

## UPPINGHAM SEMINAR 2016:

### ADULT LEARNING AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

*Note: this is an amended version of the background paper circulated to all participants early in February 2016. It has been changed in two ways. First, that paper did not give enough emphasis to some of the documents relating to the implementation of the adults dimensions to the SDGs, especially the Framework of Action (FFA) 2030, and the Recommendations regarding Adult Learning and Education (ALE) and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), both issued in November 2015). Secondly, the third section has been expanded to discuss the relationship of ALE not just to the other goals and targets but also to SDG4 (Education). But all the other parts of the background paper have been retained.*

#### Abstract:

In this paper based on a survey of a range of documents and consultations with educational agencies, I propose that our discussions might focus round three points.

**First, SDG 4: Education:** Noting a) the relative absence of adult learning from the implementation of the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), b) the almost complete absence of adults from the discussions leading up to the formulation of SDG 4; and c) the current prioritising of children in the discussions on the implementation of SDG 4, I suggest we do not challenge that prioritising but seek to understand the reasons for it. I outline a number of the arguments and assumptions suggested by my survey, and argue that unless we understand these reasons, we are unlikely to influence their programmes. We might seek to help those who make them to become more aware of their tacit assumptions.

**Secondly, adult learning in the other SDGs:** I note the inclusion of adult learning targets explicitly or implicitly within many, if not most, of the other SDGs, and the discussions of these in the Recommendation on ALE (2015) and the Framework for Action (FFA) 2030 (2015), and this leads me to ask: what is the relationship between the education envisaged in SDG 4 and these other learning targets? Is there a danger of polarisation, that focusing on provision for adult learning under these other SDGs may reduce the felt need for adult provision under SDG 4? Where is the provision for adult literacy learning and basic education best located, under SDG4 or the other goals and targets?

**Thirdly,** I note that since 1990 the concept of **lifelong learning/education (LLL/E)** has become more common in educational policy contexts in developing countries and is strongly advocated in the Recommendation on ALE and FFA 2030. This leads me to ask whether the conceptualisation of LLL/E as embracing both SDG 4 and the other learning targets would help to ensure a greater provision for adults? How can we avoid this discourse being rhetorical? Can such a LLL/E agenda which covers both SDG 4 and the other learning targets be operationalised and its learning outcomes measured? Is adult learning and education a cross-cutting issue across all the 17 SDGs?

## PART I: INTRODUCTION

“The new Sustainable Development Goals confirm the importance of ensuring life-long learning opportunities for all”. *IIEP News* 14 January 2016

**1.1.** It is important that this paper is seen as an **individual statement**. I have consulted a number of persons but none of them is responsible for what is here and what is not here. These are not the views of Uppingham Seminars.

**1.2 Development context:** The concerns of the Uppingham Seminars are primarily with education (formal and non-formal) in the so-called ‘developing countries’. But in today's globalised world, many of the same issues are faced in other countries; and developing countries are often influenced greatly in their policy-making by international cultural assumptions. The Sustainable Development Goals<sup>1</sup> (SDGs) “are conceived as a global agenda, thus they are not only focused on the countries of the Global South or ‘developing countries’ but include all countries worldwide” (EAEA 2016), so some of our discussions may refer to wider contexts than just developing countries.

**1.3 Language: Discourses:** We also need to remind ourselves that part of what we shall discuss relates to language. Rosa Maria Torres (Torres 2001) has warned us that the tendency for policy makers to use Western categories of thought and expression can be harmful for the educational concerns of developing countries. Thus the terms used in these debates, such as adult education and lifelong learning, recurrent education and continuing education, are important for their consequences. For example:

- a) **education:** this term is used in both a wide sense to include all learning, planned and unplanned, inside and outside of school, and also in a narrower sense to refer to the hierarchical stream of provision for (mainly) children and youth, purposeful learning programmes, taught courses (as Wiltshire says<sup>2</sup>), usually state-run or state supported.
- b) **learning** too is used in a wide sense to mean all the universal and ubiquitous learning which everyone does throughout the whole of life, most of it unintentional and unconscious; but the word is also used in a narrower sense to refer to planned and purposeful learning (including self-directed learning) (Rogers 2014).

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<sup>1</sup> I found that some agencies are referring to the SDGs as Global Goals (GGs); I suggest that, to facilitate communication, the seminar continues to refer to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

<sup>2</sup> Harold Wiltshire discusses the two uses of the word when he says that ‘education’ is :

*planned processes of learning undertaken by intent*, the sort of thing that commonly (though not by any means always) goes on in classrooms and that involves some who are teachers and some who are taught . . . In much discussion of adult ‘education’, the word is used much more loosely. . . so as to include the whole range and apparatus of leisure-time activities – cinemas, libraries, television and sports clubs – on the grounds that these exert an educative influence on people who use them and are therefore aspects of education. Certainly there is a sense in which anything that happens to us, from getting drunk to listening to Beethoven, may be said to be ‘quite an education’; and certainly we learn (living tissue can hardly help doing so) from our experiences, including those of our leisure. But such learning is unplanned and largely unintended: we do not go into either the pub or the concert-hall with a primary intention of learning. If we intend to learn we behave differently: we join a class or buy an instruction manual; we adopt the role of student and submit ourselves to a planned process of tuition. (Wiltshire 1977 pp 136–7)

c) **lifelong learning (LLL)**: The term 'lifelong learning' thus has a wider and a narrower meaning. For some people, it means all forms of learning from the cradle to the grave - formal (such as schooling for children), non-formal, and informal learning - planned and unplanned, intentional and unintentional, undertaken by children and adults. But LLL is also frequently used in a narrower (almost a technical) sense, to refer to planned learning *activities*, including those outside of educational institutions (e.g. workplace learning and private sector provision). In the first sense, *no-one is a non-participant; everyone is involved in lifelong and lifewide learning throughout the whole of their lives*, even if it is unconsciously and unintentionally. In the second sense, there are *some people for whom it can be claimed that they "have done no 'learning' [in this sense] since leaving school"*; and the aim of 'lifelong learning' policies is to ensure that more and more adults participate in learning opportunities such as work-related training, private sector courses or public programmes throughout life.

d) **learning and education**: The contrast between these two meanings of the term 'lifelong learning' (everyday learning for all on the one hand; and planned and purposeful learning programmes for some on the other hand) carries important implications for both policy and practice. Some prefer to use two terms to distinguish between the two meanings - '**lifelong learning**' (LLL) for the universal learning, and '**lifelong education**' (LLE) for the planned learning activities. There have been strong protests by leading educationalists at what is seen as the "tendency to treat education and learning as synonymous concepts" (Duke 2001 p 502) which leads to "the persisting confusion of education with learning" (Jarvis 1990 p 203), and pleas to "cease using the words *education* and *learning* interchangeably. If we want to argue for more resources for *adult* education ..., let us say education" (Duke 2015 p 246).

The seminar will need to be aware of these issues of language.

e) **adult learning and education (ALE)** is a term used widely by UIL and other agencies to denote the adult section of LLL/E.

**1.4 Different voices:** One implication of this diversity of language is that there is not just one constituency but different voices are being used – and these need unravelling.

**1.5** In general, I will use the term 'lifelong learning/education' (LLL/E) – for the concepts of lifelong learning/education will be important for our discussions. I will also use ALE, although from time to time I will speak of 'adult education', to mean 'learning opportunities for adults' in their widest sense. I am not going to try to define 'adult', as this varies from context to context; but adult learning opportunities relate to provision of any kind for the learning for those who are past the normal age of schooling and are outside of further and higher education. We may not be able to define the elephant but we all recognise it when we see it.

**1.6** The theme of the seminar is **the adult learning dimensions in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. 'Learning' comes into the SDGs in two areas, SDG (4) Education, and in many of the other SDG targets. I propose to deal with these separately at first and then together in a final section of this paper.

## **PART II: SDG 4 (EDUCATION) AND THE PRIORITISING OF CHILDREN**

**2.1 First, SDG 4: Education:** Adults are very prominent in the statement of SDG4, both explicitly and implicitly. Nevertheless, the background suggests that, as in the past, adults may not receive their due share in the implementation of SDG 4. There are three elements to this fear.

**2.2 Adult learning and EFA/MDGs:** First, although there were similar commitments to adults in both the Education For All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), it is widely recognised that adult learning programmes did not feature to any major extent in the implementation. The Global Campaign for Education, in reviewing the lessons of EFA and the MDGs for education, noted, “There has ... been much weaker progress in significantly advancing adult literacy and learning (other than as a side effect of greater schooling)” (GCE 2015 p 8).

**2.3. Adults in the formulation of SDG 4:** Secondly, in most of the debates leading to the formulation of SDG 4 (Education), adult learning was noticeable in its absence, despite a large amount of powerful advocacy<sup>3</sup>, and the many statements calling for the *right* to education for all (including adults)<sup>4</sup>. In these discussions about the post-2015 education goals, ‘education’ was taken to mean ‘schooling for children’. One example is the Global Education First Initiative (GEFI) of UN in 2012 where every target for education which could refer to adults was only related to children. The Oslo Summit papers in 2015 made no mention of adults. The European Association for the Education of Adults summed up their view of the situation:

“In the negotiation process, new stakeholders such as the BRIC states (consisting of Brazil, Russia, India and China), civil society organisations, think tanks and the private sector were included. However, education was mainly represented by stakeholders that are working in primary education. Organisations representing adult education, such as the ICAE were largely excluded from the negotiations. ... adult education is not mentioned explicitly in the SDGs”.(EAEA 2016)

**2.4 Planning for the implementation of SDG 4:** Thirdly, in many of the discussions in preparation for the implementation of SDG 4, adult learning is largely missing. Many agencies still barely include adult learning in their education policies or programmes. For example, the Commonwealth Ministers' Nassau Declaration of November 2015 focuses solely on educational goals for ‘boys and girls’, and ‘pupils’; there is no mention of adults<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, by UIL: Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) 2009 and CONFINTEA, the Belem Framework 2009: “adult learning and education (ALE) are imperative for the achievement of equity and inclusion, for alleviating poverty and for building equitable, tolerant, sustainable and knowledge-based societies”; and also by DVV, see especially *Adult Education in an interconnected world* 2014; see also *Convergence* 2004. For the papers relating to the implementation of ALE and LLL/E, see below sections 4.4.1-3.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the **Muscat Agreement**, May 2015, and the **Incheon Declaration** of the World Education Forum, May 2015, described by IIEP as a policy document “recently adopted as a roadmap for transformational change in education over the next 15 years”. Incheon speaks of the need to move “towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all”, but there is nothing specifically on adult learning and education.

<sup>5</sup> **The Nassau Declaration** June 2015 does not mention any adult learning goal, target, programme or activity: in the two clauses where adults could have been included, clause 7 and clause 12, the emphasis is still on ‘boys and girls’ and ‘pupils’; ‘parents’ are acknowledged only as ‘supporters’ of education.

7. ... *Addressing the Post-2015 Development Goals, Ministers note the importance of continuing to meet the needs of all learners, regardless of gender, race, or religion, or other aspects of marginalization – recognizing continued challenges in relation to provision for boys and girls (both of whom continue to face issues of equitable access in various Commonwealth contexts), as well as pupils with special educational needs.*

12. *Ministers acknowledge the key role of parents, and wider civil society, in education, without compromise to equity and quality. Ministers commit to strengthening engagement with these parties to support the development of education systems that serve the needs of their communities, while recognizing the key role of families in shaping culture.*

This is particularly noticeable in two very effective current campaigns for post-2015 education, girls' schooling (e.g. Girls' Education Challenge, UK AID) and education for people with disabilities (arising in part from the disabilities Olympic Games). Both omit adults: one organisation working in the area of education and multiple disabilities writes: "our key concern is ... inclusive education, ... getting children ... into school in the first instance since most are denied education in developing countries. Adult education is an issue for us that comes further down the line. Without basic education, our beneficiaries [children] struggle with basic life skills ... adult education is not our primary focus" (pers com - the writer has asked to remain anonymous).

**2.5 Adults in support of schooling:** In some of the discussions, there is one exception, although relatively small – adults seen as a support for children's schooling: "adult women should be given parenting education so as to promote their daughters' education" (GCE 2003 p 58). As one consultant reports, the current review of the strategic goals for USAID Education Sector has "just opened the door a crack for organizations to work on activities that affect children's reading outcomes, like student and teacher absenteeism"<sup>6</sup>, thus including some forms of adult learning as support for children's schooling: "Save the Children's Literacy Boost includes a ... community/parent/ child literacy connection"<sup>7</sup>.

**2.6 Why is adult education neglected?** Why, in the light of human rights to education (Cowan 2013), of an ageing world-wide population, of the urgent need for social integration, and attention to radicalisation, drugs, the increase in violence and other major social concerns, does adult education come so low on the list of educational priorities, in both policy and implementation? Why are adult basic education programmes in many developing countries among the most poorly supported sectors of education, in terms of equipment, accommodation, teaching-learning materials, and teacher training and remuneration etc: "Governments have been unwilling, or unable, to provide adequate funding [for adult education]. Many communities perceive nonformal education as an inferior substitute for the formal system, and the devolution of authority to ensure the responsiveness of programs to local needs has often been withheld. Formal education, consequently, continues to be perceived as the most desirable system, and access to the modern employment sector remains the pre-eminent goal" (Hall 1986)

While we have to be careful not to exaggerate this situation, for adult basic education is often included as a footnote to statements about 'education' in general<sup>8</sup>, even if in rhetoric<sup>9</sup>, we note:

"[R]esources available to support learning have historically been directed to the education of children, and the formal setting continues to consume the largest or

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Clause 7 does not say 'regardless of age' as does the Recommendation on ALE 2015. This Declaration has been described as "even weaker than SDG4 on adult education". Professor Simon McGrath drew my attention to this Declaration.

<sup>6</sup> "USAID ... were given a mandate to concentrate on a ... few strategic [education] goals so that they could make/see an impact, and primary reading is at the top of their list", pers comm., former consultant to USAID

<sup>7</sup> My correspondent continues: "It is part of their regular program. It still isn't adult basic education or literacy." pers comm.

<sup>8</sup> For example, "States have a clear responsibility to remain the key actors in the education sector, focused on ensuring free quality education from early childhood to at least completion of secondary level, including basic adult education" (GCE 2015 p 15)

<sup>9</sup> I am however reminded that "rhetoric matters if you want to inspire organisational change" (Tett 2015).

second largest (second possibly to health) proportion of most countries' social program expenditures" (Blunt 1988 p 39).

Thirty years later, the situation has not changed. Even among those committed to adult education, there is a strong feeling that 'children come first'. I well remember Professor Asa Briggs (later Lord Briggs), who was deeply committed to adult learning programmes of which he had professional experience, saying to me in a conversation, "If I had £100 to spend on education, I would spend it on the children".

**2.7 Understanding before advocacy:** I want to suggest that the key issue with SDG 4 is this question of priorities. While few would be against prioritising children, the reasons behind the *exclusory prioritising*, largely excluding adults from education, for not seeing that 'inclusive education' includes adults, are opaque. This leads me to ask, *Why do adults appear so rarely on the agendas for the implementation of SDG4? What are the reasons for prioritising children in education to the exclusion of adults?* Many have for many years stressed the importance and value of the education of adults to both the individual and society, and to education itself – but (if we are honest) with relatively little effect. I suggest that we need to try to understand why children are prioritised over adults before we advocate for more adult education. Therefore my aim here is to start the process of trying to *identify some of the arguments and assumptions behind the prioritising of children's education*. My aim is not to argue, as the ICAE World Assembly 2015 argued, that the SDGs should "accord priority to universal adult literacy and adult education"<sup>10</sup>. Rather, it is to listen, to ask questions, to try to understand, and to help those who make these arguments and assumptions examine for themselves the grounds of their discrimination.

### 3. SOME ARGUMENTS AND ASSUMPTIONS

In this connection, I list below some of the arguments used and assumptions made by educational campaigners in my survey. As stated above, there are different voices being heard, so the arguments below are made by different groups at different times and in different contexts.

**3.1. Adult education is a specialist area and needs specialists to promote it** – as recently said to me by a leading umbrella organisation for education in development contexts. They claimed they knew nothing about adult education and so excluded it from their discussions. Perhaps those of us who have been asserting that 'teaching adults is different from teaching children' have been more successful than we hoped. 'Adult education' is seen by some as a different animal from schooling or formal education, requiring different policies and practices to be developed by 'experts'. There is something about the nature of this 'social imaginary' (Taylor 2004) of 'adult education' that makes some people reluctant to engage with it. Simon McGrath suggests that adult education is "out of the compass of most politicians, at least in how it is conventionally understood. Just as politicians typically have valued things that are vocationally useful but look down on VET, so they ... see 'adult education' as something for the marginalised in society" (pers comm.).

**3.2. The logistical arguments:** One thing that makes adult education different is the fact that it is for 'adults' - and (it is argued) adults have other commitments which make it difficult for them to attend formal education. Most of them have family responsibilities, especially the need to earn enough to support themselves and (if necessary) others. Many

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<sup>10</sup> Calls for at least equivalency go back a long way: in 1972 the UNESCO Conference in Tokyo 'Adult Education in the Context of Lifelong Learning' drafted 150 resolutions aimed at achieving 'equivalent recognition' alongside primary, secondary and university education – see Lowe 1975

are committed to a work schedule which would prevent attendance at specific learning centres at the required times. They often have urgent priorities like the health issues of themselves or of others which will take precedence over any commitment to learning programmes - they are unable to make a commitment to attend regularly. The assumption behind this is that 'education' needs to take place in special locations and at set times - despite the progress made with flexible distance and open learning.

**3.3 Diversity of motivations and formats:** A third argument arises from the fact that adult education is almost always voluntary; adults - precisely because they are adults - cannot normally be compelled to attend education<sup>11</sup>. This fact leads to a range of assumptions about adult motivation for participating in learning programmes. Adults, already busy, will only attend and continue to attend if they see the real value of the learning in their daily lives. Their motivations will thus almost always be immediate and short-term. Agencies may be convinced of the value of and need for generic lifelong learning programmes available for all adults, but most potential adult learners do not see these as relevant to them *at that time* - they focus on their own immediate aspirations.

And of course these aspirations and motivations are multiple and constantly changing. They will vary from individual to individual. And from what we know about adult learning, adults will learn what they feel they need to learn *at the moment*; they cannot wait for some months for a course to start - by which time their immediate issue may have been resolved and different priorities may have taken over.

Faced with this situation, policy-makers sometimes feel that the provision for the education of adults is too complicated for them to make. What appears to be necessary is a wide menu of learning opportunities for adults to choose<sup>12</sup> as and when they are aware of their need for some specific learning:

“a mix of program offerings is required due to the demographically diverse population of adults ... there is no one marketing strategy or campaign that could reach such a diverse population” (Adams-Rogers 1997, cited in Taylor 2006 p 500).

**3.4 Recurrent education:** It has been argued that the concept of 'recurrent education' (popularised by OECD) – by which is meant opening existing educational provision to adults throughout their lives (access) and encouraging adult participation, so that adults may 'return' to 'education' throughout their lives - can lead to the assumption that we do not need special provision for adults. “A much greater proportion of learners in mainstream education provisions are now 'adults' than in previous times - as evinced by the growth of higher education and post-basic education provisions ... ” (Lauglo pers comm)<sup>13</sup>. While recurrent education in this sense would appear to be less feasible for 'developing countries' than OECD countries (although, of course, opening access to formal schooling to adults, mainly younger adults, is important), this focus on recurrent education in Western discussions of education may help to account for the relative neglect of adults in SDG 4; for a

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<sup>11</sup> Apart perhaps from some workplace training or professional development programmes.

<sup>12</sup> I find it hard to explain the reluctance of agencies to provide drop-in learning centres which appear from experience to be both effective in meeting the diversity of adult learning concerns and cost-effective (see Aderinoye et al 2005).

<sup>13</sup> It is worth suggesting that this perceived predominance of adults in Western educational contexts is mainly in programmes *outside* formal contexts such as workplace or private sector learning (see below); there appears to be a diminishing involvement of 'adults' in formal educational programmes; also that opening existing formal learning programmes to adult participants usually seems to deny to the adult learners any say in their own learning – the curriculum is almost always unnegotiable.

large part of the discussions of the SDG 4 was led by Western agencies. If the adult dimension means opening access to existing provision, it is argued, there would seem to be less need for specific adult learning provision.

**3.5 The difficulties of managing diversity<sup>14</sup>:** This leads to another identified issue with adult learning programmes - the difficulty of managing this wide range of adult learning programmes. In many countries, 'adult education' programmes are under the aegis of Ministries of Education. Ministries of Education are very good at managing standardised educational programmes - a national system of primary schools, for example. Other ministries such as Ministries of Labour may be better at managing diversity; but those who prepared the various documents relating to SDG 4 tended to assume that 'education' is the responsibility of Ministries of Education. Adult learning programmes do not fit into this neat categorisation. Once again, it is best left out of consideration as too difficult to cope with.

**3.5 The definition of 'adult education':** The fact that adult learning programmes take a diversity of modes means that – apart from a wish to regulate it and apply National Qualifications Frameworks to it - governments and agencies tend to regard most forms of adult learning and education as outside the remit of government. Similarly many agencies do not regard what they do as 'adult education'; as one agency, heavily engaged in agricultural development, health activities and livelihood promotion, reported to me during this survey, "we do not have extensive work or expertise in the area of adult education"<sup>15</sup>; their work with these forms of adult training and learning is not seen as 'educating adults'. And as such their practitioners are not felt to need any training for teaching adults. Many of those who promote learning with adults feel that, although one must be highly trained to teach children, "anyone can help adults to learn"<sup>16</sup>.

**3.6 Adults do not learn easily:** There are those who argue that adults cannot or do not learn quickly - or at least as quickly as children; that adult learning provision would need to be more extensive (and therefore more expensive) than provision for children. There are those who assert that the adult brain is hard-wired and is incapable of much adult learning - although what we now know about informal (unconscious, unintentional) learning which everyone does in the course of their everyday lives demonstrates that adults are not only capable of learning but do in fact learn much from their daily social intercourse and through critical reflection (see Rogers 2014). But a stronger case may be made for the fact that many adults find it difficult to learn formal school-based subject matter which differs from their everyday experience and practices.

**3.7 There is a feeling sometimes expressed that adult learning programmes in development have been to a large extent a waste of money:** Several agencies such as the World Bank have reviewed their experience of programmes in fields such as adult literacy compared with agricultural and health extension, and have come to the conclusion that, judged by the admittedly limited evidence of achievements and of rates of success, they have not yielded enough gains to warrant continuation - and so such programmes have been dropped for some years until something spurs a new interest. As Helen Abadzi of the World Bank said in a recent paper, citing four reports ranging from 1976 to 2012:

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<sup>14</sup> See report of Uppingham Seminar 2000 Managing Diversity, on website <http://www.uppinghamseminars.co.uk>

<sup>15</sup> e-mail 29 January 2016; the agency wishes to remain anonymous

<sup>16</sup> As an example, I found this idea among clergy when I was doing some training of clergy - "we recognise we are teaching adults but we don't need training for this". Research continues to show that a very large number of adult literacy facilitators have had no training at all.

For decades governments and international donors have financed adult literacy programs for the unschooled populations of low income countries, in the hopes the poor will read information that may improve their lives ... one characteristic that programs have in common is disappointing results. Few learners acquire usable and stable literacy skills” (Abadzi 2012 p 1)

**3.8 Lack of evidence:** Which brings me to a further point – the lack of evidence of the impact of adult learning programmes. Those who work in the promotion of ALE, especially when advocating innovative approaches, are frequently asked to “show us where it works”. But while it is easier to show examples of innovative programmes as collected (for example) by UIL and ASPBAE, it is much harder to show the outcomes of such programmes. As one of my correspondents said:

“when it comes to adult learning and basic education/literacy, we need to be much better at assessment and evaluation. ... When I was in [...], the deputy minister asked me for evidence related to learning outcomes as to why we wanted to extend the program duration (the learning hours). I searched previous projects ... contacted colleagues. And I couldn’t find much ...” (pers comm)

McGrath comments: “Part of the reason why adult education is [felt by policy-makers to be] unimportant is that there is not believed to be a strong economic case” for it. Research into the outcomes of adult literacy learning remains very thin.

**3.9 Human capital theory:** And this is important, for perhaps the biggest assumption behind the prioritising of children's education is the human capital theory - that education is an investment for the future, and therefore that it is best to invest in children with long-term potential growth rather than in adults who have already 'used up' part of their 'future'<sup>17</sup>. The neo-liberal approach to post-school education implies that adult learning is the responsibility of either the employers or the adults themselves rather than of the state. The main focus for state education in development contexts today is to get more children into school for longer periods, and secondly, to improve the quality of learning in schools<sup>18</sup>. As Simon McGrath comments: “I think the human capital argument is central ... the problem is getting worse in the sense that the economic-instrumentalist logic that it demonstrates is becoming even more apparent.<sup>19</sup>”

**3.10 The political dimension:** It is also possible that behind some policy-making in education, there are political issues.

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<sup>17</sup> Although the human capital approach to education dates back to the 1960s (Harbison and Myers 1964), it is still very strong in the international development field today; see UFHRD at <http://www.ufhrd.co.uk/wordpress/>.

<sup>18</sup> Strangely, the argument that educated adults behind children have a strongly positive impact on their performance in school and thus the quality of learning achieved seems to have relatively little force, although I understand that empirical studies have demonstrated this in several different contexts.

<sup>19</sup> McGrath goes on to say: “DFID have launched a new education research programme that is run by an economist and where all the reference group of "experts" are economists. For them only a human capital argument for education and only methods such as randomised controlled trials count. Because of the rising faith in RCTs, there is an ... imperative to find RCT evidence that adult education is important. This is a difficult issue for much of the adult education constituency, I would suspect, for reasons of philosophy as well as technical competence, and probably because of the complexity of forms and impacts of adult learning”.

“Faith in the benefits of formal education systems [has] remained unshakeable for so many years because education [is] also a doctrine firmly entrenched in the global geo-politics of development. Education [has been] the generic solution to social and economic change proposed by the Western nations just as revolution was a prescription of the Eastern bloc nations” (Blunt 1988 p 39).

I found in several contexts that to spend money on children’s education was seen as a vote winner, especially among parents and carers, many of whom say, “I want education for my children, not for myself, so that they have wider choices than I had”. It is a wise politician who listens to such demands for schooling rather than urging adult education.

**3.11 Conclusion:** There are, I am sure, other arguments and assumptions behind the prioritising of children's education; and it is hoped that the seminar will unearth some of these. But the above have either been adduced as reasons for, or can be perceived as tacit assumptions behind, the prioritising of children and marginalising adults in the discussions leading up to, and in making plans for the implementation of, the SDGs.

**3.12 Action in response:** Since advocacy has on the whole failed to persuade mainstream educational campaigners from including adults in their campaigns, one answer may be that those committed to adult learning and education should themselves mount such campaigns from an adult perspective. For example, in my discussions with campaigners for the provision of education for persons with disabilities about the absence of an adult dimension, I was urged by those campaigners that, since it lay outside their remit and expertise, adult educators should provide that dimension themselves. They argued (reasonably, it seemed to me) that it was unreasonable to expect them to include an adult dimension to their campaigns. And this raises a further question: how might such dimensions be formulated and promoted to policy-makers?

**Questions for the Seminar arising from Part II of this paper:**  
*What are the reasons for the prioritising of children to the exclusion of adults?  
How can the many diverse adult dimensions to SDG4 be formulated and promoted to policy makers.*

### **PART III: ADULT LEARNING IN THE OTHER SDGs**

“[T]he impact of schooling is inseparable from other MDG-related initiatives in health, gender equity, water, environment and [employment]” (Birdsall and Vaishnav 2005 p 27)

**4.1 Learning targets in the SDGs.** It is important to remind ourselves that the SDGs include many references to the importance of adult learning in various provisions, not just Goal 4.

“Each of the 17 goals has a set of targets and each set has at least one target that deals with or implies learning, training, educating or at the very least raising awareness for one or more groups of adults. Goals 3 [health], 5 [women], 8 [economy], 9 [infrastructure], 12 [consumption] and 13 [climate] especially include targets that imply substantial learning for ranges of adults - and organised, programmatic learning at that” (Oxenham pers comm).

**4.2 Relationship of SDG 4 and these other learning targets:** This leads me to ask about the relationship between the education envisaged in SDG 4 and these targets. A number of scenarios can be identified.

**4.2.1 Scenario 1: Education and extension:** For some people, the learning programmes expressed or implied in the other SDGs tend not to be seen as ‘education’, but as ‘extension’ programmes in health, gender, agriculture, skills development, environmental management and citizenship/community development etc. They are not regarded as the responsibility of Ministries of Education but are often run by other Ministries. But others would point out that ‘extension’ is amongst the most effective forms of adult learning programmes.

**4.2.2 Scenario 2: Formal versus non-formal:** It is possible to see a situation where SDG 4 will focus primarily on (formal) schooling for children and young people (up to tertiary level) to the exclusion of adults, and that the other learning targets will focus primarily on (non-formal) provision for adults, thus excluding children and youth from any part of the implementation of these other SDGs. It may be argued that, since there is elsewhere in the SDGs substantial concern for adult learning, the absence of adults from discussions about SDG 4 may not matter. Some may even argue that this is a good thing, for it could free adult learning programmes from formal schooling. But might this result in a situation where the focus on the provision for adult learning under these other SDGs may reduce the felt need for adult basic education for those adults who both need and want a more formal approach?

**4.2.3 Scenario 3: Basic education (literacy) versus post-literacy:** It is possible to conceive of situations in which adult learning under SDG 4 will focus on adult literacy and numeracy and the other SDG targets focus on development-related post-literacy learning for adults? Will literacy and numeracy learning (adult basic education) be separated from literacy/numeracy-in-use (literacy/numeracy practices) in these other SDG targets?

**4.2.4 Scenario 4: Lifelong learning/education:** Does the concept of LLL/E (education from the cradle to the grave, embracing both formal schooling and adult learning programmes) provide a frame for bringing the two together?

**4.3 Need for theorising the relationship:** Simon McGrath, comparing adult education in the SDGs with his study of TVET and the SDGs, speaks of the “multiple likely adult-education-to-SDG-relationships”, similar to those which he sees for VET. There is, he reports, a move to “try to theorise” the way VET relates to the multiple SDGs. “I wonder whether it would be worth trying to argue for a similar exercise for adult education” (pers comm).

**4.4. Exploring the implementation of the other adult learning targets:** Considerable work has gone into exploring the implications of these adult learning targets. I would draw attention to the products of three such explorations:

**4.4.1 The Education 2030 Framework for Action (FFA):** The FFA was adopted by 184 Member States and the global education community at the high-level meeting (Paris, November 2015) organized during the 38th Session of the UNESCO General Conference. The main objective of the FFA is to provide guidance for the implementation of Education 2030 (FFA 2030)

**4.4.2 Recommendation on adult learning and education November 2015:** With its fellow *Recommendation Concerning Technical and Vocational Education and Training* (November 2015), this represents the fullest policy commitment to ALE for many years

(Recommendation of ALE 2015) It revises the 1976 statement on adult education in the light of LLL/E. It does not specifically refer to the SDG adult learning targets.

**4.4.3 GRALE (Global Review of Adult Learning and Education)** – a programme run by UIL to collect data on the provision of learning opportunities for adults; with published version in 2009 and 2013, it is currently re-designed to monitor the achievement of the adult learning targets in the SDGs.

**4.5 Questions for the seminar:** The considerations in this section raise at least two important questions:

- a) *Does the provision for adults in these other goals mean that there is a feeling that adults are already well catered for, that separate provision of 'education' for adults is less necessary since there is so much other provision for them? That is, do we **need** a Goal 4 for adults?*
- b) *What (if any) is the relation between the education provided under SDG4 and the learning targets set in the other SDGs? Do children and youth have any role to play in the other SDGs; and do the other goals have any place in the education provided in SDG4?*

#### **PART IV: LIFELONG LEARNING/EDUCATION**

**5.1 How to build relationships between SDG4 and the other learning targets.** The issue surely now must be – how can we avoid compartmentalisation; how can we, for instance, get the substance of all the other SDGs (gender, health, environment, citizenship, finance, skill development etc) into SDG4; and equally how can we get those involved in SDG4, especially children and youth, involved in all the other SDGs?

**5.2 Theorising the relationship between SDG4 and the other adult learning targets – is LLL/E the answer?** There has in recent years been a remarkable growth of interest in LLL/E. In many circles, lifelong learning has been embraced as the panacea for all the ills of education; it has been seen as “a new doctrine of education more mindful of realities and of the truth of man than traditional doctrine” (Lengrand 1975). LLL/E is actively promoted, both in Western and developing country contexts. It has been suggested by UIL and others that LLL/E would provide a suitable framework for bringing the two SDG educational commitments (SDG4 and the other adult learning targets in the other SDGs) together. The question thus arises: does LLL/E provide a basis for theorising the relationship between SDG4 and the adult learning targets in the other SDGs? Would seeing all these forms of adult learning within a framework of LLL/E help to increase legitimacy for adult learning programmes?

**5.3 The success of LLL/E:** This drive towards lifelong learning appears to be successful in some contexts; studies have revealed that there is a great deal of involvement of adults in learning outside of the formal education system:

“more resources (public and private) are now devoted to the education of 'adults' than in previous times, simply because a greater share of adult people are now either in full time education or ... engage in episodic education and training events. But this large scale activity may not be labelled 'adult education'. ... A Swedish attempt to estimate expenses on education and training ... concluded that, in that country, it was likely that most expenditure was incurred outside the formal

education system (mainly in work organizations - firms, offices, public services) for people already working. If correct, this points to a massive investment in education and training geared to ... 'adults'. ... it may be that mainstream formal education provisions [for adults] are less important than previously" (Lauglo pers com)<sup>20</sup>.

**5.4** While this is of course mainly true of Western contexts, interest in LLL/E in educational policy-making contexts in developing countries also seems to be growing, largely through the influence of international development agencies, in particular the UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning, Hamburg.

**5.5 Implementing LLL/E:** One difficulty is how to implement such a wide programme of LLL/E, how to ensure that it becomes more than rhetoric. Would such a lifelong programme of learning opportunities embrace both the schooling of children envisioned in SDG 4 and these other targets, or will LLL/E be confined to adult learning in the other SDGs? And how should the learning outcomes of such programmes be measured?

**5.6 An all-embracing LLL/E?** I would like to make three comments on this matter:

**5.6.1 A curriculum for ALE?** One suggestion is that these other SDG targets could form an agenda for lifelong and lifewide education. One might however point out that these targets omit a great deal from their purview – there is here no art or music, no language or philosophy, no literature or history (except perhaps in citizenship), no spirituality. The Recommendation on ALE (see above 4.4.2) envisages a much wider agenda of ALE. An approach based on the SDG targets would perhaps emphasise the socio-economic and instrumentalist approach to the education of adults at the expense of the cultural; and the fact that cultural education is mentioned under SDG4 might again cause it to be segregated from other forms of adult learning.

**5.6.2 Cross-cutting issues:** My second comment is such an approach might lead to ignoring the fact that some of these SDGs are in fact cross-cutting issues. Gender, for example, should surely be seen as an aspect of every SDG as well as a sector in itself (SDG .. tends to deal with 'women' rather than with 'gender'). Literacy and language are also surely cross-cutting issues. Surely 'education' itself could be seen as both a sector and a cross-cutting issue?

**5.6.3 Partnerships:** The most productive approach would seem to be the building of partnerships - partnerships between those agencies who work in the various SDG sectors and adult educators; and between adult educators and those who work in mainstream education (SDG4). The Recommendation on ALE sees the necessity of inter-ministerial forums for ALE; and the same may be true of other agencies. So that ALE would become pre-eminently a cross-cutting programme, creating in association with mainstream educationalists a true LLL/E.

**5.7 Legitimisation of ALE:** It seems to me that the greatest potential of these SDGs is to legitimise ALE in every sector. The SDGs give adult educators a mandate to work with every sector on the provision of adult learning opportunities, to enquire what parts of their

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<sup>20</sup> Canada in the 1980s reported that the combined public and private expenditure on the education of adults exceeded that for 'pre-adults', and that more adults were participating in forms of non-formal and adult education than the total number of adult and younger participants in the formal education system: see Thomas 1981

programmes incorporate activities designed to meet the adult learning targets in the SDGs. Whereas in many sectors of development, ALE has been marginalised or even ignored, the SDGs validate the mainstreaming of ALE into those sectors. It is true that there is a danger that these 17 SDGs will perpetuate and indeed strengthen the sectoral divisions in development, resulting in 17 different development sectors, each with its own budget, goals and indicators. But at least there is now justification for enquiring about the role of ALE in every sector.

**5.8 Resistance :** Such attempts have been made before – and in the course of attempting such partnerships, resistance has been identified. Many developmental sectors show resistance to the inclusion of ALE into their programmes : Peter Easton, in his recent study of adult education in Africa, notes what he calls ‘the great divorce’:

“the lack of connection and even the strongly ingrained mistrust that tends to prevail between educators and their institutions on the one hand and the agencies and personnel most concerned with economic development and employment on the other”. (Easton 2015: 164).

But we must also the equally “strongly ingrained mistrust” of many adult educators who uncompromisingly insist that only adult educators can teach adults (especially in the field of literacy); that a skill trainer, for example, cannot teach the literacy practices of their skill, but that such teaching must be done by a literacy facilitator who knows nothing about the skills area. So that the final question in this enquiry must surely be, how can we best facilitate partnerships on both sides, the other SDG sectors and the educators, both youth and ALE? Perhaps to build such partnerships will require a measure of humility and a willingness to compromise on all sides in order to advance ALE in all its richness in SDG4 and in the other sectors in the context of LLL/E

**5.6 Questions for the Seminar:** I suggest that in this third section, we might seek to explore

- a) *Will the framing of both children’s education and adults’ education in ‘lifelong learning/education’ redress in the imbalance between children’s schooling and adult learning programmes?*
- b) *How can we avoid this discourse being more rhetorical than literal? How can such a framing be operationalised and the learning outcomes be measured?*
- c) *How can we build partnerships with others engaged in both SDG4 and the other SDGs in a way which will enhance LL/E and ALE?*

## **6. COMMENTARY**

6.1 It seems to me that the above arguments focus around two different approaches - the *positive value of schooling* and *negative images of adult learning programmes*. Schooling, it is felt, will add value in future years; it is easier to promote and manage; and its (standardised) outcomes can be more easily measured. Adult learning programmes are thought to be more difficult to provide and manage and yield fewer (and more diverse) results which are less amenable to measurement. This is (I suggest) one reason why, despite many counter-arguments, the implementation of adult learning programmes is still so poor.

6.2 I therefore suggest that, to advance the cause of **adult learning in and through the SDGs**, both of these issues – the value of schooling and perceived disadvantages of adult education - need to be addressed - and perhaps addressed in harness rather than separately. It is not enough to advocate for the benefits of adult learning programmes in an age of limited resources: we need at the same time to ask why “if I have only £100 to spend, I will spend it on the children” is a satisfactory justification. The aim of this seminar is not just to argue that the exclusion of adults from any share in this £100 needs to be seen as discriminatory; rather it is to help those who plan to implement SDG 4 to become more aware of the tacit assumptions about education they make.

6.3 For the main reason seems to me to be the social imaginary of ‘education’ – what people see when they talk of education and what they do not see. ‘Education’ is for many a matter for children and youth, for pupils and students – and this imaginary excludes adults. I am reminded of a campaign a few years ago in England called ‘Think Bike’, an attempt to get drivers and other road users to become conscious of cyclists and motorcyclists. Currently there are two remarkably successful educational campaigns to ‘think girls’ and ‘think disabilities’ in education; perhaps what we need is a ‘think adults’ in education campaign. We need to talk about *adult education* (or education with/for/of adults) in its widest sense once again.

### SUMMARY OF QUESTIONS FOR THE SEMINAR

<i>Perceptions – are these correct?</i>	<i>Questions for debate</i>
1. <i>The absence of adult education from SDG 4 (Education)</i>	a. <i>What are the reasons for the prioritising of children to the exclusion of adults?</i>
2. <i>The inclusion of adult learning in the targets of many (most?) other SDGs</i>	b. <i>In what ways does the education envisaged in SDG 4 relate to these other educational and learning targets?</i> c. <i>Is there a danger of polarisation, that SDG 4 will focus primarily on (formal) schooling for children and youth to the exclusion of adult basic education, and that the other learning targets will focus primarily on (non-formal) provision for adults, thus excluding children and youth?</i>
3. <i>Lifelong learning/education can embrace them both</i>	d. <i>Will the framing of both children’s education and adults’ education in ‘lifelong learning/education’ redress in the imbalance between children’s schooling and adult learning programmes?</i> e. <i>How can we avoid this discourse being more rhetorical than literal? How can such a framing be operationalised and the learning outcomes be measured?</i>

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## COMMENTS ON BACKGROUND PAPER CIRCULATED TO ALL PARTICIPANTS

### IAN CHEFFY...

Abstract: I agree with you that the learning needs of adults have received relatively little attention in the last 15 years. This, I feel, came about because of the desire of the international community to focus on a limited range of specific development goals concerning many aspects of development and not education alone, as seen in the MDGs.

However, I take some encouragement from the new SDGs in that they do not reduce the focus on education to simply one of primary schooling but are concerned now with education at all levels – lifelong learning. The thinking about education for all ages which was a feature of the 2000 Dakar Education for All agenda has now been integrated (with updating) into the SDGs themselves. This at least opens up opportunities for international development efforts to pay attention to the needs of adults without in any way stepping outside what are now set up as the priorities.

I am not much aware of discussions so far this year on the implementation of the SDGs but I would like to believe that The Education 2030 Framework for Action document which was formally adopted at UNESCO in November will not be overlooked. It amplifies the ten targets within SDG4 and gives a good deal of recognition to the needs of adults. We have to recognise, of course, that adults are not the only target group of concern in relation to development but they do feature quite significantly in this document. This is not entirely surprising in the view of the new emphasis on lifelong learning – for children youth and adults. It indicates that within the lifelong learning framework, “special measures are needed to address the needs of adult learners” particularly as concerns relevant skills for employment (TVET) and basic education. Adults in conflict or emergency situations are specifically acknowledged too.

2.4 It’s certainly important to see the role of adults in relation to the schooling of children. This can be in the form of parenting education, as you say, but we also need to recognise the contribution which adult literacy makes to children’s schooling even if it concentrates simply on parents learning to read and write. I came across an example from Cambodia recently where adults who learned to read and write in a church-based literacy programme ended up setting up a school for their village – which now has 300 pupils.

2.5 Perhaps in the context of the UK, Asa Briggs remark might have some justification. But I strongly feel that in the context of developing countries, the £100 ought to go to adults! It could make a big difference immediately.

2.6 Somehow I think that human survival instincts enter into this! Adults, especially parents, prioritise children since they are the “hope for the future”. Parents want their children to have better opportunities than they had – and this spills over into public policy. Unfortunately it’s hard to change human survival instincts!

Also (in the footnote) I hadn’t realised that the concept of lifelong learning already has a long history.

3.1 Yes, perhaps adult education is a specialist area, but it’s not exactly esoteric. The necessary expertise is not difficult to acquire – but there needs to be a willingness to acquire it, so attitudes enter into this as well.

3.3 I feel that I have heard “smorgasbord” used sometimes in a derogatory way as the equivalent of “mish-mash”. I’m sure that is not what is intended here!

3.8 It seems that we simply have to find a way to rise to the challenge of showing the human capital benefits of adult education, if only because this is demanded by the environment in which we are having to operate at the moment. I don’t know how it could be done; my own research at the moment is based on a qualitative approach although I am convinced that this remains valid. A colleague and I have interviewed 95 people in 5 African countries who

learned to read in their own language on average some 15 years ago. They reported wide ranging impacts in terms of their self-esteem, confidence in relating to others in their community, ability to contribute to their community, ability to manage their small businesses more profitably, as well as their ability to support their children's education. All these changes are enormously important and must have some economic impact (if one wants to look at it that way) but the challenge lies in finding a way to express it in a way which communicates to those looking for "hard" evidence.

5.4 I'm not clear what you mean by the "two SDG educational commitments" but I think that we should certainly explore how the concept of LLL/E connects with adult education. Adopting that concept might free adult education from some of the connotations which have led to its marginalisation, which you list in section 3. We need to show how much adult education is taking place already (including workplace learning) and put that under the overarching concept of LLL/E.

#### **EHSANUR RAHMAN**

This would be a good discussion paper taking issues/points in various slots of the seminar(s). Thank you for preparing a precise paper.

The point indicating the 'relationship of SDG 4 and these other learning targets' (paragraph 4.2 of the paper) would probably need to be more thrashed out. The debate would be around the questions - Whether 'extension' is 'education'? What are the roles difference between 'educationists' and 'extension agents'? Whether/How these are or can be linked linked from 'academic' point? Is there space/scope for sharing budgets? etc. etc. I see the paper does not touch upon the factors and accountability of the adult educators in 'failing' to demonstrate enough flexibility in adult learning programmes, packaging adult learning encompassing diverse learning needs of adults and developing operational partnership with other sector development actors. This is high time to be go for a kind of self-critic exercise around this issue.

#### **BRIAN STREET**

Whilst the *background paper* for this Seminar spells out many of the key issues, I would just like to add some theoretical and research perspectives from the field of Literacy as Social Practice (LSP). In an introduction to a forthcoming UNESCO Journal, 'Prospects', that addresses these issues, I examine the challenge that authors put forward to the dominant perspective evident in the approach of many Agencies, which we might characterise as a 'skills' approach. The policy assumption on 'skills' is that the 'low levels of literacy' found in many countries are the result of children not being sufficiently brought into schooling; and the educational perspective is that these children should be exposed to fairly standard teaching and learning regarding reading (and writing). The perspective here tends to ignore the role of adults, focussing on schooling and children at the expense of the wider social context, and of 'family literacy'

The alternative perspective shifts the focus from schools and from children and instead sees the importance of linking adults and children in a number of different institutional contexts. This does not simply focus on 'adult literacy' or on 'schooled literacy', as many studies do. Instead this approach works across the boundaries, the age groups and the institutions from a 'social' perspective that sees reading and writing as always embedded in social contexts whose meanings may vary rather than being uniform, as they do in the 'skills' approach.

Such an approach draws upon the concept of '*Social Literacies*' (Street,1995) which refers to the nature of literacy as social practice, and upon the plurality of literacies that leads to quite new ways of understanding and defining what counts as literacy and has profound implications for how we learn and teach reading and writing. If literacy is a social practice, then it varies with social context and is not the same, uniform thing in each case and this leads to quite new ways of understanding and defining what counts as literacy. I would like to discuss, in this context, as colleagues from different parts of the world and from different fields meet in this seminar, that the 'social' perspective has profound implications for how we conceptualise 'literacy and, in educational contexts how we learn and teach reading and writing. If literacy is a social practice, then it varies with social context and is not the same, uniform thing in each case and this has implications also for Policy, of the kind we see in current national approaches and also such international perspectives as those expressed in the SDGs. Whereas the UK National Literacy Strategy, for instance, sees 'the basics' as the key focus for literacy education, involving surface features of language and literacy, such as rules of grammar in the traditional sense and rules for phoneme/ grapheme relations, the LSP approach, on the other hand, shifts from such narrow views to the larger social and ideological context. By addressing these conceptual issues, I hope to engage practitioners, researchers and policy makers in reflexive debate about these issues and I look forward to continuing the conversation in this seminar.

#### **MARI YASUNAGA**

Regarding the background note, thank you very much once again for providing this comprehensive and useful frame with main issues analyzed. While I would still need to read it more carefully, let me share with you some main points that came up to my mind immediately, which I may share with other participants during the discussion. As these are my comments (and not institutional ones except sharing of UNESCO's documents), I may revert to you with more formal, consolidated comments.

- **Tasks of the Seminar and beyond:** This is a very timely event with fundamental and important questions to be discussed to support the implementation of SDG4. It is understood that there will be an outcome document or a report. It would be helpful to know how the outcomes of the seminar are planned to be used. In other words, I wonder if this seminar is part of a broader activity which may be continuing, or if this is an opportunity to exchange ideas to consider any possible follow-up activities?
- **Connecting the seminar discussion with other processes:** "2.3 Planning for the implementation of SDGs" of the background paper addresses a critical issue of interpretation of SDG4 and its translation into action. Some documents included in the attached list are also from some of the ongoing processes and platforms for SDG4 implementation (e.g. the regional SDG4 consultations organized by UNESCO, national consultations, mapping of related policies, programmes, indicators at country level, the work of the Technical Advisory Group to define thematic Indicators to Monitor the Education 2030). It would be useful to explore how different ongoing platforms and processes can benefit from the outcomes of the seminar.
- **Resources mobilization:** "2.5 Why is adult education neglected?" of the background paper highlights the limited public resources made available for adult education and non-formal education. At the same time, there are resources made available by non-state actors, such as communities, NGOs, the private sector and donors (e.g. grass-root level activities,

workplace education), about which a state and/or non-state actors may not have a complete picture. Considering the third element of three major state obligations (fulfill, respect and protect the right to education), it might be interesting to explore how government is 'protecting' the right to education, ensuring the quality of and equity in the non-state actors' provision (e.g. coordination of provision, enhancing regulations?). Financing experts may have ideas about effective resource mobilization from non-state actors (e.g. use of corporate tax?).

- **Making learning outcomes and benefits of adult education/literacy more visible:** While an evidence base regarding the multiple benefits of 'education' is expanding (e.g. "Sustainable development post-2015 begins with education" <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002305/230508e.pdf>), the equivalent of that for adult literacy, for instance, is still relatively limited. This may be due in part to complex variables which may need to be counted in connecting adult literacy and its impacts on people's income, livelihoods, health, environment protection, etc. I agree with the point raised by the background paper (3.7) and think that it would be important to enhance the evidence base, especially, the ones on the economic benefit of adult education (and opportunity costs) and on learning outcomes, without leaving out concerns about the other benefits and the right dimension.
- **Linking the argument for adult education with emerging issues:** Our environments are evolving with some emerging issue, including ageing society, an increasing demand for constant updates of knowledge and skills in knowledge-oriented society, higher mobility of people and expanding cities. Several emerging issues may work as supportive factors for advancing adult education. The background paper, for instance, refers to recurrent education which is a phenomenon more in Western countries. If the SDG4 claims for "universality" as its main feature, recurrent education, or adult learning and education (ALE), would deserve more attention in the SDG4 framework.
- **Connecting (fragmented) different areas/administrative units with that for adult education under the umbrella of lifelong learning:** This is easy to say but not that easy to realize, given that national education systems and broader national systems operate under certain structures. Much has been said and done to connect different areas/units, and the SDG4's lifelong learning framework can be used to continue to do so (hopefully in a more systematic and larger scale) - e.g. family literacy with an enhanced adult learning component, equivalency programmes, developing systems for recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) of learning outcomes, integrating NFE into EMIS, intersectoral cooperation.
- **Presenting adult learning and education as an integral part of LLL for its better conceptual understandings, images and profile:** Considering making advocacy more effective, it would be good to think about not only *what* (e.g. the benefit of adult learning) but also *how* to present evidence. (e.g. While the slow shrinking population of illiterate adults is a source of serious concern, if we consider other factors, notably the demographic trends, a picture may be different). Positive results and effects of adult learning and education would help raise its profile and to improve the "social imaginary of 'education'".

#### **ANNA ROBINSON-PANT**

I found the paper particularly useful in terms of scoping earlier policy discussions and statements from key meetings/players that have contributed to the formulation of the

SDGs. The important distinction made in the paper between adult education (as planned activities) and adult learning (as everyday learning which we all do) will be valuable in guiding our discussions at the seminar. My comments relate to both these aspects of the paper:

### **1. Adult learning/education and the SDGs**

I must admit that my reading of the SDGs (particularly as compared to the MDGs/EFA agenda) is much more positive than Alan's – in that I saw only two of the Goal 4 targets (4.1. and 4.2.) as focused exclusively on children and schooling. As I consider there is a reasonable emphasis on adult learning in the other targets, the issue for me is less around 'the absence of adult education from SDG 4' and more around 'what kind of education or adult learning is envisaged within each target?' For instance, 4.7. seems to mark a significant shift away from the 3Rs and formal skills/education with the potential to support informal and non formal learning around 'global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity', 'gender equality' etc. Thinking about the distinction between adult education and adult learning, a question is around what kind of learning can be planned/supported and how, and whether some everyday learning (which we often do well anyway, as Alan notes) might be undermined if it is formally supported/provided by government agencies.

I would also like to draw attention to repeated statements in the 2030 Framework for Action where there is a strong emphasis on gender equality and empowerment of women and girls as cross-cutting the three dimensions of sustainable development (eg 'A world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed'). The commitment (at least rhetorically...) to gender equality and women's empowerment in the 2030 agenda presents an important opportunity to look at what assumptions about learning and education could contribute to these aims. We could use Alan's distinction between informal learning and education to explore what kind of adult learning/lifelong education might support the targets in Goal 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls). Adult learning (particularly 'awareness raising') seems to underlie most of the Goal 5 targets (eg 'enhance the use of enabling technology') but is not stated explicitly.

We could also consider where education (and possible synonyms for adult learning such as 'awareness raising') is mentioned in the other SDGs and what this might mean in practice. Eg '13.3. Improve education, awareness-raising and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation...' This relates to Alan's points about when adult learning in other sectors is seen as 'extension' rather than 'education' (p 11) and the danger that SDG 4 focuses on adult literacy/numeracy whilst the other SDGs only on development-related learning.

### **2. Education and politics: what's the sub-plot?**

The background paper gives a great summary of the possible reasons why children are prioritised over adults in policy (section 3 on arguments and assumptions). Although most of the points addressed here are in some way related to 'effectiveness' (measuring outcomes, practical constraints re structures, governance), the 'political dimension' (see 3.9) seems most significant to me and we could reflect on it further. As well as the resource angle of political commitment (spending money on children's education as a 'vote winner', p 10), both children's and adult education are often supported for reasons other than learning and it seems important to look at what that other agenda (the sub-plot) might be. For instance, changes in UK schooling like the extended day could be seen to relate more to providing childcare (helping working parents) than to learning. Looking at where adult learning

(particularly literacy) has been strongly supported by governments in the South, this has often been part of a political movement (eg Cuba) or to provide employment for educated unemployed youth in rural areas (Nepal). For many NGOs, adult learning has provided an entry point for other development activities – valued as a way of mobilising communities and forming groups, rather than necessarily the skills taught/learned. We could also consider why adults choose to join learning programmes – a major reason is for socialising (an important point in the context of the UK’s ageing population). Does the political (or non-educational) agenda undermine or enhance the arguments for adult learning?

### **3. (Re)conceptualisation of lifelong learning**

A major contribution of our seminar could be to contribute a clearer understanding of lifelong learning within policy debates (and the two meanings outlined in Part II of the paper are a helpful starting point). In Nepal earlier this year, I met with policy makers in the Ministry of Education who explained their current commitment to moving from an ‘EFA’ (mainly schooling) agenda to ‘lifelong education’. Their current School Sector Development Plan (2016-22), being developed in response to the SDGs, proposes that ‘lifelong learning and continuing education’ is one of their four goals and discusses the desire for lifelong education increasing amongst adults. Lifelong learning is emphasised as starting from the cradle, and colleagues are exploring the connections between children’s and adult education through this definition. Now that Lifelong learning and lifelong education are more centrally on the policy agenda in many countries, there seems to be a need for clearer conceptualisation of the terms (including how they are being used in specific contexts).