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Community Learning Centres in the Asia Region: Popular Education and Community Transformation

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Introduction

This chapter examines Community Learning Centres (CLCs) as a concept and as a term that has become a significant institutional reality, that has caught on as a global policy initiative. It is an institutional term born of a set of values, beliefs, and practices. It takes different shapes and forms in different places and at different times.

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The essence of a Community Learning Centre is as a local community of place, which belongs to that 'community' and enables learning relevant to the life and culture there. An organisation development literature may grow out from instructional manuals for CLC workers. Looking at the CLC in its historical, political, and cultural context raises a familiar conundrum: does change occur top-down or bottom-up? Can there be some form of harmonising synergy between these two? How much is the 'of-by-for' principle honoured? How sustainable can this delicate balance be? It may be vulnerable when a government feels vulnerable, and its citizenry disengaged. So far, the CLC is a work-in-progress pointing in a promising direction for those suitably placed and governed to take advantage of it.

CLCs are recognisably convenient as ways of getting education and training to places and people whose disadvantages of illiteracy, poverty, illness, remoteness, and hunger inhibit their capacity to live fully. The earlier passion and energy of social reformers in the eighteenth and nineteenth century colonial north were addressed to combatting social and economic inequality. These inclinations combined with the requirement for skilled workers globally after the initial industrial revolution. The CLC may in our times provide an evolutionary means of releasing essential local energies and capabilities without provoking civil resistance, while taking up where schooling of the young ended, without equipping individuals for a full life. The literature and discourse of popular education and CLCs are mostly silent about political matters, allowing for and supporting evolutionary change.

Taking Care with Words

We must take care with the meanings and use of the words and language which are our key tools: learning, education, community, and development, even science, knowledge, and wisdom. This chapter asks about learning as and through life. Do we mean *learning*, universal and lifelong; or equipping adults with knowledge and skills as human resources for an economy; learning that goes on in the very acts of living and being, or instruction towards outcomes chosen by others: are learners

'targets', or self-directing learners? We need to know how Community Learning Centres (CLCs) are created, directed, and managed. Whose is the curriculum for assessment and individual success? What processes and influences forming those who take part does the 'hidden' curriculum contain? Is learning an aggregation of what individuals learn; or does the 'community' itself learn, becoming more effective and empowered?

Does it go beyond changing the names and the labels on the jars, into different contents, products, and outcomes? Behind it hovers the question 'do communities themselves learn? Or is the CLC simply a good place where people learn as individuals and perhaps in small groups, using the convenience of familiar facilities?

The present is experienced as an era of cultural and political dissonance beyond the living memory of many people and their 'communities', at least in the wealthy Global West and North. It is also an era of the virtual, as in virtual communities, courtesy of web-conferencing platforms, especially Zoom, as has been required during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is a world that has migrated into 'e-commerce', with the vulnerabilities of 'just-in-time' management that relies on fast and reliable transportation of goods, and a world where 'fake news' is created to confuse us. Language has become so labile that rational, consensual discourse becomes well-nigh unattainable, drowned in a melange of old words, neologisms, slogans, and phrases built to confuse.

Part of this phenomenon, but only part, is the tendency to create new professional discourse: words and expressions that mark off and lay stakes to professional territories and exclude non-experts and the general public. Are adult learning and education (ALE) and lifelong learning (LLL) susceptible to this conduct as they develop their own in-group jargon, toolkit, and qualified practitioners? Pausing over our words merits the effort: how, for example, can active communities and their citizen learners sensibly be called targets and target groups?

Power and control are contested, between power blocs, classes, and categories of people, political parties, genders, faiths, and ethnicities, often hierarchically. This tendency extends from global governance to the neighbourhoods, apartment blocks, places of employment, and self-employment, through to huge refugee encampments where 'ordinary people' share their lives. It spans from the communally embedded with

a confident identity to the lonely and isolated. Into this tumbleweed and often toxic environment, perhaps unprecedented but perhaps for the global majority always thus, the term CLC has been introduced into a carelessly deployed lexicon of learning, education, training, instructing, or teaching. Our language slips easily into (community) education and into school outreach, access, and accreditation rather than strictly *learning*—something done to rather than done by.

Local terms reflect the characteristics, traditions, and practices of different countries and their sub-systems. Each of the three terms that comprise 'CLC' slips through one's grasp, adapting its appearance as the environment changes. It has been widely adopted and extended as a common term to include a broad spectrum of institutional arrangements, some already in place for many decades. Aggregated into the common category of CLC, not all share the same purposes, much less outcomes. Contexts vary within and between countries: culturally, socially, historically, geographically, ideologically, and especially politically. The term 'community learning centre' sprang up quickly and has proliferated fast as an intergovernmental and international vehicle for advancing a kind of arrangement that it was thought may assist state policies to be adopted and carried out in diverse local settings. Guidance and then often also rules and regulations follow, as well as perhaps modest government and civil society resources.

What is a Community?

A community is an entity made up of three elements, member, connection, and purpose or interest (Dewey, 1915; Vincent II, 2009). After and with the family it is the fundamental social unit found in all types of human social life. Members can be people living or working in the same locality, or people from different geographical locations with the same interest, hobby, belief, or purpose, either long- or short-term. Members of a community have frequent communication with and provide support for one another; thus, a community of village people, or a community of factory workers, for example. The internet has made

easier the growth and spread of communities of interest and collectivities of practice among people living across the globe. Others are religious communities of people who share a belief in an ideal that they live for, always in association with a holy/divine figure named God, Buddha, Yahweh, Brahman, and such. Then there are academic communities bound together by common expertise, common rewards, and a shared passion for knowledge-making and sharing.

A group of people simply in the same location, each working and functioning in unconnected ways for their individual aims is no more than a loose group: a troop of soldiers in a battle running for the sole purpose of saving their own lives. Such a group does not suffice to be a community. Yet the place is important and integral to the CLC and the success of its community learning. It is a location, usually some dedicated, shared, or borrowed building where people feel relatively safe and confident, having some identity and a shared purpose in being there. At the other extreme from the virtual community, for First Nation Australians, the place is everything. In fact, they do not and cannot own land: land, or country, owns them and they are an inalienable part of it.

Local communities are to society what the cells of a living being are to its existence. Diseased and damaged cells are causes of weaknesses, deterioration, or decease. Nurturing the well-being and growth of local communities is a requisite of social strength and development.

Within a community, a strong sense of belonging is present and felt by all members. This sense of belonging is sometimes stronger even than the emotional attachment between family members; it provides community members with the idea that they are one. Such a feeling has a positive impact on the behaviour of the members, binding them in the pursuit of a common goal. In short: Social relationships are essential for solidarity building and successful community initiatives (Hustedde, 2009, p. 22).

The Modern International Stage

Things that a CLC is now prescribed to be, do, and enable have existed with different names, some for decades, or centuries. General global use of the term 'CLC ' is quite recent, but it has been used in other ways

also, mainly in North America in relation to community schools in the regular school system (see https://www.learnquebec.ca/clc).

Adoption and rapid spread owe much to efforts, albeit enfeebled of late, to create international governance through the United Nations family of institutions; notably, for educational affairs, through UNESCO and its Hamburg-based UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), but with many others playing a part, like the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO).

In most parts of Asia, community learning centres are a type of education centre outside the formal education system that provides learning opportunities to all, especially young people and adults deprived of or unable to finish formal schooling. Programmes offered include literacy, post-literacy programmes, equivalency programmes, income-generating programmes, quality of life improvement programmes, individual interest promotion programmes, and future-oriented programmes (Belete et al., 2022; Duke & Hinzen, 2016; Duke et al., 2021; Hinzen, 2021).

A snapshot of the status of CLCs in the general landscape of non-formal education in several countries invokes mixed feelings. On the one hand, in most countries a proportion of CLCs are active, serving a population of out-of-school children and adults in local areas, providing a form of learning and education that is easily accessible, affordable, and complementary, supplementary, or alternative to formal schooling. They are also places of essential life-knowledge dissemination including, for example, health care and policies. On the other hand, quite a few CLCs do not live up to the expectation of local people. Reasons are many and can be different from place to place, and from time to time, but key issues are management and funding.

When a CLC is born out of the true needs and desires of local people, when it is the will of the people to set up a learning place where the local community can meet and exchange knowledge and skills, or for traditional, cultural activities, the CLC is likely to be sustainable because there is not much concern over management and financing activities—people naturally come together of their own will for a shared purpose and thus are willing to support the activities with what they can. This is

the case of the post-World War Two Japanese Kominkan (ACCU, 2008). However, in most cases in Asia and the Pacific, CLCs are a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches.

Under the guidance of UNESCO and in line with the APPEAL (Asia and Pacific Programme of Education for All) manual in the late 1980s (Sakya & Meyer, 1997), the governments of many countries of the Asia–Pacific region planned on establishing CLCs to maximise learning opportunities for all. The upside of this approach is obvious: within a country, there is coherence in the way CLCs are organised, managed, and funded. The downside is that CLCs are sometimes not the product of local communities' wishes and will. As a result, a sense of emotional and spiritual attachment to the CLC is lacking in the beginning, leading to low support from local people. Some CLCs are educational sites like schools, but in a less formal setting and with modest learning facilities. Only those which are managed effectively and offer programmes and activities that meet people's needs will survive the test of time. Others become dormant.

UIL has championed, campaigned for, and to some modest extent enabled material support for CLCs in countries of the 'Global South' (GS). This has attracted more material support from civil society organisations (CSOs) or NGOs for Adult and Lifelong Education and Lifelong Learning. Notable among these enabler-donors is the German *Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband* (DVV) International, which channels German government overseas development aid to the GS. Other intergovernmental organisations (IGO) and non-governmental organisations (INGO) like the European Union (EU), the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) and the Asia and South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) have adopted the term and cause of CLCs as a means of empowering and extending adult learning located in places relatively local to their communities. UNESCO and UIL specifically, as intergovernmental agencies somewhat influenced by the civil society sector, seek to guide their member states towards practices judged fitting to bring about what these agencies were created to do. The fact that they comprise and serve national governments automatically poses the question of whether the CLC is inevitably a vehicle

to execute national policies through local machinery and whether there is always harmony of intent.

Within UNESCO as an organisation of member states, the civil society sector has won increasing influence over the years, marked by the presence and influence of INGOs at the usually 12-yearly world conferences on adult education, known as CONFINTEA (*CONFérence INTernationale sur l'Education des Adultes*). In recent years, this has been managed by UIL, where again the NGO sector has steadily and purposefully gained leverage, sharing the influence which even an emasculated UNESCO wields. A parallel innovation also fuelled by UIL has been the Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC). Launched with the People's Republic of China, the network has been carried forward with other partners such as South Korea. Being a GLCN member carries conditions to gain membership and provides a gateway to a potential Global Learning City Award, and the potential prestige that this brings. There is now some tendency to marry the local CLC arrangement into and as a 'delivery mode' for the GLCN. No such rules and measures apply to the use of the term CLC, however. Community learning centres are 'local educational institutions outside the formal education system, usually set up and managed by local people to provide various learning opportunities' (UNESCO, 2008, p. 2). They are intended to be community-driven non-formal learning centres that foster community-based learning and serve as information resource centres for lifelong learning communities.

The Global South

This account focuses on one of the three main regions of the GS, the Asia–Pacific region. The term is used along with other synonyms in Africa, where similar IGO influences, and guidance, are found. We are less clear how far similarities of ideology and intent play out in practice in Latin America and the Caribbean. Sharing power, reciprocal learning, and place-based trust, all mean big challenges. There has been some success in Asian ALE development but also struggles. At times, an NGO became the donor because the government demanded of them too much

accountability. The skill sets of both project managers and adult educators are essential, but tensions can become more fraught as they are forced in different systems to 'fit the shape' more of what 'a good development agency' ought to be. Apropos the different regions of the Global South, we must at least acknowledge that each region will have different stories of partnership, co-learning, and change.

This volume of essays honours a Scottish educationalist who grew up and worked in a context of social and economic inequality in the early and economically highly developed North. Indeed, much of the ideological underpinning and values of the global CLC movement came from the workers' education and social justice movements of earlier industrialisers in the North: from the underbelly of wealth and conquest now recognised as the downside of early generations of colonialism. This people's education was undoubtedly political in intent and sometimes in outcome. It has been observed that some members of the post-Second World War government that created the British welfare state were educated through the Workers' Education Association (WEA) in what would now be called CLCs. Political affiliation and even identity is however a delicate topic often avoided around the modern CLC (Hughes & Brown, 1981; Roberts, 2003).

Even today, socio-educational ideas, experiments and innovations are mostly created in the North for use, and well-intendedly applied, in the least privileged (as used to be called '4th world') nations of the GS. Given the still widely influential, albeit top-down, role of IGOs in policy arenas, we are obliged to ask how far CLCs are part of this old and familiar pattern of ideological domination in neo-colonial form. On the other hand, the widespread adoption of 'CLC' as a policy concept and an analytical descriptor for many learning and teaching arrangements across the globe places a question against this line of thinking, and even its flow of influence and innovation. In this cursory scan of practice in a few Asian region countries, we ask how far there is indeed a common core of purpose, process, and outcomes across community learning centres, and commonality, in the basis for claims of 'success', from place to place.

To examine if not definitively to answer some key questions, we take examples from a few countries in Asia where the term CLC has become normal currency, and often part of the toolkit of government policy.

CLCs in the Asian Setting

In the Asia–Pacific region, the establishment of CLCs through the APPEAL project was 'a politico-administrative creation' (Belete et al., 2022). It sought an integrated approach to human development, one that provided educational opportunities for all, not just in service of an elite minority of intellectually capable or financially comfortable individuals. CLCs are understood to be an enabling instrument, a multi-purpose venue for individual and community development built on a humanistic approach to development: that is, to develop individuals and the communities that they belong to in terms of knowledge, skills, morals, behaviour, attitudes, and well-being.

There are some 170,000 CLCs in the Asia–Pacific region. The same term is used, and local centres identified and supported, through much of Africa, where purposeful campaigning notably by DVV International is flowing out from pilot sites across more of the continent. Now the term has extended, perhaps flowed back via UIL and others, to be used increasingly in the continents of the wealthy 'North' and 'West', as well as at times to rich nations like Japan and Australia in the geographical East and South. This may have added to its stature, and possibility to its status and appeal to poorer countries. However, the more vital need is for basic literacy, and access for the excluded into the school system. Use of the term for earlier arrangements across Europe and North America may dilute its meaning, operations, and outcomes, when such large differences of context, resources and opportunities exist.

The Education 2030 Agenda affirms the role of non-formal education in the overall global lifelong learning ambition, stating 'broad and flexible lifelong learning opportunities should be provided through non-formal pathways with adequate resources and mechanisms and through stimulating informal learning, including through the use of information and communications technology' (UNESCO, 2016c, p. 9). Popular adult education and non-formal education are two separate concepts but with overlapping goals and shared practices. They are an essential part of the 2030 Agenda.

Of-By-For Principle

'Of the people, by the people, and for the people' is a pervading principle shared by many Asian countries regarding their CLC operation. It stems from Sen's socio-economic model which emphasises human development (Sakya & Meyer, 1997). A sense of ownership, knowing that they themselves are the beneficiaries, and consequently their active involvement in CLC management constitutes the main driving force that keeps CLCs alive, thriving, and empowering local people through leading, organising and participating in programmes and activities, under the guidance and with the support of local governments.

The Angkor CLC project is an example from Cambodia. The CLCs were built, besides financial support from the National Federation of UNESCO Associations in Japan, with contributions of all kinds from local people, from building materials to manpower, from land donation to financial contributions, and from learning materials to teaching. It is in this pulling together that local people felt a communal tie in the collective ownership of the CLCs, their spiritual children. Their voluntary cooperation resulted in community learning centres that are participatory and democratic. Among the programmes offered, the community kindergarten programme is taught by community people, organised and managed by the CLC management committee. The handicraft programme for women enables them to learn and earn from making daily use items like baskets, bags, and boxes from natural materials found in the locality, thus less dependent on their husbands' income (NFUAJ, 2017).

The of-by-for people principle also exhibits itself in the Sub-District Non-formal and Informal Education (NIE) Centre for Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and the New Theory Farming, a type of semi-autonomous community learning centre in Thailand. This promotes learning among local people, coordinates with the community learning resources based on what was called the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, an initiative of the conservative but reformist late King Bhumibol. It collects and disseminates knowledge on royal initiated projects in close cooperation with Internal Security Operations Command. Such CLCs

help direct the community in a way of life that is sustainable to the environment, and healthy to the participants.

The Chalermprakiat Community Learning Centre, Nongkai Province, Thailand, is another and somewhat different kind of example of the of-by-for principle. It 'mobilise[s] funding for computers and learning materials the Buddhist way—that is to leave offerings for the monks. It is a way to earn merit, so local people can join to donate money to the monks, but they give it back to the community for buying computers and learning materials for the community learning centres on different occasions' (Leowarin, 2010).

The 'of-by-for' principle is the guiding light for community learning centres in Vietnam. Some programmes are designed to pull local people out of poverty by providing them with practical vocational skills. A case was given at the capacity building workshop organised by the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam in Ho Chi Minh City in 2019. A community learning centre in Ho Chi Minh City attracted street food vendors in the area to classes where they were taught to cook good food. The centre then raised funds for these people to start up small food catering businesses in the area. Those who undertook the course returned later to learn more knowledge for life.

Another CLC in Xuat Hoa Commune, Hoa Binh Province, Vietnam, transferred new knowledge of raising pigs for increased productivity, and skills of beekeeping to produce honey for income generation. As a result, annual income per capita rose from 300 USD in 2009 to 1215 USD in 2016, and the rates of poverty dropped markedly from 21.9 per cent to 6.3 per cent within the same period when the programmes were implemented (Mai, 2017).

The of-by-for people principle can also manifest itself in residents' initiatives to develop CLC programmes. In 2012, a retired secondary teacher in Binh Tan, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, noticed the multiple daily life-enhancing functions of the computer and the internet. He decided to learn Microsoft office. Then he gathered old people in the local residential area to transfer the skills to them for free. The only cost the participants bore was the computer rent at an internet coffee house in the area. The class prompted the establishment of a CLC in the area (Nguyen, 2014).

CLCs in the Philippines are organised in ways that ensure community ownership and external interventions are in a synergistic relationship. Community contribution to CLC programmes and activities can be in the most fundamental form. A majority of CLCs in the Philippines are simple meeting places with tables, chairs, and a chalkboard shared by community chapels, or any multipurpose facilities owned or managed by village authorities or any private facility temporarily loaned for learning purposes (Ambat, 2021).

CLCs for Community Development

The ultimate purpose of CLCs however is for the empowerment of local communities. In what way can personal development lead to community development? The answer requires digging into the theory of community development and its constructs. Sakya and Meyer maintained that 'Education is seen as an enabling agent for development' (1997, p. 15). They proposed a model of education for human development for the ultimate goal of happy and prosperous communities as including a curriculum that provides learning and training in:

- health care
- income generation and economic development
- democracy
- science and environment
- community development and culture.

Literacy is the first rung of the education ladder, without which it is hard to engage with the learning components of Sakya and Meyer's model. It is the most common programme within community learning centres and is one of the early achievements of CLCs (Pham Le, 2017; UNESCO, 2016b).

The UNESCO APPEAL CLCs were intended to provide various learning opportunities for empowerment, community development, and improvement of quality of life, especially through training and skills development to alleviate poverty. Does this fit Sakya and Meyer's model?

Community learning centres are indispensable to the wholeness of an education system. As an accepted fact, formal education only provides for people of school ages and cannot work fully towards a lifelong learning system. Non-formal education, to which community learning centres are integral and key, can fill the void in education left by the rigid highly structured mechanism of the formal school system.

Several reviews of the CLC programmes in Asian countries (UNESCO, 2001, 2008, 2016a) reconfirm the path taken by CLCs towards community development. Literacy, income-generation, health care, and usual legal practices are common in CLC programmes. Some examples from different countries will illustrate this.

Health care: Health promotion skills are key to a stable development in a community. People with low health literacy levels may be deprived of productive living. They cannot take part in the production workforce, but on the contrary may pose a threat to the safety of the community by being unknowing disease carriers. Providing health literacy programmes is thus a priority, especially in ageing communities in Asia (Gartenschlaeger, 2017; Peou & Singh, 2017) and is most conveniently done through the programmes and activities of CLCs, as they are within easy reach of the local people.

Income generation: From the stepping stone of literacy, learners will be able to proceed to gain knowledge and skills. Most Myanmar CLCs provide practical skills courses for income generation. The Balway CLC in Chaung U Township, Myanmar, provides dress-making skill training at affordable costs which the participants will pay when they graduate and start making incomes.

Democracy: John Dewey (1915) saw democracy as a way of life. It is with democracy that people can voice their opinions and make informed decisions for the public good. Thailand takes a democratic educational approach, encouraging inclusive participation in learning, regardless of current personal, social and legal status. Education services have been expanded to cover specific target groups, including prison inmates, the labour force, the disabled, conscripts, agriculturists, the aged, hill-tribe peoples, local leaders, slum dwellers, Thai Muslims and other religious practitioners (MOE of Kingdom of Thailand, 2017).

Science and technology: Community digital centres, a type of CLCs in Thailand, teach farmers and small businesses to create simple websites to advertise their produce, receive orders, and communicate with customers.

Community development rests heavily on its human capital. The modern world is equipped with a plethora of technologies that grow in number and increase in complexity at accelerating speeds. Basic school and higher education cannot guarantee lifelong competencies that enable one to function appropriately and efficiently in a workplace or society. Upgrading knowledge and skills is a continuing process if one is to keep up with change in the workplace. Community learning centres can be an answer to this deficiency. In Malaysia the Community Advancement Department (KEMAS), Community Colleges, Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL), Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR), One Stop Centre, and Fire and Rescue Department all offer CLC programmes and activities for the development and reinforcement not only of the mind, soul, and spirit but also soft skills of human capital in rural areas for the long-term progress of the country.

The Case of Timor-Leste

Timor-Leste provides an example of the influences favouring CLCs, and the cultural, political, and economic realities of such countries. A small nation of SE Asia only recently independent of Portugal and then of its big neighbour Indonesia, it was influenced by the work of Paulo Freire and so oriented towards community-based learning for liberation rather than domestication. It adopted the idea of community learning centres, using the name *Sentru Komunitaria Aprendizarjen* (SKA) within the policy of the National Directorate for Recurrent Education (NDRE). The term Recurrent Education signals alternation of formal learning (school and college study) with employment and other activities. The term was developed by the OECD in the early 1970s and fell somewhat into disuse later. It is a welcome rediscovery in that there are now new trends towards recurrency and alternation in many places, with widespread evident shortcomings in school-to-work transitions and

apprenticeships, in recent decades, and with greatly altered economies and labour markets.

In Timor-Leste, the NDRE produced a CLC Grant Manual in 2015 on the development and management of CLCs for initial use in six districts including the capital, Dili, by district education programme SKA staff 'including the community members of the CLCs and its relevant partners in the area'. The concept was of 'an institution providing learning opportunities to empower them to become self-reliant, improve their quality of life, and develop their community' (NDRE, 2015, p. 3). It adopted the APPEAL 'from the community, by the community and for the community' philosophy of Sakya and Meyer (1997). SKAs were launched using World Bank Second Chance Education programme funds, with a full-time coordinator and a local committee.

Apart from the sheer poverty and remoteness of this largely rural society, Timor-Leste has problems with languages and associated social status. Portuguese was the dominant and official language, and the language of higher education, then replaced by Bahasa Indonesia when Timor Leste was transferred from Portugal to its big neighbour. That too became unpopular and dropped out of daily use in favour of the *lingua franca* Tetum with independence. The CLC Programme is one of NDRE's three main programmes, mandated by the Ministry of Education by law and grant-supported, but the concept and approach were unfamiliar to the public servants tasked with carrying it out. According to the 2015 Manual:

> the one very important element of a Community Learning Centre (CLC) is community participation. In the implementation of its activities, it will encourage full participation of the community members … [who] should be involved in all stages of the activities and processes starting from data collection and analysis processes. Community members are not perceived as mere recipients of the grant or any external assistance but should be involved in all stages of the activities and processes starting from data collection and analysis, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of community activities/CLC activities. The concept, benefits, importance, and advantages of the CLCs shall be socialised to heighten awareness of the community to get involved and participate. (NDRE, 2015, p. 7)

One interesting recent tendency is to contact and draw on formative experience from community development work with and by the still traditional First Nation communities of Australia's Northern Territory. Here, new thinking has begun to overturn failed models for the education of remote communities in favour of locality-based and determined CLC-type development, using local language, and drawing on traditional knowledge and ways of land and resources management. This in turn has links with efforts in other indigenous communities in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and into Melanesia in the near Pacific. Timor-Leste may thus come effectively also to use other formative CLC approaches modelling the collaborative learning which the CLC concept is intended to offer.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The of-by-for ideology of CLCs fits the idea of an education system of democracy in management, openness in participation, and appropriateness of contents to learning needs and contexts. How far have CLCs served this goal? It turns out to be easier said than done. Political will alone is not sufficient for the smooth successful operation of CLCs. In the absence of official statistics, expert educators do not paint an evenly bright picture of the state of CLC development.

Attractive as the non-formal education concept might be, the CLC is not without challenges. Not all CLCs are fully functional. CLC governance is community-based with local government and the community in partnership, the former more on the general direction and guidance, the latter more on execution. On a macro level, a top-down approach is seen in many countries with national policies that encourage—by means of legislation and regulations—the establishment of CLCs, and regulate the uniform operation of CLCs, but at the same time exposes several weaknesses.

The top-down approach: Initiation of CLCs begins with directives of the central government which are channelled down the hierarchy of governance from central to regional to provincial to local, and implementation is carried out by and in consultation with local CLC management. In attempting to reach their quota of community learning centres

within a given time window, local governments rush to work with local communities, inform them, and perhaps set up CLCs. In places, the communities are not ready for such ambitions. They are not clear about this model of community-based learning, nor are the appointed CLC directors experienced in running the centres.

Awareness: In locations where economic conditions are poor, human resources for CLCs are limited, and local practices are not advanced, as in remote areas in the mountains or forests which some ethnic minority groups inhabit, people are not aware of the value of science and technologies, or the benefits of education. CLCs are not on the list of interests. Unless people themselves see the benefits of knowledge and skills to their own living, and the wider benefits to the communities, CLCs are something perhaps nice to have, but certainly not essential.

Coordination mechanisms: While there are policies in place to promote and regulations to standardise the establishment of CLCs, lack of an overarching mechanism that facilitates coordination and collaboration among ministries, among ministry agencies, and among stakeholders, renders such policies ineffective in some countries. CLCs are left struggling for their own survival, without knowing how to mobilise resources from potential stakeholders or in the communities.

Finance: A big challenge to CLC sustainability is inadequate financial support. As institutions of the people and entities of democratic ideology, CLCs are expected to be self-sufficient and thus receive limited financial support from the government. CLC managements however are usually inexperienced in fund-raising. As a result of the lack of financial resources, many cannot carry out programmes they are supposed to offer local people. In addition, competent human resources at managerial levels may be lacking. Without sufficient training and experience in education management, some managers fail to bring their CLCs to life. Inactivity of CLCs in many places, or intermittent unconnected activities, can lead to waning interest among local people regarding the benefit that CLCs are supposed to bring.

Recognition, validation, and accreditation: Emphasis on the importance of formal education credentials, low transferability between non-formal and formal education, lack of a mechanism for recognition, validation, and accreditation of non-formal education: all contribute to a low profile

of non-formal education programmes. Internal and external monitoring and evaluation of CLC programmes need to be ongoing processes to pinpoint good initiatives for replication, and weaknesses for eradication. Several Southeast Asian countries like the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam have education systems that include both formal and non-formal education. Vietnam has made students of the formal education and non-formal education (commonly referred to as continuing education) sectors take the same graduation examinations at the end of each level, thus ensuring transferability between these modes of education.

Learning, Support, and Control

A universal chorus in the ALE movement is for more recognition and especially more resources for the education and training of adults. A 'golden triangle' of policy, laws, and resources with practically enacted rules is sought to advance ALE. A more ambitious quest formulated from the end of the 1960s and re-energised in the present century is for lifelong learning 'from cradle to grave': as a valid end and to give effect to the UN sustainable development goals (SDGs) in the 15-year planning period to 2030. We again ask whether we really mean *learning*, universal and lifelong, or simply adults with knowledge and skills as human resources for an increasingly sophisticated production line and consumption economy. Do we mean the learning that goes on in the acts of living and being or education shaped by the immediate needs of the economy and leading to outcomes validated by national states? Are the clientele of CLCs target groups or self-directing learners?

In addressing these questions we need to know how CLCs are created, directed, and managed, and with what results. Who are the local leaders and how are they appointed or chosen? What is the curriculum and whose interests are represented? Is it no more than what individuals learn (and can be counted, recorded, and audited)? Or is it a means by a community itself learns, by which it becomes more effective—and is empowered? Who ultimately enables or restricts what CLCs are and can do?

'Community development' has diverse origins, both activist-reformist and charitable: from radical action for political and economic change to remedial *noblesse oblige* out of concern for the poor and deprived. Change commonly threatens those with power and resources, leading to confrontation. The work and interests of CDCs range along a spectrum depending on who creates, controls, and manages their activities. They can be effective ways of getting education and training to places and people whose disadvantages—illiteracy, poverty, illness, remoteness, and hunger—inhibit their capacity to live productive and fulfilling lives. Much depends on who is in control.

We may see the CLC as a neat if tenuous and evolutionary means of enlisting civic mobilisation and the release of the local energies and capabilities essential to carrying out government development plans and policies, without provoking civil action of an 'Arab Spring' kind. It is not surprising that much of the conceptual and operational framework of approved popular education—and much of its literature and conference discourse—is silent about matters political, especially about the realities of war within and between nations. The silence can indeed be deafening, when andragogic and ALE lobbyists come together and the host country is afflicted by civil war or its imminent prospect.

The CLC is, one might say, an inspired means to allow and support evolutionary non-violent change. But in what sense does a local community of place, the essence of a community learning centre, belong to that 'community', nurturing and fertilising indigenous learning relevant to the life and culture there? What proportion of the tens of thousands of CLCs, one wonders, are simply useful venues for less formal teaching and training than rigid schools, where adults—and indeed sometimes young people also—get compensatory instruction for what schooling could not deliver?

Does the place, the facility, be it community hall, library, museum, school, or sporting venue, and its ways of doing and being, enable the whole community to be more complete, firing the energy and passion of local people in local language and ways? We may need an organisation development literature and acquired expertise to inform and guide this institutional form. We have instructional manuals for CDC workers. Is this enough? Does it enable learning and its use, both lifelong and

lifewide? Ultimately, taking the phrase used in a recent Paulo Freire anniversary meeting in Timor-Leste, are we talking about education for liberation or for domestication?

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