Literacy for all: Making a difference

Agneta Lind

Fundamentals of Educational Planning – 89

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Fundamentals of educational planning

The booklets in this series are written primarily for two types of clientele: those engaged in educational planning and administration, in developing as well as developed countries; and others, less specialized, such as senior government officials and policy-makers who seek a more general understanding of educational planning and of how it is related to overall national development. They are intended to be of use either for private study or in formal training programmes.

Since this series was launched in 1967, practices and concepts of educational planning have undergone substantial change. Many of the assumptions which underlay earlier attempts to rationalize the process of educational development have been criticized or abandoned. Yet even if rigid mandatory centralized planning has now clearly proven to be inappropriate, this does not mean that all forms of planning have been dispensed with. On the contrary, the need for collecting data, evaluating the efficiency of existing programmes, undertaking a wide range of studies, exploring the future and fostering broad debate on these bases to guide educational policy and decision-making has become even more acute than before. One cannot make sensible policy choices without assessing the present situation, specifying the goals to be reached, marshalling the means to attain them, and monitoring what has been accomplished. Hence planning is also a way to organize learning: by mapping, targeting, acting and correcting. The scope of educational planning has been broadened. In addition to the formal system of education, it is now applied to all other important educational efforts in non-formal settings. Attention to the growth and expansion of education systems is being complemented and sometimes even replaced by a growing concern for the quality of the entire educational process and for the control of its results. Finally, planners and administrators have become more aware of the importance of implementation strategies and the role of regulatory mechanisms, including the choice of financing methods and examination and certification procedures. The concern of planners is twofold: to reach a better understanding of the

validity of education in its own empirically-observed dimensions, and to help in defining appropriate strategies for change.

The purpose of these booklets includes monitoring the evolution and change in educational policies and their effect upon educational planning requirements; highlighting current issues of educational planning and analyzing them in the context of their historical and societal setting; and disseminating methodologies of planning which can be applied in the context of both the developed and the developing countries. For policy-making and planning, vicarious experience is a potent source of learning: the problems others face, the objectives they seek, the routes they try, the outcomes they achieve, and the unintended results they produce all deserve analysis.

In order to help the Institute identify up-to-date issues in educational planning and policy-making in different parts of the world, an Editorial Board has been appointed comprising professionals of high repute in their fields. The series has been carefully designed, but no attempt has been made to avoid differences or even contradictions in the views expressed by the authors. The Institute itself does not wish to impose any official doctrine. Thus, while the views are the responsibility of the authors and may not always be shared by UNESCO or IIEP, they warrant attention in the international forum of ideas. Indeed, one purpose of this series is to reflect a diversity of experience and opinions by giving different authors from a wide range of backgrounds and disciplines the opportunity to express their views on changing theories and practices in educational planning.

Universal literacy has been a major preoccupation of the international community for several years, but remains to be a goal that is difficult to reach. Literacy, as well as being necessary for active citizenship, healthy and prosperous living, can be an empowering tool to boost overall human capabilities and development. However, increasingly the literacy rates of women, rural youth and adults and the poor is a challenge that many countries struggle with.

Several factors that hinder universal literacy are identified and discussed in detail in this booklet. They include deficient access to and low quality of primary education; lack of political will to organize large-scale programmes for youth and adults; poor literate environments; insufficient resources and weak institutional

frameworks; and inadequate language policies. Universal literacy calls for more investment in adult education based on strong political will, as well as for a more creative and holistic approach at all levels: locally, nationally and internationally.

In this booklet, Agneta Lind has described, in a very comprehensible and straightforward manner, the various issues concerning literacy, and presents the implications for educational planners. We are sure that this booklet will be of great interest to those working in the sphere of literacy for all and are grateful to the author for preparing this edition of the *Fundamentals of Educational Planning*.

Mark Bray
Director, IIEP

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Preface

It is widely recognized that mastering literacy is essential for living in a modern society, just as a literate population is essential for a country to compete in a globalized world. Literacy is a human right; it is also key to achieving many development goals, be it improved nutrition and health, increased productivity and poverty reduction, enhanced political participation, conscientization of the poor, empowerment of women, or sensitization to environmental issues. Last, but not least, literacy is necessary to facilitate any further learning. In recent years the international community has been mobilized to achieve the goal of primary education for all by 2015. Unless children learn how to read and write while in school, it is unlikely that the adult population will ever be literate. Ensuring child literacy, however, is not sufficient to enhance development in the short term. First, many children drop out of school before they can truly be considered literate. Second, children of illiterate mothers have a greater chance of not going to school or of dropping out than children of literate mothers. Making their mother literate would contribute toward educating her as well as her children. Finally, if countries rely only on child education, it will take a long time before the whole adult population becomes literate.

According to the 2008 Global Monitoring Report, 774 million adults are still illiterate, compared to 864 million 10 years previously. Progress has been made worldwide, but, with the exception of China, this progress has been very slow. More attention has to be paid to organizing literacy programmes for youngsters and adults in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and some Arab states, otherwise the problem of illiteracy will remain serious, compromising the success of poverty reduction strategies, health campaigns, rural development programmes, and governance reforms. The fourth objective of the Dakar Framework for Action will also be in great danger of not being met.

Conscious of this challenge, the Editorial Board of the Fundamentals of Educational Planning series asked two authors to write booklets on how to address the challenge of increasing

the literacy rate of the adult population. The present booklet by Agneta Lind presents the challenges of achieving literacy for all. The author discusses why it is important to achieve literacy for all and how to go about it. Several obstacles have to be overcome by the decision makers and planners who decide to introduce a programme on a large scale. First, political leaders have to be mobilized and give their full support to the policy and to the chosen strategy. Second, a variety of partners and stakeholders have to be involved. Although the policy is to be government-led, it would be best implemented by a variety of providers at different levels. Hence flexibility is needed. Another difficulty may arise from the declining motivation of learners, who generally have many other concerns and lead busy lives: the programmes offered should therefore be relevant to their needs. The author also rightly emphasizes the importance of establishing bridges between formal and non-formal education, between primary and adult education within a holistic education strategy of Education for All, and of the need to create enabling contexts and learning environments.

The Editorial Board is very grateful to Agneta Lind, an internationally renowned expert on adult education and adult literacy issues, for writing such a booklet addressed to decision makers and planners. Her 30 years of experience in the domain, as well as her involvement in the organization and assessment of numerous programmes in countries such as Botswana, Mozambique and Namibia, make her particularly qualified to write this rich and concrete report.

Françoise Caillods
General Editor

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List of abbreviations

ABE	Adult basic education
ABED	Adult basic education and development
ABET	Adult basic education and training
ABLE	Adult basic learning and education
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADEA	Association for Development of Education in Africa
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ALADIN	Adult Learning Documentation and Information Network
ALNL	Adult literacy, numeracy and language
CBO	Community-based organization
CLC	Community learning centres
CONFINTEA	International conference on adult education
CSO	Civil society organization
EFA	Education for All
EWLP	Experimental World Literacy Programme
FAL	Functional adult literacy
GPI	Gender Parity Index
HEI	Higher education institutions
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IALS	International Adult Literacy Survey
ICT	Information and communication technology
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
IIZ/DVV	International Co-operation/German Adult Education Association
ILI	International Literacy Institute
LAMP	Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme
LIFE	Literacy Initiative for Empowerment

LLL	Lifelong learning
LWL	Life-wide learning
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NFE	Non-formal education
ODA	Overseas Development Agency
PAS	Alfabetizacão Solidária Programme
PBA	Literate Brazil Programme
PE	Primary education
PRA	Participatory rural appraisal
PRSP	Poverty reduction strategy paper
REFLECT	Regenerated Freirean literacy through empowering techniques
SIL	Summer Institute of Linguistic
UIL	UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning
UIS	UNESCO Institute of Statistics
UK	United Kingdom
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Fund
UNLD	United Nations Literacy Decade
UPE	Universal primary education
USD	United States dollar
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
YEA	Youth and Adult Education
YSP	Yo, Si Puedo

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Table 3.1 Literacy as a potential human, political, social and economic asset at different levels

Table 6.1 Evaluating criteria

List of boxes

Box 1. Literacy partnership models in Brazil

Introduction

This booklet is about creating literate societies, and the policies required to improve national literacy rates (the percentage of a population aged 15 and above that are considered literate). It focuses on the role of literacy for adults (including youth aged 15 and above) in the context of adult basic learning and education (ABLE).

The meaning of literacy and related concepts in lifelong learning, as well as the motivations for and against literacy for all, are reviewed. Literacy policies and different strategies and approaches to adult literacy programmes are critically analyzed, examining what works in differing contexts. No one universal approach or method is considered applicable to all. To be successful, it is argued, adult literacy strategies need to be supported by enabling policies and favourable contexts.

In addition to the sources referred to in the booklet, the author's own experiences garnered from different parts of the world have guided the analysis. The author has, in different capacities, worked with or monitored adult literacy and ABLE programmes in countries such as Peru, Portugal, Botswana, Mozambique and Namibia. A comparative perspective has also been developed by participating in numerous international gatherings in which information and experience have been shared, and by reviewing literature and research for publications such as the Education for All (EFA) *Global Monitoring Report 2006: Literacy for Life* (UNESCO, 2005). The general focus is on developing countries, both because that is where the literacy problem is most accentuated, and also because the author's own background in development co-operation and work is focused on those areas. Frequent references are made to the Mozambique case, where the author was based while writing this booklet.

The booklet is divided into nine chapters. Following the introduction, *Chapter I* on the challenges involved in achieving literacy for all and creating literate societies includes a brief situation analysis, with some statistics highlighting signs of progress and problems. The chapter shows that literacy for all is still an

unaccomplished goal and an ever moving target. Adult men and women who are not literate are mainly those who live in poverty. They are also the parents of the children who are not in school or who do not learn to master basic literacy and numeracy in school.

The first chapter also discusses why, in spite of numerous international, regional and national commitments over the last half of the twentieth century, progress has been slow. In most countries, adult literacy has *de facto* been neglected in actual strategies and resource allocations. Some of the main factors addressed are poverty and marginalization (often exacerbated by HIV), shortcomings in achieving universal primary education (UPE), the hurdle of instructional language, and the problem of non-literate environments. Finally, some of the specific literacy challenges resulting from international trends in social development are identified, such as shrinking formal employment opportunities, shifting gender relations, and the multiple uses of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

In *Chapter II* on the meaning of literacy, the focus is on adult and youth basic education programmes, which include the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic (initial literacy and beyond). A life-wide (home, community, work and leisure) and lifelong learning perspective on literacy is adopted – considering literacy as a continuous process of learning and practice.

While academic or philosophical debates, for example, about literacy are briefly referred to, practical meanings, as well as international definitions and concepts, are examined. Common ambiguities in the use of the term ‘literacy’ (and other often related terms such as ‘post-literacy’ and ‘non-formal education’) are addressed.

Chapter III, which discussed literacy for what purpose and for whom, focuses on why literacy for all is important and necessary and not solely for children. Literacy is presented as a basic learning need and human and democratic right integral to the achievement of EFA and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This chapter adheres with Amartya Sen’s (UNESCO, 2003*a*) view of literacy as a freedom and a potential human, political, social and economic asset. Many children will continue to be deprived of literacy and

effective education as long as their parents continue to be poor and have no or very limited education or access to literacy. Literacy, it is argued, is a potential empowering tool to boost capabilities and development. This is not to say, however, that literacy in itself leads to empowerment or development.

The various motives and objectives of literacy, as seen by different stakeholders, are reviewed, including an analysis of the demand beyond literacy. Reasons are given as to why governments and development agencies should invest in adult literacy. In this context, the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of adult literacy programmes are evaluated in comparison to investment in literacy for school children. The importance of providing different entry points and responding to the needs of diverse potential learner groups is underlined. It is argued that special effort is needed to mainstream gender equality and, in most cases, to attract men, as literacy classes are often considered as an activity for women.

Chapter IV concerns enabling contexts and learning environments. Understanding the factors contributing towards the development of literate societies as well as how development, education, and literacy are inter-related – if not directly inter-causal – is essential to discuss what can be done. Historical perspectives are presented, as well as examples of more recent developments towards literacy for all.

It is argued that successful literacy policies require political will, as manifested by the adoption of four mutually reinforcing strategies: 1) serious efforts to secure UPE; 2) investment in literacy programmes for adult men and women – both young and old – as part of an adult education system; 3) broad policies promoting a literate environment in accessible languages; and 4) overall progress in development (human and democratic, not just economic) with an impact on overcoming poverty. Without these four strategies, literacy policies will flounder.

Literacy acquisition and different teaching/learning approaches are reviewed in *Chapter V*. Transformational approaches (often inspired by the Brazilian liberation educator Paulo Freire) versus development-oriented ‘functional’ approaches are reviewed, as well as formal adult education approaches. The chapter concludes that, in

practice, these different approaches are increasingly converging, with the apparent controversies about methodologies often exaggerated and unnecessary.

Chapter VI begins with a discussion on how to evaluate learning outcomes of adult literacy programmes. It examines experiences of regular monitoring for ongoing adult literacy programme activities. Some key outcome indicators and evaluation criteria are suggested and discussed, and advantages of complementing monitoring and evaluation with research, as well as the roles of population censuses, household surveys and special literacy surveys, are also briefly addressed.

Chapter VII addresses national policies and organizational strategies, as well as the strategic challenges of going-to-scale. The importance of holistic policies, integration of literacy and adult education into EFA plans, poverty reduction strategies and other development plans and budgets are raised. Governance and the crucial role of broad partnerships are reviewed. Political will and the impetus of governments in implementing literacy policies are stressed. Some requirements for scaling up literacy programmes for adults, such as increased funding and investing in human resources and institutional capacity, are addressed. Finally, the chapter identifies four strategic issues that need clarification in the planning process for scaling up: a) objectives and motivations; b) adaptation to context and reality; c) organizational frameworks and institutional arrangements; and d) modalities of mobilization to sustain commitment and harness social energy.

The concluding chapter (*Chapter VIII*) presents conclusions and implications for educational planners. It demonstrates how certain lessons learned over past decades show that achieving universal literacy calls for not only more investments in literacy, but for a resurgence of political will, as well as for a more creative and holistic approach at all levels: locally, nationally and internationally.

Listed below are a few of the more pertinent strategic factors:

- Political will within a context of broader educational and socio-economic development interventions (inclusion of adult basic education and literacy in strategic plans).

- Adequate human, material and financial resource allocations, including state budget allocations.
- Government-led literacy policies, flexibly implemented through decentralized and co-ordinated partnerships among different state and civil society stakeholders.
- Community support and commitment at local level.
- Broad efforts to create literate environments in relevant languages.

The following are the most critical programme design factors:

- Reconciling the objectives of learners with programme targets defined by providers.
- Careful choice of language of instruction and attention to transition from mother-tongue to mainstream/official second languages.
- An adult educator training system, including training of trainers and acceptable working conditions for educators.
- Access to information, reading materials, newspapers and other media, as well as computers – especially for teachers/facilitators – as part of a support system.
- Adapting and grading teaching/learning materials according to learner interests and prior skills (textbooks, real literacy materials, radio, TV, other media).
- Relevant and enjoyable content.
- Mainstreamed gender equality.

Overall, this booklet attempts to show that a combination of over-ambitious goals, insufficient and fragmented efforts, and inadequate resources and strategies have contributed to slow progress in meeting national and international literacy commitments. While diversity is recognized as necessary and desirable, the need to address the problem of fragmentation and lack of co-ordination and consistency is stressed.

I. The challenges of literacy for all

The size and distribution of the literacy problem[1]

Even after the turn of the century, literacy for all – children, youth and adults – is still an unaccomplished goal and an ever-moving target.

In 2004, almost 800 million adults (15 years and older) worldwide lacked basic literacy skills. Of these, approximately 60 per cent were women (more exactly, the estimate for the period 2000-2004 was 771 million adults, or 100 million less than in 1990). These 800 million or so illiterate adult men and women coincide to a large extent with the estimated one billion absolute poor people in the world. The challenges of literacy and the development of literate societies are, consequently, closely related to the challenges of poverty reduction and sustainable human development.

In the past, the absolute number of non-literate adults had a tendency to grow, for example, from 735 million in 1960 to 872 million in 1990. In comparison, population growth has improved adult literacy rates from 56 per cent in 1960 to 82 per cent in 2000-2004. Progress, though, remains slow; a decade was required to raise the overall world literacy rate from 75 per cent (1990) to 82 per cent (2000-2004). This is due, in part, to the large number of children (around 100 million) who were out-of-school and consequently, contributed to the increase of non-literate adults every year.

In addition, there are uncounted millions who are considered literate but who actually possess an insufficient mastery of literacy to cope with the most elementary task. Many more people throughout the world experience problems because they are not 'functionally' literate in relation to their environment. This can be true for immigrants living in a foreign language country or in one using a script different from what they learned at home, or for people with dyslexia or for those unable to use their literacy skills because of

1. The source of all statistical data in this chapter is UNESCO (2005).

sight impairments with no access to affordable reading glasses, etc. These individuals feel handicapped in coping with modern life situations, requiring ever more sophisticated literacy skills.

This issue has been identified as a growing problem in developed countries such as the United States, Britain and Ireland; however, achieving functional literacy persists as a global problem. For many people, this problem is exacerbated by multi-lingual environments in contexts where most written communication is available in only one or a few dominant languages.

How literacy skills can be used depends very much on language situations. Even when the dominant language is known and spoken by people somewhat literate, formal and official bureaucratic language differs from the spoken language. This implies the exclusion of large population groups not belonging to the 'elite'. Unnecessary gaps exist between the literacy used in personal and family relationships and the functional literacy required for relating to public institutions or other power structures.

The challenge of literacy for all must also take into account the increasing numbers of children, youth and adults who have learned to read and write but who do not make active or meaningful use of their literacy skills. In brief, the problem of functional illiteracy is much bigger than the literacy statistics indicate.

The disparities between and within countries are large, and are far from diminishing. Most people lacking elementary literacy skills live in the developing world and have had limited or no access to school. Within countries, adult men and women who are not literate represent, predominately, the poorest segments of the population. They are also the parents of children who are not in school or who do not learn to master basic literacy and numeracy in school.

The lowest literacy rates are found in sub-Saharan Africa, especially in West Africa. In Burkina Faso, the literacy rate was only 13 per cent in 2000-2004,[2] representing the lowest in the world. Several other countries, such as Haiti, Niger and Senegal, have very low literacy rates but relatively small numbers of illiterate people. Countries with low literacy rates and large populations, such

2. Twenty-two per cent according to the data presented in the Global Monitoring Report on EFA 2007 (UNESCO, 2006).

as Bangladesh, India, Mozambique, Nepal, Pakistan, Sudan and Yemen, face the biggest quantitative literacy challenges.

About half of all illiterate adults in the world live in South and West Asia. The number of illiterate people is obviously greatest in developing countries with very large populations. Three quarters of the world's illiterate population live in 12 such countries, including India, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nigeria and Brazil. The number of illiterate people has, since 1990, decreased in several of these countries. In China, the reduction was significant – a decrease of almost 100 million between 1990 and 2000-2004. During the same period, India and Indonesia managed to reduce their numbers of illiterate people by more than five million each. In India's case, this broke the trend of ever increasing numbers of illiterate people arising from population growth with insufficient progress in UPE and adult literacy. In many countries, the number of illiterate people is still increasing, even if the adult literacy rates are improving. In Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Morocco and Pakistan, for example, the combined illiterate adult population increased by 20 million, as progress in literacy rates failed to keep up with the continuing population growth.

Disparities within countries are common. Underdeveloped rural areas with widespread poverty normally demonstrate lower literacy rates compared to more developed and urbanized areas. Poor rural populations are more likely to be illiterate than poor urban populations. In countries with already low literacy rates, the lowest literacy rates are often found among older women in rural areas, and the highest among young urban male residents. Nonetheless, disparities are normally largest between relatively well-off and poor groups, irrespective of urban or rural residence.

More women than men are illiterate since more girls than boys have traditionally been excluded from school education. Women still lag behind in many countries with low literacy rates. Worldwide, the Gender Parity Index (GPI)[3] for adult literacy improved significantly

3. UNESCO uses a Gender Parity Index (GPI) "measured by the ratio between the female and male values for a given indicator [such as adult literacy rates]" (UNESCO, 2003*a*) "This gender parity index indicates male advantage for values less than unity and female advantage for higher values" (GMR, 2003/2004).

between 1970 and 2000-2004, especially in the Arab states (from 0.34 to 0.69), East Asia and the Pacific (from 0.62 to 0.92), sub-Saharan Africa (from 0.49 to 0.76) and South and West Asia (from 0.40 to 0.66). In Latin America and the Caribbean, gender parity in adult literacy rates has almost been achieved, standing at 0.98.

Progress towards the inclusion of more children, especially girls, in school is normally reflected in higher literacy rates and a better gender balance among younger adults. Some recently identified exceptions to the trend, where lower literacy rates are found among younger adults, include Tanzania and Kenya, possessing *lower* literacy rates among 15 to 24 year olds (mainly men) than among 25 to 34 year olds. In both cases, this probably reflects the rapid and successful expansion of access to education for children and adults achieved during the first decades following independence in the 1960s, and which was followed by economic crisis, structural adjustment, declining social services and deteriorating living conditions in the 1980s and 1990s.

The global GPI among young adults (aged 15-24) was 0.93 in 2000-2004, compared to 0.88 for the overall adult literacy rate. This varies considerably from country to country and within countries. In a growing number of countries, the proportion of young literate women (aged 15-24) to young literate men is the same, or even somewhat higher. This has long been the case in the Caribbean and parts of Latin America, as well as in a couple of cattle-herding countries in Southern Africa (Botswana and Lesotho). In many regions, this is now a new trend; for example, it is the case for the United Arab Emirates among the Arab states, the Philippines in East Asia and the Pacific, Sri Lanka in South and West Asia, and Kenya in sub-Saharan Africa. Overall, in 2000-2004, the GPI favoured young women over young men in 22 countries (with relevant data), compared to 15 countries in 1990.

A review of geographical and population incidences of literacy in regions and countries indicates a certain pattern of disparities, which cannot be taken for granted. Disparities do not occur systematically even where illiteracy is more widespread among women, minorities, older age groups, etc. For planners, it is essential

to critically review and map the distribution of the lowest literacy rates in their respective countries and, locally, to check the situation properly ensuring that the assumptions behind planning are based on realities and not unquestioned generalities or prejudices.

What to measure and how

National and global literacy statistics are mostly based on population censuses taking place once every 10 years or, increasingly, on household surveys or, in rare cases, on specific literacy surveys. The concepts of literacy, and consequently the measurements, are simplified because of the large-scale nature of such national surveys. The two most common measurements are: (i) whether the respondents (usually the heads of households) and the family members are able to read and write; and/or (ii) the highest level of formal education the respondents have completed. Both these measurements are proxies. The first is a subjective assessment by the respondent on literacy skills, but says nothing about how the respondent applies these skills. The second varies widely depending on how many years of schooling one decides to use as a proxy, e.g. 4, 7, 9 or 11. Even though new and more sophisticated survey instruments have been developed, the uncertainty and the probable overestimation of official literacy statistics will continue in most situations.

At the national and global levels, a general indicator of progress in literacy, and sometimes even in poverty reduction, is an increased national literacy rate. Literacy rates normally concern adults aged 15 and over. However, this indicator is not directly related to the results of adult literacy programmes. This is because every child who turns 15, having acquired basic literacy skills through school or other means, will increase the number of adults considered literate in the surveys or censuses in which literacy is included. A significantly increased literacy rate is often the result of holistic EFA policies and actions involving basic education for both children and adults. It is, however, mostly a mistake to make claims that adult literacy campaigns or programmes themselves have caused a registered increase in the national literacy rate of a certain country. In fact, the impact of most literacy programmes on national literacy rates is very limited. If a country, for example, is estimated to have around 5 million non-literate adults, and 50,000 adults acquire basic

literacy skills in a literacy programme, this represents just 1 per cent of the said illiterate adult population; so, it can be claimed that the programme contributed to reducing illiteracy by 1 per cent. This is not so simple to calculate though, because at the same time, children who turned 15 years old during the programme cycle would add to both the number of literate adults (normally achieved through schooling) and to the number of illiterate adults who did not go to school or learn basic skills in school as children.

Adding to these problems, some studies found that self-proclaimed literacy is unreliable, i.e. the answers given to questions on literacy skills in surveys and censuses are not always accurate. In most cases, the surveyed literacy rates overestimate the actual literacy levels as obtained by testing in practice (UNESCO, 2004*b*). In addition, the literacy rate refers to a skill or ability but does not say anything about the actual use of these competencies.

Nonetheless, the literacy rate or the number of literate adults can be a useful and relevant indicator in cases where the explicit target is to increase the number of literate adults or when the goal is to make a whole village, community, municipality or district literate or free from illiteracy. In such cases, the baseline consists of an initial local literacy survey, as was the case in the Indian district-based total literacy campaigns.

The dichotomy between literate and illiterate implied in many surveys trying to measure literacy rates – such as population censuses, household surveys or specific literacy surveys – is unfortunate, since learning, mastering and using literacy are context-sensitive, relative, and comprise a continuum of communication. To address this, several large international comparative surveys, as well as some national surveys, have defined and measured different levels and domains of literacy. For example, in the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), carried out in 20 industrialized countries between 1994 and 1998, five levels of literacy were measured in three different domains (prose, document, and quantitative literacy). Literacy ability was defined as the point in each domain where an individual has an 80 per cent chance of successfully completing a set of tasks of varying difficulty (UNESCO, 2005). Direct assessments of literacy levels have been carried out in household

surveys and specific literacy surveys in some developing countries, such as Botswana, Brazil and Tanzania. The findings seem to be more reliable than surveys built on self-proclaimed literacy or other proxy measures, such as number of years of schooling, collected by censuses. However, they involve higher costs and take more time; therefore, they are not always useful to decision-makers who must respond with timely policies.

Globally, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) is developing a more sophisticated instrument for measuring different levels of literacy, adapted to specific contexts, through the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP). The idea is to develop a cross-national and comparable direct assessment tool, mainly for developing countries. The purpose is to provide decision-makers with reliable and comparable information on the distribution of different levels of functional literacy and numeracy. The LAMP project is, however, considered expensive and not always feasible in countries with the highest numbers and proportions of illiterate people. Yet, it is generally agreed that conventional assessments need to be complemented by more detailed and context-bound analysis.

Why slow progress in spite of numerous commitments?

In its resolution (56/116) proclaiming the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD): Education For All for the period 2003-2012, the General Assembly reaffirms that “literacy for all is at the heart of basic education for all and that creating literate environments and societies is essential for achieving the goals of eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, curbing population growth, achieving gender equality and ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy”.

The UNLD and EFA commitments are recent expressions of the importance attributed to literacy for all by numerous international, regional and national declarations and agreements over the last half of the twentieth century. The arguments have varied from the view of literacy as liberating and a human right necessary for social justice and democracy, to the view of literacy as instrumental in achieving economic growth and poverty alleviation. In spite of this, only a few countries have tackled literacy urgently with relatively

effective strategies. In the past, several countries in transition from colonialism to independence or in revolutionary situations, such as the former Soviet Union, Cuba, Tanzania, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Vietnam, Ethiopia and Eritrea, conducted mass literacy campaigns, which clearly contributed to improvements of national literacy rates. More recent examples of noteworthy national initiatives to boost adult literacy, in addition to literacy through schools, are India's total literacy campaign, launched in 1992; Brazil's 2003 initiated accelerated literacy programme; Burkina Faso's national fund for literacy and NFE, established in 2001; and Indonesia's 2004 launch of a national literacy movement. Nonetheless, overall progress has been slow, and literacy has in most cases *de facto* been neglected in actual strategies and resource allocations.

Why is this so and what can be done about it? What are the main challenges policy-makers and planners are confronted with in trying to achieve literacy for all? Poverty, deficient access to and quality of primary education, lack of political will, poor literate environments and inadequate language policies, inadequate literacy policies and strategies, and insufficient resources and institutional frameworks have been major constraints in the past. Each of them is briefly addressed below.

- Poverty

Economic development has helped to promote literacy, especially through UPE. The poverty of countries and people has been, and continues to be, a major obstacle. Nevertheless, even countries with less developed economies have made significant progress in literacy by combining UPE with large-scale specific adult literacy initiatives and with overall development and nation-building efforts (e.g. Cuba, Tanzania, Namibia, Vietnam and China).

Still, poverty goes hand in hand with poor literacy skills and use. Poor health, including HIV and AIDS, deficient nutrition, lack of water and electricity, poor and crowded housing conditions, insufficient access to media and other information channels, poor infrastructure, low income, early marriages, migration, child labour, and similar problems associated with poverty make it difficult for both children and adults to attend education programmes regularly in order to learn effectively and practice literacy skills. Therefore,

it is essential to implement literacy strategies for out-of-school youth and adults in the context of development, instead of acting as stand-alone strategies. This is a persistent challenge facing literacy programmes. Literacy programmes should not necessarily start in the poorest areas with the lowest literacy rates if there is no other ongoing development work being undertaken.

- Deficient access to and quality of primary education

Universal literacy for all cannot be attained while UPE is far from being achieved in a number of countries, and the learning achievements in school continue to be deficient; political will and concerted national commitment to achieve literacy in schools, and out of school, for children, youth and adults is required.

Following the economic crisis of the 1980s and structural adjustment responses subsequent to the Jomtien World Conference on EFA in 1990, the focus of EFA efforts by national governments, influenced by powerful international agency policies (not least, the World Bank), was on increasing formal primary education enrolment. *De facto* the quality and completion of primary education was neglected, as well as non-formal and adult literacy education.

The narrow interpretation of the EFA agenda meant that enrolment itself was seen as an indicator of educational progress and literacy achievement. Nonetheless, concern for quality and learning achievements has repeatedly been expressed in a variety of policy and research forums. Numerous studies have highlighted the limited achievements and low internal efficiency of the formal basic education system in many countries, especially in low-income countries with low literacy rates. Countries will not make any tangible or significant progress in reducing illiteracy without improving the teaching and learning of literacy schools among school-age children, who, when they turn 15, will be included in national statistics on adult literacy. In fact, the school factor is usually more important than adult literacy programmes for increasing literacy rates. The main challenge, however, is to combine adult programmes with serious efforts to improve the quality of primary education.

- Lack of political will

Insufficient political will to invest in literacy for all, and thereby to strengthen democratic participation, has been a major factor behind the slow progress and neglect of adult literacy. However, there are probably stronger, undeclared political reasons for neglecting adult literacy than the apparently rational explicit ones, for example concerning lack of cost-effectiveness. These are addressed in *Chapter III* on ‘Why literacy’. Here, just a few will be mentioned.

First, adult literacy mass campaigns which have made a difference had been almost exclusively a feature of socialist-oriented countries. Second, the popular adult education movement, inspired by the revolutionary ideas of the influential Brazilian pedagogue, Paulo Freire, about literacy as a liberating process, was perceived to be a subversive threat to national ruling elites and western powers. Hence, at least before the fall of the Berlin wall in 1990, adult literacy was conceived as a non-desirable area for action or support because it could favour anti-capitalist countries and revolutionary movements. Another, still persisting political reason for the neglect, is that the target group of adult literacy is poor people with limited means and confidence to publicly express demands for adult literacy. Since people in need do not put pressure on governments and politicians to provide literacy, adult literacy is side-stepped by other educational agendas that often respond to demands by the better-off segments of the population.

The neglect and disengagement in poor developing countries contrasted with the emergence of the concept of lifelong learning as a dominant policy paradigm in industrialized countries, where the need to increase literacy and education levels was considered critical for adapting the labour force to the ever-changing and more technologically advanced demands of the labour market. For example, several European countries have, over the past 10 years, invested more in adult education and training, including literacy. Ireland, Britain and Sweden provide interesting examples.

Political will must, obviously, imply reasonable budget allocations and resources for adult education and literacy.

- Poor literate environments and inadequate language policies

Literate environments and adequate language policies are also critical for making it possible and meaningful for all to use literacy in languages people are familiar with. Children need literate parents to be able to learn properly in school. Learning and using literacy in families is essential for creating literate societies. The languages spoken at home also determine children's learning achievements. Multi-lingual situations make the literacy challenge more complex. Mother-tongue literacy has long been considered preferable to learning literacy in a second language; but, learning the dominant languages is essential for marginalized people to be able to participate and communicate adequately. Language policies that take multi-lingualism and the need to promote inclusive literacy environments into account are, therefore, crucial for functional or meaningful literacy for all.

Poorly developed literate environments constitute a major challenge for the implementation of effective literacy and language policies. The development of literate environments requires access to the written word – printed, digital or other. This involves much more than just publishing and distributing books, magazines, newspapers, etc. or providing building resource centres, such as libraries and ICT centres. Overall development, such as electrification and basic infrastructure, as well as democracy and access to information, is just as necessary. Furthermore, if no reading and writing culture pertains, creating one requires broad changes in attitudes and habits, which usually takes a long time. Even in literate environments, reading books for enjoyment is becoming less common with the current tendency among younger generations to prefer watching films on TV, videos or DVDs, as well as using a variety of electronic equipment.

- Inadequate policies and strategies

Ironically, the goals and objectives of literacy programmes are very often over-ambitious and wishful about the expected impact and numbers of participants, considering that the resources provided are minimal in both quantity and quality. Strategies are frequently inadequate in relation to the goals, and their implementation too narrowly limited to the education sector, or just to activities of social

affairs or community development, involving either only civil society or only the state. Multi-sectoral collaboration and a broad societal involvement and commitment are normally indispensable for the delivery of effective learning programmes. For this to happen, the visibility and centrality of literacy goals in sector plans and poverty reduction strategies need to be reinforced.

Past experience has revealed a major literacy policy challenge in isolated initial adult literacy programmes lacking opportunities to sustain, develop and apply the initial learning and its continuance. This challenge is related to the problems of irregular attendance and retention of literacy skills. This should be addressed in a holistic manner, from a lifelong learning perspective, i.e. by gradually introducing and developing multiple paths and modalities of learning. A broad range of opportunities should ideally be made available through formal and non-formal adult education, practical or vocational training courses, apprenticeships, development projects, informal modes of learning, community learning centres, etc. Some of these post-initial literacy activities create demand for literacy and should therefore be in place before, not after, supplying initial literacy programmes for youth and adults.

Satisfying the demand by youth and adults for continuing education and for recognition of learnt skills and knowledge requires a system of bridging between formal education and other modes of learning. Validation and accreditation frameworks must be developed. Policies should consider the need for multiple entry and exit points, or bridges and ladders between different formal and non-formal learning programmes.

The unrealistic goals of most literacy and other learning programmes and projects designed for youth and adults contribute to disappointment about the outcomes. For example, an initial or basic literacy course, however well designed, will not radically change peoples' lives and lead to employment or income. One of the challenges in designing policies is to build national policy objectives which combine visionary and pragmatic national literacy goals with more specific learning objectives, leaving room for flexible adaptation to local contexts and motivations of specific target groups.

The diversity of literacy acquisition processes, which depend on the context and learner and facilitator/teacher backgrounds, poses technical challenges in the area of curricula and teaching/learning approaches that need much more professional attention. In adult basic and literacy education programmes, the challenge is to take into better account the adult education principles of participation and response to learners' prior experience, knowledge and motivations. This requires greater investment in human resources and sustainable training systems, including sufficiently paid, qualified and motivated literacy facilitators.

- Insufficient resources and weak institutional frameworks

Meeting the quantitative and qualitative challenges of achieving the literacy goals of the EFA agenda requires significantly more attention and resources to literacy, in combination with renewed policies and strategies. More of the same will not be enough. A major challenge will be to scale up and, at the same time, encourage diversity, requiring a balance between central guidance, decentralized implementation and community ownership.

Often adult literacy programmes have an insecure institutional base within governments. A stable home is needed; in most cases, this is within the ministry of education. Other institutions, such as media, universities, other ministries, local authorities, civil society (e.g. churches, unions, NGOs, women's organizations, etc.) and private companies need to be involved as partners and providers. Institutional stability needs to be complemented by broad partnerships across sectors, at all levels. This, in its turn, entails setting up co-ordination mechanisms between the various stakeholders and providers.

Limited resources for promoting literacy in schools, other learning environments, and especially in adult literacy programmes has led to poor results and contributed to reluctance among governments and other funding partners to invest in adult literacy. In fact, creating conditions for successful literacy work requires national governments to adopt holistic policy frameworks. These need to provide necessary institutional, human and financial resources. In addition, inclusive education and language policies are needed to promote favourable environments for learning literacy.

National governments and stakeholders, the international community and aid organizations should be encouraged to support literacy broadly and robustly. To this end, they must focus more on adult literacy and literate environments in education sector plans and poverty reduction strategies.

Emerging challenges of the twenty-first century

Emerging and more demanding literacy challenges result from increasingly instable livelihoods, changing gender relations, the multiple uses of new ICTs, the consequences of the rapid spread of HIV and AIDS, and other current global trends in social development.

- Unstable livelihoods and changing gender relations

In many poor countries, the proportion of stable, healthy and well-paying jobs has been shrinking, and a majority of workers are engaged in unstable, temporary or part-time work, such as subsistence work, the informal sector, migrant work, and contract jobs. For example, in Mozambique, 85 per cent of the labour force is working in the informal sector (Asian Development Bank, 2004).

The increasing levels of unemployment in many parts of the world, and subsequent massive migration, together with increasing disparities in education, income and knowledge, and the arising of new opportunities for women, seem to be undermining the traditional family, in particular the provider role of men. Growing numbers of women are becoming single mothers, forced to work harder and longer.

The effects of the new global economy and its implications for employment and livelihoods are seriously victimizing poor people in all regions of the world. A common response among young men to the growing difficulties in providing food and other basic needs for a family appears to be a retreat into the fundamentalist masculinity, which the world of gangs fosters. The consequences, including domestic violence, are often very serious for everyone; girls, women, and the boys themselves (Economist, 1996: 2004). Recent case studies on literacy, gender and empowerment in Bangladesh and Uganda confirm similar effects of the new global economies

and ideologies, as related to structural changes in work, gender and family relations (Friedrich and Jellema, 2003).

In Bangladesh, a case study shows how the rural population was forced to abandon their subsistence farming and become wage-based households, due to loss of land and growing impoverishment. Women joined the urban labour force in, for example, the textile industry, and new forms of employment for women were created in rural areas through government and NGO-sponsored projects. At the same time "landlessness and indebtedness impelled a large number of men to seek contract work in the rich Gulf States. This trend also left many women in charge of the household for long periods, and presented them with a need and a rationale for breaking with traditions of purdah" (Friedrich and Jellema, 2003: 20).

These rapid changes have created unresolved contradictions in gender ideologies, undermining the traditional patriarchal authority, and have consequently led to a backlash against female independence.

The challenges of meeting the learning needs of men – as well as of women – who are unemployed and trying to make a living through the informal sector are multi-facetted. Many young people, forced to drop out of school, need and wish to upgrade their formal education. Much more needs to be done to improve access to and the quality of formal adult education (general and more specialized) in a flexible way as urbanization continues to grow. Providing non-formal, work-oriented skills training, which is assumed to attract more men than women, should not be considered easier, as it is rather more complex and costly and must be carefully linked to the market. It involves many private and public sector institutions, in particular the ministry of labour. Such essential formal or labour market-oriented programmes should be designed for both women and men, taking into account gender roles and relations, addressing the motivations and conditions of both women and men, and integrating gender-sensitive training in the programmes.

- New technologies resulting in new demands and opportunities

Literacy needs are enhanced by the rapid expansion and use of new ICTs, and not exclusively in the North, since digital technologies

require literate users. Digital literacy has, in fact, been recognized as a basic learning need for all (e.g. UNESCO/UN Literacy Decade, 2001). Even among poor rural populations where literacy levels are relatively low, the use of mobile phones for communicating with family members living far away, including reading and writing SMS-messages, is spreading rapidly.

Distance education has been boosted by the spread of new ICTs and has renewed potential for reaching adult educators and adult learners. At national, regional and international levels, networks and specialized agencies are communicating through websites and e-mail.[4] The spread of these communication technologies, as well as the use of TV and radio, improve learning opportunities and facilitate the sharing of resources and information about adult literacy and literacy policies.

- HIV and other debilitating diseases

The rapid spread of HIV and AIDS, and their disastrous consequences for individuals, families, communities, workplaces and nations, create special challenges for all forms of adult learning and education. They also strengthen the imperative of effective and useful literacy for all, including the one billion absolutely poor adult men and women suffering the most from the consequences of HIV and AIDS. Designing effective literacy programmes is becoming all the more complex given these increasing demands and new social contexts of literacy.

4. For example, UNESCO's specialized adult education and LLL institute in Hamburg (UIL) has a documentation network called the Adult Learning Documentation and Information Network (ALADIN) (see www.unesco.org/education/aladin).

II. Meanings and concepts of adult literacy

Practical meanings of some basic concepts

Literacy is about reading and writing

In literature and in practice, the term literacy is used in varying and vague ways. In this chapter, an attempt will be made to review major trends in the development of the concept of literacy in the international context of adult education. The intention is not, however, to review the academic debates or all the available definitions.

Literacy is related to written language (script, print, digital) as a means of communication beyond – but closely linked to – oral communication. Literacy includes numeracy because it concerns using numbers in written form. It is not meaningful to use the term literacy as a metaphor for any competency, such as in the expressions 'computer literacy', 'legal literacy', 'emotional literacy', etc. Nonetheless, reading and writing do not merely involve text, but also pictures, graphs, charts, etc. The understanding and use of pictures for communication can be called 'visual literacy', and is a very important component of literacy acquisition. It is, in fact, "the link between the oral and the written lifestyle and the first step on the way to written abstraction" (Fugelsang, 1982). In literate societies and communities, people learn to read pictures automatically through informal processes. This does not happen in some rural environments where there are no or very few pictorial representations.

'Literacy', 'illiteracy', 'literate' and 'illiterate' are relative concepts, because what is required to be literate can differ depending on the context. This relativity and the confusion made between ignorance and illiteracy have led to the conclusion that one should try to avoid calling people illiterate. The terms 'non-literate' or 'functionally illiterate' are preferred terms for describing persons who, for a variety of reasons, are not able to make use of written communication. It is important to remember that non-literate or functionally illiterate men and women are adults with valuable

knowledge, life skills, and relevant work and family experiences. They must not be treated as ignorant.

A literate person has been defined by UNESCO to be someone "who can, with understanding, both read and write a short simple statement on his [or her] everyday life" (cited in UNESCO, 2005: 158). This definition can still be useful as an indicator of initial learning of literacy skills, a first step on the way to achieving a more applicable level of skills, i.e. functional literacy. UNESCO, during its General Conference of 1978, defined a 'functionally literate' person as someone who is able to "engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his [her] group and community and also for enabling him [her] to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his [her] own and the community's development" (UNESCO, 1978: 18). This definition is still valid. It shows that the kind and level of functional literacy varies and depends on the environment and the context in each given society or community at a given time. It also highlights another feature of literacy: that learning and using literacy is a continuous process, making it difficult, or even misleading, to try to draw a definite line between literate and non-literate.

Understanding that literacy and illiteracy are relative terms can unfortunately also contribute to the frequent confusion in the way the term literacy is used. For this reason, it is also important to recognize the millions of people who have never learned, or are not able, to read or write a simple word or even their own name. These men and women have been denied their right to literacy and education. They are sometimes called 'pure illiterate' or 'pure non-literate' persons. Many more can be considered 'semi-literate', because they have learned to decipher and write a few simple words or sentences but have not carried on the initial process of learning to master literacy skills. People who have learned how to read and write but who are not able to cope with the required reading and writing functions have been called 'functionally illiterate'. 'Aliteracy' is a recent term describing another new challenge: mainly young people who have learned literacy and numeracy skills well, but do not read books and read very little else.

Literacy is relevant for all ages. Adults who need and desire to engage in organized basic learning and education are often, like

out-of-school youth, those who missed out on part or all of their formal education. The reason for this is often linked to poverty, i.e. having to earn a living/livelihood for them and their families. The approaches and factors to be taken into account in enabling youth and adults to take advantage of learning opportunities and basic literacy and education programmes are often very similar. It is therefore suggested to include out-of-school youth and young adults (normally aged 15 or over) when referring to adult literacy and adult basic education, and consequently, not to treat youth and adult education as separate areas or themes. Nonetheless, it is always necessary to analyze and adapt to the context and the specific needs and motivations of different programme beneficiaries or potential participants, which means taking into account gender, age, language, occupation, family relations and other socio-cultural characteristics.

Non-formal education/adult basic education/functional literacy/literacy, etc. – are we talking about the same thing?

The concept of literacy used in literature and in policy or programme documents is often a mixture of values, objectives, methods, contents and skills. Literacy skills should be of interest and use to adult learners. Nonetheless, there are normally at least two phases in basic literacy programmes; in the first, the emphasis is on learning to read and write, while in the second and subsequent phases, the emphasis is on reading to learn, i.e. these phases are more geared towards learning the written contents.

It is both surprising and disturbing how often literacy is discussed without explicit reference to the different components necessary for a clear definition or consensus on the topic. Literacy, functional literacy, post-literacy, literacy practices, non-formal education and adult basic education are terms used to mean several different things by different people or organizations. Sometimes they overlap, and sometimes they do not.

After the EFA conference in Jomtien, non-formal education (NFE) seemed to take precedence as the term for adult education among international organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF and ADEA (Association for Development of Education in Africa). Used as an overarching term, it covers a wide range of alternative educational

activities related to second-chance primary education, literacy, vocational training, etc. for children, youth and adults. Flexible and responsive non-formal approaches are indeed important and should be encouraged, especially in addressing the diversity of youth and adult learning needs. The problem is that the term NFE is used so broadly (referring to any level, theme, skill, and age group) that the common denominator becomes unclear. At the same time, NFE is too narrow a term for the field of adult basic education, since by definition it does not include informal and formal modes. Moreover, the 'non' in NFE has an unfortunate connotation that may reinforce impressions or images of non-importance, non-professionalism, non-governmental (only), non-funded, non-certificated, etc.

Adult basic education (ABE) is a preferable term, because it is more precise in terms of purpose and yet broader in provision. ABE requires expertise in adult education, while alternative and flexible approaches to pre-primary and primary education for children should be the responsibility of the departments and agencies implementing a mainstream general education system, requiring expertise in child development and primary education curricula. It has been suggested that adult basic learning and education (ABLE) is a better label (Torres, 2004), as it highlights learning and recognizes that learning takes place not just in organized educational programmes, but also in all other life situations. This means that literacy is embedded in life-wide and lifelong learning. Adult basic education and training (ABET), associated to workplace and occupational training, and adult basic education and development (ABED), associated to development work, are other terms used, e.g. in South Africa (see Lind, 2002). ABE certainly needs to be linked to development in other sectors and thematic areas, such as democracy and human rights. However, ABED as a general term seems excessively broad.

Lifelong learning (LLL) is a term that has replaced 'permanent, recurrent or life-long education'. Learning is stressed, because it can happen that education does not enhance learning; learning takes place both within and outside organized education. LLL embraces formal and non-formal adult education, but refers to all learning, in and out of school throughout life, from birth to death. LLL is about all spheres of life, i.e. it is related to home and family, work,

community, civics, culture, leisure, etc. This has also been called 'life-wide learning', or LWL (Torres, 2004).

There is, obviously, a need for a new global glossary to sort out terminological confusion in the field of adult literacy, basic education, NFE, LLL, etc. Literacy debates and policies would obviously gain from a common understanding of different aspects and meanings of the terminology around adult literacy. One of the sources of differences in meanings for the word 'literacy' is the language in which it is used. In English, the word 'literacy' or 'literate' has been associated with being familiar with literature or, more generally, being well educated. In many other languages the word for literacy is more directly related to reading and writing or the alphabet (*alfabetización* and its variants in Spanish, Portuguese, French, German, the Nordic languages and many others). Maybe this is why the academic debate regarding the concept of literacy has been most complicated and controversial in English-speaking academic circles.

Another possible reason for differences and confusion is the ideologies, passions and visions that come with literacy. Commitment to literacy for all, or lack of, comes with strong ideas of what the role of adult literacy is, should be, or should not be. For example, literacy should be for liberation and empowerment, poverty reduction, social transformation, social justice, democracy and human rights, or learning the Bible. Other examples are the ideas that literacy programmes for adults should avoid the dominant form of literacy seen as school-based, hegemonic and oppressive, or should lead to acquisition of work-place skills and income-generation.

In discussions and documents about literacy for adults, there are at least three ways of using the term adult literacy, i.e. first, literacy referring to reading, writing and arithmetic skills; second, literacy referring to the process of acquisition of reading and writing skills (text and numbers) within or outside adult literacy learning programmes; and third, literacy referring to the uses of literacy for different purposes.

It would be much easier to talk about literacy if these three meanings were clearly and explicitly distinguished from each other. In this booklet such a distinction will be made, i.e. between literacy

skills, literacy programmes, and literacy uses/practices. The meaning of each one is briefly discussed below:

1) *Literacy as a set of skills* related to the ability to read, write and calculate in a meaningful way can vary by level and constitutes a continuum. In each context, there is variation in the minimum of literacy skills in a given language required to cope with everyday life; i.e. that can be considered functional. The minimum level of skills for functionality is frequently defined as equivalent to the competencies and the language of literacy required by the end of primary school or basic education. Literacy, to be such, must be useful or functional, and sustainable.

   Functional literacy is not just work-oriented literacy skills, as it was translated in the 1960s. It is often a combination of what, where and how literacy is learned, and the possible and actual application of this, which determines to what extent and how literacy is functional – whether for personal, family, social, economic, political or cultural purposes. The term 'functional literacy' is often used to mean education programmes or projects organized for adults to learn income-generating skills. In practice, this is often interpreted as learning to produce something such as soap, vegetables, bread or candles, and selling them. Sometimes the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy skills is included, but usually it is not. To call such activities functional literacy is confusing and should therefore, be avoided. It is better not to use the term at all, because to be meaningful all literacy programmes must be functional, in the sense that what is learned has to be applicable whether it is for signing documents, writing letters, reading timetables, reading medical recipes, voting, measuring (land, weights, construction material, for carpentry, for sewing, etc.), communicating by SMS,[5] etc.
2) *Literacy referring to adult literacy programmes or the process of acquisition*, i.e. learning to read and write (text and numbers), and developing these skills. Programmes focusing on initial learning of basic literacy skills, in conjunction with contents

5. Short message service (SMS) is used to send text messages from one mobile phone to another.

considered relevant in the context, are often simply called 'adult literacy programmes'.
The follow-up and continuation have often been called 'post-literacy' programmes, intended to sustain initial acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy skills. Such programmes sometimes include training in practical life skills other than literacy skills, creation of literate environments, and learning a second language. There is definitely a call for addressing diverse needs and levels of literacy. However, the term 'post-literacy' is misleading in that it disguises the fact that literacy is a continuum.

3) The practical uses of literacy are, in much of the recent literature on literacy, called 'literacy practices', referring to the use of written communication in its multiple forms, scripts and languages for different purposes. It can even refer to how non-literate people cope with written information. It is stressed that such practices are 'situated', i.e. they differ depending on context-specific situations, and are rooted in languages of written communication. The understandings or concepts of literacy are therefore multiple.

Universal or standard definitions have in the current literacy debate been replaced by the concept of plural 'literacies' in recognition of the diversity of literacy practices (cooking literacy, academic literacy, tailoring literacy, political literacy, etc.), including the variety of languages used for different literacy purposes.

Recent global policies and analyses stress the goal of creating 'literate societies' for which it is not enough to make everyone literate. Literate environments need to be in place, in which there is a need for written communication and in which there is broad access to written language. It is therefore important to recognize the social dimension of literacy, not least the role and organization of written communication in a society.

Internationally adopted concepts of literacy

The theoretical concepts normally differ a lot from the operational criteria used in practice for evaluating literacy learning achievements in different countries or programmes. It is natural

that literacy cannot be defined without connecting it to its purpose or to its context. At the same time, in practical terms, it is nearly impossible to measure the broader impact of literacy in isolation from other variables in the environment.

This should be considered when we present broader concepts of literacy. Generally, there is a gap between broad definitions elaborating on the role and uses of literacy, and operational definitions aiming at measuring certain skills related to literacy. The broader concepts might influence the approach (contents, methods, etc.) adopted in adult literacy programmes, but very seldom the criteria for evaluating learning outcomes.

Literacy, in the context of adult education in particular, has been the topic of international policy discussions, conferences, declarations and decisions since the 1950s, with UNESCO often playing a leading role in these discussions. During this time, the understandings of literacy have evolved, while some of the basic assumptions have, in principle, remained unchanged. This is, in particular, true regarding the concept of literacy as an instrument for development and literacy as a fundamental human right. These two premises for advocating literacy for all, or ‘the eradication of illiteracy’, have guided UNESCO’s discourse ever since its creation in 1945. The Director General’s speech on International Literacy Day in 2006 confirms this: “Literacy is important as a right in itself, but it is also broadly recognized as one of the most powerful instruments for development” (UNESCO website, downloaded September 2006).

The evolution of internationally adopted concepts of the role of literacy and its implications for adult literacy programmes can roughly be divided into six periods, all of them obviously not completely distinct from each other, rather characterized by ideas coming and going back and forth: 1945-1964, 1965-1973, 1974-1980, 1981-1990, 1991-2000, 2001-...

1945-1964: Reading and writing in the mother tongue

Contrary to common beliefs and statements, the traditional concept of literacy as reading and writing skills as an end in themselves was, in theory, abandoned by UNESCO shortly after

its creation. In 1946, the concept of 'fundamental education' was adopted to describe a broad field of development activities, of which one was non-formal literacy programmes for children and adults. In practice, it became merged with the community development movement, which stressed that literacy must be used for something of practical importance in order to result in development. This was so strongly adhered to that "adult education has been neglected altogether or turned into something so 'practical' that it no longer encompasses any serious attempt to make people literate" (Myrdal, 1978: 1687).

The notions of functional literacy evolved gradually during this period, partly related to providing equivalence to a certain minimum number of completed years of basic school education. Four or five years of education was proposed as a minimum standard for functional literacy, with the understanding that this would vary according to context. Literacy itself was conceived as exclusively reading and writing skills, preferably acquired through learning in the mother tongue. The concepts of literacy being both a continuum and necessarily functional were evolved. Numeracy was, however, not yet included in the definitions of functional literacy (see Gray, 1969).

1965-1973: Work-oriented functional literacy

It was during this period that the human capital theory had a great impact on education policies with its emphasis on vocational and technical training adapted to labour-market needs. This, together with poor progress in spreading literacy, in particular through adult literacy programmes, resulted in UNESCO and UNDP deciding, in 1964, to adopt a new work-oriented functional literacy approach. This was done by launching the Experimental World Literacy Programme (EWLP) in order to find ways of turning literacy into an effective instrument for social and economic development.

The World Conference of Ministers of Education on Eradication of Illiteracy in Teheran, in 1965, stated that functional literacy should "not be confined to teaching of reading and writing but should include professional and technical knowledge, thus promoting a fuller participation by adults in economic and civic life" (UNESCO, 1968: 48).

Each literacy pilot programme in the EWLP, implemented in 11 countries between 1967 and 1973, was to be linked to a specific economic project in industry or agriculture. The contents would be centred on the production process linked to each project. The assumption was that the lack of motivation identified in past experiences would be eliminated since the adults working in the economic projects would already have felt the need to become literate.

1974-1980: Literacy as a means of liberation

A critical assessment of the EWLP results by UNESCO, together with the growing influence of Paulo Freire, on adult literacy philosophy and practice, led to a review of the literacy concept and a new ideology on literacy. Paulo Freire was present at the International Symposium for Literacy held in Persepolis in 1975 and was awarded a literacy prize by UNESCO. The conference declaration stressed the political, human and cultural aspects of literacy. It conceived literacy as "a contribution to the liberation of man and to his full development" (Bataille, 1976: 273). Literacy was seen as a fundamental human right and 'a political act'.

The recommendations from the evaluation of EWLP coincided with this perspective in its review of the narrowly technical/economic concept of functional literacy adopted in the work-oriented pilots, declaring:

> "[...] the concepts of functionality must be extended to include all its dimensions: political, economic, social and cultural. Just as development is not only economic growth, so literacy [...] must aim above all to arouse in the individual a critical awareness of social reality, and to enable him or her to understand, master and transform his or her destiny" (UNESCO/UNDP, 1976: 191).

The 1980s: Mass campaigns for the eradication of illiteracy and social justice

Paulo Freire's philosophy of liberating education and pedagogy continued to have a great influence among most people and organizations working in the area of adult education, literacy in particular. Both his ideas on the political and cultural functions of literacy, and the human capital theories linking literacy to economic

functions, were having an impact on the content and design of adult programmes. The focus of debates and discussions seemed more geared towards organizational strategies and the scale of programmes, rather than on the contents and methods as before.

The organization of national mass campaigns or programmes became a topic of international conferences and books on adult literacy. It was recognized that mass literacy campaigns had made significant inroads on reducing literacy in a number of developing countries (e.g. Tanzania, Mozambique, Nicaragua and Ethiopia). The eradication of illiteracy by the year 2000 was set as a target by the United Nations (UN). It was hoped that the dual strategy, recommended by UNESCO, of combining UPE for children and special programmes for adults, would help to eradicate illiteracy as part of national strategies to overcome poverty and injustice (Bhola, 1983). UNESCO took several initiatives to encourage larger-scale literacy efforts. In the previous decades, small-scale pilot projects had been targeted. A study commissioned by UNESCO on campaigns, discussed at a seminar on Campaigning for Literacy in Uidapur in 1982, concluded with a Literacy Declaration. It was in many ways typical for this period, declaring, for example: “A literacy campaign is a potent and vivid symbol of a nation’s struggle for development and commitment to a just society. It creates a critical awareness ... Legislative measures and resolutions should reflect a national sense of urgency, define the order or priorities attached to the elimination of illiteracy, and set out the responsibilities and rights of citizens in taking part in the campaign” (Bhola, 1983: 246).

The concepts of literacy adopted or accepted by the seminar typically referred to UNESCO’s standard definition on reading and writing a short sentence, the definition of functional literacy proposed at the Teheran Conference, and the Freirean concepts adopted in Persepolis. These were apparently seen as complementary, not contradictive or exclusive. The report from the seminar can be considered a handbook in planning mass adult literacy campaigns. Contrary to what critics of campaigns have claimed, post-literacy and the integration of adult literacy with development and formal education were both stressed.

Other initiatives also focused on planning and implementing national adult literacy programmes or campaigns. From the beginning of the 1980s, the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) renewed its concern for adult literacy as one of the key dimensions of education, because literacy education for adults and schooling for children were seen as "two sides of the same coin" (Carron and Bordia, 1985). International workshops were organized for senior-level planners and organizers of literacy and post-literacy programmes. These were based on IIEP's translation into planning terms of the new concept of literacy, meaning "the explicit stimulation of peoples' initiative and participation and the constant co-ordination of literacy with other sectors of economic, social, cultural and political development" (Carron and Bordia, 1985: 5). During this period, it was taken for granted in these international contexts that governments should take the lead in providing adult literacy programmes, albeit in partnership with a wide range of governmental and non-governmental institutions.

The 1990s: From basic learning needs defined in Jomtien to vagueness and NGO-ization of adult literacy programmes

The EFA World Conference and the Jomtien Declaration from 1990, coinciding but not co-ordinated with the International Literacy Year, focused on meeting basic learning needs, including literacy, in its expanded vision of EFA, stating:

> "Every person – child, youth, adult – shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning ..." (WCEFA, 1990: 3).

While this vision encompassed the right to education for all ages in any modality – formal, non-formal and informal – in practice, the provision of adult literacy programmes was neglected during the 1990s.

The interest in and space for such adult literacy initiatives and adult education overall began to erode already in the mid-1980s in the context of cold war, economic crisis, growing national debt, structural adjustment programmes, deteriorating social services, globalization of markets and technology, privatization, decentralization with meagre budgets, poverty, and growing unemployment. An ideology that the state should limit its services only to formal education was globalized. This 'NGO-ization' of ABE, and of NFE in general, developed during the 1990s in countries where the role of the state was eroding, was reinforced by a narrow interpretation of the Jomtien EFA commitment. In practice "all was reduced to children, basic education to primary education and Universal Primary Education to enrolment" (Torres, 2002: 24).

While literacy for children through formal primary education, and to some extent non-formal primary education, was boosted by the EFA conference in Jomtien, ABE programmes were *de facto* set back by the EFA context and agenda.

2001 onwards – Dakar to present. Contradictions and inconsistencies: lifelong learning, literacies, and literate societies

Globalization in economic, technological and socio-political terms has led to a new education paradigm for the twenty-first century: the need to enhance LLL, and promote learning and knowledge societies. In order to be able to understand and cope with these changing and contradictory realities, new competencies are required. This is why 'learning to learn' or 'learning to know' was identified by the Delors Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century (Delors *et al*., 1996) as one of four pillars of education. The others were 'learning to do', 'learning to be' and 'learning to live together'.

The origin of the renewed focus on LLL and NFE can be traced to contexts and initiatives in the North, where the demand and supply of organized learning for the adult population has increased tremendously, mainly related to employment and adapting skills to new developments in the labour market. A number of international declarations have also reinforced the renewed interest in adult education and NFE.

While the Delors Commission focused on the formal education system – especially for children and youth – and neglected non-formal adult education (see Bhola, 2000), the UNESCO Conference in Hamburg (CONFINTEA, 1997) formulated an "enlarged vision of adult learning". Nonetheless, CONFINTEA seems to have had little impact in countries where the EFA Dakar (2000) framework remains the overarching international platform for basic education in developing countries until 2015.

Importantly, the Dakar EFA framework (EFA-FORUM, 2000) re-affirmed the Jomtien (1990) expanded vision of basic education and included ABE in two of its six goals:

- Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills.
- Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially among women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for adults.

However, other more powerful and overriding global agendas, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the G8-initiated and World Bank-driven Fast Track Initiative on EFA, have contributed to limiting the agenda by focusing on five years of primary education, in particular for girls.

The UN Literacy Decade (2003-2013), approved by the UN General Assembly in December 2001, proposes a renewed vision of universal literacy under the motto 'Literacy for Freedom'. Creating literate environments and literate societies is seen as part of the goal of universal literacy.

Declarations and commitments have little impact on decisions and actions if not continuously reiterated and actually acted upon. There is definitely a risk that a dual educational agenda is developing on a global scale: LLL for the North and a narrow concept of basic education for the South.

The notion of literacies and literate environments came into focus, for example, in the position paper of UNESCO's Education Sector (UNESCO, 2004) on "the plurality of literacy". It typically concluded that "creating a literate environment for everyone is

literacy for all". The understanding seemed to be that national adult literacy programmes, or adult education as a sub-system of the education sector, would not respond to the needs of individuals or specific communities or groups.

Adult literacy was the special theme of the 2006 Global Monitoring Report on EFA (UNESCO, 2005), an independent annual review of global achievements of the Dakar goals. It pointed out that, ideally, literate societies should enable free exchange of text-based communication and a broad range of opportunities for LLL.

At the same time, a global survey and consultation on the most common perceptions and practices of adult literacy, mainly among NGOs and individual adult educators, was carried out by the Global Campaign for Education and ActionAid, an international development NGO. On the meaning of literacy, it was concluded that literacy is "the acquisition and use of reading, writing and numeracy skills, and thereby the active development of citizenship, improved livelihoods and gender equality", and "a continuous process that requires sustained learning and practice" (UNESCO, 2005: 239).

This can be considered a representative summary of current widespread concepts of adult literacy.

The terminology in brief

Literacy refers to written communication (reading and writing text and numbers) in its various expressions, development contexts and life domains. To help individuals become literate is not enough. Literacy is not sustainable without the development of 'literate societies', which is much more complex.

Adult literacy refers to literacy skills and literacy rates among the adult population aged 15 and over, organized learning programmes for youth and adults focusing on literacy, and how adults use and apply their literacy skills. Literacy is a continuous learning process taking place in and out of school or adult literacy courses. There is no precise line between literate and illiterate. The plurality of literacy contexts, languages and uses has led to the notion of 'literacies'. This should not be confused with competencies in general.

Post-literacy can mean the phase after initial literacy and actions to strengthen the literate environment, but should not be associated to any specific content or approach. Post-literacy is an unfortunate concept because it refers to what should come after initial literacy, but the use of literacy and opportunities to continue adult education need to be in place before, not after, the introduction of initial literacy programmes.

Functional literacy is the same as meaningful literacy. Meaningful learning and application of literacy is functional. There should be no special meaning of functional literacy programmes as opposed to just literacy programmes. The functionality of literacy can be related to work, home, culture and leisure, political purposes or citizenship, not just economic activities.

Non-formal education can and often should encompass adult literacy. NFE can, however, be about any subject (not just technical, work-oriented skills) and does not necessarily include literacy. Adult literacy programmes are primarily non-formal, capable of being evaluated, and should eventually provide bridges and ladders to the formal education system. It is not meaningful to label different pedagogical approaches non-formal or formal. All adult education needs to be adult-learner-centred and participatory.

Adult basic education (ABE) includes literacy as a central learning area and as an essential learning tool. Literacy is embedded and needs special attention in LLL related to all spheres of life.

This book examines how to improve national adult literacy levels (skills, acquisition and application) and how to learn from experiences of literacy programmes for adults (including out-of-school youth aged 15 and above) in the context of ABLE and LLL.

III. Why literacy for all, not just school children?

Why literacy for all?

The question "Why literacy?" may seem simple, especially in today's globalized world, where ICTs require more and more sophisticated literacy skills. Nonetheless, as soon as we ask why literacy should be for all, the answers become more complex, and even more so when we ask why adult literacy matters. One reason is that the answers often cover a wide range of justifications related to either basic values, such as social justice, or the assumed effects of literacy, such as economic growth. Before reviewing some common justifications, either in favour of or against significant investments in literacy for all, including adults, it should be stressed that literacy (skills) in itself is only a potential communication tool or asset that may or may not be used for a great variety of purposes. As a capacity, it can be more or less mastered, and without application it can easily be lost or become meaningless. There is no automatic effect of literacy; it depends on the process of acquisition, the context, and how and for what it is used.

The right to education, as recognized in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other binding international conventions, is strongly rooted in the right to literacy. Education and literacy, or knowledge and literacy, are often equated in these conventions. This is also often the case in literature discussing the importance of mass literacy. Arguments in favour of literacy for all are consequently often the same as those for education for all. When the benefits and impact of literacy are reviewed, a similar mixture can often be found. For example, when research findings about the impact of literacy or basic education on adult women's reproductive health or farmer productivity are reported, they do not necessarily specify when in the life cycle these adults acquired literacy or completed a certain number of years of basic education.

In this chapter, the main justifications for literacy for all, irrespective of how or at what age it is acquired, will be addressed.

Then the question "Why does adult literacy matter?" will be discussed.

Literacy as a human and democratic right

Literacy is a human and democratic right. People who are able to use their literacy skills to defend their legal rights have an advantage compared to people without this ability. Those whose rights are violated (especially women) by others with more power are often the poorest and most marginalized. Their inability to read and write prevents them from seeing for themselves what they are entitled to demand and why. This is also closely linked to feelings of limitation and insecurity, which impede their participation in political arenas to express demands and have a voice. It is certainly possible for people without basic literacy skills to participate in community affairs and, for example, to vote, but people with such skills are more likely to participate, because they often feel more confident and because they can make better use of written information and communication (Hamadache, 1990).

Although, as previously pointed out, there is no given or automatic impact of the acquisition of literacy skills, literacy is an additional value for a person's, a family's and a community's life. A child who is denied the right to primary education is not only deprived as a child, but also handicapped throughout life, unable to cope with situations that require reading, writing and arithmetic. Literacy is a right which expands people's freedom, and as such requires social support. It is a right which constitutes the very foundation of human development, according to the Nobel prize winner economist, Amartya Sen (see e.g. UNESCO, 2003*c*).

Literacy as a capability and contribution to empowerment

Whatever the causal effects look like, progress in literacy and progress in human development often coincide, just as illiteracy and poverty do. Poverty is not just lack of income, but also deprivation of capabilities. Literacy contributes to strengthening the capabilities of individuals and families to benefit from existing opportunities such as health care access, education, political freedom and income.

According to Sen (UNESCO, 2003*c*), literacy and numeracy skills acquired through basic education help people access opportunities of

global commerce and employment. For example, he points out that "[a] person who cannot read instructions, understand the demands of accuracy and follow the demands of specifications is at a great disadvantage in getting a job in today's globalizing world" (p. 23).

Many important development indicators, such as fertility rates, child mortality, etc., are strongly influenced by the extent to which women are empowered. Women's empowerment itself depends on several different factors, such as their earning power, property rights, and not least, their education and literacy – a basic ingredient.

The positive impact on self-esteem and feeling of empowerment for adult learners attending literacy programmes has been reported in numerous evaluations and studies on literacy programmes worldwide. Interviews with learners, especially women, confirm their feelings of empowerment. For example, a female learner said: "I talked with my hands in front of my mouth without looking up, but now I feel strong and free to speak up" before joining a literacy programme in Namibia (Maasdorp in Lind, 1996: 86).

Literacy necessary for achieving the EFA goals

Improving literacy learning in and outside of schools is an explicit part of the EFA goals. In addition, literacy, including numeracy, is a basic learning need and a key learning tool integral to achieving all the EFA goals. Solid acquisition of literacy and numeracy is a main learning objective for primary education; reading, writing and calculating continue to develop in the process of using these skills, i.e. by reading and writing to learn. Ideally, schools are the setting for learning literacy and numeracy skills needed in a society for a fulfilled life. If every child, in every nation, had the chance to learn what he/she needed in primary education of reasonable quality, the requirements of literacy for all would be met. In such an ideal world, LLL would still be needed, but not initial literacy learning programmes for youth and adults. However, in today's world, formal basic education is as yet neither totally inclusive nor sufficiently efficient to prevent illiteracy among adults. Formal basic education (primary education or the level of education defined in each country) will, for a long time to come, be insufficient. The two-pronged approach, traditionally advocated by UNESCO, of combining policies of UPE with targeted learning programmes for adults and

youth, in which literacy is essential, will continue to be necessary. The adult literacy goal of the Dakar agenda, and the Literacy for All goal of the UNLD, is dependent on the achievement of all the EFA goals. The EFA goals regarding basic education for children are, in turn, dependent on literate adults and literate families, who possess the capabilities to encourage their children to learn, develop and use literacy skills.

Literacy integral to the MDGs and human development

Illiteracy is normally a symptom – not a direct cause – of poverty and marginalization. Thus, combating poverty will help diminish literacy problems, and effective poverty reduction strategies must include literacy. In spite of this, the MDGs do not explicitly include literacy. However, literacy is implicit in the two education-related MDGs, i.e. Goal Two on UPE, targeting completion of primary school by all school-age children; and Goal Three on gender equality, targeting gender parity at all levels of education. The latter refers to literacy in its justification: "Literacy is a fundamental skill to empower women to take control of their lives, to engage directly with authority and give them access to the wider world of learning. Educating women and giving them equal rights is important for many reasons: it increases their productivity ..., it promotes gender equality ..., educated women do a better job caring for children ..." (www.developmentgoals.org/Gender_Equality.htm, accessed August 2004). Also, one indicator of this gender parity goal is the ratio of literate women to literate men among 15-24 year olds. These, more or less, implicit literacy targets and objectives within the MDGs deserve more attention in the global development agenda. Attaining the overall poverty reduction goals of the MDGs actually requires the distribution and improvement of literacy skills.

Universal literacy is regularly seen as necessary for economic and social development, or for everything that can be classified as human development. Several studies and debates correlate literacy rates and economic growth. The links have been established but not the mechanisms. Studies on the economic returns of education, in terms of increased individual income and economic growth, have been based principally on the number of years of schooling. It has been difficult to assess the impact of literacy on such economic benefits. Nonetheless, there are studies mainly comparing OECD

countries that indicate a positive impact on earnings of cognitive skills such as literacy and numeracy (e.g. Coulombe, Tremblay and Marchand, 2004 in UNESCO, 2005).

One interesting result of reviewing such studies (Cameron and Cameron, 2005) is that "the average literacy score in a given population is a better indicator of growth than the percentage of the population with very high literacy scores (Coulombe *et al.*, 2004). In other words, a country that focuses on promoting strong literacy skills widely throughout its population will be more successful in fostering growth and well-being than one in which the gap between high-skill and low-skill groups is large" (UNESCO, 2005: 144). In all respects, human development is, to a large extent, about a literate and healthy population.

Several studies show that literacy, whether acquired in school or in an adult literacy programme, has a positive influence on health knowledge and behaviour, and such an influence has a direct effect on indicators like child mortality, especially among adult women, although it does not seem to be a direct result of transmitting health information through literacy programmes (UNESCO, 2005).

Efforts to achieve literacy for all will not eradicate poverty without other sector interventions and an overall positive political, economic, social and cultural development agenda. The development of literate societies goes hand in hand with overall development. Literacy is an individual and a societal asset, a potential tool and a necessary ingredient of strategies to overcome poverty.

Does adult literacy matter?

As we have seen, it is not so difficult to agree on the importance of literacy when it is a result of schooling. Much more controversy lies around adult literacy. The formal education system is almost always given priority over NFE for adults because it serves everyone, including those in power, and cannot be eliminated.

Judging from scarce resources dedicated to adult literacy programmes, and the enhancement of literate societies in developing countries, where most non-literate adults are found, the impression is that governments and most other possible sponsors of education

and development programmes do not believe in investing in adult literacy programmes, although they often agree that increasing adult literacy rates is important for development. This attitude among governments, NGOs and donors alike is clearly a sign of lack of belief in its importance, and to some extent, of a lack of confidence in the viability of adult literacy programmes.

In general, the neglect of adult literacy was reinforced by the neo-liberal model that accompanied structural adjustment programmes in the poorer countries in the mid-1980s; it envisaged a new, more restricted role of the state and decentralization trends, and often allocated fewer resources for implementing social services.

NGOs and civil society were believed capable of adapting to local circumstances, and better than public institutions in general at delivering decentralized and diversified programmes in areas such as adult literacy.

Many governments, including those of countries with low literacy rates, seem to accept the arguments used by various donors, and especially the World Bank, for example:

- Education for children is a priority and is sufficient to achieve the desired social and economic returns;
- Adult literacy programmes are not cost-effective. They have a "poor track record" (Abadzi, 1994);[6]

6. Past programmes of adult education, considered from a stereotypical perspective of mass literacy campaigns, if at all discussed, have been pronounced to be inefficient. The World Bank education policy document from 1995 stated: "programs of adult education are necessary, but such programs have a poor track record. One study showed an effectiveness rate of just 13 percent of adult literacy campaigns conducted over the past thirty years (Abadzi, 1994) and there has been little research into the benefits and costs of literacy programs" (World Bank, 1995: 89-90). The referred study was a World Bank-commissioned study on adult literacy acquisition that used the findings of the EWLP evaluation (see UNESCO/UNDP, 1976: 174) of selective-intensive work-oriented adult literacy programmes, but did *not* cover any studies on campaigns.

- Government should limit its services to formal education, and adult literacy should be a local community concern, not a national one;
- There is very little demand from non-literate adults, the majority of which are from poor families living in rural areas;
- Non-literate adults have other more pressing priorities related to their survival. Practical or life skills and income-generating projects should come first, not literacy.

These arguments, put forward by powerful international agencies and governments, were reinforced by many NGOs and academics, including adult educators. In reporting on the pilots of REFLECT (Regenerated Freirean Literacy Through Empowering Techniques) in Uganda, Bangladesh and El Salvador (funded by the Overseas Development Agency and the World Bank), ActionAid referred to the World Bank-commissioned study by Abadzi (1994) to justify launching REFLECT as the answer to the general 'failures' and alleged bogus claims of past adult literacy approaches (Archer and Cottingham, 1996: 4). In fact, Abadzi ignored a lot of literature reviews,[7] representing a wide range of documented experiences of literacy campaigns and other ABE programmes from the period after 1972. Relatively successful cases, such as those in Ecuador (1988), India (Total Literacy Campaigns initiated in 1988), and Namibia (1992-present), were not taken into account, despite abundant information.

In addition, the following is frequently claimed:

- Literacy is not worthwhile without economic functionality, or without being "clearly oriented at helping people achieve greater justice and equity" (Archer, in UNESCO, 2003*c*: 46).
- The information needed by those who cannot read and write to improve their lives can be and is transmitted/communicated orally, or through literate people, so they practice literacy without being literate.
- Literacy is an imposition of colonialism and the modern world, which damages traditional culture (a post-modernistic argument) and stigmatizes illiterate people (see e.g. Street, 2004).

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7. e.g. those by Bhola, (1984), Lind and Johnston (1990), Jones (1990), Rassekh (1990).

Furthermore, there are more hidden and politically-oriented motives for neglect or lack of interest, such as the following:

- Adult literacy has been associated with socialism, revolutions, liberation struggles, and awareness-raising by the poor against social injustice and oppression. This association or perceived threat seemed to disappear with the Berlin wall.
- It is too expensive in relation to its low political returns. Investing in higher levels of education gives better political returns.
- Adult literacy is not loudly demanded, since its target group represents the poorest and most marginalized segments of a population. Hence, politicians may find it easy to neglect without facing protests.
- Literacy is an asset taken for granted by academic, political and economic elites, who give little thought to the negative implications of illiteracy and the benefits of participation in initial literacy programmes.
- Non-formal adult literacy education is not considered necessary for the formal economy.
- The appropriate delivery of adult literacy is too complex, requiring shared responsibility among various ministries, and locally diversified strategies, including multiple approaches to teaching-learning languages.

Even people in communities and families with non-literate members can sometimes argue against adult literacy for the following reasons:

- They wish to give priority to children's education.
- They do not have time due to other activities necessary for survival.
- They believe that adults are too old to learn.

There appears to be a surprisingly long list of arguments against investing significantly in adult literacy and ABE programmes, especially national large-scale programmes or campaigns. One can sum them up in three categories:

(i) Those asserting that literacy for adults is not important, or not a priority;
(ii) Those referring to the lack of feasibility; and

(iii) Those meaning that adult literacy provision has or can have negative or undesirable effects.

A critical review of the counter-arguments within each category shows they are barely evidence-based and seem to correspond to political and economic interests among power elites in keeping the *status quo*, or to narrow, ethnocentric and mechanistic views of development and poverty.

"Literacy is not important, can it wait?"

In discussions on adult literacy programmes, it is often stressed that literacy is not an end in itself, or that a programme should not only or not simply teach adults to read and write. Literacy must be functional, liberating, empowering, income-generating, etc. It is not clear what these statements imply, conceptually or operationally. The message seems to be that for adults, learning to read, write and calculate cannot be useful or purposeful, that only skills other than literacy are practical, or that a learning programme has to provide all the uses of literacy. Learning and using literacy is normally based on text with a meaningful content, and should obviously be so. Maintaining the balance between learning the reading and writing skills and written forms of calculations, as well as learning its related content, is one of the important challenges of adult literacy programme design. The claim for 'not only literacy' often diminishes the importance of literacy as a life skill or practical tool for coping more independently with daily challenges. Also, it can neglect the need to include enough literacy and numeracy skills training in programme design. Incidences have occurred where learners of so-called adult literacy programmes were not even taught to write their names because of the focus on instrumental objectives of empowerment or development projects.[8]

Not giving importance to the right to literacy for all adults implies accepting the inequalities and gaps between people with highly sophisticated literacy skills, able to access instant global information, and those without literacy skills and hardly any access to information.

8. This was, for example, the case of a REFLECT circle in southern Mozambique, researched in a master's thesis (Rungo, 2004).

Policy choices should not be a factor in primary education, non-formal adult basic education, economic development or adult literacy programmes, awareness-raising or adult literacy programmes. These are false dichotomies because adult literacy and other educational or developmental programmes reinforce each other.

Some organizations and literacy researchers claim that literacy should come second, after empowerment or economic development projects, while others believe that programmes for non-literate adults should be integrated. If literacy is left to come second, it is not clear whether non-literate adults are expected to acquire literacy automatically after being empowered by other activities, or for how long they should wait for literacy. Integrating everything needed into one poorly funded programme is not an easy or even viable solution, as will be argued later in this chapter. So it is neither an issue of either/or, nor of squeezing everything needed together with literacy into learning programmes for non-literate adults. Adult literacy programmes, enhanced by making environments more literacy-friendly, must take place parallel to other learning and development programmes, because they depend on each other and have mutually synergetic effects on overall human development. Although the causal link between literacy or education and development may be ambiguous, their influence on each other is most likely mutual and cumulative.

Others would argue that illiteracy will eventually disappear when the old die and the educated young become adults. As pointed out previously, this is hardly realistic considering the continuous exclusion from school of 100 million children or more and the serious quality problems in formal basic education.

Non-literate people are poor and/or marginalized. Most of them have no access to literacy programmes. When programmes are provided, it is normally hard for adult literacy learners to find time and peace while struggling to survive. In addition, many potential learners lack confidence to express their demands and participate. This is why provision must include motivational activities, and in all possible ways, facilitate participation. The right to literacy requires that access to learning actually be provided.

The benefits are well documented: Literate or educated parents are able to support and help their children's education better and are more likely to have healthy families. Adult learners, especially women, feel empowered as a result of learning literacy and participating in adult classes. Literacy strengthens individuals' and communities' ability to access political, economic and cultural opportunities. As an essential learning tool, literacy paves the way for further learning and education.

Is literacy too complex to be cost-effective?

It is not true that adult literacy programmes are less cost-effective than primary education for children, at least in poor developing countries. In fact, one could argue that adult education has more immediate impact than primary education. Tanzania's first President, Julius Nyerere, motivated Parliament of his belief in the paramount importance of adult education when, in 1964, he said: "First we must educate adults. Our children will not have an impact on our own development for five, ten or twenty years" (cited in Lind and Johnston, 1990: 46).

Very few studies have been done on the economic returns, or the cost-effectiveness, of adult literacy programmes. One study attempted to compare the costs and returns on investment of primary education with the returns to adult basic education, including literacy (Oxenham, 2003). The programmes covered in the study were projects financed by the World Bank and carried out in Ghana, Bangladesh and Senegal. The individual earnings of successful adult literacy learners were compared to those of people who had completed four years of primary education. Although some of the estimates were recognized as uncertain, the findings suggested that adult literacy programmes help poor people raise their income, and that they compared positively to returns from primary school education.

Regarding the economic returns on investment in adult basic education as compared to primary education, the 2006 Global Monitoring Report on EFA concluded that:

"The sparse evidence that exists indicates [...] that the returns to investment in adult literacy programmes are generally comparable

to, and compare favourably with, those from investments in primary education. In practice, the opportunity cost for a child to attend school is typically lower than for an adult literacy programme. Yet, the opportunity to realize the benefits is more immediate for an adult who is already in some way involved in the world of work" (UNESCO, 2005: 145).

It is difficult to compare the costs between adult and child basic education, because so little money and resources have been allocated to adult programmes. In practice, therefore, the cost per learner has been lower for adult programmes than for primary school programmes, which is not to say they do not need more resources to uphold a better quality. The sceptics of adult literacy programmes regularly refer to the common high drop-out rates among adult learners (normally around 50 per cent) and the subsequent increased cost per successful learner, i.e. learners who complete the programme according to expected learning outcomes. The meaning and implications of irregular attendance and the drop-out problem will be discussed later. At times, an apparent case of drop-out is often an interruption considered necessary by the learner, due to such life circumstances as childbirth, illness or migration in search of work.

Available studies on costs per successful adult literacy learner compared to the cost per learner completing four years of primary education show that adult literacy was cheaper (Oxenham, 2003; UNESCO/UNDP, 1976). One study (Oxenham, 2003) revealed that the costs per successful adult learner varied between 20 and 98 USD, or between 13 per cent and 33 per cent of the cost of four years of primary schooling. A recent survey of a sample of countries carried out by ActionAid found the average cost per successful learner for adult literacy programmes at 68 USD in Africa, 32 USD in Asia, and 61 USD in Latin America. The costs per enrolled learner ranged from 16 USD to 167 USD in developing countries. In industrialized countries, the average cost per learner is much higher, for example in Ireland (742 USD) and in Canada (2,646 USD) (UNESCO, 2005).

As pointed out by Torres (2002): "There are no bases to sustain that child [school] literacy does better than adult (out-of-school) literacy. Evidence consistently indicates [...] the poor performance of schooling in literacy acquisition, retention and use. [...] Budgets and

efforts involved in trying to expand and improve primary education have no comparison with the meagre resources and efforts invested in ABE. And yet, ABE is requested to show 'cost-efficiency'" (p.19).

The problems of sustaining literacy among learners having completed initial literacy programmes and campaigns, and the relapse into illiteracy due to lack of follow-up and use of literacy, is commonly pointed out as proof of a poor track record or low cost-effectiveness of literacy programmes. This challenge needs special attention in order to increase the benefits and use of literacy for both adult non-formal learners as well as young formal education learners. Literate environments must be developed with adult initial literacy programmes inserted into a broader adult basic education context of lifelong learning opportunities. The following chapters will show the implementation of initial adult literacy programmes in stagnant economy environments, where literacy barely exists and thus adult programmes may not be advisable as a first priority. In such situations post-literacy activities seem to be needed before introducing initial or basic literacy programmes.

Obviously, both ABE and primary education need to be injected with resources and commitment for improved literacy acquisition, retention and use. But there is no reason to neglect adult literacy on the grounds of low cost-effectiveness. It is more a matter of political will – linked to commitment to social justice, human and democratic development. Political will and governmental leadership will overcome reluctance to start, on the grounds that the implementation process will become complex and conflicting. The misguided belief that adult literacy programmes are the sole responsibility of NGOs and not of governments also led to neglect and strengthened the unfounded idea that primary education was more cost-effective than adult literacy programmes. Above all, it confused delivery mechanisms – in which civil society plays an important role – with the necessary policy and funding frameworks that must be provided by government.

Other claims of lack of feasibility are related to the potential of adult literacy learners themselves. Even if they were motivated, they do not have time to attend regular classes long enough to complete a programme due to work and caring for their families (which

mostly affects women). Agricultural seasons often interfere with programme timetables in rural areas. Unemployed adults (mostly men) frequently look for jobs in places far from home and work on seasonal, temporary contracts. Literacy programmes need to adapt and be flexible in addressing the challenge of available time for potential learners in different situations. When learners themselves claim they cannot participate due to lack of time, this is almost always true; although, there may also be other reasons for reluctance behind this, such as shyness, lack of confidence, inadequate programme design, etc.

In addition, non-literate adults themselves, as well as policy-makers, say that they believe adults are too old to learn. But, it is never too late to learn. Adults with little or no literacy skills are normally poor and lack self-confidence in relation to the written word and education. They have worked hard with their hands, have often been hungry and malnourished, and have age-related sight problems at a lower average age than more wealthy literate people. As a result, they need special attention to raise their self-confidence and awareness of the value of their knowledge and wisdom, as well as pre-literacy exercises in holding and using a pen on paper, proper light, appropriate size and print of text, provision of spectacles, etc.

Also, recent brain research has argued that adults seem to learn literacy and language skills slower than children, so, adults need more extensive exercises to make the processes involved in reading automatic. Abadzi (1996: 7) found that: "As a result of less efficient processing, adults may not easily see adjacent symbols as combinations and may require much longer periods than children to acquire automaticity. Thus, fluent reading and expert reading skills may be more easily acquired during childhood and adolescence than during adulthood".

Is literacy negative?

If some of the consequences of literacy and other modernization processes may be seen as negative and possibly unavoidable, one could argue that literacy is always a potential asset when not deliberately abused. The main problem with the arguments saying that literacy for adults has negative effects, i.e. that it is oppressive, damaging to oral or traditional cultures, or stigmatizing, is that

generally, these are the opinions of people who themselves are highly literate, rather than of adult literacy learners or potential learners. Even more troublesome is that most proponents of these views – mainly academics of the so-called 'new literacy studies' – do not believe that learners' statements on the importance of literacy for them are genuine.

The common references to gaining insight through learners' testimonies on experience learning to read and write are interpreted as being dominant policy discourse, made by international organizations. For example, the following quote, relating to an Ethiopian literacy learner, is cited by Robinson-Pant (2004: 15) as evidence of "how little the dominant policy discourse on women's literacy had changed" with its "emphasis on women as mothers who need to be better educated to improve their families' lives, metaphors of rebirth, gaining sight through literacy ...":

> "At 27, Birke enrolled in a literacy centre and, after six months' conscientious and courageous attendance, despite her family and domestic obligations, she began, she said 'to be aware of many things. It is like being reborn, like a blind person recovering his or her sight. I had never dared hope something like that could happen to me'" (UNESCO, 1988: 1).

Anyone who has seen adult women or men say such things with pride and conviction can only be convinced of their authenticity.

The political motives for not promoting adult literacy reflect the political nature of literacy both as an issue and a process. Literacy plays different roles depending on the specific political, sociocultural and economic context of a literacy programme. Literacy programmes have specific ideological or religious aims, often reflected in the contents of the programme; they require a certain participation in organizing, mobilizing, learning and discussing; and finally, the skill itself provides a tool for further learning and acquisition of information that might be political. Governing elites may, in certain contexts, feel threatened by adult literacy activities. Literacy programmes as such do not, however, have such revolutionary effects, even if literacy can help popular movements to engage in social transformation. A literacy programme can also encourage learners to demand their rights or to act together to solve certain

problems or to achieve a specific goal, but will not in itself lead to the creation of opposition movements.

Explicit motivations by stakeholders or providers and sponsors

At the family level, parents and grandparents demand literacy for their children so that all generations might enjoy a better future. Groups from other fields than formal education, such as community workers, recognize the way in which literacy enhances people's understanding and application of information. For example, two health workers in Namibia asserted that it is "much easier to inform those who are literate about health. They understand better and are more willing to adopt the practices taught" (Lind, 1996: 84).

Providers, whether governmental or not, often see adult literacy as merely instrumental to achieving other objectives, such as increased productivity, improved health, social awareness, etc.

Governments

In general, governments have constituted the driving force behind the launching of national literacy programmes or campaigns. Most governments declare a mixture of overlapping objectives, sometimes even conflicting, when they formulate literacy policy aims. In Botswana, for example, the goals of non-formal adult literacy programmes and lifelong learning are both to achieve social justice and to empower youth and adults "to be effective and competitive in the global village" (UIE, 2004: 23). Nonetheless, three principal objectives can normally be distinguished: (a) socio-political objectives, such as nation-building, often involving mass literacy campaigns; (b) economic objectives, such as poverty reduction, resulting in either selective work or development-oriented programmes, or a more general programme as one of many inputs to economic development or poverty reduction strategies; and (c) general socio-economic or development objectives, where provision is made in response to demand.

In many countries, policy objectives related to literacy are integrated into educational policies motivated by wider social, cultural, religious, political and economic goals. More specifically,

learning, development and use of literacy and numeracy skills are included in national and local curriculum objectives of formal education (whether for children or adults), both as basic language and arithmetic skills and as tools for learning other subjects and skills. In others, adult literacy is considered part of community development or the like. For example, in Nepal, the aim is to improve livelihoods by integrating adult literacy programmes with income-generating activities run by community-based organizations (CBOs).

International organizations

As the international organization at the heart of the UN Literacy Decade, the six Dakar goals, and the Millennium Development Goals, UNESCO demands that literacy be provided to all for reasons of human rights, poverty reduction, increased voice and participation, and enhanced learning. UNESCO is not alone, however. Multilateral and bilateral aid agencies, NGOs, and international organizations often echo the justification for adult literacy provision, especially for women, as a means of poverty reduction.

Some organizations call for a specific form of literacy provision. In 2002, the Institute for International Co-operation/German Adult Education Association (IIZ/DVV), along with its partners in Guinea, concluded that 'integrated literacy' best serves needs when literacy is "embedded in an approach of supporting self-help and community development" (Hildebrand and Hinzen, 2004: 56). Building individual and community capacity leads to a greater sense of empowerment, one goal for which the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) UK advocates literacy. SIL UK, a development NGO, emphasizes the contribution that literacy can make toward achieving all of the MDGs, not just goals specifically addressing education. For example, with respect to ensuring environmental sustainability, it is claimed that "Literacy empowers these people [indigenous people groups] to ask for land rights and gives them a stronger voice in negotiations. A convergence between language death and decline of biodiversity has been demonstrated. Empowering indigenous communities through literacy supports effective solutions for bio-cultural diversity conservation" (SIL UK, 2003).

Civil society

Literacy programmes run by CSOs (NGOs, trade unions, community organizations, social or political movements, churches, private companies, etc.) may sometimes fit into national policy frameworks defined by governments. Obviously, NGO objectives for literacy differ widely depending on their vocation, ideology or religion. For example, the rationale of Plan Philippines' support to a basic literacy programme for both children and adults is to enable learners to "reach their full potential and contribute to the development of their societies" (UNESCO, 2005: 158).

Businesses, foundations and associations also advocate literacy, although some groups may have more interest in whether the public learns to read and write. In the United States, the American Association of Publishers sponsors Get Caught Reading,[9] self-described as an "industry-supported literacy campaign" that began in 1999 which encourages all people to enjoy books and magazines and to spread that joy among young people.

Motivations among learners and potential learners

Unfortunately, whatever the rationale for a literacy programme is, the curriculum is often more influenced by the objectives of the providers than by the demands of the learners themselves. This is against the basic principle of all adult education, i.e. that the knowledge and motivations of the learners should be the starting point for learning programmes. Motivation is the key to successful adult literacy acquisition; more so than in other forms of education, born from the normally miserable living conditions of non-literate people. All factors involved in programme development and implementation should, therefore, ensure, reinforce or maintain motivation, without which the whole endeavour would collapse. The motivational patterns of learners and potential learners are thus important to understand and diagnose in each context.

Recent surveys, studies or evaluations from different developing countries on reasons or motivations for joining adult literacy programmes confirm findings from similar earlier studies that

9. See www.publishers.org/aboutcamp.cfm

non-literate adults have a general desire to learn to read, write and calculate in order to be able to sign their names, write letters, avoid being cheated in money transactions, and generally know more and have access to school-like education (see e.g. Papen, 2005).

An analysis of the wider implications of an evaluation of the Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) programme in Uganda (Carr-Hill, 2001) observed that: “The main driver of demand seems uncomplicated: most of the people asked simply wanted to know how to read, write, and do some arithmetic [see Carr-Hill, 2001: Table 7.9]. In this they are not unique; people in Indonesia, Namibia, Senegal, and elsewhere have given similar answers. This observation suggests that, where schooling and literacy become widespread, they acquire a value in themselves” (p. 111, in a Chapter by Oxenham on wider implications).

In a recent youth and adult literacy survey in Rwanda (MINEDUC/Non-Formal Education unit, 2005), the findings on learners’ desire to learn showed that:

- “97.5% of the potential learner’s sample said yes when asked whether they wanted to learn to read and write;
- 71.7% choose reading and writing as their first choice when asked what they wanted to learn if given a chance to learn anything;
- 97% of instructors rate learners’ interest in learning very high or high;
- Most learners (51.7%) want to read the newspaper as their first choice, followed by the Bible (38.3%) and documents in Kinyarwanda (36.7%)” (MINEDUC/Non-Formal Education unit, 2005: 3).

An overall evaluation of the national literacy programme in Namibia, based on a national survey directed to all literacy groups, also found that the most common motivations by learners for attending literacy classes were quite general, such as:

- to learn to read and write;
- to gain more knowledge;
- to learn mathematics;
- to read and write letters;

- to control money when buying and selling;
- to help children with school work;
- to communicate in English, especially to facilitate travelling, filling in forms; and
- to continue education (Lind, 1996: 20).

"The wish to be self-reliant and be in control of common life situations, such as 'keeping secrets' and 'not being cheated' was expressed by many learners in their explanations for why they wanted to be able to read and write letters, deal with money and master English" (Lind, 1996: 94).

Female learners, almost everywhere, state a desire to help their children with schoolwork. They also express a wish to become more self-reliant and in control of their personal life, free from isolation and submission, as well as to be actors in the same way as men. Typically, more women than men participate in adult literacy classes worldwide, especially in rural areas.

Learners' self-reported statements on the benefits of participating in adult literacy programmes include the positive experiences of the process and the social meeting space of literacy groups (see e.g. Robinson-Pant, 2004; Stromquist, 2005). For example, in India, an evaluation of one of the areas in which the Total Literacy Campaign approach was implemented showed that "women learners had a strong desire to learn. They liked to go to the literacy classes because a literacy class gave them an opportunity to meet others and study collectively. Thus, literacy classes provided women with a social space, away from home" (Patel in UNESCO, 2003: 142). This motivating factor and some other similar, difficult-to-measure benefits appear related to important dimensions of human development, such as social cohesion, social inclusion and social capital.

Many studies have shown that although motivation for literacy is strong, the barriers preventing many of the potential learners from participating are the same as those leading to high drop-out rates and irregular attendance of enrolled learners. These barriers are linked to poverty, as shown in several studies on adult literacy in Mozambique (e.g. in Borges-Månsson, 1995). In Namibia, the evaluation studies revealed that reasons for dropping out or for not joining the programme were often external factors reflecting poor

living conditions, such as hunger, alcoholism, health problems, unemployment, migration, long distances, need to harvest, lack of water. "Specific reasons for men not attending regularly were cattle herding, negative attitudes among other men and the fact that there were too many women in the classes. Resistance among husbands, and childcare and domestic duties prevented women from attending regularly. Shyness was a strong factor preventing, both men and women, from coming to classes" (Lind, 1996: 94-95).

Once adult literacy programmes are delivered, they normally attract a large number of learners and create further demand. An evaluation of an USAID-supported adult literacy programme in Bolivia, provided by the faith-based NGO Alfalit International, concluded that "the demand for literacy courses has grown dramatically throughout the country since the USAID project began" (USAID, 2003: 18).

In Uganda, literate graduates from both the government-run programme FAL and REFLECT asked for continuing education in areas like advanced literacy, English language, vocational skills, and modern agricultural methods, "but neither program seemed to be making any provision for these" (Carr-Hill, 2001: 102).

Literacy as a plurality of potential assets

In whatever manner literacy has been acquired, it is widely recognized that in modern societies "literacy skills are fundamental to informed decision-making, personal empowerment, active and passive participation in local and global social community" (Stromquist, 2005: 12).

There is no doubt that literacy is a potential asset for individuals, families, and local, national and global communities. These assets are human, political, socio-cultural and economic. They correspond to the four pillars of education for the twenty-first century defined by the Delors Commission (Delors *et al.*, 1996), i.e. learning to be, to know, to do, and to live together. In addition, a fifth pillar should be learning to transform (Torres, 2004). This is incorporated in the matrix below regarding literacy as a political asset. The matrix illustrates and summarizes literacy as a plurality of potential assets and functions at different levels.

Table 3.1 Literacy as a potential human, political, social and economic asset at different levels

Asset / *Function* / Level	Human: Learning TO BE	Political: Learning TO LIVE TOGETHER, AND TRANSFORM	Social: Learning TO KNOW	Economic: Learning TO DO
	Self-confidence Autonomy Personal development Inclusion Access to information Freedom	Democracy Citizenship Participation Empowerment Nation-building Human Rights Peace	Literate societies Gender equality Multi-cultural inclusion Education- EFA Improved Health Fertility control	Poverty reduction Livelihoods Growth Productivity
Individual				
Family				
Community				
National				
Global				

IV. Enabling contexts and learning environments

Historical perspectives

During thousands of years, the art of reading and writing remained a monopoly reserved for a specialized class of scribes or a small elite. The invention of printing, at the end of the fourteenth century, made it technically possible to spread literacy to larger segments of the population. The use of the printed word resulted from a process of interaction between social and technical change. Both economic and ideological-religious factors have influenced the spread, and sometimes stagnation, of literacy.

Most countries in Western Europe and North America had become nearly fully literate societies by the beginning of the twentieth century, through the introduction of universal schooling for children in the mid-nineteenth century. This was facilitated and closely linked to economic development, industrialization, urbanization and struggles for democracy and equal rights, as well as religion. However, the historical development of literacy and other dimensions of development show that there is no simple correlation. In fact, in the mid-nineteenth century, when more than 50 per cent of the adult population in most parts of Western Europe was literate, the countries with the highest rates of literacy did not coincide with those most advanced in industrialization at the time. Protestant countries, such as the Scandinavian countries and Germany, were more advanced in literacy than England and France, although they were less developed. In Catholic southern parts of Europe, literacy still remained below 50 per cent.

As industrialization and urbanization required more advanced and widespread knowledge and skills, political or religious decisions also played an important role. The Protestant church, for instance, before the industrial revolution, wanted people to be able to read so as to root the catechism deeply in people's moral attitudes and behaviour. The rising bourgeoisie in power also sought social control of the masses and expected to reduce criminality by introducing universal schooling. In any case, in most countries the development

of literate societies was a gradual process. France took 53 years (1835-1888) to reduce its illiteracy rate from around 50 per cent to 10 per cent (Cipolla, 1970, referred to in Lind and Johnston, 1990).

Combining the delivery of mass adult literacy with basic education for all has proved to offer an accelerated path to universal literacy within a nation. This only works in a context of development and social change, however. The first experience of this model was gained through the mass literacy campaign in the former Soviet Union. Between 1919 and 1939, illiteracy among adults was reduced from 70 per cent to 13 per cent in 20 years. In exceptional cases, the accelerated model has been actively implemented in developing countries.

However, most countries have opted for the gradual path of spreading literacy by introducing UPE or compulsory basic education for all (children). In many countries, UPE is far from being attained, especially in the poorest ones where most non-literate people live. Even where attainment of universal primary enrolment is close, such as in parts of Latin America and East Asia, a large number of young people still do not complete the full basic education cycle; thus, UPE is not really achieved, and adults will continue to need basic and further education. Also, the situation in today's developing countries is not comparable to the economic and political process in which literate societies were developed in Western Europe. Economic dependence, political and institutional instability, weak industrialization, high unemployment and unprofitable subsistence farming are major constraints in many of the poorest countries.

Political will and overall development context

Political will, and commitment at national and local levels to implement literacy as part of wider development activities, have been identified as critical for national achievements of increased literacy rates in relatively short periods of time. For example, UNESCO's critical assessment of the 'functional' work-oriented literacy projects of EWLP concluded "that successful literacy can only be achieved when it is integrated in a national development plan where the political will to implement literacy is clearly articulated in theory

and practice" (cited by Lind and Johnston, 1990: 73).[10] Political will and commitment are important because, irrespective of strong initial individual motivation for literacy, learner attendance tends to drop as the opinion that literacy is a true priority and a people's right seems to fade (Lind and Johnston, 1990). Where significant national gains in literacy have been achieved, policies have combined efforts towards UPE and adult literacy; national and local leaders frequently stress the importance of literacy for nation-building and/or different aspects of national development; human, financial and other resources have been allocated and responsibilities shared. This has occurred in exceptional cases, often in contexts of recent liberation or independence, such as in Cuba in 1961, Tanzania, Mozambique and Vietnam during the 1970s, Nicaragua in 1980, or in countries currently undergoing rapid economic growth and transformation, such as India and China. In Tanzania, for example, literacy was a national priority and President Nyerere strongly advocated adult education, resulting in the reduction of illiteracy from 67 per cent to 20 per cent between 1971 and 1983 (Lind and Johnston, 1990: 92). However, more often than not, the lack of such political will or commitment with concomitant lack of resource allocation has been considered a key factor in explaining lack of progress (see e.g. Jones, 1990; Lind and Johnston, 1990).

Today, countries with considerable progress in the development of literate societies and education for all have often been in a relatively privileged position within the globalized economy, being able to combine the advantages of economic, social and human capital. A study on globalization and education in 16 countries (Stewart, 1996) revealed how a well educated population helps 'successful' countries (in this case Taiwan, the Republic of Korea, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, the Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and China) succeed in the global economy, thereby generating resources for more education, and enabling them to keep up with the competition. Countries that started with a poorly educated population fail economically; which, in turn, reduces their resources for education, and leads to a downward spiral. (The 'unsuccessful'

10. In fact, 96,900 out of 120,000 EWLP-enrolled learners in the 11 countries who became literate came from Tanzania (Lind and Johnston, 1990).

countries of the study were Sierra Leone, Niger, Zambia, Peru, Madagascar, Bolivia, Ethiopia and Mauritania.)

At local level, the importance of inserting adult literacy programmes into contexts of development and participation is obvious. First, motivation for literacy normally arises from immediate situations within a community, such as those created by available schools for children, decentralized development committees or associations, health clinics, transport, money transactions, correspondence with migrants, church activities, etc. Second, the decision to introduce adult literacy programmes in communities where other development programmes are already in place means that the poverty-related barriers to literacy acquisition and practice are being addressed. Access to water, for example, can in many areas translate into more time available for studying or practicing literacy, especially for women. Access to electricity – an indicator of development – is another example of an asset that could encourage the acquisition and use of literacy and make access to new information possible. The increasing spread of new technology, not least cell phones, strengthens the demand for literacy and provides an illustration of the close interaction between literacy and social, economic and technical development.

Literate environments and language policies

Implementing policies of literacy for all through inclusive educational policies and development interventions in all sectors obviously requires resources, legitimate governments, functioning institutions and political will. Nonetheless, the provision of education for all ages, which is necessary, is still not adequate; literate environments need developing at home, in schools, in the community, and in the larger society. Literacy for all, in fact, requires the creation of literate societies.

The literate environment refers to the extent to which there is something interesting and/or necessary to read, or situations that require reading and writing in any form, as well as material and infrastructure available, such as books, newspapers, paper, pens, forms, ICT, TV, cell phones and electricity. What kind of information is sought and how it is used in a community, and what documents

are available in a certain language determine the use and need for literacy.

The concept of literate environments is a useful way of bringing together all aspects of literacy, such as acquisition, use and development, practices, materials, publishing, libraries, media, institutions, purposes and languages. A lack of concern for the whole environment in which literacy is acquired and used can undermine literacy efforts and offer the learner little chance of using literacy for any desired purpose. This is often the case when local or minority languages are used for literacy but few or no written documents are available in that language.

The neglect of follow-up of literacy programmes has been considered a cause of relapse into illiteracy, and the major weakness of campaigns and many other programmes. Recent analysis gives a slightly different perspective. For example, a review of eight studies by Comings (1995, cited by Lauglo, 2001) suggested that retention of literacy and numeracy skills depends more on continued use than follow-up interventions; earlier claims regarding poor retention were based on meagre documentation, and that in such cases where relapse was evident, the initial achievements were probably exaggerated. A few impact evaluation findings, for example in Kenya (Carron, Wiria and Righa, 1989) and Uganda (Carr-Hill, 2001) suggested that literacy skills were, on the whole, retained and, in the case of Kenya, even improved among learners who had graduated a few years earlier. One conclusion is that the need to provide and disseminate reading materials for neo-literate adults is especially important in non-literate environments.

The idea behind so-called post-literacy generally includes the need to stimulate or create a literate environment, and is thus considered to be a pre-requisite for literacy (Dumont, 1990, Ouane, 1989). Many specialists (e.g. Lind and Johnston, 1990) recommend setting up opportunities to use and develop literacy before initiating literacy programmes for adults. Literacy skills are a continuum and develop throughout life in literate environments, but without literate environments and useful application, they stagnate and are easily lost.

Creating literate societies involves encouraging reading habits; providing access to media and printed matter or documents; providing time for women as well as men to read and write; creating explicit links between oral and written culture, written languages (different languages) and visual literacy; providing access to electricity, electronic communication, postal services and banks; education for all, etc. Poverty and lack of access to such services in most environments where the majority of non-literate people live pose a problem. As Dumont pointed out:

> "Indeed it is important to realize that the vast majority of the world's 800 to 900 million illiterates are not isolated individuals within literate populations, but constitute majorities in areas where, on the one hand, oral communication is predominant [...] and lack of facilities, on the other." (Dumont, 1990: 6)

At individual and family levels, poverty is an overall constraint. Poor people, especially women, simply cannot afford nor have time to read or write for pleasure or other purposes. Lack of access to water and electricity, and long distances to clinics and other public institutions or services, limit the time available for leisure activities such as reading and studies. In addition, lack of access to reading glasses is a major obstacle in using acquired literacy skills by many literate people living in poverty.

Cultural values and beliefs also have an impact on reading habits. Spending money on books, newspapers and magazines is not a priority and is even unacceptable in poor or non-literate environments. In many cultures, women are traditionally expected to work at home, not sit and read or write or study. Literature and studies have illustrated how women read less than men after having learned to read and write (see e.g. Carron, 1989). According to a case study in Bangladesh (Maddox, 2005), it is more accepted for women to spend time calculating for domestic budgeting purposes than, for example, reading a newspaper. Conversely, an opposite trend, well documented in industrialized countries such as Sweden and the UK, reveals that women read more and are more interested in reading than men (see e.g. UNESCO, 2003*a*).

Lack of printed and written documents in all languages is a major constraint to the creation of literate societies. In many countries,

most documents are printed in national or official languages that are not spoken by the whole population. Many more people than those considered illiterate are, in reality, excluded from access to written communication.

More recently, modern technology, i.e. people using their free time to watch TV and play visual computer games, contributes to diminishing reading habits (Epskamp, 1995). Many young people, who in principle learned literacy in school, do not read, creating a problem of 'aliteracy'.

Literate environments and reading habits can be encouraged in different ways by public policies, e.g. through conducive book policies supporting publishing and distribution systems, including literature in the mother tongue and easy-to-read materials, the spread of libraries, ITC resource centres, media policies, and book sales policies such as exemption of sales and import taxes on books (the latter has been successfully introduced in Sweden, resulting in higher book sales and reading habits). Subtitling TV programmes in local languages can also support literacy.

The establishment of schools in poor rural communities is, in itself, often the first step towards creating a literate environment. However, school textbooks are often scarce and other books or printed materials, which are usually on offer through libraries in schools or resource centres, are often lacking in poor communities.

The policy implications of the understanding that literacy for all requires the development of literate societies are, according to Olsson and Torrance (2001), that the following literate resources be made available:

- An orthography which reflects the oral competence of the learners, closely linked to language policies.
- A suitable pedagogy, including pedagogical materials, which allows the reader to understand how the script serves the learner as a reader and writer (Olsson and Torrance, 2001: 14).
- Supportive links between literacy of parents and children.
- A broad range of reading materials, ICT and media.
- The encouragement of authors, publishers and distributors of written materials.

- Institutional contexts that require literacy.
- Opportunities to participate in social and political activities, strengthened by being literate.

In brief, overall the lessons that must be kept in mind are as follows:

- Literacy programmes must be inserted into a context of development in which the use of literacy is encouraged.
- Adult literacy programmes are more viable in contexts of social change than in stagnant contexts.
- Actions need to be planned and resources put in place to create an environment favourable for advancing and initiating literacy programmes. Or, as Easton states about literacy, development and local capacity building, "Literacy cannot come first, but if it doesn't come second, you're in trouble" (Easton, 2006).
- Primary schools, adult literacy programmes and literacy-promoting activities for all ages should pro-actively interact and share resources.
- Adult literacy programmes should start in areas where learners will be able to use literacy in their daily lives; once they have acquired literacy skills, provide access to relevant and interesting reading materials. If there are no such materials, continuing supply must be built into the literacy programme.

V. Literacy acquisition and teaching-learning approaches

Literacy acquisition is not just about learning in school or adult literacy classes. As a literacy survey in Botswana showed, people can also learn on their own without having been to school or to literacy classes. This is the case of 11 per cent of all literate adults in Botswana (Hanemann, 2005). People teach and learn from each other at home, at work, and in other common meeting places. Strangely enough, the available reviews and evaluations are more about what learners learn and how they are taught than about how they learn.

The variety of experiences in the last decades shows that there is no single global approach or methodological model for adult literacy. Fundamentalist or dogmatic views on what works or not, taking no account of context, are doomed to fail. Flexibility and context-sensitive adaptations of any approach are essential.

However, there are a number of factors in the design, content and methods that, according to available reviews and evaluation studies, are considered important for literacy acquisition, particularly when motivation is high.

General curriculum issues

Timing and duration of instruction needs to be flexible, but long enough to provide the time required to achieve a certain level of literacy, without being too long to avoid high drop-out. In the Mozambican literacy campaigns, carried out between 1978 and 1983, the objectives were set too high, the stages were made too long, and many learners ended up repeating the stages they had not managed to pass (Lind, 1988). A policy conclusion was that it is probably more effective for learners to be given relatively short courses in stages, and to be evaluated or tested at a rather low skill level with success, as this is more likely to motivate them to continue to the next learning stage (Lind and Johnston, 1996).

The choice of language of instruction is critical for motivation and learning. A number of crucial considerations need to be taken into account. First, the mother tongue, or a language the learners are fluent in, is the most appropriate for learning. Second, it is important to find out which language the learners demand. Otherwise, they may resist and drop out, as in the case of Mozambique, where learners' motivation for literacy was tied to learning Portuguese. Third, learning literacy in a language without written material is not very meaningful. A bilingual approach is often recommended, but is not always easy to implement. The most sensible option is to use local languages for initial literacy teaching, and then to provide a route to the official language for those who have acquired initial literacy. Once the choice of language of instruction has been made, this will have implications on which learning method or methods to use; since both the structure of the language and how writing relates to speech must be taken into account in the design of a literacy programme (see more in e.g. Fordham, Holland and Millican, 1995).

Teacher recruitment and training is, according to most evaluations and reviews, the weakest point in literacy programmes. Recruitment criteria are not strict enough, as facilitators' background education and experience are either inadequate or their experience, understanding and attitudes are not appropriate. Training is normally very short in relation to the expectations of their performance as facilitators in participatory learning processes, literacy, and empowering or development-oriented skills (see e.g. Ridell, 2001; Lind and Johnston, 1990; Lauglo, 2001). Normally, it is true that "Available teachers simply lack the skills and motivation which are required to practice participatory pedagogy. In-service training and teaching materials tailor-made for participatory pedagogy are the means adopted to maximize pedagogic participation" (Lauglo, 2001: 40). However, several studies have shown that literacy teachers' formal qualifications or pedagogical training is less important than their positive attitudes and rapport with the community (Lind and Johnston, 1990). An evaluation study of adult literacy programmes in Uganda (Carr-Hill, 2001) recognized the key role of the facilitators, in spite of findings suggesting that the effectiveness of literacy education did not depend on the educational qualifications, training, support or payment of the facilitators.

Almost all adult literacy programmes require that a group of learners meet regularly together with a teacher or facilitator, even if the group is very small, consists of adults and children (as happens in family literacy), and uses radio, TV or other information and communication technology (ICT).

Literacy via *radio or TV* (or audio and video cassettes), as recently designed and technically sponsored by Cuba in its *Yo, Si Puedo* (YSP) programme in many countries (mainly in Latin America and to a lesser extent in Africa), is conceived as a distance mode of initial adult literacy[11] and basic education. Lessons are broadcast or played back to the learners *via* radio, television, or audio/video cassette in the presence of a facilitator. The advantages are not obvious,[12] but the rationale for using these mass media technologies is to reach many learners despite limited resources, and to support the facilitators and learners in the teaching-learning process. It is assumed that the TV, video or radio programmes reach more people because learners can follow the lessons on their own. Nonetheless, the classes are held in listening groups and follow a literacy primer (*cartilha*), so in practice, YSP does not necessarily reach more people than programmes that do not use radio or TV.

In some countries, for example Mozambique, the YSP classes are broadcast *via* radio. In Honduras, a combination of radio and TV/video transmission is used. Whether a country opts to use radio, audiocassettes, TV or videotapes depends on the availability and cost of electricity, radios, TV sets and transmission fees. The use of video or audio tapes – rather than fixed-time radio or TV transmissions – is less expensive and provides a more flexible teaching aid. The trouble with this approach is that the broadcasting schedule is fixed and prevents flexible timetables. The facilitator is present throughout the lesson, but most learners have problems getting to class on time. In Mozambique, where a majority of non-literate people do not master Portuguese, radio lessons broadcast in Portuguese

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11. At the end of a first stage of 62 hours of lessons, the learners are evaluated. They are considered literate if they are able to write a short, legible letter. No arithmetic is included.
12. The author has evaluated the experimental phase of the programme in Mozambique, and has reviewed reports on its implementation in many countries. For experiences in Latin America, see www.fronesis.org.

are a handicap because it is not possible to interrupt the lesson to provide explanations or translation. The crucial role of learners' understanding of the language of instruction is even more critical in literacy lessons *via* radio or TV than elsewhere.

These problems, illustrated by the YSP approach, do not mean that radio, TV, video, and other ICTs cannot be extremely helpful as supplementary teaching aids for adult literacy learners, but technologies cannot replace human resources in facilitating the learning process.

It is generally considered important to adapt methods, as well as contents, to adult learners. Participatory methods are always recommended. Nonetheless, learner motivation has been found to be even more important for positive outcomes. Varying outcomes have been obtained from applying all kinds of methods. The Uganda evaluation (Carr-Hill, 2001) also questioned the importance of choosing a teaching approach, as well as course content. A comparison between the government FAL programme outcomes with those of NGO programmes, *inter alia* REFLECT, concluded that "Participants in the REFLECT circles perform no better than participants in the FAL classes on either the test or the functional scales, after controlling for the level of prior primary schooling, even though the REFLECT facilitators are better qualified, better trained, better paid, and better supported" (Carr-Hill, 2001: xx).

The most important lesson drawn is that adults must, at least, be treated with due respect and patience, and that the chosen method must be within the reach of the teachers, "otherwise they will relapse even more easily into the methods they remember from their own school experience" (Lind and Johnston, 1990: 128). One challenge is that teaching numeracy and literacy skills often requires special teaching skills, while teaching other subjects related to literacy programmes requires a different set of skills and knowledge.

Global and eclectic methods of teaching reading and writing are normally preferred. That is, meaningful whole words, sentences or texts, not the phonetic elements of words such as the separate letters of the alphabet, are the starting point. The most commonly agreed upon approach is the analytic-synthetic method, with initial emphasis on the meaning of what is read, followed by analysis

of elements of the words and their sounds or phonetics, and then combining (synthesizing) them into whole words and texts. Literacy acquisition among adults through drilling automatic word recognition and setting increasingly fast reading tasks has been emphasized as a result of research on the brain and memory processes involved in learning to read and write (Abadzi, 2003).

The YSP literacy approach, essentially about initial reading and writing, is a very traditional alphabetic one. It is innovative in that it combines the letter learning with numbers, called the 'alphanumerical' method. The assumption is that illiterate learners are familiar with numbers; therefore, if each letter of the alphabet is associated with a number, the learners will more easily learn and memorize different letters. A case study in Mozambique[13] found, however, that the introduction of letters combined with numbers appeared to be too much at the same time and in too short a time for non-literate persons.

The debates and reviews of different approaches in Australia have attempted to relate theory, practice and policy. The implications of reviewing these policies and practices and drawing the best from all of them suggest that effective literacy programmes should allow learners to:

- "break the code
- participate in the meanings of text
- use texts functionally and
- analyse texts critically" (Tett, Hamilton and Hillier, 2006: 4).

As pointed out by Fordham *et al*. (1995: 72), "... the choice of literacy method is often controversial, and it may be best to experiment with a combination of methods according to circumstances."

Contents are, as previously mentioned, normally determined by the programme objectives. In practice, the various policy rationales need to be translated into priority literacy objectives and operational strategies. For example, setting up adult programmes stressing individual and collective empowerment leads to a case for civic education content including rights and responsibilities; while

13. As part of a study on YSP commissioned by UNESCO by Lind, Askornkool and Heinsohn: *Cuba´s literacy methodology "Yo, Sí Puedo",* May 2006.

implementing programmes that stress poverty reduction leads to a case for education in health and other socio-economic life skills (often called 'functional' knowledge). The question then becomes where to start – literacy first or second – and how to combine literacy acquisition with other learning objectives.

An important challenge is to respond to the demand and motivation for literacy among expected target groups, while reflecting on the provider's programme rationale. Literature and handbooks almost always accentuate the importance of a curriculum that is relevant and useful to learners' everyday life. In practice, this is commonly translated into lessons portraying their daily life. Caution is needed to make sure that content goes beyond the local and already known to broader perspectives, as part of their learning to communicate with the outside world. The widespread strong motivation among literacy learners to learn an official language contributes to their desire to be part of and learn about the world beyond familiar surroundings. Literacy programmes should, therefore, orient towards the 'glocal', i.e. both the global and local, and their interconnections.

Learning materials, mainly in the form of books, normally reflect both the methods and the contents of a literacy programme. A standard model for the initial stage of literacy consists of lessons starting with an illustration of a relevant theme, followed by a key word on the same theme (either on its own or inserted into a sentence). The key word is then, broken down into syllables and/or letters, and their respective syllabic families. On this basis, new words are formed for reading and writing. Gradually, sentences and paragraphs are inserted. Writing exercises are sometimes included in these so-called primers, which themselves are sometimes complemented by posters and word or syllable cards.

Many literacy programmes have separate numeracy learning materials, including exercises. Others integrate numeracy in the reading and writing primers. Some literacy programmes do not include arithmetic. This was the case of the short, one-off mass campaigns in Cuba, Nicaragua and Ecuador. Teaching aids for numeracy often consist of local material.

The importance of using real literacy materials to provide practice in reading newspapers, filling in forms, reading and writing

letters and timetables, calculating incomes and expenditures, etc., is often stressed. These should, on the one hand, complement the basic learning materials prepared for the programme, and, on the other, be inserted and integrated into learning materials. That is, the primers should include copies of real material such as newspaper articles, health instructions, and bank forms to be filled in, as well as stories, poems and songs.

Failed adult literacy programmes have wrongly been blamed on the use of pre-conceptualized and printed primers and the top-down transmission of a dominant schooled literacy, allegedly not taking into account local knowledge and literacy (see e.g. Street, 2004). Academics from the New Literacy Studies (NLS) school of thought claim that since literacy acquisition is contextual and literacy practices are 'ideological', the particular literacy of a specific locality or learner group has to be identified, and the teaching and learning should be based on local literacy practices and locally available literacy materials. They claim that using a primer is based on an 'autonomous model' of literacy which assumes literacy skills in themselves have cognitive and other effects.[14] The policy or programme design implications deriving from the NLS theories are either a kind of literacy counselling service, a resource on which local groups can call for support in carrying out literacy tasks, or a literacy programme without books, requiring learners to write their own texts, as is the case in the REFLECT approach, where a point is made of not using primers. The dilemma is that the learners often demand books – a demand reinforced by the general lack of reading materials in rural areas among poor communities. So a supposed participatory learner-centred approach can, itself, become a top-down approach. The idea of not using pre-conceived learner materials may work in literate societies, such as in the UK, where there is an abundance of written material and, where highly qualified and trained adult education and literacy personnel is available, but can be counterproductive in less literate environments. As pointed out by the Global Monitoring Report 2006 on adult literacy, high

14. The references to sources believing in these are normally from the 1970s (e.g. Goody, 1977) and such authors no longer believe in such autonomous effects of literacy.

quality literacy primers are often key to programme success (UNESCO, 2005).

Different approaches to teaching and learning literacy

Literature reviews of literacy for adults and youth discuss links between literacy and other learning needs, such as those related to citizenship or 'conscientization', and/or to development, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of integrating literacy into other activities, and the need to create and support literacy development.

In the debate about the coherence between theory, practice and policy of Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Language (ALNL) in post-school contexts in the UK, the advantages of a *social practice* approach are repeatedly emphasized, forcing us to "look beyond the texts themselves to what people do with literacy" (Tett *et al.*, 2006: 2). This approach contrasts with a *functional skills* approach, which is described as being focused on the autonomy of the text and its meanings, and built on a deficit view of people's existing capabilities. While the policies and programme design offered in England are criticized for being top-down, market-oriented and inadequate for dealing with the complex reality of diverse learning needs, the Scottish policy is given as a good example of how the social practices view of literacy and numeracy has resulted in a learner-centred curriculum. At the same time, there are recognizable problematic issues arising from the openness of the approaches to learning, teaching and assessment, such as the lack of clear guidance on what should be available to be learned and taught; great demands on the tutors in negotiating a suitable curriculum with each individual learner; and lack of necessary expertise to deliver the agreed curriculum (Tett *et al.*, 2006: 8).

These problematic issues highlight almost insurmountable challenges such an approach may pose for larger-scale programmes in the less-developed environments, where most non-literate people in the world are to be found. While there certainly is a lot to learn from the social practices debate in the UK, the theoretical arguments, consigning approaches into mutually exclusive dichotomies, do not seem helpful. A more pragmatic way forward is to recognize that literacy is about learning skills, as well as enabling social and cultural inclusion.

In reality, most approaches are a mixture. To simplify, the following three most common approaches to teaching adults literacy have been identified, of which the two former are normally non-formal: (1) the social awareness-raising approach (derived from Paulo Freire's work and theories); (2) the development-oriented (functional) approach; and (3) the 'formal education' approach. Some of the main lessons from these different approaches, though in practice they may not always be distinguishable from each other, are reviewed.

Social awareness or 'liberation' approaches

Social awareness approaches have been adopted mainly by NGOs and popular movements inspired by Freirean 'conscientization' literacy perspectives, especially in Latin America. They have explicit political and social objectives, such as ones related to citizenship. Literacy is seen as contributing to social transformation and empowering people to participate actively in democratic processes. The goal is, basically, to overcome oppression. The ideas of the 'liberation' or 'transformation' pedagogy of Paulo Freire (Freire, 1972) have been adopted by most adult educators and adult education programmes, at least rhetorically. In Latin America, the influence of Freire on adult literacy was so widespread in the 1970s and 1980s that one could hardly find any governmental or non-governmental literacy programme that did not define itself as liberating or conscientizing.

Freirean principles still inspire adult literacy in dialogue and participation, recognition of adult learners' knowledge, wisdom, use of language, culture and social reality, awareness and ability to act to solve common problems, reading and writing with understanding and critical reflection, and learning to 'read the world' not just the 'word'. A dialogue is usually introduced on an engaging issue identified through local community surveys; the basis on which discussions and new words and sentences are generated would, in principle, lead to awareness and joint action to solve common problems. In practice, the implementation has often been vague and/or mechanical. Most importantly, Freire provides a source of inspiration through his criticism of domesticating approaches to literacy and his insistence on the alternative role of the educator as

someone who shares experiences with the learners, teaching and, at the same time, learning from them. Such an approach has the potential to build democratic attitudes.

The REFLECT approach, originally designed by the international NGO, ActionAid, and now adopted by a large number of NGOs in many developing countries, has combined a Freirean perspective with the use of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques, involving learner-generated graphic representations and maps of local realities. REFLECT provides a 'structured participatory approach', in which the steps involved in the process, but not the contents, are defined in a manual for use by the facilitators. Textbooks are not used; it is believed that only learner-generated texts are appropriate. REFLECT guidelines argue against the use of pre-printed reading materials, irrespective of what learners demand.

The claimed positive empowering outcomes are believed to be the result of the process, not the learning of literacy and numeracy skills. The literacy learning process is thus seen as parallel to an empowering process. REFLECT has strongly advocated its advantages by contrasting its positive pilot experiences with what is labeled 'primer-based', or 'pre-packaged' programmes, which are considered to be formal, inefficient and non-empowering. The unnecessary polarization that has been created is unfortunate, and does not help in learning from exchanging experiences and recognizing common, as well as context-bound, problems and solutions. The outcomes of the pilot projects applying REFLECT in Uganda, Bangladesh and El Salvador were in all aspects positive compared with outcomes of control groups in these countries (Archer and Cottingham, 1996). But this is almost always the case with pilots, due to the special attention created through the monitoring and evaluation process itself. At the same time the evaluation report recognized the constraints common to almost all literacy programmes, related to the uncertain and demanding living conditions of the adult literacy learners, as well as pointing out the learners' wish to have access to reading materials.

Today, the social awareness-raising approach is used primarily by voluntary organizations working with poor and marginalized people. There are many examples illustrating the positive processes

initiated by such approaches involving participation, democratic practices and expressed feelings of empowerment. Nonetheless, a number of problems in implementing such awareness-raising or REFLECT approaches have been identified (see Lind and Johnston, 1990; 1996, and Ridell, 2001), such as the following:

- It is difficult to apply on a large scale.
- Too much emphasis has been placed on discussion or on analyzing community problems without imparting the reading, writing and numeracy skills which many learners expected when they enrolled.
- Tensions exist between the various objectives of learning literacy skills and 'empowerment'. The very broad objectives of REFLECT[15] do not even mention literacy and cross several disciplinary boundaries, and are thus "likely to continue to pose challenges, especially where these boundaries are reflected in ministerial divisions such as between education and community development" (Ridell, 2001: 39).
- Lack of resources hamper follow-up and implementation of identified necessary political, social or economic actions for desired changes.
- Failure results from lack of adaptation to the context, or insensitivity to learners' wishes to have books, to learn to write their names, to learn the official language not just the most common local language (Mozambique is an illustrative example),[16] or to other requests not conforming to the pre-conceived ideas of the 'bookless' approach.

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15. "A structured learning process which facilitates peoples' critical analysis of their environment, placing empowerment at the heart of sustainable and equitable development. Through the creation of democratic spaces and the construction and interpretation of locally generated texts, people build their own multi-dimensional analysis of local and global reality, challenging dominant development paradigms and redefining power relationships in both public and private spheres. Based on ongoing processes of reflection and action, people empower themselves for a more just and equitable society" (Ridell, 2001: 39).
16. Documented in *inter alia* a report from a reflection seminar on REFLECT in Mozambique, held in Maputo, 5-6 June 2005, organized by ActionAid International Mozambique and the Ministry of Education and Culture.

An evaluation of REFLECT 'circles' (i.e. learner groups) carried out by 30 organizations, in 28 districts in Nepal, at the end of 1999, illustrates some of the dilemmas. The findings (summarized in Ridell, 2001: 20-21) show the greatest achievement was that learners had become 'vocal' by discussing local issues and "acted in some cases to address them". Meanwhile, disappointing findings include the lack of literacy gains; the way in which REFLECT had been scaled up to the detriment of quality; insufficient care in the selection of facilitators; the lost link with national issues; abandonment of orientation practices on REFLECT before an organization takes it up; insufficient materials for neo-literates; and above all, the need to clarify the main role of REFLECT and the place of literacy therein.

Although some national mass literacy campaigns, analyzed by Lind and Johnston (1990), also had mainly socio-political awareness-raising objectives linked to nation-building, they have been geared more towards understanding and joining ongoing transformations than making them happen. The historically most well-known of such campaigns are those linked to the socialist revolution in Cuba in 1961 and Nicaragua in 1979-1980, after the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship.

More recent campaigns in non-revolutionary contexts have also focused on social and political awareness issues, for example in Ecuador in 1989, where the campaign was linked to a human rights campaign. Every literacy lesson started with one of the universal human rights (Torres, 2005).

Development-oriented or 'functional' approaches

Development-oriented approaches to literacy are, perhaps, the most common among both NGO and governmental programmes; often called 'functional literacy programmes', they refer to the inclusion of development-oriented programme components or learning contents about health practices, agriculture, marketing, environmental issues, and other so-called life or livelihood skills.

Large-scale government-led national programmes, not run as campaigns, typically have general socio-economic objectives intended to meet demand and contribute to social justice, development and/or modern attitudes.

'Integrated' approaches to literacy have also tried to respond to the concerns of poor people wanting to break out of poverty and learn how to improve their livelihoods. In practice, these approaches begin with either livelihood or literacy training, and then add the other components. Some exceptional cases try to integrate all such learning needs. The EWLP, conducted between 1967 and 1972, was designed to integrate the teaching of literacy, numeracy and vocational skills in order to ensure practical relevance and to promote increased productivity and economic development. One of the reasons for its failure, according to evaluation findings, was "that 'functionality' in EWLP terms was much too technical" (Lind and Johnston, 1990: 74).

More recently, Oxenham, Diallo, Katahoire, Petkova-Mwangi and Sall (2002) reviewed similar approaches and experiences of integrating skills and literacy training for better livelihoods. The cases were drawn mainly from experiences of local groups or organizations in a few countries in Africa and South Asia. The authors caution that available evidence was weak and their conclusions and recommendations should, therefore, be seen as only tentative. Some of their main observations were similar to those regarding most learning programmes for non-literate adults; for example, the importance of flexibly adapting to learners' interests and conditions, problems of irregular attendance and drop-out, and the risk associated with placing "too heavy a burden of expectations on education and training programs" (Oxenham *et al.*, 2002: 35). Other observations were more directly linked to the nature of vocational/ livelihood education and income-generating projects which, in the cases cited, motivated learners more than literacy. It is suggested that development-oriented organizations are better equipped to address such projects than agencies focused on education.

The practices of linking literacy to other functional or development-oriented skills, or even income generation, are very mixed. The two more common ways of relating the two are: first, to run literacy and income-generating activities in parallel but separately; or second, to run literacy activities first, followed by income-generation activities (Oxenham, *et al.*, 2002: 10). The review analysis defines two main strategies of combining literacy with livelihood: 'literacy with livelihood components' and 'livelihood training with literacy

components'. Each experience of either kind seems to have had mixed results, and difficulties in finding both the right instructors for each of the components, and the necessary institutional and financial support for achieving the objectives. A common mistake seems to be to aim at doing both in too little time, with instructors not qualified to teach all the components. A clear recommendation is that each one of the two components, in whatever order they come, should be given enough teaching-learning time (they cannot both be squeezed into the timetable usually meant for literacy, i.e. 300 hours or so), and different instructors, one for literacy, another for the development activity in question. This then, requires cross- or multi-sectoral collaboration and payment of two different categories of facilitators for the same group of learners. Another way mentioned, that seems to be easier, is to offer the livelihood training to those who already have basic literacy skills. Projects without the necessary qualities and resources, that try to combine literacy and livelihoods, often end up either doing only one or the other, or not achieving the expected gains, either in literacy or income.

The review recommendations revolve around national long-term vocational training policies that should try to include non-literate poor adults, and offer them learning opportunities in literacy as well as other practical skills.

Other reviews (e.g. Lind and Johnston, 1990) have suggested that as long as the content is not infantile or completely alien to known reality, the focus of the themes does not seem to determine the results. In Uganda, the evaluation (Carr-Hill, 2001) revealed that learners did acquire literacy and numeracy skills, as well as functional knowledge, in spite of often poorly trained and prepared facilitators and varying quality of materials. Nonetheless, on many points of functional knowledge or information, the differences between participants and non-participants were not large. The implication is that the information provided by the programmes was not new to the participants. Further questions asked were: "If functional information is not crucial to the participants, should curriculum designers spend time determining what information to impart and how best to impart it? Should they not instead focus on designing more engaging ways of enabling participants to master the mechanics of literacy?" (Carr-Hill, 2001: 114).

"Often the mixture of objectives of the program combined with efforts to make the curriculum interesting and useful to adults result in overloaded programs. Too many goals are expected to be reached by one literacy course" (Lind and Johnston, 1996: 171).

Formal education or continuing adult education approaches

Most adult literacy programmes seem to be labeled or considered non-formal, without links to formal or continuing education. Frequently, this is pointed out as a weakness by researchers, policy-makers, educators and learners themselves. Several studies, for example from South Africa and Namibia (Papen, 2005), have shown that many adult literacy learners are happy with, or actually prefer, a formal school-like approach with textbooks, exams and certificates, as compared to a non-formal community-oriented approach without textbooks or certificates. With this is a desire to learn an official national or international language, such as English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Arabic, because language skills and a formal education mean power, status and inclusion (Papen, 2005). It is not unusual for non-formal literacy programmes to evaluate the learners' achievements in a more or less formal way and issue certificates stating that they are literate or have successfully participated in a certain course or programme. This has shown to be very motivating and even empowering. However, these certificates are seldom recognized as being equivalent to a standard exit level certificate of the formal system, and thus do not guarantee entry into continuing adult education.

There is clearly a demand for bridges and ladders to formal paths of continuing education for adults who have been through non-formal literacy programmes. Very little progress has been made on this. However, in some countries, literacy campaigns have been linked to building up a formal continuing education system for adults,

such as was done in Cuba, and to some extent, in Mozambique.[17] Such links have also been established in countries where literacy is delivered mainly as part of a formal upgrading or 'remedial' adult basic education system, such as in South Africa, Brazil, Sweden or the UK. At the same time, non-formal literacy programmes for adults are also provided, mainly by NGOs or CBOs. Still, even these are often seen as stepping-stones to more formal continuing adult education and training.

In South Africa, an Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) curriculum framework has been developed – equivalent to formal basic education – and a National Qualification Authority has been established for the purpose of recognizing prior learning and assigning equivalences. It gives an impression of being a sophisticated model of an ideal system for providing the necessary bridges and ladders. Nonetheless, in practice, it has had very little outreach, and has hardly helped initial adult literacy learners become formally certified. The reasons need to be carefully analyzed: one reason appears to be that it was over-ambitiously designed and not adapted to the reality of non-literate, poorly-schooled, marginalized, and often unemployed adults (see e.g. *ABET Journal*, 1997).

Growing convergence of literacy approaches

Different approaches and methods can complement each other, and experiences shared. For example, there is no reason to dichotomize the use of primers and real literacy materials. Both are needed. Further, it is not fruitful to claim that one method is empowering and others are not. All programmes need to improve the capacities of facilitators to apply participatory methods, and all literacy programmes need to improve on specific requirements of teaching and learning to read and write, and do arithmetic. Formal,

17. In Mozambique, school and adult education (last stage of literacy) exams have been opened up to the public, even those not attending education programmes, so that self-learning or interrupted studies can be tested and certified. From there, adult learners can continue to enroll in evening classes from Grade 6 upwards in formal education, at least in the more or less urban areas. Extraordinary exams at the end of primary and secondary education are also given to external candidates.

non-formal and informal approaches also have to complement, not oppose each other.

As mentioned, many adult literacy and basic education programmes are, in practice, a mixture of non-formal, formal, awareness- or empowerment-oriented, and development- or functional-oriented approaches. This eclectic tendency was confirmed by an international seminar on Innovative Pedagogical Approaches to Literacy, organized by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) in Hamburg in November 2006. The seminar tried to review the main pedagogical approaches to literacy with a special focus on empowering capacities. The approaches discussed were: (1) REFLECT; (2) literacy and ICTs; (3) competence-based approaches; (4) text-centred approaches; and (5) approaches in and for multi-lingual environments. The following trends were identified: "the growing convergence of different literacy approaches on the need for flexibility, learner-centredness, the need for well trained facilitators and eclectic use of teaching-learning methods; the acceptance of mother-tongue-based multi-lingual education; the increasing use of ICTs; and the importance of creating a literate environment" (UIL Nexus Vol. 1. No. 2, December 2006/ January 2007).

In fact, there is no magic method or approach that will fit all contexts and all learners. Every learner group needs to be addressed according to its motivations, living conditions, language habits, prior learning, knowledge and experience. And, in every learner group there will be a diversity of learning needs and aspirations. A major challenge is thus to design programmes and train facilitators flexible enough to address a diversity of learning needs in multiple language situations, while giving enough guidance and structure for participants to feel confident that they are steadily progressing. Modular systems, with in-built continuous assessment and frequent evaluation points, have the potential to provide both flexibility and structure.

VI. Evaluating and monitoring literacy programmes

Commitments are increasingly made, both nationally and internationally, requiring attention to improving the quality of literacy learning programmes within and outside of school, and to improving the evaluation methods used to measure literacy achievement. This is underlined by the Dakar Framework for Action goals, which aim to ensure that the learning needs of youth and adults are met (goal 3), to significantly improve adult literacy rates (goal 4), and to ensure that "measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills" (goal 5) (UNESCO, 2000).

The following three progress indicators should normally be included in national and international monitoring and evaluation exercises of literacy:

- The change in absolute numbers and in percentage of the literate population.
- The relative contribution of formal school and non-formal youth and adult education to attaining literacy.
- The impact of literacy on the quality of peoples' lives.

In addition, literacy providers and stakeholders need to know accomplishments and lessons drawn from the literacy programmes they are implementing or sponsoring. Generally, an evaluation system should be an integral part of any educational programme, including adult basic learning programmes, and education programmes related to literacy. This chapter will review concepts and methods of programme and learner evaluation, since these are not specific to adult literacy programmes. Instead, a brief critical review of the value and function of evaluation and monitoring of literacy programmes will be presented, and a few specific indicators or evaluation criteria for literacy and non-formal adult learning programmes will be discussed.

Evaluating learning outcomes

Addressing how to define learning outcomes for the purposes of assessing literacy progress is a critical issue that has been the subject of intense international debates and initiatives. There is little agreement on how to operationally measure basic competencies such as literacy, numeracy and problem solving (ILI/UNESCO, 2002; UNESCO, 2005).

To facilitate the planning and process of evaluating adult literacy programmes, each country or programme provider needs to formulate specific objectives and expected major outcomes of the different stages or programme components, as well as the expected long-term effects of the latter in order to define what should be evaluated (this does not exclude goal-free evaluation or research looking for unexpected outcomes).

Evaluations can focus on the policy and strategy as such, the organizational and management system, the curriculum and programme implementation, including inputs and processes, and outcomes and impacts. If the expected outcomes, such as learning basic literacy and numeracy skills, are found to be lacking, then it might be a result of insufficient or inadequate inputs and processes, or due to insufficiencies of the policy and programme design. It is, therefore, important to monitor, evaluate, and, where possible, research all of these aspects. It would not be fair or useful to highlight only poor results if the programme in reality has not been designed, resourced and geared towards achieving the expected outcomes.

As educators know, pedagogical progress should, ideally, be continuously evaluated by the teacher or facilitator, together with the learners. However, if and when this is done, such follow-up is normally not documented or reported on by regular monitoring and evaluation. Some kind of standardized evaluation procedure and requisite level of achievement by the end of a course, stage or module are needed for stakeholders as well as the facilitators and learners themselves to gauge learning progress. Such an approach can be adopted to evaluate literacy and numeracy skills without necessarily creating a negative atmosphere and fear that develop when formal exams are imposed. Other knowledge outcomes are more difficult to evaluate in a standardized way with basic literacy

learners. To identify outcomes and attitudinal changes such as gained self-confidence, or impacts in the learners' lives, interviews are more useful, or, in the case of learners who can already write, learners' own written stories. These can be documented through overall evaluation studies or research, and need to be planned and budgeted for. In Namibia, this has been carried out systematically at intervals of three to five years.

Evaluating learners' skills and knowledge at the end of a stage or programme will not reveal what they have acquired if there is no information on the learners' prior knowledge when enrolling (regarding the content and their reading, writing and numeracy skills). Such base-line information is necessary for measuring progress, and for making it possible to compare the results between different groups or between programmes.

In research, and in some enrolment registers, prior school background of learners has been documented. Actually, it seems to be common that a fair proportion of learners who enroll for literacy classes have either, as children, started but not completed primary school, or been to adult literacy classes before. If they already have some elementary ideas about reading and writing, it may be quicker for them to learn than for those who enroll without former experience of learning to read and write. However, prior school experience is not always an advantage. For example, in a case study on the teaching-learning process in Mozambique (Lind, 1988), some learners with the greatest difficulties were rural women who had been to school for a couple of years during colonial times, where they had been beaten. Other learners come without schooling or literacy class backgrounds, but with some literacy skills acquired informally at home from other family members or friends in contexts where they have needed to practice literacy. This was the case with the fastest learners in the same case study mentioned above. They tended to be younger and male learners, who had migrated and spoke several languages.

In order to help learners advance, and be able to evaluate programme efficiency in a comparable way, initial diagnostic or placement tests are needed. These can be conducted in a natural, non-threatening way, for example by small, graded assignments

asking learners who already know how to write their names to demonstrate. Curriculum and materials need to cater for different levels among initial literacy learners, so that learners can be placed at the right level from the beginning. This may reduce some drop-out among those who feel the lessons are either much too difficult, or too slow and easy.[18]

A difficulty in comparing different literacy programmes within or between countries is that evaluation criteria vary so much, and that some programmes do not systematically evaluate learner achievements at all, only their participation. The literacy campaigns in Cuba, Nicaragua and Ecuador excluded numeracy from final achievement tests. In Cuba's past literacy campaign (1961) and in its currently sponsored radio and TV literacy approach (YSP), learners are evaluated by checking if they can write a short legible letter. In other cases, learners' skills may be tested at a very high level. In still others, different levels of literacy are defined and measured by combining criteria related to decoding skills employed in the environment. The literacy levels assessed by an NGO in Bangladesh – the Dhaka Ahsania Mission – illustrate this.

Obviously, this kind of assessment or evaluation criteria would require further work to develop the meaning of terms like 'simple', etc. Different levels of numeracy skills are, in many cases, also included as learner evaluation criteria.

A way forward towards comparable evaluation would be to base literacy and overall adult basic programmes on outcome-based curricula in which such skill levels or attainment targets are set. The contents and approaches can then vary, while the evaluation criteria could be national and used for quality assurance purposes, possibly built into a broader national qualification framework.

18. In isolated, sparsely-populated areas, it may be necessary for one facilitator alone to deal with all available levels, which can be very demanding. If there are enough learners, this can be done in different timetables or within the same group as a multi-grade/level approach.

Table 6.1 Evaluating criteria

Level	Expected reading skills	Expected writing skill
1.	Able to read and understand sentences comprising 8 words at font size 36	Able to write five simple sentences on their own
2.	Able to read and understand posters, signboards, etc. at font size 18 and above	Able to express themselves in writing on simple issues
3.	Able to read and understand simple stories and features in specially developed newsletters	Able to give answers in writing
4.	Able to read text with clear and correct punctuation	Able to fill in simple forms
5.	Able to read different books, magazines, daily newspapers and explain the matter to others	Able to write at least one page on a specific issue expressing their own ideas

Source: UNESCO, 2003*b*.

Monitoring ongoing programme activities

The introduction of large-scale national literacy programmes in developing countries reinforced the need to incorporate a monitoring system to observe the progress of ongoing literacy programmes for youth and adults. In fields other than education, monitoring has been especially important for managing large-scale and time-bound activities, as well as high-risk and complex projects.

In fact, continuous monitoring and supervision are more important for non-formal youth and adult learning programmes than for more formal education programmes, exactly because they are volatile, sensitive to disturbances, and in need of encouragement. Excessive rainfall, a famine, an intensive harvest, absence or change of the facilitator, lack of necessary material, and change of timetable can bring a literacy group to a halt. Positive factors that boost participation are actually closely linked to the monitoring and evaluation process, such as graduation and other celebrations in which certificates and/or awards are distributed, visits by supervisors,

leaders or sponsors are made, etc. Problems need to be detected in time to keep the group going.

Designing a single system for monitoring and evaluating a wide diversity of non-formal youth and adult learning programmes, with different objectives and curricula within a country, is a major challenge addressed by UNESCO in its development of monitoring tools and capacity in the area of education statistics. A methodology and database for setting up a Non-Formal Education Management Information System (NFE-MIS) has been developed. It includes a conceptual framework, prototype data collection tools, and guidelines for the development of NFE indicators and data analysis, all presented in a handbook and corresponding software programme. The package has been tested and implemented since 2001 in six countries: Tanzania, India, Cambodia, Morocco, Jordan and Niger. Evaluations are still not available, however (see UNESCO's website on education).

One purpose of the NFE-MIS is precisely to improve co-ordination among NFE providers. The reasons for grouping all non-formal programmes together must, however, be clear and meaningful, especially if they do not have comparable specific learning objectives. Even if they all aspire to impact positively the lives of poor and disadvantaged youth and adults, it does not mean that they need to belong to the same monitoring and evaluation system. It can still be useful to collect and disseminate information on the diverse providers and programmes, each with its own content and evaluation criteria.

As mentioned earlier, it is important not to mix up literacy programmes with non-formal learning programmes in general, because specific goals of developing literate citizens, communities and societies can easily lose prominence.

Systematic follow-up of the ongoing activities of a programme implies a monitoring system in which progress is checked and maintained, with the help of supervisory visits and periodic collection of information. The latter is normally numerical data on the establishment of groups and the numbers of groups operating, and the enrolment and attendance of learners (female and male). In many literacy programmes, such basic data that can easily be filled

in on a form has been collected monthly or at other regular intervals (see e.g. Muller and Dietrich, 1989), as is the case with national programmes in, for example, Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique, Tanzania, Malawi and India. Final evaluation results on learners' achievements have often been included in the monitoring system and its instruments at the various levels of the administrative system in charge. In Mozambique, statistical data collected on adult basic education, i.e. the three stages of literacy, and the evening classes from 6th grade upwards, has, from the beginning, been an essential part of the overall ministry EMIS.

Statistical data from monitoring are normally complemented by regional and national assessment meetings and sporadic supervision visits, during which progress and constraints are discussed. For these discussions and for broader evaluation purposes, the collected monitoring data can be very informative and useful.

The main challenge is to actively analyze and use the findings in time to improve and correct programme activities. This is, unfortunately, seldom done, and thus the very purpose of monitoring is undermined. Other risks are that data will be collected too frequently and that many unnecessary variables will be included in the monitoring system. This would overload supervisors, who could make better use of their time, for example, by providing pedagogical or logistical support or taking other measures to improve programme implementation.

A difficulty in monitoring and evaluating adult literacy or other non-formal adult learning programmes is that learners have a tendency to drop in and out, that is, there is no apparent convenient time for all learners to start and finish at the same time. At the beginning of a literacy programme, adults are mobilized to join and large numbers often enroll. However, not all of the enrolled learners turn up, while others usually drop out soon after enrolling and attending some sessions. In reality, adult learners assess whether what is being offered corresponds to their expectations and needs, and then decide whether to continue or not. This is normal in adult personal decision-making, with adults often beginning by trying something out. Initial enrolment figures are therefore not useful as a baseline for monitoring attendance, retention and completion of learners.

So even though enrolment data should be collected, initial enrolment should not be mixed up with real enrolment, which can be estimated about a month after a programme has started. The actual or real enrolment can be measured or registered by making a survey of existing learners attending on a certain date, or in a given week. Although this may also be relative and fluctuating, it does serve as a somewhat better baseline for monitoring retention and completion.

Adult literacy programmes are generally characterized by irregular attendance. For example, at the end of a programme, 100 out of 300 initially enrolled may still be attending now and then. Among the 200 who in this example seem to have dropped out, there are often learners who have been sick, given birth, been affected by the death of a spouse or other close family member, or moved away for work or other compelling reasons. Learners who are absent for longer periods have not necessarily decided to quit the programme, but circumstances in their lives affecting their participation lead to interruptions.

The frequently reported high drop-out rates from literacy programmes are often interpreted as proof of the irrelevance of adult literacy programmes; but they are not necessarily caused by the learners staying away. It is, in fact, not unusual for whole literacy groups to close down because of the absence or drop-out of their facilitators, who have found better jobs or who do not accept to continue without being paid, etc. So statistics showing very high drop-out rates among learners can, in some cases, be about a massive desistence of facilitators as a result of poor management in contracting, training and paying. In these situations, it is not easy or meaningful to interpret drop-out rates alone as indicators of relevance or success, or lack thereof.

Key outcome indicators

It is common to make long lists of input, process and outcome indicators instead of selecting only a few critical ones that have the potential to give an idea of both the quantitative and qualitative

benefits of the programme.[19] Retention and completion rates, complemented by an analysis of context, and qualitative data collected through interviews, visits, etc., can be useful indicators of both the quantity and quality of a programme.

The retention rate is the opposite of the drop-out rate, i.e. the proportion of learners who actually enrolled and attended the classes, who managed to stay until the end of the programme cycle. So if, for example, 100 learners initially enrolled, 80 of whom really enrolled, and 60 of them were still attending at the end, the retention rate would be 75 per cent (60:80) and the drop-out rate would be 25 per cent (20:80). A reasonable retention rate indicates that the programme is functioning and that it is sufficiently relevant to retain the learners' participation. It is obviously also important to know who the learners are, and whether they correspond to the intended target group.

As indicators of how many of the actually enrolled learners achieved the expected learning outcomes, such as basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills, data on completion and final learner evaluation could be useful. It would provide information on the number of learners successfully completing each year or cycle of the basic literacy stage of learning (and/or other stages or courses), as well as the completion rate, i.e. the proportion among attending learners who successfully complete the basic literacy stage (and/or other stages or courses). This definition of a completion rate can also be considered a 'success rate', even if it does not tell us anything specific about empowerment or other impacts or processes.

Comparative studies have shown that an adult literacy programme achieving a success rate (in the sense defined above) of around 50 per cent can be assumed to have been relatively well organized and relevant. Many programmes have much lower success rates, and only very exceptional cases have had higher success rates, for example, in the context of intensive short-term projects or campaigns, in which numeracy has not been included and where the

19. It is generally accepted that all such indicators, whenever applicable, should be gender disaggregated. Nowadays, when adult literacy programmes often target women only, or at least focus on women, statistics normally do differentiate between men and women.

language of instruction has been known by the majority of learners. In planning adult literacy programmes of any approach, these kinds of rates are important to take into account. If an expected outcome is 100,000 non-literate youth and adults learning basic literacy skills, the enrolment target may need to be doubled, i.e. room for a real enrolment of 200,000 learners. This fact, and the fact that learners attend irregularly, has many implications for planning of needed resources. For example, as regards the facilitator-learner ratio, it is common to plan for 15-20 learners per learner group. When this is done, in practice, the attendance would probably be about half that number of learners. Consequently, a better use of scarce resources would be to plan to have one facilitator per 30 or so enrolled learners.

Finally, it cannot be over-stressed that monitoring and supervision need to go hand in hand, and will, in most cases, have to be carried out by the same staff. The most important is to ensure that these two functions are conceived and implemented together in a way that helps to improve the programme’s activities and results.

VII. National policies and strategies

Governance and partnerships

Governments in the lead

As observed in earlier sections, national achievements in raising literacy levels have involved multiple strategies within and outside of the education system. Governments have normally taken the lead by defining the policy frameworks and providing resources. In these cases, national adult literacy programmes have complemented efforts to make education accessible for all children, and for other national development plans improving living standards. There is no single policy model and organizational strategy that can be replicated everywhere.

A major challenge in literacy policy planning is that broader goals, such as those concerning development, political participation, citizenship and the creation of literate societies, require the involvement of many governmental sectors, several education sub-sectors, and civil society.

Effective literacy policies aiming at creating literate societies need to address literacy within the education sector itself, within all six EFA goals; in language, book, media and cultural policies; and in overall development plans and poverty reduction strategies.

Strategies for organizing adult literacy programmes, including adult basic education beyond initial literacy, have varied and depend on the objectives of the literacy programme, its scale, its implementation modality, for whom it is intended, and by whom it is organized.

Sponsors and policy-makers of adult literacy or NFE programmes normally stress the goals that literacy can be used to reach, rather than the specific cognitive skills and their role as tools, processes and outcomes in further adult education. This has led to uncertainty as to where to place the responsibility for literacy,

and how to create linkages between literacy programmes and other training or development activities.

A review of experiences shows, nonetheless, that ministries of education normally are, and should be, responsible for the literacy and adult education policies. This is sensible, because these can then be integrated into EFA and overall education sector strategies, including lifelong learning policies and systems, within which the demand by learners for certification and flexible learning entry and exit points can be addressed. Developing systems for recognition, validation and accreditation of prior learning has been identified as critical.

At the same time, adult literacy policies and strategies are large, and depend on collaboration with other sectors – among them public, private and civil society institutions – for coherence, curriculum inputs, continuing education and meaningful application of learnt skills. These other sectors also need to collaborate with specialized literacy and adult education agencies in order to improve the literacy components of their programmes to facilitate learning and participation of non-literate or neo-literate persons.

Where there is political commitment to literacy, the government, obviously, must provide a policy framework and perform certain strategic functions, such as long-term planning, staff training, financing, quality assurance, in addition to taking measures to encourage motivation and support continuing education (Lauglo, 2001). In effectively decentralized public administrations, some of this can be left to local governments. However, decentralization policies have, in certain cases, led to decreasing and uneven support for adult education, including literacy. The decentralized implementation modality in Uganda meant that limited resources were allocated, and varied considerably according to local authority priorities and NGO availability. In most cases, too little support in the distribution of materials and supervision was given to literacy groups and their instructors. The evaluation (Carr-Hill, 2001) concluded that stronger incentives and quality control measures from the central government ministry would be needed to address weak supervision and support. In other cases, municipalities have taken the lead in providing literacy programmes, such as in Brazil.

In Brazil, where 97 per cent of school-age children have access to school, but millions drop out before completing primary education, initial adult literacy programmes provide a stepping-stone to further adult basic education. Literacy is seen as part of the constitutional right of all citizens, including youth and adults, to eight years of free primary education. Youth and Adult Education (YEA) is provided by municipal and state school systems and taught by teachers of the regular system. In addition, there are many non-formal adult literacy programmes outside of the school system that use non-professional teachers/facilitators (see Masagão Ribeiro and Gomes Batista, 2005).

In Indonesia, another big country with a relatively high literacy rate (88 per cent), the president launched a literacy movement in December 2004, after a period of relative neglect of adult literacy during the 1990s (Jalal and Sardjunani, 2005). The Ministry of Education at its different levels is responsible, and has defined a four-pronged policy strategy: (a) ensuring that all children become literate through formal and non-formal education "so as to avoid the emergence of a new illiterate group" (Jalal and Sardjunani, 2005: 11); (b) equal access to elementary education for all adults, equivalent to primary education, and junior secondary education; (c) functional literacy education for people above 15, including topics related to productivity enhancement and child-rearing; and (d) retaining literacy competence through the provision of reading materials and community libraries. Other government sector responsibilities are not mentioned, but the need to co-operate across sectors, increase community participation and raise awareness of all stakeholders on literacy is identified as part of the new strategy. This provides a typical example where the education sector takes the main responsibility, but depends on other sectors and on CBOs for implementation.

In Uganda, where the literacy rate has improved during the last 10-15 years to 75 per cent, adult literacy and primary education are the responsibilities of different ministries. Adult literacy falls under the Department of Disabilities and Elderly in the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. It is one of many functions assigned to the ministry, which is lightly staffed and inadequately budgeted to meet its many responsibilities. However, the ministry has a good staffing infrastructure in the districts, reaching right down to the

sub-county level, in the form of Community Development Assistants (Okech, 2005). In most countries with education-led literacy programmes, there is normally some collaboration with other sectors, at the local level, in carrying out follow-up development-oriented activities.

In some countries, governments have promoted independent agencies to take charge of adult literacy. Ireland is an example of this, where the government provides funds to a delegated non-profit membership organization, the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), which is concerned with national co-ordination, policy and training (Bailey, 2004. See also www.nala.ie). It is based on learner and tutor participation and is implemented through a network of vocational education committees linked to the Irish Vocational Education Association, a representative employer body. This brings literacy learners closer to labour-market training opportunities, as well as to functioning local education systems. Labour-market authorities in many countries are responsible for practical work-oriented training for unemployed adults, often implemented in partnership with employers.

Job-related training is regularly a component of lifelong learning strategies. These also include general adult education – equivalent to primary and secondary education – provided by local government education authorities, as well as a wide range of non-formal adult education opportunities led by civil society organizations. In Europe, as well as in certain countries elsewhere, these are often supported by public funds. This is, for example, a strong tradition in the Scandinavian countries.

Most government-initiated adult literacy strategies involve programmes built in stages, starting with initial literacy and followed by functional development-oriented programmes and/or continuing adult education, and/or literacy-sustaining programmes, involving links, collaboration or partnerships with other development sectors, community projects, cultural centres, libraries, vocational training, or adult night schools. The main responsibility for these follow-up or supporting activities may fall to other sectors. In fact, ministries of education, or education NGOs providing so-called functional literacy programmes, are expected to contribute to poverty reduction, through income-generation projects for example, but normally do

not have the needed resources or expertise for this, and therefore run the risk of raising false expectations (see e.g. Ridell, 2001).

Lifelong education policies in the European Union and many other parts of the world emphasize the broad responsibility of all relevant actors, both in and outside of the formal education system, for a variety of learning purposes, such as active citizenship, employment-related activities, and foundation skills of literacy, numeracy, IT and languages. The idea is to embed adult learning and education in as many portfolios as possible across the spectrum of public policies (Duke and Hinzen, 2005). Hence many reasons exist for both collaboration and division of responsibilities across sectors in the pursuit of effective literacy strategies.

Partnerships are crucial

Most large-scale national adult literacy programmes or campaigns have been led by national or local governments in collaboration with other organizations and institutions, such as social movements, grassroots organizations, churches, schools, universities, employers, local authorities, etc. Central co-ordination, combined with local responsibility and flexibility, as well as mobilization of sufficient resources and involvement of all sectors of the state and civil society, including the media, have been identified as crucial (Lind and Johnston, 1990). Nonetheless, most adult or non-formal literacy activities in the world are fragmented, unco-ordinated, small in scale and limited to narrow-target groups. They are often run by NGOs, local communities or other civil society organizations such as churches, without guidance or support from national public policies. These activities can be very important for the learners participating, but they have very little impact on national literacy rates.

In almost all countries with literacy programmes, there are both government and civil society providers. Civil society participation in literacy programmes along with the state has been important, but not without tensions. The general trend, since the mid-1980s, to downsize the role of the state meant that adult literacy was seen by many governments and international agencies as the responsibility of NGOs, which were considered to be more effective implementers of locally adapted programmes than governments. Reviews and evaluations have recently recognized that this is not necessarily

the case. The Uganda evaluation (Carr-Hill, 2001) confirmed findings from a number of other countries that programmes run by governments can be just as effective as those offered by NGOs. They have been operating too separately from each other and could benefit from greater interdependence.

While some civil society organizations or movements assume a critical and even oppositional role, other NGOs play a role as providers of services. The extent to which different interventions are co-ordinated and driven by a comprehensive policy differs, however. Fragmentation and competition between actors are not unusual. The challenge is to create genuine partnerships, in which literacy becomes the concern of everyone, such as individuals, media, employers, NGOs, unions, churches, the private sector, schools and training institutions. The contribution of each partner may differ, and can comprise a wide spectrum of activities, from advocacy and delivery to targeted groups or areas, to the provision of meeting places or training and research. How to share resources and divide roles and responsibilities among available stakeholders is one of the main issues involved in planning and designing literacy policies and strategies.

While the merits of NGOs and civil society involvement in literacy work is indisputable, experience shows that without substantial government support to guide and aid them in their efforts, the rate of progress is likely to prove disappointing. The case of Uganda is an example where the government has encouraged pluralism in the delivery of educational services, and that "has given rise to many initiatives all operating autonomously, in most cases without reference to each other" (Okech, 2005: 6). In spite of an existing framework for collaboration between government and civil society in the provision of adult literacy education, many NGOs and CBOs work outside of this framework. The common characteristic of civil society adult literacy activities in Uganda, according to Okech (2005: 6), "is that they are often small-scale efforts with very limited coverage" and "their input still adds very little to the efforts by the Government." "In spite of limited coverage and short duration, practically all the interventions have gone ahead to create an autonomous structure for their programme, a structure which comes and goes with the project, leaving nothing behind to continue

with what they have started. Perhaps the impact would be greater if there was more joining of efforts to strengthen a common provision structure" (p. 6-7).

It is crucial to organize effective partnership arrangements across sectors of the public sector, as well as collaboration with and co-ordination between civil society, the business sector, and development agencies of different kinds. Fragmentation and lack of co-ordination often leads to duplication and tensions, instead of complementarity and genuine partnership (see e.g. Ridell, 2001). Such partnerships can expand delivery and help reach specific target groups; they can also be beneficial for mobilizing learners and facilitators, providing meeting places and other local resources, supervision, training, research, and, not least, multiple functional linkages to a wide range of development and learning activities (Lauglo, 2001; Lind, 1996). Nonetheless, the institutional responsibilities and the modalities of co-ordination between different providers and support agencies depend on what is available in each context. The government-led literacy programme in Namibia had a policy to encourage partners to deliver literacy, but due to the limited number of NGOs and other circumstances, the response was very weak. In other instances, there can be tensions between government and CSO agendas, constraining partnership opportunities. Co-ordination committees at various levels involving learners and the community in organizing and monitoring literacy activities have often been set up for literacy programmes as noted in Namibia, Mozambique and Indonesia (Lind, 1996; 1988). Where these have provided leadership and support, more regular participation and better results have resulted (see e.g. Lind and Johnston, 1990).

Partnerships can be more or less informal. They can involve funding contracts requiring accountability and specific results. In Senegal, for example, a business-like outsourcing model called *faire-faire*, supported by the World Bank, has been implemented by an agency set up for the purpose of encouraging adult literacy provision by NGOs and small entrepreneurs. The model is being spread to other West African countries and is fairly often uncritically advocated in global contexts. An analysis of this public-private partnership model applied to literacy education in Senegal concluded that it had been successfully implemented, "largely because of the government's

strong commitments to the approach – and to literacy. Hence, the outsourcing approach is not a substitute for public involvement" (Nordtveit, 2004: 45, in Duke and Hinzen, 2005). Growing quality problems in delivery have been identified in Senegal, however, resulting from providers inflating estimated costs in their funding proposals and cutting down on implementation inputs while keeping the costs up (Nordtveit, 2005).

Box 1. Literacy partnership models in Brazil

In Brazil, adult and youth literacy policies have been based on a combination of short initial literacy courses, followed by continuing education in a municipal formal adult education system. Innovative partnership strategies have been implemented, involving local government, NGOs, private companies and universities.

The literacy movement, MOVA, was launched at the beginning of the 1990s, in the city of São Paulo, when Paulo Freire was leading the city education authority. A model of partnerships with CBOs was established, in which the CBOs were responsible for recruiting learners and facilitators, and providing group meeting sites. The city council provided funding for paying the facilitators and was responsible for pedagogical supervision and monitoring. In 1992, 18,000 adult learners were participating, implemented by 73 community organizations. Due to changes in the municipal government, the programme was interrupted at this time, and was taken up again only in 2001. It was then spread to other cities with local adaptations, involving new partners such as unions and companies.

A new strategy for adult literacy, *Alfabetizacão Solidária Programme* (PAS) was launched by the federal government in 1996 as part of policies to combat poverty. Partnerships were sought among municipalities, companies and higher education institutions (HEIs) to begin with, mainly in the poorer regions. The HEIs were given the responsibility to co-ordinate the work of engaging the municipalities, training and supervision of facilitators. The municipal authorities recruited learners and provided learning facilities. PAS was transformed in 1998 into an NGO, but continued to receive most of its funding from the federal government. It also mobilized support from many other sponsors and partners. Between 1997 and 2004, among the partners were 2,050 municipalities, 144 companies and 209 HEIs. The cost per learner was 62 USD, including grants to facilitators, local co-ordinators, snacks and textbooks for the learners, training and evaluation.

The new Brazilian Government of 2003 launched an accelerated initiative, the Literate Brazil Programme (PBA). It enters agreements with governmental and non-governmental agencies with experience in adult literacy, and funds the expansion of their coverage. NGOs were, to begin with, the majority among the partners, but this changed in 2004 when the PBA extended its partnerships with local governments while the number of learners decreased somewhat, from 1,98 million to 1,81 million. More decentralization was planned to take place in 2005.

Lessons learnt*:*

- The government needs to allocate more resources to the poorest regions.
- Local authorities need technical assistance to manage and deliver.
- Civil society participation is an important complement to state delivery and encourages independent monitoring of public policies.
- Large-scale programmes have a tendency to privilege larger organizations "connected to companies and churches".
- The participation of CBOs is essential to reach the marginalized target groups.
- Partnerships with CBOs are more easily mediated by local governments.
- Local governments need to have the capacity to monitor and evaluate the results and the use of transferred public funds.

Source: Masagão Ribeiro and Gomes Batista, 2005.

Both national government-sponsored and local NGO-led programmes depend on stable funding, trained and motivated staff, availability of materials, and above all, community support. In running a literacy programme, the functioning of community committees plays an active supportive role in achieving sustained participation by both facilitators and learners.

At local level, community learning centres (CLCs) demonstrate constructive partnerships across sectors, and between the state and civil society (especially in Asia, where they have been supported and documented *via* the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Programme for EFA – APPEAL).[20]

There is no single governance or partnership model that can be replicated everywhere. Rules, procedures and contracts that regulate partnerships are sometimes needed, especially for funding purposes,

20. See www.unescobkk.org./education/appeal/index.htm

but these are not sufficient. Political commitment, at national and local levels, community participation, as well as the quality of human and other resources, are often even more important.

In Brazil, a different partnership model has been applied involving local authorities, universities, large NGOs, companies, and CBOs (see *Box 1*).

Implications and challenges of going to scale

To have an impact on significantly increasing literacy rates, adult literacy programmes must reach more adult learners and become more effective. This is the most obvious implication of scaling up. Much more attention and resources to literacy, combined with renewed policies and strategies, will be required. More of the same will not do. A major challenge will be to scale up while encouraging diversity, requiring a balance between central guidance, decentralized implementation, and community ownership.

The challenges involved are multiple and go beyond the education sector. Whatever measure is applied, the challenge is greatest in countries with more than half of their adult population not yet minimally literate, and far from achieving UPE, through which all children complete basic education with a functional level of literacy. These are the poorest countries of the world, and the children and adults who do not get a chance to learn and use literacy are also among the poorest people.

If there is a favourable development context and strong political will and national commitment to scale up, it will still require clear and strong public policies, strategic planning, feasible programme design adapted to institutional capacity, and the human, financial and material resources that can be realistically harnessed for the purpose.

Holistic and rights-based policies

Larger-scale adult literacy and continuing education programmes will hardly succeed without holistic and inclusive education and language policies. These provide better quality and expanded education for children. At the same time, diverse learning programmes for out-of-school youth and adults need to be provided,

together with the development of learning environments receptive to the meaningful use of literacy.

The major policy challenge is, therefore, to maintain the visibility and centrality of literacy goals in wider education and development strategies, at all levels. In aid-dependent countries, literacy and adult education will probably be funded only if they are included as explicitly budgeted components of EFA plans, education sector strategies and poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs). For this to happen, governments must take the lead in pushing literacy policies.

Scaling up does not only mean organizing a mass adult literacy programme, but also making efforts to develop literate communities and societies. As has been argued, this requires supportive policies beyond literacy and adult education, especially as regards inclusive language, book, publishing, and information policies. All of these are obviously about political will and public concern for a more equal distribution of resources and democratic participation. In such policy contexts, literacy is an enabling tool to accessible information and creates opportunities for every citizen to communicate, express opinions and make independent and confident decisions.

A rights-based policy context, in which literacy and basic education for all – children, youth and adults – are defined as rights, is, obviously, an ideal foundation for large-scale literacy interventions. A rights-based approach should then follow, meaning that the state works towards ensuring that everyone can enjoy learning and using literacy. This would require incorporating the delivery and promotion of literacy within sustainable and adequately equipped institutional frameworks, and allocating enough funding for literacy through formal, non-formal and informal education, including an adult education sub-system within the education system.

In such a rights-based approach, literacy would be given attention across the curricula of various education and training programmes, within and outside of the education sector itself. One known challenge is how to establish effective collaboration between different social and economic sectors. Consequently, for governments, the implications include taking responsibility for the creation of partnerships with a wide range of governmental and

non-governmental institutions and services, such as health clinics, agricultural extension, small business training courses, libraries, ITC centres, etc.

Budgets and funding

Scaling up is not possible without also scaling up funding, investing in human resources, and developing sustainable institutional capacity. In exceptional cases, governments allocate more than 1 per cent of education budgets for formal and non-formal adult education, including literacy (see e.g. Mera, 2004 and UNESCO, 2005). Some countries are leading the way, notwithstanding countries in the North, such as Sweden, Germany, the UK and Ireland, where literacy rates are already relatively high. In the South, it is mainly middle-income countries that have invested more in adult literacy and continuing adult education. For example, Namibia is known for taking adult education very seriously, allocating around 4 per cent of the education budget to this cause, and applying ambitious policies aimed at creating a literate learning nation. Other such countries in the South known for having launched large-scale sustainable programmes with proper budgets are India, China, Brazil and Venezuela. In all of these cases, the ministry of education, or an independent authority, has provided the institutional framework for adult education, including literacy programmes.

In aid-dependent countries with low literacy levels, there are few cases of sustainable, large-scale adult literacy programmes. Where national mass literacy campaigns or programmes were organized in the 1970s and 1980s, such as in Tanzania, Vietnam, Nicaragua, Ethiopia, Somalia, Ecuador, and Mozambique, these have, in most cases, been terminated for various reasons. They were either intended to be short-term (e.g. Ecuador, Nicaragua) or were dismantled by structural adjustment programmes (Tanzania, Ethiopia and Mozambique) and/or war (Nicaragua, Ethiopia, Somalia, Mozambique).

As noted, the dominance of global agendas over the policies of donors and aid-dependent governments contributed to neglect of adult literacy and the sub-system of adult education as a whole. Evidently, governments at central and local levels ought to increase the budgets allocated for adult education and literacy in the state budget. The role

of international co-operation could then complement governmental funding with additional funds and support to institutional capacity.

The move away from targeted co-operation projects to sector-wide and general budget support programmes, involving donor harmonization and co-ordination, has in many countries meant that even less support is targeted to adult education and literacy than before. However, new aid modalities can boost the amount of external funding available to benefit literacy and adult education through ensuring inclusion in state budgets, poverty reduction programmes and education sector strategic plans. Governments which do include adult literacy, NFE, or adult education in their plans seem to manage to obtain funding through basket arrangements or budget support. The use of this money then depends on political will and transparent financial management systems. In Mozambique, two thirds of the costs of paying literacy facilitators' subsidies have been included in the common education sector support fund, while the state budget has covered the other third.[21] Other items for adult literacy programmes, such as learning materials, have also been included in the fund.

A risk involved in such dependence on aid is, obviously, that short-term programmatic approaches may be funded instead of safeguarding regular funding for a national sub-system of adult education. Public funding for such a system should not only cover the state; it should ideally provide subsidies for NGOs working well within agreed policy frameworks (i.e. without contributing to fragmentation and waste of resources). In addition to financial budget support, donors committed to the EFA goals and literacy for all could strengthen public policies and system capacities, as well as capacity development structures.

The feasibility of scaling up is determined by proper and realistic cost estimates leading to sufficient funding to cover the indispensable costs, such as paying full-time and part-time staff (including trainers, supervisors and facilitators), training of trainers

21. The facilitators are contracted on a yearly basis and work part-time. Problems of delay or non-payment of the subsidies do arise, similar to those related to paying temporarily contracted school teachers' salaries. Dealing with this requires stricter control of the public financial system and, above all, political leadership and will.

(short- and long-term), pre-service training of all facilitators (initially, for example, for about 10 days), in-service pedagogical support and in-service training (requiring transport arrangements), and learning materials, especially books, for all facilitators and learners.

In addition, material resource mobilization and partnerships for sharing facilities are usually necessary and possible.

Institutional capacity and human resources

Institutional capacity is not just about establishing institutions and recruiting and training competent staff. A certain institutionalization of activities, such as those promoting literacy among adults and communities, can be positive for literacy outcomes if they turn into a normal part of life and community services. The other side of institutionalization is when the delivery of literacy programme activities becomes overly bureaucratized, as in some cases where mass campaigns have tended to dwindle and continue merely as a normal top-down ministerial duty, without any sense of urgency or community participation.

In India and Bangladesh, the adult literacy programme activities seem to have become institutionalized as something normally available or provided for. This is probably a result of numerous attempts to launch large-scale literacy programmes, which, however, only relatively recently, in the 1990s, managed to make a mark in the form of higher literacy rates. This was thanks to the Total Literacy Campaign in India, and similar efforts in Bangladesh – to a large extent executed through NGOs.

In some of the countries mentioned, where earlier large-scale programmes had been dismantled, new initiatives and revised strategies have recently been developed. For example, in Tanzania and Mozambique, previous experiences and institutions now play a renewed role, and a certain institutionalization of adult basic education can be noted. This obviously helps. In Mozambique, every primary school headmaster is, according to the general ministerial educational guidelines, responsible and accountable for including the adult literacy classes in his/her areas, which often take place in or around the school premises. So when the headmaster sends in reports, statistical and others, the adult literacy classes should be and are normally included. In Tanzania, the Institute of Adult Education

established in the 1970s is now again playing an important role in training trainers and educators.

In fact, the most critical issue for scaling up is to decide who the facilitators are going to be, and how they are going to be selected, motivated, trained, supported and paid. Facilitators are often part-time extension workers, and they need to be recruited in and from the communities where they are going to teach. Otherwise, there have to be special reasons to believe they will be willing and able to stay long enough to finish a stage or a course in the places where they are most needed, for example in isolated, deprived rural communities. Examples of groups from which facilitators have been selected are secondary school students (in the cases of short intensive campaigns in Cuba, Nicaragua and Ecuador), primary school teachers (e.g. Tanzania in the 1970s), youth doing national service (e.g. in Eritrea), and anyone available and accepted by the community who has a defined minimum educational background (e.g. in Namibia's NLPN, and in Mozambique's current strategy, a minimum of seven years of schooling).

Once the profile of the facilitators has been determined, the kind of support needed and possible to provide to the facilitators must be decided. The choice of methods and teaching materials needs to take into account their background, knowledge and experience. With thousands of facilitators spread over large distances, it is normally not easy to monitor and support their work, and even less so for them to attend regular in-service training sessions. It is therefore important to choose self-instructive methods that available facilitators feel they can easily assume. It might still be difficult to avoid including content that facilitators do not know well, so in most cases, it should be assumed that the facilitators will need a lot of support, in addition to their short initial training and supervision. Such support can take the form of assistance from other specialized extension staff in areas like health, agriculture and entrepreneurship, or access to supplementary books suitable for them, distance education material, audio-cassettes, radio or TV programmes, video films, websites, etc. depending on the available infrastructure and feasibility in the different contexts.

Ad hoc short training courses are not enough; a system for training staff and facilitators is needed. This requires an institutional arrangement for the training of facilitators and trainers, i.e. those who are going to train the facilitators. This is costly and requires committed and capable human resources. Universities often play a role in training the trainers by offering certificate, bachelor's and master's courses in adult education. However, more specific training is also often required. At decentralized level, where the training of facilitators has to take place, in the case of large-scale programmes, both pre- and in-service training is needed, as is funding and institutional responsibility for these functions. This is typically the most costly component of a sub-system for adult basic education and large-scale literacy programmes. Questions to ask are: who can train, who can provide in-service training support, and who can teach? Who is available in poorly literate environments and what experiences do they bring with them? What can they learn in relatively short pre-service training? How can they remain motivated and committed to their task? What career development can they expect?

Strategic planning issues

The scaling up of small successful projects is often problematic. The quality problems experienced by REFLECT in trying to scale up the approach in Bangladesh are typical (see Ridell, 2001). It is often recommended (see e.g. Lind and Johnston, 1990) that smaller-scale pilot projects be carried out before embarking on new larger-scale strategies. However, large-scale activities often require quite different modalities and present different problems compared to a small, intensively-monitored project.

Pilots are often able to achieve good results thanks to the novelty, resources, focused work, as well as all the encouragement and attention given to them by the involved leaders, supervisors, observers, evaluators, etc. Even 'old-style' control groups in pilots have, in some cases, achieved better results than 'new-style' literacy groups not belonging to pilots (e.g. Lind, 1988). They probably received more attention than usual, and had materials and facilitators, as well as being monitored. Pilots, on a bigger scale, for example, in whole districts or municipalities, may be more indicative of what

is required to scale up to the national level than the more common small, intensive projects.

In discussions about policies and strategies for youth and adult literacy programmes, the methodological approaches are frequently overrated as the key to success, without due consideration of other, maybe more critical issues for scaling up small 'innovative' projects. Strategic issues that must be considered in planning for scaling up include clarity on (a) objectives and motivations; (b) adaptation to context and reality; (c) organizational frameworks and institutional arrangements for implementation, monitoring and evaluation; and (d) modalities of mobilization to sustain commitment and harness social energy.

(a) Objectives and motivations

Experiences show the importance of carefully defining both general overriding long-term goals related to the social, political, cultural or economic development aspects of the programme, and specific learning objectives or attainment targets. The mistake of only defining general goals such as poverty reduction, and not setting specific learning objectives, has made it very difficult to develop curricula and to evaluate literacy programmes fairly. The concept of literacy also has to be clear and consistent. There are often conflicting concepts among stakeholders and providers. If this is not made explicit, no consistency will be possible, and fragmentation instead of synergy will prevail.

It is further helpful to define priority target groups, and/or targeted geographical areas – giving special attention to populations who are denied access to school or who have only very elementary literacy skills – including consideration of gender, age, languages, the unemployed, migrants, the disabled, etc. Regarding gender, it should be noted that targeting women is not the same as promoting gender balance or gender equality. To do this, the subject of gender equality needs to be included in the curriculum or in the very objectives of the programme. Special efforts often have to be made to facilitate sustained participation and learning by women, and to convince potential male learners to join. Programmes are more likely to function satisfactorily if the diversified needs and motivations of learners are identified. These then need to be reconciled with the

programme objectives defined by the providers. By doing this, the motivational driving force of the programme or campaign can be developed. This will help to focus advocacy campaigns on the benefits or incentives that can be gained by people participating as learners, facilitators, supervisors or sponsors.

The expected outcomes need to be defined on the scope, stages, languages and possible ramifications of the programme, in order to meet the diverse motivations and aspirations among learners. For example, literacy can be divided into several stages, each of which can have different functions, and there can be alternative options for continuation after the initial stages of literacy. Namibia's National Literacy Programme, initiated in 1992, is an illustrative example. It was originally designed for three stages, each expected to normally take a year to get through: stage one for initial mother tongue literacy; stage 2 for reading to learn life skills and civics, still in the mother tongue; and stage 3 for introduction to functional literacy in basic English. Later, a much-demanded continuation in the form of an upper primary adult learning programme was designed to provide for formal equivalence. In addition, alternative follow-up programmes, such as micro-credit projects, were prepared.

(b) Context and conditions

In order to give value to and make appropriate use of relevant experiences and community-based learning opportunities, as well as any other ongoing useful programmes, it is necessary to identify what is working and what is not working in the local environment, and to build creatively on what is available. For this purpose it can be useful to:

- analyze and assess ongoing and previous experiences (the results, problems, and lessons learned);
- identify and establish relations between literacy and other educational and developmental programmes; and
- map and plan for the application and consolidation of literacy, continuing education (formal and non-formal) and complementary informal learning opportunities (amongst others through radio, TV, newspapers, etc.).

(c) Organizational and institutional framework

As stressed in previous sections and other chapters, clearly defined and strongly placed organizational responsibilities, co-ordination mechanisms and leadership at all levels are crucial for effective implementation and tangible results. Among the strategic organizational and institutional issues that have to be planned and well catered for in scaling up are the following:

- Deciding on division of institutional roles and responsibilities.
- Defining the responsibility of the state in relation to civil society. (It is a common perception that NGOs are best suited to run small-scale quality programmes and that large-scale programmes have to be run by governments. However, NGO-led literacy projects are not necessarily small, or government-led programmes large).
- Defining modalities of collaboration, co-ordination, partnership and involvement of all state and civil society stakeholders, at central and local levels.
- Developing central guidelines and principles that can be combined with local responsibility and flexible implementation.
- Identifying and/or establishing mechanisms for sustaining participation and rewarding progressive learning achievements, for example by introducing assessment tools that recognize prior learning and place learners in at the right level.
- Introducing a monitoring and evaluation system, and identifying research partners.
- Establishing a system of supervision and pedagogical and logistical support integrated with monitoring functions.
- Developing a system that provides continuing education opportunities *via* bridges between non-formal and formal education, and between general and technical or vocationally-oriented education and training.

(d) Mobilization, commitment and social energy

Many evaluations and experiences have shown the importance of advocacy, social mobilization and commitment at all levels (see e.g. Lind, 1988). Social energy was identified as crucial by the comprehensive evaluation studies of the Bangladeshi NGO-led literacy programme, called the People's Movement *Nijera Shikshi*,

in which around one million adult literacy learners were involved. The findings revealed that one of the three main factors responsible for the positive outcomes was the way in which the movement harnessed social energy in its operations.[22] (Cawthera, 1999 and 2003). This is obviously closely linked to community participation, for which concrete organizational frameworks need to be available. In order to facilitate such participation and encourage motivation, the following could be useful to consider in planning for scaling up:

- Identifying how national and local commitment can be manifested and expressed, e.g. what kind of leaders and media could be involved, how they could be motivated and what their role could be.
- Defining modalities for community support and learner participation in monitoring and implementation.
- Identifying responsibilities and partners for advocacy, motivational and mobilizing activities.

The other critical implementation design issues not explicitly addressed above are those analyzed in the preceding text and chapters relating to enabling contexts and learning environments, teaching-learning approaches, and governance and partnerships.

Large-scale or national adult literacy programmes need to be planned strategically, operationally, and even more carefully than other education programmes or sub-systems. Formulating the policy, deciding on an organizational approach, and appropriating funding are all necessary, though still not sufficient. Planning must build on the available human resources and other material conditions, as well as on existing experiences. International assistance can sometimes help, if it is sensitive to the context and sensitively provided, but the implementation of plans developed or driven by external models and actors is doomed to fail. Ownership and participation is key to the feasibility of plans.

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22. The other two were the learning methods of aided self-education and the 'post-literacy' course.

VIII. Conclusions and implications for educational planners

Lessons learned over the past decades show that meeting the goal of universal literacy calls not only for more and better efforts, but also for a resurgence of political will, as well as a change at all levels: locally, nationally and internationally.

Before presenting a brief overview of some of the most important success factors identified for literacy-promoting interventions, it is helpful to recall the concept of literacy introduced in this review, stressing literacy as a useful and necessary communication and learning tool, complementing oral communication. There is no single beginning or end point. Literacy is a continuous process of developing and using reading and writing skills (including numeracy) for multiple purposes. Conceptually, it is also essential to understand literacy as a human, social and democratic right that must be universalized.

Its effects are not automatic; yet, literacy is a necessary ingredient of active citizenship, healthy and prosperous lives, gender equality, peace and overall human development.

The following important strategic factors, requiring more attention in planning, implementation and analysis of literacy strategies, have been identified:

- Political will within a context of broader educational and socio-economic development interventions, which demands the inclusion of adult basic education and literacy in the strategic plans for poverty reduction, education, and preferably other sectors such as health, culture, agriculture, etc.
- An integrated and holistic approach to national education for all: strategies aiming at adult, youth and child literacy, all reinforcing each other.
- Broad efforts to create literate environments in relevant languages, through publications, print and digital media.

- Adequate language policies responding to national needs, cultural and human rights, as well as pedagogical principles of literacy acquisition, etc.
- Nationally and locally adapted approaches, building on past and ongoing experiences and existing structures, avoiding the tendency to uncritically transfer models from elsewhere. The review confirms the widely shared insight that success of any literacy programme depends on its flexibility to respond to unique local needs and circumstances.
- Government-owned literacy policies, flexibly implemented through partnerships and co-operation, with a clear division of roles and responsibilities among different providers with public and private or civil society stakeholders.
- Adequate human, material and financial resource allocation, including national and local government budget allocations.
- Community support and commitment by respected leaders at local levels.
- Advocacy and programmed actions for sustained participation and progressive achievement.
- Bridges operating between non-formal and formal education.
- Promotion of equity – special attention to populations denied access to school or having only acquired elementary literacy skills (a majority of women among older adults).

Some of the most critical programme design factors that have been highlighted are as follows:

- Reconciling the objectives of the learners with the programme objectives defined by the providers.
- Meeting the diversity of motivations and aspirations among the learners by providing a variety of optional programmes/courses/ levels, which often requires collaborative efforts between different social, cultural and developmental sectors.
- Careful choice of languages of instruction, and attention to the transition from mother tongue to second mainstream/official languages.
- Establishing or reinforcing the institutional capacity of an adult educator training system, including training of trainers.
- The regulation and implementation of acceptable conditions of service for educators/facilitators.

- Provision of access to information, reading materials, newspapers and other media, as well as computers, especially for the teachers/facilitators, as part of a support system.
- Attention to literacy across the curriculum in all forms of basic education.
- Adapting and grading teaching-learning materials according to learner interests and prior skills (i.e. textbooks, real literacy materials, radio, TV, other media).
- Relevant and enjoyable contents, and mainstreamed gender equality.
- Participatory learner-centred teaching methods adapted to the competencies of the available educators.
- Flexible time, place and duration of instruction, according to the learners' needs and the availability of educators.

Among the most complex challenges involved in promoting literacy for all and literate societies is how to combine diversity and co-ordination at all levels. At national level, the negative repercussions of lack of co-ordination among international agencies are strongly felt. Aid-dependent national governments and NGOs working in the field of literacy should demand that the different international agencies and initiatives reconcile and co-ordinate their positions and approaches to avoid ambiguities, waste of resources, unpredictable stoppages, as well as undue and unnecessary complications in the development of inclusive and efficient literacy policies and strategies.

Finally, without significant increases in funding of literacy programmes for youth and adults and for literacy development within and outside schools, and without sustained investment in the human resources necessary for implementing literacy-promoting strategies, it will not be possible to address the literacy challenge at global, national and local levels seriously. The achievement of internationally agreed goals and targets requires renewed commitments, not least to adult and youth education, in order to create inclusive literate societies.

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