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Effective Literacy Programs

Parallel Session A-1

**Vision, Policy and Strategy:
Analysis and Prospects for
Future Development**

**Brazilian National Policy of Adult
and Youth Education**

*by Ministry of Education of Brazil
Secretariat of Continuing Education,
Literacy and Diversity*

**Working Document
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Contents

1. Summary	4
2. The Brazilian Social-Educational Context	5
3. Education for All – Educational Inclusion and Reduction of Inequality	5
4. Brazilian National Adult and Youth Education Policy	6
5. National Plan of Evaluation	9
6. References	10

1. Summary

1. In the case of Brazil, there are profound regional differences/disparities: literacy rates are much higher in the South, Southeast and Central West regions than in the North and Northeast regions. Regional differences are further complicated by disparities between urban and rural settings. Differences of gender have improved considerably over the years – the number of male illiterates is higher than the number of female illiterates and, in general, girls and women present a higher average number of years of formal schooling- but there continue to exist profound inequalities between the different ethnic/racial groups. The average level of illiteracy among blacks (12.9%) is more than twice as high as that among whites (5.7%). This problem is worse in the Northeast, where one in five black people cannot read or write.
2. Literacy is a political priority established by President Lula at the beginning of his administration in 2003. It is the gateway to citizenship, as it provides access to education as a right for all throughout life. Literacy is directly linked to increasing the average number of years of schooling of young people and adults. From 2003 to 2005, there was a significant change in the political perception about education as a right for all. Since education is a right for all, this requires the recognition of a diversity of realities and subjects, with a diversity of learning needs and, as a result, policies directed to these segments demand a strong partnership between civil society and the public sector. Education is treated as a part of the process of building conscious and active citizenship, by respecting and giving value to the plurality of subjects and to their respective specificity.
3. The agenda for Brazilian education is based on a broad dialogue between the three levels of government – national, state and local (municipal) – and with organised civil society as a whole, so that joint efforts can produce outcomes in the smallest time-frame possible, by trying to face the major challenges posed by the country's historical educational debt.
4. As a first step, the Ministry of Education created a specific department within its administrative structure, entitled the Secretariat of Continuing Education, Literacy and Diversity (SECAD), dedicated to these issues. Continuing education addresses the core character of the agenda for youth and adults, which extrapolates the levels of formal schooling and comprehends education as a lifelong experience. It is directed towards the millions of Brazilians who have not yet benefited from entering a school and remaining in it. Literacy expresses the political priority and the focus on citizenship. Finally, diversity expresses a strong concept, not just of educational inclusion but, above all, of respect and valorisation of the multiple nuances of our ethnic and racial, gender, social, environmental and regional diversities.

2. The Brazilian Social-Educational Context

According to the Census of 2000, of a total population of 119,5 million over the age of fifteen, 16,2 million were illiterate (less than a year of schooling), a further 17 million had not concluded the first four years of primary education and could be considered as functionally illiterate and a further 32,7 million had not concluded their primary education¹. In all, more than half the population over 15 years of age or one third of the total population had not concluded primary education.

Although the general picture is important, in the case of Brazil it camouflages profound regional differences/disparities: literacy rates are much higher in the South, Southeast and Central West regions than in the North and Northeast regions. Regional differences are further complicated by disparities between urban and rural settings. Differences of gender have improved considerably over the years – the number of male illiterates is higher than the number of female illiterates and, in general, girls and women present a higher average number of years of formal schooling- but there continue to exist profound inequalities between the different ethnic/racial groups. The average level of illiteracy among blacks (12.9%) is more than twice as high as that among whites (5.7%). This problem is worse in the Northeast, where one in five black people cannot read or write.

3. Education for All – Educational Inclusion and Reduction of Inequality

Literacy is a political priority established by President Lula at the beginning of his administration in 2003. It is the gateway to citizenship, as it provides access to education as a right for all throughout life. Literacy is directly linked to increasing the average number of years of schooling of young people and adults. From 2003 to 2005, there was a significant change in the political perception about education as a right for all. Understanding education as a basic human right demands special care for the more fragile segments of the population. Since education is a right for all, this requires the recognition of a diversity of realities and subjects, with a diversity of learning needs and, as a result, policies directed to these segments demand a strong partnership between civil society and the public sector. Education is treated as a part of the process of building conscious and active citizenship, by respecting and giving value to the plurality of subjects and to their respective specificity.

The agenda for Brazilian education is based on a broad dialogue between the three levels of government – national, state and local (municipal) – and with organised civil society as a whole, so that joint efforts can produce outcomes in the smallest time-frame possible, by trying to face the major challenges posed by the country's historical educational debt. This cannot be carried out in isolation, but in the perspective of lifelong education, by establishing commitments that contribute to the democratisation of the educational systems and the creation of instruments that can guarantee education for all.

The Ministry of Education's action strategy prioritises dialogue between educational inclusion and literacy and between literacy and social inclusion programmes. This dialogue is understood as strategic for citizenship as is the dialogue

¹ Primary education in Brazil is composed of eight years of schooling divided into two segments: 1st – 4th grade and 5th – 8th grade. For children the obligatory period of schooling is from 7 to 14 years of age.

within the national government and also with local programmes at state and municipal levels. Dialogue with the *Bolsa Família Programme* (Income Transfer Programme), also allows a significant focus on the population living in extreme poverty. The literacy and adult and youth education agendas are the base of a structural dimension of inclusion. A dialogue with vocational courses reveals the role that literacy can play as a gateway to inclusion and citizenship.

Therefore, the differential treatment given to Adult and Youth Education (AYE), including literacy and the whole lifelong learning process - either formal or informal - reflects the nuances of an agenda directed at increasing the quality of educational systems and the construction of a platform for attaining equity and educational inclusion, by paying specific attention to ethnicity and race, culture and regional issues within the Brazilian population.

Within this framework and as a first step, the Ministry of Education created a specific department within its administrative structure, entitled the Secretariat of Continuing Education, Literacy and Diversity (SECAD), dedicated to these issues. Continuing education addresses the core character of the agenda for youth and adults, which extrapolates the levels of formal schooling and comprehends education as a lifelong experience. It is directed towards the millions of Brazilians who have not yet benefited from entering a school and remaining in it. Literacy expresses the political priority and the focus on citizenship. Finally, diversity expresses a strong concept, not just of educational inclusion but, above all, of respect and valorisation of the multiple nuances of our ethnic and racial, gender, social, environmental and regional diversities.

In addition to being responsible for the Adult and Youth National Education Policy, the Secretariat deals with specific issues such as rural education; indigenous education; education for populations living in settlements of descendants of former fugitive slave communities (*Quilombolas*); education for ethnic/racial diversity and valorisation of Afro-Brazilian culture and history; environmental education; complementary educational activities for children and adolescents at risk; human rights education and education for those deprived of liberty (prison population).

4. Brazilian National Adult and Youth Education Policy

4.1 The Literate Brazil Programme: inclusion and continuity

The Ministry of Education (MEC), through the Secretariat of Continuing Education, Literacy and Diversity (SECAD), has been investing in programmes, projects and actions directed at Brazilian youth and adults, with the objective of providing them with the opportunity to enrol in schools and conclude primary and secondary education. The Ministry, as representative of the National Government, is required to perform the so-called redistributive action and generate agreements as set out in the National Bill of Education n°. 9394/96 (*Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional*).

In this sense, one of the Ministry's strategies is to support and fund literacy projects for youth and adults, in partnership with the State Education Secretariats, local education authorities (municipal administrations), non-governmental organisations,

higher education institutions and the private sector, in all Brazilian states, through the Literate Brazil Programme (*Programa Brasil Alfabetizado*).

The funds for developing the Programme are directly transferred to public institutions. In the case of NGOs, higher education institutions and private companies, funds are transferred after their pedagogical projects are analysed and approved and learners, literacy teachers and co-ordinators are registered. The programme offers US\$ 49 for the training of each literacy teacher (US\$ 16 for initial and US\$ 32.50 for continuing formation); a floor of US\$ 49 per month for a ten hour week for all literacy teachers, with the addition of US\$ 3 per pupil month. This means that the amount received by each teacher varies according to the number of students regularly attending classes (the minimum number for a class being ten and the maximum 25 students, with a different rule in the case of classes with students with special learning needs, and in prison and rural populations). It is important to point out that literacy teachers, within the government programme, and according to Brazilian law are considered as volunteers. It is also worth mentioning that the minimum wage in Brazil is US\$ 122.

4.2 Making a School (*Fazendo Escola*) Programme

The policy adopted by the Ministry of Education is based on an expanded concept of literacy and upon the need for continuity in order to ensure that young people and adults entering literacy programmes have the opportunity to continue their education after concluding the initial phase. In this perspective, and in constant dialogue with the Literate Brazil Programme, MEC has developed a programme known as **Making a School** designed to offer financial and technical support to state and municipal governments by means of a supplementary *per capita* transfer of resources related to enrolments registered in the School Censuses in school-based primary courses for young people and adults. Up until 2004 the basic indicator used for selecting those states and municipalities which received resources was a Human Development Index (HDI) equal to or less than 0.500 as shown on the 1988 UNDP Atlas. In addition the programme served another 390 municipalities located in micro-regions, which also belong to the municipalities with an HDI of 0.500 or less. In 2005 this programme was radically reformulated to offer differentiated support to all state and municipal systems of primary education for adults and youths based on a composite index of Fragility in Adult and Youth Education (IFEJA)* reflecting a policy of Universalised Differentiated Support.

4.3 Changes and innovations

Funding the area

The most recent proposal of the Brazilian government, presented by the Ministry of Education, is the creation of a Basic Education Development Fund (FUNDEB), which will include funding for adult and youth education. The proposal is at present

A composite index made up of the absolute rate of illiteracy together with the rate of functional illiteracy and that of individuals aged 25 or over who have not completed primary education.

being discussed in Congress, after a long process of negotiation and debate with many instances and social and political representations. The most intense polemic in relation to the inclusion of AYE concerns the value attributed to the cost per pupil, defended as potentially less than other levels and educational segments by many sectors including some public authorities and members of parliament.

Actions, projects and programmes

MEC/SECAD recognises the importance of training critical, conscious and creative readers and the importance of schooling as a major factor for promoting skills and reading habits. To this end, it is developing a Reading and Book Policy to stimulate reading practices among young and adult people who have recently learnt to read, thus strengthening the literacy strategy developed by the **Literate Brazil Programme**.

SECAD has developed a series of projects based on the theme “AYE and the marketplace” that will lead to the formulation of training processes integrating literacy and/or increase schooling – primary school – and basic vocational training. Within the perspective of attending the specific learning needs of the subjects of adult and youth education, SECAD is implementing joint actions and projects directed at rural workers, fishermen and young people and adults in conflict with the law.

In partnership with UNESCO, the Secretariat launched the collection *Education for All (Educação para Todos)*, with the objective of creating a channel for the dissemination of texts, official documents, research and conference reports, and studies carried out by national and international researchers, scholars and educators, as a means of widening the debate on education for all.

Training of teachers and educators for adult and youth education

Ministry policy in this field is directed at:

Setting up a network of partner universities for the discussion of adult teacher training, both at the level of undergraduate teacher training courses (*licenciatura*), and at the level of university extension courses;

Funding the elaboration of textbooks for adult teacher training courses, as part of the distance education *Pro-formação Programme*, and in collaboration with an experienced NGO, for teacher’s training courses;

Developing a proposal of distance education for training teachers and managers who work with the theme of diversity - *Education in Diversity* – to be delivered making use of the tools of Internet. It is also participating in the development of a technological platform for the production and dissemination of knowledge in partnership with universities and UNESCO called the **Educational Inclusion Observatory** (*Observatório da Inclusão Educacional*). This platform will host the distance education course.

Integrated Action with National Agencies

Based upon a broad concept of AYE, MEC has established collaborative agreements with Ministries and National Agencies in order to integrate its National Literacy Programme with other initiatives directed at the same population. With the Ministry of Health, for example, a policy is being implemented to provide eye tests and glasses for students. With the Special Secretariat for Human Rights, a manual of orientation on civil registration is being distributed to teachers.

Construction of an Adult and Youth Education Policy: the collaborative model

The construction of a National Adult and Youth Education Policy entails the pursuit of solid co-operation between national government, states and municipalities. In this sense, MEC /SECAD has been promoting a broad dialogue with a view to establishing forms of responsible decentralisation. In recognition of the importance of the National Council of State Education Secretaries (*Conselho Nacional dos Secretários de Educação*) - CONSED and the National Association of Municipal Education Managers (*União Nacional dos Dirigentes de Educação Municipal*) - UNDIME, which exercise an important leadership role with the specific segments they represent, MEC/SECAD has developed a policy of consulting these entities on specific issues which imply and involve public resources and collaborative actions.

Dialogue with civil society

An important feature to be highlighted is the ‘democratisation’ of formulation, monitoring and assessment of policies on adult and youth education, by means of the creation of the National Literacy Commission in 2003. With 14 members representing different institutions of civil society and presided by the Minister of Education, the National Commission is a consultative body designed to assist government in defining programmes and policy. In addition, it ensures the transparency and social control of funding mechanisms and accompanies the development and results of policies and programmes in process. In July 2005, in line with the Ministry’s emphasis on an amplified concept of literacy, the Commission had its remit broadened to encompass adult and youth education, reflected in its new title - The National Literacy and Adult and Youth Education Commission.

Civil society has played an extraordinary role in Brazil in the consolidation of rights related to Adult and Youth Education through the network of State Forums of Adult and Youth Education, the first of which was created in the State of Rio de Janeiro in June 1996, during the national preparatory process for the V International Conference on Adult Education – CONFINTEA. At present there are 25 State Forums and 19 Regional Forums, plus one in the Federal District (Brasília), representing an extremely important national network for discussion and debate on Adult Education policy.

5. National Plan of Evaluation

Empirical data on the outcomes of adult and youth literacy initiatives in Brazil, as in many countries, is limited. Undoubtedly, in order to propose more radical measures in terms of redesigning literacy actions, which can significantly improve quality, it is essential to learn more about the results of past experiences.

With these concerns in mind, MEC/SECAD in partnership with the Institute in Applied Economic Research (IPEA) is developing an Assessment System of the Literate Brazil Programme. The major components of the system are: (i) Assessment Plan of the Literate Brazil Programme; (ii) expert committee and other forums for validating and monitoring the elaboration and execution of the programme; (iii) definition of an institutional framework to gather specific competencies in different scientific areas in order to evaluate the programme.

To date, 38 specific instruments have been elaborated within the first component of the assessment plan. These include:

Assessment of the programme’s central management

Analysis of partner's functioning and behaviour
Analysis of the demand for literacy
Impact assessment of the programme
Immediate impact assessment of literacy, based on secondary information
Diagnostic evaluation of the Literate Brazil and Making a School Programmes
National survey of adult and youth literacy initiatives.

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