

Crisis Response – The role of Adult Learning and Education in coping with the corona pandemic

Societies around the globe have been hit hard by the coronavirus (COVID-19). People are being affected in their daily lives and are concerned about the consequences for their health, jobs and well-being. In nearly all countries across the world, providers of youth and adult education have been forced to temporarily close their doors, with dramatic consequences for the sustainability of these institutions, their employees, and, not least, the learners. At the same time, adult learning and education (ALE) can contribute to mitigate the consequences of the crisis, offer badly needed education and training and support social action.

DVV International, as the only development partner focusing on ALE, suggests concepts on how ALE can contribute to managing the crisis by offering social and educational services, especially to vulnerable groups. At the same time, we urge governments and international actors to provide ALE providers – public, private and civil society organizations – and their staff with the necessary resources to deal with this situation. It is a joint responsibility of all stakeholders to ensure that non-formal education offers will continue to be available during the crisis and after.

Using the potential of ALE to combat the crisis

ALE is a sub-sector of the education system with a combination of characteristics which are of particular value in the ongoing situation. ALE provision is strictly demand-driven, flexible, mostly non-formal, action-oriented and transformative. Based on this, ALE providers and projects have the potential to support people in many ways:

- Implement low-threshold health education, e.g. through campaigns to inform especially marginalized groups about the virus and (simple) ways to protect individuals, families and communities.
- Arrange income-generating activities, which contribute to produce desperately needed equipment, services and products like masks, soap, and nutrition.
- Develop and provide alternative learning opportunities to help compensate for the interruption of formal education services, thus counteracting the aggravating learning crisis
- Provide opportunities for reflection on common values like global responsibility, solidarity and active citizenship
- Mobilize and manage community action, as ALE-providers are in many cases deeply rooted in the local context and near to the people.

Develop new offers

All across the world, face-to-face learning activities are coming almost to a complete halt. As a consequence, participants lack the possibility to participate in essential learning opportunities. On the supply-side, ALE providers and a very high number of freelance teaching staff are facing critical economic situations. At the same time, the nature of the ALE sector with its flexibility and the strict orientation on the demand of the learners and societies makes it favorable for developing creative, quick responses:

- Push digital learning opportunities for participants, including the establishment of platforms, non-formal trainings and (certified) online courses.
- Support parents in enabling them for online work and assisting the online learning of their children.
- Boost the outreach through making use of social media tools and channels and using traditional means of distance learning, e.g. cooperation with radio stations and TV channels.
- Offer psycho-social support services to help adults to cope with the burden of crisis.

These new formats demand an investment in the creation of an enabling environment:

- Invest in digital infrastructure at the level of national and regional networks as well as local providers and provide digital devices for participants from vulnerable groups, where no other options are available.
- Train staff to be able to use digital options and consult learners.
- Develop more online opportunities for capacity building of ALE staff, managers and trainers.
- Offer digital communities of practice (CoP) at the local, national, regional and global level to facilitate the development of competencies for ALE staff, exchange experiences and support each other.

Governments and development partners are requested to support ALE providers in their digital efforts.

Ensure the sustainable future of ALE

For many, if not most ALE providers, this is an existential crisis. With income possibilities dropping near to zero (participants fees, at least temporary termination of project funds), many are struggling. It is the role of the public and governments worldwide to ensure the survival of the ALE sector. Direct financial support is needed!



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Recognizing the primary responsibility of national governments, there are still some things that development partners and international agencies can do:

- Support networks in their efforts to advocate for public support in coping with the crisis.
- Support policies and practices to help ensure that the crisis is not used as a pretext to implement measures leading to shrinking spaces for civil societies.
- Ensure that existing structures will be used to implement corona-related actions, instead of establishing parallel mechanisms (reinventing the wheel).
- Provide flexible, tailor-made funding schemes for protecting the institutional substance and key staff of essential ALE providers and networks.

DVV International views its role as supporting its partners to cope in the best possible way with the impact of the corona crisis and to develop formats for essential ALE services as a response to this crisis. We will regularly inform and update about innovative initiatives developed by our projects and partners on how to deal with the crisis and provide necessary support to the people. The coronavirus is a global crisis, and we should ensure that the response to it will be truly global.