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MOJA

ADULT EDUCATION AFRICA

JOURNAL OF ADULT EDUCATION

ISSUE 3, November 2025

The Role of Adult Learning and Education in Transforming Lives and Livelihoods

The MOJA Journal of Adult Education
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Cover picture: Liquid soap making using traditional environmentally-friendly bioproducts: Kolokani Women's Multifunctional Centre, Mali (DVV International/photographer: Mr Rainer Schwenzfeier).

Photo Page 10: Corn cultivation, rural commune of Bantignel, Pita Prefecture, Guinea. 'A World Without Hunger' project - Guinéenne des Volontaires du Développement (Guinean Volunteers for Development), a partner of DVV International, West Africa.

Photo Page 59: Soilless vegetable production at Kalabancoro Community Education Centre, Mali.

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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORIAL BOARD

Dear readers and authors

The Editorial Board[1] is delighted to announce the release of our latest Issue: *The Role of Adult Learning and Education in Transforming Lives and Livelihoods.*

This publication arrives at a time of profound global and regional transformation. Adult educators grapple with the effects of multiple, intersecting crises and how Adult Learning and Education (ALE) can be positioned as an educational tool in responding to them. This collection offers a snapshot of the diverse, dynamic, and innovative practices of adult education across the African continent, highlighting how ALE serves as a powerful vehicle in supporting communities, fostering resilience, and working towards sustainable futures.

While not exhaustive, the stories, case studies, and commentaries provide valuable insights into education as a lifelong engine for change. They all point towards hope, possibility, and practices for sustainable futures. We are particularly proud to share stories of women from across the continent, underscoring their vital role in sustaining and advancing livelihoods and community education.

We encourage our fellow adult educators to engage deeply with this Issue, using it as a resource for learning and teaching, dialogue, and curriculum development. We hope it will serve as a foundation for new knowledge creation, as well as building meaningful, context-specific praxes in Africa as an integral part of our collective commitment to transforming lives and building sustainable futures.

We hope the contributions in this Issue inspire your work and enrich both your perspective and practice.

Enjoy reading this Issue.

The Editorial Board
MOJA Journal of Adult Education

1. We welcome Nazaret Nazaretyan (Tunisia), a new member to the Editorial Board. We would also like to thank Donia Benmiloud for her service to the Editorial Board and the MOJA Journal.

EDITORIAL BOARD

CAROLE AVANDE HOUNDJO

Carole Avande Houndjo has worked in the field of education since 2005. In addition to her studies in linguistics, she has expertise in adult education, advocacy for the right to education for all, and international project management. Carole has coordinated the Pamoja Education Network (formerly Pamoja West Africa) since 2014. Under her leadership, the network has become more visible and closer to its members through capacity-building trainings and funding for innovative projects. Furthermore, she contributes to international discussions on the right to education through her involvement in the Board of Directors of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), where she has held the position of Vice-President for Africa since 2021. In October 2025, she was elected Vice-President of the Education Commission of the Conference of Civil Society Organizations of the Francophonie.

CHIRAZ KILANI

Dr Chiraz Kilani is an HDR Lecturer in Science Education at the University of La Manouba, Tunisia, and former Director General of the Higher Institute of Education and Continuing Training (ISEFC) at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (2020–2024). She is an international expert in adult education, curriculum development, teacher training, and educational leadership, with extensive experience across Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. Holding a PhD in Science Education from Claude Bernard Lyon 1 University (France) and a postdoctoral qualification in Educational Sciences from the University of Tunis, she has led numerous national and international projects on professional development of teachers, curriculum innovation, and lifelong learning. She has collaborated with UNESCO, DVV International, AUF (University Agency of the Francophonie), and several Ministries of Education on initiatives in curriculum design, adult literacy, and education quality assurance. Her expertise focuses on adult education and lifelong learning, particularly on empowering educators, trainers, and community leaders through participatory and innovative approaches. She co-developed innovative methodologies such as the Semio-Didactic Approach in adult education, and continues to contribute as a researcher, trainer, and consultant for institutions and organisations worldwide. Chiraz is also a certified Lead Auditor ISO 21001:2018 and holds international certifications in education quality assurance, reflecting her engagement in promoting accountability and excellence in education systems.

DAVID HARRINGTON

David Harrington has worked in the field of education and adult education for the past 30 years, previously as Regional Director for DVV International in Southern Africa. He is Project Manager of the African Continental Project and MOJA Adult Education Platform, and co-editor of the *MOJA Journal of Adult Education*. He has worked extensively with African networks and other stakeholders in helping to establish an enabling environment for adult education, especially in Southern Africa, including the development of policies, strategies and curricula. His interests include promoting and working with community-responsive education that recognises the value and contribution of non-formal education to community development.

FRAUKE HEINZE

Frauke Heinze is an international public health and adult education expert with more than 25 years' experience in international cooperation across Africa and Asia. Currently she is working as the Regional Director DVV International, East/ Horn of Africa and has been involved in the design and establishment of the MOJA platform. She is passionate about enhancing national systems for quality health and non-formal youth and adult education service delivery, and designing respective policies, implementation frameworks and curricula. She also has a keen interest in research and developing community-needs oriented education, skills development, and behaviour change interventions and trainings.

IVOR BAATJES

Ivor Baatjes is the Executive Director of the Canon Collins Trust. The Trust promotes scholarships in social justice, ethical leadership, and socially engaged scholarship and practice. Prior to this, he served as Director of the Centre for Integrated Post-School Education and Training (CIPSET), Nelson Mandela University; co-host of the National Research Foundation SARChI Chair in Community Adult and Worker Education; board member of the National Institute for Human and Social Sciences (NIHSS); and Chair of the Education Policy Consortium (EPC). Ivor was a senior researcher at the Centre for Education Rights and Transformation (CERT) at the University of Johannesburg and served as Director of the Centre for Adult Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). He also served as a policy maker in the National Department of Education in the mid-1990s and as a member of several ministerial and departmental reference groups and task teams. He has worked across several subsectors of the post-school education and training sector. Ivor was involved with the establishment of MOJA and served as content manager (2021-2023). He also served in the capacity of Editor-in-Chief of the first Issue of the Journal. He holds a keen interest in the Adult Educators in Higher Education Network, established by MOJA in 2023.

NAZARET NAZARETYAN

Nazaret Nazaretyan has more than 24 years of experience in Adult Learning and Education (ALE). He joined DVV International in 2003 and has since held leadership positions in Armenia, the Middle East, and at the organisation's headquarters where he worked as Senior Desk Officer and Senior Funding Manager. From 2017 to 2022 he served as Regional Director for the Middle East, and since June 2025 he has been Regional Director for North Africa. His professional focus is on developing strategies to promote and advocate for ALE and strengthening cooperation among civil society actors and ALE networks at national, regional, and global levels.

REBECCA NTHOGO LEKOKO

Professor Rebecca Nthogo Lekoko was educated in Botswana, Canada, and the United States of America, first as a teacher trainer then adult educator. She graduated from Pennsylvania State University with a Doctor of Education in Adult Education. With four decades of working in diverse adult education and learning environments, Rebecca has made a significant contribution to out of school education for children, non-formal education, community learning centres, empowerment, and social mobilisation strategies; these mostly done under the aegis of the University of Botswana (UB). Now retired from UB, she is an inaugural Dean of Academic Affairs of a premier Military College, Defence Command and Staff College of the Botswana Defence Force. Additionally, she is now a prominent advocate for age with rights and a founder of Ageless Inspirations Charitable Organization, Botswana. She believes inclusion and representation of all is essential for an inclusive economic development agenda. She is the Chief Editor of Ba Isago Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies and has published extensively locally and internationally, and has attended many conferences serving as a presenter, a keynote speaker, chair of sessions and a discussant to the keynote speaker.

TWINE HANNINGTON BANANUKA

Twine Hannington Bananuka works as a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Adult and Community Education, School of Distance and Lifelong Learning at Makerere University, Uganda. He holds a Master's degree and a PhD in Adult and Community Education from Florida A&M University, USA and the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa respectively. His teaching and research interests are in areas of adult education and socio-economic transformation, community development, citizenship education, post-qualitative research methodologies, and innovative teaching and learning methods.

EDITORIAL

The third Issue of the *MOJA Journal of Adult Education* is published at a time when the world faces unprecedented polycrises including, among others, economic instability, climate change, food insecurity, and geopolitical conflict. Together they create a feedback loop that worsens conditions and contexts in which people live and, as a result, it becomes more difficult to address the multiplicity of problems. Across the globe, materially poor and vulnerable communities continue to experience socio-economic hardships amid an ecological crisis, with many people living under increasingly precarious circumstances. More and more, 'ordinary' people have been excluded from the formal economy, or were never able to access it. They exist in the so-called margins, even though they make up the 'majority world', a term popularised by the Bangladeshi photojournalist, writer, curator, and educationist, Shahidul Alam.

To improve their material conditions and sustain themselves and their families, people engage in diverse activities, initiatives, and small enterprises. Some of these are considered 'survivalist', focused on adapting to and navigating existing circumstances. Others are 'prefigurative', aimed at challenging the status quo and creating new, alternative possibilities. This Issue primarily highlights examples from the survivalist and adaptive traditions. While survival is indeed vital, we draw inspiration from the political slogan, poem, and song *Bread and Roses*[1], as well as from the nine articles in this Issue that echo its message - that people need more than just 'bread'. They also need 'roses': dignity, respect, and the opportunity to live fully, with purpose and pride.

The articles and profiles, originating from nine African countries, highlight various examples of *livelihoods* oriented to improve the living conditions of those involved, strengthen the stability of households, and the wider communities. These examples speak to personal and socio-economic *well-being*, and also demonstrate an awareness of the need to live more gently with nature and to restore a deep respect for it. We view these examples as illustrative of livelihood practices in countries across the African continent.

The contributors share stories that highlight the role that Adult Learning and Education (ALE) plays across contexts - showing how cooperation, collaboration, and collective learning underpin each example. They also reflect on how the blending of Indigenous wisdom and new learnings contributes to meaningful and sustainable possibilities.
In this Issue, the majority of the writers are women, and the articles largely highlight women's experiences, with a particular emphasis on rural women. Tithi Bhattacharya's concept of 'life-making'[2] activities is especially relevant here - contrasting with what she calls 'thing-making' or 'profit-making'. Life-making activities centre on the essential, often invisible work that women perform, work that is frequently undervalued. These activities, part of social reproduction - including caregiving, nurturing, cooking, cleaning, and community support - sustain people's lives and underpin the functioning of the economy, yet are rarely recognised as economically or socially productive. Globally, women make up close to 40% of the agricultural labour force, reaching over 50% in certain parts of Africa and Asia[3]. It is therefore a fitting tribute that the United Nations General Assembly has declared 2026 as the International Year of the Woman Farmer. Issue 3 also offers recognition and acknowledgement of this.

The practices, demonstrations, and actions featured in this Issue reveal what is possible as 'ordinary' people use their agency to take action. They invite us to imagine a re-envisioned world in which people can thrive where they live.

Another world is necessary.
Another world is possible.
Another world is happening.

Grace Lee Boggs[4]

Alison Moultrie begins the Journal with a reflection on Issue 2, noting how the Journal weaves together stories, testimonies, and reflections that describe the everyday experiences of people and community food systems across Africa. She sees the Journal as a living tool for political education and reiterates the call for adult educators to embrace their roles as political educators, working collaboratively with communities to build collective power.

In her article, **Keltouma Adouane** reflects on her personal learning journey in saffron cultivation in Béjaïa, Algeria, describing how it transformed her life. She explains how sharing her knowledge with other rural women enabled them to create sustainable incomes, thereby improving their household stability, and contribute to strengthen local economies.

Nicholette Mutenda and **Colette February** explore adult literacy education in two informal settlements in Namibia. Their article examines the perceptions of adult learners and educators who took part in a 2023 qualitative study, focusing on how literacy classes improved their lives, livelihoods, and overall standard of living.

Monia Manai and **Kaouther Rassaa** discuss the *Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards Rural Women's Economic Empowerment* in Tunisia. They highlight how the project empowered women to actively drive change in their communities by addressing their real needs, valuing traditional and local knowledge, and using participatory approaches.

Abdelhakim Zidi argues that urban agriculture is revolutionary. Despite numerous challenges, it transforms urban spaces into places of food production, enabling city dwellers to reduce expenses, generate income, and strengthen their food autonomy, while promoting social inclusion and the ecological transition. The article highlights some inspiring initiatives from North Africa and looks at the role adult education plays.

Kaylianne Aploon-Zokufa's article focuses on women in the Western Cape, South Africa, working as Early Childhood Development (ECD)

practitioners. Despite an ongoing struggle to access higher education, the women participated in formal and non-formal adult education learning opportunities in order to improve their lives and build sustainable livelihoods. The article explores the ways in which adult learning and education contributes to an ECD 'community of practice'.

Salome Olesi Terah writes about the Gravity CBC and Community Learning Centre in Nairobi, Kenya, an intergenerational and second-chance learning hub. It brings together children, youth, and adults, preserving indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage while equipping learners with skills and competencies to navigate contemporary socio-economic challenges.

Betty Lunkuse's article explores the establishment of Ngalo Buwereza Organisation (NBO) in Uganda, which organises and supports home-based workers. Home-based workers, like other informal workers, have no formal legal or social protections. This article emphasises the role of workers' education in strengthening the capacity of NBO members to deal with socio-economic issues within their communities.

In their article, **Rebecca Nthogo Lekoko** and **Ontlametse Kebatenne** focus on how adult education played a catalytic role in the lives of two senior entrepreneurs who graduated from the Out of School Education and Training (OSET) programme in Botswana. Their stories illustrate how the two women have been able to look after themselves and their families, despite being 'older adults', classified as part of a vulnerable group.

Ms SYLLA Fatoumata Hama CISSE explores how adult education has transformed the lives of women in Yélékébougou and Kolokani, Mali, through literacy programmes, vocational training, and income-generating activities. Her article highlights how these initiatives have enabled hundreds of women to regain control over their lives, serving as a powerful catalyst for women's empowerment in the region.

Hope has never trickled down. It has always sprung up.

Studs Terkel

Endnotes

1 A political slogan associated with women's suffrage and the labour movement, as well as a poem and song. It originated in a speech given by American women's suffrage activist Helen Todd; a line in the speech about 'bread for all, and roses too' inspired the title of the poem Bread and Roses by James Oppenheim.

2 Jaffe, S. (2020, April 2). Social Reproduction and the Pandemic, with Tithi Bhattacharya. https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/social-reproduction-and-the-pandemic-with-tithi-bhattacharya/

3 https://www.fao.org/statistics/highlights-archive/highlights-detail/employment-indicators-2000-2023-(july-2025-update)/en

4 The phrase 'Another world is possible' originated as the slogan of the 2001 World Social Forum. It later inspired Arundhati Roy's 'Another world is not only possible, she is on her way'. Grace Lee Boggs, a long-time activist and philosopher, frequently discussed the idea of transforming ourselves and our society to build 'a new world'.

Peanut processing mill, rural commune of Bantignel, Pita Prefecture, Guinea. 'A World Without Hunger' project - Guinéenne des Volontaires du Développement (Guinean Volunteers for Development), a partner of DVV International, West Africa.

REFLECTIONS ON ISSUE 2, MOJA JOURNAL OF ADULT EDUCATION

In this review, Alison Moultrie examines Issue 2, highlighting how the Journal brings together stories, testimonies, and reflections that reveal the everyday realities of people and community food systems throughout Africa. She suggests that the Journal can serve as a living curriculum for political education and reinforces the call for adult educators to embrace their role as political educators and mobilisers, working alongside communities to build collective power.

Alison Moultrie is a clinical psychologist, coach, and facilitator with a wide range of experience and interests. She has worked in prosocial media as a scriptwriter for radio, television, and documentaries, and has published academic articles in the field of psychology. She has lectured in psychology at the University of Cape Town, and has facilitated trainings for other health professionals. Alison has a long-standing interest in activism for food justice, and has managed social media spaces focusing on food and environmental justice since 2017. She has a particular interest in embodied practice, and has facilitated workshops to resource food activists using a combination of methodologies, including dance, visioning, and systemic constellations, all grounded in Joanna Macy's *The Work that Reconnects*. You can reach her at alisonmoultrie@gmail.com

Issue 2 of the *MOJA Journal of Adult Education*, dedicated to the theme of 'Building Community Food Systems and Livelihoods', emerges at a time when communities across Africa are contending with overlapping crises - the ecological and economic shocks of climate change, mass unemployment, hunger, and political instability. The call for submissions framed this Issue as a space to share practices of resilience and imagination during crisis. It sought contributions that could help adult educators re-think, re-imagine, and re-build theory and practice for community food systems, and to foreground hope as well as struggle. In this reflection I consider the editorial framing, the individual contributions, and the Issue as a whole, through the lens of critical food systems education and the wider politics of food sovereignty in Africa. I write in appreciation of what the editors have achieved, while pointing to ways adult educators might mobilise the material as political education.

The editorial and its framing

The editorial anchors Issue 2 in the urgency of food struggles, locating them within broader crises of inequality, climate change, and precarious livelihoods. Particularly valuable is the explicit distinction made between food security and food sovereignty. Food security is presented as a narrow frame concerned with calories and availability, often co-opted by corporate and state actors to justify industrial agriculture. Food sovereignty, by contrast, is situated as a people's project: the right to define food and agriculture systems based on ecological sustainability, cultural relevance, and justice. This distinction helps adult educators sharpen their political vocabulary. The inclusion of the Nyéléni Declaration and quotations from global movements roots the Journal in a long lineage of peasant, feminist, and Indigenous struggles. It makes clear that this Issue is not only about growing food but about reclaiming agency and building collective power. As a resource for educators, these sections could serve directly as study circle material: prompts to differentiate between technical fixes and systemic transformation.

The community food garden of Cissie Gool House

This article by Karen Hendricks, Melissa Jansen Arendse and Bevil Lucas, grounded in the occupation of a former hospital in Cape Town, demonstrates how food is woven into housing, dignity, and collective survival. Through testimony and poetry, it frames gardening not only as food production but as healing and solidarity. For educators, this piece offers a vivid entry point into discussions of food as a commons. Its strength lies in storytelling, though it leaves implicit the connections to wider national struggles for food sovereignty. Adult educators can take up this article to explore with learners the ways ordinary acts of cultivation embody resistance.

ALE as a response to climate change and food insecurity in the Sahel

Mamadou Mariko presents a structured approach to adult education for climate adaptation, outlining stages of awareness-raising, collective diagnosis, and action. The

piece offers educators practical tools through practical methodology, but is more technical than political. Educators can take from this piece the importance of process design, while supplementing it with critical questions about the global forces driving climate collapse. The article invites us to consider how pedagogy can prepare communities not only to cope but to resist.

Adult extension practitioners' contribution to community food systems in Botswana

Keba Hulela's reflection on adult extension practitioners shows how ALE has been mobilised to support food systems through formal programmes. It also exposes the vulnerability of such initiatives to the withdrawal of state and donor support. The lesson for political educators is clear: while institutional support matters, long-term resilience depends on community control and autonomy. This article can help learners analyse the tensions between state-led and community-led education.

The struggle for a just community food system in the Eastern Cape, South Africa

The Abamelwane collective describes farming as both survival and resistance in a context of poverty and unemployment. Their emphasis on farming as therapy and collective renewal deepens the meaning of food sovereignty: not just access to land, but healing from the traumas of dispossession. This is perhaps the strongest example of critical food systems education in the Issue. Educators can take up this article to prompt reflection on how food work restores both bodies and communities.

Seed sovereignty's role in achieving food security: Limphasa Rice Irrigation Scheme, Malawi

Sangwani Tembo and Ellen Kapeleta foreground the politics of seed. Their piece shows how local seed saving sustains culture, biodiversity, and food security in contrast to the dependency fostered by corporate seed regimes. This article underscores food sovereignty as a struggle over knowledge. Adult educators can use it to examine with communities how seed embodies both memory and future, and how defending it is a political act.

How refugees in Uganda are re-building livelihoods and food systems

Salome Joy Awidi's contribution repositions refugees as active agents who use food to rebuild livelihoods, identity, and dignity. It challenges deficit narratives and shows how ALE supports cultural continuity amidst displacement. While the critique of humanitarian aid structures is muted, the article is valuable for opening dialogue on resilience and self-determination in crisis contexts.

Women's livelihoods and food security in Algeria

Zahia Kacher documents women-led cooperatives and intergenerational learning. This piece highlights the centrality of women in food sovereignty, demonstrating how ALE can enable economic participation and gender justice. It is a vital reminder that gender cannot be an afterthought in food systems education. Educators might use this text to spark conversations about power, patriarchy, and solidarity economies.

Profiles of food sovereignty organisations

The profiles of organisations across Africa - Better World Cameroon, Kenyan Peasants League, Observatory of Food Sovereignty And The Environment, South African Food Sovereignty Campaign, Terre Verte, and GRAIN - offer a valuable mapping of movement infrastructure. They show that communities are not isolated but part of continental and global struggles. Though brief, these sketches can help educators introduce learners to the breadth of food sovereignty organising, and to imagine alliances beyond national borders.

Resources and recent publications

The resources and recent publications section offers educators material to extend their learning journeys. It could have been strengthened by clearer guidance on how to use these texts pedagogically. As it stands, it provides a starting point for study circles and curriculum development. The inclusion of global reports and local materials reflects the editors' intent to situate African struggles within wider debates.

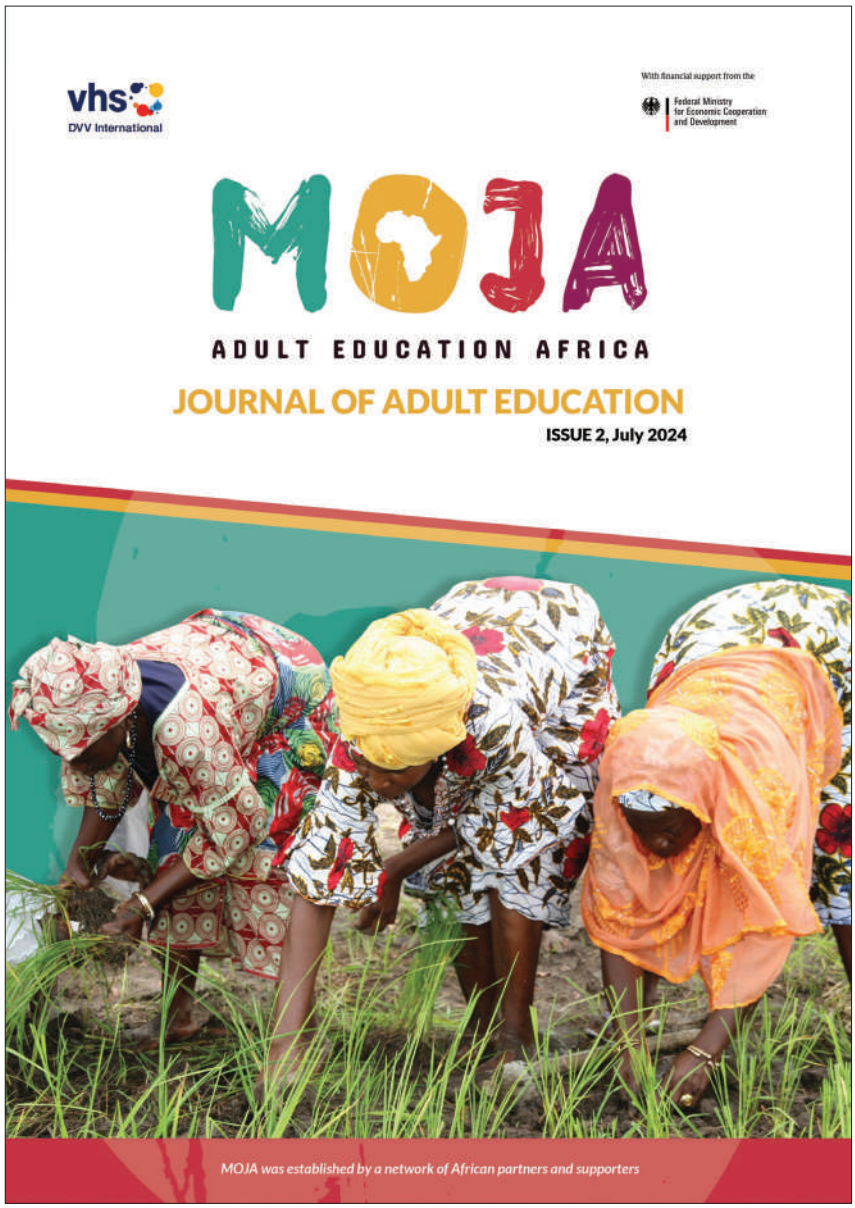
Reflections on editorial choices

Editorially, Issue 2 achieves accessibility through language, diversity of voices, and the creative use of poetry and visuals. Its greatest strength lies in presenting food as a political and cultural question, not simply a technical one. The emphasis on food sovereignty, and the anchoring in the Nyéléni Declaration, aligns the Issue with global movements and provides educators with strong political framing tools. At times, however, the editorial voice is cautious, preferring to describe rather than directly confront the forces of corporate power, finance, and imperialism that shape Africa's food systems. Yet this restraint may also be

strategic, keeping the Journal open to a wide audience. For adult educators, the task is to radicalise the material in practice - drawing out systemic critique in dialogue with learners.

Conclusion

Issue 2 of the *MOJA Journal of Adult Education* is a significant resource. It offers stories, testimonies, and reflections that can be used as living curriculum for political education. For educators, it provides material to mobilise with communities: to distinguish food sovereignty from food security, to explore seeds and land as commons, to reframe refugees and women as leaders, and to see food work as healing as well as resistance. The inclusion of the Nyéléni Declaration roots the Journal in the global struggle, and the diverse African contributions demonstrate that food sovereignty is not an abstract idea but a lived, urgent practice. Adult educators reading this Issue are called to see themselves as political educators and mobilisers - those who not only transmit knowledge but who join communities in building power. In times of polycrisis, this is the vocation of adult education: to plant seeds of survival, dignity, and transformation.



If you haven't yet read Issue 2 of the *MOJA Journal of Adult Education*, please click HERE to download it.

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A learner from the RUVU JKT Community Learning Centre, Kibaha District, Tanzania, in her shop.

Many small people, in small places, doing small things, can change the world.
Thought to be of African origin; often attributed to Eduardo Galeano (Uruguayan journalist, writer, and novelist)

The motivation from which I began the journey to the future was born from my conviction that paradigm shifts, if achieved, occur at the base of society, rippling outwards in concentric circles towards their societal environments. Motivating experiences can open people's eyes to their surroundings, sow hope that change is possible and show that it is up to each person to live in greater coherence between their convictions and their daily life: from their consumption, their food, their mobility, their travels, their economic rationality and others.
Jorge Krekeler (German-Colombian self-taught geographer and economist, lecturer, and author of the Almanac of the Future)

It's now that we have to act, transform ourselves and move away from this coerciveness of the dominant culture and system.
Darcia Narvaez (American Professor of Psychology Emerita at the University of Notre Dame who has written extensively on issues of character, moral development, and human flourishing)

If wealth was the inevitable result of hard work and enterprise, every woman in Africa would be a millionaire.
George Monbiot (English journalist, author, and environmental and political activist)

A natural buoyant intelligence is arising as people are coming together ... the natural instinct for collaboration is stunningly evident.
Joanna Macy (American environmental activist, author, and scholar of Buddhism, general systems theory, and deep ecology)

Learners from Kongwa performing a literacy-themed presentation during International Literacy Week 2024 at the Hogoro Community Learning Centre, Tanzania.

You don't have to be overwhelmed with the macro aspects of the things that are harming us. You can sit with your time and space, with the community around you, and start weaving from there.
Margarita Bárcena (Mexican cultural producer and storyteller working across art, music, food sovereignty, and world-building)

I have always been political in a sense that there are better ways we can live on this earth to be more empathic to other people and to our nature and understanding that we can't do this me, me, me game. We need to take care of each other.
Aimée Wallin (Swedish/Malian food systems activist and youth leader, co-director Ghana Food Movement)

If you give me a fish, you have fed me for a day. If you teach me to fish, then you have fed me until the river is contaminated or the shoreline seized for development. But if you teach me to organise then, whatever the challenge, I can join together with my peers and we will fashion our own solution.
Ricardo Levins Morales (Puerto Rican-American social justice artist, healer, and activist)

It's not wrong to go back from where we came from… It is only through going back to fetch it that we're able to inform the present in order to create the future.
Rutendo Ngara (South African practitioner of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems and transdisciplinary researcher)

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.
Margaret Mead (American cultural anthropologist, author, and speaker)

Find your place on the planet. Dig in, and take responsibility from there"
Gary Snyder (American poet, essayist, lecturer, and environmental activist)

FROM A QUEST FOR WELL-BEING TO AN ENTREPRENEURIAL PASSION: MY SAFFRON LEARNING JOURNEY

Keltouma Adouane pursued business law at the University of Béjaïa in 1996. Enthusiastic and interested in fashion, she then studied fashion design and pattern making at the Béjaïa Training Institute in 1999. Thereafter she participated in a vocational training programme (PEP) in the clothing field. Her eagerness to continue learning led her to courses in stained glass painting, colour research, and didactics and pedagogical approaches. In 2015 Keltouma completed the PSEP1 (Specialised Training Programme for Access to the Grade of Professor Specialised in Professional Education, First Grade). Since 2018 she has been passionately pursuing a project growing saffron in her hometown of Béjaïa. In 2020 she broadened her horizons by training in artisanal cheese making, artisanal soap making, artisanal jam making, mushroom cultivation, and beekeeping. In 2023 she was elected Vice-President of the Rural Women's Association of Béjaïa (AFUD).

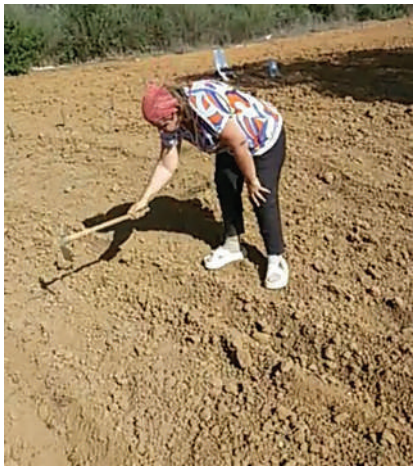
My name is ADOUANE Keltouma and I was born in 1975 in Béjaïa[1], a region of richly contrasting landscapes between sea and mountains. I grew up between the town of Béjaïa and Sidi Aïche. From an early age these places awakened in me a deep connection with nature.

My career began in the legal field with studies in business law, but my passion for something more creative soon steered me in a different direction. In 1999, I did a training course in fashion design, laying the foundations for my commitment to craftsmanship. In 2003, I became a fashion design trainer in the vocational training sector. In 2015, I became a trainer of trainers, a role that enabled me to reach more young people and women seeking autonomy.

My journey with saffron began in 2018 when my health was particularly fragile. In search of natural solutions to improve my condition, I discovered the medicinal benefits of saffron, a precious spice known as 'red gold'[2]. Convinced of the benefits of saffron, I started consuming it in infusions. Within two years, my health had significantly improved, which led me to take a closer look at the saffron plant[3] and consider cultivating it.

Saffron stigmas.

To learn more, I travelled to southeastern Algeria, where I met ELHADJ Louibi, an experienced saffron grower. Although I faced scepticism from those around me, such as some doubting the feasibility of growing saffron near the sea, I had a deep conviction that this fragile yet powerful flowering plant could transform many lives. I followed ELHADJ Louibi's advice and planted my bulbs in September 2018 (I had an initial investment of five kilograms of bulbs). A month later, a beautiful purple carpet emerged from the soil - a sight that remains etched in my memory. This was the beginning of an adventure that would change my life - the start of a passion that would gradually evolve into an entrepreneurial project.



My journey with saffron cultivation: Hands in the soil.

In 2019, I joined the Rural Women's Association of Béjaïa (AFUD)[4]. I participated in training sessions on the artisanal production of local goods (and became Vice-President in 2023). I took advantage of the COVID-19 lockdown period to dedicate more time to saffron cultivation, and I explored new applications for the plant. This was a turning point in my project - I developed saffron-infused cheeses, artisanal soaps, and cosmetic products made from the spice.

My saffron products.

Additionally, I used saffron straw to cultivate oyster mushrooms[5], an initiative that enriched my project and diversified my source of income. My commitment then took on a collective dimension as I shared my knowledge and skills in saffron cultivation with other rural women, helping them generate income for their families and strengthen their economic independence.

I received Algeria's first saffron farm card[6]. This official recognition gave new momentum to my project. Thanks to the training provided by DVV International in the form of communication, semiotics, didactics, project management, engineering, and 'la boîte à outils' (the toolbox/tool kit), I was able to further structure my initiative.

In 2024, I was invited to lead a workshop on saffron at an international symposium in Tunisia, where I shared my knowledge of its uses in cosmetics, nutrition, and health. A few months later, another international symposium organised in collaboration with the International Labour Organization, gave me the opportunity to speak on the economic and therapeutic potential of saffron, particularly in the fields of well-being, cosmetics, and sport. These events marked an important step in the recognition of my work and that of the region's rural women.

In June 2024, a major breakthrough came with the publication of a dissertation by HAMLET Billel and IDIR Rachid under the supervision of Professor KATI Djamel Eddine (Department of Food Sciences, University of Abderrahmane Mira of Béjaïa). The study focused on 12 saffron samples grown by rural women in Béjaïa and the factors influencing the quality of saffron. In March 2025, Professor ABDEL FETAH Dalila (Department of Process Engineering, Abderrahmane Mira University) completed a doctoral thesis[7] examining the characteristics of saffron from the Béjaïa region. For this study, I contributed 20 saffron samples cultivated by rural women from our area. This scientific research is vital for validating our work and giving recognition to the quality of Béjaïa saffron.

Today, I continue on this collective adventure by working closely with rural women to develop natural saffron-based cosmetics such as moisturisers and enriched soaps, which are particularly beneficial for the skin. One of my proudest achievements is the development of a therapeutic saffron cheese, currently in the research and development phase, which could become a signature product for our region. My objective is clear: to create a factory or plant for the production of artisanal saffron cheeses, supported by the women of the region using ancestral knowledge and innovation - maintaining the artisanal aspect with a touch of modernity, in order to develop a sustainable local industry. My dream is to market these products on a national scale.

My concluding thoughts

Through my personal experience in saffron cultivation, I discovered how learning can not only change a life, but also offer sustainable economic opportunities to an entire community.

Acquiring skills is not just about individual improvement - through the training sessions I attended and the opportunity to share my knowledge, I have helped other rural women diversify their activities, establish sustainable sources of income in order to improve their households, and contribute to strengthen local economies. My experience demonstrates that practical learning, combined with a commitment to sharing knowledge, can help foster independence among participants and build local economies.

Rural women's exhibition.

Endnotes

1 Béjaïa is located in northeastern Algeria on the Mediterranean coast and is the capital of the Béjaïa Province. It is known for its natural wealth, strategic port, and historical and cultural significance. The region is also an agricultural hub, particularly for saffron cultivation and olive oil production.

2 Saffron is often called this for a few reasons, including its characteristic colour, wide-ranging health benefits, and high market value (each fragile thread must be carefully handpicked, with thousands of blossoms needed to produce a small amount).

3 Saffron comes from a flowering plant called Crocus sativus. It is a beautiful, aromatic, purple flower with bright red threads (stigmas) which when dried make up the spice.

4 The Rural Women's Association in Algeria (AFUD) assists rural women by providing practical training and local economic development projects.

5 A type of mushroom cultivated on natural substrates such as saffron straw, used in alternative agricultural projects.

6 An agricultural card (for farmers) and craft card (for artisans) - the card is an official document issued by the relevant authorities, confirming a person's professional status as an artisan or farmer. The card is crucial as it enables the authorities to keep track of and support artisanal and agricultural activities, while also granting artisans and farmers specific benefits and rights associated with their profession.

7 https://ft.univ-setif.dz/fr/departements/departement-de-genie-des-procedes

THE CONTRIBUTION OF ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION TO LIVELIHOOD IMPROVEMENTS: A CASE STUDY OF TWO NAMIBIAN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

Nicholette Mutenda holds a Master of Education in Adult Learning and Global Change from the University of the Western Cape, South Africa, and a Master of Business Administration from the University of Namibia. She has spent much of her career working at a distance education centre (Centre for Open, Distance and eLearning, University of Namibia) primarily engaging with adult learners in an administrative capacity. Currently, she serves as a Postgraduate Coordinator at the University of Namibia.

Dr Colette February is a lecturer in Adult Education at the University of the Western Cape. She has a Master's degree in Literacy Studies from the University of Cape Town, and a Master's degree in Adult Learning and Global Change from the University of the Western Cape. Since 2017 she teaches on an intercontinental, intentionally online, adult education postgraduate programme, which has become a successful 24-year international collaboration between the Universities of British Columbia, Canada, Linköping, Sweden and the Western Cape, South Africa. Her PhD dissertation allowed her to explore her interest in nontraditional students and lifelong learning in higher education. Colette is also interested in finding ways to make lifelong learning personally and socially meaningful, and believes that authenticated forms of lifelong learning may assist in democratising the public spheres and educational contexts she knows and seeks to build.

Introduction

This article shares an account of adult literacy education in two informal settlements in Namibia - Groot Aub and Mix Settlement. The article reflects on the perceptions of adult learners and adult educators (promoters) who participated in a qualitative study[1] in 2023 about the kind of influence literacy classes had on improving their lives, livelihoods, and standard of living. Their perceptions reveal that the adult learners now feel empowered and independent in certain aspects of daily life where they previously did not. The skills the learners gained are not only beneficial to them but also have a positive impact on their families and the communities in which they live. While this article explores and examines the positive influence of the literacy classes, it does not seek to make any undue claims about literacy 'solving' all social ills.

Background and context

Namibia is experiencing increasing urbanisation as people move from rural to urban areas in search of better opportunities and improved livelihoods. However, the cost of urban living is financially prohibitive for many people and, therefore, they find themselves living in informal settlements. Many residents of informal settlements face multiple challenges, including limited or no ability to read or write. There is a perception amongst some that acquiring literacy skills would better position them to sustain themselves and improve their livelihoods. In this instance illiteracy is seen as a barrier. On the other hand, there are others who do not perceive their inability to

read or write effectively as a societal disadvantage. As a result they do not regard adult literacy classes as a meaningful way to improve their current living conditions. The literature supports both arguments. For example, studies by Keja-Kaereho (2013) and Alfeus (2017) suggest that adult literacy provision can lead to an improved standard of living and poverty reduction among participants.

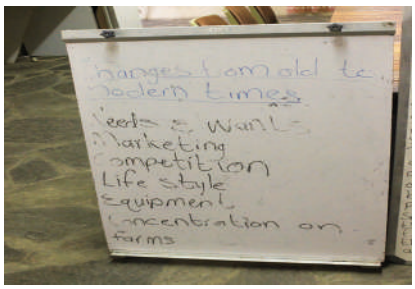
In September 1992, the government introduced the National Literacy Programme in Namibia (NLPN)[2], as part of its commitment to national development and education for all. It draws from a long tradition of literacy and adult education and serves as a way to assist people in acquiring useful skills such as reading, writing, communication, and numeracy. The idea is that once adult learners are equipped with these skills, they will be able to improve their standard of living and quality of life. While the government is regarded as the main facilitator and sponsor of the adult literacy programme through the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and its Directorate of Adult Education, the ownership of this programme resides with the communities who are expected to take ownership of the entire process of learning. For example, adult literacy promoters are tasked with finding places where classes can be conducted. In Namibia, an adult literacy promoter is generally regarded as someone who helps adult learners develop reading, writing, and numeracy skills. This term is used in Namibia because adult literacy promoters are considered to go beyond teaching adult learners literacy skills. They create awareness about the importance of adult literacy, actively encourage community members' enrolment and full participation in classes (participation is done on a volunteer basis), and engage with community members to understand their needs.

A closer look inside the literacy classes

Groot Aub is 57 kilometres south of Windhoek and Mix Settlement 20 kilometres north of Windhoek.

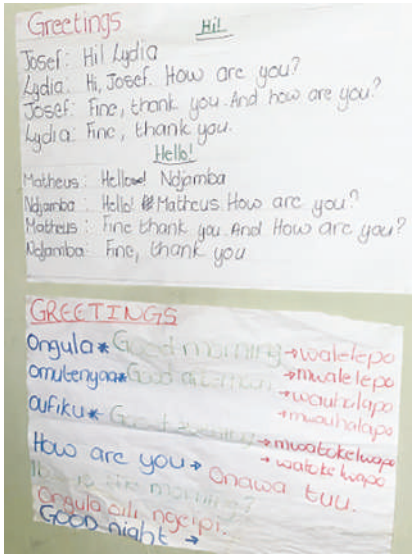
The adult literacy promoter was given permission by the local church to conduct literacy classes there free of charge.

Adult learners were told to read what is on the board while waiting for the adult literacy promoter. There was low attendance on this day.

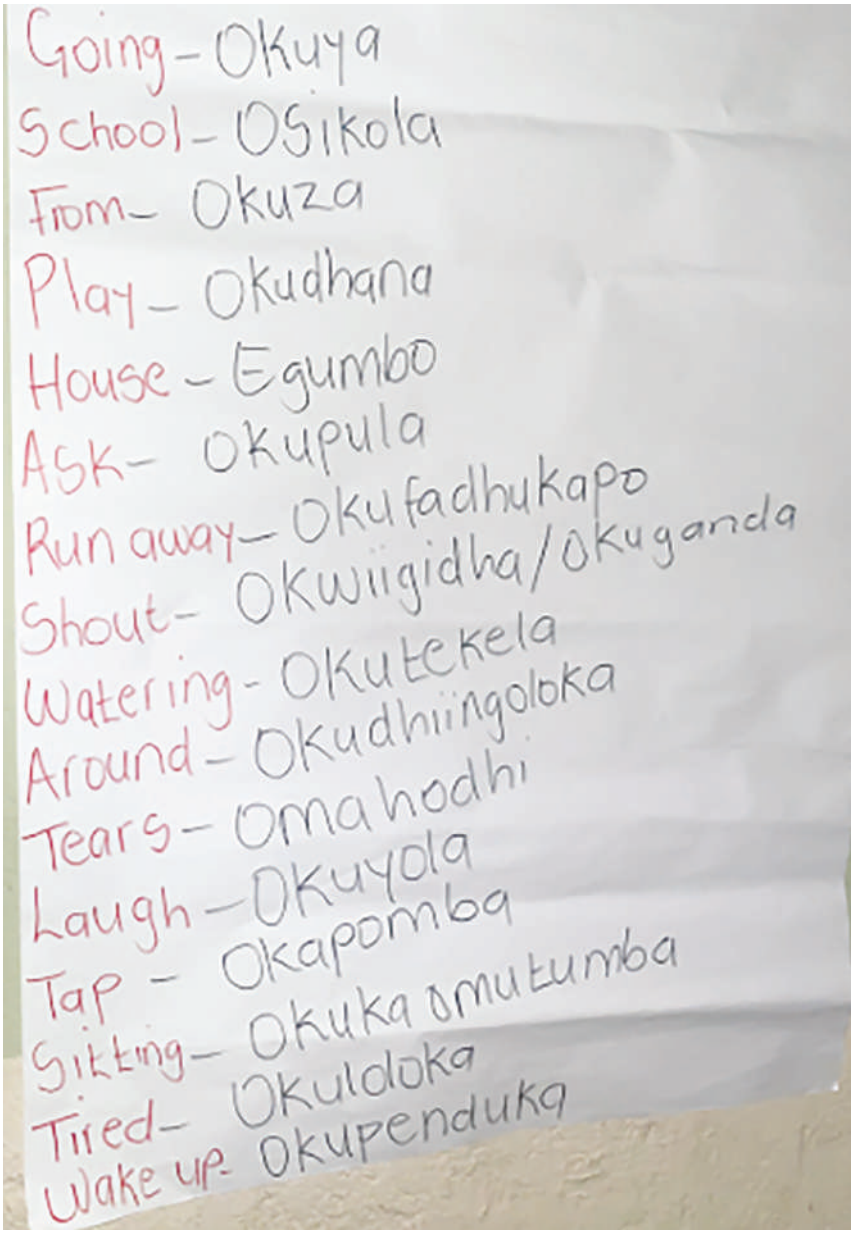


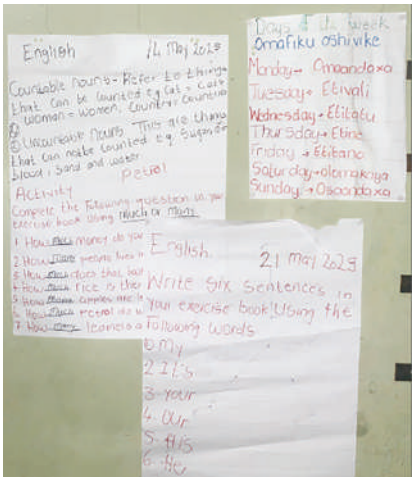
Lesson of the day.

Learners attending a class in a local library at Mix Settlement. There is no electricity in the library. The adult literacy promoter brings a torch and, at times, the learners use their phones for lighting.



Examples of charts. Learners are in Stage Two - Oshiwambo (the mother tongue) and some English (e.g. greetings) are used in the classes.





How adult literacy is helping adult learners in their daily lives

Adult learners were asked in what way/s the literacy classes are helping them. Following are some key positive findings. The adult literacy promoters also share their observations further below.

Responses from learners at Groot Aub

- *The ability to read and write, mathematics skills - I can add money and divide money among the children.*
- *Good English communication skills, reading and writing skills. I can read important information which is pasted somewhere.*
- *I can go to the clinic alone and be able to speak to the nurses in English without a translator. I can go to the bank, fill in a deposit slip, and be able to deposit money in my account.*
- *When I go to the government offices, I can now communicate in English. Unlike in the past when I did not know how to speak in English. When going to town I can speak in English to the driver to say where I am going, and at the clinic I can speak in English to the doctors and nurses.*

Responses from learners at Mix Settlement

- *Yes, adult literacy classes have helped in the way I speak, learnt how to read, and write. I can write on my own.*
- *I am now be able to help my children with their homework. I can also give directions to tourists if asked for directions in English.*
- *I acquired English speaking skills - I can talk to others in English, I can go to the bank and fill in a bank deposit slip on my own.*
- *When looking for a job it is now easier as I can speak English. I can communicate in English with my boss or supervisor.*

Adult literacy promoters have seen the following improvements:

- *Learners can now read and write. They can now count on their own as well as adding and subtracting money which is useful in their daily lives.*
- *They can now talk and communicate in English - read and write. They can now spell certain words correctly.*
- *They now know how to write their names, count money, and they can now speak English in certain situations.*
- *Learners can now speak English - they can even notice if you make a mistake and correct you as a teacher.*
- *They are now able to communicate freely in English, and they feel freer to make their voices heard. Some say they can start a small business because of the numerical skills they acquired.*
- *They can now read on their own. When they started their skills were low, but now they are able to answer questions in class, and they are able to write their names. They can now even communicate in English.*

From the above it is clear that the functional literacy[3] classes are benefitting the adult learners in several ways. Learners reported an improved ability to communicate effectively in English in various settings which require English, such as when expressing their needs in healthcare settings and when seeking employment. They experienced increased independence when doing things such as filling in a bank deposit slip on their own. Promoters stated that there has been a rise in learners' confidence, including identifying and correcting promoters' errors during lessons.

Social uses of literacy[4] have also been recorded, such as learners using their new skills to support their children's education and health, thereby contributing to improved family well-being and overall living standards. A parent who is able to assist their child with homework provides learning support which can contribute to enhancing the child's academic performance. As stated above, adult learners can communicate more confidently with medical staff and can also find reliable healthcare information for their family's well-being, such as healthier ways of eating. Learners have also acquired knowledge about their democratic rights and responsibilities as citizens of Namibia. Literacy provides a foundation for adults to better understand these rights and responsibilities, for instance by enabling them to read and engage with the country's constitution.

An adult learner who demonstrates willingness and motivation to continue learning can inspire their family and others to also embrace lifelong learning.

Some limitations

While the study found that the government-run literacy programme in informal settlements has helped improve certain aspects of adult learners' lives, other areas remain unchanged. Learners expressed that the programme could further address the diverse needs of adults living in informal settlements, be more relevant and useful, and better support livelihood improvements, as evidenced through this request by a learner from Groot Aub: '*Bring computer courses into the adult literacy programme so that we learn how to operate a computer and have computer literacy skills*'.

The study recommended that continuous refresher training be provided to the adult literacy promoters. Adult literacy promoters from Groot Aub informal settlement stated: '*Refresher trainings are needed so that we (adult literacy promoters) can acquire in-depth information on how to teach the content of the subjects - the content is more theoretical and there is a need to bring in practical content*'.

Scholars such as Awgichew and Seyoum (2017) have found that inadequate orientation and training of facilitators has resulted in unsuccessful implementation of adult learning and education programmes.

Conclusion

This article has explained how adult literacy in two informal settlements has helped adult learners in certain important aspects of their lives, particularly with regard to improved communication skills, reading, writing, and numeracy. The study upon which the article draws, makes several recommendations that could further enhance the success of the literacy programme and continue to improve the living standards of the adult learners involved, their families, and the communities in which they live.

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Awgichew, S., & Seyoum, Y. (2017). Integrated functional adult literacy: Existing practices and challenges in Eastern Ethiopia. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 5(4), 87-97. https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.5n.4p.86

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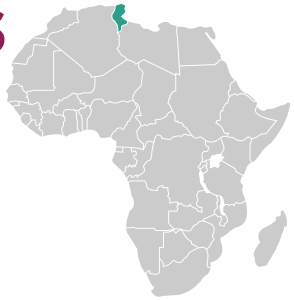
1 Mutenda, N. (2024). *The contribution of literacy education in raising the standard of living: A case study of two Namibian informal settlements* (Master's thesis, University of the Western Cape). https://uwcscholar.uwc.ac.za/items/219779a5-6726-4fd7-8726-adbcee41eba5
Twenty adult learners and six adult literacy promoters took part.

2 The NLPN programme consists of two broad components/stages -
Adult Basic Literacy Education Programme:
Stage 1: Basic Mother-Tongue Literacy
Stage 2: Intermediate Literacy Learning
Stage 3: English for Communication/ Communicative English
Post-Basic Literacy Education Programme:
Adult Upper Primary Education (AUPE)
Adult Skills Development for Self-Employment (ASDSE)
https://www.uil.unesco.org/en/litbase/national-literacy-programme-namibia

3 Refers to the capacity of a person to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective function of his or her group and community and also for enabling him or her to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his or her own and the community's development. https://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/functional-literacy

4 This approach (mostly associated with Prinsloo, Breier & Street) views literacy not merely as a collection of technical skills acquired through formal education, but as a set of social practices rooted in particular contexts, discourses, and social positions.

WOMEN RISING UP, COMMUNITIES MOVING FORWARD: THE JOINT PROGRAMME ON ACCELERATING PROGRESS TOWARDS RURAL WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT



Monia Manai (Higher Institute of Education and Continuing Education) is a researcher and trainer in educational sciences, specialising in non-formal adult education. With over 30 years of experience, Monia has dedicated her career to mentoring and training rural women with low levels of education.

Kaouther Rassaa is a lecturer and researcher at the Faculty of Sciences in Tunis, Tunisia. She holds a PhD in physics education and her research focuses on the analysis of learning difficulties as well as on lifelong education.

Contextual background

In the first quarter of 2025, Tunisia's National Institute of Statistics (INS) reported a 20.3% unemployment rate for women and a 13.6% rate for men. Although unemployment levels are high in both urban and rural contexts, women in urban areas have a higher labour force participation rate - approximately 26%, compared to 20% in rural areas[1]. Organisations such as the World Bank and IFAD[2] report that rural women experience much higher levels of unemployment and poverty than their male counterparts. This is largely due to their limited access to resources and economic opportunities, combined with the unequal burden of unpaid care work. IFAD notes that in the areas where it works, only 20% of women have their own income sources, compared with 65% of men.

Despite the fact that rural women are among the most economically vulnerable and their traditional wisdom and skills often go unrecognised, they play an essential role in agricultural and community activities in Tunisia. It is in this context that the *Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards Rural Women's Economic Empowerment* (JP-RWEE) was launched. It is part of a global initiative 'with an overarching goal to secure rural women's livelihoods, rights and

resilience in the context of sustainable development, Agenda 2030 and the SDGs[3]. Launched in February 2024 in Tunisia, specifically in the governorates (provinces) of Jendouba and Kairouan[4], the JP-RWEE project is spearheaded by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), UN Women (ONU Femme), IFAD, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). DVV International joined by signing a partnership agreement with the FAO, and was assigned a part of the project that involves developing relevant training materials tailored to the target audience, as well as delivering these trainings to members of professional agricultural organisations[5] in ten rural delegations.

Participants' training needs

In order to ascertain the training needs of participants, the project's technical-educational team carried out field visits to meet potential beneficiaries and understand their agricultural systems. Interviews and focus groups, utilising an active listening approach, were conducted with participants to understand the practices of women farmers, analyse their concerns, assess their level of schooling, and gather their expectations regarding training services. Based on the identified needs, the team developed a list of topics to be covered in training: free-range chicken farming; beekeeping; valorisation of medicinal and aromatic plants[6]; permaculture/ sustainable agriculture; and cereal seed production.

It is important to note that not only does the JP-RWEE, through adult education and learning, support the economic empowerment of rural women in the agricultural sector, but also encourages rural women to take an active role in community decision-making, fostering a stronger sense of agency and leadership. In many ways, the impact of the JP-RWEE goes beyond economic empowerment.

Rethinking agricultural training

Learning together.

The project's pedagogical team sought to move away from traditional coaching methods, which relied on a one-way transfer of knowledge from the trainer, usually considered the 'expert' to the learners. The new approach which employs participatory learning methods, enhances not only the technical skills of women farmers, but also the awareness of their role in community development. By recognising and valuing participants' existing knowledge, skills, and experience, the training sessions foster an environment that supports the empowerment of the women participants.

The training courses were developed with adult learners' characteristics and learning motivations in mind. According to Knowles[7]' principles of andragogy[8], adults are autonomous and self-directed learners who prioritise practical, real-world applications. They bring their prior experiences into the learning process and are motivated to acquire knowledge that helps them solve problems, achieve goals, and improve their lives at home and/or work.

Beyond the above, this training is also about the women's self-perception as essential contributors to their own and families' development, and that of their communities.

The training cultivates critical awareness, enabling women farmers to recognise themselves as agents of change in their quest for social and economic emancipation. Here one can draw on the work of Mezirow[9], the founder of transformative learning theory, which emphasises that adult learners can change their perspectives, assumptions, and beliefs through critical reflection on their experiences, leading to deep, transformative learning.

The semio-didactic approach and the CEPα method

As part of the JP-RWEE project, two pedagogical approaches were adopted: the semio-didactic approach[10] and the CEPα method. The semio-didactic approach is rooted in semiotics (study of signs and representations) and didactics (theories of teaching/ learning). It emphasises that learning is co-constructed through signs, symbols, and representations, and that learners interpret knowledge within their own cultural, social, and linguistic contexts. Drawings, diagrams, and/ or representations are used as tools to externalise thought and stimulate discussion. This approach fosters communication in learning that is interactive, reciprocal, and interpretive.

Participants' drawings: symbols representing local knowledge.

The CEPα (Farmers' Field School with Literacy) method integrates practical agricultural training with functional literacy. Participants are actively involved throughout the process, from diagnosing needs to the evaluation of activities, drawing on their own experiences. Learning takes

Co-constructed symbols creating a common vocabulary.

place in the field, where participants simultaneously acquire reading, writing, and modern agricultural techniques across a full production cycle. Literacy is taught in practical, context-specific ways, such as reading agricultural calendars or calculating yields. Unlike traditional adult education, CEPα embeds literacy into farmers' everyday environments, ensuring that learning is immediately relevant and applicable. This method empowers vulnerable groups, particularly women in rural areas, to strengthen their livelihoods, build collective agency, and contribute to local development. Trainers serve as facilitators, providing guidance, encouragement, and support.

Bridging local knowledge with professional knowledge.

The following statement made by Aïcha Metawaa, a beneficiary of the poultry farming training, illustrates the effectiveness of the semio-didactic approach and the CEPα method in the adult learning process, particularly in a rural context: *'I'm illiterate, I've never been to school. But during the training, they really adapted to my level. They start with us from the beginning, step by step. Their goal is for us to understand, so they do everything they can to make that happen. They use signs, images, gestures... sometimes just a word, but they don't give up until we understand. I, for example, learned to use the incubator thanks to these visual methods. It's a way that speaks to me, that's adapted to my way of learning'.*

Cascade training

Cascade training is a method for efficiently reaching large numbers of people, particularly in big programmes or organisations. It starts with a small number of 'experts' or master trainers (level 1) who train trainers (level 2), who then train other groups until they reach the broadest target group. This approach is efficient and cost-effective, particularly useful where there is a shortage of experts or a large number of beneficiaries. The success of cascade training depends on careful planning, well-prepared and capable trainers, and strong feedback systems that allow monitoring and programme/course corrections. However, cascade models encounter difficulties, including a lack of feedback, insufficient expert support, and dilution of content at each level, which can affect the quality of training (Abeysena et al., 2016).

To mitigate these problems, the model for this project establishes direct contact between senior adult educator trainers, mentor trainers, and relay[11] trainers throughout. This creates a cohesive team and a community of practice[12] where members interact and support each other in their roles.

The cascade training is as follows:

1. Familiarisation with DVV International's approaches: Provided by senior adult educator trainers.
2. Specific training in agricultural production: Provided by mentor trainers.
3. Field training: Provided by relay trainers who come from the professional agricultural organisations. They work with the mentor trainers on a daily basis in the field and the training combines field training and feedback sessions.

Impact

The training courses have equipped participants with a diverse set of skills and knowledge, including technical and scientific know-how, literacy, communication, cooperation and collaboration, resource management, and leadership. In the process, the participants' confidence and decision-making abilities have been boosted. This has positively impacted their roles in their communities, strengthening social ties and community cohesion. During a follow-up visit to a cooperative - the GDA[13] (Agricultural Development Group) El Baraka - the project team observed women, who had participated in the animal production training, explaining with confidence and pride how to select appropriate eggs for the incubator (a tool with which they were previously unfamiliar); how to use it effectively; and how to optimise poultry farming. They fully mastered the subject matter and were now trainers themselves.

By adopting participatory and inclusive educational approaches, the training courses have created a space for knowledge and skill exchange where each participant is both learner and trainer. The experience of Mabrouka Jarray, a beneficiary of the training, explains this: '*We worked together as a family. The training has strengthened the woman's spirit and personality, to the point where she says to herself: I have to work the land, and I have to be competent!'*

By encouraging sustainable and profitable practices, the training courses have strengthened the economic independence of rural women. The trainings have provided

opportunities for women to support themselves and their families, contributing to a better quality of life. By generating new sources of income, the women's economic vulnerability has decreased and they have become more resilient in the face of unforeseen difficulties. This is illustrated by a participant, Basma Zaghdoudi: '*Before, a person would enter their plot and work randomly, sometimes planting two types of vegetables that don't even go together. When you don't have the information, you can easily lose everything. Thanks to the permaculture[14] training, we have learned to make the most of everything in our plot and practise agriculture that is sustainable and healthy*'.

Conclusion

The JP-RWEE project in Tunisia highlights the transformative power of learning. By responding to the real needs of rural women, recognising their traditional and local knowledge, and employing participatory methods, the project has empowered them to take an active role in driving change within their communities. This initiative demonstrates that when women gain knowledge, skills, and confidence, they not only enhance their own lives but also positively impact the well-being of their families and communities. In this way, education emerges as a vital catalyst for resilience, social cohesion, and sustainable development.

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Endnotes

1 Economic Research Forum; World Bank Gender Data Portal; International Labour Organization.

2 International Fund for Agricultural Development.

3 https://jprwee.org/
SDGs - Sustainable Development Goals.

4 Jendouba is located in the northwest of Tunisia, and Kairouan in the central part of the country. Jendouba has rich forested areas and agrotourism potential. Kairouan has water resources and agricultural potential. Both regions face climate change and a rural exodus.

5 Agricultural Development Groups and Mutual Agricultural Services Societies - types of farmer organisations.

6 This involves harnessing their medicinal and aromatic properties to derive active ingredients, finished products, or extracts for therapeutic, food, or cosmetic use.

7 Malcolm Knowles (1913-1997) was an American adult educator.

8 While some scholars critique the term 'andragogy', Knowles' andragogy theory is understood to stand in contrast to 'pedagogy', which focuses on how children learn. The term was first used by Alexander Kapp in 1833.

9 Jack Mezirow (1923-2014) was an American sociologist and Emeritus Professor of Adult and Continuing Education at Teachers College, Columbia University.

10 Also referred to as a semiotic approach to didactics.

11 These trainers relay or *pass on* the knowledge and skills to the next group of participants.

12 'Communities of practice are self-organized and selected groups of people who share a common sense of purpose and a desire to learn and know what each other knows' (Lave & Wenger 1991; Brown & Gray 1995; Brown & Duguid 1996; Wenger 1998 in Hansman, 2001).

13 Groupement de Développement Agricole.

14 Permaculture is a way of farming and caring for the land that takes its inspiration from nature. By copying the patterns and balance found in natural ecosystems, it helps reduce waste, avoid pollution, protect wildlife, and create farms and gardens that are more sustainable and resilient.

URBAN AGRICULTURE: A SILENT REVOLUTION

Abdelhakim Zidi is an agro-pedologist[1], cartographer, and geomatics engineer with a passion for sustainable land management and knowledge sharing. He has pursued training in agronomic sciences, remote sensing, geographic information systems (GIS), and space science and technology through the University of Batna, Mohammed V University of Rabat, and CRASTE-LF (affiliated with the UN). He currently works as an agricultural engineer, responsible for studies and research at the National Institute for Agricultural Extension (INVA) in Algeria. His commitment to adult education is reflected in his active participation in the training of agricultural sector executives as part of the Human Capacity Building and Technical Assistance Program (PRCHAT), which aims to develop professional skills and encourage knowledge exchange for the benefit of rural communities.

Urban garden (Freepik).

Introduction

This article argues that urban agriculture is much more than just a trend - it is asserting itself as a strategic response to the socio-economic and environmental challenges of the 21st century. In line with the FAO's 2030 vision, this approach promotes the creation of 'more efficient, inclusive, resilient, sustainable, and inclusive[2]' food systems. Despite facing a number of obstacles, urban agriculture transforms urban spaces into places of food production and by doing so, enables city dwellers to reduce their expenses, generate income and strengthen their food autonomy, while promoting social inclusion and the ecological transition. This article argues that urban agriculture is revolutionary, highlights some examples, and looks at the role adult education plays.

What is urban agriculture?

Today, globally, an increasing amount of people move to and live in urban areas. In this context of urban development and environmental challenges, urban agriculture is emerging as an innovative solution aimed at establishing a synergy between urban dynamics and nature. It decentralises food supply by bringing food production closer to the place of consumption, and improves access to fresh food. Urban agriculture refers to various practices of cultivating, processing, and distributing food in urban areas[3].

Aquaponics: there are catfish in this tank, feeding the plants above, which feed the worms below, which feed the catfish (Ryan Somma).
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aquaponics_with_catfish.jpg

According to Mougeot (2000), it addresses major challenges such as food sovereignty[4], sustainable development, and social cohesion, while offering new prospects for improving living conditions in urban areas.

A brief history

Urban agriculture is not just about growing a few plants in small spaces. It goes beyond simple gardening and is part of a broader approach, rooted in our history. For example, the famous hanging gardens of Babylon illustrated the ability to grow plants in a dense, resource-limited urban environment. In the Middle Ages, monasteries and villages set up enclosed vegetable gardens, focusing on medicinal and food plants, thus ensuring essential nutritional autonomy, plus contributing to spiritual well-being. Later, during the two world wars, urban agriculture regained importance in the face of shortages. 'Victory gardens' or 'war gardens' cultivated in private residences, courtyards, and public spaces enabled essential foodstuffs to be produced locally, reducing dependence on supply chains while strengthening community resilience. Since the beginning of the 21st century, this type of farming has enjoyed a new lease on life, driven by increasingly sophisticated, sustainable, and commercially viable production systems. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the vulnerability of the global food system and played a part in rekindling interest in local solutions. The proliferation of urban farming initiatives and relocalising food systems, both individual and collective, reflects a growing desire for empowerment and an awareness of the need to strengthen community resilience.

Why do we need urban agriculture and why is it revolutionary?

Firstly, increasing urbanisation is putting unprecedented pressure on available natural resources. According to UN-Habitat (2024)[5], 70% of the world's population will live in urban areas by 2050. As cities expand, agricultural land is gradually disappearing, limiting the space available for conventional agriculture. At the same time, the rapid growth of the urban population increases the vulnerability of the poorest households to food insecurity and, therefore, intensifies demand for fresh, affordable food.

Secondly, current environmental crises exacerbate this fragility. Climate change is causing major disruptions including droughts, floods, and extreme weather events which directly threaten supply chains. These disruptions underscore the urgent need for more local, resilient food production capable of adapting to contemporary ecological constraints. Urban agriculture contributes to a concrete ecological transition. By reducing transport distances, recycling organic waste through composting, and recovering rainwater, it encourages sustainable resource management. It embodies a form of green resistance to speculative urbanisation[6], reconnecting city dwellers to the cycle of life.

Thirdly, on a socio-economic level, exclusion and marginalisation in urban centres are becoming a cause for concern. In this context, urban farming is a valuable lever in the fight against poverty: by producing one's own food on rooftops, in backyards, or on community plots, many families are able to meet part of their food requirements and this helps reduce their daily expenses. In addition the local sale of surpluses generates additional income. Urban agriculture plays an important role in improving living conditions for city dwellers, particularly in working-class neighbourhoods by helping to strengthen the financial autonomy and resilience of urban communities. Socially, it redefines the uses of urban space. Collective gardens, urban farms, and vertical gardens are becoming places of cooperation, learning, and solidarity. Seeds, advice, recipes, and hopes are exchanged. These spaces strengthen social ties and restore the dignity of residents, particularly young people, women and marginalised people, by offering them concrete opportunities to integrate into economic and community life.

Finally, beyond food security alone, urban agriculture is important from the perspective of food sovereignty. It gives citizens back the power to influence their food choices, farming practices, and relationship with the environment. By combining traditional know-how and technological innovation, this model promotes a fair, sustainable, and democratic approach to food. By giving citizens the means to produce, process, and distribute their own food, it challenges dependence on international markets and inequalities of access. It enables people to regain control over food choices that are often dictated by industrial and commercial logics that are far removed from local needs.

Urban agriculture is revolutionary because it stimulates the imagination: that of a city that nurtures, supports, and is in harmony with its ecosystem. It invites everyone to become a player in the transition, not only by growing plants, but also by cultivating autonomy, justice, and hope. Urban agriculture is more than just a technical adaptation to urban space - it revolutionises the way we think about cities, food, and our relationship with nature. Urban agriculture questions the dominant logic of the globalised agri-food system, by mobilising atypical resources, such as informal land tenure, citizen self-help, waste valorisation[7], and non-market exchanges that escape classic agricultural models. These resources make it possible to design economic models that are more resilient, better adapted to urban constraints, and conducive to social innovation.

Inspiring initiatives in North Africa

Today, this dynamic of adaptation and innovation is taking concrete form in a number of inspiring projects in North African cities. By combining traditional know-how and technological innovation, these initiatives enhance urban livelihoods and generate economic opportunities, notably through the development of local micro-enterprises.

In Algeria, *l'Association Torba*[8], active since 2014, trains citizens in permaculture and promotes production on rooftops, balconies, and shared gardens, contributing to food self-sufficiency and reducing expenses. *Les Agriparcs Urbains* (Urban Agriparks) combine production, social inclusion, and environmental education. These public parks, which integrate cultivated, educational and commercial zones, offer young people and vulnerable populations sustainable income opportunities.

In Morocco, the *Réseau des Initiatives Agro-écologiques au Maroc* (RIAM) (Network of Agro-ecological Initiatives) encourages the creation of micro-farms and urban vegetable gardens. The growing use of urban greenhouses ensures stable production and creates jobs. *Le Toit en Vert* (The Green Roof) is an association founded in 2019 which promotes the greening of buildings by integrating agriculture into urban architecture.

In Egypt, the scarcity of arable land has encouraged techniques such as aquaponics and aeroponics[9], promoting local production that saves water and space. In Cairo, green roof projects are reducing heat islands[10] and boosting food self-sufficiency, notably in neighbourhoods such as Shubra and Imbaba, with the support of local NGOs. In Tunisia, community gardens and cultivated roofs in Tunis provide healthy food and supplementary income. The *Jardin du Belvédère* (Belvedere Park) offers training in sustainable agriculture, strengthening the capacities of small-scale producers. On the outskirts, the *Groupements de Développement Agricole* (GDA) Sidi Amor (Agricultural Development Groups) combine aquaponics, permaculture, and ecological management, and promote green entrepreneurship and socio-economic integration.

One of the most promising aspects of urban and peri-urban agriculture is the active participation of women, who serve as a key driver for both social and ecological resilience.

By combining economic autonomy, social innovation, and local know-how, several initiatives place women at the heart of transition strategies. In Tunisia, the *LandAgritech* digital platform, launched as part of the *SALAM-MED* project, facilitates women's access to agricultural services and entrepreneurial opportunities in the peri-urban areas of Médenine. In Algeria, *la Coopérative Green Women* (Green Women Cooperative) in El Kala also reinforces this by developing local plant resources and supporting women's economic emancipation through solidarity-based practices adapted to peri-urban realities.

By adapting to local specificities, these North African initiatives strengthen urban resilience and inspire other regions to adopt innovative and inclusive urban agricultural models.

What is the role of adult education?

In working-class neighbourhoods and urban renewal areas, collective workshops, local training courses, and informal learning paths enable unemployed youth, women seeking autonomy, retirees, and migrants to acquire knowledge and skills in agroecology[11], composting, resource management, artisanal processing, and agricultural entrepreneurship. These initiatives promote the creation of income-generating activities such as micro-gardens, solidarity baskets[12], the sale of seedlings, and cooperative markets.

Beyond the economic aspect, a renewed relationship with the city and nature is taking shape. Adult education contributes to the emergence of a shared ecological awareness in which everyone becomes a player in their own territory, the guardian of their soil, and the architect of a common future. It transforms the act of cultivation into a gesture of emancipation, and the urban garden into a space for learning, social ties, and intergenerational transmission.

Education and learning can further empower those engaged in urban agriculture - this aligns with Baatjes' (2022)[13] analysis of workers in the informal economy, which highlights how learning and collective organisation can serve as powerful drivers of emancipation for marginalised groups.

The future of urban agriculture: Challenges and hopes

Despite its growth, urban agriculture faces structural obstacles. Limited access to cultivable space in dense cities, growing land pressure, and a lack of appropriate regulatory frameworks are holding back its expansion. In many cities, public policies do not yet fully recognise its social, economic or ecological value.

Urban garden (Markus Spiske Unsplash).

Financing is also a major challenge. Setting up an urban farm, even a small one, requires substantial resources: equipment, seeds, irrigation systems, training, etc. Yet, in the absence of long-term support mechanisms, many projects remain fragile. To remedy this, alternatives are emerging, such as local cooperatives, short circuits[14], social currencies, and community partnerships. Added to this are ecological constraints: soil pollution, water scarcity, climatic extremes - all challenges that require responses adapted to specific urban situations. It is precisely in this context that a promising mechanism for the future is emerging: the dialogue between traditional knowledge and technological innovation. Ancestral practices such as the use of local seeds, rainwater harvesting, and domestic (home) composting offer a precious ecological memory, deeply rooted in the local environment. Coupled with modern solutions such as hydroponics, aquaponics, intelligent sensors[15], and automated irrigation, they help optimise resources and create resilient, economical, and inclusive production models.

The future of urban agriculture will depend on our collective ability to build bridges: between citizens and institutions, between cultural heritages and emerging technologies, between the constraints of the present and the promise of a more autonomous, equitable and sustainable future, driven by the communities themselves. It is essential to put in place supportive public policies, open up access to financing, and support the training of citizens in sustainable agricultural practices.

Conclusion

Despite numerous obstacles, urban agriculture reminds us that another model of the city is possible: more equitable, more autonomous, and deeply rooted in the knowledge of its inhabitants. It addresses urgent socio-economic and environmental challenges while restoring citizens' agency over their food, livelihoods, and environment. As argued above, adult education - a living exchange of knowledge and skills - plays a crucial role in supporting its growth and solidifying its presence.

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Endnotes

1 Agricultural soil scientist.

2 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

3 It includes, among others, school and community gardens including rooftop ones, farms including vertical and backyard, hydroponics (growing plants using a water-based nutrient solution rather than soil) and aquaponics - couples aquaculture (raising aquatic animals such as fish, crayfish, snails or prawns in tanks) with hydroponics.

4 La Vía Campesina coined the term *food sovereignty* and introduced the right of food sovereignty at the World Food Summit in 1996 as "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through sustainable methods and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems". Food sovereignty is concerned with the right of people to determine their own food and agricultural policies independently, meeting their own interests and without harming the interests of others.

5 https://urbanoctober.unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/wcd_concept_note_2024.pdf

6 The creation of new urban environments and infrastructure not to meet existing demand, but to increase land and property value and generate future economic and political returns for developers and governments.

7 The process by which waste or residues from an economic process are recovered (receive an economic value) through reuse or recycling, in order to create economically useful materials.

8 Literal translation from Arabic: 'the association of the soil'.

9 Growing plants using a water-based nutrient solution rather than soil.

10 Usually experienced by urban areas - they are significantly warmer than surrounding rural areas. Heat gets trapped and absorbed due to such things as the configuration and design of the built environment, building materials, reduced ventilation, reduced greenery, etc.

11 An approach to farming and food systems that applies ecological principles to agricultural practices. It focuses on creating sustainable, environmentally friendly, and socially just food production by working with natural processes rather than relying on chemical inputs or industrial methods.

12 Typically a box or parcel of food (sometimes including hygiene products or other necessities) distributed as part of a community-support or mutual-aid initiative. The key idea is that it is organised in a spirit of solidarity rather than charity.

13 *Workers in Informal Employment and Inclusivity* (MOJA Journal of Adult Education, Issue 1).

14 Also called a *short food supply chain*, a short circuit means reducing the number of intermediaries between the producer and the consumer.

15 A sensor that takes some predefined action when it senses the appropriate input, such as light, heat, sound, motion, touch, etc.

THE ROLE OF ALE IN SUPPORTING MATURE WOMEN WORKING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Kaylianne Aploon-Zokufa is a lecturer in the Institute for Post-School Studies (IPSS) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in the Faculty of Education. She holds a PhD in adult education, with a specific focus on Early Childhood Development (ECD) practitioners' learning pathways and access into higher education. Before she joined UWC, she completed a Master's degree in Curriculum Studies at the University of Cape Town. Her interest shifted to adult learning during a six-year period of teaching, training, and facilitating Adult Education and Training programmes in workplaces and ECD programmes at Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges. Kaylianne is currently steering a research project that investigates the social organisation of knowledge in 14 ECD centres in the Western Cape. The project aims to provide knowledge and understanding around the nature of teaching and learning in the critical area of ECD.

Photo by Tina Floersch (Unsplash).

Introduction

This article focuses on mature[1] women in the Western Cape, South Africa who work as Early Childhood Development (ECD) practitioners and is based on a survey of 51 women, life history interview data from eleven participants, and four in-depth case studies (Aploon-Zokufa & Papier, 2024). Despite an ongoing struggle to access higher education, the women participated in formal and non-formal adult education learning opportunities in order to 'make their lives' and build sustainable livelihoods as educators and caregivers. The article explores the ways in which Adult Learning and Education (ALE) contributes to an ECD 'community of practice' in a country with high unemployment, where many, particularly women, continue to live in poverty. The article shows how ALE supports women's livelihood development which positively impacts families and communities.

Context

In South Africa women who work as ECD practitioners face a variety of challenges. They are materially poor and marginalised; live and work in harsh social and economic conditions; have limited opportunities for professional teacher development; experience job insecurity; and have limited access to higher education. Recent research shows large numbers of ECD practitioners aim to access the B.Ed (Foundation Phase) programme at universities in order to become teachers in basic schooling (Aploon-Zokufa & Papier, 2024). However, they are denied access due to their age and/or because they do not meet the admission requirements for their preferred university programmes (Aploon-Zokufa & Papier, 2024). The ECD sector is filled with women who start working in ECD centres as volunteers, with limited to no formal qualifications. As part of their participation in these centres they access ECD Level 1, Level 4 or Level 5 programmes at Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges[2].

Photo by Road Ahead (Unsplash).

Background

Fifty-one women residing in lower-income areas in the Western Cape responded to a survey that sought to understand the context of their lives and work opportunities as ECD practitioners. According to the survey, they tried to gain entry into higher education (many for five consecutive years) without much success. Life history interviews were completed with 11 of the survey respondents and four in-depth case studies were done in order to map out learning pathways of mature women in this sector. The women volunteered or worked as ECD practitioners in their own or neighbouring communities, fulfilling roles such as principal, teacher, and teacher assistant. Some of them worked as Grade R teachers or teacher assistants in contract positions in the Foundation Phase of primary school. Many entered the ECD sector because it was often the only form of employment available in their communities, and the only opportunity that allowed them to volunteer in the hope of securing employment one day. In her life history interview, Ruth stated: '*I went to the Principal and asked if I could volunteer there at the ECD centre and she allowed me to do that; and I had a friend who told me about a college offering ECD courses, learnerships, and then I went there. I was volunteering when I received this letter to say I have been accepted there - at the college*'. Similarly, Elethu said: '*I heard about this programme from a friend - through social media - who also did it*'.

TVET colleges offer adult learning programmes in the form of ECD Level 1, ECD Level 4 and ECD Level 5. These programmes are learnerships for people working in ECD without the necessary qualifications to do so. Participants in these programmes are often volunteers in centres, such as Ruth.

Prior to entering ECD, the respondents to the survey had worked as security guards, cashiers, call centre agents, and factory machine operators. They had participated in short courses or had done non-formal training in their communities, such as first aid training, management skills, fetal alcohol syndrome training, and computer training. A few (four of the 11 women interviewed) had gained access to higher education through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).[3]

What the women have gained

The opportunities afforded to the women to participate in ALE strengthened their self-confidence, gave them greater purpose, and brought hope to their lives. Some, like Elethu, found a career path in the field of education: '*I fell in love, because yes, I* [had] *a baby that time, yes … but I never thought that I will want to work with children. That's where I started to design programmes* [for the children in the centre], *that's where I started to help them in their activities. This is a journey that I never thought I would be on, now that I'm working here, I must bring change. There's a lot that I can do, especially now that I'm given this opportunity to be a principal*'.

Surreya, who has a child with special needs, said: '*I started helping out at the school to assist him because he was a bit … I was worried about my child, and this is how I got into wanting to* [study] *education. I really want to do special needs - this is what I'm aiming for. So, I went through with him to the centre, trying to really help him, figuring out* [how to help him] *… with the stuttering and the speech* [challenges]'.

Referring to the children that she teaches, Chuleza said: '*I want them to become better leaders. So, with the foundation that I give, I feel like they can be whatever they want to be in life. And with the experience, with the knowledge that I have, I want to share the knowledge. I want to share the experience with them so that they can become better leaders*'.
Chuleza also stated: '*Yes, I'm so happy where I am right now, and I really think maybe I was supposed to be a teacher*'.

Some negative experiences

While many women had positive experiences through gaining qualifications and working in the ECD sector, some also encountered negative experiences which led them to not want to stay in the ECD sector permanently. These are to do with conditions of service. In her interview, Chuleza said: '*I want to get a job. I don't want to work in the centre. Please, I want to be in a school. People working in centres, they don't get money, or in the specific place there they must wait, or maybe they don't even get* [paid]. *Even if they get* [paid], *they get small money*'.

Lithemba also shared her experience of working in the sector:
'*I worked for a year in 2017. Teachers went on strike for monies from October, November and December. I worked for those three months without payment. I got payment in December and January. They were supposed to open the school on the 22nd and then the Principal, said: 'We*

must open on the 20th for registration'. We went there and the teachers were on strike, querying their money. Then they just closed the gate and said they no longer need us'.

Communities of Practice

The women in this study were employed by fellow materially poor and marginalised women who had started ECD centres on their own. Through their shared interests and learning, the centre owners and practitioners became a *community of practice* (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Their *social learning* included such things as establishing and managing ECD centres, and learning how to create sustainable learning environments for young children. Participants also made use of shared resources and tools to support early learning. Through regular interaction, participants engaged in collaborative activities, exchanged experiences and information, co-constructed knowledge, and supported one another in their learning journey.

All of the women in this study learned about ECD programmes, RPL and other aspects around teaching in centres, as well as how children learn, via word of mouth, from others who were also ECD practitioners. Social learning theory suggests that learning is a social process which occurs through interaction and participation within a community. It emphasises the role of social interactions, apprenticeship, and situated learning[4] in knowledge acquisition and skill development (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978).

Benefits - individuals, families, communities

ALE has offered meaningful support to the women at a personal level by helping them grow and develop in their knowledge, skills, and confidence. Despite the deep challenges of poverty and unemployment, they have been able to secure livelihoods. The women have enhanced their ability to support and sustain their households, and this has had a positive impact on their families and communities, and, in a small but meaningful way, contributed to economic development. Some women have started their own ECD centres - this has not only been about self-empowerment and improving early learning outcomes for children, but also about creating much-needed employment opportunities for other ECD practitioners. The women strive towards sustainability for themselves and their families - Serrat (2017) defines this as individuals, households, and communities having the ability to better their living conditions in the face of hardship and adversity while considering their well-being and that of future generations. Ruth stated: '*My children and children's children, they are not going to struggle*'.

Although the women face challenges in accessing higher education, their participation in non-formal and formal adult education and training programmes enables them to participate in the ECD sector. Though the sector is in crisis (Atmore, Van Niekerk & Ashley-Cooper, 2012), the women have been able to transition from being unemployed to becoming ECD practitioners, bringing with them knowledge and skills needed to contribute meaningfully to the field.

Conclusion

The experiences of the women involved in the study show how important ALE is in supporting the growth of knowledge, skills, and confidence of materially poor, marginalised people. It also helps in the building of livelihoods and, contributes to economic development, albeit in limited ways. Although the women struggle to access formal education such as the B.Ed, they use formal and non-formal learning opportunities to forge a path from unemployment to becoming ECD educators with the ability to make a difference. Their learning journeys highlight the value and need for adult education and training, especially for women living in poverty. Although ALE remains on the margins, it continues to offer hope to communities and empower those excluded from mainstream social and economic development. The women's stories deepen our understanding of ALE's transformative impact.

Endnotes

1 Women who are 24 years and older, have not completed high school, and have family and work responsibilities - they have dependants for whom they must care while they participate in education which is via a non-traditional pathway or learning route, such as a night school (Chen, 2014; Kasworm, 2018).

2 NQF Level 1 is equivalent to Grade 9; Level 4 to Grade 12 and Level 5 is often associated with Higher Certificates and the first year of a bachelor's degree or National Diploma.

3 RPL is a process used to identify and acknowledge the knowledge and skills a person has gained through life, including outside formal education. This recognition can help one gain access to undergraduate or postgraduate study programmes.

4 Situated learning is about the connection between learning and a particular space, time and people (the social situation). The learning cannot be separated from the situation/context in which it happens.

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A HUB OF INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING: GRAVITY CBC AND COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRE, NAIROBI, KENYA

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Introduction

This article focuses on the Gravity CBC and Community Learning Centre in Nairobi, Kenya. It is a centre of intergenerational and second-chance learning - bringing children, youth and adults together - preserving Indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage, and at the same time equipping learners with the skills and competencies needed to navigate modern socio-economic challenges. This space of inclusivity and lifelong learning describes itself as a centre that 'provides a holistic education that goes beyond traditional classroom learning'. It is a good example of how a community learning centre can complement the formal education system. This article highlights some of the adult learning happening at the centre. It begins with a brief background about how and why the centre was formed; then focuses on the important adult educational work happening at the centre and, importantly, the ways it contributes to learners/beneficiaries making a life and a living.

Contextual background

Since 1985 the education system in Kenya was the 8-4-4 system (eight years of primary schooling, four years at the secondary level, and a minimum of four years of university education). In 2017 the competency-based curriculum (CBC)[1] was introduced to restructure the school system. The Kenyan CBC was designed with the objective that at the end of each learning cycle every learner will be competent in seven core competency areas: communication and collaboration; critical thinking and problem-solving; imagination and creativity; citizenship; learning to learn; self-efficacy; and digital literacy. It was meant as a shift away from rote learning and memorisation. With the introduction of CBC, the teaching methods also changed and became more learner-centred and participatory. The role of the teacher changed from 'expert' to facilitator.

Gravity - beginnings

When CBC was implemented in Kenya it faced several challenges, including limited resources; facilities required for such things as practicals; and inadequate preparedness of both educators and parents. These challenges were further intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted learning and exposed gaps in the education system, especially for adults and out-of-school youth. The centre started as a community initiative amongst Kamakis[2] estate members during lockdown when the founder, Duncan Arimi[3],

began growing vegetables in gunny bags, old tyres and plastic containers to feed his family and tenants who lived on the plot. This small effort provided food, generated income, and supported community members in need during lockdown. From this, the initiative expanded to include play equipment for children, helping to keep the local community engaged and safe. After travel restrictions were

lifted, Mr Arimi marketed the space to educational institutions, initially highlighting the sports facilities. Visiting schools were more interested in the kitchen gardens and learning about the CBC system. This interest inspired Mr Arimi to study CBC, identify its challenges, and develop various models, programmes, and studios and it became a resource centre supporting schools and the broader community. Over a few years, the centre has evolved into a dynamic hub for adult education, youth engagement, and community development and as a place for school learners to engage in experiential learning, for example hands-on learning on the educational farm.

Learnings on and from the farm include such things as safe agricultural practices; food production; environmental sustainability and climate action.

Empowered, transformed, sustainable - beyond the traditional classroom

Gravity grew out of a time of crisis and grounded itself in the REFLECT approach, which stands for 'Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques' (developed by ActionAid). REFLECT is a fusion of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's theory and the practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). From those beginnings the centre demonstrated and continues to show how community members can identify local issues and problems, come together to discuss them, and work towards solving them. Gravity's vision is 'an empowered, transformed, and sustainable society' and it works towards this in various ways.

Three beneficiaries share their experiences at Gravity

'My name is Ruth Eshiwani. I am a parent to two children in Grades 3 and 6 and I am an adult educator. I got to know about Gravity Community Learning Centre from a women's group meeting. I visited Gravity to learn how I could help my Grade 6 son choose learning areas and how I could help my children handle their assignments. When I visited Gravity I learned more than what I expected. I learned about CBE but, most importantly, I learned about kitchen gardening and food security. I also learned about animal husbandry using my small urban space and I have started to practise this. I am a church leader and have had interaction at the Ark of Covenant section with our church members - this has helped me understand how to live peacefully with other religious groups. Gravity has also helped our women's group members get training on financial management and our group's savings have started growing. I have learned so much at Gravity. I would encourage each and every one of you as parents to visit this centre'.

Here community members learn about diverse beliefs, various religions, and cultures.

'My name is Janet Lwoyelo. I am an adult education instructor and a community mobiliser in Westlands, Nairobi, Kenya. The competency-based curriculum in our country calls for parental engagement. Some of my learners had a problem when they were asked to engage with their children's educational decisions. To help them understand CBE, our Director advised a visit to Gravity Community Learning Centre where parents/learners were informed about how to support their children's learning through parental guidance and involvement.

The parents then also got involved in Indigenous knowledge sharing activities. In addition to this they learned about kitchen gardens, learning new knowledge and skills that have improved their livelihoods. Since this visit, people from the ACE (Adult and Continuing Education) Centre frequently visit Gravity to learn various skills, such as pottery; weaving; production of learning resources made from locally available materials; and literacy. Some of the parents even got temporary jobs at Gravity. Gravity Community Learning Centre is the place to be for learning and improvement of livelihoods! It demonstrates how a community learning centre can provide support for education at all levels'.

Gravity plays a part in the local economic development of the area as some community members have permanent jobs at the centre and others have casual jobs.

'My name is Morgan Marcelino aka Moji. I am 21 years old and an out-of-school youth. I left school in Form One because of a lack of school fees. I have been on the streets of Nairobi for six years. I learnt about Gravity from my friends who went to look for a job there in order to feed themselves. When I visited Gravity I realised I can go back to school and study through continuing education. I started learning how to plant vegetables and make liquid fertiliser through vermiculture[4]. I have now started planting vegetables and will enrol myself to sit for national examinations[5] in the coming year. I will keep going to Gravity to learn other skills like pottery, so that I can make flower pots and sell them to make some money. I also encourage my street friends to go to Gravity, join adult education classes and learn skills that will change their lives'.

In addition to offering youth and adults practical skills training in various vocational fields such as carpentry, plumbing, electrical work, and mechanical engineering, the Centre also has a Digital Studio.

The Cultural Section is a vibrant space where all generations come together to share and document their cultural heritage. Here, adult learners engage in the innovative 'Talk-a-Book' concept where elders narrate folk tales, songs and traditional practices, while youth transcribe and compile them into books, crediting the elders as authors. This space also preserves cultural artifacts and shares traditional and modern practices. One can find elders teaching traditional skills like basketry; making musical instruments; using medicinal herbs; and promoting traditional nutrition practices.

Conclusion

At Gravity, learning takes place at all levels in a non-discriminatory space, in which every person has the opportunity to engage in interactive educational experiences in which critical thinking, creativity, and hands-on learning are prioritised. It serves as a good example of what is possible for other community learning centres in Kenya and beyond.

Endnotes

1 In Kenya, competency-based education (CBE) has replaced CBC. CBC was primarily focused on the curriculum itself, whereas CBE encompasses a wider educational system.

2 Kamakis is located about 23 kilometres from Nairobi's Central Business District and is a lively and fast-growing area along the Eastern Bypass. Known for its vibrant roadside eateries - especially popular for nyama choma (grilled meat) - and modern hangouts, it has become a favourite stop for both locals and travellers.

3 From humble beginnings as a teacher, Mr Arimi (present CEO of Gravity) has positively impacted countless lives through his deep commitment to lifelong learning as a powerful tool for social transformation.

4 Vermiculture is the cultivation of earthworms for the purpose of composting organic waste, a process also known as vermicomposting.

5 Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination - entrance qualification to higher education.

HOME-BASED WORKERS, COLLECTIVE ACTION AND EDUCATION: THE JOURNEY OF NGALO BUWEREZA ORGANISATION, UGANDA

Betty Lunkuse's background is rooted in environmental management, women and gender issues. She trains women in her community to make handmade jewellery, weave baskets, plant bananas, rear local poultry breeds, and form groups to rear pigs. Recently, the women ventured into pineapple value addition by making organic pineapple jam. Betty's passion for working with women to enhance their social and economic well-being, while protecting the environment, connected her to Ngalo Buwereza Organisation where she serves as the National Coordinator, overseeing the organisation's operations.

Introduction

Most of the developing world's materially poor who work, earn a living in the informal economy. In many instances, their work is characterised by low earnings and poor working conditions. This article explores the establishment of Ngalo Buwereza Organisation (NBO), an organisation registered in 2022 and launched in February 2023, which organises and supports home-based workers in Uganda. Home-based workers, like other informal workers, have no formal legal or social protections. This article emphasises the role of workers' education in strengthening the capacity of NBO members to deal with socio-economic issues within their communities.

What is a home-based worker?

Home-based workers are workers who produce goods or services for the market either from within their own homes or from somewhere within their communities. They are either self-employed own account workers or sub-contracted workers or could be both[1]. All home-based workers face numerous challenges such as low incomes, delayed payments, unreliable supply of raw materials, and inconsistent and/or cancelled work orders. Although largely 'invisible', home-based work represents a significant share of urban employment in many countries, especially for women, and the resultant income provides crucial support to their households. In Uganda, home-based workers' work includes many things, such as making crafts, basket weaving, cloth stitching, tailoring, crochet handbag production, hand washing of clothes, jewellery production, bee keeping, crop/fish/poultry and pig farming, solar drying of fruit, vegetable growing, pottery, and making briquettes.

Ngalo Buwereza Organisation timeline

In 2018, with the support of Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO)[2], home-based workers engaged in sensitisation efforts that highlighted their value and contributions, for example how their work contributes to the national economic coffers; their rights as workers; and their unique challenges as informal workers. This also served as a way to mobilise the workers toward building collective power.

The sensitisation was based on a manual: *We are workers; our homes are workplaces*.

Following the sensitisation sessions, home-based worker leaders began planning for a home-based workers' network in Uganda.

Home-based workers planning the network.

An Interim Working Committee made up of seven members was selected to oversee its creation. The Committee began by visiting key regions of the country with the task of mapping home-based workers. Home-based workers were identified in the Central Region in the areas of Entebbe, Kayunga, Jinja, and Mpigi.

As the network expanded into more regions, additional Interim Working Committee members were appointed, bringing the total to 19. The members continued conducting mapping[3] exercises in the new areas. Throughout 2019, further sensitisation activities were extended to all regions.

Recruitment and sensitisation exercises within communities.

In 2020, despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, members continued to reach out to others through virtual communication, such as WhatsApp. Workers shared how COVID and lockdown were affecting them and this led to the drafting of an open statement[4] addressed to government asking for its intervention.

In May 2021, members agreed to formalise the network by registering with the Uganda Registration Services Bureau (URSB). Through their organisations, members contributed funds for registration. A Registration Committee, made up of four members, with consultation from the Working Committee, was appointed to oversee the registration process. The registration process began in June 2021, starting with the requirement to select a name for the organisation. After some discussion and debate, the name Ngalo Buwereza[5] (Hands and Services) was chosen, in recognition of the products and services the workers provide using their hands.

NGALO BUWEREZA ORGANIZATION
OUR HOMES ARE WORK PLACES

Membership recruitment continued between April and July 2022 under the theme 'we are workers; our homes are workplaces'. Supported by WIEGO, NBO held its first national workshop in Kampala from 5th-7th February 2023. The workshop brought together home-based workers from across Uganda, building solidarity and creating a shared understanding of NBO's objectives.

NBO first national workshop.

Leaders from 121 groups worked on the first draft of the NBO constitution and mandated the Working Committee to advance the work geared towards achieving NBO's goals. This led to the opening of an NBO bank account overseen by a Finance Committee comprising of the Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer, with members contributing joining fees. A member-led process was then carried out across NBO's seven operating regions to develop the next draft of the constitution, which was approved and adopted by the NBO General Assembly in March 2025.

Today NBO has a total membership of 122 groups representing 4,300 home-based workers in Uganda.

Working together and the role of worker education

NBO demonstrates the power of collective action. NBO is a good example of what happens when people come together and work collectively and collaboratively. Through organisation, workers who work in the informal economy and face considerable challenges, struggles and hardships, can combine their knowledge and skills. Together they can command a common voice for recognition, build contacts with other organisations, and access valuable information and support, for example (as mentioned above) working with WIEGO when doing the sensitisation activities. NBO receives support from HomeNet[6] Africa in areas such as increasing visibility of its products and market access, including through the development of a product catalogue.

Most of the products that the workers make are produced and sold collectively - small groups in a community agree to an arrangement specific to each group. These self-help groups not only help members earn a living - they also build unity. Other examples of collaboration include skill-sharing when members come together to share information about the various activities and initiatives they are involved in, for example solar drying of fruit and vegetables to extend their shelf life and creating broader sales avenues beyond local communities.

Spice growing.

Scholastic book production.

Fruit and vegetable solar drying.

Production of liquid soap and shoe polish.

Worker education has played a significant role in the formation, success, and strength of NBO. Below are some examples:

- Union membership
  Recognising the importance of visibility, unity, and collective power in advocating for their rights, NBO members joined the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union (ATGWU) in June 2024. This led to youth participation in the Young Workers Camp held in Gulu City in August 2024, which focused on the green economy, skills development, and enhancing opportunities for young workers. The camp featured inspiring talks, collaborative workshops, and practical insights into how trade unions operate.

NBO Executive Committee members signing into the ATGWU.

- Engagement of members with disabilities
  NBO members living with disabilities met with the ATGWU to gain practical insights into trade union functions. The ATGWU has demonstrated a strong commitment to engaging with members living with disabilities, working to better understand their needs, and ensure their full inclusion within the union and workforce. One NBO representative was elected to the union's committee for informal workers with disabilities.

- Social protection advocacy
  NBO became a member of the Social Protection Platform Uganda and some members participated in a focus group discussion on digital social protection organised by the Africa Platform for Social Protection on 14 August 2024. They also engaged in dialogue on implementing the Ugandan National Social Protection Policy (2015). Through this policy, which affirms that all citizens are entitled to social protection regardless of their employment status, the government recognises the need for social protection for informal workers. However, this commitment remains largely unmet, leaving home-based workers exposed and vulnerable.

More recently, home-based workers have been encouraged to join the goal-driven savings plan of the National Social Security Fund7 which allows informal workers to choose how much they save, when they contribute, and the length of their savings period.

Conclusion

The journey of Ngalo Buwereza Organisation reflects the strength, determination, and resilience of the home-based workers it represents. Despite facing numerous challenges and hardships, NBO stands as a powerful example of what is possible when workers unite around a shared purpose and take collective action. NBO has built a space for members to organise, advocate for their rights, and work toward improving their livelihoods. The article emphasises how vital worker education is in making all of this possible.

Endnotes

1 Self-employed home-based workers assume all the risks of being independent operators. They buy their own raw materials, supplies and equipment, and pay utility and transport costs. They sell their finished goods mainly to local customers but sometimes to international markets. Most do not hire others but may have unpaid family members working with them.
Sub-contracted home-based workers (called homeworkers) are contracted by individual entrepreneurs or firms, often through an intermediary. They are usually given the raw materials and paid per piece, but cover many costs of production: workplace, equipment, supplies, utilities, and transport. They typically do not sell the finished goods themselves, and often do not know where or for whom the goods will be sold. https://www.homenetinternational.org/about/home-based-workers/

2 WIEGO is a global network that supports the movement of workers in informal employment, especially women and those living in poverty. WIEGO believes all workers should have equal economic opportunities, rights, and protection.

3 Mapping in this instance includes such things as understanding workers' geographical distribution and working conditions. It is used as a way to organise unprotected workers.

4 https://www.wiego.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Homebased%20workers_Uganda_open%20statement_15May2020.pdf

5 Luganda, a language widely used in Uganda.

6 HomeNet International (HNI) is a global network of membership-based workers' organisations representing millions of home-based workers (HBWs) around the world. https://www.homenetinternational.org/network/homenet-africa/

7 The National Social Security Fund Uganda is mandated by the government through the NSSF Act, as amended, to provide social security services to all eligible employees in Uganda. The fund is a contributory scheme and is funded by contributions from employees and employers of 5% and 10% respectively of the employee's gross monthly wage.

Member-led constitution drafting process.

ENTREPRENEURIAL SENIORS: THE ROLE OF OUT OF SCHOOL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (OSET)

I knew I found a home to nurture not only my being but my living.
Ms Rotwane

Rebecca Nthogo Lekoko is a professor of adult education, lifelong learning, and community development. Her work integrates a wide range of critical issues, including life skills development and the empowerment of marginalised groups such as older adults. She has conducted extensive research in non-formal education and has contributed significantly to the Department of Out-of-School Education and Training, serving in various capacities as a keynote speaker, trainer of trainers, advisory committee member, and researcher. Rebecca has published widely. Her flagship publications include *Facilitators' Resource Book for Out of School Education for Children; Economic Empowerment for Older Adults; Lifelong Learning for Africa's Older Adults: The Role of Open Educational Resources and Indigenous Learning; and Critical Humanistic Pedagogy in the Context of Adult Basic Education: Making Sense of Numeracy as Social Empowerment.*

Ontlametse Kebatenne is a dedicated Principal Adult Educator who has a commitment to ensuring quality education and training that is accessible to all learners in non-formal spaces. She has been helpful in assisting her Ministry reach those individuals who are excluded from formal education. As a change agent teaching life skills, she has inspired practical, hands-on, and entrepreneurial activities to assist in the upliftment of individuals and communities. Her greatest passion lies in supporting adults involved in income-generating projects aimed at improving their livelihoods and lives.

Introduction

This article focuses on how adult education played a catalytic role in the lives of two senior entrepreneurs who graduated from the Out of School Education and Training (OSET) programme in Botswana. By sharing their stories, the readers are able to understand how the two women have been able to look after themselves and their families, despite being 'older adults', classified as part of a vulnerable group[1]. The article reflects on their experiences, including challenges and resilience characteristics, and demonstrates seniors' capabilities to improve livelihoods and play a significant role in the development of their communities.

Context

Since independence in 1966, the Government of Botswana has prioritised eliminating poverty and inequality. This goal has been integrated into all national plans and vision documents, including Vision 2016, Vision 2036, and eleven national development plans. The aim is to promote inclusive, sustainable economic growth rooted in social justice and economic independence. In March 2018, a conference[2] was held which led to the development of a National Poverty Eradication Policy (NPEP) and an Implementation Plan, as well as a National Multidimensional Poverty Index. These initiatives, guided by the Office of the President and supported by the United Nations Development Programme, are part of Vision 2036's Human and Social Upliftment Pillar[3]. The NPEP aims to foster a moral, inclusive society and eliminate extreme income poverty. As a way to deal with poverty eradication, the Ministry of Presidential Affairs, Office of the President, Poverty Eradication Coordinating Unit provides free

start-up equipment and materials for various income-generating projects, such as kiosks, home-based laundry, leather works, jam production, vegetable gardening, bakeries, textiles, food catering, tent hire, landscaping, backyard tree nurseries, and hair salons[4].

The plight of seniors

Despite these visons, plans and initiatives, according to the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Regional Office for Africa, Botswana's socio-economic development has not effectively kept up with the rapid increase in its older adult population, resulting in a mismatch between the specific needs of seniors and available services, like healthcare and social protection. This situation contributes to the vulnerability of older adults. A 2024 study by Lekoko and Tsayang highlighted that, despite the availability of numerous schemes and grants aimed at economically empowering people living in extreme poverty, such as the Poverty Eradication Programme (PEP) mentioned above and Ipelegeng[5], older adults (65 years and older) remained excluded. A few of them took advantage of the Government of Botswana's backyard gardening initiative (introduced in 2010) as a means of reducing poverty and increasing food security. Deserving individuals were funded for household consumption and potential selling. Today, many of these seniors no longer do backyard gardening. Lekoko and Tsayang argue that without a specific economic empowerment policy for older adults, this group continues to face injustices, such as the stereotype of being considered a burden, negative age-related discrimination, and marginalisation.

OSET training

One main function of the Out of School Education and Training (OSET) unit[6] of the Ministry of Basic Education is provision of functional literacy and entrepreneurial skills to deserving adults. This programme aims to assist participants to live their lives in the most productive way possible by addressing two dimensions of vulnerability: lack of or low income and participation poverty. Participation poverty refers to the situation where materially poor individuals lack meaningful opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their lives, such as a lack of access to resources, information, or decision-making processes. This hinders their ability to be industrious.

From an adult education perspective, learners are primarily interested in acquiring knowledge and skills[7] that are directly relevant to their lives - the functional literacy and entrepreneurial knowledge and skills offered by OSET equip learners with the necessary skills to engage in various economic activities. Functional literacy goes beyond basic literacy. It gives learners the ability to use reading, writing, and numeracy skills to function effectively in everyday life and participate fully in one's community, such as by improving one's livelihoods. As per the 2024 OSET Report[8], the South Region had 128 OSET income-generating projects (107 female learners and 21 males). Projects are diverse and include agriculture; home economics; tourism and hospitality; arts; design and technology; construction; performing arts; automotive engineering; Indigenous Knowledge Systems; and health and beauty therapy.

Figure One shows the range of businesses/activities.

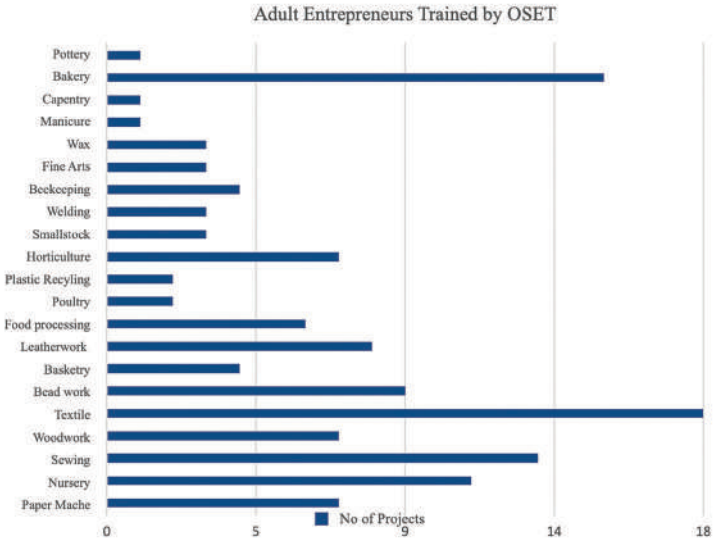
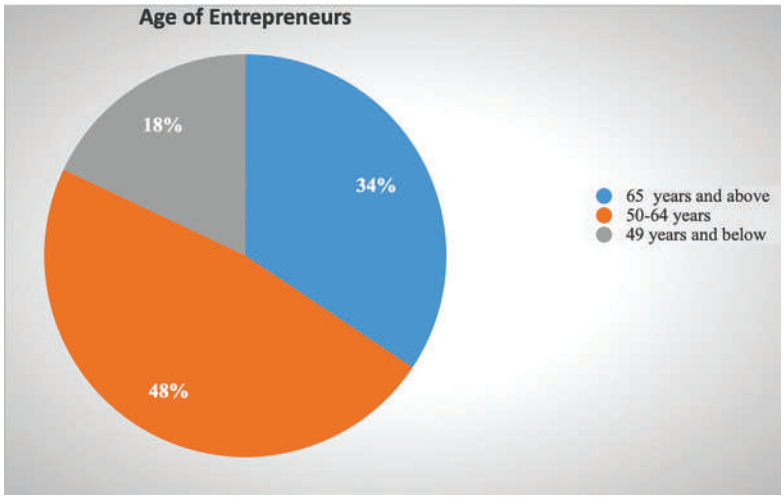


Figure Two shows the entrepreneurs who attended the OSET programme as per the 2024 OSET Report.



Generally, senior entrepreneurs are defined as older adults who commence ownership of a small business when aged 50 or above (Stirzaker et al., 2019; Soto-Simeone & Kautonen, 2021).

A note on mentorship

From left to right: Ms Kentsenao Rotwane, a senior entrepreneur who owns a pottery and basketry small business; OSET Principal Adult Educators (PAE) and mentors: Ms Neo Tlhako, Ms Ontlametse Kebatenne and Ms Keolebogile Ditedu; Ms Rebecca Lekoko, a professor in adult education and community development.

The two senior entrepreneurs and their mentors recognised the value of monthly home visits by mentors particularly as a vital form of ongoing support. The visits created space for discussions about progress, challenges, and the development of suitable strategies to sustain each business. The consistency of the visits was especially appreciated, given the limited resources available. Many benefits associated with these visits were cited, for example, lessening the risks of giving up on their businesses; mentors were described as *'shoulders to lean on'*, *'motivators'*, and *'supporters with admirable networking skills'*. Mentors were praised for their gentle yet firm guidance, their dedication, and their high but supportive expectations. Seniors commented as such: *'In them lies a clear message: There is a winner in you'* and *'It pushes you to be up to your next best, the next visit'*.

Additional support mechanisms were noted. These include participation in radio interviews[9]; product showcases at small markets and at government events, such as those organised by the Department of Social and Community Development; involvement in cultural activities; assistance in acquiring trademarks; job shadowing; and connections with potential buyers. These experiences helped entrepreneurs recognise the importance of collaboration and partnerships.

The entrepreneurial journey of two seniors

As mentioned earlier, this article focuses on two senior entrepreneurs, Ms Rotwane and Ms Onneng.

Ms Kentsenao Rotwane is 67 years old and describes herself as a hard worker, innovative thinker, multi-tasker (she does both basketry and pottery), and passionate about her business. Her choice to pursue basketry and pottery comes from years of experience gained by 'sitting next to Nellie'[10] - observing, learning and doing hands-on 'work' under the guidance of her mother. Her initial learning was done by real-world practice rather than by formal education. Ms Rotwane's business started in 2013. She explained that her choice was also 'demand-driven' because her baskets and pots are used during traditional activities and events like weddings and Dikgafela (a festival that celebrates the 'first fruits' of the year).

Ms Gadifele Onneng is 65 years old and describes herself as a hustler, a hard worker, committed, and passionate about her project. Ms Onneng does sewing and plastic recycling. She did not think she would adopt her mother's trade but she did. Her business started in 2013. Her decision to start a business was influenced by both the demand for products and lessons learned from OSET about the environmental benefits of plastic recycling. She also hoped the business would generate enough income to support her and her family, which it does. She has been able to do home improvements, like painting, flooring, and some fixtures. Ms Onneng said that she is the only person in the area actively and enthusiastically producing recycled plastic items such as shoes, bags, and hats.

In both cases, social learning theory[11] played a part in how the women (who were girls at the time) learned. They observed, imitated, and modelled what others (their mothers) did. The experiences of Ms Rotwane and Ms Onneng align with findings in the literature that it is usual for senior entrepreneurs to contribute a wealth of life experience to whatever it is they do (Rehak et al., 2014).

One major and common reason for both women starting their own businesses was the need to survive as mothers, grandmothers, siblings, and community members. Following in their parents' footsteps (who also struggled with issues of poverty), they looked for opportunities to improve their livelihoods and identified OSET as a pathway. Both seniors felt that OSET with its focus on functional literacy and entrepreneurial skills would be beneficial for this purpose, and both agree that it has been. These senior entrepreneurs are able to look after themselves and their families as explained by the following:
'*My children don't go to school with empty stomachs, bare footed and dirty*' (Ms Rotwane).
'*Hunger is a not a perpetual visitor to my home*' (Ms. Onneng).

Community support and respect

Ms Rotwane explained that the slow growth of her business was due to a lack of support, such as government grants or loans, especially when compared to assistance often available

to younger entrepreneurs. The two senior entrepreneurs indicated that, because they did not have access to formal markets, they have built relationships and networks with peers and community members, and that these have helped sustain their businesses. They explained that the trust and loyalty that exists between them and community members has earned them 'prestigious social status'. They provide quality products with *botho*[12]. Botho is a Tswana word emphasising relational aspects like care, respect, and kindness.
'*When at shops, walking the street, I am known for what I do. I feel valued because I work nicely with everyone*' (Ms Onneng).

Wisdom to pass on

In addition to the respect, trust, loyalty and high social status these senior entrepreneurs have earned from other community members, they are also recognised for their years of experience and wisdom. Even though they pass on this knowledge and wisdom informally and non-formally, the two seniors expressed a desire to pass on their knowledge and skills as trainers, trainers of trainers, mentors or advisers in a formal capacity to others wanting to know more about entrepreneurship. Unfortunately, the seniors' lack of formal certification is a major barrier to fulfilling this aspiration.

'*Ke godile mo tirong e, ke ka abela ba bangwe*' (I have reached advanced competence and others can benefit from it) (Ms Rotwane).

Ms Onneng echoed the sentiment with: '*Kitso e a abelwana*' (Knowledge is meant to be shared/
Knowledge is passed on).

Conclusion

The stories of these two senior female entrepreneurs illustrate that older adults are capable of taking charge of their own lives and supporting their families by improving their livelihoods. While poverty was a key driver in their decision to pursue entrepreneurship later in life, both women show a profound commitment and dedication to their work. It is evident that their businesses are not merely a means of survival, but an integral part of who they are. The seniors credit OSET with the role it played in their learning which assisted them in being able to achieve what they have. This confirms that education has an important role to play in the lives of adults, no matter their age. More recognition by government, including having a specific economic empowerment policy for older adults, would help ease the challenges faced by senior entrepreneurs.

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Endnotes

1 Between 2002/03 and 2009/10, the poverty rate among the elderly population (age 65+) witnessed a larger decline compared to the national average. While overall poverty decreased from 31 to 19 percent, the elderly population had a larger decline - from 38 to 17.7 percent. An estimated 11.9 percent of the elderly population is considered to be extremely poor. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank (2022).

2 *Leave no one behind: The fight against poverty, exclusion and inequality* (with support from the United Nations Development Programme).

3 Pillar 2 - Human Social Development By 2036 Botswana will be a moral, tolerant and inclusive society that provides opportunities for all. For easy execution the pillar will be looking into different sectors which includes spiritual wellbeing, culture, strong family institution, health and wellness, social inclusion and equality, education and skills development, gender equality, the youth and children's wellbeing. The other pillars are Sustainable Economic Development, Sustainable Environment and an Governance, Peace and Security. https://www.statsbots.org.bw/sites/default/files/documents/Vision%202036.pdf

4 https://www.scribd.com/document/424070164/Poverty-Eradication-Guidelines

5 A public works programme designed to provide short-term employment opportunities to relieve Batswana affected by economic shocks.

6 There are 10 OSET regions across Botswana. This article focuses on the South Region, which comprises five main villages: Kanye, Moshupa, Goodhope, Lobatse, Jwaneng and surrounding small villages.

7 In addition to relevant content, appropriate teaching strategies and methods are used, such as experiential learning, demonstrations, teamwork, storytelling, and the REFLECT approach (REFLECT is a combination of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's theory and the practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal).

8 Ministry of Basic Education, Botswana OSET Centres Year Report 2024, unpublished.

9 '*A o itse gore!*' (Do you know that!) is occasionally aired on a national radio station. Sometimes senior entrepreneurs are featured to share success stories - this programme is seen as raising awareness about senior entrepreneurs and moulding a positive image about them to others.

10 '*Sitting next to Nellie*' (or 'by' or 'with') means learning a job by observing how an experienced worker does it.

11 Albert Bandura is best known for developing social learning theory.

12 Similar to 'ubuntu' that emphasises interconnectedness, humanity, and the importance of community.

THE ROLE OF ADULT EDUCATION IN THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN MALI

Ms SYLLA Fatoumata Hama CISSE holds a Master's in Modern Literature from the École Normale Supérieure (Higher Normal School) de Bamako. In 2024, after 27 years in social sciences and research, she specialised in Education Sciences by obtaining an Advanced Studies Diploma from the Institut Supérieur de Formation et de Recherche Appliquée (Higher Institute of Training and Applied Research) de Bamako. Ms SYLLA Fatoumata Hama CISSE has participated in numerous regional and international forums on adult education, national languages, and non-formal education - leading panels, roundtables, and training sessions. Since 2021, she has been the National Director of Non-Formal Education and National Languages, previously serving as Technical Advisor in the Office of the Minister of National Education, coordinating activities such as International Literacy Day. She continues to champion the inclusion of the literacy and non-formal education (AENF) subsector in Mali's educational system, initiating an AENF programme at the École Normale Supérieure de Bamako.

Introduction

This article examines the impact of adult education in the lives of women in Yélékébougou and Kolokani[1], who have participated in literacy programmes, vocational training, and income-generating activities, supported by DVV International and its local partners. The article argues that these initiatives, in which hundreds of women have participated and regained control of their lives, have become a powerful catalyst for women's empowerment in Mali.

Context

More than half of women in Mali are illiterate and this negatively impacts their access to information, civic participation, and employment opportunities. Many have no option but to take on precarious forms of work. Adult Learning and Education (ALE) offers them an alternative. Adult education is provided by the state, civil society, and the private sector. It extends beyond basic literacy and numeracy by building self-confidence, enhancing technical skills, and supporting income diversification. This empowers participants to engage more actively in economic activities, improving their ability to provide for their families, while also fostering greater involvement in community life. Women who have participated in the programmes have taken charge of shaping their futures, as reflected in the following testimonials collected by a team during a field visit to the Community Education Centres (CECs) in Yélékébougou and Kolokani in 2025:

'*I am Mrs Simpara Kaniba Coulibaly, a widow with six children. I am a product of adult education. At the Centre d'Education Communautaire (Community Education Centre/CEC) in Kolokani, I learned to read and write, then to dye fabrics, and make soap. Today, I am a trainer, municipal councillor, and provider for my family. I have trained 10 women, raised my children alone, and built a house that I rent out which provides me with money at the end of each month. Thanks to DVV International, I am economically independent*'.

'*Thanks to DVV International, we have learned many trades that allow us to be independent today. We have our own money to take care of the daily needs of our families, and we have fewer arguments with our husbands about expenses for food, health, and children's schooling. We live in peace at home*'.
Mrs Sitan Konaré (learner at Yélékébougou CEC)

Literacy, an essential foundation

In Yélékébougou 150 women have participated in literacy learning in five REFLECT (Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques) circles[2], and in Kolokani there are 75. The REFLECT method is a participatory approach to literacy that uses learners' real-life problems as the basis for learning and social empowerment. REFLECT is not just about basic literacy; it aims to build critical thinking and encourage social action. For example, the women have organised health awareness campaigns around malaria, strengthening their civic engagement. Ms Rokia Traoré from Kolokani affirms: '*Avoiding disease means saving money to invest elsewhere*'. The women also better manage their income-generating activities, for example, seamstresses master measurements and vendors learn how to use scales. Ms Sounkoura Coulibaly says: '*We can no longer be fooled at the market. If a customer wants two kilos, they'll get two exact kilos*'.

Vocational training

In Yélékébougou, as in Kolokani, learners receive training in a number of specialties: cutting and sewing/dressmaking, peanut paste production, saponification (soap making), processing of agro-food products[3], clothes dyeing, beauty services, and market gardening. One thousand and nineteen women have benefited from one or more training programmes, and been awarded certificates. Some have become trainers at the CEC where they were trained or elsewhere, while also working independently, whereas others have chosen to start their own businesses.

Income-generating activities

After completing various training programmes, many women in Yélékébougou and Kolokani have engaged in one or more income-generating activities, leading to remarkable transformations both in their personal lives and in the well-being of their families. It is clear from the women's accounts that trades learned at the two CECs have brought joy and fulfilment, as evidenced by the statement '*today is better than yesterday*', a sentiment echoed by many.

Mrs Diaraoulé Diarra, a learner at Kolokani CEC, explains it as such: '*Now I know better how to do business to earn a living and take care of my family. I manage to make a profit from selling agro-food products. I can meet my family's needs. I even managed to increase my capital without anyone's help!*'

Mrs Sanogo Aichata Koné adds: '*I can't even list all the benefits of my activities. I hardly ask my husband for anything anymore. I even cover our children's expenses without waiting for him. The children are now receiving a better education, and their school results have improved*'.

Cutting and sewing/dressmaking: One hundred and nineteen certified seamstresses have each opened their own sewing shop in Yélékébougou, Kolokani, and other villages within these two communes[4]. Among them, there is one hearing-impaired woman and two young women with physical disabilities.

Below is a table showing the number of women trained since 2023 at the Yélékébougou and Kolokani CECs and their specialisations:

Specialisation	Yélékébougou	Kolokani
Cutting and sewing/dressmaking	45	170
Peanut paste production	83	80
Soap making	74	50
Agro-food processing	64	150
Clothes dyeing	16	55
Beauty services	37	00
Market gardening	45	150
TOTAL	**364**	**655**

Cutting and sewing/dressmaking at Kolokani CEC.

Peanut paste production: This activity is carried out in a peanut growing area, so the raw material is purchased locally. This product is highly valued in Mali as it is the main ingredient in a sauce called *tigadèguè* which is eaten with rice. In Kolokani a group of women were trained in how to make this product, and 31 women work in a processing unit located in the Koko neighbourhood. They produce 20 buckets of peanut paste per week which they sell at 6,000 CFA francs[5] each, earning 120,000 CFA francs weekly. According to the centre's manager: '*They work for themselves and are able to take good care of their families*'.

At the Yélékébougou CEC, Ms Kadidia Traoré, a learner, explained the production and sales process during a literacy lesson held in the presence of the testimonial collection team. Other learners came to the board to do addition and multiplication calculations - from 600 kg of peanuts as raw material, the women produce 72 buckets of peanut paste per month, with a monthly profit of 162,000 CFA francs.

All production is sold to local buyers (traders and individuals) and foreign buyers, such as workers from World Vision, DVV International, government officials (on site or in transit). Sometimes, a single trader comes from the capital, Bamako, and buys the entire yield to resell it there.

Soap making: Recently, this has been a challenging period due to the high cost and scarcity of raw materials. Of the women trained in Kolokani, only three have managed to set up their businesses and work. Nonetheless, reports from Yélékébougou indicate that this activity was quite profitable

not so long ago, owing to its practical value, as Ms Salimata Diarra states: '*The benefits of soap production are countless because everyone needs it. You cannot go a day without using it*'. From the money generated by soap sales, an amount was withdrawn as a contribution to construct a shed in the centre's yard in which the women carry out several activities, such as statutory meetings of CEC members, small sales stands, and literacy classes during the hot weather.

Soap making at Yélékébougou CEC.

Agro-food processing: The women work in a small unit where they dry fruit and vegetables such as mangoes, tomatoes, onions, peppers, and celery, purchased during the harvest season. These dried products are then sold during periods when fresh produce is scarce and expensive. They also produce fruit juice, which is sold on-site or by order and transported to other localities.

Clothes dyeing: Despite competition, mainly from Chinese suppliers, women engaged in this activity manage to succeed because there are customers who prefer traditionally dyed *bazin*[6]. The widow Kaniba Coulibaly is well-known in this field. She has regular clients in Kolokani and surrounding villages, and also in Bamako. She also makes soap to diversify her income sources.

Clothes dyeing at Kolokani CEC.

Beauty services: There are a few trained women in this area and they earn a living working for themselves in Yélékébougou or other areas of the commune. Their services are popular, particularly among women wishing to enhance their appearance for traditional or religious events, weddings, and baptisms.

Market gardening: Women trained in Kolokani are all active and work in various villages of the commune. The CEC manager confirmed that this activity has changed the lives of these women. They sell their produce, earn money, and support their families. In the village of Djoima, Yélékébougou commune, DVV International funded the development of a one-hectare irrigated area, with fencing and a water pump for watering mainly vegetables. Forty-five trained women currently work on this site. Selling their produce generates income that allows each woman to contribute to improving her family's quality of life. The women hold certificates in organic agriculture and, therefore, offer organic products to customers.

Soil preparation for vegetable farming at Kolokani CEC.

Women's groups and Saving for Change (SfC): In Kolokani, the women set up a dual-purpose fund, consisting of a solidarity fund to help in times of need and a working fund to sustain income-generating activities. They also use the Saving for Change model[7]: groups save money, and loans are granted to members in rotation, who repay with a pre-agreed interest rate. This rotating loan system ensures continuous activity for each learner in the group.

Way forward

While the knowledge, skills, and income-generating activities highlighted in this article help women become more confident and independent, they continue to face challenging working conditions. As a result, they hope to have:

- More rooms to work more efficiently and comfortably
- A secure storage facility for their products
- Educational materials
- More sewing machines[8] and equipment for soap and peanut paste production.

Conclusion

The above testimonials of the women's lived experiences illustrate that adult education is a catalyst for socio-economic transformation in Mali. Supported by DVV International and its partners, women are equipped with literacy and practical skills - strengthening their ability to manage business activities effectively, building self-confidence, and opening the door to independence, even in challenging contexts. By improving their livelihoods and living conditions, women are able to care for themselves and their families. They are role models within their communities and inspire others. To strengthen, sustain, and expand these achievements, continued investment in adult education and support for local initiatives is essential.

Endnotes

1 Yélékébougou is a village and rural commune and Kolokani is a town, both are in the Koulikoro Region.
2 REFLECT is a combination of the theory of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, and the practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal. Reflection Circles are facilitated gatherings where participants engage in shared learning.
3 Agro-processing involves value-adding transformation of products that originate from agriculture, forestry, and fisheries industries.
4 Mali is divided into 10 regions and one capital district. The regions are divided into 56 cercles. The cercles and the district are divided into 703 communes.
5 The West African CFA franc is used by eight countries.
6 A West African fabric made from hand-dyed cotton, resulting in a damask textile known for its stiffness and vibrant sheen.
7 This is a well-established community-based savings initiative that began in Mali in 2005 to provide financial services to women in rural areas who are often excluded from formal banking systems. It is a form of the broader category of informal savings groups or Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs).
8 Presently, 105 young women are being trained in cutting and sewing/dressmaking at Kolokani with eight machines. There are 54 learners at Yélékébougou with five machines.

Agro-food processing at Nossombougou CEC, Mali.

PROFILES OF COMMUNITY-BASED INITIATIVES IN AFRICA

In line with the theme of livelihoods, we present brief profiles of community-based initiatives and their unique approaches to livelihoods and education. These examples represent just a few among many inspiring efforts taking place across the continent.

EAST AFRICA

Integrated Programme for Out-of-School Adolescents (IPOSA)

The Integrated Programme for Out-of-School Adolescents (IPOSA) in Tanzania is designed to provide a second chance for young people who missed out on formal education, with a strong emphasis on building sustainable livelihoods. IPOSA combines pre-vocational training, entrepreneurship, literacy, and life skills, creating a holistic foundation with a focus on sustainability that aims to ensure interventions are not only impactful in the short term but also have the potential to contribute to lasting change.

Furniture workshop, Kigoma Region.

Batik making, Kondoa-Dodoma Region.

The pre-vocational training component includes tailoring, carpentry, agricultural practices, and creative crafts/industries such as batik making. These skills are complemented by entrepreneurship training which focuses on how to start and manage income-generating activities and small enterprises. Learners, through the IPOSA Empowerment Clubs (IECs), can access loans provided under both governmental and non-governmental initiatives. IPOSA also offers training in small business planning, marketing, financial literacy, and access to mentorship opportunities.

Many participants enter the IPOSA programme with limited literacy and numeracy skills. To address this, IPOSA integrates basic literacy and numeracy across all training components, equipping learners with the ability to read, write, and perform calculations necessary for daily life. This has strengthened their confidence and participation in both civic and economic activities.

Youth from Mbarali in the Mbeya Region showcase their products: 50th anniversary of the Institute of Adult Education, August 2025.

To thrive in today's rapidly evolving world, individuals need more than technical know-how. IPOSA incorporates life skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and adaptability to prepare participants for socio-economic challenges they are likely to face. These competencies help to build resilience and foster innovation.

Through its holistic approach, IPOSA has become a powerful catalyst for youth empowerment, equipping young people with the knowledge and skills needed for economic self-reliance and sustainable community development. By expanding livelihood opportunities, the programme ensures that Tanzania's youth are prepared not only to navigate today's challenges, but also to shape a more resilient and self-sufficient future. Those who previously lacked access to formal education now acquire practical knowledge that enables them to earn an income and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

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NORTH AFRICA

Green Women Cooperative

The Green Women cooperative, Algeria's first 100% female cooperative, was established on 3 July 2018 in El Kala (El Tarf province), within the El Kala Biosphere Reserve and National Park. Its creation was part of a pilot programme initiated by the Ministry of the Environment in collaboration with the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), whose objective was to strengthen women's empowerment and promote local biodiversity.

Bringing together women aged 20 to 51 with diverse backgrounds, including university graduates and women with ancestral knowledge of gathering and processing medicinal and aromatic plants, the cooperative overcame a difficult start to reorganise and structure itself collectively. By combining traditional knowledge and modern technical skills, it diversified its areas of activity in order to break free from its exclusive dependence on mastic (Pistacia lentiscus)[1], incorporating other local species such as wild myrtle, eucalyptus, lemon balm, and thyme.

Green Women cooperative's main activities include careful plant harvesting in forest areas (limited to 10% of buds to preserve the natural cycle) and steam distillation in a 30m² urban workshop in El Kala.

This interrelationship between the forest and the urban environment gives the cooperative a peri-urban character, reflected in the collection of resources in the natural environment and their processing in an urban space for packaging and marketing. In addition, the cooperative markets jams made from wild fruits such as myrtle and arbutus, produces natural and organic pomegranate vinegar, and dries medicinal and aromatic plants.

Numidian thyme (Thymus numidicus).

Green Women's products are natural and artisanal, focusing on organic quality rather than quantity.

With the support of the Ministry and GIZ, members have benefited from specialised training in extraction, distillation, cooperative management, and marketing. Specific equipment, including distillation apparatus and an electric dryer, has also been provided.

The development of these skills has led to an improvement in the quality of essential oils and a restructuring of their administrative and financial management. In 2019, the cooperative gained international visibility by representing Algeria for the first time at BIOFACH in Nuremberg, Germany - the world's largest trade fair for organic food and agriculture.

Filtration stage for natural extracts followed by bottling in the cooperative's laboratory.

The social impact of Green Women is profound: the cooperative has transformed the status of its members, who have gone from being simply farmers' wives to recognised farmers, artisans, and entrepreneurs. Today, the cooperative is recognised as an inspiring model of green female entrepreneurship in Algeria, integrating economic empowerment, biodiversity protection, and sustainable development. It now faces a new challenge: sharing its experience and supporting the learning process of new emerging associations. With its wealth of experience, Green Women is also a living learning environment, combining practical know-how and community andragogy, thereby contributing to sustainable and inclusive development.

1. A dioecious evergreen shrub or small tree, cultivated for its aromatic resin.

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SOUTHERN AFRICA

Bulungula Incubator

The Bulungula Incubator (BI) is a community development NGO based in the Xhora Mouth Administrative Area of the Eastern Cape, South Africa. It is one of the most rural and poorest parts of the country, and also one of the most beautiful.

When the BI founders first came to Nqileni village - where their work was launched in 2004 - there were no roads, no access to healthcare, no functioning schools, no electricity, no sanitation, and no access to safe drinking water. BI follows a holistic preconception to career model, believing that no single intervention is a path out of poverty. It therefore has four focus areas: education, health and nutrition, sustainable livelihoods, and vibrant villages. Its vision is to act as a catalyst for vibrant, sustainable rural communities by blending traditional African ways of life with innovative approaches to education, health, and livelihoods.

Projects at BI span from before birth to adulthood, with the Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes starting at home with pregnant mothers. There are five ECD centres across four villages, tablet-based mathematics and literacy tutoring at the government primary schools, and the first-ever high school in the area - Bulungula College, which opened in 2019. There is also the Job Skills and Entrepreneurship Programme, which supports youth who wish to develop their skillsets and gain meaningful work experience.

Bulungula Playgroup run by community health workers with parents and caregivers, part of their 0-3 Early Childhood Development Programme.

The award-winning Jujurha Preschool.

In healthcare, BI established the Bulungula Health Point, a fixed-outreach site of the local government clinic. The Health Point is staffed by two professional nurses and a mental health counsellor providing primary healthcare services, including child nutrition and health, maternal and neonatal health, sexual and reproductive health, dentistry, immunisations, mental health support, HIV testing, ARV and chronic medication distribution, noncommunicable disease support, and acute and minor ailment care. Its Outreach Project is a mobile extension of the services offered at the Health Point for people in very remote areas with serious ailments. Health access is further supported by the home-based care project that offers primary healthcare directly in people's homes, staffed by a team of 20 community health workers.

At Masilime Ngqo, BI's nursery, a wide variety of seasonal vegetable seedlings, including spinach, beetroot, carrots, peppers, cabbage, lettuce, onions, and tomatoes are grown and sold. Masilime Ngqo sells 6,000 seedlings per month to community members. To encourage people to try new crops, the nursery often gives away seedlings such as eggplant, peppadew, and cauliflower. The nursery also maintains its own demonstration garden, where fresh produce is sold and community members are introduced to new crops and sustainable farming practices.

Masilime Ngqo nursery sells vegetable seedlings to community members for sustenance gardening.

Its Vibrant Villages Programme hosts sports tournaments, talent shows, a surf therapy team, and the Bulungula Community Radio. It promotes art, culture, and community cohesiveness.

Bulungula Incubator's holistic approach blends innovation with deep local knowledge, creating lasting solutions that strengthen food security, livelihoods, and community well-being. By centring dignity and resilience, it supports people from before birth to adulthood to shape their own futures.

Bulungula Lodge, 100% community owned and run backpacker accommodation in Nqileni village. See https://bulungulaincubator.org/a-bulungula-history-independent-tourism-as-a-tool-for-rural-development/

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WEST AFRICA

Faranfasi So

The Faranfasi So Federation of Service Delivery Centres brings together farmers' organisations in Mali, particularly in the Niono district. It aims to strengthen the capacities of farmers' organisations with regard to their management and operations. The federation is grounded in the principle of collective empowerment, helping farmers unite their efforts into a stronger, more effective entity, for example when negotiating prices and availability with suppliers. Faranfasi So provides and supports farmers with agricultural inputs such as fertilisers, technical advice and assistance, access to resources and financing, and market linkages. It has been involved in initiatives such as establishing rice parboiling centres aimed at enhancing women's roles in the rice value chain. The federation assists producers to support their families through livelihoods. In this way, it plays a direct role in fostering local development, strengthening rural resilience, and promoting food security.

Adult education

The Faranfasi So centres build capacity and offer holistic support to members by providing literacy, numeracy, and life skills in addition to technical training. Participants learn about management, marketing, accounting, and other knowledge and skills essential for running a business, and are also encouraged to participate actively in democratic processes, such as advocating for their rights.

Beneficiaries share their stories:

Drissa Konota, farmer in Kolongo

Before Faranfasi So's arrival, I was not literate. I couldn't read or write, but when I joined the Service Delivery Centre (SDC), everything changed. I learned to read and write, and to keep track of SDC management tools.

Before Faranfasi So's advisory support, I used 100 kg of seed, which was not enough for one hectare. But today, with 45 kg of certified seed, I'm able to transplant[1] one hectare, and I still have seedlings that I often sell. Thanks to the support and advice I've received, I've been able to limit the number of times I've had to break off seedlings, use old seedlings and/or set up complementary late nurseries[1]. The use of good quality seed means that we are able to transplant more areas with less seed (45 kg of seed for one hectare). The technical advice from Faranfasi So has awakened in many farmers an awareness of the cultivation calendar and the importance of respecting the timing of different farming operations.

Currently, I'm employed by the cooperative. I am responsible for monitoring family farms of the members of Faranfasi So, Kolongo and I am also the storekeeper of the Sinignèsigi[2] seed cooperative. I also help the advisors with the farm accounts. I represent the federation of Faranfasi So centres in cereal exchanges. I have 2.5 hectares for the production of rice for consumption and 0.5 hectares for the production of rice seeds. I have a yield of 78 bags of paddy rice per hectare. In addition to growing rice and producing rice seeds, I also raise poultry.

All my children go to school and I provide food, education, and healthcare for my family, and I've also built a house in Kolongo (Dialacoro-camp).

Modibo Bouare, member of the Danaya cooperative in Nara (Kokry)

I have six hectares with an average yield of 78 bags of paddy rice per hectare, thanks to the support and advice of Faranfasi So. Today, I have a small shop selling agricultural inputs, such as spare parts for equipment. The shop serves as a supply point for members of the Village Association (VA). I also own a threshing machine[3]. All my children are in school, and I am able to buy medicine and look after the health of my family and feed them. In addition, I am responsible for collecting data and preparing the VA's operating accounts in the Bambara language, and I am a literacy facilitator for young farmers (boys and girls) in my village.

Drissa Toure, farmer in Kolongo (Djidian)

I have 3.5 hectares of land for growing rice. Before Faranfasi So arrived, I used two bags of urea[4] per hectare of rice, or 100 kg of urea. Now, thanks to literacy classes and training on the technical and practical use of granules[5] and organic fertiliser, I currently use a total of 113 kg of granules for the 3.5 hectares, which is a saving of 87 kg, with a production of 80 bags of paddy rice per hectare. Today, I'm better able to take care of my family's daily needs: food, health, education, and I help people learn the techniques I received from Faranfasi So. In addition to rice growing, I also market and sell rice.

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1 This usually refers to establishing an additional nursery later than the main one to produce seedlings that can be transplanted after the main crop, extending the harvesting period or covering gaps.
2 Meaning 'plan for tomorrow' (Bambara language).
3 A piece of farm equipment that separates grain seed from the stalks and husks. It does so by beating the plant to make the seeds fall out.
4 The most common and widely used nitrogen fertiliser for rice cultivation.
5 Provides a controlled slow-release nutrient delivery to ensure that nutrients are available to plants over an extended period.

Submission and discussion of operating accounts: Sinignèsigi seed cooperative, Kolongo.

Income-generating in Koulikoro and Dioila

This project aims to strengthen the livelihoods of rural populations through solutions that serve to protect, preserve, and improve the environment and focus on the careful use of natural resources.

In three Malian beneficiary municipalities in the Koulikoro and Dioila regions, 180 participants (80 of whom are women) undergo 30 days of training in different environmental solutions addressing the specific needs of the local environment, using the functional REFLECT approach[1]. They are then temporarily employed and paid for 120 days to collectively carry out activities based on the solutions and services discussed during training.

The agroecological activities include:

- Sustainable land management and landscape restoration (reforestation, stone barriers, composting, and riverbank protection)
- The recovery of degraded land through land protection, fallow techniques[2], and the installation of dead and live hedges[3]
- Local recovery of agricultural waste
- The production and use of botanical biopesticides[4] for crop treatment
- Agri-food processing (local products)
- Community participation in natural resource management and conflict resolution.

The activities help to stabilise yields, improve soil productivity, and increase community income. The project contributes not only to improving the living conditions of the participants and their households but also contributes to protect, preserve, and improve the environment for all those living in the municipalities.

This project is funded by the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) through the Local Irrigation Sub-Sector Support Programme (PASSIP) and implemented by DVV International, in partnership with the Regional Development Agency (ADR) of Koulikoro region, the technical services of the State (Agriculture, Water and Forests, Rural Engineering, etc.) and the municipal authorities.

1 REFLECT reflection circles are facilitated gatherings where participants engage in shared learning.
2 These involve resting agricultural land from cultivation to improve soil health, fertility, and productivity.
3 Widely used in land management, conservation, and agroecology to enhance habitat, prevent erosion, and serve as natural barriers or boundaries.
4 Pest control products derived from natural materials.

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RESOURCES

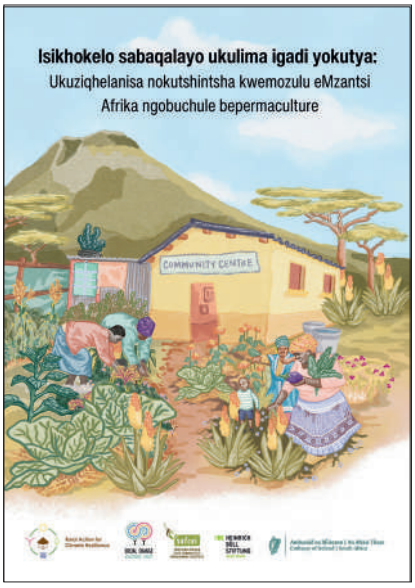
MOJA is a space for sharing educational resources and materials. These are predominantly open source and support our practices in diverse contexts. MOJA encourages adult education practitioners across the continent to add to the growing repository on the platform.

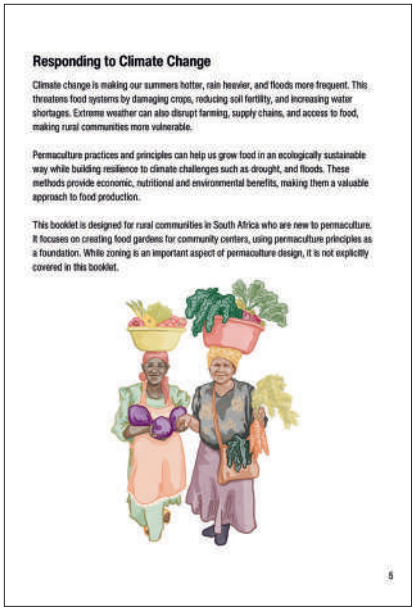
We share three resources to do with livelihoods - a brief synopsis of each and a link to where they can be accessed.

PEASANTS' DIGNIFIED LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS published by La Via Campesina (an international movement defending peasant agriculture and promoting food sovereignty) is the third in a set of four thematic booklets developed as popular education tools to support the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP). This booklet focuses on how dignified lives and livelihoods are protected by the UNDROP including, among others, the right to development, the right to adequate living conditions, the right to water, the right to social security, and the right to physical and mental health. It also outlines the obligations of states and includes examples of experiences from peasants in different countries. This booklet serves as a foundational tool to ensure that the UNDROP is respected, implemented, and promoted at all levels.

https://viacampesina.org/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/01/LVC-EN-Thematic-Booklet-4-UNDROP_web.pdf

A BEGINNERS' GUIDE TO FOOD GARDENING: ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE IN SOUTH AFRICA WITH PERMACULTURE TECHNIQUES was compiled by Rural Action for Climate Resilience (RACR) (a project partnering with rural community-based organisations and faith leaders to build social, economic, and environmental resilience to climate change). The guide offers practical, step-by-step guidance on creating climate-resilient gardens using permaculture principles to promote sustainable, community-based food production. The guide is available for free download in several South African languages.

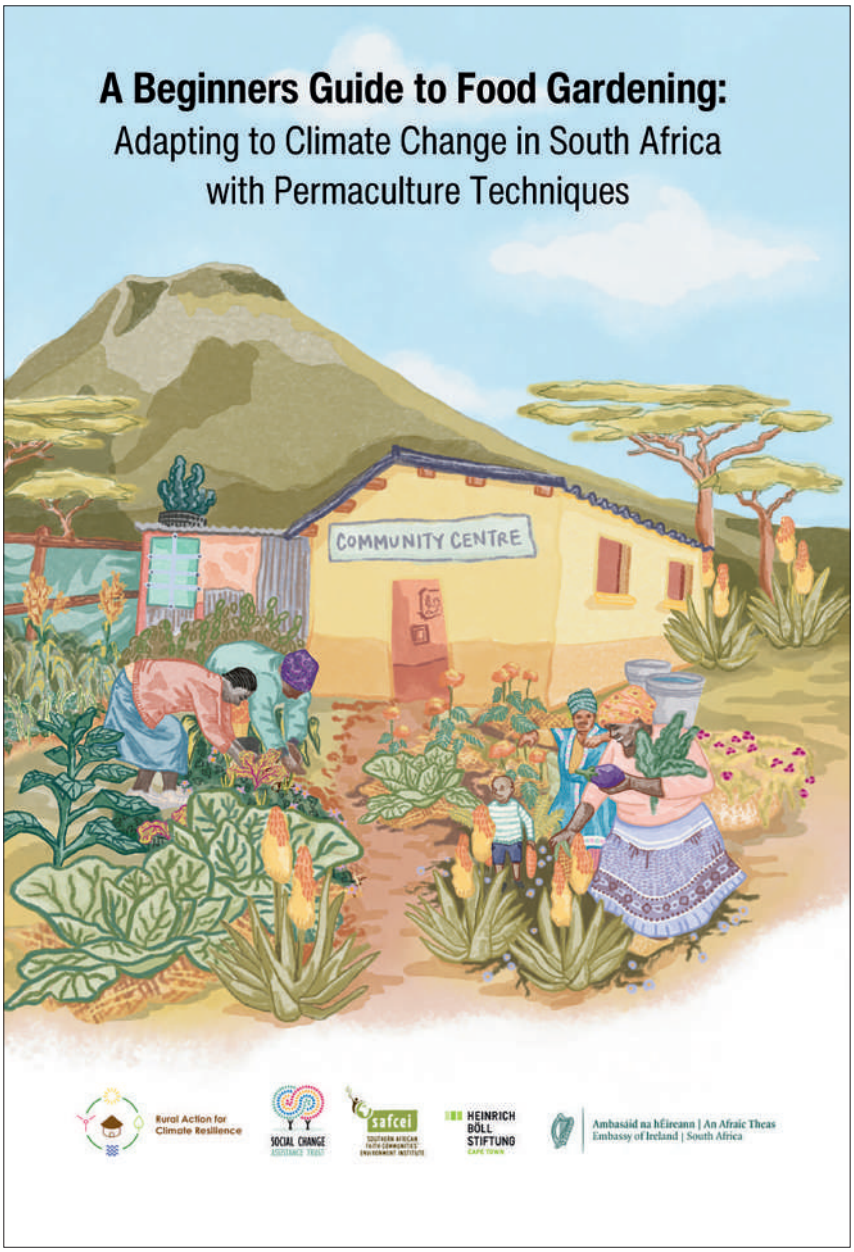



Responding to Climate Change

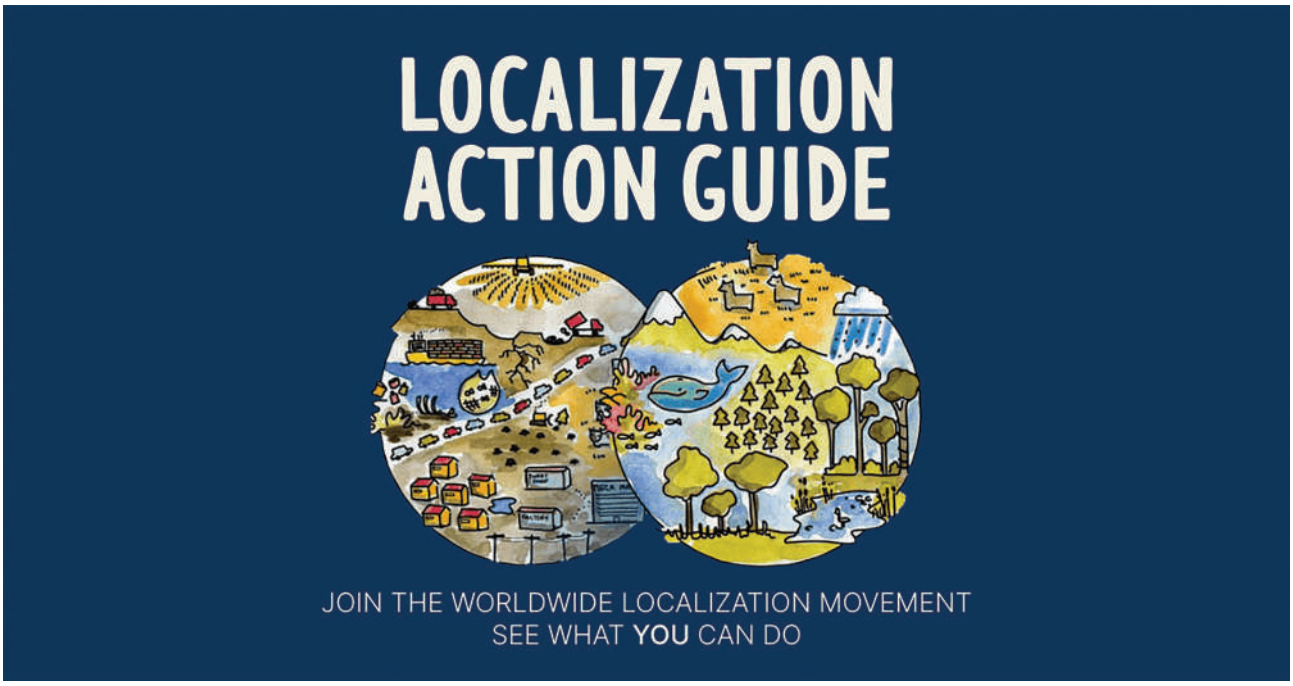
Climate change is making our summers hotter, rain heavier, and floods more frequent. This threatens food systems by damaging crops, reducing soil fertility, and increasing water shortages. Extreme weather can also disrupt farming, supply chains, and access to food, making rural communities more vulnerable.

Permaculture practices and principles can help us grow food in an ecologically sustainable way while building resilience to climate challenges such as drought, and floods. These methods provide economic, nutritional and environmental benefits, making them a valuable approach to food production.

This booklet is designed for rural communities in South Africa who are new to permaculture. It focuses on creating food gardens for community centers, using permaculture principles as a foundation. While zoning is an important aspect of permaculture design, it is not explicitly covered in this booklet.



https://www.mojaafrica.net/en/resource/a-beginners-guide-to-food-gardening



The **LOCALIZATION ACTION GUIDE**, available in many languages, and created by **Local Futures** (a non-profit organisation working to renew ecological, social, and spiritual well-being by promoting a systemic shift towards economic localisation) provides practical tools and resources to help build resilient local economies and flourishing communities. The guide is not only about sharing practical actions, but also about addressing the root causes of social, economic, and ecological crises. Organised around key themes - **Food, Business, Finance, Energy, Consumption, Community, and Education -** and grounded in the belief that localisation acts both as *resistance* (against harmful centralised systems) and as *renewal* (building healthier local economies, cultures, and democracy), this guide offers tangible strategies for individuals, communities, and organisations to take meaningful action. It aims to empower a global localisation movement capable of challenging and reversing the concentration of corporate power.

https://actionguide.localfutures.org/

EVENTS

We publish events related to Adult Learning and Education on a regular basis.
Please find a list of upcoming and past events here.

We encourage the MOJA community to use the platform to upload their events.

RESOURCES

We continue to update the resource section of MOJA. All the resources can be downloaded for use by our community.
Please visit MOJA to see the variety of resources available.

ORGANISATIONS

Please visit MOJA to see these organisations. Follow this link to list your organisation on the MOJA platform.

NEWSLETTER

MOJA circulates a monthly newsletter with information on ALE from around Africa, organisations, events, resources and more. To receive our newsletter please sign up here.

JOIN OUR COMMUNITY

MOJA invites the adult education community to help build the platform. Please join us and register as a member.

MOJA – your platform for sharing insights, resources and experiences, and building connections to enhance Adult Learning and Education for transformation in Africa.

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