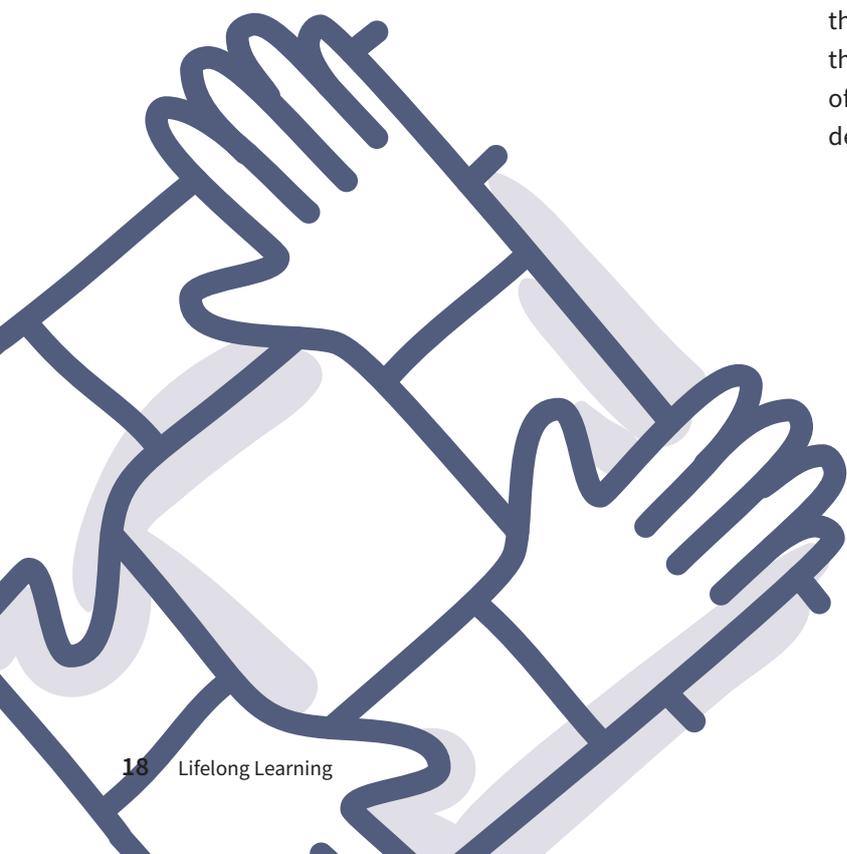
Exchanging Views, Exploring Senses funded by the European Commission

This project aimed to bring together blind, visually impaired, and non-blind individuals to engage in a discussion on their perceptions and experiences of Berlin. The project brought together individuals aged 22-45 to capture an intergenerational component whereby young and old can learn from the experiences of navigating a city by those who are visually impaired. The project used informal learning strategies to teach participants the challenges and opportunities of learning to live together. A visually impaired individual was paired with someone without visual impairment to explore Berlin together. The participants then gathered to share experiences. The creative and collaborative activities allowed for participants to develop a shared understanding, respect, and solidarity.

Source: European Intercultural Forum 2014

Learning to live together also brings to fore the importance of creating and maintaining peace in society. Drawing from their research in South Africa, Bray and Joubert (2007) argue that peace education should be a lifelong process whereby attitudes, skills, knowledge and values are cultivated across the life course using varied strategies. While many peace education programmes are targeting schools and educational institutions, the importance of non-formal learning provisions have also been recognised, particularly in mainstreaming peace education (European Intercultural Forum 2014). Non-formal learning strategies in peace education are seen to be learner-centred, flexible and adaptable, planned and inclusive – whereby “educators create a barrier-free programme making it accessible for anybody by a sensitive use of exercises and language” (EIF, 2014, p. 41). Non-formal and creative learning approaches, such as city walks (see Case Study Box 4), poetry and theatre plays, have been effective tools to foster peace education and develop tolerance. As Case Study Box 4 illustrates, these approaches have the potential to consider the needs of otherwise marginalised sectors in the society.

While the SDG Target 4.7 calls for the importance of gender equality and being able to live together in peace, issues of inclusion and voice remain a challenge. This section has highlighted how certain groups – women, girls, people living with disabilities – continue to face barriers in accessing the dominant and formal spaces of education and learning. Lifelong learning’s emphasis on learning outside schools and formal contexts, and the importance of recognising the ‘funds of knowledge’ that individuals already possess, have the potential of contributing towards a more inclusive sustainable development.



5

Conclusion and recommendations: Enabling policy environment for lifelong learning and the SDG Target 4.7

This advocacy paper has provided evidence and analysis to support the significant added value of integrating lifelong learning strategies into policies and programmes that address SDG Target 4.7. This paper has proposed conceptual linkages between lifelong learning and SDG Target 4.7, illustrating that they are complementary approaches that when harnessed together, could lead to impactful development outcomes. While education policies have dominantly focused on learning of children and youth in schools and universities, lifelong learning brings to fore the experiences, challenges and needs of adults and older people into the policy arena. They, too, play an important role in achieving SDG Target 4.7 and the broader sustainable development goals. Drawing on the discussions in the previous sections, four key points emerge.

First, by recognising that lifelong learning occurs in everyday life, in formal, non-formal and informal spaces and across one's lifespan, the concept encourages policymakers, practitioners and academics to take a more holistic view of education. Informal learning – which can be unconscious, unstructured, and unintentional – while not always recognised in formal settings – is a significant part of one's learning experience. In developing approaches to reach SDG Target 4.7, life-wide and lifelong learning are an important part of the picture.

Second, the 'learning outcomes' of lifelong learning programmes are not always limited to literacy and other instrumental skills. Although these so-called 'basic skills' are important, the wealth of learning outcomes facilitated by non-formal and informal learning also include 'soft' skills such as communication and advocacy, increased awareness about social issues and skills to bring together actions to address these issues. Learning was not only about gaining skills and knowledge but also about increased tolerance to diversity, empathy, learning to live together, leadership, intergenerational learning, and awareness of social injustices.



Third, formal, non-formal and informal learning all offer pathways for active and global citizenship. Rather than thinking of them as discrete and separate, these forms of learning co-exist and interact and, therefore, can support and/or limit each other. Within the context of actions towards the SDG Target 4.7, this signals the need to expand the dominant focus on formal programmes such as in school and universities towards creating a variety of learning spaces that could spur discussions about, awareness of and action towards all the SDG Target 4.7 components.

Fourth, lifelong learning could be a pathway for more inclusive strategies for education that consider the learning experiences and needs of the most marginalised segments of the society. For instance, the paper has argued that many ALE provisions bring to centre stage the needs of adults – particularly women – in resource-poor contexts. On the other hand, lifelong learning also encourages us to recognise the ‘funds of knowledge’ and ‘banks of skills’ already existing in these communities – challenging the deficit discourse that is dominant particularly in development circles even today.



Recommendations

How can policies and state-sponsored programmes in ESD, GCE, gender equality, human rights and peace create an enabling environment to harness the benefits and impact of lifelong learning strategies? Below are a series of policy recommendations that may be useful for governments and CSOs interested in taking these discussions forward.

- ▶ **Target 4.7 policies should acknowledge that learning occurs in all stages of life, in various forms and spaces.** Approaches to Target 4.7 should be lifelong and life wide. Transformative education, such as ESD and GCE, often have a strong focus on formal education and schools, yet as this paper has shown, learning takes place at all stages of life and both in formal, non-formal and informal spaces. By failing to recognise the importance of non-formal and informal learning spaces, we fail to reach large sections of society.
- ▶ **Policymakers need to ensure that lifelong learning and transformative education are made a priority at national, regional and global levels.** This includes providing funding for these programmes (see for instance the Resources paper that is part of this advocacy series) and building cross-sectoral partnerships. Voices of lifelong learning advocates should also be taken seriously in decision-making spaces.
- ▶ **Programmes need to highlight transformative competencies and outcomes of lifelong learning as contributing to sustainable, just societies.** Lifelong learning has often been framed as a tool for reskilling and upskilling populations to become more ‘fit’ for the requirements of the 21st-century workforce. However, strong evidence exists that lifelong and life-wide learning could be transformative in a way that goes beyond economic benefits. Lifelong learning policies need to focus on outcomes and competencies that relate to increased awareness of social justice, inequality, and sustainability.
- ▶ **Lifelong learning could be positioned as a policy approach to education that cuts across and brings together various SDGs.** Transformative education and lifelong learning have a strong potential to contribute towards transversal issues such as fighting poverty, social exclusion, racism and discrimination, and promoting social justice and gender equality. Therefore, they should not be positioned as discrete and separate but as cross-cutting.
- ▶ **More needs to be done to recognise, validate and accredit (RVA) non-formal and informal learning so that adults are able to receive equivalencies and navigate the various levels of education more smoothly.** In doing this, decision-makers demonstrate commitment and concrete actions to build societies where all citizens are able to think critically and constructively address the transversal challenges. RVA policies also provide opportunities for stronger linkages between informal and non-formal learning programmes and informal opportunities.
- ▶ **Marginalised communities should not only be seen as recipients of lifelong learning provisions but as stakeholders that could shape these policies.** Their participation in various phases of policymaking and programme development could lead to increased ownership and sustainability. Policies and programmes on sustainability must build on pre-existing local and indigenous knowledge and skills. Needs of adult learners must be recognised so that practitioners and government officials could develop responsive programmes.
- ▶ **Governments must support the professionalisation of adult educators and literacy facilitators,** recognise their contributions, finance them and their activities. More support is needed in the development of new methods and pedagogies to better address learning needs of marginalised and disadvantaged groups.

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