

THE ADULT LEARNING NETWORK

A SNAPSHOT EVALUATION

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Adult Learning Network

The Adult Learning Network (ALN) is a national network of organisations, institutions and individuals involved in adult learning. Its membership is drawn both from civil society organisations and government structures, particularly public adult learning centres. It presently operates across seven provinces and has a national office in Cape Town. It is loosely structured, with host organisations carrying out provincial activities on its behalf. National activities and events, such as conferences and awards ceremony during Adult Learners Week, draw the provinces together. The ALN is governed by a Board of Trustees, comprising the provincial co-ordinators. The ALN has been operating since 2001 with funding support from the Institute for International Co-operation of DVV-International. Recently it has embarked on income generation through service delivery.

The ALN has its origins in the post-apartheid era and its key context has been the contestation around the delivery of adult education. Discussions concerning the establishment of a national networking organisation for the adult learning field began in 2001. The demise of the National Literacy Co-operation (NLC) and the Adult Educators and Trainers Association of South Africa (AETASA) had left the country without a national networking and co-ordinating body for civil society organisations and individuals involved in literacy, ABET and adult education activities. Adult education activists from various provinces met and set up a structure and appointed a national co-ordinator in August 2001. DVV-International, one of the very few funders that remained in the field of adult learning after 1994, provided strong financial and moral support for the initiative. At a meeting in October 2001 trustees were elected from the provinces and a Deed of Trust established the Adult Learning Network Trust in February 2002. The first national conference of the ALN in September 2002, attended by over 400 delegates from around the country, gave the network a mandate “to be the adult education sector representative in all matters relating to adult learning in this country” (Resolutions of the Adult Learning Network, adopted at the National Conference, Kimberley, 2002).

Arising from this mandate, the mission of the ALN was defined as follows:

- To provide a national networking structure for organisations working in the field of adult learning, basic education and development.
- To promote redress and transformation in our society, with the key focus on improving the status, quality and provision of adult education.

Its objectives include advocacy, communication and research. It targets educators, trainers, learners, project managers and development workers and has provincial co-ordinators in seven out of nine provinces. Key activities of the ALN include the organisation of events and conferences around Adult Learners' Week and International Literacy Day, as well as lobbying government at national and provincial levels around adult education issues.

1.2 Background to the Evaluation

DVV-International requested the Centre for Adult Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, to conduct an organisational evaluation of the ALN in the first quarter of 2007. This evaluation would inform the future direction of the ALN. Sonya Keyser and Peter Rule were deployed by the Centre for Adult Education to conduct the evaluation. They gathered data during February and March 2007, analysed the data during April and presented the report in early May 2007.

The inception and development of the ALN took place in a rapidly evolving national context which included changes in the funding environment, in government policy towards adult education, in registration and accreditation regimes, and in the status and sustainability of civil society organisations. This evaluation attempts to locate its discussion and findings within this wider context.

The scale and time frame of the evaluation meant that it could not be comprehensive. It provided a "snapshot" of the organisation and its operation over the last seven years.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the extent to which the ALN has been guided by its mission, to evaluate the ALN's achievements over the last seven years and to inform decisions about future direction. It also had a formative purpose in that it makes recommendations regarding the improvement of practice. These purposes arise from a brief submitted to the Centre for Adult Education by DVV/ALN that was subsequently discussed and refined with them. The purpose was not to conduct an impact assessment of the ALN, as such an assessment would require engaging much more widely and intensively with beneficiaries and other stakeholders.

1.4 Key Evaluation Questions

- 1.4.1 To what extent has the Adult Learning Network achieved its mission and objectives over the last seven years?
- 1.4.2 How effectively has the Adult Learning Network used its human and financial resources?

1.4.3 In what ways has the Adult Learning Network and its operating environment changed over the last seven years?

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

2.1 Introduction

Evaluation is a specific type of research activity with an emphasis less on theoretical development than on practical implications (Hall and Hall, 2004)¹. Evaluation usually focuses on the aims of a programme and the extent to which the aims have been realized. It has a judgemental role: it implies judgement of the worth or value of a programme or organisation, and this means that evaluation is a difficult process which has political and ethical dimensions.

Evaluation research may have a range of different emphases. For example, an evaluation may focus on the needs that a programme or organisation is designed to address (needs assessment), the processes involved in conducting a programme or the impact of a programme or organisation. This evaluation focuses on the extent to which the Adult Learning Network has achieved its mission and objectives. This includes a sense of how the organisation has changed during its life course, as well as how effectively it has operated and used its various resources. The study thus attempts to generate an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation, enable a review of mission and vision, and provide some pointers for future development.

As mentioned above, the evaluation is not an impact assessment of the ALN. Such an assessment is not possible given the time and budget constraints. This kind of study would require engaging much more widely and intensively with beneficiaries and other stakeholders. The study attempts to gauge the extent to which the ALN has the capacity to measure its own impact, given its resources etc.

2.2 Methodology

The evaluation methodology was mixed-mode. The evaluators collected both quantitative and qualitative data and engaged in both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis. The design was based on principles of flexibility and responsiveness. There was an understanding that the selected sources and methods might change in response to emerging factors as the evaluation proceeded if this helped to fulfil the evaluation purpose and answer the key questions more effectively.

¹ Hall, I. and Hall, D. (2004). *Evaluation and Social Research: Introducing Small-Scale Practice*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

2.3 Sampling and sources of information

Given the limited time available for the evaluation, it was decided to identify key national respondents as well as interviewees in four of the nine provinces in which the ALN operates. The names of interviewees are listed in Appendix B.

The following people/categories of people were interviewed:

- The ALN national co-ordinator and provincial co-ordinators
- ALN staff members
- Seven ALN Board members
- Representatives of three ALN member organisations, past and present, in four provinces
- Sample of beneficiaries (adult learners; adult educators; programme managers)
- Other stakeholders (state representatives; SETAs; business; other donors)

The study included visits to four provinces (KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, Gauteng and Western Cape). In each of these provinces, key stakeholders were interviewed and various sites were visited.

In addition, ALN documents (newsletters; media coverage; conference programmes and proceedings; reports; attendance and membership records; minutes; correspondence; website; etc.) were gathered and analysed.

2.3 Data gathering techniques

Semi-structured interviews: This constituted the primary form of data collection. A semi-structured format was appropriate because it allowed for a core of standard questions (see Appendix A for interview schedules), and thus for comparison across responses, as well as some scope for probing. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and two hours, depending on the interviewee's experiences of, and functions within, the ALN. Depending on the context of the interview, some interviews were tape recorded while others were recorded by means of detailed notes.

Documentary analysis: An analysis of key documents was crucial in providing a historical sense of the ALN and in discerning changes in operation, emphasis and context. Membership and attendance records, although somewhat sketchy and incomplete, provided a quantitative dimension of the ALN's work. Documents both from the national and provincial offices were analysed, as well as relevant documents in the wider public domain such as media coverage of the ALN activities. Documents consulted included the following: the ALN Deed of Trust, newsletters, letters and faxes, ALN funding

reports, newspaper articles, meeting minutes and membership records. A detailed list of documents is included in Appendix C.

2.4 Data analysis techniques

Data analysis comprised:

- Quantitative analysis of membership and attendance records, including analysis of trends across time and region. This type of analysis was limited by the nature of the available data. Only three provinces were able to produce membership data of any sort. Some of these records were characterized by repetition and omitted important details of individual members such as affiliation and profession. It was thus not possible to generate an overview of the ALN's national membership profile on the basis of provincial data. Some tentative conclusions are included in the report on the basis of this data.
- Qualitative analysis of interview and documentary data, identifying themes and patterns relevant to the key research questions. The data provided greater scope for this kind of analysis. Rich interview data generated numerous pertinent themes, and analysis across the interview data set pointed to significant trends and concerns that had a bearing on the research questions. This was cross referenced with analysis of documents to ensure that conclusions and recommendations had a substantial grounding in the data.

2.5 Ethical issues

It was important to be scrupulous in collecting, analyzing and interpreting data, and to follow ethical guidelines of informed consent and anonymity of participants. The names of interviewees are not included in the body of the report to avoid violating the principle of anonymity and, when quotations are included in the report, these are not attributed to particular interviewees. The evaluation report is to be made available to the ALN and its findings discussed in a workshop with the ALN board members and DVV-International.

2.6 Reporting

An evaluation report was compiled and submitted to DVV-International and the Adult Learning Network at the conclusion of the study. The report includes recommendations and possible scenarios regarding future direction. The report will also be submitted in pdf format for electronic distribution. In addition, CAE planned to conduct a debriefing workshop, as mentioned above, with ALN/DVV at a time convenient to both parties.

3. FINDINGS

The evaluation findings are presented in relation to the three research questions:

- To what extent has the Adult Learning Network achieved its mission and objectives over the last seven years?
- How effectively has the Adult Learning Network used its human and financial resources?
- In what ways has the Adult Learning Network and its operating environment changed over the last seven years?

It is important to recognize that these questions are not entirely discrete. There is some overlap between responses to the first question, which may be regarded as the primary research question, and the two that follow. There is therefore some overlap in the discussion that follows, although, where the same themes or issues arise, they are addressed from a different angle which aims to contribute new insights and develops a cumulative argument.

3.1 Mission

One of the key questions asked in this evaluation was - to what extent has the Adult Learning Network achieved its mission and objectives over the last seven years?

The **mission** of the ALN is

- To provide a national networking structure for organisations working in the field of adult learning, basic education and development.
- To promote redress and transformation in our society, with the key focus on improving the status, quality and provision of adult education.

All respondents agreed that the ALN provides a networking structure for organisations working in the field of adult learning, basic education and development. It is the only umbrella organisation for this sector and it appears to be performing this role effectively. One of the respondents claimed that the ALN has “achieved more than the NLC did” and another claimed that “the ALN is visible in communities and is successful in bringing diverse organisations together”.

It is clear, however, that this mission is not achieved equally in all provinces. Our evaluation revealed that there are differing levels of ALN profile and involvement across provinces. Some provinces, like Western Cape and Gauteng, are well organized with strong provincial structures and an extensive membership. Others, like KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape, have functioning provincial

structures and some membership. In other provinces, namely Mpumalanga and Northern Cape, the lack of effective provincial structures means that the ALN does not exist at all. The scope of the evaluation did not include an in depth evaluation of all provinces. For example, the evaluators did not visit Free State and Limpopo and did not receive membership data from these provinces. However, the dearth of membership data from the provinces – only three could provide membership data after numerous requests – indicates that provinces either do not have the data in an accessible form or are unwilling to reveal it.

Furthermore, there is a range of conceptual understandings (and different practices) among members when it comes to “adult learning”, “adult basic education” and “development”. Some member organisations believe the ALN is and should be primarily about formal adult basic education. For others the work of the ALN is much broader than that and encompasses any adult education and/or development initiative.

The second part of the mission of the ALN – the promotion of redress and transformation (with the key focus on improving the status, quality and provision of adult education) - is a constant battle. The ALN has made some progress and continues to lobby for improved delivery of adult education programmes and for the professionalisation and institutionalisation of adult educators.

In the Western Cape the ALN had made significant strides in this regard. Evidence of this includes the fact that a memorandum of understanding is on the table which will govern how the Western Cape Education department and the ALN work together. In addition, members of the ALN sit on the ABET Board of the province and contribute to the planning of adult education initiatives in the province such as family literacy and skills development. Many interviewees asserted that ALN members were not afraid to speak out and, in the Western Cape in particular, the Adult Learning Forum “tells the top guys what the people want”.

In the Eastern Cape the ALN has highlighted adult learning as a human rights issue and has strived to make the government accountable and ensure that decisions about adult education are implemented.

In Gauteng, too, the Council for Adult Training and Education (CATE) has pushed the Department of Education to address issues pertaining to the conditions of service of educators and has been described as “an essential powerful tool” in this regard.

3.2 Objectives

The **objectives** of the ALN include **advocacy, communication and research**.

It was almost unanimously acknowledged that the ALN has been most successful in meeting the first two objectives and less successful in achieving the last mentioned objective.

Advocacy

The ALN has engaged in a range of advocacy activities at both a provincial and a national level.

These have included

- provincial and national conferences
- award ceremonies
- letters and faxes to government officials
- press releases and newspaper articles
- meetings with government representatives
- participation in various fora concerning adult learning
- national, provincial and global campaigns
- public street demonstrations and petitions.

It has used a combination of co-operation and confrontation to pursue its advocacy goals which has, at times, resulted in an uneasy relationship with government.

The extent to which it has achieved its objective of “advocacy” is very difficult to assess. Although there have not been many concrete, measurable changes in the delivery of adult learning, without the ALN’s constant engagement, adult learning might have atrophied entirely through official neglect and disappeared from the national agenda. Suffice to say, the ALN has maintained a national profile for adult learning in difficult circumstances. It has won recognition in most provinces as the voice of the adult education sector and as the organisation to be consulted in the planning of adult learning interventions.

The recognition and respect that the ALN has achieved through its tenacious advocacy and lobbying is perhaps the single greatest achievement of the organisation. A number of respondents mentioned that the government had resisted and ignored the ALN’s advocacy, but that the ALN had persisted and is now recognized by the Department of Education as a legitimate and valuable player in the adult learning field. As a provincial co-ordinator put it, “the ALN became known. We gained much more access to the Department of Education.” This was evident in the ALN’s success in involving the Department of Education in joint Adult Learners’ Week conferences and celebrations, in the development of working relations with department officials and in the acknowledgement in government circles of the ALN’s important role. A provincial Head of ABET described the ALN as “a force to be reckoned with”. The national Minister of

Education recognized, in a 2006 reply to an ALN letter, the weaknesses in the government's delivery of adult basic education, acknowledged the ALN's effective contribution to policy development, and called upon the ALN "to continue to play a role in addressing the needs of our adults" (Naledi Pandor, 2006, p2).

Through input in some of the provincial Departments of Education, some of the SETAs, SADTU, SANGOCO and in the Global Campaign for Education, the ALN continually raises awareness of the needs and challenges of the adult education sector and keeps them on the national agenda.

One of the most important advocacy roles for some members of the ALN has been the "union" type role the organisation has played in fighting for the rights of adult educators. The ALN has been involved in the debates about the qualifications of adult educators and has fought for the recognition of experience (or prior learning) rather than only formal qualifications. The Conditions of Service debate has received attention in "Talking Adult Learning", as well as at ALN conferences and provincial fora, and has been taken up by ALN leaders with the Department of Education. A special Educators' Indaba convened by ALN in 2006 powerfully highlighted educators' concerns within the Public Adult Learning Centres.

Plenary sessions in various regions in the Western Cape make potential learners aware of their right to a basic education and where they can obtain it, and help motivate people to go to classes. The learners' voices are less prominent than those of educators in ALN conferences and newsletters, possibly because learners are more difficult to organize and less articulate in contributing to public discourse. However, conference resolutions and newsletter articles indicate that the ALN is aware of this imbalance and is trying to address it.

Some members of the ALN expressed frustration at the lack of concrete results following from the ALN's advocacy efforts. As one respondent put it, "We haven't achieved real changes." In most provinces there had been very little progress on the issue of educators' conditions of service, although the ALN has been lobbying government on this issue in a variety of ways. ALN members both within and outside government lamented the meagre resources allocated to adult learning by the state and the failure to prioritize adult learning at both provincial and national level. Despite these disappointments, the ALN's strong advocacy work over the years has established it as an important national and provincial role player in the adult learning field. This means that it is well positioned to contribute in the future, for example to the envisaged mass literacy campaign, the development of a broader national conception of adult learning, and the integration of adult learning with themes of development.

Communication

One of the respondents stated that “communication is what the ALN is best at”. The greatest achievement of the ALN is widely reported to be its success in establishing a platform for dialogue and sharing, amongst its own members and with institutions responsible for adult learning (for example, the Departments of Education, Correctional Services and Health). This success is closely related, and essential to, its advocacy work. Interview respondents repeatedly pointed out that there has been no other national umbrella organisation for adult education since the demise of the National Literacy Co-operation at the end of 1998.

The main vehicle of communication for the ALN members is the ALN newsletter, “Talking Adult Learning”. It is generally agreed that it is a good newsletter and that it is well distributed. ALN members in all provinces visited mentioned its value. An analysis of back copies of the newsletter revealed that it carries a wide range of articles. These include reporting on the ALN activities such as conferences and marches at a provincial and national level, profiling member organisations and their programmes, and drawing attention to new publications and learning materials of interest to the Adult Education practitioners. It also included speeches from politicians such as Naledi Pandor and Helen Zille which highlight the importance of adult education from a government perspective, thus providing a basis for engagement and accountability. The newsletter tends to be dominated by contributions from Western Cape, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, with very few articles from or about the other provinces. This points to a lack of capacity in these provinces with regard to publicising their activities and is an area for development in the newsletter and ALN as a whole. Generally, there is an insecurity and marginalization in the adult learning field which makes it difficult to generate national debate around adult learning policy and implementation. Given this context, “*Talking Adult Learning*” has done remarkably well as an advocacy and communication tool. This may be attributed to the small group of dedicated editors and writers who have not only kept the newsletter going but improved its appearance and taken it to new heights regarding content and format. “*Talking Adult Learning*” has attained the stature of an important national communication instrument in the adult learning field.

Other means of communication for the ALN are email, faxes, meetings of provincial structures, representations to the legislature, to MECS and to the Youth and Gender commissions, to SANGOCO, marches and campaigns. Many interviewees reported that they were empowered by information provided by the ALN and that the communications of the ALN assisted in making potential learners curious about education and learning. This communication often takes place at provincial level in meetings and workshops.

Many interviewees pointed out that maintaining communication between members is not easy because of budgetary constraints (the *Talking Adult Learning* (TAL) was described as “barely kept in circulation by minimal funding”).

Some national executive members of the ALN don't have email and faxes. Furthermore it was the minority view that the ALN has not been able to attract media coverage because "government does not take the ALN seriously" and "if (the ALN) were more like the unions, they (government) would give us more response".

One interviewee cautioned that the ALN should check information and facts before they are communicated to the sector because comments based on assumptions and misconceptions can have a demoralising effect.

Research

This is an area where the ALN has not been very active. One respondent stated categorically that "the ALN has no capacity to do research unless through partnerships" and another said the ALN did not have enough funding to do research.

On the other hand, many interviewees said that the ALN was well placed to do research on the problems of adult educators and learners. The Cape Town conference produced resolutions about researching relevant curricula to meet adult learners' needs and the drop-out rate of adult learners, but these resolutions had not been acted upon as yet.

Some interviewees bemoaned the fact that ALN members had not been consulted in the research and planning stages of the mass national literacy campaign, into which they felt they could have given practical, unbiased input.

One of the respondents expressed the opinion that ALN members are engaging in a type of "research" through their advocacy work, in the sense that they find out what others are doing and this creates networks and opportunities to work together.

'Talking Adult Learning' has also on occasion reported on research in the adult learning field conducted by universities and member organisations.

It is debatable whether, given the ALN's existing resources and capacity, research is a realistic objective. On the other hand, ALN members, with their wealth of experience and diverse expertise in the adult learning field, undoubtedly have a lot to contribute to the generation of knowledge about adult learning. It might be worth revisiting the research objective and formulating it in terms of research partnerships and dissemination of relevant findings through its communication tools, rather than conducting research itself. This might make the research objective more achievable.

3.3 Resources

Key question:

How effectively has the Adult Learning Network used its human and financial resources?

Financial resources

This key question dealt with extensively elsewhere in this report (in addition to this section below) as it is very much part of the data about the achievement of the ALN's mission and objectives, and the ALN's changing context.

Prior to being awarded the HIV/AIDS tender, the ALN was funded exclusively from DVV with occasional contributions and in kind support from others for particular events or activities - particularly for Adult Learners Week (ALW).

The money for the HIV/AIDS tender comes from the Extended Public Works programme via the Department of Health. The ALN reports quarterly to the Department of Health.

The total annual funding for the ALN is allocated by DVV to three main areas, viz. programmes, personnel (national and provincial) and infrastructural expenses.

The provinces are each given the same amount. The reporting requirements are not very stringent although the co-ordination fee is not meant to be more than 30% of the total allocation.

One interviewee said there was not enough transparency around what the provinces spend their money on and she was of the opinion that some provinces seemed to manage to do much more than with their money than others. If the funding reporting requirements were more orientated towards measuring impact, and if requirements included monitoring for example, the impact of the provincial allocations would be easier to determine.

Human resources

One of the challenges, according to one respondent, is to persuade people of the importance and purpose of structures. She went on to say that NGOs look after their immediate needs rather than sit on structures and that the ALN is "voluntary work". She suggests that the ALN needs to investigate how to draw in expertise without paying for it.

In one province the NGO host organisation believes it is "carrying" the ALN as the staff member tasked with ALN work already has a full-time job.

Regarding its human resources, the evaluation indicated that the ALN is as strong or as weak as its member organisations. Thus in provinces with a well-developed adult learning sector, the ALN tends to have a profile and to be active. This profile tends to be identical to that of the host organisation or forum. Many interviewees in the provinces visited identified the ALN with its host organisation rather than as a separate entity. In provinces where adult learning organisations are weak or non-existent, the ALN's profile and activities suffer accordingly.

A quantitative analysis of the little quantitative data available to the evaluators indicated that attendance of national and provincial events may have declined slightly between 2002 and 2006, although the data is not comprehensive enough to reach definitive conclusions. We were also not able to confirm the conference data from sources other than *"Talking Adult Learning"*. One interesting trend is that the 2002 events in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal were attended by many adult learners, whereas the 2006 events were attended by 'delegates', suggesting that adult learners were not as numerous or as well represented.

Year	Location	Attendance	Source
2002	National: Kimberley	400+	TAL Oct 2002
	KZN: Pietermaritzburg	1000	
	Gauteng: Heidelberg resort	2000+	
	Western Cape: Good Hope Centre	50+ stallholders	
2006	National: Durban	430	TAL Edition 3 2006
	Gauteng: Vdbijlpark	250	
	KZN: Durban	200+	
	Western Cape: Strand	no figures	

Figure 1: Conference Data, 2002 and 2006

The membership data was provided by only three provinces, despite repeated requests from the national co-ordinator. Again, the extent and quality of the data does not allow for definitive conclusions, besides the recommendation that data collection requires urgent attention. The available data suggests very different scales of operation in different provinces, as well as differences in membership affiliation. For example, the Eastern Cape has a small membership list, with a preponderance of NGOs and/or community organisations. The Western Cape has a very extensive membership list with a wide range of organisations, including government departments and agencies, and library literacy groups. The KwaZulu-Natal list includes a number of companies and commercial ABET providers. This confirms the finding that the character of the ALN varies considerably between provinces, as does its regional profile within provinces.

Province	Number of members on list	Comment
Eastern Cape	16 organisations	The list includes NGOs, CBOs and government-supported adult learning centres. Most of the organisations are from the East London area.
Western Cape	241 organisations (fewer because of repetitions) as well as 43 individuals of unstated affiliation.	List includes NGOs, adult learning centres, tertiary institutions, library literacy groups, department officials, government agencies, publishers. There are a number of repetitions of organisations on list.
KwaZulu-Natal	Approximately 219 individuals, some with an organisational affiliation indicated. Repetitions make accurate calculation difficult.	List includes NGOs, CBOs, government officials, companies, commercial ABET providers, colleges, municipalities. There are many repetitions on the list.

Figure 2: Membership Data

3.4 Context and change

The ALN Context

In what ways has the Adult Learning Network and its operating environment changed over the last seven years?

Introduction

In certain respects, the environment in which the ALN operates has changed quite substantially over the last seven years. In other respects, it has remained largely unaltered. We focus first on the wider context and then on the operating environment of the organisation itself. These two environments, the external and the internal, are related in ways that we will spell out below.

3.4.1 The external environment

Skills development and SETAs

There have been some significant developments in the wider context of adult learning, both positive and negative. The government's skills development thrust, as legislated in the Skills Development Act (1998) and the Skills Development Levies Act (1990), and embodied in the National Skills Development Plan, has put in place a whole new tier of capacity and bureaucracy in the form of Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). These SETAs are responsible for disbursing funds to industry, generated through a skills levy, for the purpose of educating and training the workforce. In 2004 the Minister of Labour announced that unspent SETA funds would be redirected to resource the Expanded Public Works Programme, which included ABET training. This has opened a new source of funding for adult learning, albeit primarily in the industry sector.

The ALN has developed relationships with some of the SETAs, in particular the Education, Training and Development Practices (ETDP) SETA, Services SETA and the Mining Qualifications Authority. The ALN is represented on the ETDP SETA Board where it can advocate for adult learning. It has also received some financial support from the ETDP SETA, as well as from the CHIETA (Chemical Industries Education and Training Authority), for Adult Learners Week activities. In addition, the ALN has won a second tender from the Department of Health in the Western Cape to provide Ancillary Health Care training for 1200 learners.

The SETAs have a strong technical and instrumental emphasis regarding adult learning: adult education is for economic purposes and is related to increasing productivity, efficiency and global competitiveness by upgrading the skills of the South African workforce. The ALN has had minimal interaction with, and influence over, Adult Basic Education within the industry sphere where SETAs are most active. The SETAs have not to any great extent addressed the

developmental agenda of adult learning in relation to aspects of development such as civic participation, housing, HIV/AIDS, poverty, and so on.

In its engagement with the SETAs, the ALN has the potential to temper the instrumental emphasis on adult learning for productivity and global competitiveness. It can do this by continuing to explain and promote the role of adult learning in the development agenda, and the need to properly resource development-oriented programmes.

HIV/AIDS

The growth of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa has had a far-reaching influence on the adult learning sphere. South Africa has the largest number of people living with HIV in the world, estimated at about 5.7-6.2 million people or approximately 15 percent of the population (Department of Health 2005)² – although this position might recently have been taken over by much more populous India. HIV prevalence among antenatal clinic attendees nationally rose from 0.7 per cent in 1990 to 27.9 per cent in 2003 (Gouws and Karim 2005:56)³. By 2004 the prevalence rate at ante-natal clinics in KwaZulu-Natal had risen to 40.7 per cent with more than 50 per cent of young women in the 20-24 age group infected (Department of Health 2005). A whole new cadre of activists, volunteers and practitioners involved in HIV/AIDS education and home-based care has emerged in response to the disease at community level. This has posed a challenge to organisations involved in adult education. Some ALN member organisations (for example Operation Upgrade in KZN and iSophakama Care Centre and Ikamvelihle in the Eastern Cape) have a primary focus on HIV/AIDS, while others have begun to provide training in HIV/AIDS.

Another aspect of the disease is its impact on educators. A survey of educators released in 2005 found that KwaZulu-Natal had the highest rate of infection among educators, 21.8 percent compared with a national average of 12.7 percent (HSRC 2005)⁴. There is evidence therefore that both adult educators and adult learners are widely infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, and that this is a key challenge to the adult education field.

From 2003 DVV International actively built the ability of the ALN to become an accredited provider with the Health and Welfare SETA and to develop curriculum and learning units for the Ancillary Health Care qualification. This strategic decision put the ALN in a position to take advantage of new opportunities for service delivery and income generation. As a consequence the ALN is now

² Department of Health. (2005) 'National HIV and Syphilis Antenatal Sero-Prevalence Survey in South Africa 2004'. <http://www.doh.gov.za> Accessed 27.3.2006.

³ Gouws, E. and Karim, Q. (2005) 'HIV infection in South Africa: the evolving epidemic', in S. Karim and Q. Karim (eds) *HIV/AIDS in South Africa*, Cape Town: Cambridge University Press.

⁴ Human Sciences Research Council (2005) 'HIV Prevalence among South African educators in public schools: Fact Sheet 6', <http://www.hsrb.ac.za/media/2005/3/20050331FactSheet6.html>. Accessed 21 March 2006.

involved in Ancillary Health Care training in the Western Cape that includes a focus on sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS.

Development imperatives

The socio-economic context loomed large among respondents as we conducted the research. A number of respondents highlighted socio-economic issues as key concerns for adult learning and for the role of the ALN. In the Eastern Cape, for example, issues such as unemployment, crime, teenage pregnancy, housing shortages, poverty and illiteracy, as well as HIV/AIDS, provided the backdrop for adult learning. This was mirrored in other provinces. As a Gauteng Department of Education official stated, “The adult learning sector is hard-hit by all sorts of social issues such as AIDS because of the low level of education and life skills.” An ALN provincial co-ordinator stressed the importance of engaging actively with the socio-economic context: “ALN has to relate to this situation or it becomes completely irrelevant to its members who face these socio-economic challenges.”

Rural areas are particularly affected by poverty, and yet rural development has been neglected by government in South Africa. As one NGO director put it, “We need to do rural development – rural people improving their lives. Impetus for rural development has gone to municipalities who don’t know what to do.”

Decline of funding in the ABET NGO sector

A major funding crisis hit the NGO sector in South Africa in the 1990s and many NGOs involved in adult education were forced to close down. The trend continued in the first decade of the new century. Funding for literacy and adult education generally dried up as funders shifted attention to HIV/AIDS and other developmental issues. One key ALN member organisation in KwaZulu-Natal, the Natal ABE Support Agency (NASA), closed down in 2004 (*Talking Adult Learning*, September 2004). Other organisations, such as Project Literacy, successfully remodelled themselves as large scale commercial providers of ABET and survived by winning contracts and tenders in the public and private sectors. NGOs that remained committed to working with disadvantaged adult learners struggled to make ends meet.

The issue of funding was raised by many respondents as a key challenge to the ALN and as a limitation on its effectiveness, as well as a problem in the sector more widely. “Our greatest challenge is funding,” one ALN member stated. Department of Education officials also complained about the allocation of funding to ABET within the Department. “ABET has always been the stepchild of education,” one official lamented. “You get a quarter of what you requested.” A senior provincial government employee disclosed that ABET still received only 0.04% of the provincial education budget.

The ALN itself has struggled to source funding. DVV remained its only core funder throughout the period despite many fund-raising attempts. The ALN's decision to move into the provision of services was a way of both sustaining the organisation while developing the capacity of health care workers.

Government literacy initiatives

The period of the ALN's existence has been characterised by a number of government-led initiatives to address illiteracy, the most important of which was the South African National Literacy Initiative (SANLI). The SANLI campaign was launched in 2000 by then Minister of Education Kader Asmal to "break the back of illiteracy". This campaign was characterised by a lack of consultation with stakeholders in civil society and inadequate financing, as well as exaggerated claims of achievement (Macfarlane, 2005)⁵. The campaign struggled to meet learner target numbers and experienced high rates of educator drop-out (Prolit, undated)⁶.

The ALN 2006 Conference Resolutions included support for a "mass literacy campaign" but called on the government to ensure that, *inter alia*, "learners, educators and civil society have a voice in the planning and implementation" of the campaign; and that the campaign "draws upon existing expertise in the sector" (*Talking Adult Learning*, 3, 2006, p20). The new Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, is planning a mass literacy campaign. However, both government ABET officials and NGOs involved in adult education had not been officially informed about these plans at the time of conducting this evaluation.

Stagnation within ABET: conditions of service; formalisation; resourcing; sensitivity to criticism

Trends within the ABET field from 2000 include an increasing formalisation of curriculum, assessment and certification, and stronger government regulation of provision, at least at the level of policy (Adult Basic Education and Training Act, 2000). Some ALN respondents expressed concern about this move towards formalisation in so far as it did not cater for illiterate adults and their development needs. As a fieldworker put it, "Being so formalised is the major factor deterring learners. .. The system is only there for those who want to further their education. It does not cater for those who cannot read and write at all."

On the other hand, certain aspects of the system have not changed at all. Educators' Conditions of Service remain appalling, including claims-based

⁵ Macfarlane, D. 2005. False claims on adult literacy. *Mail & Guardian*. www.mg.co.za/articlePage.aspx?articleid=235068&area=/the_teacher/teacher_features/ Accessed 17 April 2006.

⁶ Project Literacy (undated) SANLI project. www.projectliteracy.org.za/projectpg.htm. Accessed 17 April 2006

payment which is often late or not forthcoming, no leave and UIF benefits, inadequate training, and inconsistencies in conditions of service across provinces. Many educators within the formal system leave “for greener pastures” because of these poor conditions, and the quality of the remaining educators is sometimes poor: “[adult] centres have become dumping sites for anything rejected by the department of education” (Educators’ Indaba Report, 2006, p3).

Adult educators remain largely unorganised and their interests neglected by existing educator unions. This makes them extremely vulnerable to government cost-cutting and budget-balancing measures. For example, in 2006 the Department of Education closed Public Adult Learning Centres in KwaZulu-Natal for three months in order to “curb over-expenditure” (*Talking Adult Learning*, 3, 2006, p1). ABET appears to be perceived by government as a soft target for this kind of bureaucratic measure.

Relationship with the Department of Education

During the period of the ALN’s existence, the organisation has acted as a “watchdog” in the ABET field and raised issues of concern such as educators’ Conditions of Service, underfunding of ABET, irrelevant curricula and a general failure to deliver. It has done so vociferously using a variety of methods, including conference resolutions, petitions, open letters to the Minister of Education, and marches on parliament. The Department of Education has, on the whole, not responded well to criticism and, for a long time, did not engage with the ALN because of its critical position. “They would literally close doors on us,” according to one ALN member. ALN members in all provinces researched had similar experiences. Referring to the past relationship between the ALN and the Department of Education, one ALN leader stated, “In our country we have failed because the Department of Education sees the ALN as an enemy not as a partner.” One ALN leader described this tension between being “the critical voice in the sector” and “working with the Department of Education” as a “schizophrenic existence”, and acknowledged that working in partnership with the Department had not always been effective.

However, there were indications of a thawing in the relationship between the ALN and Department of Education, both at a national and provincial level. In the Western Cape, for example, ALN members are represented on an Adult Learning Forum which advises the Department. The Head of ABET in the province acknowledged the Adult Learning Forum as “a group to be reckoned with”. In 2004, the national Adult Learner’s Week conference was planned jointly between the ALN and Department of Education. In 2006 the Minister of Education responded personally to a letter addressed to her concerning problems with adult literacy and adult basic education. In it she acknowledged “that ABET delivery can be improved and accelerated” and that the Department has given “insufficient focus” to ABET in the past. She called on the ALN to “continue to play a role in addressing the needs of our adults” – a tone markedly different to

the previous hostility and/or denial expressed by the Department (Pandor, 2006, p2).

3.4.2 The internal environment

Shift to service provision

Perhaps the most significant and far-reaching shift has been the ALN's decision to become a provider of adult education service provision within a development context. This was a direct response to the challenge of funding and the need to diversify funding sources – the ALN has been dependent on a single core funder since its inception. This change should be understood in relation to the broader environment explored above, specifically the decline of funding to the NGO sector and the rise of the skills development system and the SETAs. The shift began in 2003 when the ALN began to work on accreditation as a service provider and in 2005 the ALN obtained money from UNESCO to implement a programme linking HIV/AIDS and income generation. The ALN became an accredited provider with the Health and Welfare SETA. This focus was extended in 2006 when the ALN, together with two other service providers, won a Department of Health tender to train 326 learners in Ancillary Health Care in the Western Cape and 1200 new learners in 2007. Interestingly, the money for the programme came via the Expanded Public Works Programme, which is partly funded by the National Skills Fund. Another ALN proposal to the ETDP SETA relating to project management is currently pending.

The shift to service provision meant that the ALN became an employer of project staff for the first time, with eight to ten staff members (where previously there had been only one full-time staff member). It has also meant that the ALN national co-ordinator has invested energy and attention on the project which “shifted us away from our initial course.” The benefits have included a higher profile in the adult learning sector, recognition for excellence in service provision, and the generation of income to support the ALN's other activities.

While the ALN conference resolutions of 2002 provided the ALN with a clear mandate to pursue its primary objectives of advocacy, communication and research, there has been no such explicit mandate concerning service provision from its membership. A number of members expressed concern over the implications of service provision for the ALN's relationships with its member organisations.

- “When the ALN became a service provider it got into competition with member organisations”
- “[I'm] Not crazy about it [the ALN as service provider]. There's going to be conflict. It's a very petty field with lots of competition... You don't want to be competing with the people you are representing”

- “Should our member organisations that are providers find that we are in competition with them, then the ALN is going to be another NLC [National Literacy Co-operation]. At the same time, we can’t just sit and wait for donors and not sustain ourselves. Actually, we are in a predicament”
- Concern that service provision could be “derailing the organisation in terms of its initial objectives”
- “Some members interested in the ALN as a provider would want the ALN to win tenders and they become sub-contractors, but this could undermine [the ALN’s engagement in] advocacy relating to development”

While many ALN members acknowledged the need for the ALN to generate new sources of income, and recognized that the service provider role could raise the ALN’s profile and win recognition, there was a lot of ambiguity about the other implications of the role: the potential for conflict and competition with the ALN member organisations; the danger of diverting the ALN’s attention from its advocacy and capacity-building roles.

There is also a legal dimension to the debate regarding service provision. The ALN’s Deed of Trust does not explicitly make provision in its ‘objects’ for generating funds from service provision, and it seems unlikely from the Deed that the founders had this intention. The ‘Object’ of the Trust is “to lobby and support existing organisations in the sector for the purpose of empowering historically disadvantaged people in South Africa” by: leading advocacy campaigns; facilitating and encouraging networking processes; supporting information sharing and dialogue; organizing conferences; commissioning research; and lobbying government and potential funders (Adult Learning Network Deed of Trust, 2002, p1-2). Provision of services is not mentioned here. Clause 7.2 under the heading ‘Limits on Trustees Powers’ states that “The trustees may only pursue activities which are aimed at fulfilling the objects of the Deed of Trust” (p5). While it may be argued that providing services in order to generate funds constitutes an activity that is aimed at fulfilling the objects of the Deed of Trust, this is far from explicit in the Deed of Trust and arguably in contravention of the spirit of the Deed. Thus, if the ALN pursues service provision, some revision of the Deed of Trust, as well as to the network’s mission and objectives, may be required.

Focus on educators

Many respondents identified adult educators and adult learners as the ALN’s two primary target groups. The Adult Learners’ Week provincial and national awards, for example, recognize excellence in both educators and learners. Learners have been involved in the ALN activities such as award ceremonies, celebrations such as outings, and protest marches in Gauteng and the Western Cape. However, some felt that there had been a shift in the ALN’s emphasis towards educators’ needs and interests, and a relative neglect of learners. This was reflected in the

growing attention paid to educators' Conditions of Service in the organisation and the neglect of learners issues at national conferences.

Although there have been articles about learners in *Talking Adult Learning*, these have been comparatively few when compared to articles about and for educators. The newsletter was viewed as primarily for educators. The 2006 Conference Resolutions recognized that the current conference programme was "too academic in nature and that the tone, language and structure may be intimidating and inhibit effective participation" and called for a "learner-centred agenda" (*Talking Adult Learning*, 3, 2006, p20).

Shift in Board's functions

The Board was initially made up of prominent provincial players in the ABET and literacy fields who wished to take up adult learning concerns after the demise of the National Literacy Co-operation (NLC) and the Adult Educators and Trainers Association of South Africa (AETASA). It included both Department of Education employees and NGO activists. One of the anomalies about the Board is that Board members are also provincial co-ordinators. At one level, as Board members, their function is to set policy and direct the organisation. At another level, as provincial co-ordinators, their function should involve reporting to the national co-ordinator and implementing the ALN objectives on the ground.

To further complicate the various roles and functions of Board members, a question has arisen over the Board members' personal interests in service provision. There are thus a number of areas that require clarity. In addition, some conflict has arisen in the Board. There is a need to develop consensus around co-ordination, management and governance functions within the organisation.

A number of respondents expressed the need for "new blood" on the Board since the organisation was entering a new phase of its life and the existing members did not necessarily have the all the experience and expertise required to deal with this. Some respondents also raised a concern about Department of Education employees being members of the Board given the ALN's critical advocacy role and the potential conflict of interest that such Board members might face.

There is a need for a thorough review of the roles and responsibilities of the Board, and a clarification of the relationship between the Board and the national co-ordinator and the provincial co-ordinators and between the national co-ordinator and the provincial co-ordinator.

Relationship with DVV

As the sole core funder of the ALN since its inception, DVV has a very close relationship with the organisation to the extent of sharing premises and occasional administrative support. Respondents expressed appreciation for DVV's visionary role in sustaining the ALN: "DVV has been amazingly generous and understanding. They've played a huge role [in sustaining the ALN]. We're still here and fighting fit" (NGO Director, Gauteng). Without DVV's support, the ALN would quite probably no longer exist and certainly would not be in the position of relative strength that it has attained.

However, some concerns were expressed about the closeness of the relationship and the consequent influence that DVV is perceived to exercise over the ALN. These included a feeling that the Board was expected simply to rubber stamp the direction set by the funder. Other respondents questioned the relationship between the ALN and other organisations funded by DVV, such as the REFLECT Network. They expressed concern that the REFLECT Network was given undue prominence in *Talking Adult Learning*, for example, and that the ALN was especially favouring and promoting one among many member organisations and/or methodologies/practices.

3.5 Conclusion

The discussion above shows a close link between the external and internal environments of the ALN. For example, the ALN's shift to service provision has been strongly informed by the lack of funding available from donors to the adult education NGO sector and the new sources of funding available from SETAs and government departments in the form of contracts and tenders for service provision. Sustainability, rather than mission and objectives, has been a key determinant of the ALN's new direction. There is a need to reconcile the sustainability imperative with the ALN's mission.

The ALN has evolved from a pioneering advocacy and networking body run with a tiny full-time staff complement and relying on provincial member organisations to host it, to a well-established organisation with a staff of ten and an influential set of relationships with government and civil society. The composition and role of the Board, which suited the ALN's initial stage of development, is no longer suitable and requires review. We make recommendations regarding these issues in sections 3 and 4.

4. FACING THE FUTURE: SCENARIOS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 ALN Scenarios

The following three scenarios were developed during and from the evaluation study to assist the ALN in its strategic planning process. They attempt to place the options facing the ALN in clear relief so that they may be differentiated from one another and considered on the basis of their associated advantages and problems. All three scenarios received support from various members of the ALN, and there tended to be differences of emphasis in different provinces.

Planning by/through looking at different scenarios is useful in that it enables the organisation to 'learn about the future' by subjecting various options for future direction to critical scrutiny. They enable an organisation to imagine its future in a number of forms and to project the benefits and limitations of each option. This brings out options that might have been implicit in the emerging practice of an organisation and to critically assess them in relation to the organisation's mission and objectives, resources and wider context. This can help to avoid a situation in which the organisation slides into a scenario because of immediate contextual pressures without the necessary consideration, and then faces unforeseen consequences when it is too late.

Although three distinct scenarios are set out below, in reality it may not be so easy to separate the scenarios and the ALN may decide to incorporate aspects of more than one scenario in its future direction. Various combinations of scenarios were advocated by some members. The presentation below does not intend to suggest that scenarios are mutually exclusive. On the other hand, adopting more than one scenario might generate serious tensions within the organisation in terms of its mission and objectives, its members' needs and expectations, and between the organisation and other stake-holders. For example, playing the role of both an educator union and a service provider would involve obvious contradictions and conflicts of interest, since a service provider could employ educators who would then be represented by their employer in a dispute with itself. Similarly, if the ALN plays the role of both an advocacy network that brings together adult learning service providers, and a service provider itself, it could end up in competition with its own members.

Scenario One: Educator Union

Description

The ALN sets itself up as a union for adult educators. Its largest primary target group is ABET practitioners employed in Public Adult Learning Centres. This

gives the ALN a huge potential membership. This would include ABET practitioners in other sectors, community development workers, community health workers, etc. In this scenario the ALN furthers its members' interests by negotiating improved conditions of service in bargaining fora. It advocates for the professionalisation of adult education.

Rationale

Adult educators are not adequately represented by existing teacher unions whose primary focus is school teachers. As a result, their interests regarding conditions of service are neglected. The Department of Education is able to victimize them (e.g. halting payment of educators for months to cut costs, as happened in KZN) without fear of serious union repercussions. They occupy insecure and poorly rewarded positions. Morale is often low. There has been growing pressure on the ALN by adult education practitioners to play this role.

By constituting itself formally as a trade union, the ALN would have greater leverage over Department of Education policy and implementation. It would have a formal position on various committees and decision-making structures which could increase its influence.

Advantages

- Increased membership
- Financial assistance from membership fees
- Recognition by and leverage with Department of Education
- Stronger voice for adult educators, a marginalized constituency within education
- Potentially enhanced national profile and clout

Problems

- Could lose networking and advocacy functions
- Learners' interests could be subordinated to educators' interests
- Energy taken up by salary and Conditions of Service negotiations
- Danger of co-option by government
- Difficulty of mobilizing and organising educators, many of whom are part-time and temporary
- Neglect of educators outside the formal sphere.
- Possibility of stepping on toes of other unions.

Scenario Two: Education and Training Provider

Description

The ALN sets itself up as a provider of education and training services within the public sector, private sector and community domains. Such services could include HIV/AIDS education, project management, capacity-building and entrepreneurship.

Rationale

The primary motivation is financial. The income generated from selling services would diversify the ALN's funding base and make it more sustainable. Some of this income could be used to support advocacy, communication and research work.

The ALN is well-positioned to take advantage of service provision opportunities given its extensive network and hard-won credibility with government departments, SETAs and organisations in the ABET field. It has also gone through the rigors of SETA registration and could act as an umbrella for members in service provision projects. The quality of its programmes is assured.

The ALN has developed marketable expertise over the years from its advocacy and communication work.

The ALN could work with the ALN member organisations to develop capacity through partnerships and consortia. This could assist in sustaining NGOs and CBOs within the adult education field, and in making their interventions more effective.

Advantages

- Financial sustainability
- Engagement in effective delivery of services
- Intervention in neglected fields of practice
- Enhanced status from being a reputable provider
- Generation of experience and expertise in niche areas of provision
- Ability to mobilize funds from government sources for development-oriented service provision projects

Problems

- Potential clash of interests with member organisations, e.g. tendering for the same work
- Down-scaling of advocacy and networking roles because of concentration of energy and resources on service delivery

- Compromise of critical advocacy role if engaged in service delivery to government (biting the hand that feeds you)
- Danger of replicating fate of previous networking and co-ordinating bodies e.g. NLC
- Registration and accreditation regimes might narrow focus and restrict activities to particular sectors

Scenario Three: Networking and advocacy organisation in wider Adult Learning field

Description

The ALN pursues its current mission and objectives of advocacy, communication and research within the wider field of adult learning, adding to ABET and literacy areas such as community development, HIV/AIDS education, agricultural extension, entrepreneurship training, further education and training, civic education, etc. the ALN develops the field of adult education across a wider spectrum, including both the formal and non-formal, and creates a public profile for adult education and lifelong learning. The ALN makes a stronger link between adult education and national development imperatives and links adult education to the development agenda.

Rationale

Adult educators in various field of development are neglected and unorganized. The ALN serves both a development and an adult education agenda by bringing together these practitioners and giving them a voice. The advocacy role remains critical in the adult learning field because of the propensity of government and society more widely to ignore adult learning needs. In addition, the watchdog role of an advocacy organisation puts pressure on government to allocate reasonable resources to adult learning programmes and to use these resources optimally. Effective and holistically conceived advocacy contributes to keeping adult learning on the national learning agenda and to linking it with development.

Advantages

- Vast potential membership
- Wider advocacy role within development
- Insights into links between adult education and development

Problems

- Financial sustainability
- Diffusion of focus
- Compromising existing strengths in the ABET and literacy fields by spreading energies and resources too thinly

4.2 Recommendations

This section presents recommendations in eight key areas that emerged from the evaluation as critical for the ALN's future direction and effective functioning. These were vision, mission and objectives; structures; staffing; service provision, relations with state organs; educators' needs; learners' needs and member organisations' needs.

4.2.1 Vision, mission and objectives

Motivation

The ALN's mission and objectives were developed six years ago in a context and at a time significantly different from the present. Since then, as this report has outlined, the ALN's external and internal environments have shifted. Of particular importance are the shifts in the funding environment, the emergence of new sources of funding in government through the skills development system, the prevalence of socio-economic challenges such as HIV/AIDS and the persistence of illiteracy. The ALN's vision, mission and objectives need to be updated and revised to suit the present context.

Recommendation

The ALN should conduct a strategic planning exercise in which it revisits its vision, mission and objectives in the light of the current context.

4.2.2 Structures

Motivation

The ALN was founded by a Board of Trustees comprised of individuals with a history of involvement in adult learning drawn from different provinces. The Board members also played the role of provincial co-ordinators. While this arrangement may have been appropriate at the time of setting up the organisation, it is not appropriate for the ALN in its present phase where there is a need for a greater clarification of roles and responsibilities. Having provincial co-ordinators sit on the Board confuses two levels of operation: that of governance and that of management/co-ordination. Provincial co-ordinators should not sit on the Board as their role is to implement the vision and mission of the organisation, not to govern the organisation. Such a confusion of roles is bound to result in conflicts of interest, e.g. when the Board is deciding on matters of financial policy which directly affect provincial co-ordinators. It also confuses channels of communication and accountability. Provincial co-ordinators should be accountable and report to the national co-ordinator, who, in turn should report

to the Board on behalf of the organisation. If the Board is comprised of provincial co-ordinators, the reporting procedure becomes absurdly circular and the Board is drawn away from its primary function of governance to management and co-ordination issues.

Recommendations

The role of the Board as a governance structure should be clarified. This should include overall direction, policy-making and financial oversight. It should not include micro-management, which should be left to the manager/s and/or co-ordinator/s.

The roles of provincial co-ordination and Board membership should be disaggregated. Provincial co-ordinators should not be Board members and vice versa.

There should be a separate structure established, whose function it is to co-ordinate the implementation of national programmes.

4.2.3 Staffing

Motivation

At the moment there is no clear reporting link between the national co-ordinator and provincial structures. This is because 'provincial co-ordinators' are not full-time employees of the ALN. They characteristically run their own organisations and/or they are Department of Education employees. In addition, they are Board members and see the national co-ordinator as accountable to them rather than vice versa. The consequence is that the ALN is only as strong as its provincial host organisations and the fora organized by them. While this ensures that the ALN is owned by the provinces, it also means that the ALN hardly exists in provinces with weak adult learning organisations, and that the ALN's national identity is often submerged in the identity of the provincial host organisation or structure.

Recommendations

Provincial co-ordinators should be independent of host organisations in the provinces. They should be employed directly by the ALN, either on a part-time or full-time basis, depending on available funds, and report directly to the national co-ordinator. The reporting on the funding to the provinces should be more onerous.

Provincial co-ordinators should co-operate closely with local organisations in helping to build their capacities and in developing the adult learning field.

Provincial co-ordinators should play a role in gathering and collating membership data, co-ordinating provincial programmes in line with national goals, liaising with provincial structures, networking with provincial stakeholders and strengthening the link between national and provincial structures.

4.2.4 Service Provision

Motivation

The shift to becoming a service provider has been the major internal change for the ALN since its inception. This brings in welcome revenue to fund the ALN's advocacy function, raises the ALN's profile and addresses the link between adult learning and development. However, the shift to service provision has major implications for the way the management and staffing of the organisation operates and for its relationships with members. Running a service provision operation requires dedicated management skills and it is impossible for the same person to manage the ALN's service provision and fulfil its advocacy functions at the same time in a sustainable way. Also, service provision has the potential to alienate member organisations who might view the ALN as competitors as well as to divert the ALN from its crucial advocacy and networking functions. It might also compromise its independence as a critical voice, if it is contracted to deliver services by government organs. The ALN thus needs to reconcile and balance its service provision with its advocacy and networking mission, both in terms of internal management and external relationships.

Recommendations

The ALN should set up a separate wing with a different name to perform the service delivery function, e.g. 'Adult Learning Solutions' so that the service delivery function is not confused with the advocacy and networking functions.

The service delivery wing should engage with member organisations in partnerships and consortia to apply for and deliver on contracts and tenders, at national and provincial levels.

The service delivery operation should recruit and employ someone with strong personnel and financial management skills and project management capacity, including project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The ALN membership should be clearly informed about the function of this entity and its potential benefits for them, as opposed to it being in competition with them.

The profits made by this service delivery entity should be used to further the ALN's objectives around advocacy, communication and research.

4.2.5 Relationships with the Department of Education and other State providers

Motivation

During its relatively brief history, the ALN's relationship with the Department of Education and other government agencies has been fraught with moments of conflict, but has also involved close co-operation, especially in the last few years. The nature of this relationship requires continual reassessment and careful discernment. If the ALN becomes too intimate with government, it is in danger of losing its function as a critical voice of civil society and of alienating its membership. If, on the other hand, it fails to co-operate with government where appropriate, it forfeits its potential contribution to making a concrete and practical difference where it can. The challenge is to remain independent but also critically and constructively engaged.

Recommendations

The ALN should maintain an independent position in relation to the state, allowing for both co-operation and criticism when necessary.

The presence of employees of the state on the ALN's Board should be reviewed and clarified against the background that the ALN represents civil society and is not a state organ.

4.2.6 Educators' needs

Motivation

The study revealed that state employed educators look to the ALN to represent their interests and champion their cause with government. It also indicated that adult educators are not well served by existing unions. The ALN has developed an important role for itself in representing educators' concerns and conditions to unions and government. On the other hand, the ALN represents a wider constituency than PALC educators. This includes NGO practitioners, development workers inside and outside the state, adult learners, and a range of civil society organisations engaged in or concerned with adult learning.

Recommendations

The ALN should mobilise educators and represent their interests by engaging on their behalf with unions and employers, and encouraging their membership of progressive unions.

The ALN should support educators' 'indabas' and forums at national and provincial levels.

The ALN should find ways to build the capacity of educators to fight for their own interests, representation and conditions of service.

The ALN should not become an educator union itself but retain its role of representing the adult learning sector as a whole as a civil society organisation.

4.2.7 Learners' needs

Motivation

Adult learners are a particularly vulnerable and often invisible constituency in South Africa. Those learners with poor levels of literacy have very little access to public resources and discourses. As a consequence, their voices remain largely hidden.

Recommendations

The ALN should represent the needs of learners and celebrates their achievements through conferences, awards, social activities, competitions and other creative methods.

The ALN should explore ways of making learners' voices heard more clearly and vocally in the public domain.

4.2.8 Member organisations

Motivation

Data about member organisations is either incomplete or does not exist. This is a serious shortcoming because there appears to be no way of knowing exactly who the ALN represents, in terms of member organisations and individuals. This weakens the ALN in its dealings with government and others that may question its mandate and representivity. Other kinds of information, such as what these member organisations do, what level of skills and expertise they have, and what they can offer the wider ALN network, would be useful to gather in building the ALN as a national organisation and key player in the adult learning field; and in instances when the ALN brings organisations together in a particular province for service delivery opportunities or for joint programme initiatives around development issues such as HIV/AIDS.

Recommendations

The ALN should compile a comprehensive national database of member organisations and associate organisations and individuals

The ALN should hold national programme planning meetings with member organisations around specific programme and campaign issues, e.g. HIV/AIDS, mass literacy campaign, etc.

Conclusion

Each of the eight key areas above should be carefully considered in ALN strategic planning along with any other areas that the evaluators may have missed which may emanate from the ALN members or the Board, in order that the ALN may function optimally for the benefit of all adult learning stakeholders.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

ALN Evaluation: Learners' Interview Schedule

Name of learner:

Age:

Male/Female:

ABET level:

Centre name:

Own learning

1. What are you learning (learning areas and levels)?
2. Why did you decide to learn?
3. What do you hope to achieve?

ALN

4. Have you heard of the Adult Learning Network?
5. If so, what do you know about it?
6. Have you been involved in ALN activities? If so, tell me about them.
7. How effective is the ALN? Do you think it is a good thing? Why/why not?

Learner needs and concerns

8. As an adult learner, what problems and challenges do you face?
9. Do other adult learners face the same problems and challenges? Please explain.
10. What would you like an organisation that represents adult learners to do?

ALN Evaluation: Educators' Interview Schedule

Name of educator:

Male/Female:

Qualifications:

Centre name:

Own work

11. What are you teaching (learning areas and levels)?
12. Please tell me about your general conditions of employment.
13. Are you satisfied with these conditions? Why/why not?

ALN

14. Have you heard of the Adult Learning Network?
15. If so, what do you know about it?
16. Have you been involved in ALN activities? If so, tell me about them.
17. How effective is the ALN? (Probe around key objectives of advocacy, research and communication)
18. Do you think it is a good thing? Why/why not?

Educator needs and concerns

19. As an adult educator, what problems and challenges do you face?
20. Do other adult educators face the same problems and challenges? Please explain.
21. What would you like an organisation that represents adult educators to do?

A LN Interview Schedule: Member organisations

Background

1. What has been your involvement as an organisation with ALN?
2. What is the relationship between your organisation and ALN?

Mission and objectives

3. What is your understanding of ALN's mission?
4. To what extent do you think ALN has achieved its mission?
5. ALN's key objectives include advocacy, communication and research.
 - a) How has ALN gone about achieving them?
 - b) How well has it done on these objectives?
6. What have been ALN's greatest achievements over the last seven years?
7. What have been its major failings?
8. What problems or challenges does it face in achieving its mission?
9. Who are ALN's main target groups? Have these changed over the years? If so, how and why?

Changing environment

10. What have been the major changes in ABET within the province and in the country over the last seven years?
11. What have been the changes in ALN's role?

ALN Interview Schedule: Board members

Mission and objectives

12. What is your understanding of ALN's mission?
13. To what extent do you think ALN has achieved its mission?
14. ALN's key objectives include advocacy, communication and research.
 - a) How has ALN gone about achieving them?
 - b) How well has it done on these objectives?
15. What have been ALN's greatest achievements over the last seven years?
16. What have been its major failings?
17. What problems or challenges does it face in achieving its mission?
18. Who are ALN's main target groups? Have these changed over the years? If so, how and why?
19. What are ALN's most important relationships? Have these changed over the years? If so, how and why?

Resources

20. What are ALN's major sources of funding and support?
21. How does ALN's management structure operate? Do you think this is an effective system?
22. How is the budget constructed?
23. Please describe the relationship between ALN's national office and the provinces.
24. What challenges do the provinces face in their work?
25. How does ALN communicate with its members?
26. How does ALN deal with issues of financial accountability at national and provincial levels?

Changing environment

27. What have been the major changes that have affected ALN over the last seven years? How have these changes affected ALN?
28. What have been the key developments within the organisation?
29. How does ALN relate to global initiatives such as EFA?

APPENDIX B: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

List of interviewees

Barry, Bev
Birkett, Jenny
Booi, Khunjulwa
Christians, Eunice
Cibi, Ntombovuyo
Damon, Andre
Danile, Vumile
Dean, Pat
Hasheni, Cynthia Ntsiki
Helme, Lin
Hunter, Farrell
Jack, Thandi
Kutoane, Martha
Leibrandt, April
Leumer, Wolfgang
Mokonane, Archie
Msotywa, Moses
Ncgobo, Sindi
Ncoyo, Gertrude
Ndlakuse, Dumisani
Nsibande, Dumisani
Nyovane, Nonhlanhla
Pietersen, Pat
Ramdas, Chris
Rustin, Jonovan
Smith, Ren
Tshetlo, Violet
Tumzi, Phumla
Witbooi, Nomhle
Zaleni, Spamandla John
Zazini, Liziwe
Zulu, Lucy

Written input

Brock, Freda
Harris, John
Thomas, Jacky

APPENDIX C: LIST OF DOCUMENTS

ALN Documentary Analysis

1. 'Talking Adult Learning'
June/July 2001
October 2001
March 2002
May 2002
August 2002
October 2002
July 2003
June 2004
September 2004
April 2005
Editions 1,2,3 2006
2. Adult Learning Network Deed of Trust, 2002
3. Adult Learning Network (ALN): Final Report July-December 2004
4. Adult Learning Network: National Co-ordinator's Report 2005
5. Annual Report for IZZ/DVV Partner Organisations (2005)
6. Adult Learning Network (ALN) – National Report (September 2006)
7. 2006 Resolutions (from ALN Conference 6-8 September 2006)
8. The Adult Learning Network (brochure)
9. 'Freezing of ABET Educator Posts and Closing Centres in Pinetown is Unacceptable!!!' (message of support form ALN, undated [August 2006?])
10. Adult Education and Training Conference 2006 (Programme)
11. David Macfarlane 'Lean months ahead for teachers' *Mail & Guardian* Nov 24-30
12. Educators Indaba Report, 22-23 November 2006.
13. 'Adult Literacy and Basic Education in South Africa', 1 December 2006 (letter from Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor to Mr Farrell Hunter)
14. 'Threat of Closure of PALCs in KZN and Freezing of Educator Posts' (letter from Farrell Hunter to Ina Cronje, MEC Education, 12 October 2006)
15. List of ALN – EC Member Organisations
16. Western Cape List
17. KZN List