

THE MARRAKECH FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION: POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION IN AFRICA



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Introduction

The release of the CONFINTEA VII Marrakech Framework for Action (MFA) (UNESCO, 2022a) creates a moment for critical reflection on adult learning and education (ALE) on the African continent, and for the conceptualisation of adult educational praxes towards the kinds of societies and continent we want.

The MFA offers African activists, scholars, policymakers and civil society organisations a new moment to advance human rights-oriented and social justice adult education systems in a time of great transition. Moreover, the MFA moment calls for much greater solidarity, collaboration and collective action amongst the actors in this transdisciplinary field - a moment of re-imagining and reinventing transdisciplinary adult education as a vehicle for social change.

The world is changing. The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the socio-economic conditions of millions of Africans, especially the circumstances of the poor and marginalised. COVID accentuated the vital contributions of adults working in life-making community activities (health, food systems, caring, etc.) while climate change and the ecological crisis further exacerbated the conditions on the continent where 'food and hunger' remains a prominent theme. The ecological crisis has resulted in an increase in climate refugees and

migrants. Workers in the informal economy continue to bear the brunt of the COVID crisis, and conflict and an increase in gender-based violence (GBV) remain concerns in Africa.

Inequality between and within the continent has not diminished and poverty remains a recurring theme. The embrace of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), in which digitalisation is a key component, presents further challenges in several areas of life on the African continent. It is within this context that adult educators need to reflect on and frame possibilities as part of the MFA-moment.

The current realities of adult education in Africa suggest that the sector continues to face many constraints in building responsive, effective and transformative ALE systems. The data from the Africa Regional Report (UNESCO, 2022b) shows the ongoing struggles around adult education. Africa is home to 155 million 'illiterates' (66 percent of whom are women). Funding and resourcing of adult education systems remain poor (less than 2 percent of national budgets where they exist) and the declaration of adult education policies and legislation is irregular and slow. The focus of adult education remains limited to functional adult literacy, and post-literacy programmes seem to focus increasingly on human capital approaches to adult education with technical vocational education and training (TVET) as priority.

The role and work of civil society in adult education has not gained the necessary traction that it deserves. The regional report offers various systems-building recommendations in areas such as policy, governance, financing, stakeholder participation and quality. These systems-related issues are all important and should be addressed. I want to raise five important points in the hope of generating a broader discussion amongst adult educators



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working in this transdisciplinary field, and in and across a pluriverse of community-based adult education programmes and projects on the continent and elsewhere.

The Just Transition

The first and most urgent point is the growing debate around a just transition, which is about the role of communities in visioning alternatives to a relentless adherence to the political and economic systems that are geared towards an unsustainable future and the resultant threat to all forms of life. The just transition represents a variety of strategies that aim to transition communities to building thriving economies that provide dignified, productive and ecologically sustainable livelihoods, and value socially useful and life-making work, democratic governance and ecological resilience. The current systems are concerned with endless growth, extractivism, consumerism and technical innovation that propel us into deepening ecological crises and a hastening of the annihilation of the world's interlocking ecosystems (CIPSET, 2019; Kahn, 2010). Adult educators and activists working in several social movements, including labour, environmental justice, solidarity economy, food sovereignty

and ecofeminism have emphasised the disproportionate impact of climate change on African communities, particularly impoverished, low-income and rural communities. Ecoliteracy and ecopedagogy are vital within the overall framework of a just transition. Adult educators on the continent should explore a variety of ways to centre life-affirming ecological pedagogical praxis that inculcates a deeper ecological consciousness that inspires actions toward the protection of all life forms. Developing planetary consciousness and a life-affirming ecological praxis could be foundational in dealing with the widespread forms of inequality and central to the humanising project. Transition is inevitable.

Community food and related systems

The second point forms part of the praxes of just transition movements - food security and food sovereignty. Africa has a rich history of food production and community food systems. Afroecology, for example - a philosophical, methodological and ethical tradition - involves the sacred relationships of indigenous people on the continent with land, seeds, water, air and food. It also treasures indigenous knowledges, experiences, cultures and ways of being within planetary life support systems. More recently, several scholars working across disciplines of social, human and natural sciences have pointed to the increase of climate change on food systems in Africa. Many African countries have experienced droughts and flooding which have had devastating effects on food production and resulted in humanitarian disasters and the loss of lives. Very recently, Madagascar's famine was described as the first in modern history to be caused by climate change. Once again, activists and social movements have raised the disproportionate impacts of drought - a climate shock - on the unemployed, the working class and the urban and rural poor. Consequently, scholars and activists continue to call for the development of community food systems as a longer-term solution to hunger and health and within the context of climate change. Within a food sovereignty framework,

community food systems would return food production to communities as part of a commons. Community food gardens have emerged, laying the foundation for the development of community food systems as integral to community life. Community food systems are intertwined with the right to clean water, quality public health and clean energy. Adult educators could play an important role in supporting communities to engage with these issues and to strengthen interventions that advance water, food, energy and health systems necessary to sustain life.

Adult education as community development

The third important point for adult education is about the role of adult education within the national planning frameworks of governments on the continent. Many governments are incorporating adult education as a vehicle of skills formation to support formal labour markets. (Vally & Motala, 2014). Such policy changes should be understood in relation to the dominant global discourse of neoliberalism, human capital, supply and demand, the skills mismatch, and their association with employability and productivity. Steven Klees highlights how, as part of this dominant discourse, governments persist in asserting that "education leads to skills, skills lead to employment, employment leads to economic growth, economic growth creates jobs and is the way out of poverty and inequality" (Klees, 2017). This, Klees argues, is a neoliberal reform analysis that is false. It is therefore not surprising to see how vocational education has become the focus of governments as critical to economic development. Technical vocational education and training (TVET), a subsector of adult education, is gaining increasing attention -- much more than adult literacy. I want to suggest that adult educators in Africa engage more deeply with **vocational education as community development** and reclaim it as a vehicle to address community needs and interests. The development of vocational education in building community systems in the thematic areas of food, energy, water, health and shelter could be the focus.

Adult education and the fourth industrial revolution (4IR)

The fourth issue relates to the growth in the global and national focus on the 'fourth industrial revolution' as the 'new phase' of development that will address a wide variety of social and economic issues in societies. The 4IR is promoted as the new era that offers opportunities to improve human lives and lead the world out of crises, towards a better future for all of us. The 4IR is associated with several disruptive technologies, including artificial intelligence, that will combine as a transformative force to address a wide range of socio-economic problems (CIPSET, 2020). The 4IR is also shaping educational frameworks from schooling to higher education. Some of these technologies include learning management systems (LMS), technology enhanced learning (TEL), tactile training systems (TTS), massive open online courses (MOOCs) and many more. These tools are also associated with educational reforms geared towards job-preparation, upskilling and reskilling of workers. Digitalisation and digital learning are integral components of these new technologies, and it is evident that most adult learners and educators on the continent have limited access to these technologies (MOJA, 2022). Although these tools could aid learning, the question is what role the 4IR and its regime of technologies can or should play in addressing inequality, poverty and the ecological crisis.

Pluriverse of hope and possibilities

The last issue is the vast number of innovative and transformative practices prevalent in communities across the continent. Africa is rich with the kind of adult education innovation that reflects the many ways in which adult education contributes to socio-economic transformation. In fact, one of the great limitations in the scholarship of adult education is the lack of documentation/research on the 'pluriverse of possibilities' or 'profiles of hope and possibilities' that show the

advancement African communities are making in using adult education theory and practice as a vehicle to address the needs and interests of communities. Today this 'pluriverse' includes many orientations and methodological approaches in which governments, civil society organisations, as well as community-based formations or grassroots organisations use adult education towards the socio-economic development of communities. In some cases, governments partner with civil society organisations - both local and international - to conceptualise and implement new projects and programmes. In other cases, civil society organisations combine their efforts with communities to use adult education as a vehicle to address a wide variety of community related issues. However, more and more we witness agency in communities as instrumental to addressing community needs. The growth in a vast array of autonomous formations is encouraging - all inspired by community agency and resilience, as people co-construct knowledge. It is in these activities that I find the 'pluriverse of possibilities' a useful way to capture the myriad of initiatives through which African communities address immediate needs and interests. Whilst much of this work involves adult learning and education, it is not referred to as such.

The innovative practices are vast when one looks at the work of several social movements, multi/transdisciplinary formations and autonomous groupings across the continent. Some of the formations include organisations such as The Climate Justice Project; La Via Campesina Southern and Eastern Africa; South Africa Food Sovereignty Campaign, Eco-village Permaculture (South Africa, Uganda, Kenya); The Global Ecovillage Network-Africa; WoMin; and several other formations that integrate the themes of a just transition. In many local communities, people are turning towards building community systems of food, care and other life-making activities. All these spaces provide forms of literacy, learning and education related to the themes directly related to community needs and interests. These innovative practices begin to shift the focus of adult education away from traditional functional adult literacy approaches. What is required is to understand these innovations better, to know how we can learn from them, and to know how to use them to build better adult

education systems as vehicles for genuine social change.

In conclusion, the MFA offers adult educators working across the broad field of adult education an opportunity to build solidarity, collaboration and shared practices. With the advance in technologies, we have at our disposal the use of digital platforms and other social media tools. Whilst transformative adult education emerges from practices on the ground, digital platforms and social media tools such as MOJA (mojaafrica.net) are useful mechanisms for us to create regular dialogues about local, regional and national struggles in building adult education systems in the context of a great transition.

Acknowledgement: This article was first published in the PIMA Bulletin (44), September 2022. The Special issue focused on CONFINTEA VII.

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