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## DVV International

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Lifelong.

# Adult Learning & Education – System Building Approach (ALESBA)

## Toolkit for Implementation

# An Overview of the Approach and Toolkit

# Imprint

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

**A key challenge many government and non-government adult education institutions face is the lack of a system to develop, fund, monitor, and support Adult Learning and Education (ALE) at a national, regional, and local level. While many countries have more or less sophisticated systems in place for primary and secondary schooling, higher education, and sometimes vocational education, the same cannot be said for ALE.**

DVV International has more than 50 years' experience in supporting the establishment and improvement of ALE systems. One lesson learnt from these efforts is that isolated interventions bear a high risk of failure. With this background in mind, DVV International started a process of developing a holistic approach for sustainably improving ALE systems.  We called it the "Adult Learning and Education System Building Approach" (ALESBA). The process of developing the approach was shaped by the principles of action learning that started in the East/Horn of Africa region and since then was taken up by many other African countries.

ALESBA is a tool, which can guide governments, civil society, universities and others (e.g., the private sector) in the complex task of system building, at the same time the approach is open to improvement, adaptation, and modification. ALESBA was born in Africa but rests on a generic conceptual framework of what an ALE system constitutes and can therefore be adapted for use in any country. Underlying principles and considerations such as participation, partnership, ownership, capacity building and sustainability, among others, guide the implementation. ALESBA employs systems thinking because it allows us to more effectively examine the complexities we work with and to test the way we see problems. It enables us to find the root causes and see leverage points where modifications may be most meaningful. It takes a longer-term view of solving problems sustainably and looks at ALE service delivery from both the demand and supply side within the governance structures and systems of a country. It requires all stakeholders to take up their roles and responsibilities within the system from national to local level and involving all sectors that make up the scope and definition of ALE in the country.

This brochure provides an overview of the approach and toolkit that is implemented across five phases. The approach is captured in a series of six booklets and the full set can be downloaded from the DVV International (www.dvv-international.de/en/ale-toolbox) and Moja (www.mojaafrica.net) websites. The Moja Adult Education Africa platform also provides online training opportunities in the approach.
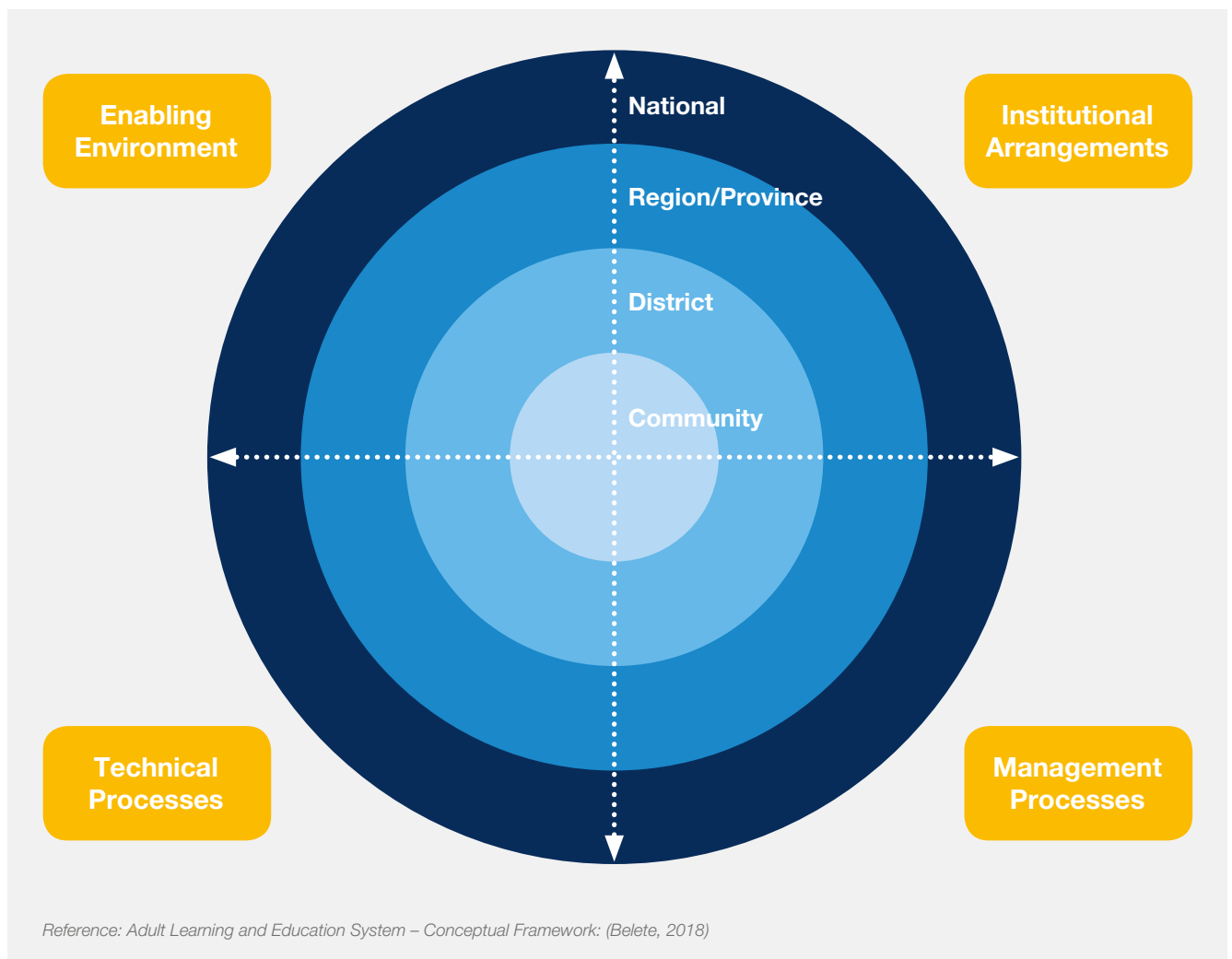
# 2. THE ALESBA CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND SYSTEM BUILDING BLOCKS

At the heart of the ALESBA lies a conceptual framework that captures the elements and building blocks of a comprehensive adult learning and education system. A system is usually understood as an entity composed of different elements, structures and processes which are interconnected and interdependent with feedback loops. In the context of ALE, all elements and processes needed to deliver ALE services must be considered. System building includes the process of assessing and diagnosing the system and finding alternatives to redesign/improve the system, test the improved design, make adjustments and scale up interventions to reach a wider target group in a larger geographical area, e.g., nation-wide. The ALESBA Conceptual Framework[1] is presented below:



Enabling Environment

Institutional Arrangements

National

Region/Province

District

Community

Technical Processes

Management Processes

Reference: Adult Learning and Education System – Conceptual Framework: (Belete, 2018)

1 Belete, S: ALESBA – Introduction to the Approach and Toolkit, 2020

The conceptual framework suggests that an ALE system should consider all tiers/spheres of governance across different levels. This depends on the governance structure of a particular country. The concentric circles in the framework represent each sphere of governance and imply so-called 'vertical integration', meaning links and feedback loops between each level. If the scope and definition of ALE have an integrated nature, which considers services such as functional adult literacy combined with non-formal skills training, etc. ('horizontal integration'), these ALE services are understood to be collectively delivered across the same tiers/spheres of governance. For a fully functional adult education system, four main elements

(or components) are needed. Each system element has several building blocks that should be in place for the system to function. The toolkit identifies five prioritised building blocks within each element, but there may be more. Since we are referring to a system with interrelated and interdependent links, it should be understood that the elements and building blocks do not operate in silos but are linked to each other through several processes. Processes consist of a range of activities linked to each other that turns inputs (people, information, and money, etc.), into outputs (services delivered), to meet policy and operational objectives. The building blocks within each of the four system elements are:

| Enabling Environment | Institutional Arrangements | Management Processes | Technical Processes |
|---|---|---|---|
| ALE Policy | ALE Implementation Structures | Participatory Planning Processes | Localised Curricula |
| ALE Strategy | Human Resources | Appropriate Budget and Resource Allocation | Clear ALE Programme Design & Methodology |
| ALE Programme Implementation Guidelines | Leadership & Management | M&E System | Capacity Development at all Implementation Levels |
| Qualifications Framework | Accountability Mechanisms | Management Information System | Material Development |
| Legal Framework | Partnership Structures between State/Non-state Actors | Coordination and Cooperation Processes | Learner Assessments |

**Note that:**

**The lines in the conceptual framework between these four elements are not solid, indicating that processes flow between the four elements in both horizontal and vertical directions. Furthermore, each element plays across all levels of governance and considers the definition of ALE and all sectors/stakeholders involved in the delivery of services.**

# 3. THE ALESBA PHASES

Depending on the status of the system at the time of starting the journey of system building it can take anything from six to 12 years or more to establish a fully functioning system that can deliver needs-oriented adult education services. The ALESBA consists of five phases as described briefly below. Each phase considers all the elements and building blocks as per the ALESBA Conceptual Framework across different levels. The framework also takes into consideration the definition of ALE and cross-sectoral programmes. Although the phases follow one after the other, the process is not necessarily linear. For example, consensus building is an ongoing process and the assessment of the status of the system (Phase Two) can be repeated after implementation has started (Phase Four) to determine what progress has been made. Stakeholders often need to see the results of the assessment (Phase Two) to understand the urgent need for system building – and therefore, Phase Two can contribute to consensus building. Each phase is covered in detail in the series of booklets in this toolkit.

## Phase One: Consensus Building

Before embarking on a long-term process of ALE System Building, all stakeholders need to agree on a common interest and the necessity to improve the ALE system for optimised adult education service delivery. It is becoming increasingly clear that governments cannot meet the continually growing demand for services by acting alone. There is a need to co-operate and seek support from other sectors of society including NGOs, universities and the private sector.

Considering the complexity of stakeholder relations, consensus building is not a once-off step, but rather a crucial intervention conducted throughout the five ALESBA phases. Phase One of the ALESBA unpacks the conceptual understanding, principles and outlines a roadmap for consensus building. It covers the following steps:

- Preparation: A preparatory period to convince stakeholders to engage in adult learning and education system building.

- Start-up: Start-up activities of consensus building include defining the scope and context of ALE in the country, agreeing on the major existing challenges of the system and a visioning exercise.

- On the way: Embracing consensus building across all the ALESBA phases with teamwork, partnerships, conflict management, risk management, etc.

## Phase Two: Assessment and Diagnosis

Phase Two consists of two parts. Once stakeholders have reached a consensus to start ALE system building, the status of the current ALE system needs to be assessed. The assessment provides baseline data and will assist in the design of a new improved system. The assessment of the system is conducted from the demand and supply side based on the ALESBA conceptual framework. The supply side assessment provides both quantitative and qualitative data on the status of the system.

Once the assessment is completed, a diagnosis has to be carried out to determine the root causes of system blockages and failures. The tools of assessment and diagnosis in Phase Two can be used at any time during other ALESBA phases and form part of the M&E tools of the ALESBA.

## Phase Three: Alternatives Analysis and Design

Phase Three feeds the outcomes of Phase Two into a decision-making process to design a better and improved system. For each decision to be taken there are alternatives to be considered and weighed against each other. Phase Three consists of four main steps:

- Find and prioritise the best entry points to improve the ALE system.
- Consider the alternatives for the redesign of prioritised system building blocks.
- Assess the impact of the redesign on the whole system.
- Consolidate the redesign of the system into a cohesive ALE system design response framework.

Systems are implemented by different stakeholders and the redesign of the ALE system will also require attention to the partnerships, roles and responsibilities and mandates of different stakeholders. The alternatives analysis and design process should be driven and conducted by a core selected representative group from all ALESBA stakeholders.

## Phase Four: Implement and Test

Phase Four provides the opportunity to test run and implement the newly designed ALE system (Phase Three) in selected areas and with specific target groups on a smaller scale before reviewing, adjusting and scaling up to a national system in Phase Five of the ALESBA.

A national ALESBA steering committee is formed to guide the implementation and testing of the new system. Stakeholder participation during the entire Phase Four is crucial for the success of the new system. The institutional capacity of individual stakeholder organisations may need strengthening to fulfil their roles and responsibilities.

The implementation of the new system must be carefully monitored and evaluated. The data should be recorded in the MIS to inform Phase Five. Learning insights and best practices must be recorded to provide insights for upscaling potential. Information should be gathered from the demand side to know whether the new system addressed the needs and interests of the target group.

## Phase Five: Review, adjust and up-scale

Phase Five of the ALESBA pushes the focus and agenda towards the rationale for ALE system building or strengthening in the first place, namely, to have a national ALE system that can deliver quality services to all its users. Phase Five consists of three major sub-phases/steps. To improve the system a review of the outcomes of the system that was piloted on a smaller scale during Phase Four (Implement and Test) is a necessary first step. The review outcomes need to be analysed and adjustments will have to be made to strengthen the system and make it work better especially at a much larger scale (second step).

Ultimately, we need to have a national ALE system in place that can deliver services to all ALE learners and target groups. We need to go beyond fragmented one-off projects. Therefore, the practical implications of pursuing a systematic up-scaling approach are the focus of the third part of Phase Five.

# 4. CONCLUSION

Although it may seem Phase Five is the last phase, it is just the beginning of a new phase. Once the pilot system has been adjusted and the complex and long-term task of up-scaling starts, the ALESBA partners will have to continue to use system approaches to understand the system they work with and implement changes on the spot as required from both the demand and supply side of the system. The task of delivering ALE services is too big for one stakeholder to carry out and the ALESBA partners will have to continue to cooperate, build consensus and institutionalise their structures for holistic ALE service delivery. Therefore, the tools and processes in the ALESBA journey will be used repeatedly. The ALESBA conceptual framework, concepts and principles explained in the first booklet, 'Introduction to the Approach and Toolkit', will remain the framework of reference for all the phases and booklets. Ultimately reaching the objective of quality services for all ALE learners will always make the journey worthwhile.

DVV International is the Institute for International Cooperation of the Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband e. V. (DVV), the German Adult Education Association. DVV represents the interests of the approximately 900 adult education centres (Volkshochschulen) and their state associations, the largest further education providers in Germany. As the leading professional organisation in the field of adult education and development cooperation, DVV International has committed itself to support lifelong learning for more than 50 years. DVV International provides worldwide support for the establishment and development of sustainable adult education structures and systems for youth and adult learning and education. To achieve this, DVV International co-operates with civil society, government and academic partners in more than 30 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. DVV International finances its work through funds from the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the German Federal Foreign Office, the European Union as well as other donors.

The Adult Learning and Education System Building Approach (ALESBA) is a product of DVV International that can assist countries in building sustainable Adult Learning and Education (ALE) systems that can deliver a variety of ALE services to youth and adults. The ALESBA toolkit covers the conceptual framework of the approach with guidelines and practical tools to implement the approach across five phases.

**The toolkit consists of the following books:**
1. Introduction to the Approach and Toolkit
2. Phase One – Consensus Building
3. Phase Two – Assessment and Diagnosis
4. Phase Three – Alternatives Analysis and Design
5. Phase Four – Implement and Test
6. Phase Five – Review, Adjust and Up-scale

**For further information visit:**
www.mojaafrica.net
www.dvv-international.de/en/ale-toolbox

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ALESBA

### Can we use the ALESBA when the ALE system in the country is already functioning and in place?

The ALESBA can be applied at any stage of ALE system building, whether an established system is already in place or whether a country embarks on a new journey to define/redefine ALE as a sector/sub-sector. The different phases of the approach allows for multiple entry points to use the ALESBA.

### Is ALE system building and the ALESBA the same thing?

The answer is both yes and no. NO: All stakeholders in countries all over the world potentially engage in some form of ALE system building already. The ALESBA does not change this. YES: The ALESBA is fully based on the concept of ALE system building and is one potential approach (among others) that can assist ALE stakeholders to systematically build ALE systems.

### How do we use the ALESBA in the context of existing and ongoing ALE system building efforts/projects?

The ALESBA is a guideline to acknowledge and support the existing work and efforts towards a long term vision of ALE system building. The conceptual framework serves as a guiding instrument/compass of all the building blocks and system elements required for a well-functioning system. Based on the system assessment described in phase two, countries can map out a strategic journey of ALE system building and have the option to move through all the five phases, or start the process based on their existing status and needs. ALE stakeholders may therefore decide to use only selected tools, processes and booklets in the ALESBA.

### Does the ALESBA require capacity building?

The ALESBA booklets aim to give a comprehensive description of the five phases with a selection of practical tools that can be complimented with organisations' own tools and techniques. However, like any approach and methodology, capacity building of staff and partners is recommended. Online training on the Moja platform is available. See www.mojaafrica.net

### How do we contextualise the ALESBA for our own needs?

The ALESBA rests on the generic principles of ALE system building and can therefore be contextualised to the context and needs of any country. The conceptual framework can be adjusted as per the governance system of a country.

### Is the ALESBA difficult?

A differentiation should be made between ALE system building and the ALESBA. ALE system building is a complicated task. The ALESBA attempts to structure and systematise the process of ALE system building.

### How long does the ALESBA take?

ALE system building is a long process and successes on the way can often be overthrown by external factors. The ALESBA doesn't dictate a long process, it rather suggests phases that follows the natural journey of ALE system building and it depends on the country context and ALE stakeholders how long the journey takes.