

Adama Ouane
Director
UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning

Literacy: Where do we stand today?

Keynote Address

**Seminar:
Literacies matter! Scottish and
Global Perspectives
10 September 2010
University of Glasgow**

Table of contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Understanding literacy
 - 2.1 Literate societies – societal literacy
- 3 The changing and evolving nature of literacy
- 4 Literacy for a literate world
 - 4.1 Literacy as a tool, a right, a foundation of EFA, as a key to lifelong learning
 - 4.2 Literacy and languages
- 5 From rhetoric to action
 - 5.1 World situation
 - 5.2 Current international initiatives promoting literacy
 - 5.3 Recommendations of the Belém framework for Action
- 6 Examples of good practice
- 7 Conclusion

1. Introduction

Literacy is broadly conceived as the basic knowledge and skills needed by all in a rapidly-changing world and throughout the lifespan. It is a right which enables the individual to function effectively in sustainable personal, community and societal development. It is a concern for all, in both developing and developed countries. It is important for men and women children and adults alike, allowing them to understand the interconnections between personal, local and global realities, empowering them to take part in various modes and forms of transactions and communication. Thus, it is a prerequisite for the development of personal, social, economic and political empowerment. It is a key element of any survival kit required for life, work, learning and leisure in today's increasingly complex world. As the right to literacy is an inherent part of the right to education, it is also the foundation of lifelong learning: an indispensable basis that makes it possible for individuals to engage autonomously in learning opportunities at all stages of the learning continuum.

Yesterday – the eighth of September – we celebrated International Literacy Day. And today we are here to remind the international community of the meaning and current status of literacy and to reflect on the challenges ahead.

Literacy still remains a challenge. Globally, there are 796 million illiterate adults (15 years and older) – and around the same number again have only limited overall literacy proficiency. Additionally an estimated 67.4 million primary school-aged children are out of school and therefore have little or no chance of acquiring basic literacy. In most developing countries, the quality of formal basic education remains very poor. Moreover, Education for All (EFA) Goal 4, which addresses youth and adult literacy, is the EFA Goal which is the most off-track.

This keynote address will look at the status of literacy today in a world characterised by rapid transformations. Its developmental relevance will be

reviewed. The central question that it will attempt to raise will not be “What can literacy do for people?” but “What can people do with literacy?” to quote David Olson’s formulation in the landmark publication resulting from CONFINTEA V literacy thematic under the umbrella “The Making of Literate Societies”¹

2. Understanding literacy

Literacy is too wide a concept, too complex and too embracing to be narrowed down to a technical definition. The precise meaning of “literacy” continues to be subject to intense academic debate. There are no clear-cut dividing lines between the literate and the non-literate.

More than half a century ago UNESCO defined a literate person as someone “*who can with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his or her everyday life.*”² More recently, in the report of an Expert Meeting on literacy assessment, UNESCO published a related working definition of literacy which reflects the emphasis on context and use and serves primarily assessment purpose:

*‘Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve his or her goals, develop his or her knowledge and potential and participate fully in community and wider society’.*³

A combination of these two broad definitions captures the reality of illiteracy as a condition that denies people opportunity.

¹ Olson, D; and Torrance N.(eds.), 2001, *The Making of Literate Societies*, Blackwell publishers, Malden Massachusetts,USA, Oxford, UK.

² UNESCO (1958), *Recommendation Concerning the International Standardization of Educational Statistics*. Adopted by the General Conference, Paris, UNESCO (10 C/11)

³ UNESCO (2005). *Aspects of Literacy Assessment: Topics and issues from the UNESCO Expert Meeting*, 10-12 June, 2003. UNESCO: Paris.

2.1 Literate societies – societal literacy

Literacy policies were adopted by some societies in which economic relations went beyond the basic forms of reciprocity; in others it was adopted because it facilitated religious matters or social organisation. Other potential uses may not have emerged elsewhere because the social situation where they could have applied simply did not exist. Similarly massive educational interventions such as compulsory schooling may be appropriate in societies where reading and writing are, or promise to become, part of daily life. The conceptualisation of literacy as a socio-historical tool implies the recognition of its potential to do different things in different situations, because literacy is reshaped in every single context of use.

Education-learning and literacy must not be considered as independent and separate attributes but as part of the social actions in which an individual participates. Consequently, literacy must be recognised not only for personal development, but also as a part of societal development and embedded in social practice. It is essential to see how literacy functions in different social, linguistic, economic and institutional contexts. Only then can we make useful policy recommendations for different types of actors and stakeholders.

Critical to the understanding of literacy is not the power of literacy itself, but rather the characteristics of the users.⁴

A literate world is more than the sum of constituent literate societies, which in turn are not formed by the summation of literate individuals. Both literate societies and the literate world rest on defined and shared literacy practices in the form of broad and visible transaction, production and use of knowledge and information which are constructed and shared by all. A literate world is not only

⁴ Jung I., Ouane A.2001, *Literacy and Social Development: Policy and Implementation* in: Olson D. R, Torrance N. (eds.) *The Making of Literate Societies*, Blackwell Publishers, Malden USA, Oxford, UK

about learning but also and mainly about living. It is a world in which opportunities for learning and benefiting from one's own efforts and the experiences of others are to be found everywhere. The massive flooding of knowledge and information on individuals and societies does not make a literate world or society. A literate environment is more than an aggressive and pervasive presence of written materials; it implies also the capacity to select, to handle and to use literacy-related skills and competencies appropriately according to different situations and contexts.⁵

Consequently literacy is a constituent part of further learning opportunities, whether formal or non-formal learning programmes such as computer courses, skill development or training for professional certification. However, there are different views about the links between literacy and development: should literacy learning precede learning other skills or go along with it? Should we leave literacy learning until the need arises, assuming that it is not necessarily the first step? The answer depends on the learner, their needs and the purposes of using literacy. One thing is clear: it is a process and not an end-point: the passport to lifelong learning. The ultimate goal is not "eradicating illiteracy" but engaging people in lifelong learning through universal access to the written culture.⁶

3. The changing and evolving nature of literacy

Until the mid-1960s, promoting literacy was fundamentally a matter of enabling individuals to acquire the technical skills of reading, writing and calculating, irrespective of the content and method of their provision.

⁵ Ouane, A., 2006, Literacy non-formal education and adult education, in: *Social alternatives* vol.25, no.4. fourth quarter, the University of Queensland, Australia p.20

⁶ UNESCO, 2008, *The Global Literacy Challenge. A profile of youth and adult literacy at the mid-point of the United Nations Literacy Decade 2003-2012*, UNESCO, Paris.

This led to mass literacy campaigns aimed at the “eradication of illiteracy” within a few years. The 1960s and 1970s brought attention to the ways in which literacy is linked with socio-economic development, and the concept “functional literacy” was born. Programmes for functional literacy – designed to promote reading and writing as well as arithmetical skills necessary for increased productivity – were the subject of many national and international campaigns. This concept allied education (and especially literacy) with social and economic development. It was a negative way of apprehending the literacy skills and competencies which were needed and demanded by societies with complex industrial, administrative, bureaucratic and communicative patterns and needs. The view was solely to increase productivity, efficiency and contribute to economic growth which in turn would have trickle-down effects on other aspects of life.

Contributing to this understanding, Paulo Freire spotlighted the political dimension of literacy. He developed a method for teaching literacy in terms of cultural actions immediately relevant to the learner. His approach moved literacy beyond the narrow socio-economic confines and located it squarely in the political arena, emphasising connections between literacy and politically-active participation in socio-economic transformation.

In the 1980s and the 1990s, this work served as the basis for the further elaboration of what literacy means and how it is acquired and applied. During International Literacy Year in 1990, a more analytical perspective came to distinguish literacy as a technical skill. It was then seen as a set of practices defined by social relations and cultural processes – a view exploring the range of uses of literacy in the entire spectrum of daily life from the exercise of civil and political rights through matters of work, commerce and childcare to self-instruction, spiritual enlightenment and even leisure.

The World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien, 1990) introduced the concept of “basic learning needs”, featuring literacy in a continuum

encompassing formal and non-formal education for children, youth and adults. This concept, together with the famous four pillars of education – learning to know, to do, to live together and to be – of the Delors Report (1996) *Learning: the Treasure Within*, is solidly linked with that of lifelong learning and the foundational contribution of literacy.

Subsequent international pronouncements such as the Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning (CONFINTEA V, 1997), the Dakar Framework for Action (2000), the United Nations General Assembly Resolution of the United Nations Literacy Decade (2002)⁷, the African Regional Conference in support of global literacy, Bamako (2007)⁸, the Belém Framework for Action (CONFINTEA VI, 2009) and recently the Abuja Framework of Action and Cooperation⁹ (2010) portrayed the evolving and changing notion of literacy as a key element of lifelong learning in its lived context.

As UNESCO has begun to take note of multiple literacies, the documents on the United Nations' Literacy Decade adopted a new approach and vision. They no longer present literacy as a single concept, but rather as a range and blend of diversified forms, meaning that there are different types and levels of literacy.

The notions of computer literacy, science literacy, and health literacy etc. are all born from the realisation that new types of literacies of communication – of interaction, codification and transaction – are now emerging, linked to the emergence and domination of digital communication with all its implications in terms of forms and tools. Health and science literacies reflect specific types of basic thematic competencies in understanding, which are essential for grounding in these fields and for acting independently with a certain degree of mastery.

⁷ UNESCO (2004), *The plurality of Literacy and its implications for policies and programmes*, UNESCO, Paris, p.10

⁸ 2007, African Regional Conference in support of global literacy *Renewing Literacy to face African and International Challenges*, 10-12 September 2007, Bamako

⁹ Eighth E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting on “Literacy for Development”, 21-24 June 2010 Abuja Nigeria

As we have already seen, this evolution is dictated and conditioned by socio-economic circumstances and changes. New skills and competencies are demanded. Therefore, even if literacy is defined as a proxy measure, this proxy changes over time according to the economy and social changes and circumstances. For example, in the 1960s literacy in Thailand was defined as equivalent to two years' primary education; later in the early 1970s it was defined as equivalent to four years' and then six years' primary education. In the 1980s and 1990s this moved to eight and 10 years and now to 12 years. This means that the core literacy survival skill needed for an individual and subsequently for the community and nation to become autonomous and included is growing in terms of complexity and levels. In turn the true nature of literacy is being revealed as a key parameter for development, a crucial indicator of human well-being.

4. Literacy for a literate world

4.1 Literacy as a tool, a right, a foundation of EFA and a key to lifelong learning

Literacy is the beginning of a journey towards learning and is an unfolding of human potential. Its benefits are deeply tied to an individual's self-esteem and confidence and are part of achieving other human rights or development goals such as gender equality, health improvement, sustainable development, participation and active citizenship, early childhood development, inclusion and empowerment.

Literacy is a key tool in learning for all ages, in all domains of study and in all institutional contexts. In today's knowledge societies, lifelong learning is the norm, with the need to access learning opportunities, improve qualifications or move into new work. None of this is possible without literacy – for adults, young people or children. In the development of learning societies, the promotion of

family, inter-generational and community-based approaches to learning is increasingly important.

Literacy is also a tool for communication and information which serves to transmit and store information, express opinions, create ideas and communicate over time and distance. These functions are often taken for granted by those who use literacy, but remain largely out of reach for those who have not had the opportunity to acquire literacy competencies. The chance to acquire and use literacy in the languages that learners habitually use is a key feature of achieving successful communication and information.

4.2 Literacy and languages

Languages are the keystone to humanity's intangible heritage. They are markers of identity, the foundation shared by societies and indispensable tools of communication. They have variously been seen as the basis of thought; as the expression of the human spirit and of the identity of the speakers. The opportunity to learn in one's mother tongue and to learn to speak a language of wider communication was identified as an important human right in the UNDP *Human Development Report 2004* to ensure that people are not excluded from education, political life and access to justice.

Literacy is a language-based activity, and wherever a number of languages are used, the question that rises is: which language for literacy? The reports and outcome documents of the International Forum on Multilingualism in Bamako (2009) and the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI, 2009) reflect the fact that mother-tongue-based multilingual programmes are increasingly being accepted as a necessary element for the development of literate environments.

Multilingualism is the norm in most parts of the world, requiring well-designed multilingual approaches to literacy. Decisions about which language to use are often influenced by limited resources for literacy and the implications of developing or translating learning materials into the languages spoken by a particular group. Policies frequently propose literacy in the mother tongue and then classes to teach the additional language that participants want to learn.

A collection of case studies (on Mali, Papua New Guinea, Peru and the USA) gathered by UNESCO in 2007¹⁰ points to the benefits of mother-tongue multilingual education. These indicate that mother-tongue-based bilingual programmes are significantly more effective in enhancing learners' outcomes and academic achievements than their monolingual second-language counterparts. Four key lessons can be learned from these case studies. First, implementing initiatives like these is contingent on developing the capacities of a critical mass of professionals at all levels. Second, there is already a great deal of expertise available that can be shared and used. Third, the available evidence from research and practice suggests that the medium- and long-term benefits of effective mother-tongue-based multilingual education programmes that link education to learners' lives far outweigh the costs of the reforms needed to implement such programmes. And last but not least, these initiatives are dependent on community support and empowerment. Furthermore, recent research clearly indicated that the longer the mother tongue is maintained as medium of instruction and learning, the better the quality of learning and achievement.

Some literacy programmes have failed, because language and the needs of the learners were not taken into consideration. In designing effective literacy programmes in a multilingual environment, it is essential to understand how people use different languages in their daily communication in both oral and

¹⁰ UNESCO (2008b), *Mother Tongue matters. Local language as key effective learning*. UNESCO, Paris

written form, and what their attitudes towards different languages are. Hence one thing is certain: literacy for all will not become effective if it is not applied in a linguistic and cultural frame where the learning needs of the individuals and the local communities are taken into consideration.

5 From rhetoric to action

5.1 World situation

According to the UNESCO EFA *Global Monitoring Report 2010* the number of children out of school has dropped by 33 million worldwide since 1999. South and West Asia more than halved the number of children out of school – a reduction of 21 million.

In 2008, the global adult literacy rate was 83%, with a male literacy rate of 88% and a female literacy rate of 79%. More than half of those unable to read and write -421 million- lived in Southern Asia. A further 176 million adults were in sub-Saharan Africa. Together these two regions accounted for three-quarters (74%) of adults unable to read and write worldwide. Nonetheless, adult literacy rate increased by about 8% points globally over the past twenty years-an increase of 6% for men and 10% for women. In almost all countries youth literacy rates (for the population aged 15-24 years) were higher than adult literacy rates in 2008. Thus, adult literacy rates will continue to improve in the coming years due to progress among younger generations.¹¹

Progress was strong in Northern Africa, where the rate increased by 20% and in Eastern and Southern Asia, which saw an increase of 15%. In other regions adult literacy rates increased since 1990 as follows: Western Asia: 11%; sub-Saharan Africa 9%; Southern-Eastern Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean 7%; and Oceania 4%. In the developed regions as well as in the Commonwealth and Independent States (CIS) the increase was negligible as they were already close to universal literacy.

Yet, progress is not everywhere. Women are catching up, though in many countries they are starting from a long way behind. The disadvantage suffered by

¹¹ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2010, UIS Fact Sheet, September 2010, no.3, Montreal, Quebec

women is not the only source of inequality within countries. Adult illiteracy interacts with poverty, geographic location, parental education, ethnicity, language and disability. For example, in Guatemala, 60% of adults living in extreme poverty are illiterate, compared with 17% of richer adults. Minority language groups and indigenous populations often register far lower levels of literacy. In Viet Nam, the literacy rate is 94% among the majority Kinh population but only 72% for ethnic minorities.

In the developed countries we can also find significant pockets of deprivation. For example in England 1.7 million people (5% of those aged 16 to 65) perform below the level expected of 7-year-olds on the national curriculum test, and 5.1 million perform below the level expected of 11-year-olds. In the Netherlands, 1.5 million adults (including 1 million native Dutch speakers) are classified as functionally illiterate, implying that they are not equipped to process basic information.

The UNESCO EFA *Global Monitoring Report 2010* suggests that the world is very far off track for the 2015 target of achieving 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy. At the current rate of progress, an estimated 710 million adults – 13% of the world adults – will lack basic literacy skills in 2015.

In the absence of a concerted international drive to prioritise literacy, there is little prospect of the target being within reach.

5.2 Current international initiatives promoting literacy

I now briefly present three major initiatives initiated within the UN Literacy Decade and the EFA Goals.

Literacy for Empowerment (LIFE) (2005-2015)

The Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) is a key strategic framework which UNESCO has put in place to implement the UNLD and as a contribution to the EFA Goals (in particular Goals 3, 4, and 5). LIFE also supports the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals on poverty reduction and women's empowerment. It is a platform for collaborative action and a mechanism for strengthening South-South cooperation to accelerate literacy efforts. It has also been a framework for the sharing of experience and effective practice. The overall goal of LIFE is to empower people, especially rural women and girls, who have inadequate literacy skills and competencies.

The focus is on 35 countries where literacy rates are below 50 per cent and or where there is a population of more than 10 million youth and adults without literacy competencies. 85% of the world's non-literate population – the majority of them women – lives in these countries, of which 18 are in Africa, 9 in Asia and the Pacific, 6 in the Arab region and 2 in Latin America and the Caribbean.

UNESCO's role is to facilitate these country-led processes and provide or help to mobilise the support needed. A major review was published in 2009 (UNESCO-UIL, *Advancing Literacy: A review of LIFE 2006-2009. Literacy Initiative for Empowerment*) to take stock, assess achievements, identify lessons learned and move forward. While much work remains to be done in order to tap into LIFE's full potential, and to more resolutely address important issues such as gender and the specific learning needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, the relevance of LIFE has been demonstrated and is widely appreciated. The initiative will continue to act as a catalyst to enhance commitment, strengthen

capacities, forge strong partnerships and enable mutual learning in order to make a real and tangible difference to the lives of millions of learners.

LAMP

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics has developed the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP) in partnership with other international agencies and technical experts.

This programme was launched in 2003 and aims to gather quality data on literacy through new household surveys repeated on a five- to ten-year cycle. The objective is to arrive at a comprehensive and detailed assessment of current levels of literacy among populations, as a basis for better analysis of the challenge and more targeted action as well as to develop national assessment capacity. The LAMP instruments and methods were developed by and validated in the following countries: El Salvador, Kenya, Mongolia, Morocco, Niger and the occupied Palestinian Territories.

LAMP is based upon the OECD International Literacy Survey (ILS). It works closely with participating countries to design appropriate instruments and ensure that each assessment is tailored to the specific needs and requests of national policy-makers. Through this collaborative approach, countries can strengthen local capacities to conduct their own surveys while collecting the data needed to focus on real needs and to better target resources.

E-9 Initiative

The E-9 Initiative is a forum –launched in 1993-including the nine most highly populated countries of the South (Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan). These nine countries represent more than 60 per cent of the world's population, over two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults (511.5 million adults) and over half of the world's out-of-school children. Their education systems thus face similar challenges. The aim is to mobilise

stronger commitment to literacy, boost effective delivery of literacy programmes, harness new resources and continue a successful teamwork.

Biennial E-9 Ministerial Review Meetings and expert meetings are organised on a specific theme for a two-year period, where measures to strengthen cooperation between E-9 countries on EFA, and explore ways that E-9 countries can support other countries of the South are discussed.

Literacy for Development” was the theme of the Eighth E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting that was held in Abuja, Nigeria, from 21 to 24 June 2010. The aim of the Abuja meeting was to contribute to halving adult illiteracy rates by 2015 (Education for All (EFA) Goal 4) with a special focus on girls and women in both the E-9 countries and in other countries which E-9 countries can support through South-South cooperation. The Abuja Framework for Action and Cooperation adopted at the end of the meeting recognized that more political commitment, innovation, and resources are needed from their individual countries, coupled with support from the donor community and a renewed focus from UNESCO on the promotion of literacy.

The Iberoamerican Plan for Youth and Adult Literacy and Basic Education (PIA) (2007-2015)

The Organisation of Iberoamerican States (OEI) has initiated and is promoting the implementation of an Iberoamerican Plan for Youth and Adult Literacy and Basic Education (2007-2015) – the PIA – in Latin America. This shared multilateral strategy to address the literacy challenge in the Latin American Region was approved by the XVI Summit of Iberoamerican Heads of States and Governments in 2006. Its main goal is to universalize literacy and basic education for all youth and adult population in the region until 2015. Coordinated by the Iberoamerican General Secretariat, the implementation of the PIA involves capacity development, partnership building, resource mobilization, and monitoring and evaluation of progress made. Seventeen countries are now

participating: Argentina, Bolivia, Brasil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Spain, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Paraguay, Chile, Cuba, Peru and the Dominican Republic.

5.3 Recommendations of the Belém Framework for Action¹²

In December 2009, CONFINTEA VI recognised the urgency of redoubling efforts to ensure that existing adult literacy goals and priorities, as enshrined in Education for All (EFA), the United Nations Literacy Decade and the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment, are to be achieved by all means possible. It is imperative that we redouble efforts to reduce illiteracy by 50 per cent from 2000 levels by 2015 (EFA Goal 4 and other international commitments), with the ultimate goal of preventing and breaking the cycle of low literacy and creating a fully literate world.

To these ends, the commitments included among others:

- (a) ensuring that all surveys and data collection recognise literacy as a continuum;
- (b) developing a road map with clear goals and deadlines to meet this challenge, based on critical assessments of progress made, obstacles encountered and weaknesses identified;
- (c) developing literacy provision that is relevant and adapted to learners' needs and that leads to functional and sustainable knowledge, improved skills and competence, empowering participants to continue as lifelong learners whose achievements are recognised through appropriate assessment methods and instruments;
- (d) establishing international indicators and targets for literacy;

¹² UNESCO (2009a), *Harnessing the power and potential of adult learning and education for a viable future. Belém Framework for Action*, Final document of the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) 4 December 2009 UIL, Hamburg

(e) systematically reviewing and reporting progress on, for example, investment and the adequacy of resources in literacy in each country and at the global level by including a special section in the EFA *Global Monitoring Report*.

6. Examples of good practice

In **Egypt**, a pilot training programme on the use of ICTs in literacy was implemented in the context of the CapEFA Literacy Project in January 2009. The training workshop targeted 40 illiterate women from disadvantaged areas. After five days of intensive training, during which they used a specially-developed computer programme to aid literacy learning, the participants were able to start writing short stories about themselves. The Community Learning Centre (CLC) model – one of several literacy activities within the CapEFA Programme – has been piloted as an approach that promotes ownership on the part of the targeted communities and mobilises communities to support and seek out literacy and learning.

Burkina Faso: Bilingual Education Programme (Government and NGOs)

Since 1994, the Swiss Organisation for Workers' Solidarity (OSEO) and the Government of Burkina Faso through the Ministry of Basic Education and Literacy (MEBA) have been implementing the Bilingual Education Programme. The project was initially conceived and implemented as a non-formal adult literacy and rural development programme in aid of small-scale farmers. The success of the adult literacy programme convinced state officials and policy-makers to adapt and expand the programme into a broad-based inter-generational education programme targeting all age groups over the age of three. The BEP is currently linking non-formal and formal education and is being

implemented in all 13 regions of the country. It employs French and national languages as the media of instruction. Principally, the BEP aims to resolve the problems associated with access to quality and relevant education in the country.

The Programme has achieved major accomplishments which have had strong and positive impacts on the entire education system as well as on the quality of life of the beneficiaries.

Major lessons that emerged over the years have been that the use of local languages as the medium of instruction in schools and training enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of the learning process. In addition, the bilingual approach to education enhances learners' language acquisition abilities. Most importantly, for a poor country like Burkina Faso, is that as the approach has been proved to be more cost-effective and efficient as the formal system it enables parents to support the education of their children.

Ethiopia: Integrated Women's Empowerment Programme (IWEPP).

The Dutsches Volkshochschulverband international's Regional Office, East and Horn of Africa, in bilateral agreement with the Ministry of Education of Ethiopia, is implementing a pilot programme in Ethiopia, called the Integrated Women's Empowerment Programme (IWEPP). IWEPP strives to promote an integrated approach that combines three traditionally separate components namely functional adult literacy education, livelihoods skills/non-formal vocational training and entrepreneurial support (business training and economic support via small scale credit, grants, etc). At the same time the newly established models and structures are expected to form the basis of an adult education system with special emphasis on women in the country and contribute to the National Adult Education Strategy of Ethiopia.

Three key components remain the essence of IWEPP, namely functional adult literacy (through methods such as FAL and Reflect), skills training (non-formal

and vocational) and entrepreneurship support (business skill training and access to finance through saving schemes, small scale credit, grants, etc.). These components are not new as ingredients of women empowerment programmes, the challenge however is to deliver them in an integrated manner to the target group namely adult women.

Mali : Strategic plan for a strong and effective programme to promote literacy and national languages (Programme vigoureux d'alphabétisation et de promotion des langues nationales).

This ten year programme aims to promote the non formal sector in the field of literacy by teaching the population the national languages throughout the country.

India:

1. Reading for a Billion: Same Language Subtitling (SLS) since 1999 (NGO:Planet Read and IIM Ahmedabad)

The idea behind this project is to subtitle as many public access television channels in India as possible in the same language as the audio so that viewers can read along with the soundtrack. In 2006, with support from the Google Foundation, SLS was implemented on ten TV channels with subtitles in ten different languages. This diversity allows people to benefit from reading in their mother tongues. The main goal of the SLS project is to support the transition of early-literates to functional literates through lifelong reading practice and to raise the general literacy rate in India. As mass media play an important role in everyday life, the impact of SLS in improving literacy can be positive. In a world where literacy is of growing importance, this project offers a simple and successful way to reach this goal by giving individuals better access to reading practice through film songs they enjoy.

2. Saakshar Bharat Programme

The Saakshar Bharat Programme was launched in 2009 aiming to promote and strengthen adult education in the lifelong learning perspective and create a literate society. To this end, it seeks to establish adult and continuing education as a permanent and institutionalized set up parallel to formal education system. Within next three years, it will cover 70 million non-literate adults (60 million of them, women) in 15 plus age group in 365 low female literacy districts. This would redress the gender, social and regional disparities in literacy. The main focus group are women and adolescents from socio-economically disadvantaged sections.

Brazil: Literate Brazil Programme (Programa Brasil Alfabetizado, PBA). Implementing Organization Secretariat for Continuing Education, Literacy and Diversity – SECAD (Secretaria de Educação Continuada, Alfabetização e Diversidade) in partnership with the Secretariats of Education at state and municipal levels.

Since 2003, LBP has provided literacy training services to almost 8 million young and adult learners aged 15 and above. It has improved learners' future prospects, as demonstrated by the real-life success stories of Brazilian citizens whose newly-acquired literacy skills transformed their lives, leading, for example, to improvements in their financial situation, a reduction in domestic violence and an increased determination to continue their studies.

Overall, however, evaluations indicate that there is a need to improve both the selection process for beneficiaries and the quality and effectiveness of existing youth and adult literacy programmes. There continues to be a need to improve teaching/learning methodologies and provide more appropriate didactic materials.

7. Conclusion

International Literacy Day is an occasion to remind to us that all individuals at all ages have the right to access in learning which breaks the isolation of poverty and brings a deeply positive change. Each year governments, social and international communities focus their advocacy activities on a particular topic, following the biennial themes of UNLD.

This years' theme, *The power of women's literacy*, is an occasion to celebrate women's empowerment through literacy and pay tribute to the women and men who work behind the scenes to help others acquire literacy skills and gain entry to a world of opportunities. International Literacy Prizes were awarded to innovative literacy programmes focusing on women's empowerment through literacy in Cape Verde, Colombia, Egypt, Germany, Malawi and Nepal.

Nevertheless, even if the empowering role of literacy is uncontested, and despite the efforts that have been made, the global situation today shows us that there is still much left to be done to engender literacy policies and programmes in all their dimensions. The principle of empowerment needs to permeate more systematically the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of learning programmes. This also requires working more resolutely towards achieving a gender balance at decision-making levels. The promotion of new role models will encourage more female staff and learners to engage in literacy programmes.

It is largely accepted that the foundation for effective literacy promotion is the political commitment of governments, the allocation of sufficient resources and a stronger partnership with civil society and networks. The provision of valid and reliable data and evidence (from assessments and past experience) on literacy levels is needed for adequate policy design, planning and action. Last but not

least the quality and effectiveness of literacy programmes depend on a systematic professional approach.

The current economic, financial and social crisis should not be seen as an insurmountable obstacle to literacy and an “excuse” to abandon our efforts to take the cause forward. Instead, we should view it as an opportunity to create truly sustainable systems that will promote literacy for all, today and in the long-term. As the UNESCO Director General mentioned in her introduction to the 2010 Global Monitoring Report *Reaching the Marginalized*, “...let us use this crisis as an opportunity to create sustainable systems that promote inclusion and put an end to all forms of marginalization.”

Bibliography

Banzon-Batista C. and Medel-Añonuevo C. (2005), *Why Literacy in Europe? Enhancing Competencies of Citizens in the 21st Century*, Report of the Regional Meeting on Literacy in Lyon.

Benavot, A. (2008), *Meeting the lifelong learning needs of youth and adults*. In: Duke C. and Hinzen, H. (eds.), “Knowing More, Doing Better: Challenges for CONFINTEA VI from Monitoring EFA in Non-Formal Youth and Adult Education”, DVV International, Bonn, pp. 8-14.

Bhola H.S. (1990), *Evaluating “Literacy for Development” Projects, Programs and Campaigns*, UIE, DSE, Hamburg.

Jung, I. and Ouane, A. (2001), *Literacy and Social Development. Policy and Implementation*. In: D.R. Olson and N. Torrance (eds.) “The Making of Literate Societies”, Malden, MA / Blackwell, Oxford.

Ouane, A. (2006), “Literacy, Non-Formal Education and Adult Education” in *Social Alternatives*, vol. 25 no.4, fourth quarter 2006, The School of Education, the University of Queensland.

Reinking D.*et al.* (eds.) (1998), *Handbook of Literacy and Technology. Transformations in a Post-Typographic World*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associate Publishers, Mahwah, NJ.London

United Nations (2008), 33d session of the United Nations General Assembly, *Implementation of the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade*.

UNDP (2004), *Human Development Report*, UNDP, New York.

UNESCO

- (1947), *Fundamental Education: Common Ground for All Peoples*. Report of a special Committee to the Preparatory Commission, UNESCO, Paris.
- (1993), *International Forum on Scientific and Technological Literacy for All*, Final Report, Paris, 5-10 July, UNESCO, Paris.
- (1996), *Learning the Treasure Within*. Report to UNESCO of the International Commission of Education for All for the 21st Century, UNESCO, Paris.
- (2000), *Literacy for All: A United Nations Literacy Decade*. A Discussion Paper, UNESCO, Paris
- (2002), *EFA Global Monitoring Report: Education for All. Is the World on Track?* UNESCO, Paris.
- (2003), *Literacy, a UNESCO perspective*, UNESCO, Paris.
- (2004), *Position Paper. The Plurality of Literacy and its Implications for Policies and Programmes*, UNESCO, Paris.
- (2005), *2006 EFA Global Monitoring Report, Literacy for Life*, UNESCO, Paris.
- (2006b), *Promoting Literacy in Multilingual Settings*, UNESCO, Bangkok.
- (2008a), *The Global Literacy Challenge. A profile of youth and adult literacy at the mid-point of the United Nations Literacy Decade 2003-2012*, UNESCO, Paris.
- (2008b), *Mother Tongue matters. Local language as key effective learning*. UNESCO, Paris.
- (2009a), *Harnessing the power and potential of adult learning and education for a viable future. Belém Framework for Action*, Final document of the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) 4 December, UIL, Hamburg.
- (2009b), *United Nations Literacy Decade, International Strategic Framework for Action, July 2009*, UNESCO, Paris
- (2009c), *Advancing Literacy: A review of LIFE 2006-2009. Literacy Initiative for Empowerment*, UIL, Hamburg.

- (2009 d), *The Next Generation of Literacy Statistics: Implementing the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP)*, Technical Paper no. 1, UIS, Montreal.
- (2009e), *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*, UIL, Hamburg.
- (2009f), *2010 EFA Global Monitoring Report, Reaching the marginalized*, UNESCO, Paris/Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- (2010a), *Draft Communiqué*, Conference on the Integration of African Languages and Cultures into Education, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, 20-22 January, ADEA-UIL., Ouagadougou
- (2010b), Abuja Framework for Action, *Literacy for Development, Eighth E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting on Literacy for Development*, 21-24 June, Abuja, Nigeria.

Wagner, D.A and Kozma R.B. (2005), *New Technologies for Literacy and Adult Education. A global Perspective*, International Literacy Institute, National Center on Adult Literacy, University of Pennsylvania/Paris, UNESCO.

Wagner, D.A., Venezky, R.L. and Street, B.V., (eds) 1999, *Literacy. An International Handbook*, Westview Press, Boulder CO.