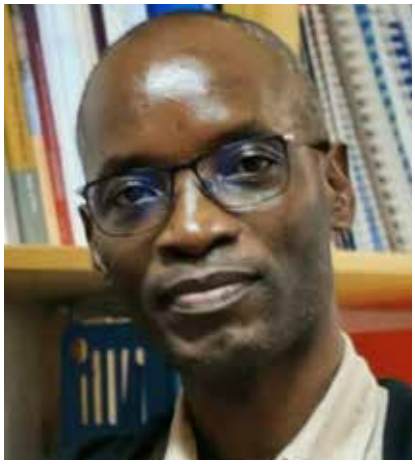
REFLECTIONS ON ISSUE 3: TRANSFORMING LIVES & LIVELIHOODS THROUGH AGENCY-FOCUSED ADULT EDUCATION

In this review, Robert Jjuuko examines Issue 3 of the MOJA Journal of Adult Education. He points to the rich collection of contributions demonstrating how Adult Learning and Education can strengthen people's capacity not only to respond to difficult circumstances, but also to shape more sustainable and dignified livelihoods. Across diverse contexts, the Journal illustrates how knowledge, practical wisdom, collective action, and learning can enable individuals and communities to move beyond survival towards greater autonomy, solidarity, and transformation.



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The third issue of the *MOJA Journal of Adult Education* arrived at a difficult and fluid moment in global politics, governance, and economics with consequential stresses, shocks, and risks on the lives and livelihoods of individuals and communities everywhere in the world. In this review, I examine how the *MOJA Journal* frames Adult Learning and Education (ALE) as a foundational pillar for building sustainable livelihoods. I approach this conversation using the dual lenses of agency and resilience. As the Editorial brilliantly implies, by moving beyond a survivalist tradition toward a prefigurative one, the Journal highlights how transformative ALE enables individuals to not just read the word, but to read the world and change it (Freire, as cited in Baatjes & Baatjes, 2008). In the phrase 'people need more than just bread…they also need roses - dignity, respect, and the opportunity to live fully, with purpose and pride,' the Editorial eloquently flags ALE's transformative rhythm.

Agency as the soul of livelihood transformation

I see the idea of reclaiming individual and collective agency as a core of sustainable livelihoods (Manlosa, 2022) running through most of the articles. Agency, defined as a person's ability to pursue and realise goals they have reason to value, is presented as the essential 'treasure within,' that ALE must unlock (Crocker, 2008; Delors, 2013). For instance, Keltouma Adouane's article describing her *Saffron Learning Journey*, and her transition from business law to setting up a saffron-based social enterprise, exemplifies the essence of the freedom for individuals to pursue goals they have reason to value (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). I think her commitment for sharing saffron knowledge with other rural women escalated a personal quest for well-being into collective agency for community empowerment.

A reflection on the Tunisian *Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards Rural Women's Economic Empowerment* reveals latent agentic intentions and resilience. The authors make a powerful recognition of the practical wisdom of often neglected social actors in society. As agreeably observed by Monia Manai and Kaouther Rassaa, rural women are among the most economically vulnerable, and their traditional wisdom and skills often go unrecognised. It is encouraging to read that the project implements a predominantly 'Participatory Learning and Action methodology' with a blend of andragogical principles where the experiential knowledge of adult women farmers constitutes one of the essential knowledge building blocks.

Resilience in the theory and practice of sustainable livelihoods

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework conceptualises a living as sustainable when one can 'cope with and recover from stress and shocks' (Chambers & Conway, 1991; Natarajan et al., 2022). Issue 3 presents resilience not as a slogan but as a demonstrated capability of the poor to navigate a vulnerable context, characterised by knowledge and economic injustices. The role of social actors in the informal settlements of Namibia illustrates the resilience-harnessing power of adult literacy education. Nicholette Mutenda and Colette February argue that adult learners from the two informal settlements 'feel empowered and independent in certain aspects of their life.' According to the authors, the adult learners reported that acquiring English communication skills, for example, enabled them to express their healthcare needs, and assist their children with school homework.

The North African initiatives in Abdelhakim Zidi's article highlight how communities of urban farmers can make a strategic response to socio-economic shocks. By transforming urban residential locations into production zones, city dwellers strengthen their food autonomy and social inclusion. The idea that permaculture training in Algeria can build community resilience, and that this demonstrates the transformative power of small, collective efforts by groups or individuals who are united for a cause, are both compelling intellectual arguments.

Transformative ALE and 'communities of practice'

Issue 3 showcases how self-organised groups who share a common sense of purpose can exercise individual and collective perspectives to trigger community action. The South African story of mature women working in Early Childhood Development work demonstrates the multiplier effect of ALE-embedded communities of practice. Kaylianne Aploon-Zokufa suggests that older women, who had ordinarily been denied access to mainstream education and training, used this form of ALE as a pathway from having limited work opportunities to engaging in meaningful work. Aware of the structural barriers, such as apparent ageism in the social struggles over limited decent work opportunities, I deeply appreciate this as a *contribution to dignified ageing while acknowledging and preserving practical wisdom in promoting early learning outcomes*. A similar argument is presented by Rebecca Nthogo Lekoko and Ontlametse Kebatenne in their article about the 'catalytic role' played by adult education in the lives of two senior entrepreneurs in Botswana.

Salome Olesi Terah's article about Kenya's Gravity CBC and Community Learning Centre demonstrates intergenerational learning which blends Indigenous wisdom with so-called scientific knowledge. By grounding its work in the REFLECT approach which fuses Freirean theory with Chambers' Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), the Community Learning Centre supports the empowerment of communities to tackle systemic local problems through collective agency and action. Ms SYLLA Fatoumata Hama CISSE's examination of ALE's impact in the lives of women in Mali further exemplifies the social actors' courageous choice of REFLECT, an agency-freeing methodology amidst escalating 'economics in social policy' across the entire world. Betty Lunkuse's narration of home-based work-focused ALE is a beautiful testimony of what it means to approach ALE practice with sharp attention on matters that are often peripheral to public policy making. Uganda's Ngalo Buwereza Organisation's ALE approach illuminates the possibilities of supporting home-based workers to value and defend their occupations. This clearly resonates with social justice and transformational resistance which can thrive on the power of collective bargaining and solidarity.

Conclusion

In general terms, MOJA Issue 3 tremendously contributes to our understanding of ALE's transformative potential as an essential tool for sustainable livelihoods. By providing space for ALE practitioners and professionals to share stories of the learning and working experiences of communities including rural women, farmers, and displaced citizens, the Issue affirms the power of practical wisdom. This wisdom, in turn, is a mirror of the social actors' agency and resilience. Among the many important takeaways from Issue 3 is the virtue and essence of democratic adult education (Slowey et al., 2023).

Democratising ALE practice gives rise to the idea of reclaiming the personal and professional autonomy of social actors in ALE policy and practice to enable them to act as animators, mentors, and facilitators. Relatedly, Jjuuko's research suggests freeing the individual agency of social actors to overturn deficit narratives that blame the poor and socially disadvantaged learners for their circumstances (2021). Fundamentally, MOJA Issue 3 powerfully reminds us that another world can happen and that it is possible when communities are facilitated and motivated to use their agency to plant seeds of meaningful livelihoods underlined by social, ecological, and cognitive justice.

References/Further reading

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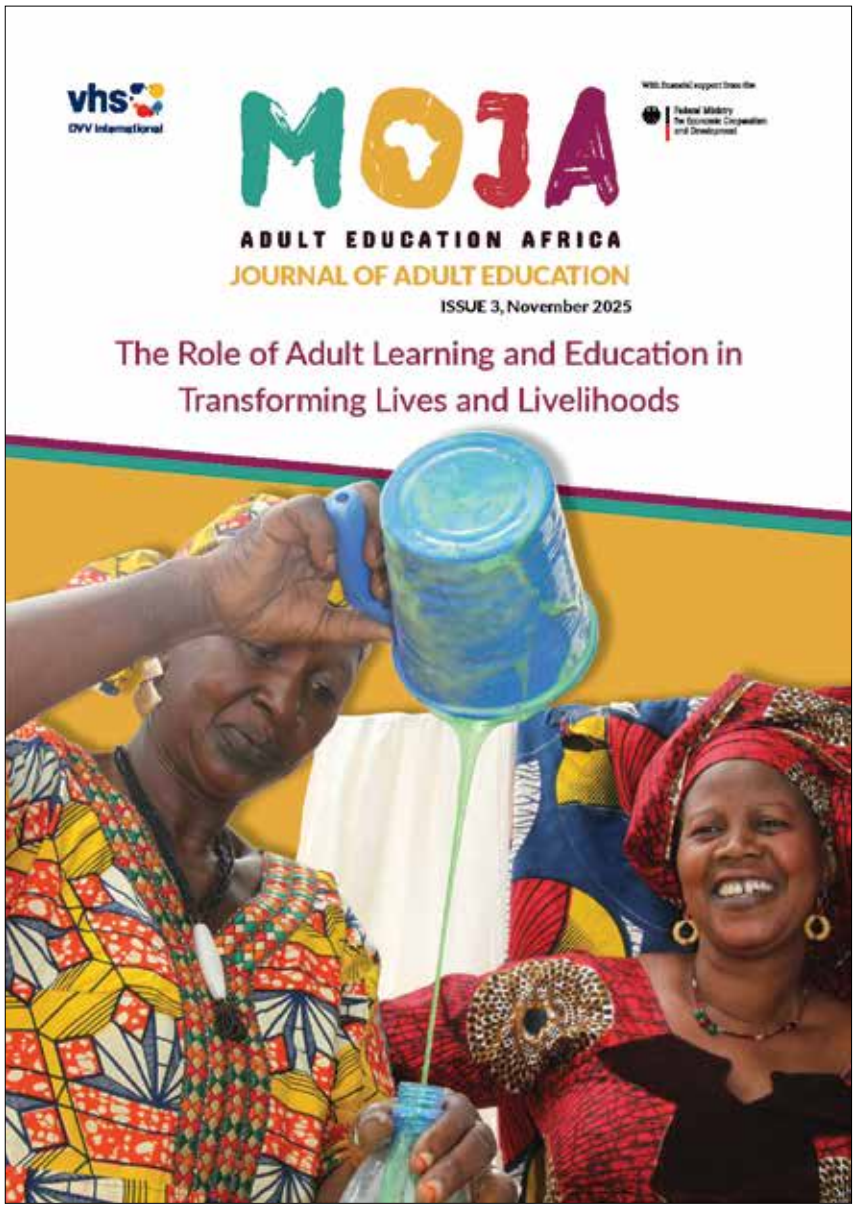

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