Effective literacy programmes: options for policy-makers
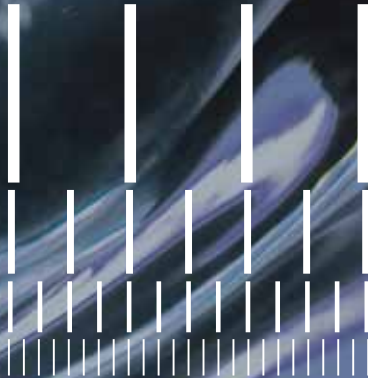
John Oxenham

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Fundamentals of Educational Planning – 91

Included in the series:*

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Effective literacy programmes: options for policy-makers

John Oxenham

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.

Illiteracy is a major factor responsible for poverty. Indeed the opposite can also be said: poverty is a cause of high illiteracy rates, when children from disadvantaged families are deprived of an education. It is a case of which came first, the chicken or the egg? What is sure, however, is that poverty cannot be reduced unless the context in which it exists is improved; the influencing factors need to be dealt with first. Literacy can be one of these factors that play a vital role in the development of a country or region.

In this booklet, John Oxenham focuses on literacy and numeracy skills that enable people to capitalize better on knowledge of other subjects, to participate more in the social and political aspects of life, and thus to contribute in a valuable way to society and its development.

Mark Bray
Director, IIEP

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. Specific programmes have to address the needs of young and adult illiterates. First, many children drop out of school before they can be truly 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 a mother literate would contribute towards educating her as well as her children. Finally, if countries are to rely solely 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 a decade ago. 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

John Oxenham focuses on options available to decision-makers when designing and implementing an adult literacy programme. There have been in the past, and there still are today, different ways of organizing an adult literacy programme. Decision-makers face different options at different moments: for example, in the design of the strategy when they consider the role the State should play; the approach to be adopted; the content of the programme, making it more or less functional (through including livelihood skills, health practices, child care, HIV and AIDS prevention etc.); the choice of language of instruction; the selection of facilitators; the financing modalities, etc. Decision-makers also have to choose between different options when defining the implementation strategy or selecting the monitoring methods. The author draws on his extensive knowledge and experience of programmes all over the world to present different approaches. As he points out, there is no empirical evidence that allows one to conclude that one option is better than another. At most, one can say that some approaches seem more effective than others in a given social or cultural context. The purpose of this booklet is thus to present the various options that exist, and to outline their advantages and drawbacks. As far as the effectiveness of such programmes is concerned, the author rightly emphasizes that literacy alone cannot lead to poverty reduction. However, many economic and rural development programmes would be more effective if the population were literate.

John Oxenham has written a very clear and easy-to-read booklet on this complex issue. It is in many ways complementary to the other booklet in this series written by Agneta Lind. Decision-makers at all levels will find it useful and inspiring as it highlights the different possibilities that are available to them and helps them to make enlightened decisions.

For many years John Oxenham has been involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of national literacy programmes on an international scale. He recently reviewed experiences in literacy around the world for the World Bank, focusing particularly on programmes that combine literacy with income-generating projects. This unique experience makes him particularly suitable to write such a booklet. The Editorial Board is very grateful to him for his contribution.

Françoise Caillods
General Editor

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List of abbreviations

ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CERI	Centre for Educational Research and Innovation
EFA	Education for All
HIV	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
IIZ/DVV	Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association (now known as 'DVV International')
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RDU	Research and Development Unit
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UPC	Universal Primary Completion

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Introduction, purpose and definitions

No country reduced poverty without addressing its macroeconomic imbalances and creating solid foundations for growth; and they all implemented parallel social pro-poor measures ...
Countries that reduced poverty at a scale were also able to develop and sustain institutions that produced good governance, as well as an environment in which learning and adaptation took place, which allowed for midcourse correction.

Source: World Bank, 2005.

There are two key elements in the quotation above. One is the observation that reducing poverty requires several elements: all are necessary, none on its own is sufficient. The second is that reducing poverty requires an environment in which learning and adaptation take place. An indispensable element of such an environment is literacy, indeed universal literacy, as will be argued later. Without good governance, supporting institutions and sound economic policies, a people will be hampered in realizing the potential that universal literacy offers by way of access to, as well as exchange and use of, new information and fresh ideas. The reverse observation, however, is equally important. Good governance, supporting institutions and sound economic policies will be slower in achieving their objectives, and will fail to achieve them fully, if large proportions of people remain illiterate and excluded from a range of sources of information. This is especially true if large proportions of mothers have no option but to depend only on traditional customs and practices, word-of-mouth reports and advice from possibly ill-informed sources (see discussion of family literacy below) about how best to cater for the nutrition, health and education of their children.

Universal literacy is far from being a reality all over the world. According to the Global Monitoring Report for 2006, *Literacy for Life* (UNESCO, 2005), over 771 million people remained illiterate in 2004. They formed about one fifth of the world's adult population and were concentrated in what are called the 'developing countries' and particularly in the poorer of them. This underlines the well-known observation that poverty and illiteracy correlate strongly. In South

and West Asia[1] and in sub-Saharan Africa,[2] 3 out of 10 men and 5 out of 10 women are illiterate. This underlines the equally well-known observation that two thirds of the world's illiterate people are women – mainly poor, rural women – who tend to belong to marginalized ethnic and cultural minorities.

In a revitalized response to this situation, the countries participating in the Dakar World Education Forum of April 2000 set six goals for themselves. The fourth aimed to achieve "a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults". Two years later in 2002, the United Nations confirmed the goal by instituting the UN Literacy Decade, 2003-2015. The goal posed a difficult challenge for societies with relatively low literacy rates. Nevertheless, almost every participating country had some experience – either through its government or through other agencies, or both – in running adult literacy programmes. Indeed, organizations of many different sizes and orientations in virtually all countries have been planning and implementing adult literacy programmes for close to a century.

At one end of the spectrum is the huge, pioneering, twenty-year effort of the Soviet Union Government in the 1920s and 1930s. It aimed to make every illiterate adult literate. It also aimed to help create the kind of socialist person who would transform and modernize society under the guidance of the state. Many other states undertook similar large-scale programmes during the rest of the century. Most had aims larger than simply teaching people how to read and write. They included messages and information on many topics – civics, nation-building, health and other subjects aimed at social, economic and sometimes political development.

At the other end of the spectrum were – and are – the continuing efforts of small community organizations, and even of socially-responsible individuals, who aim only to help some members

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1. Among the nine countries of this sub-region (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka), literacy rates range from 41.1 per cent in Bangladesh to 96.3 per cent in the Maldives.

2. Among the 45 countries in this region, literacy rates range from 12.8 per cent in Burkina Faso to 90 per cent in Zimbabwe.

of their community to master the skills of reading and writing for possibly local and parochial purposes. In between these extremes are the charitable and religious organizations, both international and national, that run moderately-sized literacy programmes for a range of learners.

The variety of programmes has developed a variety of approaches, strategies, curricula, teaching methods, teaching materials, administrative structures and so on. They have also produced a variety of results. What lessons and guides have all these experiences yielded for today's educational planners and decision-makers who want to achieve the fourth goal of the Dakar Forum?[3] The major lesson is that no single solution will suit the variety of human situations that exist around the world.

Purpose

The author's aim in this booklet is to review what has been learned in such a way that present-day education decision-makers can assess which mixture of options will serve their people best. In terms of the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, the author aims to help educators offer the kinds of literacy education that will enable their people to capitalize fully on sound macroeconomic policies, good governance and supporting institutions. The decision-makers in mind can be local or national politicians or civil servants, or members of large non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or of modest community organizations, who seek only to help fellow citizens exercise their right to literacy. However, a word of caution is in order. It has happened that persons with no previous experience in either adult education or adult literacy have suddenly found themselves responsible for organizing a literacy programme – sometimes local, sometimes even national. This discussion assumes that such a possibility continues to exist. It therefore also assumes that its readers seek a basic and practical treatment of the issues, with some sense of what might or might not be effective practice.

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3. "Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults" (see Education for All Global Monitoring Report on UNESCO web site).

Definitions

But what is literacy? This apparently simple word has generated so much discussion and argument during the last half of the past millennium that, despite the best efforts of UNESCO, there is still no internationally-agreed absolute standard. In 1958, UNESCO proposed that literacy meant "the ability to read and write, with understanding, a short, simple sentence about one's everyday life". In 1978, UNESCO's General Conference adopted a revised formula that is lengthy and entirely relative:

> A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his [or her] group and community and also for enabling him [or her] to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his [or her] own and the community's development (cited in UNESCO, 2005: 30).

In effect, functional literacy in a community of lawyers would probably involve much more than functional literacy in a group of porters.

The argument became even more complicated when ethnographic studies gave rise to the concept of 'multiple literacies' and literacy as social practice. An ancient example came from Burma (now Myanmar) where the ruling classes, the military and the priesthood each had their own scripts and literary conventions. Similarly today, in countries where different scripts coexist (the Arabic script alongside the Latin, for example), ethnographers find that communities differ in the values they attach to a particular script and to the people who use them, and also in the uses they make of them.

Further complications have resulted from efforts to link literacy with wider purposes. Very soon after its founding in 1946, UNESCO realized that teaching adults to read and write could achieve high rates of success only if the skills were closely linked to uses, meanings or purposes that were important to the learners. Christian missionaries had long attached literacy to reading the Bible and religious texts. In the late 1960s, UNESCO tried links with job skills, health, hygiene and household skills and the like, and coined the phrase 'functional

literacy'. Others followed the lead of Paolo Freire in using literacy to empower the oppressed groups of a society to take action to alleviate their predicaments. Definitions of literacy then included some reference to these wider links or purposes. In effect, no single definition of literacy could cover all the situations in which the skills of reading, writing and written calculation could be useful.

In this paper an attempt has been made to short-circuit such discussions. The term 'literacy' has been used to indicate only the fundamental understanding that sets of symbols are agreed by numbers of people to carry particular sounds and are used to represent spoken words. Being able to decipher and understand the meaning of written or printed words constitutes the skill of reading, while being able to encode symbols into recognizable words constitutes the skill of writing. It is assumed that there is no clear dividing line between being 'literate' and 'illiterate': people may be literate enough to recognize their own names in written form and to be able to write them, but not literate enough to read or write a complete sentence. If their only purpose in learning literacy is to read and write their own name, they are literate in their own terms. If they wish to use their skill in reading to acquire more information, or in writing to post messages to relatives, they will need, of course, to make themselves more literate.

That said, it would be wise to take note of the findings in neuro-cognitive science about human memory and effective reading. At the present state of knowledge, a person reading in the Latin alphabet needs to be able to read 60 or more words per minute to be an 'automatic' reader who can read and understand a text and is in no danger of forgetting how to read.[4] Human memory functions in much the same way in all individuals, regardless of language or cultural contexts. This means that reading languages in other scripts (Arabic, Farsi or Urdu in the Arabic script, for instance; Chinese in Chinese ideographs; or any of the languages of India in any of the scripts of India) will probably be performed at similar speeds. The implication is of course that educational planners need to find out

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4. The average 'permanent' reader in English reads at the rate of about 200 words per minute. Some outstanding readers achieve 1,000 words per minute with no loss of comprehension.

what reading speed will ensure that their average learner becomes a competent and 'permanent' reader in whatever language and alphabet they are using.

If the term 'literacy' indicates only the understanding of what reading and writing are about, 'illiteracy' then indicates only the lack of such understanding and of course the lack of any skill in reading and writing. It says nothing of a person's intelligence, knowledge, powers of logic, articulation and argument, or qualities of leadership.

Similarly, the term 'numeracy' indicates only knowledge that sets of symbols are agreed to represent particular quantities. People may be able to do quite complicated calculations in their head, but not be numerate in the sense of being able to do or even to recognize those same calculations in written form. If their only purpose in learning numeracy is to keep simple records of money borrowed or lent and payments made, they are numerate in their own terms.

The two preceding paragraphs have included the word 'purpose'. The reason is that the world's experience strongly suggests that most adults are prepared to invest and persevere in mastering the skills of literacy only when they clearly see a valuable use for them. Reading and writing are indeed general tools, useful for ranges of very varied tasks. However, most adult learners need to see their use for the tasks that are important specifically to them. This booklet therefore takes the view that literacy education should be offered not as a stand-alone activity, but as a component of education and training programmes that offer benefits of specific value to their learners and that become even more valuable with literacy.

At the same time, the focus of this booklet has been restricted to literacy and numeracy. It does not consider the other possible elements of an education or training programme. Civic empowerment, social action, livelihood skills for income generation, child care, health practices, combating the spread of HIV and AIDS, environmental concerns and an array of other subjects are all potential vehicles for instruction in literacy and numeracy. However, they lie beyond the scope of this paper, which concentrates instead on the literacy skills that enable people to capitalize better on knowledge of those other subjects.

Beneficiaries

It is true that illiteracy or inadequate literacy occurs in all countries and in all social classes. However, it is also true that illiteracy is proportionately much more common in what are called the 'less developed countries', among poorer people, rural populations and minority groups who suffer forms of discrimination or exclusion. In all such communities, rates of illiteracy among women tend to be higher than those among men. A poor, rural, minority-group woman is a citizen most likely to be among the illiterate. It follows that in countries where families or other agencies do not hinder women from attending literacy programmes, the majority of people who enrol are likely to be poor, illiterate women.[5]

At the same time, it needs to be borne in mind that most countries have made strong efforts to enrol all their children in primary school. Although these efforts have led to largely increased enrolments, they have not always been able to sustain the quality and effectiveness of instruction, nor to contend successfully against customs of early marriage for girls. Among the results are young people who have dropped out of school before they have mastered literacy, as well as young people who have completed the full primary school course of five or six years, but still feel unable to read and write as well as they would like. In addition, there are adults who have indeed become literate, but feel they have forgotten their skills because they have not used them sufficiently. Such people of course include both men and women. In a number of countries, they have used literacy programmes as opportunities for a second chance at gaining an education. In at least one country, they actually took up the majority of places on a programme. It is probable then that in countries that have not achieved universal primary schooling of good quality with virtually universal primary completion, literacy programmes will attract numbers of people who are not illiterate, but who nevertheless want to improve their skills in reading, writing and written calculation.

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5. However, it seems likely that poverty will prevent or deter the very poorest of the poor from joining literacy classes, unless special provisions are made to attract and retain them.

Options, not edicts

The mere variety of literacy programmes testifies to the fact that human beings have learned – and in some cases spontaneously developed – literacy skills under various conditions, strategies, methods and materials. However, as far as is known, there has been no comprehensive comparative study of these strategies and their outcomes, so that none can be put forward as the best way of enabling adults to read, write and perform written calculations at particular levels of proficiency. All that is possible is to set out the options that have been tried and to review what approaches seem to be more effective within given social and cultural contexts.

Before that, however, it would be sensible to review just why so many countries, UNESCO and other international organizations regard universal literacy as such an important goal. The next chapter explores the matter.

I.   The case for adult education with literacy

The aim of this chapter is to provide information to help government and other policy-makers to weigh policy options in considering literacy education for adults. It should also enable them to negotiate balanced proposals with ministries of national development planning and finance, as well as with other potential funding bodies and partners. Policy-makers in charitable or religious bodies already dedicated to adult literacy will likely not need to read it.

Reasons why governments and other bodies interested in social, political or economic development should organize literacy education programmes as core components of a holistic development strategy will be reviewed in this chapter. First, the implications of the human right to literacy are considered: to what extent does this right bind governments to allocate resources to literacy education? The discussion then proceeds to look at social, political and economic evidence that could inform political decisions on the kinds of literacy programmes that might both satisfy that right and generate other benefits for the learners and for society as a whole.

The evidence will be presented in terms of the potential contribution of such programmes to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (see *Annex 1*). These goals (MDGs) can be taken as a form of benchmark of standards that the world's societies have agreed should be achieved by the year 2015.

Literacy as a right

What are the implications and options that arise from the establishment of literacy as a universal human right? The question is examined at length, because some advocates of literacy have asserted that the continuing prevalence of illiteracy is a gross violation of human rights. The assertion is an accusation against the majority of the world's governments that spend less than 2 per cent of their education budget on literacy education programmes. It is also an accusation against international agencies that help support education for children, but offer very little support to educate adults. Is such an accusation justified?

For most of history, most humans have been illiterate. Literacy as an essential human skill rose to high importance only in the 1800s, because of the rapid growth and spread of knowledge, technology and industrialization. Although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognized the right to education through systematic schooling in 1948, it did not mention literacy explicitly. Express recognition of literacy as a human right came only in 1975 with the Persepolis Declaration, when an International Symposium for Literacy convened by UNESCO, meeting in the ancient Persian/Iranian city of Persepolis, issued a four-page document that included the sentences: "Literacy is not an end in itself. It is a fundamental human right". Four years later, in 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, and, 10 years later in 1989, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, both confirmed that the right to literacy was implicit in the right to education. In other words, recognition of literacy as a human right has come very late in history. Nonetheless, these declarations have given rise to what is currently termed a 'rights-based approach' to planning and developing educational and literacy programmes.

The simple reason for these declarations is that, in the overwhelming majority of current societies and communities, not to be able to read, write and follow written calculations with fluent competence puts a person at a grave disadvantage economically, socially and politically. It is no accident that in most societies the groups with the highest rates of poverty and destitution are generally those with the lowest rates and levels of literacy. However, recognizing a right in principle does not automatically illuminate the policies, strategies or methods through which it can be exercised. At this point, it may be helpful to consider the obligations that a right generates both for the rights holders on the one hand, and for their families, communities, wider societies and governments on the other hand.

For the individual, the first question is whether or not she or he knows about the right to literacy. If an individual is aware of this right, what obligation is there to exercise it? If acquiring this right entails time, effort and learning, is the individual obliged to undertake this training? In regard to literacy, if a person enrols in an adult education class that offers to teach literacy, what obligation

does the person have to accept the offer? Is the person obliged to continue in the class until all the skills are fully mastered? In at least one widespread form of adult education, social empowerment is the lead element: although literacy is offered, it is not obligatory. This raises the question whether a person has the right to decline a right. Further, if a person succeeds in learning how to read, write and calculate on paper, what is the obligation to apply those skills frequently? If a person chooses not to pursue or exercise a right, should some form of sanction apply?

However pertinent these questions are, approaches to the issue do not usually start with the individual. They tend to start instead with society and its obligations to make the right to literacy accessible. They presume that all individuals would take up this right, if it were available to them. This point of view emphasizes the obligations that a society or government bears to ensure that all its citizens enjoy a given right. The minimum obligation is presumably to ensure that people should encounter no deliberate obstacles to a right; for example, if a girl or a woman wishes to become literate, no family member should forbid her or make it difficult for her to attain this goal. If they do obstruct her, then an obligation falls upon the local society or the state to remove the obstruction either through persuasion or sanctions. *In general terms, the minimal obligation that a society or its government bears is to ensure that no third party prevents a person from exercising a right.*

In other situations, where people are not actively obstructed from becoming literate, but do not know of their right to it, or live in conditions which make the right unimportant, what might be the obligations of a society or state? A range of options would seem to be available.

(i) At one end of the scale, a government may decline to take any active measures. In the case of literacy, it may point to the examples of citizens who have taught themselves to read and write through their own efforts, and argue that if some can achieve this, so can everybody else. It may also argue that, if adults do not seek to achieve literacy, they likely feel no need for it and very probably have no use for it either. There would then be no point in forcing literacy upon them. Such a government

may also argue that experience elsewhere has shown that many people who start learning literacy either drop out before they have mastered the skills, or forget what they have learned because they have no real use for reading and writing. If such people do not think that the right to literacy is important to them, why would anybody want to force them to learn it?

(ii) At the other end of the scale, a society may consider a right so important as to compel its citizens to exercise it. An example is the Australian law that decrees that every eligible citizen must exercise the right to vote in national elections or face punishment for failing to do so. It makes this right an obligation. Closer to literacy are, of course, the laws of compulsory schooling. They insist, on the one hand, that all children take their education and go to school, however reluctantly. On the other hand, they forbid parents and guardians from either denying their children an education or colluding in their truancy. Similarly, in its great drive for universal literacy in the 1920s and 1930s, the Government of the Soviet Union made it compulsory for every illiterate citizen to attend literacy classes. Such a stance meant that the government itself had to mobilize the resources for all the many components of literacy programmes. It also had to make sure that opportunities for mastering the skills and knowledge on offer were made sufficiently available. Nobody had an excuse for not attending a literacy class and persevering to a level of mastery that satisfied the government's standards. Indeed, the government's concern went so far as to provide spectacles for those who had difficulty in seeing print clearly.

(iii) Between these extremes, there is a range of options for a government to mitigate obstacles to rights. It can create opportunities to exercise rights, encourage, or even actively assist its citizens to take up their rights, or, by means of sanctions and incentives, ensure that most do. With regard to literacy, the entire range of options has been used, from leaving people to develop their own forms of local literacy, to denying ration cards or employment to adults who refuse to take literacy instruction.

Several questions therefore present themselves. The first is one of priority. An interesting example is a comparison between

the MDGs and the Dakar World Education Goals. It is agreed that primary education, like literacy, is a universal human right; the MDGs aim for universal primary completion (UPC) by 2015, but mention literacy only among 15-24 year olds and only as an indicator of success in primary education. In contrast, the Dakar Goals, while also aiming for UPC, aim for a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, but not a 100 per cent improvement. A legitimate inference is that both the MDGs and the Dakar Goals give universal literacy a lower priority than UPC, and that Dakar judged that universal literacy by that date would be infeasible. In effect, the right to primary education for children takes priority over the right to literacy for adults. In this light, what priority should a particular government give to literacy?

Related to this issue is a second: literacy and primary education are deemed to be basic human rights, whereas neither secondary nor tertiary education is so proclaimed. Yet governments everywhere allocate many more resources to a secondary school student – and even more to a university undergraduate – than they do to a primary school pupil. The disparity between the unit costs for second and tertiary education, which are not basic rights, and those for adult literacy is even wider. This is anomalous and apparently inequitable. However, in the nature of things, it is unavoidable, for organizing and delivering secondary and tertiary education are more expensive. What options might a government have to reduce the disparity and inequity without imperilling whatever benefits flow from the current arrangements and allocations?

The third question is this: To what extent is adult literacy like primary education (a vital right), and to what extent is it more like secondary and tertiary education (rights that should be available but are not vital)? The issue here is that the right to primary education insists that it should be universal, free and compulsory, whereas secondary and tertiary education need not be universal, free or compulsory: students enter them voluntarily and can be asked to help pay for them. Need opportunities to learn literacy be universal, free and virtually compulsory, or should they rather be at least partially targeted, partly paid for and encouraged, but voluntary?

The term 'targeted' arose from the strategy that UNESCO used in its Work Oriented Literacy Programme in the 1960s and early

1970s. Experience around the world had convinced the Organization that adults who could not see how literacy was useful to them tended to lose interest in learning the skills – i.e. in taking up their right. It therefore promoted a *selective* approach that identified productive occupations, like farming or factory work, and moulded literacy curricula to what would be useful to people working in such areas. The approach implied that, although literacy was a basic right, the priority of that right depended on the uses to which literacy could be put. In effect, UNESCO raised a fourth question: To what extent can the skills of literacy be considered independently of their contexts and uses? The question draws added force from experiences in India and Tanzania. Communities that were participating in few social and economic improvements tended to make little use of their literacy and numeracy skills and to forget them. In contrast, communities that were part of the development mainstream tended to remember their literacy skills and even to improve their numeracy skills.

This, in turn, raises a fifth question: What is the priority of literacy in relation to other rights? If the right to life is the most fundamental right of all, should not all other rights contribute to enhancing it? Providing more food of better quality and more regularly not only enables people to live longer, it also helps them to live lives of better quality. The beneficial effects of school breakfast and lunch programmes on the school attendance – and perhaps on the learning achievements – of children from poor families help attest to this, as do the effects of a healthy diet on the productivity of workers. To what extent do the simple skills of reading, writing and written calculation similarly enhance the right to life? Are they on a level with life, food, water, clothing and shelter?

This question brings out the existence of an implicit ranking among rights – some rights are more important than others and should take priority. The discussion above on the weighting of levels of education reflects this. Most would agree that the more education an individual takes, the better for both the individual and the society in which he or she lives. Nonetheless, there are different views and practices on where society's obligation to enable individuals to continue pursuing their right to education tapers off and individuals' obligations to fend for themselves increase.

In a ranking of rights, where would literacy stand? If basic literacy – the ability simply to read a letter or an invoice, to write a brief letter, to do arithmetic on paper – could be shown to be manifestly essential to life, it might attract treatment more on a par with primary education.

The question can be posed also from the point of view of illiterate people, who are the rights bearers, as to what rank they give literacy in their daily priorities. To what extent do they feel seriously deprived of a right? No general answer is possible, largely because of the circumstances of different groups of people. Some officially illiterate people have found literacy so necessary that they have developed their own forms of recording, of retrieving experiences and information and of keeping accounts. On the other hand, most groups remote from urban centres, who operate subsistence and barter rather than cash economies, have scarcely any need to invent or to learn reading and writing, or account keeping. They might find the notion of a right to literacy irrelevant.

Evidence from several countries fuels the sceptical view that many illiterate adults do not rank literacy high in their priorities. Indeed, even when they have mastered the skills sufficiently to be deemed 'new literates', they do not seem to apply the skills to enhance the quality of their lives. Perversely, when adult educators advocate the development of post-literacy programmes and the creation of literate environments to enable new literates to exercise and develop their skills, they provide sceptics with an additional argument. For why would these open-ended commitments be necessary if literacy were such an essential right? Would the new literates not of their own volition and energy seize, hone and apply their newly mastered tools to improve their lives? To what extent then should societies and their governments calibrate their treatment of the right to literacy in the light of the treatment that illiterate and recently literate people themselves accord it?

Perhaps most telling in this connection is the experience of instructional methods that focused on the skills of literacy without regard to meaning and relevance to the adult learners' interests and conditions. The failure of such methods to retain large proportions of their learners – let alone make them literate – led to the development

of approaches that demonstrated more readily the usefulness and other values of literacy. Literacy needed to be combined with religious interests, economic improvement, social action or political empowerment, before it could hold most of its adult learners sufficiently long for them to master its skills. In short, for most illiterate adults, literacy in itself appears not to be an absolute value or passionately-pursued right, but very much an instrument to other ends. Would governments be prudent to treat it otherwise?

A literacy floor or ceiling?

Nevertheless, for the sake of discussion, let us grant simple literacy equal status to food as a basic human right. Is there a minimum to which governments and voluntary agencies should feel obliged to help all illiterates, and beyond which they can leave them to their own devices? Two factors complicate the question.

The first is the observation that literacy is a moving target: A level of skill sufficient to function well as an electrician could well be insufficient for a lawyer. Completing only primary schooling in many societies has long been insufficient to guarantee a decent living. On the contrary, it now virtually guarantees a life among the poorest of those societies.[6] Yet, only primary schooling is required to be free and compulsory. There can then be no universally applicable minimum; each society would need to define its own at a particular time and, at a later moment, to redefine it in the light of its development. At one time, for example, some societies compelled children to take only six years of school education. Now those societies require children to take as many as 11 years of schooling. They even offer incentives to encourage children to go further in their studies and training. In other words, the right to literacy may be worthless, unless it is acquired to a degree that makes it useful within a given context.

In such a context-dependent view, where does the obligation of a society to ensure opportunities for developing literacy cease? For instance, several evaluations suggest that current literacy

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6. Of course, the poorest in such societies might be regarded as comfortably well-off by the poorest in other societies.

programmes enable an 'average' adult to read, write and count as well as an 'average' pupil who has completed between two and four years of primary school. However, studies in a number of countries suggest that, even with five years of 'average' current primary schooling, many people are insufficiently literate to be able to read and write brief passages, let alone read a newspaper or write a report. Nonetheless, is such a level of attainment sufficient for the government to require new literates to continue on their own? After all, they have grasped the principles of literacy, even if they are not yet fluent readers or facile writers. Should they then be obliged to take their skills further on their own, if they need or want to?

The second complicating factor is the issue of language. Many countries have so many language groups that they have to use one or two as 'official' languages for the purposes of government, law, education and national communication, and allow the rest only secondary status. A frequent result is that literacy in these secondary languages is limited to domestic uses and is not helpful in accessing information or literature, or in dealing with official institutions. Should adult new literates, having mastered literacy in their mother tongue, then set about becoming literate in the official languages under their own steam, or does the right to literacy oblige governments to use taxes and subsidies to arrange appropriate opportunities for this purpose? Alternatively, would it be enough to leave the matter to the market? Those who want to learn the language and literacy of the official language might well be prepared to bear the costs entailed, if mastery of the official language were sufficiently important to their affairs. As with school education, at what point should the state expect individuals to take responsibility for developing their own literacy?

The right to literacy

The discussion above suggests that a rights-based approach to literacy on its own is insufficient to warrant the kind of priority and the scale of resources that the Dakar Goals for education advocate. The right to literacy needs arguments from both utility and benefit perspectives to enable policy-makers to undertake appropriate assessments of priority in comparison with the demands from other rights, forms of education and forms of development. The rest of

this chapter will then consider the benefits of literacy in terms of individual, social, political and economic development. To the extent possible, it will assess the benefits in the light of the empirical evidence available and of their potential contribution to the MDGs.

Development of the individual

As remarked earlier, people are born illiterate. This is to say that illiterate people are normal human beings with no deficiencies. Literate people are also normal human beings, but they have the advantage of having learned the skills of literacy. Neuroscience and cognitive studies now suggest that, when individuals have learned their skills through schooling, they have also acquired efficiencies that give them certain advantages in the functioning of their brains and intellects.[7] For example, people who have had as little as six months of literacy instruction appear to improve their understanding of radio broadcasts of information on health, on avoiding HIV and AIDS infection or on improving nutrition. Literacy also seems to improve their memories, their ability to use information for judgments and decision-making, their attention span and their verbal skills. In short, mastering literacy develops a more enabled person. This is in the interest of both the person and society.

Social, political and economic development

Small-scale research efforts scattered over several countries since 1975 have been producing empirical evidence in support of the beneficial effects of literacy programmes, some of which will be discussed in the following sections. It may be most helpful to summarize the findings in relation to the MDGs, which involve poverty reduction, social and economic development and gender equity, and which have been adopted by all the member governments of the United Nations. However, a word of caution is in order.

Although most of the research studies have been undertaken since the mid-1960s, few of them, whether mainly quantitative, qualitative or ethnographic, escaped imperfection in terms of scientific rigour,

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7. See *Adult education and development 65/2005: 19-34* for a condensed discussion of this and Abadzi, 2003: Chapter 2 for fuller descriptions.

representative coverage or thorough analysis. Most programmes have not been able to maintain complete records of attendance, progress, dropouts, completion and levels of attainment, let alone longer-term monitoring of the actual uses of skills and knowledge and their impact on daily living. Many – perhaps most – programmes have had to contend with some hostility and resistance to attempts to evaluate them. Few have been able to escape the ranges of findings, the consequent ambiguities and the apparent inconsistencies that characterize research into the behaviour of human beings. As far as can be ascertained, very few studies exist of the actual rates of return on investment in literacy programmes, very likely because they are too difficult to design and implement.

The lack of proper baselines and control groups has enabled some to raise the following objection: What favourable evidence there is, is favourable only because the adults and youths who enrol in literacy programmes are exceptional. Even though they are poor, they are more energetic than average, already more favourably disposed towards modernization, and already know more than their non-literate neighbours. They are selecting themselves into the programmes and cannot be taken to represent their more average neighbours. The inference is that, if these participants are used to justify programmes for the general non-literate population, there would likely ensue much worse rates of enrolment, attendance, completion and success – particularly in terms of usable and 'permanent' skills in reading, writing, and calculation – and less than worthwhile longer-term changes of attitudes and behaviour.

Even if the proposition is accurate, it does not undermine the case for literacy programmes. On the contrary, it underlines the probability that the investments are actually reaching the right sorts of people: those who can best make the investments productive. From the practical point of view of investment, then, the proposition would in fact reinforce the soundness of literacy education in development policy.

Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that the proposition is probably wrong. Evidence from at least three total literacy campaigns in India (Malavika, 2000) shows that only a small minority of adult learners are unable to learn the skills of reading, writing and

written calculation. The three campaigns recruited virtually all the non-literate adults of their areas and succeeded in teaching most of them at least enough to succeed at the official graduation test. They thus tended to vindicate the learning abilities of the average non-literate adult and to justify appropriate learning programmes.

On the other hand, field studies carried out nearly 10 years after the campaigns did suggest that many, if not most, of the successful learners had largely forgotten how to read and write. The findings suggest either that the learners had not learned the skills to a permanent, usable degree or had simply found no reason to put their skills to use. In other words, average non-literate adults can indeed learn new skills quite rapidly but can also forget them.

Whatever their shortcomings, the studies on which this monograph is based represent a substantial advance on what was available before. They have at least striven to address the concerns of policy-makers and planners. Further, they come from more than 20 countries in several regions of the world: Bangladesh, Bolivia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mali, Mexico, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, Nicaragua, Senegal, Sudan, Tanzania, Turkey and Uganda. They can thus be considered representative of larger proportions of the human race as a whole and not restricted to just one or two particular cultures.

Using the evidence from these studies, this booklet will examine the possible contribution of literacy programmes to the MDGs in: (1) the reduction of poverty and hunger; (2) achieving universal primary education; (3) promoting gender equality and empowering women; (4) reducing child mortality; (5) improving maternal health; (6) combating HIV and AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; and (7) ensuring environmental sustainability. As will be seen, the general trend is to reinforce rather than retard movement towards them. The evidence also reinforces the view that literacy education programmes can support and promote social, economic and political development only if the social, economic, political and infrastructural environment permits it.

MDG 1 – Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Do literacy education programmes help to reduce poverty through improving the productivity of livelihoods and raising incomes, and do they help reduce hunger through enabling farmers – women and men, on a small and a large scale – to make their land more productive for both subsistence and marketing purposes?

Studies pertinent to the question are available from eight countries but cannot answer the question definitively. On the negative side, the 1998/1999 national household survey in Ghana (Valerio, 2003: 26) suggested that, although the level of schooling made a difference to earnings and income, literacy skills acquired through non-formal education did not appear to do so definitely in either waged or self-employment.

On the positive side, a statement by Carr-Hill, Kweka, Rusimbi and Changelele (1991: 324) in their study of the effects of 20 years of literacy programmes in Tanzania will help set the general tone:

The main effect which may be attributable to literacy is the spreading of modern agricultural techniques in the rural areas. Even where there were problems in affording the necessary agro-inputs, peasants had a positive attitude towards agricultural development. Kalinzi people acknowledged that they attended literacy classes not so as to be able to seek waged employment as had previously been the case, but to become better farmers.

The richer farmers were first to adopt the new agricultural techniques, openly attributing their success to the effects of literacy. Farmers in Ugwachanya stated that the primers were of direct, practical use. All farmers were enthusiastic about the methods pioneered by the richer farmers ... Though the poorer farmers might not see the direct relevance of literacy, such examples of a horizontal transfer of information from the richer farmers can probably be attributed indirectly to the literacy campaigns.

More directly, in Kenya, farmers who had graduated from literacy courses were much more likely to use hybrid seeds and fertilizers than their illiterate fellows (Carron, Mwiria and Righa, 1989: 173, Table IX.6), while managers in the SODEFITEX corporation of Senegal

estimated that the literacy programme had helped its associated farmers to raise their productivity by 6 per cent.

In Bangladesh, Cawthera evaluated the effects of the Nijera Shikhi approach in 1997, and again in 2000. His observations led him to conclude that the Nijera Shikhi approach to NFEA had engendered

[a] sustained and beneficial impact on livelihoods: ... Incomes have increased by amounts which are highly significant to people who earn below-average incomes in one of the world's poorer countries.

A lasting impact on agricultural practices and on nutrition: ... Many of the women now have kitchen gardens and grow a wider variety of fruit and vegetables. They also rear more poultry. Some of this is traded and so raises household income while some is consumed within the household and improves vitamin and protein consumption.

A sustained increase in savings and investment: ... Many of those engaged in entrepreneurial activities had saved and invested in capital assets in order to generate profit. Many of these people said they only thought of doing this as a result of their learning during the course. (Cawthera, 2003: 14-15).

In their evaluation of three REFLECT[8] projects in Bangladesh, El Salvador and Uganda, Archer and Cottingham (1996: 63 f.) approach the issue of productivity and income through an examination of resource management – or making available resources more productive than they were previously. They are able to furnish examples from all three countries of how the process of that particular form of literacy education had stimulated participants to reconsider and improve their uses of land, water, crops and money (echoing the fact that, to affect people's behaviour, instruction in literacy should be combined with practical information and skills).

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8.   Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques: a methodology first introduced by the international NGO ActionAid, and currently being developed further in more than 60 countries.

In this connection, the observations by Carron (1989) and Carr-Hill (1991) and their teams in Kenya and Tanzania, as well as other studies in India and Ghana, suggest that, unless literacy instruction and even functional knowledge were supported by favourable environments, their use and impact on incomes and standards of living were much diminished. Similarly, a study from Mexico noted not only that rising literacy influenced economic growth, but also that workers in urban manufacturing enterprises benefited more from literacy than rural workers in agriculture.

Quite apart from productivity in its normal sense and related to empowerment (discussed below) is the effect that some mastery of calculation engenders. In almost every study from almost every country, participants who became literate say that they can now handle money, especially paper money, more confidently. More importantly, they feel less vulnerable to being cheated in monetary transactions. This is a key gain for people who are micro-entrepreneurs, for it enables them to begin managing their businesses on a sounder basis.

At this point, it is convenient to recall the 'literacy second' approach. For example, the ten-country Grassroots Management Training Program of the World Bank Institute began in around 1990 with training for non-literate women in basic business management, using non-literacy-based methods. However, the programme eventually had to respond to a demand from the participants themselves for more systematic instruction in arithmetic, writing and reading. Where it is used, this approach appears to be successful in building both literacy and livelihood skills.

In this context, economists of education may wish to consider the possible rates of return to investment in literacy. Three World Bank projects undertook such estimates. The first, in Indonesia in 1986, calculated that the individual rate of return to investment was about 25 per cent. The second, in Ghana in 1999, yielded a private rate of return of 43 per cent for females and 24 per cent for males, and a social rate of return of 18 per cent for females and 14 per cent for males. The third, in Bangladesh in 2001, suggested that the private rate of return was 37 per cent (World Bank 1986: 16; 1999: 11; 2001: 49). All of these estimates compare more than favourably with

the usual estimates of returns to primary education, and suggest that literacy education is a sound and productive investment for national resources.

The overall inference then is that literacy education does contribute to poverty reduction, the focus of the first MDG. Whether literacy stimulates other skills or is invoked by them, it seems clearly to be a helpful element of improved livelihoods and rising productivity. Demand for it may be more powerful and its poverty-reducing effects more observable if two conditions are present: an environment that nurtures broader efforts to reduce poverty; and a direct and obvious connection between literacy skills and the skills to reduce poverty.

MDG 2 – Achieve universal primary education

Does literacy education raise demand for schooling, so that newly literate parents send their children, especially their girls, to school? Further, do they try to see that the children observe the requirements of successful participation?

A number of studies such as those of Burchfield that appear below have looked at the question of the influence of literacy education, particularly for mothers, on the schooling of children. Despite differences and variations, the general finding is positive. In several countries, high proportions of mothers, whether literate or not, had most of their children in school, which argues that the value of schooling is now apparent to all, whether literate or not. Nonetheless, all the studies found that a higher percentage of mothers enrolled in literacy classes tended to have placed their children in school than illiterate mothers not enrolled in literacy classes. Three further points were noted:

- First, as the classes progressed, an even higher proportion of mothers began to send their children to school.
- Second, enrolled mothers were more likely not only to send their daughters to primary school, but also to want them to go on to secondary school along with their sons.
- Third, enrolled mothers were more likely to insist on their children's regular attendance at school, to ensure that their children did their homework, and to discuss their children's progress in class.

In one remarkable instance, government primary schools in Uganda fed by communities that were participating in a literacy education programme increased their enrolments by 22 per cent. In comparison, schools for other communities increased theirs by only 4 per cent. In addition, communities that did not have government schools and had established their own, and that were also participating in the literacy education programme, more than doubled their enrolments, with a particular increase in the proportion of girls. Further, one third of the communities studied had set up new nursery schools for their younger children and paid facilitators to run them.

On the other hand, it is fair to note that such positive developments were not universal. One study found only slight impacts, while the findings of another were mixed: some communities showed no change at all in school enrolments, while neighbouring communities raised their primary school enrolment by more than 50 per cent. In at least three countries, severe economic decline had led even schooled and educated parents to fail to maintain their children's education. Local economic, political and employment factors seem to interact with the effects of educational programmes. The overall signal seems to be that, where the economic and social climates are favourable, literacy education will tend to support the attainment of universal primary education and universal primary completion.

An important inference for both the first and the second MDGs flows from this signal: if parental literacy greatly helps school attainment, then governments need to organize effective adult literacy programmes, because they would help make mainstream education more effective and thus more likely to enable people to reduce their poverty.

MDG 3 – Promote gender equality and empower women

Do women who take part in literacy education programmes feel more able to improve the quality of their lives and the lives of their families? Equally important, do they tend to take stronger roles in organizing their communities to improve the quality of life in their localities and societies? Does literacy education in effect tend to strengthen civil society?

In many countries, the majority of participants in literacy education programmes are women, and poor women at that. The reason is doubtless that girls from poor families generally have the fewest opportunities to attend and to continue in primary school, and therefore form the majority of adult illiterate populations. Adult educators suggest that their participation helps these women to develop self-confidence, to inspire greater respect among their family and community members, and to take more active roles in running and improving their communities. If that is so, literacy education programmes would certainly be promoting gender equality and empowering women. But what evidence is there that this is actually the case? A number of studies provide some data, most of which is supportive.

The drift of the evidence can be characterized by Burchfield's (1997) findings in Nepal, which compared three groups of women: those who had had no schooling or adult education; those who had had a basic six-month adult education; and those who had taken a three-month post-literacy course after their six-months' basic experience. Two indicators measured confidence or empowerment: (1) perceptions that one is respected by her family and community; and (2) confidence in stating one's opinions to her family and community. The findings were not dramatic, but certainly positive. Whereas 38 and 42 per cent of the basic and post-literacy course participants respectively believed they now had more respect within their families, and could give examples of what they meant, only 2 per cent of the control group shared that belief.

On the second indicator (confidence in stating one's opinions to the family and community), the proportions of basic course participants asserting that they now had more confidence to do so were much the same as on the first indicator. In contrast, among the post-literacy course participants, a full 50 per cent claimed they were more confident in stating their opinions to the family, and 44 per cent made the same claim with regard to the community. In steep contrast, only 4 per cent of the control group felt their confidence had increased over the past year.

These percentages of cases reporting a change for the better are of course large. On the other hand, they also indicate that half or more

of the treatment groups did not feel they enjoyed either increased respect from their families or more confidence before the community because of what they had learned. All the same, the minorities who did feel they had gained respect within their families are substantial, not negligible.

In a later study, Burchfield, Hua, Baral and Rocha (2002: 100) reported more indirectly:

> According to studies sponsored by USAID, by 1998 nearly 1,000 advocacy groups had been formed by women who had increased their literacy skills ... These groups have undertaken a wide variety of actions on both individual and public issues. A 1997 sample survey showed that such groups have confronted a number of social problems including domestic violence, alcoholism and gambling ... The advocacy groups have spoken out on national issues such as women's right to own property, caste discrimination and trafficking of girls. Recognizing that access to income increases their decision-making role in the family and community, women have also demanded greater access to economic interventions.

In short, these studies suggest that participating in literacy education does enable many women to develop more confidence and greater determination to take on more assertive roles in their families and communities. The gains are admittedly variable and by no means universal. On the other hand, neither are they negligible. They thus do tend to contribute to the achievement of the third MDG.

MDGs 4, 5 and 6 – Reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, and combat HIV and AIDS, malaria, and other diseases

Do literacy education programmes assist the improvement of health as measured by the indicators of child mortality, maternal health and the reduction of disease?

This section considers possible contributions of literacy education programmes to the three MDGs that bear on health. There are studies that suggest that at least some of the graduates of such programmes do use the knowledge they acquire to improve their own health and that of their families. The most interesting study

was done in Nicaragua 10 years after the National Literacy Crusade of 1980. It found that women who had learned literacy through the crusade enjoyed higher survival rates among their children than the women who had remained illiterate. Also, survival rates were higher among the children born to participating women after the crusade than among the children they had had previously. Similarly, Burchfield's three-year study in Nepal found that participation and attainment in literacy classes did increase health knowledge, but by not very much more than other media such as the radio.

At this point it may be as well to draw attention to the lag between knowledge and practice: people may know what good health practice is, but may take a long time to implement it. Indeed, many people may not implement it at all. For example, when asked at the end of the programme that Burchfield evaluated to name good sources of vitamin A, 61.9 per cent of the women who had not participated in the literacy programme could do so. However, only 18.6 per cent of them actually bought vitamin A capsules to ensure that their children had a sufficient intake. Among the women who had participated well in the programme, a much higher proportion (95.4 per cent), indeed almost all of them, could name sources of the vitamin, but only just over half (52.6 per cent) had actually purchased it for their children – almost three times the number of non-participants who had done so. Therefore these figures do tend to suggest that a literacy programme is a more effective medium for improving both knowledge and behaviour. However, it also corroborates the well-known observation that knowledge moves ahead of actual practice.

In regard to HIV and AIDS, Burchfield's study in Nepal found that participation in the literacy education programme showed clear superiority over reliance on other sources of information. Similar findings emerged from another programme in Nepal, Girls' Access to Education; after nine months of tuition, adolescent girls in the programme showed greater gains in health knowledge than girls who had received their information from other sources.

As regards maternal health and norms on family size, graduates of literacy programmes in Kenya and Tanzania tended to know more about family planning, to hold more positive attitudes towards it, and to practise it more than those who had not entered the programmes. However, the graduates shared with the non-participants a pattern of

adoption similar to that noted above in Nepal: more knew about it than were positive towards it, and more were positive towards it than actually practised it. As usual, knowledge on its own did not guarantee changes in behaviour. Yet, it did facilitate change in some and was measurably higher among the participants of the programmes. In Ghana, participants in the literacy programme were certainly more aware of measures for family planning, but utilized them no more than non-participating women – illustrating again that information on its own may not be enough to change behaviour, even though it paves the way for change.

Nevertheless, the overall message from the available studies is that knowledge conveyed through literacy education programmes does tend to contribute towards the achievement of the MDGs for health.

MDG 7 – Ensure environmental sustainability

Many of the literacy education programmes reviewed have included aspects of environmental sustainability in their curricula. However, none of the evaluative studies have examined the outcomes of those contents on the practices of the learners involved. Assessing the contribution of literacy education to ensuring environmental sustainability is unfortunately not possible at this stage.

Social and political participation

Beyond the MDGs, current trends towards more extended decentralization, democratization and the nurturing of civil society and political participation raise the question whether literacy programmes contribute to them. A few observations suggest that such programmes can indeed promote these trends, although with the usual variable outcomes. For instance, a study in 1990 evaluated the outcomes of adult basic education in four provinces in Burkina Faso. It found many – but again not all – of the newly literate men and women undertaking roles in almost all the economic and governing bodies of their villages. Similarly, the SODEFITEX corporation in Senegal was pleased to find that the farmers – men and women – who had taken the literacy course took up roles in managing the affairs and accounts of the producers' co-operatives and began to take control of the marketing of their products. In addition, many of them taught literacy classes of their own.

In less favourable conditions, a study in Bangladesh noted that local cultural norms can militate against the aims of literacy education. What prompted the observation was the institutional exclusion of women from active roles in community organizations other than their own class committees. Expecting such institutions to change overnight would be unrealistic. Nonetheless, within that set of social constraints, women's committees did become more active in pursuing their own programmes. In one case, for example, in a community that had no easily-reached and safe source of water, the women's literacy class committee wrote to the local district government petitioning for a tube-well and raised the money to have it constructed.

In sum, the message is that suitably organized and implemented literacy education programmes do tend to promote stronger and more confident social and political participation by poor, unschooled people – particularly poor women.

Better understanding of radio information

An unexpected potential benefit from literacy education is signalled by studies in Mexico and Nepal. Apparently, illiteracy can prevent people from understanding messages broadcast by radio, because an illiterate person tends to be dependent on a concrete and personal context to which to relate language. There appears to be a strong correlation between listening and reading skills, which suggests it is not easy to circumvent the obstacles of illiteracy by offering health information over the air. The studies showed that the women with the weakest or non-existent skills in literacy had the most difficulty in understanding messages broadcast over the radio.

Reciprocally, targeted radio programmes can enhance the learning achieved in literacy programmes. This is the conclusion of an evaluation of a project in Ghana to reinforce the country's functional literacy programme with a radio component. It found that enrolments, waiting lists, attendance, retention, and knowledge gains were all enhanced by the radio contributions.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to consider the case for promoting and investing in literacy. It suggested that the simple assertion of the right

to literacy, although valid, was insufficient to guide a government on the priority, resources and effort that it should allocate to achieving the Dakar educational goal of achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults. However, it showed that a recent and growing body of empirical evidence supports the view that literacy education programmes do tend to contribute to the achievement of most of the MDGs. In effect, achieving the Dakar goal for adult literacy is likely to act as a cross-cutting or transversal reinforcement of other efforts to achieve the goals. Neglecting literacy education would then be tantamount to undermining efforts along other dimensions, such as achieving UPC, diversifying agriculture and raising its productivity, raising levels of health, or providing training for all forms of employment.

II.   Expectations for well-run literacy programmes

To round out the empirical case for investing in literacy, this section lists features that can reasonably be expected from a well-planned, well-delivered programme in terms of inputs, efficiency, learning outcomes and outcomes for social, economic and political development.

Expectations about learners or beneficiaries

The people who are expected to benefit from the programme are likely to express a strong initial demand. However, encouraging and sustaining this demand will probably require deliberate measures tailored to the circumstances of the learners.

Most learners will be poor. However, to attract and retain the very poorest and most marginalized people in a community, planners should expect to have to assess local situations very carefully. They should also expect to arrange a well-considered set of inducements and reinforcements to attract and keep such people attending classes.

In most countries, a bias in favour of boys has meant that most of the people not sent to school have been girls, which in turn has meant that most illiterate people are women (they constitute two thirds of the world's illiterate population). Most learners then are likely to be women. Their ages are likely to range between 15 and 60 or more years. However, the majority can be expected to be between the ages of 18 and 30. This implies that the majority are likely to be married, to have young children and to manage households, as well as jobs or livelihoods. These factors will have a bearing on the kinds of programmes that will facilitate or hinder the participation of such women.

Most beneficiaries can be expected to be rural, with the majority being agriculturalists, as well as household managers. Conversely, a minority of the beneficiaries are likely to be urban. While some of their interests will coincide with rural concerns, other – possibly

more central – interests may need to be taken into account to make the programmes more relevant and appealing to them.

Some of the learners can be expected to have had some primary schooling. The actual proportions are likely to correlate with the literacy rate of the country: countries with high literacy rates are likely to have high proportions of primary school dropouts who wish to capitalize on opportunities for a 'second chance education'. In multilingual countries, instruction in the dominant official language is likely to increase the participation of primary school dropouts.

Expectations about attendance and completion rates

Family and other commitments can be expected to cause some irregularity of attendance among most learners. However, with reliable and competent facilitators, aided by special local arrangements to encourage regular attendance, attendance rates can be expected to average around 75 to 80 per cent. Without such arrangements, planners should expect much lower attendance rates.

Although some programmes have achieved completion rates of more than 90 per cent, an average of 75 to 80 per cent completion may be a more realistic expectation even from a well-run programme. Most drop-out is likely to occur during the first few months of a programme and particularly among participants with more irregular attendance patterns. Attendance rates could possibly be improved and drop-out reduced if the early parts of the programme were especially engaging and convincing. Programmes with long breaks between phases should expect higher drop-out rates.

Expectations about prior knowledge and information

As regards knowledge and information, the average learner will likely know more than local specialized technical workers credit. Assessments of awareness, knowledge, views and practices in areas relevant to the programme, possibly along the lines adopted by the REFLECT method, would be prudent.

If the programme aims only to increase awareness and knowledge about given topics and is well designed and implemented, the average participant will likely be better informed about the topics when he or she completes the course than when he or she began. However,

planners should expect a majority of participants to show little immediate change in their attitudes or practices. The minority who do show changes in attitude can be expected to amount to between 30 and 40 per cent; those who change their practices may amount to between 20 and 30 per cent.

On the other hand, literacy learning groups that explicitly focus on social action, savings and credit, income generation or small business development can be expected to show stronger changes in both attitudes and actions.

If the programme can lead to training in areas for which there is clear and effective demand and for which literacy is necessary, it can be expected to engender better attendance and completion rates. Also, its participants will likely develop a stronger appreciation of the uses of literacy. Similar results can be expected if the programme can accommodate and promote the interests of groups that already exist for other purposes.

As regards reading, writing and written calculation, planners should expect the average non-literate participant to need at least 300 to 400 hours of instruction and practice[9] to attain levels of skills roughly equivalent to the levels attained by second- or third-year pupils in local primary schools. Without further learning and practice, or without frequent reasons to apply the skills, he or she is likely to retain those levels for two or three years, and possibly to improve his or her level in written calculation. However, at those levels, the average participant is unlikely to be able to read available literature fluently or to write more than simple letters. In effect, average participants will have difficulty in using the skills for further personal, family or social development.

As regards lifelong learning, average learners will likely prefer short, relatively informal courses closely tailored to their interests. A minority of perhaps some 10 to 20 per cent can be expected to seek longer courses leading to formal qualifications. However, experience in a number of countries suggests that the percentage will be larger

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9. Primary school dropouts will likely require fewer hours, depending on their level of skills when they ceased their schooling. Also, younger learners will tend to learn slightly faster than older ones.

if the basic course is structured to lead to some equivalence with primary or lower-secondary schooling.

Expectations about potential facilitators/instructors

Wide experience suggests that most literacy programmes can expect to meet no difficulties in recruiting literate people to act as facilitators for literacy classes. Large numbers of people of all levels of education and from all social groups have been willing to help others to master the skills of literacy. The majority can be expected to continue with their class until the end of a course. Without adequate training, support and encouragement, however, some of these willing people can be expected either to be irregular in running their class or even to abandon it. If local conditions require that a literacy course be run in two or more stages with intervals of several months, some facilitators can be expected to drop out between stages. Larger proportions of volunteer facilitators than remunerated facilitators can be expected to drop out either between stages or before the end of a long course. Most literacy programmes can expect to have to remunerate their facilitators in some way to retain their services and to build up a corps of experienced skills.

Experiences in many countries suggest that the steadily increasing availability of primary and secondary schools can justify an expectation that the majority of facilitators will have had more than a primary but not more than a complete secondary education. Many can be expected to be primary and even secondary school teachers. However, most will have had no training in educating adults. To transform them into skilled instructors in literacy, as well as skilled facilitators of social change, literacy programmes should expect to offer short but practical and thorough initial training of at least two to three weeks. Equally important, they should expect to continue with periodic brief in-service sessions to upgrade and expand the instructors' skills.

Literacy programmes should foresee courses totalling some 300 to 400 hours and delivered by generalist facilitators with current levels and quality of training to enable their learners to attain literacy skills equivalent on average to two or three years of primary school. As for changes in attitudes and practices leading to social, economic and political improvements, general programmes can expect their

facilitators only to lay the foundations for longer-term change. In contrast, programmes that aim mainly to promote social change, and integrate literacy only as an instrument for that purpose, can expect results more rapidly.

A pervasive and persistent observation in large-scale literacy programmes is that, whatever the length or nature of their initial training, most facilitators tend to revert to teacher-centred, didactic forms of teaching. Most appear unable or unwilling to sustain the learner-centred and participatory methods that are currently widely advocated. One exception was a pilot project which provided frequent and substantial support for the facilitators as they conducted their classes. If a new literacy programme is unable to offer that degree of support, it would be prudent to expect that its facilitators, with only brief training in educating adults, will tend to adopt a teacher-centred and didactic stance. However, the available evidence does not suggest that this will necessarily impede the objectives for literacy, if other supporting conditions are satisfied.

Other issues to do with facilitators/instructors are considered below in *Chapter III*.

Expectations for support

Supervisors. Most literacy programmes with large numbers of facilitators, whether governmental or non-governmental, appear to have been able to provide only relatively untrained, inexperienced, weak, irregular and unreliable support for them. Supervisors expected to offer regular and frequent technical pedagogical support to facilitators have found themselves unable to do so. Options for new systems of support and supervision need to be explored.

Community support. Community ownership and participation have long been elements in literacy programmes, although indeed their actual realization has been variable. Where they have been successfully fostered, they do seem to have enhanced both efficiency and effectiveness. Whatever the attractions of community participation, it is as well to bear in mind that not all communities are united in seeking the welfare of all sections. Social relations of domination, exploitation and antagonism can generate resistance to efforts to educate the poorer or marginalized groups. Such

possibilities need to be taken into account. Overall, however, the leaders – both official and unofficial – of many communities can be expected to be supportive.

Expectations for instructional methods, curricular content and materials

Although neuropsychological research has begun to indicate more effective ways of teaching adults how to read and write, existing evidence on the merits of different methods does not enable any firm recommendations. Therefore, different agencies can be expected to follow their own preferences. However, the average adult learner is likely to be prepared to tolerate a degree of less-than-best instruction and even some redundant content in the interest either of becoming literate or of learning new skills.

Expectations for capitalizing on emerging technologies

Developments can be expected to continue in ways of using new technologies for instruction (both face-to-face and at a distance), accessing information, and creating and reproducing locally-based reading materials rapidly and cheaply, even in very difficult isolated conditions. The inventors and corporations that develop such technologies can be expected to support their application to literacy programmes to at least a limited degree. Mobilizing such support will require educational planners to maintain frequent contact with the corporations and to stay abreast of technological developments by whatever channels are available.

A puzzle for the planner

In the light of the empirical evidence presented in the previous chapter and the expectations outlined above, the following question may occur to an educational planner: What explains the persistently inadequate investments in literacy education by governments and the persistent reliance on charitable bodies for funds and innovations in strategies, methods and materials?

As far as is known, no systematic study has focused on the question. Possible answers then have to rely on personal impressions and inferences.

A ready first hypothesis would point to the heavy competition for public funds. Education normally consumes a very large proportion of a government's budget – in many countries it indeed takes the largest single share of close to 30 per cent. Even so, the share is not enough to support universal primary enrolment – let alone provide good quality learning materials for every school child – and at the same time pay for sufficient quantities of secondary, technical and tertiary education to feed both the primary sub-system and the many other sectors of a modernizing society. The fact that some governments depend on international donors and financiers for large portions of their budgets underlines the point. Given the pressures to educate the young – they are, after all, the future – and the willingness of many parents to forgo their own education in favour of ensuring schools and universities for their children, programmes to educate adults are at a severe disadvantage in the competition for support.

Three factors may exacerbate this disadvantage. One might be a covert and lingering prejudice about the inferior learning abilities of older people: you cannot teach old dogs new tricks. The fact that this ancient supposition has been proven false both by research during the last century and by the outcomes of a number of literacy programmes in Africa, Asia and Latin America may not yet have adequately altered the thinking of key administrators and financiers.

A possibly more powerful factor may be the perception of poor performance by most literacy programmes. In 1976, UNDP and UNESCO published a joint evaluation of the World Experimental Literacy Programme, which had introduced the concepts of functional and work-oriented literacy organized on selective and intensive bases. The evaluation was not encouraging. In 1994, Helen Abadzi[10] of the World Bank used its findings to reckon that on average only one in eight adult enrolees in a literacy programme achieved sufficient mastery of reading and writing to remain permanently and usefully literate (Abadzi, 1994). In 1995, the World Bank published an education strategy paper that declined to advocate investment in adult literacy on the ground of poor performance. Such documents help reinforce the casually empirical impressions of inspectors and visitors to poorly run literacy programmes – classes where attendance

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10. In a later publication (Abadzi, 2003), she offered a much more hopeful view.

is erratic, instruction ineffective and attainment low. Once formed, such perceptions are tough to change, for the more recent empirical information that contradicts them tends not to be disseminated beyond scholarly journals.

The perceived poor performance might itself arise from the scarcity of funding. It is a fact that most adult literacy programmes are done on the cheap. Planners of adult education, in their anxiety not to price themselves out of the competition, tend to try to offer the lowest possible costs. They rely on volunteer instructors; they offer only a minimal training to the instructors; they offer minimal, irregular support in terms of help from qualified specialists in adult education; they try to make do with relatively poor materials; and they often cannot supply pamphlets or books to enable their students to develop their reading skills. In sum, they feel forced to under-invest in the programme. Under-investment leads to less-than-good implementation, which leads on to less-than-satisfactory learning outcomes, which of course lead to perceptions that investing in adult literacy is not the wisest or most productive use of resources – a vicious circle!

The third factor is the nature of the evidence adduced in *Chapter I*. Its relatively small quantity, variable quality and limited reach help explain why breaking the circle and reversing it into a virtuous spiral is so difficult. The adult education profession (practitioners, evaluators and researchers) has until the late 1990s not been able to put on the table the kinds of data, both quantitative and qualitative, that would outweigh the arguments of the competitors and override the hesitations of policy-makers and financiers. Not surprisingly, allocations for adult education and adult literacy tend to amount to little more than 1 per cent of national education budgets.

Yet, there are programmes that demonstrate that proper planning, investment, training and support for every level of implementation and well-managed delivery will enable adults to master, use and benefit from the skills of literacy and the knowledge and information that accompany their acquisition. The educational planner needs to ensure that all these requisites are in place. A thorough planner will also ensure that whatever is delivered is properly monitored and evaluated.

III. Options for planning and implementing literacy

This chapter discusses the options that might be examined by governments and other agencies when planning literacy programmes.

The role of the state

As there is a human right to literacy, the first and minimum role of the state is to act as guarantor that nobody will be deliberately denied that right. In this, it may have to contend with religious, cultural or other interests that view literacy and organized education as inappropriate for certain groups, and may have to take deliberate steps to remove such barriers. To go beyond that and take proactive measures to promote universal literacy, the state has no option in reality but to assume a substantial role. It could not leave the task in its entirety to non-governmental agencies. No matter how many national or local voluntary or other private bodies may exist in a country, it is almost certain that their resources would not enable them to reach every single community where some adults needed to learn literacy. *The government's participation in some substantial form would be indispensable.*

This is emphatically true for governments that are committed to the fourth of the global Education for All goals: "Achieve a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults".

In determining its role, a government has at least six options in deciding how best to enable all its people to take up and use their right to literacy. Each one of these options has been selected by at least one government in the past few decades. Some governments have indeed operated two options at the same time. Each option has yielded successes and disappointments, depending on how it was implemented and in what context. Any government would then need to assess the applicability of an option or options to the variety of conditions in its country before deciding on the optimal mix.

Option 1 – The state as monopolist: A government can assert a monopoly over all literacy programmes, in the sense of assuming full responsibility for all action on literacy and disallowing initiatives from other agencies. This option has been the choice of mainly socialist regimes as in the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, Nicaragua and Viet Nam, which were aiming for a total social transformation. It requires sustained commitment on the part of the government and its agencies, as well as considerable institutional capabilities and resources.

Option 2 – The state as licensing authority: A government may assume main responsibility for literacy activities, but may also permit or license other agencies to assist its efforts at their own cost, provided they accept its curricula and instructional materials or agree to use only methods, materials and content approved by itself.

Option 3 – The state as parallel worker: The state may choose to run its own literacy programmes through a ministry of education or of social or community development, but at the same time permit other organizations, whether national or local, to undertake initiatives of their own, using their own resources, materials and methods. This is the option that has been most commonly adopted.

Option 4 – The state as provider of subsidies: The state may run its own literacy programmes and simultaneously offer to subsidize other agencies on one of two bases: They can either act as its subsidiaries, using the approach, methods and materials designated by the state; or they can offer programmes of their own design, subject to government approval.

Option 5 – The state as supervising contractor: The state may decide, in addition to offering its own programmes, to contract with qualified voluntary non-profit bodies and appropriate private for-profit enterprises, to organize literacy programmes, subject of course to standards of quality assurance and financial accountability. The practice serves to stimulate, develop and strengthen civil society and the private sector, as well as to promote literacy. Experience with it is relatively recent, limited and decidedly mixed. A government needs to be confident of its ability to supervise its own officers as well as its contractors effectively, and to ensure that the adult learners enjoy instruction of adequate quality.

Option 6 – the state as sponsor: To maximize the resources that can be mobilized for universal literacy and to avoid relying solely on tax revenues, the government may set up a foundation or similar institution to promote and implement literacy programmes on its behalf. It guarantees a minimum level of funding for the agency and at the same time enables it to seek additional resources and form partnerships wherever it can, both locally and internationally.

Selecting an option: The option that a government selects will depend above all on the kind of society and polity it aims to form. One-party states and governments concerned with issues of national unity or national uniformity will tend to select options that ensure their control over the content and curriculum. They will encourage civil society and local initiatives only in so far as they conform to official views. Pluralist societies, on the other hand, will prefer to promote diversity. They will likely wish to encourage citizens to increase their participation in community and national affairs. This may lead them to reinforce civil society by encouraging larger numbers of agencies of different social or religious philosophies to partner governmental efforts, at least to a degree compatible with maintaining quality, effectiveness and social harmony.

The next consideration in selecting an option is the government's assessment of its own resources and institutional capabilities. Where governments judge that there is sufficient local capacity in the country, they may confine their roles to encouragement, providing financial and material incentives, and possibly technical assistance. This could be the case in countries where adult literacy rates are comparatively high and where the distribution of literate people and capable bodies is sufficient to meet the needs of all population groups.

However, there remain countries where adult literacy rates are still comparatively low and where literate populations and capable bodies are unevenly distributed. Some population groups – particularly in areas with many small, scattered or isolated farming, fishing or nomadic communities – will be at risk of being marginalized. In such cases, governments will need either to foster the development of local capacity – as in Option 5 – or, as has happened in the majority of countries, set up official departments to plan and implement literacy programmes.

On the matter of resources, a government will likely prefer to operate through one of its own ministries or departments, if it feels able to mobilize sufficient resources to sustain a national programme. Such a decision, of course, raises issues about the possible implications for expanding the numbers of public employees and increasing public expenditures, in both the long and the short term. Where public resources are constrained, it may seek modalities that allow it or its agents to raise funds from diverse sources within or external to the country.[11] Relevant to this point is the fact that most governments tend to allocate very minor proportions of their annual education budgets to adult education – currently around 1 to 2 per cent on average.

In many countries, there are strong constraints on the numbers of people a government can engage on a permanent basis. Nevertheless, some governments have had to engage additional people to implement adult literacy programmes and have resorted to making contracts just for the duration of a programme; these have removed the need for long-term commitments to such items as pension contributions, housing and the like. Such measures are clearly less than ideal for the additional staff. They are also less than ideal for fostering professional cadres and supporting efforts towards providing continuing and lifelong education for all adults that is essential for continuing national modernization and coping with the challenges of globalization. Nonetheless, they may be necessary as temporary expedients until the government has more resources at its disposal.

In addition, a government will need to consider what functions of a literacy programme it should undertake and which responsibilities it should farm out to other agencies. Developing curricula, drafting and testing primers, creating ranges of readers and other follow-on materials, developing means of monitoring, assessing and evaluating attainments, organizing local classes, recruiting and training facilitators, supporting and supervising classes – these are all functions that a government can opt either to reserve for itself, to

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11. Broadening and reinforcing the arguments in favour of literacy programmes are of course crucial in the competition for public resources. They underline the need for reliable monitoring and evaluation.

partner with others, to contract out to others, or simply to leave to others completely.

There is no systematic empirical evidence that would argue strongly for one of the six options rather than another, as each offers advantages and drawbacks. Experience with all six has yielded successes and disappointments in relatively equal measure. However, whichever option is selected would probably benefit from provisions to mobilize popular – and particularly local – community support. The reason is that, while literacy is a right, mastering its skills calls for considerable effort that has to be sustained over several months. It often requires that families, friends and local authorities give much moral encouragement to learners, which helps to keep their attendance regular and their skills and knowledge continuously advancing.

Placing responsibility for literacy: There is also no empirical evidence to guide the placement of a governmental agency for promoting literacy. The logical home for such an agency would seem to be the ministry of education, and this is indeed where most agencies are located. However, in some countries, the agency is under the ministry of labour or the ministry of social development. In at least one country, the agency was established under the Prime Minister's office. Ideally, as literacy is a set of transversal, cross-cutting or general skills, the agency should be established and financed in a manner that enables it most readily to arrange for literacy work to fit in with and support the efforts of other development-oriented ministries, such as those of labour, employment, social affairs, industry, agriculture, livestock, fisheries, forestry and similar departments.

The roles of other organizations

The preceding paragraphs imply that the roles of NGOs, whether local, national or international, will depend very much on their government's policies. Where pluralism is the norm, a range of organizations are likely to be active in promoting literacy – religious, social service, community-based and internationally-supported. Where there is insistence on a single ideological or religious view, only agencies in sympathy with that view are likely to be permitted to operate literacy programmes.

In pluralist societies, a non-governmental body may take on any role in promoting literacy that its resources and capabilities permit. If its resources are constrained and it is new to the field, it might do well to adopt the methods and materials that the government or other agency already experienced in literacy is using, and ask for its own staff to be trained in their use.

If, on the other hand, it has or wants to develop its own approach, methods and materials, it would probably be wise to consult the government, as well as other agencies working in literacy, about population groups who are currently not served by literacy programmes, and assess whether it could serve them. This would minimize the risk of either duplicating or competing with the work of other bodies.

Further, given the existing dearth of sound studies comparing the relative effectiveness of different learning methods, the agency would serve the entire literacy profession well, if it offered its work for systematic research and evaluation. Its roles would include that of pioneer of a fresh start and that of a careful contributor to tested and verified knowledge.

Options for overall strategy

A strategic decision facing educational planners of literacy work is the choice between the *campaign approach* and the *programmatic approach*. The difference between them is one of style.

Campaign strategy: The campaign approach treats illiteracy as a blight that requires drastic and dramatic action for its eradication. Through publicity, parades, street theatre and other devices, the campaign arouses enthusiasm and fervour among both literate and illiterate people, and almost imposes on them a moral, national and social duty to participate in classes as either instructors or learners. In this, the campaign recognizes that the motivation to learn literacy needs to be promoted, reinforced and sustained, as many adults not only find learning difficult, but also have other priorities and commitments that take up much of their time.

Although the word 'campaign' may give the impression of a short burst of action, this is not necessarily the case: a campaign may

be carried on over several years, but confine itself to a season of a few months in each year, for example during the winter in northern countries or during the dry season in some African countries, when farming populations have more time available to allocate to learning new skills and information.

A government may conduct a campaign on a national scale for several years, or it may confine the campaign to one or a few regions in a given year. Regions of the country that have not experienced the campaign would await their turn. Those that have already had the campaign would expect to continue building on its achievements and develop their adult education programmes in ways best suited to their contexts.

Other agencies that opt for the campaign approach clearly would not be able to achieve a national outreach. They would necessarily have to select a limited number of areas, communities or community groups in which to operate.

Programme strategy: The programmatic approach also recognizes the importance of the learners' motivation and of sustaining it over several months, preferably years. However, precisely because of the long-term nature of learning, of developing the uses of literacy, and of creating institutions for lifelong learning, this approach sets aside the principle of artificially arousing enthusiasm and moral fervour. Instead, it adopts quieter measures of discussion, support, encouragement and steady expansion.

Assessing the strategies: As with the six options on the role of governments, neither approach has an empirically verified advantage over the other. Both have had successful as well as disappointing experiences. Both need to implement the first or basic stage of helping people acquire literacy, and then follow up with provisions to continue learning to apply and develop their skills through other forms of education. The crucial factors for success in both approaches seem to have been the commitment, energy, effectiveness and consistency of the organizers and supporters of a campaign or programme, and the resources that they could mobilize locally and internationally.

National standard vs. decentralized variety

The foregoing discussion suggests the question whether national campaigns and programmes promoted standard curricula, instructional methods and learning materials, or allowed for variations to accommodate particular interests. The question actually touches on issues of language, finance, cost-effectiveness and *functionality*. Each of these will be examined in more detail later. For the moment, it is possible to say that, although a national campaign or programme can have a bias towards a centrally prescribed and standard set of curricula, methods and materials, it is not necessarily the case.

Options for functionality

There is universal agreement that literacy is not an end in itself. On the contrary, it needs to be oriented to uses, 'functions' and satisfactions. Very early examples of this realization were the primers designed for illiterate American soldiers during the First World War, 1914-1918. The texts were drawn from army life and demands, and the characters were ordinary soldiers trying to cope with the requirements of the military system. Later, in the 1950s, the well-known literacy advocate, Frank C. Laubach, surveyed the needs and desires of illiterate villagers in India, so that he could base the content of his primers on what would be relevant to them.

Consistent with this view, UNESCO and a dozen or so countries organized a large-scale experimental programme in functional, work-oriented literacy in the mid-1960s. In this, the content and vocabulary of the course was to be drawn from daily work, for example from cotton farming or manufacturing sisal rope, and supplemented with other desirable information. This meant that a programme required several curricula, each one addressing a quite separate occupation and interest group. Through this very specific focus, the learners would immediately see how literacy related to their own functions and could help them become more productive. They would then be more interested and more strongly motivated to persevere until they had mastered the skills.

Although the Work Oriented Adult Literacy Programme did not achieve the success expected – it was, after all, an experimental and

pioneering effort – it did help to establish more firmly the principle of linking literacy instruction with uses directly relevant to the adult learner. Indeed, the phrase 'functional literacy' remains very much in use. The question for the educational planner – whether a government official or a member of a voluntary body – is what uses or functions will be relevant to which groups of adult learners?

A common option adopted by many government programmes is to create literacy primers that cover many topics that the designers believe are – or at least should be – functional for adult learners. As most adult participants in current literacy programmes tend to be young women, many primers teach literacy through topics such as nutrition, child care, hygiene, family planning (reproductive health) and ranges of domestic issues. Civics, agriculture, horticulture, environmental issues, savings and credit, business management and social action can also feature in functional literacy texts. In effect, the texts become multi-functional with the intent and advantage of being relevant and appealing to several groups of adult learners. A second advantage of this approach is that it enables a government to print very large numbers of primers and reduce the cost of a single primer – and thus the unit costs for participants.

On the other hand, actual practice has revealed two disadvantages to this option. The first is that the people who suggest content for the primers tend to rely on their own perceptions of what the prospective learners already know and want to know. Only very exceptionally do they actually check with the prospective learners; market research or needs assessment has not so far been a skill common among them. The result is that primers often tell the adult learners what they already know and add nothing to their knowledge. Instead, what they offer and the way they present it can bore and annoy the learners, in which case the primers can actually encourage rather than prevent drop-out.

The second disadvantage is that each topic is necessarily treated superficially: if the learners wish to obtain information beyond the text, they need to rely on their facilitator or secure the services of a specialist in the topic. As facilitators tend, for the most part, not to know much more than their learners, they are often not in a position to help. Further, they also tend to experience great difficulty in securing help from a specialist.

In Indonesia, the Department of Community Education pursued a variant of this approach. It developed a range of 100 booklets, Package A, each dealing with a topic that the government deemed 'functional' and ranging in difficulty from very simple to slightly more difficult. Completing the first 20 satisfied the basic requirements for reading skills, while progress through the remainder depended on the interests of the learning group and the individual participants. On the whole, learners in some of Indonesia's districts with the lowest rates of literacy tended to make rapid progress through the booklets, which suggests that the levels of reading difficulty were well gauged and the intrinsic interest of the topics well assessed (Indonesia Ministry of Education and Culture, 1998).

Of course, functionality need not be restricted to the topics mentioned above. The campaign in Ecuador, for instance, used the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights as its basis for teaching literacy. Learners surprised educators with the strong interest they took in the subject. Religious groups, of course, welcome the ability to study and understand their sacred texts.

Non-governmental agencies are more than likely better placed to find out what topics and issues are particularly functional for particular groups of learners and to develop methods and materials that respond to those interests. One radical methodology, known as REFLECT, suggests that the most functional way is to start with no standard primers or alphabets at all. Instead, it helps a set of learners to analyze and portray themselves, their community and its way of life in maps, charts, matrices and other symbols. They thus become accustomed to perceiving their reality in terms of symbols and are better prepared to understand written words as just another form of symbol. It also brings out the issues that are uppermost in their minds and that would be functional for them to analyze in the symbols of reading and writing. In other words, the learners and facilitators together create a functional curriculum. As to actual outcomes, there is some controversy: some observers suggest that the methodology seems to be effective in stimulating and empowering learners to take action and deal with local problems, but less effective in encouraging and helping them to learn literacy. The proponents of REFLECT have replied that the empowerment of groups of people is the chief objective of their efforts; as long as that is achieved, the objective

of literacy can be secondary and less emphasized, particularly if the learners themselves see no immediate need for it.

Less radical, but on first reports equally functional and effective with literacy, is another method that also does without texts or primers. Piloted in Egypt under the CELL[12] project, it offers a structure that starts by considering the learners and their families, before moving on to their communities and then to the nation. In other words, the curriculum works its way from the known and familiar to the less known, which requires more information and thought. The literacy learning derives from the words that are actually used by the group at each stage. Initial assessments of 200 pilot classes with some 5,000 learners showed that groups that used this method had better attendance, completion and attainment rates in reading, writing and written calculation than groups that used a standard primer covering a large number of topics that the government's educational planners judged to be functional. On the other hand, the pilot groups enjoyed much closer and more frequent support than the other groups, and their facilitators enjoyed more training and re-training, so it is not clear whether the better performance was due to the method or to the training and support. Further, as would be expected, the costs of the pilot groups were much higher and it was not clear whether they were outweighed by the better performance.

Yet another approach, family literacy, capitalizes on a very powerful human motivation: the desire of parents for their children to do well in life. It harnesses that desire to stimulate parents to master literacy themselves. Its advocates see it as one programme to promote simultaneously two of the EFA goals: universal primary completion and a 50 per cent increase in the rate of adult literacy. Most experience with family literacy so far has come from countries with very high rates of literacy, like the United States of America, Canada and the United Kingdom. However, countries like Turkey, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Uganda have run some very promising programmes of their own. In essence, family literacy uses the primary school curriculum as the basis for teaching parents both literacy and parenting skills in supervising and supporting their

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12. CELL stands for Capacity Enhancement for Lifelong Learning. For a condensed version of the 2005 evaluation, see *Adult Education and Development, No. 65/2005: 35-58.*

children's attendance and learning in school, as well as in improving nutrition, hygiene and financial management. Conclusive evidence on the effectiveness of family literacy is not yet available. However, the signs are that, for the children, it does lead to higher enrolments in primary schools, better rates of attendance and perseverance (i.e. lower drop-out rates), and more effective learning. The outcomes for the parents appear to include not only literacy, but also better relations with their children, more supportive and co-operative relations with school teachers, and more confident relations with the education and local government administrations. On the other hand, family literacy is quite complex to organize and the additional costs it imposes on an education system are not yet clear.

'Literacy second': Except for REFLECT and family literacy, the methods described above deal with functions as part of literacy programmes: literacy is the main objective. Another option is to use functions as the main focus, with instruction in literacy shaped to support them – in effect, a variant on work-oriented literacy. This option has been called *literacy second*.[13] For example, a group of literate and illiterate people may have formed to press for social and political action to reduce and stop domestic violence. The content and vocabulary used to enable the group's illiterate members to master the skills of literacy would then be mainly drawn from the kinds of information, ideas, posters, pamphlets and letters necessary to support the group's aims.

On the limited evidence available, the method appears to be effective for both the main purposes of the group and literacy. However, it appears more easily suited to the operations of small organizations working with a small number of groups, than to the operations of a national government department managing a large-scale programme that necessarily has to work with ranges of interests and functions. From this point of view, the role that would best suit a government that wished to test this method would be that of Option 5 above – the state as a supervising contractor.

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13. The World Bank and the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association (IIZ/DVV) published a study of 'literacy second' approaches. It is listed under "Suggestions for further reading", Oxenham *et al.*, 2002.

Options for the choice of language

The discussion so far has tacitly assumed that the language of literacy instruction would be the same for all adult learners in the country. However, many countries – indeed, most developing countries – have many population groups who speak very different languages. Some of them may well have very different scripts or alphabets. Some of the languages may in fact have no written form at all. Multilingual countries tend also to have one or two official languages in which their national laws are encoded and the business of government conducted. In such situations, those who offer instruction in literacy and those who want to learn literacy have to negotiate which language and script they should choose.

In pedagogical terms, educational research has established that humans – both adults and children – learn most efficiently in the language with which they are most familiar. For most people this is of course their mother tongue. Ideally then, adult literacy learners should learn literacy in their mother tongue. In monolingual countries there is no issue. However, in multilingual countries practical questions do arise for both governments with their national responsibilities and non-governmental agencies that wish to do the best for their more limited clienteles. Not least among these practical questions is the political issue of which language policy prevails in a country. The issue is not trivial. Language is essential for communication and learning. It is also a matter of identity and affiliation: it helps determine who and what people think they are and identify with, and how they view other people.

Some governments insist on a monolingual approach in what are believed to be the interests of national unity, while other governments take the view that supporting diversity is the path to stronger unity. The current consensus of practitioners favours the latter: it points out that insisting on a single language for literacy can succeed only where a very large majority actually speaks that language as a mother tongue, or as a *lingua franca*[14] with which they are fully at ease.

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14. A *lingua franca* is a language used as a common language between speakers whose native languages are different.

Where this is not the case and yet where there is official insistence on using only an official or mainstream language, a number of undesirable effects can follow. First of all, instead of unifying the society, the practical difficulties of implementing the policy tend to increase the disadvantages and isolation of groups already at a disadvantage as a result of poverty, rural residence, cultural distinctions or other factors. From another angle, the policy biases those who do speak, read and write the official language to look down on those who do not, and unavoidably makes the latter feel inferior and second class – this is hardly a recipe for unity. On the contrary, it may foment resentment, non co-operation and, in extreme cases, rebellion.

Second, using a language that learners do not know and have not chosen for themselves can make the job of the instructors more difficult, slow down learning, increase the frustrations of the learners, encourage drop-out and overall make the programme less efficient, less cost-effective, and less productive in terms of successful graduates. On the other hand, if the learners have insisted on learning that language, each of these potential problems will be eased.

Third, refusing to encourage or simply support the development of minority languages makes it more likely that local knowledge and oral traditions and lore will be lost to the country. The policy can in effect impoverish the society.

That said, a policy in favour of multilingualism raises a number of practical questions that even an organization serving a single, small and relatively isolated community with its own language will need to face.

The very first one is: does the language of the community already have a written form? If not, does the organization have the capacity to develop an alphabet for the language?[15] If not, does it have the resources to import such capacity? How much time is likely to be required for the task, and then for the next task of developing a

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15. Religious missionary societies, e.g. SIL (formerly the Summer Institute of Linguistics) have been particularly prominent in developing alphabets for languages without written scripts of their own. Papua New Guinea and many countries in Africa furnish examples.

relevant and appealing curriculum? At the next level, what purposes would literacy in the community's language serve? Would they be clear and attractive enough to make people want to learn literacy and spend many months labouring at it? What forms of literature might be developed in the language to enable the community to sustain and reinforce their reading skills? Who would develop it? Who would reproduce it in sufficient quantities to serve the community? Who would pay? What time scale would be needed?

Alternatively, would literacy in the community's language serve only as a first step towards becoming literate in a more widely spoken language, or a *lingua franca* that is understood across most of the country, or towards learning and becoming literate in an official language that offers access to government and legal documents and literature?[16] Would members of the community insist – against advice – on learning the official language first, before they embark on learning literacy? Does the organization have the capacity to teach people the official language sufficiently well to enable them to become literate in it also?

Identical questions, but on a larger scale, would of course confront larger NGOs, if they worked with several separate communities, each with a different language. Governments would face the same questions on the largest scale of all. They may well find that some of the country's languages have such small numbers of mother-tongue speakers as to make programmes for them appear uneconomic in terms of creating and reproducing instructional materials. They may also find that the recorded literatures of these languages are so small that attempting to sustain literacy in them would be similarly uneconomical. Yet explicit decisions to exclude a language could well provoke political problems, so that careful assessments of possibilities and costs are in order.[17]

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16. At least one government (that of Namibia) has used successful progression through two years of learning literacy in a mother tongue as a qualification for moving on to learning the official language (English), both orally and in writing.

17. Although the Namibia National Literacy Programme planned to reach around a quarter of a million people in its first stage, it produced primers in no fewer than 10 languages and readers in nine, i.e. in small quantities that were uneconomical, but were judged socially and pedagogically necessary.

Fortunately, two facts facilitate resolutions to the issue. The first has to do with methods and how the skills of literacy are learned; the second is sociological or to do with how people in multilingual societies make their way in life.

Old methods of teaching literacy depend on printed primers and texts and need normally to print large volumes of each primer and follow-on book to keep the prices affordable. However, more recent methods like REFLECT depend very little on primers, readers and other existing literature to lay the ground for literacy. Instead, they draw much more on the local environment, culture, practices, problems and vocabularies to help people grasp what literacy is about. They need only instructors or facilitators familiar enough with the language and with a sufficient grasp of how to communicate the principles of literacy to non-literate people. On that basis, non-literate people even in unwritten languages can build the foundations for literacy for themselves, as experience with the small and scattered communities in Papua New Guinea has demonstrated.

However, even the practitioners of REFLECT would need to be sure that learning literacy in a language used by few people is not a dead end for their learners. They would need to connect the skills to uses valuable enough to motivate the latter to keep developing their skills and to apply them to becoming literate in a language more widely used for communications with the larger society. Challenges to help write down hitherto unwritten lore, legends, history and laws may indeed stimulate people to extend their literacy skills.

The sociological observation is that in multilingual countries, most people tend to be fluent in at least two languages and can learn without too much difficulty in the second. Only small minorities, who live in communities so isolated that they have little contact with the wider society, are likely to speak only their own language. Where the second language is a *lingua franca* familiar to most people, the choice of a single language for instruction could well be feasible, and has in fact been successful. Such a choice of course serves also to promote social and national cohesion and at least to mitigate divisive tendencies. Indeed, there are situations where divisive tendencies are strong enough for governments to insist on a language policy that outlaws the development or educational use of minority languages in any way. While such a policy may not be ideal

from a pedagogical point of view, its potential ill effects are offset by the likelihood that most people are familiar to some degree with the *lingua franca*.

Where none of the indigenous languages is sufficiently widely known to serve as a *lingua franca*, a choice has to be made between three options: first, the mother tongue; second, another language spoken by a large number of people and familiar to the prospective learners; and third, an official language that may be neither indigenous nor known by many people, for example English and French in a number of countries. As regards the second option, many governments have chosen to run programmes in several languages – 15 languages in Ghana, and 7 in Zambia. As would be expected, the third option – teaching through an official language – is the most problematic to implement, if only because of the difficulty of finding people who are both familiar with it and who live in those communities where they are most needed – i.e. in poor, mostly rural and relatively isolated places.

Options for facilitators/instructors

Most literacy programmes do not engage a permanent corps of literacy facilitators/instructors. They tend to rely on what might be called *seasonal workers*, who facilitate classes only for as long as the classes last. The reason is that in most developing countries most of the classes form in the rural areas, where most of the learners, both women and men, are agriculturalists, whose workloads vary substantially with the season. During cultivation and harvest times, most find it impossible to attend classes, so there is no work for the facilitators.

The situation could of course be different in urban areas; municipal governments and other agencies could assess the option of forming a permanent corps of trained adult educators to facilitate not only basic literacy classes, but also programmes of diversified lifelong education to respond to the changing needs of their towns and cities.

Job description: literacy + functionality + income generation? Since literacy programmes moved from offering only literacy, many have aimed to enable their learners to advance in three distinct spheres:

(1) basic literacy skills; (2) functional information, with associated changes in attitudes and practices; and (3) income-generating skills. The expansion of scope necessitated a revision of what was to be expected of the facilitators/instructors. Five options have been used in various programmes, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

The most common is to have the facilitators deal only with literacy and basic information about hygiene, health, nutrition, agriculture, civics and other topics judged to be important for personal, social and economic development. This enables large numbers of people with relatively modest educational qualifications and general information to be trained to facilitate classes.

A second option involves equipping the facilitator with sufficient knowledge and skills to handle all three spheres. The implications for investment in training and technical support are so substantial, that in no known case has the implementation been fully satisfactory. Nevertheless, in at least one country, some facilitators who have run income-generating projects with their learners have experienced better attendance and completion rates than their colleagues who have confined themselves to literacy and functional knowledge.

The third option is to encourage facilitators to invite technical specialists such as health, agricultural or veterinary personnel to visit their classes to supplement the information offered in the primers. The general experience with this option has been less than satisfactory. One reason is that many facilitators do not have the necessary contacts with technical personnel. Another is that facilitators do not have the resources to compensate technical specialists for their travel expenses or time.

Fourth, the government of Indonesia used generalist facilitators for the first stages of its literacy programme, then offered the learners the possibility of continuing with a technical specialist of their choice. The offer proved sufficiently popular for many of the specialist groups to have attracted people who had been to school, and who tended to outnumber the literacy learners.

The fifth option is to start with a facilitator who is already a specialist in a field that the learners want to learn, and who can help with both literacy and the speciality. As far as is known, only

non-governmental agencies have been able to take this route and implement it on a relatively limited scale in fields like savings and credit, business management or social action.

Selecting the most appropriate option or combination of options for a particular programme will depend on its particular aims, scope and resources.

Volunteer or paid facilitators? Literacy programmes have two main options when they recruit facilitators/instructors: They can engage them as unpaid volunteers offering a public service to their neighbours, or as remunerated employees. Within those two main options, there are of course some sub-options. Volunteers can be both wholly unpaid and unrewarded or they can be offered some kind of token or material recognition. Employed facilitators, for their part, can be engaged on a permanent, part-time, seasonal or even hourly basis. The information available does not enable any reliable comparisons on effectiveness between either the two main groups or the sub-groups. The only observation safely possible is that some long-term programmes opened with a strictly voluntary approach, but eventually found it necessary to dilute it with defined – if modest – honoraria and material rewards. On the other hand, campaigns such as those in Cuba, Nicaragua and Ecuador, and the Total Literacy Movement in India, have shown that it is possible to recruit large numbers of people for intensive efforts over relatively brief periods of time.[18]

The case for paying facilitators is persuasive. Although their training is likely to be relatively short (two weeks or less on average), they are doing a quasi-professional job that is important for the overall development of the country; it will help determine whether the country achieves its MDGs, and for this they need educational and personal qualifications and skills. In addition, although many facilitators may have full-time jobs that are adequately remunerated

18. Although all the campaigns used various forms of moral pressure to encourage people to volunteer, the efforts in India are not really comparable with those in the other three countries. The governments of the latter even closed the secondary schools and fully equipped the students to go out and live with rural families who needed to learn literacy. The campaigns in India, on the other hand, depended on unpaid volunteers from the local communities.

(school teachers are an example, especially in rural areas and small towns), many others are poor and earn low and uncertain incomes. It seems only just that their time and efforts should be remunerated.

On the other hand, accepting the case can cause problems for governments, if not for other agencies. Obviously, paying the facilitators raises the cost of a programme, and their payment may come to constitute the main item of expenditure, amounting to as much as 30 per cent of the unit cost. Governments might well need to raise substantially the priority of adult education in the competition for national and educational resources and to reduce or cut expenditures elsewhere. Second, in Namibia, where the government did pay the facilitators a regular fee, facilitators soon argued that as teachers they should receive payment proportionate to the salaries of primary school teachers for the time they spent in class. On winning that argument, they then argued with equal success that they should be paid also for the time they spent in preparing for their lessons. Finally, they argued that, like all public servants, they should receive annual cost-of-living increments of salary. In South Africa, the government engaged facilitators on seasonal contracts, the season being the period during which literacy classes could run. Arguing that the need for lifelong learning and education made permanent and full-time engagements necessary, a number of facilitators took to the streets in demonstrations against the government.

Anticipating precisely such problems, the Ghana Government refused absolutely to countenance anything but volunteer facilitators. However, it did accept that volunteer effort should be recognized and possibly rewarded. It offered up-front recognition in the form of electric torches, raincoats and Wellington boots, so that facilitators could reach their classes safely at night and in the rain. At the end of the course, facilitators who took their classes through to completion could be rewarded with bicycles, sewing machines, or even motorcycles for particularly long-serving and meritorious people.[19]

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19. A factor that can influence the scale of monetary reward is the proportion of instructors/facilitators who have stable, permanent jobs. Such people (school teachers are a common example, in rural areas especially) enjoy some remuneration as a welcome supplement to their salaries. However, they do not need it to the same degree as a person who depends on casual employment or petty trading. Where large proportions of the instructors/facilitators are poor and do not have reliable streams of income, pressure for monetary rewards is likely to be strong.

The Senegal Government invited proposals for local literacy programmes from non-governmental and community-based organizations, and offered contracts to implement the proposals selected. Part of the contract was a fixed payment for the facilitators. If the contracting organization decided to pay them more, the additional amount was its own responsibility. As far as is known, no organization paid its facilitators more than the government's allowance.

In sum, programmes run by governments may need, on the one hand, to maximize reliability, continuity and accountability among facilitators/instructors, and on the other to avoid demands for permanent and increasingly expensive public employment. The least problematic short-term option may be to design non-monetary recognition in a form that immediately confers some clear and special social status on facilitators, and over the longer term raises the potential productivity of their livelihoods. For the longer term, governments will need to consider their options for sustainable systems of lifelong education for all.

Programmes run by NGOs have recently tended to offer their facilitators salaries, some on scales more generous than those of the government. The organizations can defend their rates on the grounds that they tend to give their facilitators much more training than their government counterparts, so that their general professional level is rather better. They also expect higher levels of performance. Of course, the international connections of many of these organizations also enable them to offer better rates, while their legal position affords them more discretion in fixing levels and terms of remuneration.

Options for meeting costs

Governments and non-governmental agencies have a number of options for meeting the costs of running a literacy programme. They range from variations on the principle of 'user pays' through forms of mixed financing, to a simple acceptance by the government or sponsoring agency of all the costs involved. This discussion starts with the user – the learner – and moves outwards to the central authorities of either the government or the sponsoring non-governmental agency.

User pays: It is widely accepted that people tend to value what they have to pay for and, conversely, to be wasteful with whatever comes to them free of charge. This view is the basis of asking even the very poorest people to contribute according to their means to the costs of a literacy programme. They might pay for their primers at a subsidized price or contribute in cash or kind to the remuneration of their facilitator. Alternatively, they might be asked only to buy their own paper and pencils, while the programme supplies the primers and meets the other costs.

On the other hand, many programmes take the view that the people who enter literacy classes are usually so poor that even the smallest contribution demanded can hinder their enrolment. Indeed, the opportunity cost of their giving up their time to learn at the expense of some other possibly remunerative work is in itself a kind of payment and contribution. A middle course seems fair – for instance asking learners who can afford the costs to pay, and exempting those who cannot. In practice, such a course can be complicated to implement, and can of course lead to dissension within classes over who should or should not pay. Non-governmental agencies, particularly religious ones, will likely be better placed than government bodies to operate a compromise of this nature.

Community contribution: Because many poor people need moral support from their families and communities to enrol and persevere in a literacy course, communities might be invited to set up funds to help with local costs, such as partially remunerating the facilitators, providing lamps and oil for evening classes, contributing to the purchase of primers, readers, writing materials and so on. Raising the funds can be done either by routine levies or by organizing special fundraising drives and activities. It might also be possible to attract contributions from businesses that are either local or that do some proportion of their sourcing or sales in the area. In some countries there are national lotteries, which by their constitutions have to contribute to local projects for social and educational development and to which a community could apply for help.

Local government: Where tax-raising powers are granted by central government to lower tiers of authority like municipalities and districts, the latter could initiate, fund or co-finance literacy

work. Central governments may also have cost-sharing schemes, by which local governments can initiate an approved scheme and claim part of the cost from the centre. Local governments are, in addition, well placed to mobilize further support from the private sector operating within their boundaries, as well as from wider sections of the population.

Central government: Earlier, the discussion observed that the EFA goal of halving the rate of adult illiteracy by 2015 makes government action indispensable. It also makes government financing indispensable. This is not an option. The question is only what options are open to the government of a country with a substantial rate of adult illiteracy (above 25 per cent overall).[20]

It goes almost without saying that the government's resources are likely to be severely constrained, so that its first two options will be either to alter its priorities in allocating its current resources, or to seek new resources. The latter option opens three more questions: should it seek the new resources from within the country, from the international community, or from both?[21] If it approaches the international community, should it seek the resources as grants, loans, or a mixture of the two? It may be the case that its success with the international community will be proportionate to the energy and success of its efforts to mobilize fresh resources from within the country itself.

Maximizing resources for literacy will probably require governments to maximize the varieties of partnerships, both domestic and international, that promise to generate the necessary money, materials and human resources.

Budgeting for costs: As would be expected, the items of cost associated with literacy programmes are very similar to those of other educational programmes. In terms of costs per learner, most literacy programmes appear to cost somewhat less than primary

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20. The EFA Global Monitoring Report for 2006 lists 47 countries where the official rate of illiteracy is above 25 per cent overall. It also lists 71 countries where the official rate of illiteracy is likely to remain above 10 per cent in 2015.

21. These options of course also face non-governmental agencies that strive to organize literacy programmes.

school, and most government literacy programmes tend to attract about 1 per cent of the total national education budget. In *Table 3.1* below, an attempt has been made to distil what has been learned from the costs of several programmes into an indicative framework of cost items and the proportion of costs that each tends to absorb. The table aims to accommodate all programmes, i.e. those that are run wholly by government agencies, as well as those that are either the initiatives of voluntary bodies or have been contracted out by the government to private, voluntary or community agencies.

Table 3.1   Indicative framework for the categories and distribution of the costs of literacy programmes in developing countries

Item	Rough % to be allocated	% (cumulative)
1. Instructional materials development and production	13	13
2. Training (and refresher training) for literacy facilitators, specialist trainers and immediate supervisors	15	28
3. Remunerating facilitators, specialist trainers and field supervisors	30	58
4. Training and other forms of capacity building and institutional strengthening for public and private agencies	13	71
5. Operational and administrative expenses (offices, vehicles, lighting, fuel, consumables, distribution of materials)	15	86
6. Monitoring, evaluation, research	4	90
7. Encouraging schemes of savings, credit and enterprise development (most programmes have not attempted this, but those that have seem to have been successful)	10	100

Options for phasing

Areas of dense population, such as cities, large villages or littoral ribbon settlements, may include numbers of unschooled people whose occupations enjoy a stable and consistent rhythm of work throughout the year. They permit literacy courses to be scheduled throughout all seasons with little variation. However, in most countries that have high rates of adult illiteracy and aim to halve them by 2015, rural populations engage predominantly in agriculture. They also provide most of the adults who want to learn literacy. Two thirds and more of those adults are likely to be women with young children. These facts imply that most of these people will face seasons of the year when they simply will not have the time or energy to spare to attend literacy classes. They will also have seasons of the year when time will be relatively plentiful and available for learning new skills. Educational planners concerned with ensuring regular attendance, low drop-out, high completion and satisfactory attainments need to tailor literacy programmes to fit these facts.

On the other hand, they need also to take into account the facts that (a) mastering the skills of literacy to the points of fluency and frequent use requires between 300 and 500 hours[22] of learning and practice by the average adult; (b) not practising skills leads to their deterioration and being forgotten; and (c) long gaps between phases of a course tend to raise drop-out and non-completion rates. Educational planners then have to balance the pedagogical need for continuity and steady progress against needs of the learners' lifestyles. They have to think in terms of phases of learning interrupted by, or alternated with, phases of other activities. The phases of learning need to be long and intense enough to enable sufficient progress to satisfy the learners and keep them learning. The other phases need to be short enough to minimize forgetting and losing interest. In large countries with a variety of climatic patterns, national planners may have to think in terms of several patterns of phasing. For their part, non-governmental planners will likely be dealing with more limited and more manageable environments.

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22. The time needed depends on the complexity of the writing system and the consistency of spelling patterns. English, for instance, has a simple writing system but very inconsistent spelling patterns, which make it difficult for both children and adults to master.

IV.   Options for implementation on the ground

In this chapter the options for actually setting up classes on the ground and peopling them with adults who want to learn literacy will be considered. Although a number of options can be conceived, a particular factor has narrowed them down to a virtual consensus that all programmes should be based, in some clear and concrete sense, on the community of which the learners are members. The factor is an irony in literacy programmes: although literacy is a human right, many people have to be motivated to enrol for it. The previous chapter mentioned campaigns as an example of such motivating exercises. However, many of those who enrol eagerly and without outside pressure nevertheless need to be motivated to attend classes regularly and to persevere until they have mastered reading and writing. Several factors help explain the paradox.

One is the sheer mental and manual labour involved – sustaining attention to unfamiliar material and learning to shape relatively small letters and numbers can be tiring and sometimes a bit painful. A second factor is the time involved – several hours a week over several months are taken from other priorities and commitments, domestic, economic and social. A third set of factors could be physical – the difficulty in seeing what is on a writing-board, chart or poster, or discomfort in sitting still in cramped conditions for a couple of hours. A fourth factor could be morale – discouragement at slow progress, boredom with uninspired facilitation, uneasy relations with fellow learners or with the facilitator, or conflicts in the family about the time taken from other tasks.

Community base: Whatever the complexity of such discouraging factors, literacy programmes, or even programmes following the literacy second approach, have found that adult literacy learners need considerable moral support if they are all to attend regularly, complete the course and attain the skills they seek.[23] Such support has

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23.   For practical purposes, the word "all" here may be taken to mean between 80 and 90 per cent. Few programmes can attain 100 per cent attendance for 100 per cent of the class sessions or 100 per cent completion, let alone 100 per cent attainment in fluent reading, writing and written calculation.

to come from the learning group as a whole, from the families of the learners, and, above all, from the community. The local campaigns of India's Total Literacy Movement, the approach of the REFLECT programmes in several countries and the CELL project in Egypt, to name only three, are the most recent expressions of this growing conviction that without focused community support, literacy classes are likely to be inefficient in retaining large proportions of their learners and thus relatively ineffective in expanding literacy.

In principle, a programme could provide some form of attendance monitor from its own resources. The functionary would be responsible for checking attendance in a number of classes and then visiting absentees to try to coax them back to class. In practice, government programmes have encountered great difficulty in providing even occasional and sporadic supervision for classes with support and advice for the learners and facilitators. To provide daily monitoring and follow-up of attendance at public cost would be simply out of the question. Well resourced and possibly internationally financed non-government programmes might well be able to provide such monitoring and follow-up. However, unless it was sensitively designed, staffed and conducted, such a mechanism could well provoke resentment from both learners and their families.

A second option is to help a class form its own monitoring committee. Its members could note absentees and, after the class closed for the day, visit them to discover the causes of their absence and see what help might ensure continued attendance.

A third option is to invite the wider community of the class to arrange for some form of attendance monitoring and encouragement. In one community in Egypt, for instance, an attendance committee would visit an absentee as a group to enquire about the causes of absence and possible needs for help. Customs of hospitality obliged the absentee to provide tea and eatables for the entire group and thus acted as a mild deterrent to absence and a helpful encouragement to regular attendance.

In this example, enlisting the help of the community was possible, because the entire programme had started with the community. Officially recognized community leaders had first been consulted on the need for and acceptability of a literacy programme. Then,

a survey had been carried out of the people who would appreciate having a programme, the kind of programme they would find helpful and the milieu in which the programme could be based. That survey also took care to identify people who were not official leaders, but in whom neighbours had confidence, who were thus influential and who were also actively interested in supporting literacy work. These people were then invited to form an advisory and monitoring committee for the literacy work, and developed their informal mode of gentle pressure and encouragement to ensure regular attendance at class.

Experiences of this kind are the basis for the consensus that literacy programmes, whether governmental or non-governmental, should associate the local community in helping to plan its formation, content and governance. While the principle holds for all literacy programmes, it can be particularly important where multilingual issues with their choices of language, acknowledgement of local cultures and longer-term directions for the learners are involved.

Mobilizing learners: Once a community and its leaders have agreed on a structure and processes of support for the learners and classes, three distinctive options are available for mobilizing the learners. A fourth option is to combine the three in various ways to suit particular communities.

General mobilization: The first option, which unsurprisingly is the most frequently used, is to advertise the formation of classes by public proclamation and word of mouth, in addition to appropriate posters, and to invite interested people to join a class. Campaigns, of course, can supplement these means with street theatre, parades, special songs, door-to-door calls and so on. Although the approach is general, it relies on individual responses, supported whenever possible by family members or friends.

Group grafting: The second option appeals to groups or associations that may already exist in a community for special purposes. Those purposes could perhaps be furthered to greater effect if the members were literate or if more of their members were literate. Recruiting the groups to form their own literacy sub-groups and assisting them to adopt or develop curricula in close support of their purposes would serve five aims: (1) demonstrating to the

learners in a very direct and immediate way the needs for and uses of literacy; (2) securing close and involved moral support to supplement the community's; (3) increasing the chances of good attendance, retention, completion and attainment rates; (4) raising the effectiveness of the group; and (5) raising the effectiveness of the literacy programme. In short, literacy is grafted onto the main workings of the group and depends on a group response that would put it into effect.

While this option is open to all programmes, small-scale and non-governmental programmes would likely find it easier to implement, simply because they are likely to deal with far fewer communities than national programmes.

Box 1.   Adult literacy programmes in Indonesia

Indonesia has had more than half a century of experience in delivering adult literacy programmes. The Indonesian Government has done most of the work. It may be the only government that has borrowed money from the World Bank on interest-bearing terms to supplement its own efforts. Between 1977 and 1999, the country borrowed nearly US$123 million and reached at least 21 million people. By 2002, the adult illiteracy rate had declined to just 10.49 per cent. Spurred by the 2000 Dakar EFA goal of halving the rate of illiteracy by 2015, the government resolved to achieve that target by 2009.

Structure

The government used its established structures for education and local government to implement the programme. Official village heads were responsible for assisting local education officials to organize and support classes. Village primary school teachers were expected to give a lead by volunteering to teach.

Operational strategy

The operational strategy combined a community base with government technical and material support to identify adult students and mobilize instructors. Although it initially relied on volunteers, the programme soon found it necessary to offer honoraria to retain their services. However, many primary school teachers taught literacy classes for only nominal rewards, well below the official poverty income.

Pedagogical strategy

Two strategies ran parallel to each other for some time. Both strategies used only the official language, *Bahasa Indonesia*, as the medium of instruction. From 1966 to 1979, Indonesia used a functional approach that worked to increase the productivity and literacy of selected illiterate groups. To this end, the government co-operated with private firms and other institutions with illiterate workers involved in agriculture, veterinary medicine and a range of industries. From 1970 onwards, Indonesia also implemented the Package A Program. This used a set of 100 booklets of increasing complexity to follow the concept of 'a spiral circle': teaching and learning started from personal daily life issues and 'spiralled' up to family and community issues. Supporting materials included posters, shorter leaflets and folders. A person who completed the first 20 booklets was deemed to have mastered basic literacy, while completion of all 100 equated with the completion of four years of primary school. The Package A Program succeeded to a degree sufficient to earn the Avicenna Award from UNESCO in 1994.

In the current drive to halve the illiteracy rate by 2009 and increase the adult literacy rate to 95 per cent, the government is focusing on the nine provinces which have the highest illiteracy rates. In addition to urging local governments and the Indonesian Teachers Association to increase their commitment to the goal, it is involving NGOs that have had substantial but separate literacy programmes of their own.

Outcomes

The completion rates appear to have been high – between 75 and 88 per cent – while achievements in the skills of reading, writing and written calculation showed satisfactory averages, even though the ranges were very wide. Follow-up evaluation suggested that most adult students retained their skills for several years after instruction, despite a general lack of reading materials and few calls for writing. Skills in written calculations showed some improvement.

For further reading see Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, 1998.

Group formation: Where there are no ready-formed associations or where there is room for even more associations, there is an option to identify common interests that wider literacy in the community would promote, and around which a new group or association could be formed. The implication is that, in any given community, a number of new groups or associations could arise, each with its

own tailored literacy curriculum. Implementing the option would clearly require more work and be more time-consuming than 'group grafting', as well as a general mobilization. These factors would tend to place the option more within the reach of the community and non-governmental organizations, and less feasible for large government programmes.

Family base: In some countries, there are population groupings that live so near each other that they appear to be communities. However, reasons of migration, enforced resettlement or asylum-seeking mean that they are not really communities. Indeed, there can be strong suspicion and mistrust between them. In such conditions, there might be the option of family-based classes, where learners and facilitators are all drawn from kinship networks. They can identify the uses of literacy that most appeal to them or to various sub-groups within them and help to develop a set of appropriate curricula. Again, while in principle this option would be open to all kinds of organizations, it may be managed more easily by smaller and non-governmental organizations.

Mobilizing facilitators/instructors: Identifying and mobilizing the right kinds of people to be facilitators is at the heart of effectively implementing a literacy programme. The quality of teaching and facilitation is perhaps the weightiest factor in determining the success of a class on indicators of attendance, completion and attainment. Programmes then need to assess carefully their options in the matter. A number appear viable, of which none can be singled out as best or especially good practice by the evidence available.

Minimum qualifications? The first issue is whether programmes should require potential facilitators or instructors to have a minimum educational level, such as a complete primary education or even a complete secondary education. This is an obvious and convenient initial criterion of quality, as it indicates that the potential facilitator is at least literate. On the other hand, experience in a number of countries suggests that some of the more effective facilitators have never been to school. Instead, they are themselves graduates of literacy classes and have picked up and developed their skills through their own experience. In many locations and communities, it may be necessary to make use of every literate person available. Demanding

formal educational qualifications might then be counterproductive and prevent a programme from benefiting from locally available talent. As a general rule then, it seems advisable for programmes not to limit their potential resources and options by setting arbitrary[24] educational levels as minimum qualifications for facilitators.

Rather, the overall expectation should be that any person who is willing to act as a facilitator and who can demonstrate ability to teach literacy and work with groups of unschooled adult learners is likely to be a resource for a literacy programme. Where a potential facilitator's own literacy skills are not formally validated by a school or literacy certificate, it should be possible to devise locally appropriate examinations and aptitude tests to verify them. The option to do so would more than likely result in a programme that attracts a range of potential facilitators, whose cultural backgrounds, literacy and other attainments differ very widely. This would affect the design of the courses to train instructors, since the literacy and communication skills of university graduates could well be rather stronger than those of graduates of literacy classes. This point will be raised below in the discussion of options for training facilitators.

Primary school teachers? One of the issues in assessing the suitability of people as teachers of adults has been the appropriateness of involving primary school teachers in adult education. It is argued on the basis of a number of actual observations that their profession of teaching young children ingrains habits that disable them from teaching adults effectively. On the other hand, other observations in several countries have attested that many primary school teachers teach adults very effectively and are well appreciated by their learners. No known study has systematically assessed the balance between the two sets of observations. In pragmatic terms, maximizing the resources available to a programme would counsel that assessments of the suitability of primary school teachers proceed on a person-to-person basis: recruit primary teachers who show the willingness and ability to adapt their teaching style to accommodate adults,

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24. The use of the term 'arbitrary' is justified by recent findings in many countries that young people with five or six years of primary schooling are still unable to read or write acceptably. See, for example, the SACMEQ Policy Reports published by IIEP, and Greaney, Khandker and Alam (1999).

and decline the services of teachers who appear inflexible in their teaching habits.

How to recruit? Once the decisions are set on the general criteria for selecting facilitators, several options are available for recruiting them. Some campaigns have brought strong moral pressure – in some cases amounting almost to coercion – to bear on school teachers, secondary school and university students and members of particular political parties to serve as literacy facilitators. These campaigns have been able to record considerable success, in terms both of literacy attainments and of promoting stronger social cohesion. At the present time, however, most governments would likely prefer to rely on more voluntary approaches.

The most common approach so far has been simply to publicize a programme and to call for literate people to come forward. Those who do and satisfy the local criteria are then allocated to a learning group on a basis convenient to both the group and the facilitator, and later invited to a training course. This option has served many programmes satisfactorily.

A second option is first to help groups of learners to form and then encourage them to seek out and invite a qualified friend to be trained and rewarded as their facilitator. Where the group already exists for some other purpose, identifying a qualified friend is of course often easier. In some instances the programme accepts the friend simply on the basis of the group's recommendation, while in others the programme applies some kind of validation test or forms a selection committee of local leaders to assess the suitability of the recommendation. If the committee has doubts about the abilities of the person recommended, it asks the group to reconsider and recommend somebody else.

A third option, used where facilitators receive an official stipend, is to invite people to apply for approval as instructors and, if approved, to recruit their own learners from among their families and neighbours. If potential learners are not available in the instructor's neighbourhood, the programme can identify communities in need of instructors and advise the approved applicants to seek learners there. The option appears to have worked sufficiently well that at least one programme has used it over a number of years.

As remarked at the beginning of this section, none of these options appears to be superior to the others in operational outcomes. Each produces a range of performances: some of its facilitators are very good, while others are less good and still others either abandon their classes or are abandoned by them. The evidence available does not enable comparative estimates of the proportions of each category of performance. Operationally, then, each programme will need to decide which option – or mix of options – appears best suited to the conditions of its learners.

Training and supporting facilitators/instructors: Considerable empirical evidence confirms what most educators would think obvious: the facilitator is the most influential factor in determining the success of learners. The commitment and skill of a facilitator influences the regularity of learners' attendance, their perseverance and their attainments. Effective facilitators tend to have high attendance rates, high rates of perseverance and completion, low drop-out rates and good attainment rates. Further, with such facilitators, the differences between the learners with the highest attainments and those with the lowest tend to be narrower than the average. In this light, preparing facilitators for their roles and maximizing their morale and skills should form a central element of any programme.

Despite this observation, there is a question whether preparation in the form of explicit training is needed. By definition, persons selected to be facilitators already know literacy and have the experience of being taught the skills. They should therefore be able in turn to teach them to other people. At least one programme is known to operate on this principle, in which people apply to be facilitators, and the programme authorizes and pays them to organize one or more classes, and equips them with primers and teaching guides, but does not routinely offer them any training for the role. It does, however, offer them occasional support in the form of visits from supervisors, who advise them on dealing with issues of pedagogy or class management. This option does have the advantage of keeping the costs of a programme down.

Box 2.   Senegal's *faire-faire* approach

Like many other countries, Senegal had a government literacy programme, besides which several NGOs ran their own adult education work. Dissatisfaction with the scale and performance of the government programme led to the trial in the early 1990s of a new, very decentralized approach called *faire-faire* or *making things happen*. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the International Development Association (IDA – the arm of the World Bank that offers interest-free credits) helped finance the experiment. The aims of the new approach went beyond literacy to promoting the development and capacities of civil society and community-based organizations and supporting the development of the country's several indigenous languages. Its general success led to later phases of expansion and improvement.

Structure

Under *faire-faire*, the main responsibility for organizing and delivering literacy instruction was contracted out to a number of NGOs – some national, most community-based – while the Ministry of Education retained responsibility for supervising the adequacy and quality of the literacy instruction. Intermediate structures included a national committee for assessing and awarding contracts, a body to manage the contracts and contractual payments and to train small and rural organizations in how to bid for contracts and to account for their funds, and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation.

Operational strategy

The principle of the strategy was to rely on qualified local organizations to identify the literacy needs of their communities and to organize the instruction required, while the government enabled them with training and finance to do so. The organizations could choose to teach in the language of their communities. Their contracts with the government included a standard sum of money to pay the people who were trained and acted as instructors – there was no reliance on volunteers.

Pedagogical strategy

No standard pedagogical strategy was laid down, although training, if needed, was available from approved sources. Local organizations could use what instructional materials they preferred, provided the latter had been approved by the Ministry of Education.

Outcomes

The approach proved very popular and spread very quickly. In terms of literacy instruction, average completion rates exceeded 80 per cent, with satisfactory attainments as measured by assessments of skills in reading, writing, written arithmetic and technical knowledge. Despite a certain degree of failure and instances of fraud on the part of both community organizations and government officials, an evaluation in 2003 concluded that:

> Diversifying the educational supply involves more than a dozen adult functional literacy programs and alternative models for young people's education. These various programs have made it possible to enrol more than a million learners, which has led to reducing the level of illiteracy from 68.9% to 46.1% and decreasing gender disparities ... (ADEA, 2003: 10).

As regards strengthening civil society, the number of bodies that could bid credibly for contracts grew from 90 in 1995 to more than 500 by 2003. Their capacities in programme management and in diversifying their activities have expanded. The continuous and reliable funding of their work has helped consolidate their capabilities, as well as enhance their professionalism.

For further reading see ADEA, 2003.

Three further points can be made in its favour. The first is that many programmes that do offer training organize courses that last only three or four days. They clearly assume that the necessary pedagogical skills are easily learned. If they were indeed so easily learned, facilitators should be able to learn them from the teaching guides that most programmes produce to accompany their primers. The resources, organizational effort and time expended are arguably superfluous. Second, despite such training and despite even longer courses of up to 14 days or more, observations of literacy classes in actual operation tend to report that, in fact, most literacy facilitators do not use the special methods taught in the courses. Instead, they revert to the ways their own teachers taught them literacy in school. Furthermore, in several programmes, the learners themselves have voiced a preference to learn literacy in the way that their children

learn it in school, rather than with 'newfangled' methods. In short, the training is ineffective, unwanted and therefore wasteful.[25]

Opposed to this view is the entire adult education profession. They point out that adults do learn differently from children. Teaching adults as though they were children presents the risk of boring them and leads to disappointing rates of attendance, completion and attainment, and to high drop-out rates. The record of many programmes supports this view. Indeed, the enormous efforts and ingenuity dedicated over the past 50 years or so to developing fresh ways of engaging and sustaining adults in literacy are clear symptoms of the unsatisfactory nature of the traditional methods. These fresh ways have to be explained and demonstrated to facilitators, who in turn need to be able to practise them before applying them in their classes and achieving a high quality of facilitation. In addition, the almost unanimous current consensus is that literacy should be only one component of a wider education or training programme. What all this requires is more and better training for facilitators.

The need to contain costs leads many programmes to shorten their training to just a few days, usually between 3 and 14 days – vastly less than is required for training primary or even pre-school teachers. Yet, they are trying to bring about behaviour change in their facilitators, trying to help them revolutionize their thinking and acting to help groups of adults to master new skills and knowledge, before moving on to new behaviours. In effect, literacy facilitators are called on to be social reformers. Such a task requires more than a few days. That is why more training is needed.

Because of the short training, training methods often fall back on lectures just to explain to facilitators how to facilitate. Courses are unable to afford sufficient time to demonstrate how to teach in learner-centred, participatory and context-based ways that engage all the learners. Still less are they able to afford the time to have the facilitators practise the new methods and discuss potential problems until they feel confident in using them. Training thus often remains

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25. This view is likely to be taken by authorities that prefer to do the minimum to support the right to literacy than to treat literacy as a necessary investment to accelerate social and economic development.

theoretical and its application in classes far from perfect. Better training is therefore needed.

There are a number of options to resolve the issue, each more practicable in some circumstances than in others. For instance, frequent short training sessions and seminars are more readily organized in densely populated areas with large numbers of facilitators within easy reach of each other. Close and frequent support from supervisors is also possible. Where populations are more scattered and where facilitators have long distances to travel to training centres, longer periods of more intensive training become necessary, as facilitators will need to work in relative isolation with less opportunity of support from supervisors. In these cases, follow-on support and reinforcement might be possible through occasional meetings of several facilitators and through some form of distance learning.

Some training options are more easily managed by smaller NGOs working in relatively limited areas with small numbers of classes and facilitators than by government programmes with much wider remits and larger numbers of classes and facilitators. Some of the options are listed briefly below.

Option 1: Short training of five days, followed by practical training as an assistant facilitator with an experienced instructor in an actual class for 5 to 10 sessions, then by a one-day seminar with other facilitators to discuss problems and solutions; followed by the opening of a new class with support from a visiting supervisor; followed, a month or six weeks later, by another one-day seminar with other facilitators. This option is more feasible in urban or densely populated areas, where communications are easy.

Option 2: Short training of five days to handle the first month or so of a literacy course, followed by the opening of a class with weekly support from a visiting supervisor for the lessons involved, followed by a second short period of training to handle the next phase of the course, followed by the continuation of the literacy class with less frequent visits from a supervisor, and so on until the completion of the literacy course.

Option 3: Longer training of perhaps 14 to 21 days with much demonstration and practice, followed by the running of a class

for three to four months, accompanied by whatever support visits from supervisors, news bulletins and distance learning support are possible; followed by refresher training with evaluative discussions; followed by the next phase of literacy facilitation.

Training methods: Although there have been unfortunate examples of facilitators being trained only with a series of lectures, most instructors recognize that the training has to be active and hands-on, with the new facilitators practising or simulating the practice of facilitation.

The earlier discussion of the qualifications for facilitators raised the possibility that trainee facilitators could vary widely in their literacy skills as well as in their abilities to communicate with and train other people. Such a situation could enable trainers to capitalize on the abilities of the more skilled to help raise the capabilities of the less skilled through appropriate forms of multigrade and peer-teaching.

Box 3.   Brazil

The Brazilian Government and civil society have been working to reduce adult illiteracy since the 1940s. One of the more recent programmes, Solidarity Literacy Training (locally known as AlfaSol), launched in 1996, won a prize as one of the five best literacy programmes of the world and has been adapted elsewhere. Although by 2001 Brazil had an illiteracy rate of only about 12 per cent, a population of some 177 million meant that nearly 15 million adults remained inadequately literate. A law passed in that year declared that a priority goal was to provide literacy training for two thirds of the illiterate population – i.e. about 10 million people – within five years. In 2003, the new government of President Lula reaffirmed that priority.

Structure

As a federal state, Brazil has a central government, 26 state governments and more than 5,500 municipalities. Its literacy efforts fit that structure. The federal Secretariat of Continuing Education, Literacy and Diversity (SECAD) gives a lead in promoting literacy, while the state governments, civil society, the private sector and higher education institutions all implement their own programmes.

Operational strategy

SECAD's main strategy is to fund the literacy projects of other agencies through its Literate Brazil Programme (LBP). Using the National Literacy and Adult and Youth Education Commission, with 14 members representing different institutions of civil society, it ensures the transparency of its funding mechanisms.

SECAD also has agreements with other federal and national agencies to integrate LBP with development initiatives involving non-literate populations. With the Secretariat of Health, for example, it provides eye tests and glasses. With the Special Secretariat for Human Rights, it has distributed a manual on civil registration. In addition, it initiates projects on the theme of adult and youth education and the marketplace with the aim of integrating literacy with basic vocational training for a range of workers in agriculture, other rural occupations, fisheries and industries.

SECAD transfers the funds for programmes directly to governmental or public institutions. Other agencies (NGOs, higher education institutions and private companies) apply for funds, have their approaches and methods analyzed and approved, and receive funds once they have actually registered learners, literacy teachers and co-ordinators. The funds support mainly the literacy teachers through covering their initial and continuing training, their honoraria for a standard ten-hour week of instruction over 24 weeks, and the additional fee they receive for each enrolled and regularly attending learner. (There are special provisions for rural learners, those with special needs and those in prison.)

In further support of agencies, SECAD has created partnerships with universities to improve the training of adult education teachers through a range of conventional and distance courses, and funds the production of appropriate training materials.

Pedagogical strategy

As the previous paragraph suggests, SECAD allows agencies to use their own materials and methods, provided they satisfy its standards. It does not impose uniformity.

Recognizing the critical need of a rich reading environment, SECAD has developed a reading and book policy. The range of the policy is wide and includes, in partnership with UNESCO, a set of publications on Education for All to stimulate and inform public debate on the issue.

For further reading see MEC/SECAD, 2006.

Training the trainers of facilitators: Discussing the preparation of facilitators leads on to the question of who implements the preparation. The question that follows on from there is who trains the trainers of the facilitators? The answers depend on the nature of the programme. If it is piloting an entirely new approach in terms of aims, content, materials and methods, its original designers may be best placed to train the trainers and assist them in training the first few batches of facilitators. They would best communicate the aims, demonstrate how to put them into action, and mentor the trainers and facilitators in implementing the methods. However, using the designers exclusively would be feasible only for small pilot programmes, or those run by local non-governmental or community-based organizations for relatively few learning groups. Large governmental programmes reaching thousands – perhaps tens of thousands – of people, or the programmes of international NGOs operating in several countries, need of course to develop other options. How might they most effectively: (a) train trainers to induct facilitators initially into the methods and materials of training, and (b) train supporters or supervisors to help facilitators to overcome concrete problems in actual classes, to develop their skills of facilitation further and to suggest how the methods and materials might be improved?

As usual, there are no hard and fast rules arising from experience. Much would depend on the history of literacy efforts in a particular country and the range of capacities and viewpoints that have grown out of it. Trainers, supervisors and facilitators skilled in established curricula, materials and methods may be good resources to train and to support new ones. Many of them may also have ideas for improvements that might be worth disseminating to other facilitators. Some may even feel that radical changes are needed to achieve greater effectiveness. On the other hand, some experienced supervisors and facilitators may resist ideas for change and be quite hostile to the introduction of new content or methods.

Education managers then need to weigh the effectiveness and costs of existing work and decide what sorts of changes, if any, are needed. If some changes are clearly required, the managers need to weigh whether the degree of continuity is high enough to warrant using all available experienced personnel as trainers. Alternatively, if

the degree of change is substantial and likely to meet some resistance, the managers may need to identify allies in introducing the changes. Trainers, supervisors and facilitators who have been critical of the existing programme would likely co-operate in helping experienced facilitators adapt to the changes and in training new facilitators in the revised approach.

Apart from training the trainers, education managers will need to decide how to fit them into the structure of an organization.

Options for teaching the skills of reading and writing: In addition to deciding on educational goals beyond literacy and on a broad learning strategy to engage interest and maintain the will to learn, every literacy programme has had naturally to adopt, adapt or develop a method for teaching the actual skills of reading, writing and written arithmetic. This has led to the emergence of a number of methods, all of which have claimed to be effective. However, "[l]ittle research is available on the most effective methods for teaching reading to beginning-level adults" (Hager, 2001: 2) and systematic comparisons of effectiveness between them are not yet available, so that no definitive recommendations can be risked.

At this point, it is as well to note that human societies have developed numerous systems of writing, each with methods of teaching people how to read them. The common point of all writing systems and all methods of teaching them to readers is the necessity to link written symbols with meaningful ideas and sounds – developing *phonological awareness*, to use the current term. However, what may be effective with Chinese ideographs may be much less effective with the Arabic or Devanagiri alphabets. As this monograph uses the Latin alphabet, the discussion here is limited to scripts that use the Latin alphabet to represent their sounds, words and ideas.

The methods used for teaching reading and writing in the Latin alphabet tend to fall into two broad groups: the synthetic and the analytic groups. The *synthetic* group tends to work from the fact that writing is a form of encoding sound and meaning into symbols called letters, while reading is a means of decoding the sound and meaning. It develops the skills through an initial emphasis on the

letters and syllables – the building bricks of words – rather than on words and sentences – the actual units of meaning.

The *analytic* group tends to focus more on the fact that writing and reading are intended to communicate meaning and thus emphasize meaning rather than encoding and decoding. It starts from words or sentences and works back to syllables and letters to show how those words and sentences are constructed.

It is worth remarking that the designers of many literacy primers have been eclectic in the sense of combining elements from both groups to suit what they felt would be effective with their particular languages and students. Their creations tend in fact to be called *eclectic*.

Currently, advocates of the analytic group would appear to be in the majority, as the programmes that proceed from meanings to encodings seem to outnumber, or at least be more widely discussed, than those that emphasize first the arts of encoding and decoding.

All the methods necessarily involve repetition in one form or another along with a good deal of practice. The reason is simply that reading requires memorizing 24 and more shapes, the sounds associated with them, and combinations of these shapes with the sounds that accompany them, as well as the meanings associated with these sounds. Writing requires all this, in addition to learning the order in which the shapes must follow each other (i.e. correct spelling), and acquiring the fine motor skills needed to control a pencil, pen or other instrument used to create the necessary shapes on some surface like paper or a slate. Indeed, many adults find the motor skills involved in shaping letters so difficult, that they are often encouraged to try to draw them on a relatively large scale in sand or on the floor using first their fingers, then grasping sticks, then gradually moving on to holding chalk, crayons, pencils and pens.

Ingenious and resourceful educators have been at pains to invent exercises, learning aids, games, competitions and forms of co-operation that would help make the drills, repetition and memorizing entertaining and stimulating, rather than laborious and dull. Even so, the difficulties of memorizing the letters, sounds and combinations to make sense of reading material, and even more

of holding it all in mind, while struggling to write the right shapes in the right order, do discourage many adults. Encouraging them to persevere and maintaining their morale are part of the arts of effective adult educators.

Synthetic-alphabetic (code-based)

The 'alphabetic' method focuses on teaching the names of the letters of the alphabet first, then using the letters to show how words are constructed, and then moving on to sentences. Similarly, it teaches the students to write letter by letter. It is the oldest known method. It teaches all the letters of the alphabet in traditional order; a, b, c, ... all the way to x, y, z, before it launches into words and sentences. Its shortcomings were recognized long before the 1900s and gave rise to the search and development of more effective teaching methods. Nevertheless, instructors may still be found requiring their learners to repeat after them, as they point to the letters on a board or chart, "A", "A", "A", "B", "B", "B", and so on. To help memorization, the letters might be taught through familiar objects and shapes. For example, 'a' could be formed around the shape of an apple, 'b' around the shape of a table tennis bat, 's' around the shape of a snake.

Synthetic-phonetic

The *phonetic* method focuses on the sounds that a letter makes, rather than on the name of the letter, e.g. 'buh' rather than 'bee'. Where a language is consistently phonetic, the method can use syllables as well as single letters to create phonological awareness. At its most traditional, the method follows the conventional alphabet: a = 'ah' or 'ay'; b = 'buh'; c = 'cuh'; and so on. More boldly, it can rearrange the conventional order of the letters to help render phonological awareness clearer by making it easier to form words. For example, as everybody has a father or a dad, a course could start teaching the alphabet with the letter 'd' followed by the letter 'a'. The next letters could be 'm' and 'u' to lead to the word 'mum'. Where an alphabet is strictly and consistently phonetic, a course might start with teaching syllables such as 'da', 'de', 'di', 'do', 'du', 'ma', 'me', 'mi', 'mo', 'mu'. After that, the instructor can combine the letters and syllables into words, and then gradually proceed to sentences. Of course, where a method alters the conventional order

of the letters of an alphabet, it needs to ensure that all the letters and syllables are covered.

Analytic-look-say (meaning-based)

The *look-say* method starts with a single word that is well known in ordinary speech and incorporates only two or three letters, e.g. 'dad'. It shows the word to the learners, discusses its meanings, then challenges them to recognize it in several different contexts. At a later stage, the word is analyzed into its component letters and syllables, which are then used to rebuild it and to form the base of writing exercises.

Analytic-sentence/story

Going beyond a single word, the *sentence* method – and even more the *story* method – uses complete sentences or stories to set up a consideration of topics that interest the learners and contexts for the word or words to be learned, analyzed and reconstructed. Some versions use a photograph, drawing or pictorial chart to stimulate the learners into creating their own stories, from which important words can be selected for analysis and reconstruction. For example, a photograph or drawing might show a group of women standing around a well, trying to pull water up using only ropes. The class is invited to describe the picture, discuss the expressions on the women's faces and analyze the kind of situation that could cause such expressions. The keyword might be 'water' or 'well' or both.

Akin to this method was the *generative word* used by Paolo Freire. He took a word that carried powerful meanings for poor, powerless and oppressed people, developed discussions from them, then returned to them for phonological analysis and reconstruction for reading and writing.

Building on Freire's approach, REFLECT first uses the environment, residential patterns in a village or township, seasons, and social occupations and customs to encourage the learners to develop maps, charts and calendars about their lives. Through these they gain an understanding of how different symbols can represent different realities. That then paves the way for understanding how

written letters and words can represent the realities of speech and ideas. From there, the concerns and words that crop up most frequently form the basis for teaching reading, writing and written arithmetic.

Neuroalfa

Since the 1990s, scientists concerned with the workings of the brain, memory and the mechanics of how humans learn, have looked also at how humans learn to read and write. A group of Mexican neurocognitive scientists has developed a method which they have labelled *Neuroalfa*, or literacy teaching derived from the workings of the human nervous system. So far, they have tested it on small groups of adult learners and compared the results with those of adult learners in Mexico's national literacy programme. Their findings encourage them to believe they are on the right track to defining more precisely the constituents of effective instructional methods for enabling adults to master literacy and numeracy. However, educational planners will need to wait while the approach is tested further on larger samples of adults and in other languages than Spanish.

In conclusion: As far as is known, no large-scale and thorough comparative studies of the variations of methods have been tried and documented. Nonetheless, all of them can cite successes. In this situation, only four statements can be made safely:

1. Many, if not most, adults can learn literacy with whatever methods and materials are available, provided they have the help of a competent instructor.
2. The method must make clear to the learners the system of relationships between the written symbols and the spoken sounds. Phonological awareness is indispensable.
3. The stronger the intrinsic interest of the vocabulary and subject matter for the learners, the higher the likelihood that they will learn literacy successfully.
4. Whatever the method, it does need to include sufficient practice for the learner to achieve a reading speed of at least 60 words

per minute with high accuracy and understanding, even with new, but not too strange or difficult, words.[26]

(These statements clearly relate only to the effective learning of literacy. They do not relate to the broader purposes for which literacy is being learned, whether they are for social action, political empowerment, business management, or family care.)

Options for scheduling classes: Planning for venues for literacy classes and times for conducting them, whether the programme is a government's or another agency's, faces two options. Either the venues and times can be stipulated by the agency, like those of the schools, or they can be negotiated between the agency, the facilitators and the learners. A government might stipulate that the literacy classes should take place in schools or other official centres after normal business hours. A non-governmental agency, for its part, might require classes to run on its own premises during its normal opening hours. The learners and facilitators would simply have to decide whether they could fit their own commitments around these stipulations.

Where the three parties negotiate the issues, a variety of venues and times is likely to emerge. In one country, for example, the main government programme ran all its classes after six o'clock in the evening in schools and village halls. In contrast, a smaller pilot project, in which the stakeholders negotiated among themselves, held most of its classes in private homes, with some starting at noon, others somewhat later, and only a minority running in the evenings. A small-scale evaluation suggested that completion and attainment rates were better in the pilot project, but not to a dramatic degree.

Options for phasing: Scheduling classes needs of course to take account of phasing, as pointed out in the previous chapter. The aim is to enable adults to master reading to an 'automatic' speed and writing to a satisfactory degree of skill within 300 to 500 hours of class

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26. The reason for this is the usual working of the human memory: slower reading speeds mean that, unless the sentences are very short, the reader forgets the beginning of a sentence before reading the end, so that comprehension fails. The speed mentioned here applies to English in the Latin script and may vary with the kind of alphabet and script used. But the principle of combining speed and accuracy applies to all languages.

time. The challenge for those who are implementing a programme in a particular locality is to phase these hours so as to maximize attendance and learning within the periods that learners can allocate to attending class and doing some homework and to minimize forgetting during the breaks between the learning periods.

In urban or other densely populated areas, where many people work consistently throughout the year, it may be possible to run classes for two hours a day, five days a week, for a term of 12 weeks, take a short break of a week, then run another twelve-week term; and so on for four terms. Such a pattern would yield a total of 480 hours of learning and practice in class. In theory, this should suffice for the average adult learner, for he or she would likely forget very little during a break of only one week. On the other hand, experience suggests that even the more assiduous adult learners can manage only an 80 per cent attendance, so that the course and its learners may benefit from an extension of 20 per cent. That would mean five terms, each of 12 weeks. The total course, including breaks, would then run for a total of 56 weeks, or 13 months.

In contrast with this 'ideal' urban scenario, as noted earlier, most countries with high rates of adult illiteracy have most of their people in rural areas and dependent on types of agriculture that are intensely seasonal. There are extremely busy seasons of sowing and harvesting, and slack seasons, when people have some time to dedicate to learning. During the busy seasons, which can last for several weeks or even months, it is almost impossible for people to attend classes. In such situations, educational planners need to explore options that promote intense 'learning seasons', when people can spend several hours a day in class, and support 'idling seasons',[27] when people can spend only a few minutes a day revising what they have learned and minimizing what they forget.

A vital factor in devising the seasonal options is, of course, the facilitator. In extreme cases, can she or he spare five to six hours a day facilitating a literacy class during a learning season? Can contact be maintained with the learners during an idling season to help with

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27. 'Idling' is taken from the minimum speed of an automobile engine, when the vehicle is at rest.

their homework? Much would naturally depend on the working conditions and other employments and commitments.

If a programme has to accept relatively short learning seasons, with only 10 to 15 hours of learning and practice per week, and relatively long breaks with little or no possibility of idling, its planners will need to devise options that build in a good deal of revision and revival at the beginning of each new term. They will of course also need to think in terms of courses that include many more hours than the 500 mentioned above.

Options for sustaining attendance: It is obvious that adult learners need to keep attending their classes regularly, if they are to achieve their learning goals within the period of the course. Less obvious but to be expected is the fact that those who fail to attend regularly are more likely to drop out and fail to complete the course. The effect of such failure is to raise the unit costs per graduate of a programme and make it vulnerable to adverse criticism. Regular attendance is thus in the interests of both the learners and the programme. However, maintaining regular attendance among adult learners seems to be a universal problem. The reasons are too obvious to require discussion here.

Nevertheless, effective literacy classes and programmes do seem to be able to achieve rates of 80 per cent or better. Others have managed average rates of only 20 per cent or less. A large proportion of the difference is due to the quality of the facilitators. Those who succeed in making their classes interesting and in helping their learners feel that they are gaining skills and knowledge at satisfactory rates succeed in encouraging high attendance rates. Yet, facilitators differ in their ability to keep their learners interested. Training may reduce the differences, but does not appear to remove them completely. Therefore, programme planners and implementers should consider what options or mixture of options might be appropriate to support facilitators in ensuring that, once enrolled, learners do attend classes regularly enough to achieve their learning goals within the period of the course. The six options below have been used in various projects. All have reported success to some degree, but no systematic comparative study is available on their relative efficacy.

The simplest option is to make it a custom that any learner who needs to miss a class sends an explanatory message to the facilitator through the medium of a family member, friend or classmate, and perhaps asks for some homework.

A second option is to encourage the facilitator to visit absentees in their homes when they have not sent a message to find out and perhaps discuss the reason for their absence, and, if time permits, to explain what the class was about. The conditions under which the facilitator works will determine the feasibility of this option.

Third, the participants of a class could form pairs to help each other attend regularly, to inform the facilitator and the rest of the class when an absence becomes really necessary, and to help each other catch up on any work missed.

Fourth, the class could form an attendance committee with functions similar to those of the pairs. The entire committee of a CELL class in rural Egypt made a point of calling on an absentee at his or her home to ask the reason for absence. Customs of hospitality would require the family of the absentee to serve refreshments to all the committee members and to entertain them for some time. This obligation seems to have had a steadying effect on the high attendance rate.

Fifth, where existing groups, associations or clubs form literacy classes for their members, the group's management could take responsibility for sustaining attendance.

Sixth, where communities have undertaken responsibility for sponsoring and supporting literacy classes, they might also take responsibility for encouraging regular attendance by visiting absentees.

V.   Options in monitoring, evaluation and assessment

Monitoring, assessment and evaluation have been essential in the progress in designing and delivering more effective literacy programmes since the early to mid-1970s. Since the 1960s, most financiers of literacy programmes have routinely required evaluations of the processes and outcomes. Yet, the previous chapters have been unable to offer firm and balanced assessments between the various options available for almost every aspect of a literacy programme. This inability suggests that the three activities have been honoured so imperfectly that information and lessons useful for planning have not emerged. UNESCO's evaluation of its worldwide Work Oriented Adult Literacy Programme of the late 1960s and early 1970s was unable to do more than propose a number of hypotheses, despite careful designs and substantial expenditures for monitoring and evaluation. Similarly, the World Bank has supported literacy programmes over the past 30 years, but has been unable so far to extract firm guidance from the evaluations of the variety of projects it has supported.

The reasons for these apparent failures are not difficult to detect. They divide into three interdependent categories: practical obstacles, technical obstacles and attitudinal obstacles. The next paragraphs will look at some of the common ones. After that, the discussion will investigate options for mitigating some of them.

Obstacles: Obstacles occur even in monitoring simple quantities. At the very base, all programmes with more than a very few classes report difficulties in getting their facilitators to keep exact and complete records of enrolments, attendance, progress, drop-out and completion. National programmes with thousands of classes and tens of thousands of learners clearly face a mountainous task. Where the facilitators are volunteers or receive only very modest honoraria, their willingness to spend extra time on maintaining and transmitting records is correspondingly reduced.

At one level removed from the learners, supervisors or other collectors of class records often do not have the time or staff to undertake the laborious and often tedious task of collecting and collating the data from numbers of classes into tables that can be analyzed. Still less do they have the training and capability to evaluate and analyze the data for insights into the state of attendance and perseverance, trends and patterns, areas of weakness and so on. This results in reports and returns being incomplete and late, so that the planners and policy-makers are necessarily slow in noting where changes are needed and in responding to them.

Similarly, the further up an office is in the hierarchical chain, the larger the volumes of data to be analyzed and the more aggregated they will tend to be, and the greater the capabilities required for collation, analysis and reporting. Although there are now many computer software programmes available that facilitate processing large quantities of data, the practical problem is that most countries with high rates of adult illiteracy do not have sufficient numbers of computers, lack the software, or do not have people trained and able to use either the computers or the software.

If quantitative monitoring is problematic, qualitative efforts are even more so. Most supervisors do not have the time to observe the processes and interactions of single classes from beginning to end, nor do they have time to write up their observations in detail. Still less do they have the time to undertake systematic comparisons between the classes under their supervision. In addition, they are more than likely not to have received the training to undertake such monitoring.

Over and above the simple monitoring of quantities and processes is the issue of assessing learners' attainments in reading, writing and written arithmetic. Some programmes have graded successive levels of literacy. Level 1 might include the ability to recognize words that have already occurred in class, decipher words that are familiar in speech but new in written form, and recognize numbers up to a specified quantity. Level 2 might include the ability to read sentences of not more than six words that have been used in class, and so on up to four or five levels of skill. The final level might be equated with whatever is expected from four or five years of primary schooling,

or possibly with the ability to read, understand and summarize a short news report in a popular newspaper. However, deciding what levels of skill should be expected of the average learner after a given period of learning and practice remains contentious. Should learners be asked to read passages aloud, with their speed and accuracy being measured? If so, what vocabulary should be used to compose the passages, and what speed and measures of accuracy should be set as the pass rate? If reading aloud is considered inappropriate, should the assessment of reading consist of reading a passage silently at the speed determined to be appropriate for the average learner, and then writing down the answers to a few questions about the passage? Should the learners be asked to write a letter or a story? What length and spelling accuracy would count as a pass? What kinds of calculations should they be asked to undertake and write down? All these questions are practical, but answering them depends on reliable knowledge of what can be expected of the average learner on a particular course, as well as on considerable skill in composing and marking the assessments. Few programmes appear to have undertaken the necessary study for the task.

Beyond monitoring and assessment are the skills needed for reliable evaluations of the long-term uses that learners are making of their literacy and numeracy. These do tend to be in short supply and the people who possess them tend to be in very strong demand, expensive and not easily available for literacy work.

Attitudes: Perhaps more important than these practical and technical obstacles are the obstacles created by attitudes. One is simple unawareness or even scepticism about the value of sustained monitoring. Facilitators wonder whether keeping records of attendance serves any useful purpose; so do field supervisors. These personnel are only rarely informed of the outcomes of any evaluation and analyses done of the data they submit. Still less do they learn of any improvements that their data may stimulate.

Alongside this attitude, there is a view that literacy and education are self-evident goods that need no laborious monitoring or evaluation to justify them. In national and other large programmes, a reinforcing view can hold that actually reaching beneficiaries throughout the country and offering them the opportunity to receive education

takes priority over concerns about regular attendance, effective learning and possible further development. Where governments are concerned, additional reinforcement of this belief can arise from a preference for harvesting wide public appreciation for visible, massive countrywide efforts over marginal improvements in quality for smaller and less visible clienteles.

Suspicion can reinforce such scepticism. Where a programme depends on finance from an international donor, personnel can suspect that the data on attendance, completion or attainments could be used for decisions on whether or not to continue the finance. Honoraria and even jobs may be at stake. Similarly, where a government finances a programme, personnel may fear that unsatisfactory data will lead the government to terminate it. In response, they can overstate all aspects of the programme, from enrolments through to completion. This kind of nervousness tends to be more severe when sponsors attempt to undertake in-depth evaluations using independent evaluators, whether academic, from the private sector, or imported from another country.

Options for dealing with the obstacles: The will to deal with these obstacles depends on the goals of a programme. If, for the sake of argument, a government or other organization feels obliged to provide only an adequate opportunity for people to make themselves literate and judges that all further effort to educate and develop literacy skills must come from the learners themselves, then monitoring, evaluation and assessment take low or even no priority. If, however, the organization regards literacy as only the start of a substantial investment in educational, social, political, economic and other development, then ensuring that this investment does indeed lay a firm foundation for subsequent development takes very high priority. In this case, monitoring, assessment and evaluation become important – indeed essential – tools. Eliminating, or at least minimizing, the obstacles to them is necessary.

Considering what options might be available for dealing with the obstacles requires clarity about the purposes of monitoring, evaluation and assessment. Since each of these activities costs time, labour and money, they should be used only to the minimum necessary to achieve their purposes. Ideally, from the viewpoint of

educational policy-makers and planners, the purpose of each should be to enable more realistic expectations, better planning, more effective implementation, and more useful outcomes for the learners and their society. They should also enable more adequate cost projections and better assessment of the worth of the investments.

In *Table 5.1* below, an attempt has been made to summarize the uses of the three activities from the point of view of the people most closely involved in implementing literacy classes. It uses the main indicators that have become customary for weighing the relevance and effectiveness of literacy work: enrolments, rates of attendance, rates of completion, rates of test-taking and actual attainment rates. It shows that each of the indicators, if properly monitored, could be of use to everybody concerned with the programme. However, the uses may not be obvious to some of those concerned, or the labour and time involved in meticulously monitoring the indicators may seem to outweigh any value that they offer. The options then open to the implementing agencies are to: (1) persuade and convince facilitators and others to monitor the indicators by demonstrating their usefulness; (2) compel facilitators and others to monitor the indicators; (3) offer incentives to entice them to undertake the monitoring; (4) reduce the time and labour needed by simplifying the monitoring procedures; or (5) abandon programme-wide monitoring in favour of monitoring samples, using specialist skills.

Experience in many countries suggests the likelihood that, in large government programmes, the first two options – i.e. persuasion and compulsion – will not yield satisfactory results: many officials will still tend to neglect meticulous monitoring, be uneasy about evaluation, and be sceptical about research and experimentation. The third option – to offer incentives – would require careful design and supervision, may prove difficult to administer reliably, and might draw objections on the grounds of cost. The fourth option – to simplify procedures – could be effective, but runs the risk of reducing information to a level that is of little use for future planning. The feasibility of the fifth option – to rely on samples – will depend on the specialist skills available in a country or to a programme, and could increase the overall costs. Nevertheless, the experience of the past 25 years indicates that comprehensive coverage of even moderately sized programmes has proven impracticable. Until

official climates are more favourable towards monitoring and evaluation, and sufficient local capacity is developed to cover a large programme adequately, a carefully limited approach appears to be the most prudent.

Where a programme is financed by external agencies, the fifth option may also involve the issue of ownership and control: should the local agency – whether governmental or non-governmental – be responsible for the samples, or should the financier accept them? Currently, the general policy is to encourage local ownership and control in the interests of promoting capacity-building, although external specialists are often imported to help with the design and analysis. So far, as the earlier chapters suggest, this policy has not produced clear guidance for choices of strategy or methods.

For the financier, the issue then becomes one of priority. If the financier deems that one of its important functions is to generate and disseminate reliable knowledge that is useful for policy and practice in promoting literacy and lifelong education, and that this function should temporarily receive higher priority over encouraging local ownership and building local capacities, then it has the option of negotiating the issue with the people whom it is supporting.

The final issue in evaluation concerns the long-term effects of a literacy programme: what uses do the learners make of the skills they have acquired? In what ways have these uses enabled the learners to improve the quality of their lives and to pursue further education? Are there lessons for current and future literacy work? As far as is known, only international agencies like the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) and the Asian South Pacific Bureau for Adult Education (ASPBAE) have undertaken such work. Necessarily, they have had to rely on relatively small, but still representative, samples of previous learners. The only options appear to be whether or not to undertake such evaluation and, if so, what size and distribution of sample to select.

Table 5.1   Uses of monitoring indicators from different viewpoints

Indicator	Facilitator	Supporters (supervisor, community)	Planners, sponsors & financiers
Enrolments	Too many to handle? Need to break into more classes? Too few to justify continuing with the class? Scope for group work, peer teaching?	Less than expected? More than expected?	Less than expected? More than expected? Patterns of gender, age, socio-economic status, educational experience as expected? Any indications for policy change or action?
Attendance	If below 75 per cent, enquire into causes. Any persistent absentees? Enquire why, discuss possible help.	Any fluctuations? Any steady declines? Enquire why. Any persistent absentees? Enquire why, discuss possible help.	Generally above at least 75 per cent? If not, enquire into causes: curricular content? Methods? Scheduling? Any specific regions or communities in decline? Enquire.
Completion	Do we know why any non-completers have not completed? Do any of the reasons point to how the curriculum, schedule or venue could be improved?	Do we know why any non-completers have not completed? Do any of the reasons point to how the curriculum, schedule or venue could be improved? Do they suggest better training and support for the facilitators?	Do the completion rates suggest any patterns or trends? If they are generally less than expected, do the causes lie within the programme itself?

Options in monitoring, evaluation and assessment

Test-taking	Do we know why some learners decline having their literacy attainments assessed? Could we suggest ways of assessing attainments that would be more acceptable to all learners?	Do we know why some learners decline having their literacy attainments assessed? Could we suggest ways of assessing attainments that would be more acceptable to all learners?	Are there any general or any local patterns in the rates of test-taking? Do any of them indicate flaws or possible improvements in the test-taking process?
Attainments	How do the average attainments of our learners compare with those of other facilitators? What are the gaps between the attainments of the average learner and those of the most and the least able learners? Can they be easily explained?		What are the general levels of attainment in reading, writing and written calculation? Do they meet expectations? Are there any patterns of particularly high or particularly low attainment? What do they suggest for the curriculum, for training and supporting facilitators?

VI. Options for lifelong learning: keeping up with the cutting edges of information and communication technologies

It is also important to integrate specific literacy and learning efforts into different industrial and workplace policies and settings, and into policies on health, women, families and other community arenas of policy and practice, so that learning is anchored within diverse lifelong and life-wide activity.

Source: Duke and Hinzen, 2006: 165.

As suggested in the *Introduction*, literacy is just one ingredient for promoting development and has to work in interaction with other ingredients. Without an environment requiring people to use their literacy, they could let the skills lapse. Studies in several countries have shown that, where people do not use their literacy skills, they gradually forget them.[28] Conversely, without widespread literacy, development efforts fall short of their potential.

Chapter I then highlighted two issues. First, the average participant in current literacy programmes appears to achieve skills equivalent to those of children who have completed two or possibly three years of primary schooling. Those skills are a good – but not permanent – foundation. They need to be built up and developed. Second, it is in the public interest to ensure that people put their skills to work, so as to make the most of other development efforts. It is also in the public interest that people continue to acquire knowledge that will enable them to raise the quality of their lives. In support of these considerations, the third and fourth goals of the Dakar World Education Forum aim to create for young people and adults, especially for women, equitable access to appropriate programmes of basic, continuing and life skills education – in other words, access to lifelong learning.

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28. It is as well to recall that the forgetting is not rapid, and can take several years. The rate depends on the level to which the skills have been mastered.

Most recently, the EFA Global Monitoring Report for 2006 has made a powerful argument for creating and fostering literate societies, not just literate individuals. Doing that would require efforts to expand the uses of literacy into what might be called a 'literate environment', where people are surrounded by expressions of literacy: street signs and directions, posters, notices, advertisements, as well as free community news-sheets, cheap newspapers, magazines, books, local libraries and so on. This chapter examines the options that governments and non-governmental agencies can consider for contributing to these aims.

First, however, a point needs to be made. Because discussions of literacy are so closely linked with economic, social and political development, the content of literacy programmes tends to be heavily functional. Useful subjects such as hygiene, nutrition, agriculture, horticulture, savings and credit, civics and so on predominate in primers. These are certainly vital topics and constitute a good use of public funds in governmental programmes. On the other hand, the human spirit seeks a more varied diet. In one programme, a follow-on reader that told a simple village love story proved a best-seller. In another, photo-novellas of love and crime stories were favoured, even though they had to be paid for. In a third, news of local and national events attracted intense interest. The point is that to nurture motivation to use literacy skills and foster continuous learning and a literate environment, a broad view is required; current affairs, amusement, leisure pursuits, adventure, romance are all part of human interests and can promote human development.

Creating a literate environment for a literate society with access to opportunities for lifelong learning is a big task that demands a long-term perspective. Conceivably, it could happen without governmental intervention. Relying on what might be called 'natural processes of dissemination' would, however, require an even longer-term perspective. It may also prove to be against the interest of the more general development of a society. This discussion then assumes that any government intent on the social and economic – and possibly political – development of its people would wish to promote a literate environment for a literate society.

In considering the options available to governments, its development and educational planners would do well to survey and

assess the range of bodies throughout the country that could contribute to promoting a literate environment and supporting the development of literacy and lifelong learning. In addition to the government in its several layers and publicly owned enterprises, and in addition to the usual range of voluntary, charitable and religious bodies, the private business sector is likely to include enterprises whose interests would be served by a more actively literate population. They could well be prepared to invest in helping to develop one. Examples include publishing firms, newspapers, printers, booksellers and firms dealing in hardware and software for computers. The expertise, information and ideas they might be prepared to share are perhaps more important than any money or other material resources they might contribute. They are more likely to be aware of existing and potential market niches, to have ideas on how to develop them and to be better informed of emerging technological developments that could facilitate the use of literacy.

As with literacy itself, the first policy option facing a government is whether to view the drive for lifelong learning as solely a responsibility of the state. Alternatively, should it to try to associate other forms of initiative in the effort, for instance from NGOs that draw their support from a wide base, whether they are voluntary, non-profit or, as suggested above, for-profit? It may also work to encourage even more localized community and neighbourhood organizations to identify what forms and content of learning would benefit their people on a long-term and continuous basis. Going further, the Nordic option of making it possible for individuals to organize *ad hoc* learning groups or circles for their particular purposes is also one of interest.

Within the governmental option is the sub-option of the degree to which a central government will share responsibility with lower tiers of government, as well as the degree to which it will support the lower tiers with resources and capacity-building. Or, where a federal constitution devolves the responsibility from the federal or union government to state, regional or municipal governments, the federal government has the option to encourage the other tiers to treat the responsibility seriously by creating incentives of additional and conditional support.

The degree to which a particular option can be pursued will depend on four assessments: (1) the degree of compatibility between the option and the government's goals for its society; (2) the matter of resources which are either at its disposal or which it believes it can mobilize; (3) its appraisal of the capacities existing in the non-governmental for-profit, non-profit, voluntary and community business sectors; and (4) its appraisal of its own existing and potential capacities to build capacity elsewhere in society. In each of these aspects, educational planners could assist their case with development planners, if they are proactive in doing the studies and assembling the information for the range of decision-makers involved.

Among the incentives that a government can offer successful graduates of literacy programmes is access to learning for formal educational qualifications. Completion of a course can be equated with the completion of a certain amount of schooling – say four years – and qualify for entry to the next grade and learning for the full primary certificate. In some countries, offering such an incentive has had the effect of attracting numbers of young people back into education. They had dropped out of school before attaining fluent literacy and saw the literacy programme as a form of second chance education.

Too much should not be made of the offer, however. While the incentive does indeed motivate many people to enrol in a programme, relatively small proportions of them appear actually to take up formal schooling after graduation. In one country, only one in every five literacy graduates continued to enrol for a further education certificate. The reason seems to be that most adults, particularly poor adults, cannot easily sustain protracted periods of attending courses. Having taken two or possibly three years of part-time study just to qualify to enter a primary school course, most adults seem unwilling to face the prospect of possibly more arduous part-time study over an even longer period.

Two options can respond to this limitation. One is to adapt the academic credit system to fit the local system. For example, learners can study just one subject of a curriculum at one time and save the credit they earn, until they have passed all the subjects that they

require for a full certificate. A single subject would require less time to cover and learn than the full primary or secondary curriculum. The second option is to run the course as a series of short bursts of learning alternated with short breaks of up to a week or two. For example, instead of holding classes for a full term of 12 weeks, followed by a break of four weeks, a course might run classes for four weeks, followed by a break of just a week. The 'learning bursts' could of course cover only a couple of subjects, rather than the whole curriculum. Deciding which option learners would prefer would best be negotiated with the learners themselves.

Although some demand for formal qualifications certainly exists in most countries, many – perhaps most – adult learners simply want to learn what they find interesting or useful. Many may want to receive a certificate as well. However, they are more likely to want it only as evidence of actual attainment, and possibly as a support in seeking some employment. The majority are not likely to be looking for a qualification for more advanced study. Meeting the range of demand from these learners is where the state can tap the potential of the non-governmental sectors and offer stronger support for initiatives that are already in progress.

In multilingual societies, there is likely to be a strong demand to learn one or more of the official languages. Access to a language in which the laws are encoded and much government and commercial business conducted clearly both stimulates the desire for literacy and extends its uses. This helps ensure the retention and development of the skills. Many illiterate adults may indeed wish to learn their literacy in an official language, despite not knowing how to speak the latter. It may take considerable persuasion to convince them that they would be better advised to master literacy in a language they know well. After that, they could proceed to apply it to learning a new language. Or, if they can make the time to take two courses at once, they might learn literacy in their own language and simultaneously start learning an official language in oral fashion. But their desire to learn an official language is clearly in the public interest, if only to make it easier for government agencies at all levels to communicate with the population and to increase the number of people within a country who can communicate with each other.

There is of course the option for a government to leave the provision of opportunities for learning the official languages entirely to the non-governmental sectors, non-profit or for-profit. Its reason could be simply that people who are already literate can be asked to accept full responsibility for organizing their own further education. There are two reasons for counselling against such a decision: one has to do with the entire rationale for promoting literacy; the other concerns equity. First, the option would undermine a major justification of literacy, which is to encourage people to maximize their abilities to access and utilize information for social, political and economic development. Second, it would deepen the bias in favour of richer urban and densely populated areas and against people who lived in poorer, more remote and lightly populated rural areas. That is, it would exacerbate existing inequities.

A more equitable option would comprise a framework of both incentives and safeguards. The incentives would encourage the non-governmental sectors to participate in promoting the official languages. The safeguards would ensure that public authorities offer adequate access to appropriate courses where private effort is lacking. Whether or not such courses would charge tuition fees on a more or less subsidized basis could be determined by two main factors: one is the strength of a government's commitment to fostering its people's abilities to use and communicate in one or two common languages; the other is the need to gauge the strength of demand for learning the official language by requiring some level of fee that would signal a serious desire, but not deter poorer people from learning it.

Countries with lower than average rates of adult literacy tend to have high proportions of their people living in rural areas in relatively scattered settlements. They may well belong to several ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups and make their living through combinations of agriculture, livestock, forestry, fisheries, small-scale processing and petty trading. Some may practise transhumance, migrating from place to place in accordance with the seasons. Communications in terms of roads, transport, telecommunications and postal services may be difficult to the point of non-existence, at least during the monsoon or rainy season. Few non-governmental agencies, whether national, local or community-based, may be

present. In such circumstances, government agencies, national and local, would carry almost total responsibility for promoting development. Promoting literate environments for the people involved could well be challenging. As regards lifelong learning, it might be relatively easy to identify the ranges of content that the different groupings would find relevant and worth making time for. Rather less easy, however, would be conceiving and assessing the practicability of the options for organizing and delivering lifelong learning to them in their varied contexts.

For both purposes, a government would have at least two options: it could decide to work on its own until conditions improved to the point where other agencies began to decide of their own accord to join in; or it could offer incentives to attract non-governmental bodies to come in to complement its efforts.

Under either option, a government's own way forward could be through a combination of four measures. The first would be to put in place lines of communication that enabled the prospective learners to speak directly to the planners of content, method, materials and so on. This would enable the latter to stay in direct, current and constant touch with their clients' evolving needs and interests. The second is a form of decentralization that would enable educators actually in touch with the learners to decide how to use resources in the interests of the learners. It would mean minimizing the layers of decision-makers and the opportunities for resources to be diverted from lifelong learning. The third measure is an information system that would enable the learners to know what resources were available for their learning, how they could access them and how to hold the resource managers to account. The fourth is to stay abreast of the opportunities being opened up by new technologies for more effective ways of implementing the first three measures.

Using new technologies to educate and train rural people has long been obstructed by the lack of infrastructure and high costs. Manually operated technologies, such as jelly-tray duplicators, silk-screen posters, mechanical duplicators with wax stencils, and other information and learning aids were feasible, although even they often had problems as supplies arrived late and in insufficient quantity. Correspondence education relied on postal services;

many of the services were slow and occasionally unreliable, while many rural people had no such services within easy reach. The lack or unreliability of electricity supplies meant that many rural populations had to depend on rare visits from cinema vans for very limited experiences of the technology of film. The same problem hampered the use of film and slide projectors in educational and training centres. Radio was a more promising medium, as receivers could operate on relatively inexpensive batteries. But many places suffered from poor reception, and supplies of batteries could be erratic. In addition, broadcasting schedules were often unreliable and unpredictable. The problems with introducing television were much the same. Even so, patient and determined educators and learners did manage to make some use of these older technologies.

Using the newer technologies for rural people will likely require similar patience and determination. Wireless, solar, wind, wind-up and satellite technologies promise to make cheap hand-held computers accessible to the remotest and poorest areas. Operating them will likely galvanize many people into making themselves sufficiently literate for the purpose. While fulfilment of that promise may be some way off, the cell-phone has already begun a process of reducing poverty and illiteracy. It has enabled poor – and in many cases illiterate – rural women to learn a way to make an income, along with learning some literacy and numeracy in the process, despite the local lack of electricity and the occasional unavailability of batteries. It could inspire educators to devise fresh forms of learning through conferences. The portable radio, powered by sun and wind, could support forms of distance learning for individuals, as well as reinforce the efforts of educators with learning groups. Compact discs and digital video discs and their players have already opened new possibilities for both face-to-face and distance learning. Newer machines for reproducing large numbers of copies very cheaply and on cheap forms of recycled paper – again powered by alternative sources of energy – hold out the possibility of facilitating the creation and maintenance of literate environments in both communities and homes.

The purpose of the previous paragraph is not to stimulate euphoria. It is simply to suggest that education decision-makers, whether in governments or in other organizations, should put

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mechanisms in place to alert them to advances and innovations in information and communication technologies. They would also need to know the likely costs and the feasible operating environments. Some of these innovations may turn out to be very helpful and cost-effective in creating and sustaining literate environments and lifelong programmes of education and training for many different groups of rural people.

Conclusion

This booklet has tried to show, first, that what is a sufficient level of skill in literacy and numeracy will differ between societies and communities. Educational planners, whether governmental or non-governmental, will need to consult local specialists in literacy on the level appropriate to their societies, languages and writing systems.

Second, while literacy is indeed a right, recognizing the right does not automatically reveal the best strategies and methods for enabling people to take it up. There are more powerful reasons of public interest for striving not only to make the right readily available, but also for actively encouraging people to take it up and put it to use. The reasons have to do with benefits that affect an individual's self-confidence, health, social relations, political awareness and economic capacities. These benefits spread from the individual to their communities and societies. In seeking the resources for literacy work, educational decision-makers would do well to stress the full range of these benefits. They would do even better to encourage local researchers to investigate the extent of these benefits from earlier local literacy programmes.

The third point is that the available evidence suggests that several strategies and methods can be effective in enabling people to make themselves basically literate. However, methods that start with the mother tongues of their learners and orient themselves to the actual interests, lives and idioms of those learners seem to be more effective. A crucial factor is the skill and commitment of the facilitator or instructor; how a programme nurtures these will affect its quality and effectiveness. Developers of literacy curricula would likely benefit from investigating the effectiveness of methods that

dispense with detailed primers and instead rely on the language and lives of the learners to create initial learning materials.

Fourth, all these factors require supporting strategies to develop the basic skills to fluent and readily usable levels. Literate environments and carefully focused continuing education programmes that are flexible in their application and use of available communication technologies are essential to bring the investments in basic literacy to full fruition.

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Annex 1.   The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

GOAL 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Target 1: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day.

Target 2: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

GOAL 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education

Target 3: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

GOAL 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Target 4: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and at all levels of education no later than 2015.

GOAL 4: Reduce child mortality

Target 5: Reduce by two thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-5 mortality rate.

GOAL 5: Improve maternal health

Target 6: Reduce by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality rate.

GOAL 6: Combat HIV and AIDS, malaria, and other diseases

Target 7: Have halted by 2015, and begun to reverse, the spread of HIV and AIDS.

Target 8: Have halted by 2015, and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.

GOAL 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Target 9: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources.

Target 10: Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water.

Target 11: By 2020, have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

GOAL 8: Develop a global partnership for development

Target 12: Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, nondiscriminatory trading and financial system (includes a commitment to good governance, development, and poverty reduction? both nationally and internationally).

Target 13: Address the special needs of the Least Developed Countries (includes tariff- and quota-free access for Least Developed Countries? exports, enhanced programme of debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries [HIPCs] and cancellation of official bilateral debt, and more generous official development assistance for countries committed to poverty reduction).

Target 14: Address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and small island developing states (through the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and 22nd General Assembly provisions).

Target 15: Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable in the long term.

Some of the indicators listed below are monitored separately for the least developed countries, Africa, landlocked developing countries, and small island developing states.

Target 16: In cooperation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth.

Target 17: In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries.

Target 18: In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications technology.

Annex 2. The Dakar Global 'Education for All' (EFA) Goals

1. Expand and improve comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
2. Ensure that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances, and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
3. Ensure that the learning needs of young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes.
4. Achieve a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.
5. Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieve gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.
6. Improve all aspects of the quality of education and ensure excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy, and essential life skills.

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The booklet

The fourth goal set by the Dakar Forum on Education for All (EFA) in 2000 aimed to "achieve a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults". However, the EFA Global Monitoring Report for 2006 estimated that 50 countries were at risk or serious risk of not achieving this goal.

Despite a century of experience in running adult literacy programmes, the empirical comparative evidence on what makes for the most effective strategies, teaching methods and learning materials remains surprisingly scarce. This paper therefore uses what hard evidence there is to discuss the options that education and curriculum planners can consider, whether they are governmental or non-governmental. Starting from the operational meaning of 'literacy' and the implications of a human right to literacy, this booklet looks at what can realistically be expected from a literacy project and explores the different options available to education policy-makers and national development planners to ensure that their own countries do achieve this literacy goal.

The author

John Oxenham began work on literacy in 1964, when he was made responsible for establishing a national literacy programme in seven indigenous languages for the newly independent Zambia. UNESCO later awarded the programme the Nadezdha Krupskaya prize for the quality of its organization. He was also later involved in work on literacy in Turkey, Indonesia and India. His more recent reviewing experiences in literacy have included the World Bank's long-standing programmes and work that combine literacy with livelihoods and income-generating projects. Most recently, he evaluated the Egyptian pilot literacy project, CELL, financed by the UK Department for International Development.