10

ALADIN: CASE STUDY OF A NETWORK OF NETWORKS

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Structure

Learning Objectives

It is expected that after going through Unit 10 you would be able to

- ❖ Gain information about ALADIN as a global network
- ❖ Make out how to use it for your activities in the field of adult learning documentation and information services
- ❖ Consider the possibilities of your making contributions to augmenting the qualities of this useful resource for policy-makers, researchers, and programme developers in adult learning
- ❖ Learn to network in order to excel in your profession.

10.1 Introduction

As a PALDIN learner you are interested in establishing useful links with resources that would help you analyze and develop your skills to build and cultivate your professional network. Unit 10 will introduce you to a network that has come into being as a result of networking among key stakeholders in the area of adult learning documentation and information. In this lesson you will not only learn about a global network but also get to know how

to access resources that link you with the wider world of knowledge and information about adult learning. The inputs obtained from such sources are likely to enhance your professional skills as an adult educator and in turn enable you to carry out your responsibilities in adult education more effectively and efficiently.

In Unit 10 you will learn about the Adult Learning, Documentation and Information Network (ALADIN).

Through this case study we hope to serve a dual purpose. One purpose concerns your familiarity with the concept, objectives, approach and activities of ALADIN and the other concerns your skills to network and access and link with various resources that are integral parts of ALADIN. For the first purpose you will need to simply go through the contents of Unit 10 and for the second purpose you will need to complete all the exercises given in the unit.

10.2 ALADIN: A Global Network

The Adult Learning Documentation and Information Network (ALADIN) is a global network, set-up by the UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE) and several adult learning documentation and information centers. It is co-ordinated by the Head of Documentation at the now called UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UILL), in co-operation with the ALADIN Task Force. (The following description of ALADIN is entirely based on *Energizing ALADIN,* edited by Lisa Krolak. I have at times used the author's own words, without quotations marks but with full acknowledgement and gratitude. For full reference see the entry under Krolak 2005 in the list of References at the end of this unit.)

This network has been established for facilitating the access to adult learning resources. Its current membership comprises 100 members spread in more than 40 countries. It was initiated in 1997 as a follow-up action of CONFINTEA V (Fifth International Conference on Adult Education). For more information on the various aspects of the network please visit its website, http://www.unesco.org/

education/aladin

A general and broad definition of adult learning characterizes the philosophy and activities of ALADIN, which binds in one network practitioners of adult learning located in such diverse environments as university, research institutes, national, regional and sectoral centers, community-based organizations and services and online information providers. In this sense ALADIN makes possible an access to resources from different parts of the world. While respecting the diverse character of adult learning in the various regions of the world, ALADIN endeavors to construct a coherent network with the aim of linking theory with practice, improving research, programme development and planning and supporting advocacy for policy-making in adult learning.

You can access the network through its website or by entering the ALADIN e-mail listserv, which is an e-mail link between friends of ALADIN. You can either visit the website or contact the ALADIN co-ordinator for further information.

Activity 10. 1

In order to access the ALADIN Website, you need to have your computer connected to the Internet so that you can use a browser to view ALADIN website on the world wide web. As you know that every website has a unique uniform resource locator (URL) that identifies it on the computer. URL of ALADIN website is www.unesco-aladin.net. You can also find this website by using a search engine (e.g. google, yahoo, ask jeeves, aolsearch, hotbot etc). Each search engine does not search a website directly. It searches a database of the full text of web pages from the billions of web pages out there living in servers. You need to simply type the keyword relevant to the topic you are searching. In this case you need to type the word ALADIN and the search engine will display all the web pages in its database that contain this word.

After finding the ALADIN website, you will see its homepage which expects you to click at its various icons for finding further information under each head. Try to click some of these icons and then answer the following questions.

❖ What steps did you take to find the home page of ALADIN website?

❖ Do you find its design attractive and appealing to your sense of aesthetics?

❖ What is the name of the ALADIN Co-ordinator?

10. 3 Objectives of ALADIN

ALADIN's objective is to network and build the capacity of adult learning documentation and information services. The network makes it possible to access relevant documentation on adult learning and in this sense it facilitates informed policy-making, research and programme development in the field of adult learning. Further, ALADIN endeavors to continuously update information on adult learning and therefore its members are always well-informed about the latest developments in the field.

In a nutshell, you can say that ALADIN acts like an information provider for researchers, practitioners and policy makers in the area of adult learning. It presents a platform to share relevant information on adult learning and to provide training in adult learning knowledge management. The network aims to set right the uneven access to adult learning documentation and information resources.

10. 4 Year-wise Account of ALADIN Activities

ALADIN is only a less than ten-year old child with a history of very active life. Let us look at its birth and growth that its co-ordinator has chronicled in a report on a Workshop, held in 2003 at the CONFINTEA V mid-term review conference in Bangkok, Thailand. The following year wise account of ALADIN activities is based on this report.

10. 4. 1 The Year of 1997

As mentioned earlier, ALADIN came into being in July 1997 as a result of a CONFINTEA V workshop on adult learning documentation and information. Taking into account the then prevailing state of unequal access to documentation and information regarding adult learning, a group of

representatives of adult learning documentation and information centers felt a strong need of organizing an interactive knowledge management system in the field of adult learning. The Head of the UIE Documentation Center coordinated the initiative.

10. 4. 2 The Year of 1998

The year of 1998 saw major events for ALADIN, including a worldwide survey of adult learning, publication of the first annotated Directory of ALADIN Network Members, a fellowship programme and an expert seminar.

The Directory of Members provided the profiles of 89 adult learning documentation and information services located across the world. The most recent Directory, published in November 2005, carries an updated list of ALADIN members.

During autumn 1998, under a fellowship programme, five research fellows from Africa, the Arab states and Eastern Europe drafted proposals for regional ALADIN action plans.

A three-day expert's seminar on "Adult Learning Documentation and Information Network" took place in Hamburg. Its 25 participants not only shared their experiences but also drafted an action plan that reflected the principle of free and global access to information on adult learning.

10.4.3 The Year of 1999

The events of the preceding year led in 1999 to the launch of the ALADIN website and convening of the ALADIN Task Force through an e-Mail seminar.

The ALADIN website provides detailed information and online access to all ALADIN members.

The ALADIN Task Force has members,

forming the international steering body of ALADIN. Its online seminar was coordinated jointly by the UIE's Documentation Center and the ERIC Clearing House on Adult, Career and Vocational Education. Along with updating on ALADIN activities and stating its administrative functions for the Task Force members, the online seminar collected information from the members to set the future agenda of ALADIN.

10. 4. 4 The Year of 2001

An ALADIN workshop, "Adult Learning Documentation and Information: Building the Network" was held in August 2001 at the International Council of Adult Education (ICAE) World Assembly in Jamaica. Aimed at strengthening ALADIN, this workshop identified the need for a comprehensive training approach for its members and made a case for supporting grassroots documentation efforts.

10.4.5 The Year of 2002

In January 2002 the ALADIN e-Mail listserv was launched to enable the ALADIN members and friends of ALADIN to regularly get in touch with each other. This is now a platform where the ALADIN members and friends of ALADIN can share ideas, comments, concerns and requests. We very much hope that PALDIN learners will take advantage of his facility to augment their stock of information and knowledge as well as share their own experiences in the sphere of adult learning.

In April 2002, seven members of the ALADIN Task Force held a meeting at the Coady International Institute in Antigonish, Canada to discuss general ALADIN issues, including the specific issue of approaches for capacity-building. This meeting resulted in a flow

of ideas on upgrading the ALADIN website and turning it into a comprehensive knowledge forum for information and research on adult learning. At this meeting the Task Force members decided to focus on training information specialists to help ALADIN members that require institutional support. This means that the mid-term agenda of ALADIN network is i) to prepare a training manual (in English, Spanish and French) on documenting and organizing information in the field of adult learning and ii) to formulate a training strategy at the regional level.

Then in November 2002, ALADIN Task Force member (Eva Kupidura) collected as well as annotated and added as many as 200 adult learning links to the ALADIN website.

Activity 10.2

Write answers to the following questions after considering carefully your access to resources that you require for your work as an adult educator.

❖ What kind of resources do you need most for your everyday work as an adult educator?

❖ Have you ever felt that you have little access to resources available to adult educators in other parts of the world for developing or documenting adult learning programmes?

❖ As an adult educator, do you find that ALADIN website is a useful resource for your work in the field?

❖ Have you ever accessed any resource from any website for your research/ programme development in adult learning, documentation and information?

10.4.6 The Year of 2003

The Coady International Institute in Antigonish, Canada organized in May and June 2003 a four-week certificate course in "Managing NGO Resource Centers" and five ALADIN members received full scholarships to attend it. For details of the four-week certificate course and its methodology see Box 10.1.

Box 10. 1 Managing NGO Resource Centre and its Methodology

The following description has been taken with acknowledgement from the website http://www.coady.stfx ca.library//MRClinkshtm.

Development organizations around the world recognize the power of information to raise awareness and mobilize action for social change. They also recognize the need to develop their own capacity to access, organize and use information effectively. The rapidly growing focus on technology is causing many NGOs to look at how they manage their development information. They need methods that are both locally appropriate and globally connected. To meet this challenge, many NGOs have established—or plan to establish—information resource centres. Well-managed resource centres are a valuable component of learning organizations, and can help reduce unproductive duplication of effort both within and among NGOs. They can also serve as centres of community learning and participation in civil society initiatives.

The Certificate in Resource Centers for Learning and Change will provide participants with the opportunity to gain or improve skills in managing information, as well as to analyze the dynamics of indigenous knowledge, appropriate media, information-sharing and networking. During the program, participants will develop an action plan for their resource center's contribution to the community-based development, and the information and education strategies of their organization. (For the content, objectives, target group and methodology of the program, you need to visit the site and gather further information.)

In September 2003, twenty members of the ALADIN Task Force and various friends of ALADIN representing 12 countries attended an ALADIN thematic workshop in Bangkok. The workshop was held in the context of the CONFINTEA V mid-term review conference with the aim to review ALADIN network's growth and achievements since 1997. Besides revisiting ALADIN's objectives and finding them still relevant, this review included discussions on future ICT developments in ALADIN and capacity-building initiatives. In group sessions, the participants identified emerging trends, challenges and innovative practices in adult learning. The entire exercise helped the participants to identify ALADIN's priorities and to state its vision for the activities to be carried out before CONFINTEA VI (to be held in 2009).

This significant workshop paved the way for concentrating on the following five areas up till now.
1. ALADIN ICT & Standardization developments
2. The ALADIN Toolkit for capacity building
3. The pilot country study on adult learning in India
4. A bibliography on adult learning in Latin America
5. ALADIN membership

The workshop in Bangkok recognized the growing importance of developments in information and communication technologies for ALADIN. The ICTs enable and support networking, the connection of information services, the sharing of knowledge and the e-learning at different levels. A networked community requires the standardization of knowledge management tools, such as cataloguing software and indexing

rules and a consensus on method and form of data transfer. In order to concentrate on these specific issues, ALADIN formed a sub-group called the ALADIN Information and Communication Technology and Standardization (ALADIN ICT&S) group.

10. 4. 7 The Year of 2004

The year 2004 proved to be a phase of extremely engaging activities for ALADIN.

In the beginning of 2004, two members of the ALADIN ICT and Standardization group held discussions with the ALADIN Co-ordinator at UIE on ALADIN related ICT issues. A by-product of this meeting was the coming into being of a new e-mail listserv.

The newly created e-mail listserv was then at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in South Africa, with its mirror site at the Norwegian Association of Adult Learning (NAAL). In the new format of the ALADIN e-mail listserv uses a moderator (the first moderator was Glen Arendse of UWC) on a rotating basis. The moderator collects all messages and analytically organizes them before sending them out. This has resulted in the high quality and systematic presentation of each ALADIN message.

A by-product of this innovation is a message archive that all members can access via normal web interface. In this way each ALADIN member can maintain her/ his own personal information and work out the way one wants to receive the messages.

In May 2004, the work began on redesigning the ALADIN website, a task that is still underway. The vision is to create the most comprehensive platform on knowledge and information on adult

learning. It shall be an interactive site with links to existing information services and to the resources of the ALADIN members and other key actors in the adult learning community. Besides search functions and online fora for members and visitors, the website offers regularly updated news. The ALADIN website can be a very powerful tool in the hands of those engaged in policy making, research, programs development for adult learning

documentation and information. All PALDIN learners are likely to find the ALADIN website an interactive meting point.

Six Latin American ALADIN members met in July at INEA in Mexico and discussed common information issues with particular reference to guidelines and necessary steps for preparing an ongoing Joint Bibliography on Adult Learning for Latin America. For details on this project see Box 10.2.

Box 10.3 Joint Bibliography on Adult Learning for Latin America

The following excerpt has been taken from the website http://www.unesco.org/education/aladin

Bibliography on Adult Learning in Latin America, April 2005

OREALC/UNESCO Santiago has published: La Educación de Jóvenes y Adultos en América Latina y el Caribe. Hacia un Estado del Arte. (The Education of Young People and Adults in Latin America and the Caribbean. Toward a State of the Art). The work presented here was motivated by the lack of studies of what is being done in the field of education for young people and adults. It presents the general analytic and policy framework for the education of young people and adults in Latin America and the Caribbean, providing a compendium of best practices in literacy training and adult education carried out in the region.

During the International Adult Learners' Week in September 2004, an ALADIN lecture was held in Cape Town, South Africa, on the topic of "Overcoming Barriers: Reaching Out to Excluded Learners".

An ALADIN Toolkit workshop followed the lecture. The University of the Western Cape (UWC) South Africa hosted the workshop, which focused on the development of an ALADIN Toolkit for setting up basic information services on adult learning. Various meetings of ALADIN had raised the concern about a need for ALADIN to support training and capacity building in the sphere of knowledge and information management and to set up documentation and information centers on adult learning in regions where no

such centres exist. This felt need of ALADIN members emanated from the realization that i) library and information management has globally received little attention and ii) there is hardly any material that supports documentation and information centers on adult learning in information management. The ALADIN Task Force expressed deep concern about both issues and took upon itself to develop the material to support information management that will a) assist non-professional information workers in their everyday work and b) establish general guidelines for facilitating electronic networking of the ALADIN members.

The ALADIN Toolkit will contain information management tools (cataloguing rules, keywords, indexing

rules and possible classification systems focusing on adult learning issues). It will also include a standardized database software based on the free UNESCO.CDS/ ISIS database software that many ALADIN members worldwide already use to access information on various issues. For details of the toolkit see Box 10.3.

Box 10.4 ALADIN Toolkit, for setting up basic documentation centers for adult learning

The following excerpt has been taken from http://www.unesco.org/eduation/aladin/atkToolkit.htm .

You can visit the website to obtain further information on each of the sub-section of the toolkit.

The ALADIN Toolkit is ALADIN's response to member requests for assistance in managing information and setting-up documentation centres. We hope that it will prove useful to a wide range of new and existing adult learning libraries, documentation and resource centres. Its primary goal, however, is to assist adult learning organizations and community-based groups that are wishing to organize their information resources or to improve efficiency of existing information centres, and whose staff have limited or no training in information management.

In the first half of 2004 an ALADIN member (S. Y. Shah) carried out an ALADIN Pilot Country Study for India. The rationale and purpose of the country study was in terms of i) the assumption that an effective documentation and information network plays a key role in strengthening adult and lifelong education, ii) the realization that documentation is not taken to be a core activity within adult learning programmes, iii) while larger organizations employ professional documenters, smaller organizations lack such expertise and iv) very little information is available on the existing documentation centers in South Asian countries. It came as a revelation that the 2003/2004 ALADIN Directory included 89 documentation centers in 41 countries and listed only two centers in India and one each in Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Since the available directories of libraries and documentation centers in India provide very little information on adult education documentation, the UIE decided to sponsor a pilot country study on the current status of adult education documentation centers in India.

10.4.8 The Year of 2005

The ALADIN Pilot Country Study for India resulted in March 2005 in an international workshop on ALADIN India in New Delhi. For details of the country study and the international workshop (see Box 10.5 and figure 10.1).
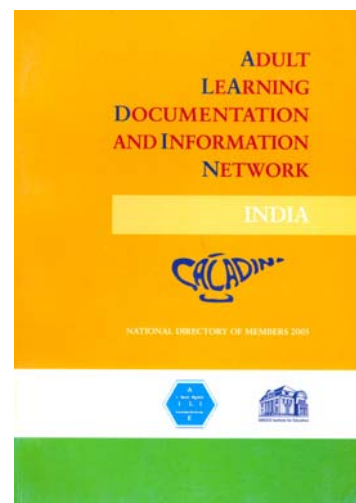

Figure 10.1

10. 4. 9 The Year of 2006 and Beyond

ALADIN is an ongoing project proceeding from strength to strength. For the duration preceding CONFINTEA VI in 2009, ALADIN network will expand itself in the area of information exchange and capacity building for adult learning documentation and information services. ALADIN's long-term vision is to achieve balanced global access to information and documentation in the field of adult learning. For achieving this vision ALADIN is striving to achieve a balanced global representation of adult leaning documentation and information services.

In 2006 and beyond ALADIN is continuing its activities regarding such projects as

❖ the ALADIN Toolkit

❖ constant improving and updating of the ALADIN website

❖ organizing training and capacity building initiatives in different regions of the world

❖ building up regional structures, supported by ALADIN regional meetings (for example, there was held an international workshop in New Delhi in March 2006 for developing a framework for a professional development programme of study in Participatory Adult Learning, Documentation and Information Networking (PALDIN) in March 2006.)

❖ identifying documentation and information centres in adult learning in need of support with particular reference to the least developed countries

❖ Identifying and supporting those partners who would engage in setting up adult learning documentation and information centres in countries and regions where none exist

10.5 PALDIN Learners' Networking on the Network

In order to project your professional persona – a way for people to know that you are a member of the profession (adult learning, documentation and information), you need to think of building relationships through a web of networking. One way of starting the process is by creating your own home page through the Internet. You can learn how to do it through the Internet itself. Your home page needs to include four elements.

❖ Complete contact information (paper mail and e-mail addresses,

work phone and fax numbers etc)

❖ Links to organizations you are associated with (your department, project, professional associations, classes you teach, events that you are involved in organizing etc)

❖ Full references to the publications/ programmes you have developed and you want people to know about

❖ Links to other web-based facilities that you maintain, for example a page of links to resources that are relevant to your profession.

It is not advisable to include personal information or goofy stuff on your professional web-page. You need to deliberately try and design your professional web-page in a non-frivolous format. Creating your web-page with links to online resources that are specific to your professional interests, directories of research projects in your field that people might have built on the Web, and the home pages of university departments of adult education and other research institutions dealing with adult learning, you will save yourself and other people the trouble of looking for them again.

You can also use online discussion groups to become familiar with current debates in the area of adult learning, documentation and information. Before taking such a step, you need

to listen in on a discussion group for a while and become familiar with its customs and conventions and then only consider responding or chatting. One good method of entering a discussion group is that you write an intelligent, self-respecting, unshowy, low key less than one page message that reflects a single, clearly stated point about a topic that is of interest to you and others in the discussion group. This strategy offers you a chance to either withdraw or enter the ongoing discussion.

Your professional life as an adult educator demands you to construct and maintain a professional persona that entails largely your research, writing and other professional activities. It is important to remember that network-building takes time. It is a long-term investment of time and efforts. The above discussed case-study of ALADIN shows that a number of committed stakeholders have been proactive for nearly a decade to make possible the existence of an adult learning, documentation and information network. ALADIN members use the various tools of a larger ecology of communication media, each with its own role to play. If you pay attention to the relationship among media, you can use the right tool for each task.

Activity 10.3

Identify the various tools of communication media employed by ALADIN members and consider the possibility of creating a home page for PALDIN program of study. State the main elements that this home page will include in its design.

OR

Create your own home page and include the four components discussed above. Take help of ALADIN web pages for creating links to other online resources which are important and relevant for your professional work as an adult educator.

10.6 Conclusion

The professional community of adult educators is a public arena and you as an adult educator have to develop an identity for locating yourself in this arena. Through the case-study of ALADIN, we have attempted to present before you some tacit rules of establishing your professional identity. Socialising as an adult educator amidst professional adult educators is a normal activity that we expect each PALDIN learner to appreciate and practice.

Having initiated the process of networking, you would like to consider what to do with it. If you would like to do well in your field, you will like to try organizing something like a workshop, a journal issue, an e-mail discussion group, an approach to a funding agency for a grant for your project etc. You have either created your own home page or become a member of ALADIN or you have both venues open to you for undertaking any of the above activities. In this context, if you remember the norms of humility that operate in most spheres of social life, you will engage in the activity of your choice with extensive constraints on your public persona. Here you are basically attempting to get a public voice. Learning about ALADIN has paved the way to knowing about insides of networking process. We feel that your own experience of networking at grassroots level can give you impetus to try and make use of ALADIN for boosting your professional identity.

Of course, you are not always successful with the process of networking. There are many times several pitfalls in the process of forging links because some networks work beautifully while some others do not pose problems and it is a very good idea to be on one's guard while networking. There are risks involved in the process that you need to be aware of. For example, as Krolak (2003) has mentioned in her handout on networking, network may face the following serious risks.

❖ Lack of concrete activities that are interesting and beneficial to members

❖ Neglect of training and capacity building

❖ Lack of focus, clear roles, objectives and vision

❖ Restricted access to communication tools such as e-mail

❖ Lack of financial resources, time and human resources

❖ Language can be a barrier

❖ Dilution of organization's objectives and distraction from daily work when spending too much time on networking

❖ Arriving to consensus can be time consuming

❖ Network may be too large or too small and become ineffective

❖ Lack of regular opportunities to meet face-to-face in meetings, conferences etc.

❖ High expectations and limited patience resulting in disappointment

❖ Network has just one project and when the project is finished the network deteriorates

❖ The network is artificially created and not really needed or wanted by its members

❖ Passive membership or low commitment or interaction of members

❖ Hidden and conflicting agendas

❖ Danger of centralization and domination if one network co-ordinator or an organization is leading the process

❖ Networks suffer if the co-ordinator is not in close contact with the field, whom they claim to represent

❖ Dependency on personalities or conflicts and competitiveness between strong personalities or organizations

❖ Lack of appropriate leadership

❖ Failure of individuals to carry out agreed actions

❖ Neglect of monitoring and evaluation of the network - evaluation is made difficult through the iceberg and snowball effect

Indeed we do not want to end Unit 10 with the thought of possible risks to be possibly encountered in the world of networking. Therefore we discuss in the last section of the unit the features of successful networks.

10.7 Apply What You Have Learnt

In this lesson you have learnt about ALADIN as a global network of networks. It is expected that you have accessed some links to support and enrich your own professional work as an adult educator. You will also know about other networks in your personal or professional life. In this exercise we would like you to go carefully through the following criteria of successful networks (the list of criteria has been taken from Krolak 2003) and identify criteria that are met by ALADIN and/ or by networks that you know. Please choose at least three criteria and explain your decision.

Successful networks usually meet the following criteria.

❖ a realistic strategy for working together with clear objectives

❖ members have the capacity to contribute financial resources, time or information

❖ efficient communication

❖ mechanisms that allow for two-way communication

❖ regular meetings and conferences take place

❖ skills are developed through collective training, information sharing or informal mentoring within the network/there is transparency, trust and a willingness to actively co-operate

❖ members see the benefits of joining the network, have a stake in the general objective(s), an interest in specific activities, a sense of belonging and a confident feeling of achievement and future possibilities

❖ a committed core of active members will take initiatives for co-ordination, management and logistics

Hopefully after completing this exercise you will find that you are well aware of the good and the bad aspects of networking and it will much depend on your sound judgement to find out as to which links provide you with the support that you are seeking as a professional adult educator. Best of luck!