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Plenary Session 2

**The Foundations and
Evolution of Literacy in Africa**

Investing in Literacy:
Where, Why and How

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Working Document
DRAFT

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The document is a working document still in the stages of production. It has been prepared to serve as a basis for discussions at the ADEA Biennial Meeting and should not be disseminated for other purposes at this stage.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ABEL	Adult Basic Education and Literacy
ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training (South Africa)
ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
AL	Adult Literacy
ANFE	Adult and Nonformal Education
ARED	Associates for Rural Education and Development (Senegal)
BREDA	Bureau Régional de l'Education des Adultes [Regional Bureau for Adult Education] (UNESCO/Dakar)
CBA	Cost-Benefit Analysis
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CDD	Community-Driven Development (World Bank)
CONFINTEA	Conférence Internationale sur l'Education des Adultes [International Conference on Adult Education]
CSO	Community Service Organization
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
EFA	Education for All
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization (UN)
FTI	Fast Track Initiative
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMR	Global Monitoring Report
GPI	Gender Parity Index
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILO	International Labor Organization (UN)
LABE	Literacy and Adult Basic Education (Uganda)
LCB	Local capacity building
LIFE	Literacy for Empowerment (UNESCO)
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals (UN)
NEPAD	New Partnership for African Development
NFE	Non Formal Education
NFET	Nonformal Education and Training
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NQF	National Qualification Framework
OAU	Organization for African Unity
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PADLOS	Projet d'appui au développement local au Sahel [Support Project for Sahelian Local Development] (CILSS/Club du Sahel-OECD)
PRGA	Participatory Research and Gender Analysis (CIGAR/Colombia)
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (World Bank)
REFLECT	Regenerated Freirian Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques
UIE	UNESCO Institute for Education

UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNEP	United Nations Environmental Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US$	United States dollars
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization (UN)

Preface

This paper is dedicated to taking the measure of lessons learned in African literacy programming over the last century and to throwing light on what the author believes to be important new directions in the field. The convergence of past accomplishments, lessons learned and promising new directions makes of literacy, I firmly maintain, a vital investment for all who are committed to achieving Education For All and the Millennium Development Goals. This said, some of the ideas and interpretations advanced may be controversial, for they are intended to stimulate discussion and new resolve rather than simply to recite elements of existing consensus.

The document contains no Executive Summary because that abbreviated version of the data, analysis and recommendations is being disseminated to all delegates to the ADEA Biennial Meeting of March 2006 in separate form as a paper entitled "Education *By* All: A Brief for Literacy Investment." Readers wishing to consult a more condensed version of the material that follows are encouraged to refer to that paper, which may in addition be obtained directly from ADEA.

Despite (or perhaps because of) the length of the present document, it remains – like all the studies prepared for the ADEA Biennial – a draft, and the comments and rejoinders of readers are warmly welcomed. For related reasons, references in this version are not entirely on target: more than is required in some instances, less than is needed. Better calibrated substantiation will be added to the final document, at the same time as modifications are made to take account of readers' suggestions. Emphasis has rather been put here on working out a line of reasoning and a style of presentation that may suggest new avenues for our common cause.

Finally, a word should be said about the African proverbs cited epigrammatically or in the text itself in numerous places. They represent, I feel, a vital reservoir of wisdom; but those cited only constitute the tiniest tip of a much larger reality and not necessarily the most representative one. I cannot vouch for the accuracy of the transcription, which is something that "northern" editors and typists were scarcely equipped to correct. Your amendments will be much appreciated. In addition, the selection reflects a bit of bias in access and experience. The plurality is West African, as that is where I have spent the most time; and the largest number of these is from Hausa and Bambara/Malinké, the two languages with which I am personally familiar. I gladly cede the floor to any who can propose a more balanced selection that makes the same points – or an improved set -- as well, if not better!

1.   ABSTRACT

1.   This paper draws lessons about the conduct and results of literacy programs in Africa from the various studies prepared for the ADEA Biennial Meeting, from the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006 and from related field experience. The task is undertaken by means of a synoptic review of available evidence on performance and problems in the four main components of literacy strategy: (a) design, administration and supervision of activities; (b) field implementation of instructional programs; (c) the application of lessons learned to the personal and working lives of participants; (d) and the relations between such undertakings and their larger environment.

2.   The evidence considered demonstrates that literacy programs have made important achievements over the last fifty years in spreading basic education and knowledge of the written word more widely throughout the subcontinent, while adopting a multitude of forms in order more effectively to reach target populations. In recent years, moreover, women have taken increasing advantage of these resources and now constitute the majority of participants.

3.   Literacy and nonformal education programs have nonetheless suffered marginal status within the development strategies of national governments and international donors alike and have been funded at levels far below formal education. Though more consistent financial support is warranted, the greatest obstacle to their development appears to lie in deficiencies in the enabling policy environment:

> the lack of reading material in the languages of literacy;

> the dearth of opportunities for continuing education beyond basic levels; and, particularly,

> the lack of articulation between literacy programs on the one hand and, on the other, activities in the numerous sectors of development that must rely on local capacity to assume new responsibilities and to initiate, take over and manage new production and service delivery activities at the community level.

4.   The study concludes that if these structural obstacles can be at least partly resolved at the same time as measures are taken to remedy some of the operational problems of literacy programs highlighted in the text, these efforts hold the potential for turning fuller achievement of EFA and the MDGs into a genuine popular movement, led and supported in each locality by literate adults and so likely to be accomplished sooner, more effectively and more democratically than current strategies presage.

2. WHAT, WHERE, WHY AND HOW

Nyìnìnkàlìkèla te fili
The one who asks questions doesn't get lost
Bambara (Mali)

5.   UNESCO estimates that there are 771 million illiterate adults (age 15 and over) in the world today, nearly two-thirds (64%) of them women.[1] They represent just under a quarter (24%) of the world's adult population. Sub-Saharan Africa counts over 140 million illiterate adults. The majority of these – 85 million – are women. Illiterate adults in fact currently constitute 40% of the region's population, the highest proportion for any major area of the globe. To them should be added perhaps another 10 or 15 million children of school age who are not, or who are no longer, in school.

6.   The situation therefore remains very dramatic. We are in the midst of the United Nations' Literacy Decade and of the period chosen for implementation of UNESCO's Literacy for Empowerment (LIFE) campaign, designed to boost attainments in the countries in greatest need[2] before the next EFA deadline in 2015. Much remains to be done.

2.1. LITERACY AND "LITERACIES"

7.   "Literacy" is a generic term -- "a metaphor for many kinds of skills," as UNESCO puts it. It is also a social construction: The term finally means what people wish and agree it to mean. Specificity comes in its definition and use. The initial approach adopted by UNESCO in the 1950s was to consider as literate "a person… who can, with understanding, both read and write a short simple statement on his or her everyday life." UNESCO subsequently defined "functional literacy" in the following more elaborated terms, fitting numeracy into the mix as well:

> A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective function 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. (UNESCO 2005, p. 30).

8.   In fact, definitions differ a bit from country to country[3]; and, if the term is taken in the more general sense of *the ability to decipher, use and understand some given code of knowledge or procedure*, then -- figuratively speaking, at least -- it may be applied to initial levels of competence in many different fields of endeavor. For related reasons, a number of researchers have taken in recent years to speaking of "literacies" in the plural rather than "literacy" in the singular.[4] The different kinds may vary by area of competence, by language used and by the level that is required for the learner to become conversant -- and they may be acquired in varying sequences. They are in fact "embedded" n uses partly determined by context. Some may be "high power," like Latin in medieval Europe or English in much of East or southern Africa; others may be of lower status, like French in that same historical epoch or African languages in many areas of the continent today.

9.   For the most part, we will be talking in the pages to follow about the basic forms of typographic, scriptorial or numeric literacy. It is nonetheless important to keep other varieties in mind,

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[1] Unless noted otherwise, statistics are derived from the EFA 2006 Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2006).

[2] Officially defined as those having more than 50% illiteracy or an illiterate population of 10 million or over.

[3] For example, in Mali, someone who has not attended school is by definition illiterate. In Namibia, those who can read and write "with understanding" in any language are deemed literate. In Cameroun, that language must be French or English. In Benin, Burkina Faso and Tanzania any language will do. In the Seychelles, the person must be over 12 years of age. (UNESCO 2005, p. 157).

4 Among these, Street (2001) and Barton (1994a). The propriety of using the plural of a long-standing term like "literacy" is at the same time debated (e.g., Wagner 2004). As should be evident in the text to follow, I myself find it useful as a means not just of differentiating, but also of relating, alphabetic and numeric literacy with the many other basic skills and sets of knowledge that are important to local development. See note 11 below for further comment and references regarding "new literacy studies."

because they are often closely related to the acquisition of alphanumeric skills and may either precede or follow them. The ABCs do not always come first and other "literacies" are what give substance to lifelong learning.

2.2. WHERE IT IS ACQUIRED: MULTIPLE VENUES

10. "Literacies" – in this sense of basic codes of knowledge -- are acquired in multiple ways in Africa, from age group initiations to traditional apprenticeships, from religious instruction to military training, from media exposure to travel, from nonformal training programs to formal schooling, and through a myriad of other venues. Even the basic forms of alphabetic and numeric literacy are disseminated in diverse fashions. Worldwide and historically speaking, as many people have become literate through a variety of informal means -- including "each one teach one" phenomena and self-directed learning -- as have done so in schools or official literacy centers; and census data suggest that this is no less true of Africa today.[5]

11. All these venues and styles of instruction contribute in one way or another to attaining the goal of literacy and education for all; and, in theory at least, all related programs should cooperate closely. In fact, of course, this may be no more the case among alternate forms of literacy provision than it is in any other arena of life. Two of the most important agencies in question – primary schools and nonformal literacy programs – frequently use different languages, address different clienteles, employ different instructional methods and confer very different entitlements.

12. Our focus at the ADEA Biennial is on the acquisition of literacy by out-of-school children, adolescents and adults, principally in nonformal education, a category of provision that is itself highly diverse. That variability extends to the names used for such programs: adult literacy (AL), adult basic education and training (ABET), nonformal education and training (NFET), adult basic learning and education (ABLE), adult and nonformal education (ANFE) and a host of others.

13. Probably the simplest way to define the common denominator of these varied initiatives is to say that they all target people – men, women, young people and/or children – who never had the opportunity to attend formal primary school, who never took that opportunity and/or who retain too little of what was taught there to be functionally literate in one or more of the written codes used in their living and working environments. We will continue to refer to all organized efforts addressing their learning needs as "literacy programs."[6]

2.3. WHY INVEST: HUMAN RIGHTS AND ECONOMIC RETURNS

14. Judging by the figures cited at the beginning of this section, we are not yet close to achieving literacy for all in Africa, or even to decreasing illiteracy rates throughout this region by half before 2015, as was proposed at the Dakar EFA Forum in 2000. *Who* will finally accomplish this task and *what motivations* will fuel the necessary effort?

15. Two fundamental motivations for acquiring literacy and for promoting its dissemination have been cited over the years: on the one hand, the relation of literacy to *basic human rights*; and, on the other, the *benefits or "returns"* that literacy acquisition ensures for learners, their families and their societies. There has been a regrettable tendency to put the two in opposition to each other,

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[5] …a point clearly made by Harvey Graff (1987) and Myron Tuman (1989).

[6] This amounts to collapsing together the distinction often made in literature on literacy between *campaigns* (large, intensive though frequently multi-year efforts to eliminate illiteracy in some region or nation, often with an important element of political motivation or content), *programs* (ongoing and open-ended initiatives to increase provision and achievements in literacy, generally sponsored and staffed by some permanent social institution of the country in question, whether public or private) and *projects* (time-limited and often donor-funded schemes to accomplish some specific set of objectives in a given geographic area). In this document, the word "program" will be used in the generic sense of any "plan or [organized] system under which action may be taken toward a goal" (Merriam-Webster) and will thus cover all three varieties of literacy promotion named above.

though they are, in fact, close complements. Neither is entirely sustainable alone; the combination can be very powerful indeed.

16.   The "basic human rights" argument was strongly advanced in development circles in the 1970s and – always valid -- has been brought to the fore once again by the democratization movement of recent years and by the work of people like Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, who take an "entitlements and capabilities" approach to development (Sen 2000; Nussbaum 2000). The fundamental goal of all development efforts from this perspective is to *enhance human capabilities*, both as a means to further development and as an end in themselves. Literacy is one of the most important of those capabilities. National and international agencies now increasingly talk of the "right to development" and the United Nations has solemnly affirmed everyone's right to literacy on repeated occasions.

17.   But if half of the battle is *recognizing rights*, the other half is *rendering them truly effective*. For the "right to literacy" to mean what it should, recognition of this entitlement must be paired with *the commitment to create an environment in which that right can be readily exercised* and in which the literacy or "literacies" acquired can be used to the benefit of those concerned. So if a rights perspective resolves the supply side of the moral equation – the recognition of a fundamental human entitlement, -- it does not necessarily do the same on the flip side of the issue: the establishment of conditions that make it feasible to exercise this right. In short, it does not automatically illuminate *how* to create circumstances in which literacy is of such material and psychological benefit to members of the illiterate population that they can obtain, sustain and improve it themselves. Elucidating these matters means dealing with the individual and collective "returns" to literacy as well.

18.   Returns to literacy have always been a slippery topic, not because there aren't important ones or for lack of rhetorical endorsement, but because these benefits are difficult to track and demonstrate, particularly in monetary terms. The subject is further discussed in the section below devoted to literacy's costs and benefits. Suffice it to note for the moment that the right to literacy may have little meaning if the knowledge acquired has scant application in the beneficiary's immediate environment. Whether it does or does not depends in part on the strategy adopted for literacy promotion and provision – in other words, on the way in which related policies and programs are designed and put into practice.

2.4.   HOW TO GO ABOUT IT: IDENTIFYING EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

19.   *How* most effectively to promote widespread literacy is in fact the crux of the question and the focus of the rest of this document. The next section is devoted to examining the background of today's challenges and opportunities. In Sections 3 through 7 we turn to an assessment of the record of literacy work in Africa over the last half-century and the lessons that can be learned from it. Section 8 presents summary consideration of the costs and benefits of literacy programs. Section 9 is devoted to conclusions that can be drawn from this overview of African experience, and Section 10 to closing recommendations about new directions for literacy work.

3.   REMEMBERING THE CONTEXT

Kòlòngosi bè dlòn fe, sen t'a la.
The tortoise loves to dance, he just doesn't have the legs.
Bambara (Mali)

20.   Adult education and literacy cannot be divorced from their context – cultural, economic and political – nor should we attempt an overview of accomplishments and lessons learned from the experience of related programs in Sub-Saharan Africa over the last 50 years without also fixing in our minds a few of the main parameters of African development since the independence epoch and the tribulations, hopes and successes that the sub-continent has experienced during that period.

3.1.   THE CONTINUING CHALLENGE OF AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

21.   There is neither space nor justification in a paper like this for going into an elaborate portrayal of the ups and downs of African development. It is nonetheless worth recalling a few traits well known to all that should at least be kept in mind as we survey the situation of adult literacy, since literacy programs are so frequently assigned a role in overcoming poverty and giving new hope to the deprived.[7]

22.   Afflicted by recurrent drought, civil unrest, the strictures of structural readjustment, the sclerosis of key institutions and, at times, governance malfunction and corruption, the economies of Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole actually *shrank* between 1975 and 2003 (average growth rate of –0.7% per annum), according to data from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP 2005). The record is a bit better in the more recent past. The average economic growth rate for the 1990-2003 period was +0.1% and performance in 2004, OECD reports (2005), reached a 5% rate. The same is hopefully predicted for the just elapsed and current years.

23.   Slow progress is the more preoccupying as Sub-Saharan Africa remains both the poorest region of the globe and the one characterized by the greatest income inequality:[8] GDP per capita for the region stood at US$1,865, compared to a developing country average the same year of US$4,359 (UNDP 2005). The World Bank reports this year that household survey data place Africa and Latin America lowest in income and welfare equity (2005).

24.   The Region also has the fastest growing population of any in the world. The average demographic growth rate from 1990 to 2003 was 2.7% per annum, tied with the Arab States for "first place." It is projected to be 2.2% over the period 2003-2015, 0.2% above the projected rate for the Arab states and well above those for other regions.

25.   The primary school net enrollment rate has increased across the region – and the increase for girls has been greater than that for boys – but the pace is scarcely enough to meet the Education for All and Millennium Development Goal (re)set for 2015. Between 2000 and 2005, the net rate of primary school coverage for the Region increased from 50 to 55 percent, a tenth of the distance that would have to be accomplished to meet the MDGs, and somewhat less if South Africa and Nigeria are excluded.

26.   Overall, the picture remains one of great duress, underscored by real human strength and traversed by definite rays of hope. Yet as the epigraph above[9] reminds us, what can be done by actors on the ground is often severely constrained by the legacy of burdens under which they labor. And to a

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[7] The majority of the data in this section is drawn from UNDP (2005) and UNESCO (2005).

[8] Income distribution data are available for 125 of the world's 177 nations. The twenty countries on this list with the greatest income inequality are in Sub-Saharan Africa, as are 35 of the 40 most inequitable (UNDP 2005).

[9] A proverb often used by impoverished Malian peasants in the Boucle du Niger region to respond to agricultural extension agents who proposed to them new plows and farming equipment.

history of travail must be added the current challenges and strictures of globalization.[10] If that movement is potentially a source of hope, its real effects remain largely molded by influences and interests that leave little breathing room for much of the continent.

3.2. A CAPSULE HISTORY OF LITERACY IN AFRICA

27.   The history of literacy work in Africa can be concisely portrayed as a succession of styles and strategies for spreading the word, well summarized in the 2006 Global Monitoring Report (pp. 147-159). The successive phases are not mutually exclusive and they have more than purely historical interest, because in fact all are still present today and continue to influence – in their original or a revised form – the implementation of current programs and the design of new ones.

> *Scholastic and religious literacy* programs were predominant at the time of African independence, the first based on the transposition of primary schooling to adult classes and the second on the scripture-learning of religious instruction.

> UNESCO sought to break with these patterns in the mid-1960s by introducing *functional or work-oriented literacy*, eventually implemented on a large-scale experimental basis – and sometimes in collaboration with other donors -- in fifteen countries, ten of them from Sub-Saharan Africa.[11]

> In the 1970s, the conviction that literacy could not in fact be functional if it was not better connected with other forms of local development began to grow, as did an increased interest in the varied kinds of related nonformal education that existed already in different sectors of the economy and an increased willingness on the part of donors to underwrite such efforts. The result was a series, even a fashion, of "*integrated rural development*" projects.

> At the same time, a more political or *"conscientizing" approach to literacy instruction* was taking shape in Latin America, where Paolo Freire broke from traditional literacy programming in Brazil to create a "pedagogy of the oppressed" that enlisted the active participation of peasants in naming the oppressions they endured and visualizing means to overcome them as part and parcel of their learning. Though his methods were not directly applied on any scale to programs in Africa outside of Guinea-Bissau until recent years, Freire's thought was very influential and similar concerns with joining literacy to "consciousness raising" and political mobilization were reflected at various times in the large-scale campaigns of African countries that attempted revolutionary social change -- countries like Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Guinea, Mozambique and Tanzania.

> In the late 1970s awareness grew that relapse into illiteracy (or "aliteracy," the non-use of these skills) was a real threat, even for graduates of successful programs, if they found little to read and few other employments for their new competency after completion of study, just as it was a factor inhibiting the motivation of new participants. This awakening spurred a good deal of discussion of the challenges of *"post-literacy"* and led to the implementation of a few programs that were designed to provide a better supply of reading materials to new literates or to offer them continuing education opportunities.[12]

> Disenchantment with the generally meager results of such efforts and a rightward shift in global economic climate in the 1980s were among the factors that led during the following decade to progressive *de-funding of literacy and nonformal education* by donors and a much narrower focus on primary schools as the only effective means for

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[10] For a discussion of the interactions of globalization and literacy, see Hoppers (2006) , one of the component studies for the ADEA Biennial Meeting.

[11] See Thiam & Isaksson (1984).

[12] "Post literacy" is another hotly debated term that some would prefer to jettison. It is used here in its simplest sense as a term for the realm of application of literacy lessons, often concurrent with programs themselves.

generalizing basic education.[13] Governments strapped by the rigors of structural adjustment could take up little of the slack; but *nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)* of various descriptions *played an increasingly prominent role* and became in the 1990s a chosen vehicle for provision in many countries.

Three still more recent trends that span the end of that decade and the beginning of the new one indicate directions that literacy programs may be taking in the 21st century: (a) a renewed emphasis on integrated and functional literacy in the guise of *"livelihood" training*; (b) promotion of *the universal right to literacy* as part and parcel of UNESCO's new policy thrust; and (c) accelerated development of *offerings for women,* plus greatly enhanced participation by them. Each is discussed further on in this paper.

28.   Each of these overlapping strategies or "fashions" of literacy programming generated useful elements, each left a heritage of accomplishments and from each numerous lessons of experience may be derived – lessons that we will attempt to review in subsequent sections.

29.   Parallel to the succession of strategic models for literacy programming, there has occurred an equivalent evolution in *our understandings of literacy* itself. Emphasis has moved from the rather straightforward and simplistic image of literacy as a unitary attribute propelling development on its own – the "autonomous model" of literacy current in the 1950s and 1960s -- to an appreciation of the many different forms that literacy may take, their potential variation from one context to another and the particular conditions under which each is most applied.[14] Researchers in this new tradition have placed an emphasis on how literacy is in fact *used* in different cultural and socio-economic settings and on the particular meanings that it has for the people concerned. The question, as Olson and Torrance (2001) put it, is not what literacy can do for people but what people can (and do in fact) do with literacy.

3.3.   LITERACY POLICIES AROUND THE CONTINENT

30.   The most explicit and widely promulgated policy with respect to literacy in Africa has to date not emerged so much from African governments themselves as at the occasion of (or in reaction to) international meetings held on African soil, notably the CONFINTEA V African Regional Meeting in Cape Town, South Africa in 1996; the regional Conference on Education For All in Sub-Saharan Africa convened in Johannesburg in 1999; the World Education Forum held under UNESCO auspices in Dakar in 2000; and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) adopted at the 2001 meeting of the Organization for African Unity (OAU) in Addis Abeba, the only truly African initiative among them.

The first of these conferences recommended the establishment of an African Paolo Freire Literacy Decade (1998-2008), which was then endorsed by the CONFINTEA V Declaration and Agenda for the Future adopted in Hamburg in July 1997.

Both government leaders and civil society/NGO representatives took part in the landmark Johannesburg Conference in 1979. Conferees affirmed that education and literacy were "basic rights" of all in Africa and proclaimed education to be a prerequisite for empowering Africans to participate on an equal footing in the global economy.

The Dakar Framework of Action adopted by the World Education Forum in 2000 reformulated and affirmed specific goals for adult literacy – notably to achieve by the year 2015 a 50% reduction in illiteracy rates, particularly among women, while ensuring equitable access to continuing education for all – and enjoined nations to develop their own National Plans for Action.

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[13] It can likewise be maintained that the frequent association of effective nonformal education programs with contestation and entitlement claims by disenfranchised strata of the population had something, at least, to do with this disaffection.

[14] These perspectives, globally characterized as the "new literacy studies," are succinctly summarized in Clark (1999) and more fully developed in Barton (1994).

NEPAD emerged from a study conducted by five African nations (Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa) at the request of the OAU and articulated a vision of a "vibrant, rich and culturally diverse continent" achieving development and full democratization through collaboration among government, civil society and external partners. With respect to education, it urged that responsible institutions design their programs to "prepare people to take charge of their destiny, to liberate them from dependency and to enable them to engage in critical thinking" – all quite congruent with the conscientization or human rights approach to literacy, though NEPAD documents did not directly reference these models (Joshi & Mick 2000).

31. Such general prescriptions have not been without their critics. The South African Council of Churches, for example, has taxed NEPAD with ignoring the current dependent status of Africa within the global economic order and with underplaying the need to galvanize the participation of the continent's population in development and decision-making. Their arguments remind us that these meetings necessarily took place "in the lee" of major economic and political forums outside Africa, like the high level exchanges leading to the Washington Consensus in 1989, which established many of the policies and parameters that determined the course of African development and foreign assistance over the following decade (Gore 2000). The meetings in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Dakar, and the provisions of NEPAD nonetheless provided a potential framework for renewed literacy work at the national level.

32. Only a few African countries have explicit policies with respect to literacy. Botswana, Rwanda, South Africa and Tanzania are among these exceptions. Botswana's *Vision 2016*, for example, argues for "learning as a lifelong process that should be accessible to all regardless of circumstances or age" and advocates "flexible modes of educational delivery." South Africa's vision foresees the day when all citizens will benefit from both basic education and training and participate actively in "social transformation." In general, though, as Maruatona (2005, p. 13) notes, the visions of African nations regarding literacy "are mostly integrated into the national planning framework through [strategies for] expanding formal schooling." [15]

33. The potential for using national policy instruments to promote literacy beyond schooling has therefore been little exploited to date on the continent, though it can be argued that supra-national undertakings like the Fast Track Initiative (FTI) and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) requirements have left governments relatively little room for maneuver in this regard. For the most part, as UNESCO/BREDA observed nearly a decade ago, educational policy development in African countries remains constrained by the infrastructure inherited from colonialism; and new policy directions, while increasing endorsed and locally experimented, prove difficult to generalize.

3.4.   CURRENT INDICATORS OF PROGRESS

34. Considerable data on current and historical levels of adult literacy in Sub-Saharan Africa are presented in the Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2005) and selected portions are excerpted here. Caution must be exercised in interpreting this information, given widely varying methods of collection and problems of accuracy and validity; but it remains true by order of magnitude at least.

Overall literacy rates in the Region have approximately doubled since 1970 and have in fact more than doubled for women. (A weighted estimate puts the overall figure for 2005 at about 55%.)

The ratio of women's to men's literacy rates has gone from approximately 45% to nearly 75%. There are at the same time striking differences among countries in the female-to-male literacy ratio, varying from under 20% (rates for women only one-fifth of those for men in some countries) to almost 90% (near parity in others).

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[15] For a fuller discussion of the current state of literacy policy in Africa, see Maruatona (2006) , one of the component studies for the ADEA Biennial Meeting.

The number of illiterate adults throughout the Region remains massive, however -- in excess of 140 million – and if literacy rates have improved by almost ten percentage points since 1990, the absolute number of illiterates has simultaneously grown by nearly 12 million souls.

Sixteen of twenty-four Sub-Saharan countries have not yet reached 80% of their EFA goal, seven are within 80 and 94% and only one has passed the 95% mark. Only Botswana and Malawi are recognized to be achieving EFA goals.

From an equity perspective, only three African countries of the 40 for which data are available have attained or exceeded gender parity in literacy rates (Botswana, Lesotho and Seychelles), according to the EFA Global Monitoring Report; three others are within 5% of parity; and only nine of the forty have GPIs (gender parity indices) above the average for all developing countries.

35.   There has thus been definite progress, in terms both of coverage and of equity; but, as a Bambara expression reminds us, *N ba wolola ani n ba tilara, u te kelen ye:* "'Saying 'My mother has given birth' and saying 'My mother has finished her work' are not at all the same thing." The end is not yet in sight.

4.   A SYSTEMIC FRAMEWORK FOR DIAGNOSIS

Ranar wanka ba a b'oyon cibiya
The day of the bath is no time to hide the bellybutton.
Hausa (Niger/Nigeria)

36.   We turn now to an examination of lessons learned from several decades of experience with literacy and nonformal education in Africa. In order to diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of literacy programming, a framework that helps in identifying functions and understanding the relationship of component activities to each other can be very useful. The one illustrated in Figure 1 hereafter -- by no means original -- should render that service for the purposes of this document. Three realms of program operation and one for the environing context are distinguished:
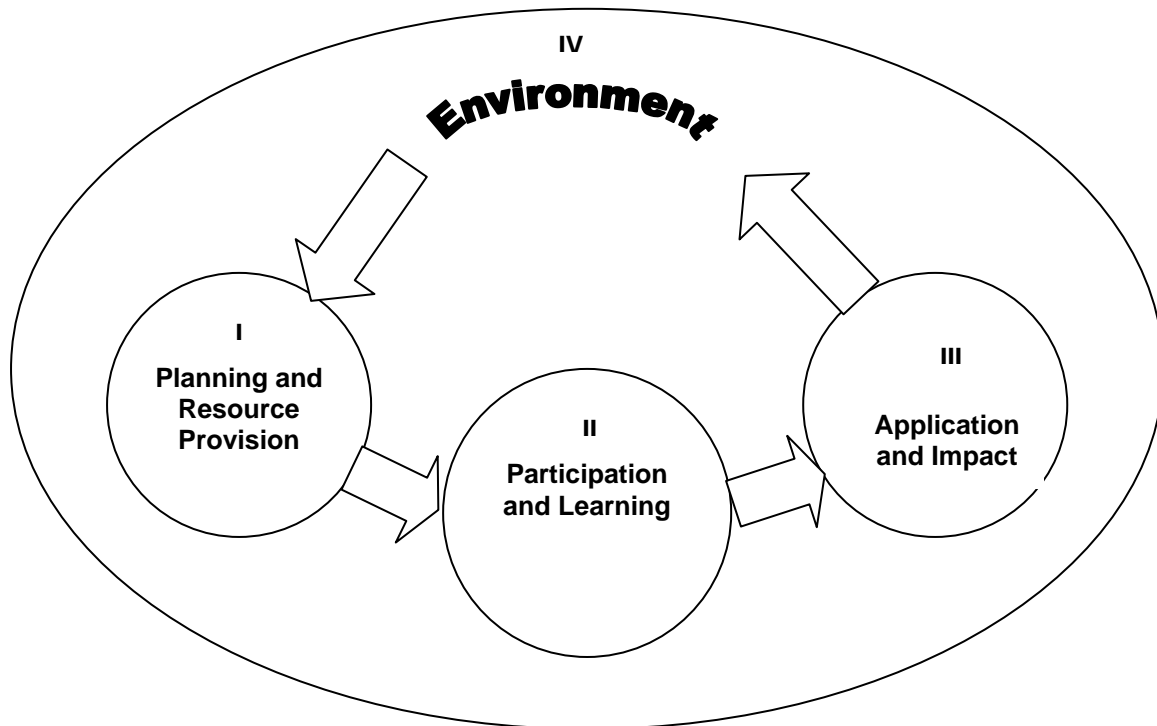
*Figure 1: Simple graphic portrayal of functional realms of a
literacy or NFE program*

I   The realm of *provision* "upstream" of the actual instructional process where resources generated from the larger environment and necessary for the conduct of the program are adapted to this purpose and transmitted to field sites. Note that all functions in this realm are not necessarily exercised by central bodies: some may be carried out by field sites themselves, depending on the level of decentralization and the division of labor adopted in any given program;

II   The realm of *participation, instruction and learning*, where these resources are put to local use in carrying out the program and where organized teaching and learning take place;

III The realm of *application and impact* "downstream" from the actual training where participants do (or do not) apply what they have learned to their personal and working lives. These applied activities produce in turn some sort of impact on --

IV The social, cultural and economic *environment*, represented here as a fourth residual category or background domain, from which resources must once again be generated to support the ongoing literacy work.

37.   The review of lessons learned in the conduct of literacy programs will follow this scheme, beginning "upstream" of the realm of teaching and learning in the administrative domain where resources necessary for the program are generated and deployed (Section 4), and following the progress of that impetus through actual instructional activities (Section 5) to application of the new knowledge acquired (Section 6) and thence to impact on and relations with the surrounding environment (Section 7). Of course, though these activities are logically sequential, they in fact take place simultaneously and influence each other in many ways. The scheme above is therefore not meant as a photograph of reality, but simply as a template for organizing presentation and analysis.

5.   UPSTREAM FACTORS: PLANNING AND PROVISION

Da an ce da kare, "Tuwo ya yi yawa a gidan biki," ya ce, "Ma fa gani a k'as."
When the dog was told there was food for everyone at the feast, he said, "We'll check that out at ground level
Hausa (Niger/Nigeria)

38.   "Upstream" from the instructional activities undertaken in literacy programs are all the functions and units responsible for establishment of policy, for procurement of funds, for supervision of the work and for provision of literacy services -- at whatever level they may reside. Though deficiencies of support and materials delivery have been a problem in literacy work over the years, the decentralization of many of these programs and the diversification of provision that has accelerated over the last two decades – provoked in part by the budgetary austerity that accompanied structural adjustment -- have modified the situation in some fundamental ways and led to creative outsourcing solutions as well as marked efforts to promote local ownership and adaptation of programs.

5.1.   DIVERSIFICATION OF SUPPLY

39.   The adoption of newly literate adults as instructional personnel beginning in the 1960s[16] and initial measures to decentralize the administration of national programs two decades later[17] both had a significant impact on the shape and effect of activities in the field. However, it is the institution of cooperative arrangements with NGOs, community service organizations (CSOs) and private grassroots providers in recent years -- and the outsourcing to them of service delivery responsibilities -- that constitute the most important innovations on the supply side of literacy programming. In Burkina Faso, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda, to cite only those examples, NGOs of diverse types play major roles in provision of literacy services. In Ghana, private commercial providers have met much of the need in those sectors – like irrigated farming – where effective demand from the local population is intense enough to support a business approach to the supply of training (Closson et al. 2002).

40.   Where well designed, implemented and monitored, outsourcing or decentralization systems like this have proven to have a number of virtues: The fact that the NGOs and private organizations in question are often in closer contact with the communities served than are government agencies concerned can facilitate better adaptation of programs to local needs. Providers this close to client groups may also ensure quicker response to the problems of implementation that inevitably arise. And this mechanism for delegating implementation responsibilities frequently makes it possible to extend the reach of existing programs well beyond what central government agencies could ever manage to do, particularly in times of budgetary austerity.[18]

41.   An essentially different but potentially complementary strategy for diversification of supply is constituted by the ongoing development and experimentation of "National Qualification Frameworks" in South Africa, Namibia, Kenya and Uganda. These schemes establish unit standards for assessing basic knowledge and skill acquisition that "culminate in qualifications for [all] learners" – including literacy students – and "permit portability, accessibility and transferability" of qualifications attained between formal and nonformal education and across different venues (McKay & Romm, 2006, p. 10). Though these initiatives may appear to have more to do with techniques of assessment than with policies of provision, they in fact create a situation in which learners may acquire skills and competencies in any effective manner they choose – on their own, by personal

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[16] ..and elevated to the rank of a formal policy recommendation in evaluation reports on the EWLP.

[17] For a fuller discussion of the results of tentative efforts at administrative decentralization of literacy programs in East and southern Africa, see Aitchison (2006) , one of the component studies for the ADEA Biennial Meeting.

[18] For a pertinent analysis of the funding of outsourcing mechanisms in Burkina Faso, see Tiéndrébeogo and Mathias (2006) , one of the component studies for the ADEA Biennial Meeting. And for more detail on outsourcing and partnerships in Senegal, see Gueye and Diagne (2006), likewise prepared for the ADEA Biennial.

tutoring, through organized nonformal instruction or in formal schooling – and then have this learning fully accredited.[19] Without denying the important role of organized provision, such policies open up new possibilities for literacy acquisition and allow current strategy to better mimic the historical process by which most people have become literate: through self study and group interactions on their own.

5.2. PROBLEMS OF OVERSIGHT

42.   At the same time, problems with such outsourcing and qualification schemes have arisen when they are not thoughtfully designed, well implemented or closely supervised. Involvement of NGOs and "local partners" is scarcely a panacea. To begin with, those terms are as imprecise as the word "literacy" itself and may cover everything from international organizations like ActionAid or Save the Children to local groups established by newly literate adults themselves, and from voluntary associations to commercial ventures. Good mechanisms for evaluation and accountability are required, including *downward* accountability to the local communities concerned, whose interests risk being ignored in the negotiations between government agencies and private or nonprofit contractors. Effective monitoring systems, however, are not yet the norm. Successful outsourcing also requires well-oiled and reliable mechanisms for contracting with civil society organizations and ensuring fiscal oversight, domains in which there is a considerable learning curve. Moreover, a perfectly adapted and carefully designed scheme for provision will still yield few results in an area where post-literacy opportunities are largely absent or are limited to the few things literacy agencies can devise themselves – a subject further discussed in Section 7 below.

43.   The emerging partnership between government literacy agencies and private or nonprofit providers has nonetheless begun to indicate the dimensions of a *new division of labor* in which institutional partners work together to increase both the scope and the quality of literacy provision, while local stakeholders acquire new rights and responsibilities. In general, overall planning, central management and a series of "staff" and technical support functions remain the province of State agencies, whether central or regional. Civil society and local actors typically assume responsibilities for program adaptation and implementation, training of field personnel, and any other functions that require iteration, modification and first-hand presence in order to work in the particular environment.

44.   The implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks has also encountered its share of problems and is characterized by a similarly steep learning curve. Implementation is demanding and slow work. Training teachers to handle the unit standard system has proven difficult and care must be taken both to continue serving adults not interested in accreditation and to avoid cramming too much into the curriculum (McKay & Romm 2006). But a new environment for literacy provision – and for post-literacy -- is gradually being created.

5.3. CHALLENGES OF LANGUAGE PLANNING

45.   Development of a successful partnership or outsourcing system does not in itself resolve planning challenges like identification and cultivation of environments that are supportive of literacy or optimal targeting of participant groups. High on the list of such issues is the challenge of language planning and of developing appropriate educational language policy. Literacy programs – going back to religious and mission offerings more than a half century ago -- have had the immense merit of transcribing, officializing and developing African languages that might otherwise have remained "mute" and of affiliating with African universities in this regard, but much more remains to be done.

46.   One issue that has bedeviled literacy programs but may lend itself to easier resolution with the diversification of supply mechanisms discussed above is *choices among the use of international, vehicular African and local languages*. From a human rights perspective, all people are

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[19] For a fuller discussion of the status of NQF implementation, see McKay & Romm (2006) , one of the component studies for the ADEA Biennial Meeting.

entitled to acquire and perfect literacy in their own mother tongue, but there are more than 2000 languages on the continent and as many as 8000 dialectical variants. Vehicular languages like Swahili, Hausa, KiKongo and Bambara-Malinke offer a compromise solution in many cases, though sometimes a deficient one, as when their adoption means teaching participants to read and write in a language they do not even speak with facility and may hardly understand (Limage 2005). And in areas topographically and historically divided among multiple ethnic groups with differing languages, as is the case in some of the coastal regions of West Africa, for example, an international language or a derivative of it may in fact play the vehicular role.

47. The domain of language policy and use is a complex one that concerns much more than just literacy programming and must be approached from several perspectives: those of African cultural heritage, of the practicalities of information system development and of the diverse needs and desires of a country's citizenry, many of whom may wish to master a language of outside commerce and international communication as well as the written form of their own tongue. Formulas for equivalence between learning systems in different languages and for a degree of cooperative bi- and trilingualism seem to offer the best long-term hope, but are by no means simple to develop. However, as a Mooré proverb puts it, *Sàls làgm koabgà ti kùri ké bake*: "A hundred slips do not prevent the turtle from getting to the pond." These problems can be resolved in time.[20]

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[20] For further discussion of the use of written African languages, see Alidou (2006) , one of the component studies for the ADEA Biennial Meeting.

6. CORE PROCESSES: PARTICIPATION AND LEARNING

Ntaa wigira kwôga mw-ibenga.
No one learns to swim in deep water.
Kirundi (Burundi)

48.   The great diversity of programs and clienteles that characterizes the realm of adult literacy and nonformal education makes for an equivalent variation in patterns of participation, curriculum design and instructional methodology as well. These variations – if attentively monitored and evaluated – create in fact a living laboratory of literacy strategy; but the structures, habits and resources necessary to capitalize on that natural experimentation are not yet in place.

6.1.   TRENDS IN PARTICIPATION

49.   In most countries of the region, literacy programming has grown and diversified over the last several decades and participation has broadened with it. Considerable wastage and dropout continue to be the norm, more accentuated in situations where support and monitoring are weak or fields of application and benefits to learners seem limited. The proportion that completes programs successfully is most often between $1/10^{th}$ and one-half of original enrollments.

50.   Women make up an increasing proportion – and in many countries an outright majority – of literacy students. They have generally had less access to formal schooling than men and must frequently manage homes and communities in the absence of male family members. "Plenty sits still, but hunger is a wanderer" (*Inala aihambi kuhamb'indhlala*), the Touareg say. Women have in any case been quick to respond to opportunities for instruction and have prized and put to good use, at the same time, the occasion to meet with other women, to extend networks and transform them into legal associations. As a Xhosa expression puts it, *Umntu ngumtu ngabantu:* "A person is a person through [or because of] other people."

51.   At the same time, the average age of participants, both male and female, has tended to decrease over the years – as it has in the history of individual programs as well – due to an influx of school dropouts, who hope by this means to resume their education or gain access to outside employment possibilities. In addition, programs have been increasingly developed for, and have increasingly enrolled, special populations with particular and acute needs, like street and working children, migrants, refugees from zones of conflict or famine and victims (direct or indirect) of HIV/AIDS – as well as groups that face specific new opportunities and challenges, like recently elected local officials, informal economy craftsmen and women hoping to expand their market access, or grassroots credit mutual personnel.[21] Finally, there has been an ongoing "hybridization" of literacy programs with projects in other sectors like agriculture, health, natural resource management and public administration and with "livelihood" training in general.

52.   One related dimension of participation is seldom emphasized but highly significant to this study: Given the legacy of varied types of literacy, training and schooling provision that characterizes nearly every region of the continent – comparable to as many "archeological strata" of past efforts and former clienteles – literacy programs often tend to enroll people who have quite a history of previous involvement in different forms of instruction and may possess very different levels and types of existing knowledge and skill. Programs scarcely start up in "virgin terrintory." In fact, the authors of the PADLOS-Education Study (Easton et al., 1998) demonstrated, through multiple case studies in five countries of West Africa, that new local development initiatives typically attracted participants with some background of learning in venues as diverse as Koranic instruction, initial years of primary schooling, earlier literacy or nonformal education ventures, vocational training, traditional

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[21] For a description of innovative literacy and nonformal education program for street and working children, see Easton, Klees & Papagiannis (1994). For migrants, see Rinta, L. (2005). For literacy with refugees from conflict, see Hannemann (2005). For literacy initiatives with HIV/AIDS patients, families and communities, see e.g. accounts of the GOAL Sudan program.

apprenticeships and experience gained through out-migration. In such cases, current nonformal education and literacy programs come to serve as a social mechanism for "recycling" aspirants to positions of responsibility in the new economic activities and of "homogenizing" the local labor pool – by building on the existing knowledge of participants and giving them a relatively standard set of relevant competencies anchored in mastery of literacy and numeric operations in the applicable African language. This process is graphically portrayed in Figure 2 on the next page.

6.2.   TRENDS IN INSTRUCTION

53.   In the early stages of most programs, literacy instruction remains as a rule quite traditional and didactic. Whatever the intended pedagogy, teachers are typically inspired by the scholastic model. However, the conditions and challenges of literacy instruction are different enough from those of primary education to have impelled, over time, some fundamental changes in approach:

(a) *From participation to "conscientization"*: Perhaps the most important of these is the development of much more participatory and sometimes "conscientizing" approaches than are characteristic of traditional scholastic instruction. This is part of the reason why literacy and adult education programs have often worked well with children in exceptional circumstances and with school dropouts: treating them as adults who have their own needs and ideas is just what it takes, at times, to give them new hope and impetus. As the Sara people say, *Gòwró kä ngon ì kä kùmänèé*: "Even the little squash has its seeds."

Full-fledged or "strong" participation, of course, means not just taking part in instructional sequences but having a role in decision-making about the content and conduct of programs as well. In addition, human rights curricula have increasingly become a means of helping participants to discover their capacity for enhanced roles in society at large, often borrowing from Freireian pedagogy the notion that adults can learn to "read the world" as well as the word, can learn to name – and address – the sources of oppression that weigh upon them, and can begin to write their own histories and speak their own truths.

(b) *From scholastic models to livelihood and empowerment strategies:* The "hybridization" mentioned above has had important consequence for curriculum and instructional design as well. Livelihood strategies have come to involve combining chosen elements and sequences of the "three Rs" (plus numeracy) with the development of trade and income-generating skills, though they have typically been more successful when literacy is built into training programs in other sectors than when trade apprenticeship is folded into existing literacy programs.[22] Livelihood programming *plus* conscientization or a human rights focus often produces a uniquely effective empowerment approach.

From chalk talk to varied technologies: Though literacy itself is a new "technology" for many program participants, the technologies used in instruction have typically been limited to a restricted supply of chalk boards, dog-eared manuals, notebooks and pens, not to speak of dilapidated infrastructure. Responses found for such constraints have ranged from "deconstructing" literacy itself by demystifying the ideology of status and supernatural power that tends to surround it to beginning instruction with more accessible forms of empowerment and enriching the methods used to convey it by inclusion of theatre, art, indigenous wisdom and available electronic media (Archer 2005). Computer–assisted instruction holds great promise for the future but its application is largely limited at present by cost and infrastructure to important administrative uses (like teacher training, highlighted below), even in Swahili-speaking regions of the continent where other African-language media have begun to spread.[23]

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[22] A process well described and analyzed in Oxenham et al. (2002).

[23] The International Literacy Institute has undertaken quite a concentrated effort to develop supportive uses for information and communications technology in literacy programs, currently spearheaded in South Africa. See Wagner & Kozma (2005).

Skills required for local self-governance and assumption of new development responsibilities

Literate — Technical

Urban-rural networks

Out-migrants

Self-taught

Media, correspondence

Religious networks

Koranic/biblical students

Initiates of traditional education

Traditional authorities and cultural systems

School leavers and dropouts

New literates and traineees

Apprentices and para-professionls

Formal educational system (primary, secondary)

Public, private and NGO-funded nonformal education

Technical agencies and extension services

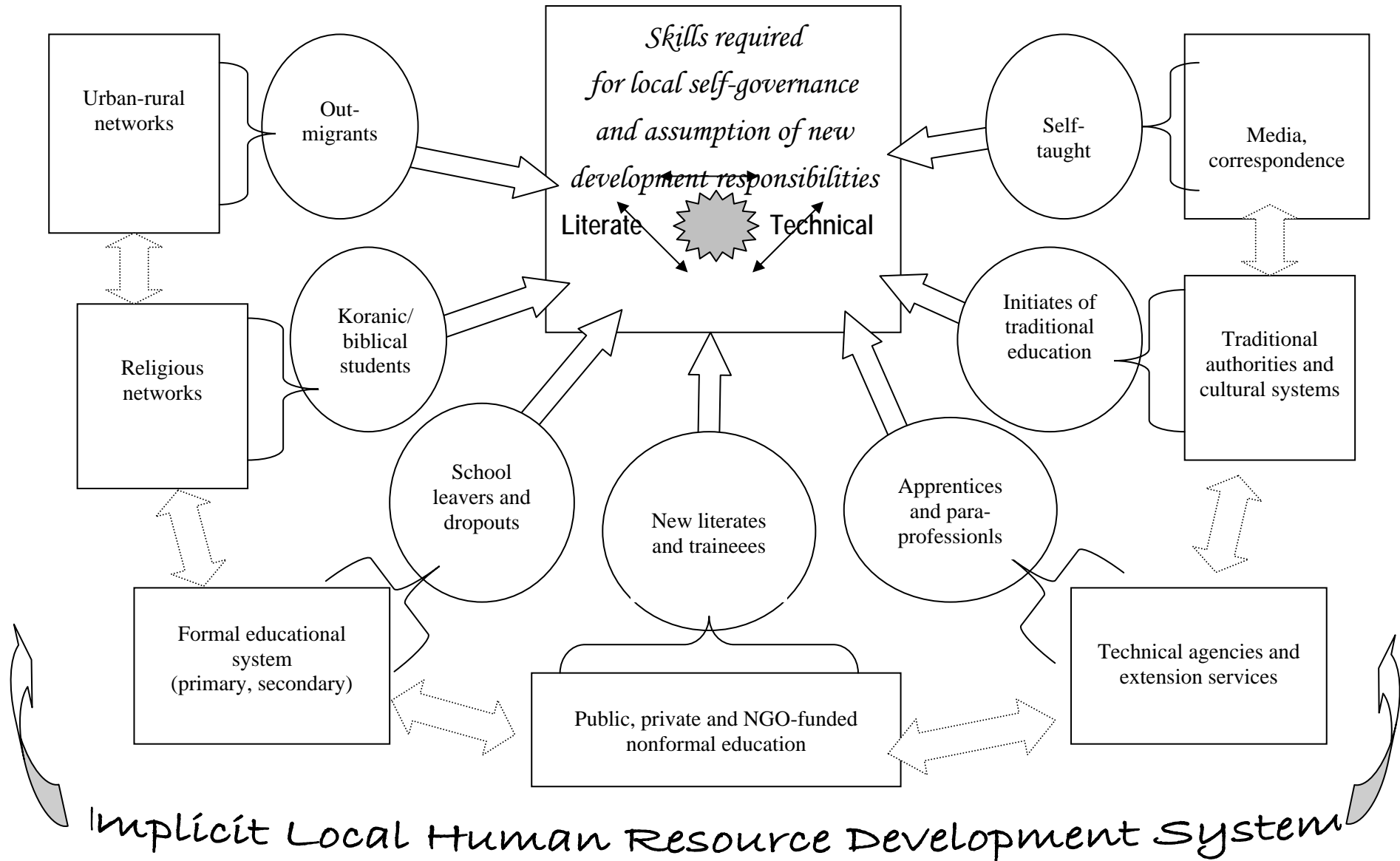Implicit Local Human Resource Development System

Figure 2: Sourece of Local Competence

6.3. UPGRADING TEACHER TRAINING AND INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

54.   As the opportunities and complexity of ground-level instruction in literacy programs become clear, the demands this creates for a highly competent and dedicated teaching corps also become increasingly evident.[24] New means have been found over recent years to improve teacher training and to enrich and systematize the university preparation of those who must in turn recruit, train and monitor the new teachers: namely, the personnel of literacy agencies and of relevant Ministries and NGOs. New university degree programs for literacy, nonformal education and human resource development personnel have appeared across the continent and existing ones have been significantly strengthened. Computer-assisted training and distance learning, moreover, offer valuable ways to more easily expand the training of new literacy staff.

55.   But each level of the structure will require increased capability in order to meet the needs sketched above and in order to help literacy and nonformal education agencies with challenges like

> "going to scale" in teacher training;

> evolving from a predominant if not exclusive focus on basic literacy to competence in a progressively broader set of training curricula; and

> learning to design and support varied forms of training and lifelong learning in many different sectors.

56.   Needs for training local actors across the spectrum of local development concerns will not diminish, but only increase, as the goal of Literacy for All is reached and people move on to the many "literacies" required in order to effectively manage their own affairs and durably achieve the MDGs, locality by locality. As a consequence, staff of literacy and nonformal education agencies must be equipped to play the role of professional training consultant and instructional design specialist ready to help other agencies and organizations in devising, administering and monitoring a variety of kinds of instruction in a variety of practical curricular areas.

6.4. STRENGTHENING LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

57.   In the sometimes threadbare economy of literacy programs, evaluation functions tend to be the last funded and the first cut. The consequence is that regular and proficient formative evaluation and even monitoring of literacy activities can be hard to find. Yet conscientious evaluation is not simply a priority from the funder's point of view – it is also a critical means for program improvement and a way to turn the mix of programs in any region or country into the laboratory for identifying best practice mentioned earlier (Easton 1977).

58.   There have been laudable if sporadic efforts by government ministries and external donors to bolster the competence of staff in evaluation methods. They have produced some effect and merit extension. Arguably, though, the factor most likely at this point to further improve monitoring and formative evaluation practice is reinforcement and better articulation of *downward* as well as upward accountability: i.e., systems that give local participants a live interest in demonstrating and documenting their own performance in objective fashion and the means to monitor the outcomes of programs.[25] Participatory and professional styles of evaluation go hand in hand in this endeavor, just as they have increasingly in other sectors of development (Idem).[26]

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[24] The nature of the challenge is discussed in Rogers (1999) *inter alia,*

[25] In its support for local development programs, the World Bank has put an emphasis on social accountability (e.g. Malena 2004).

[26] Methods for participatory research and evaluation have become increasingly widespread in development work in other sectors: agriculture, natural resource management and health, for example (cf. Minkler, Wallerstein & Hall 2003; and the Participatory Research and Gender Analysis (PRGA) website:

7. DOWNSTREAM FACTORS: APPLICATION AND USE

Magana ba ta kai tsofuwa kasuwa
Sweet talk alone won't get the old woman to go to market.
Hausa /Niger, Nigeria

59.   We turn now to the realm of application "downstream" from the instructional domain though largely overlapping with it (realm III in Figure 1 above). Unfortunately, the environment and the circumstances in which people previously illiterate typically live tend to be chronically poor in opportunities for beneficial application of their new skills – they tend, that is, to lack readily available reading material in the language of literacy, to present few if any accessible options for further instruction and to be bereft of the financial resources and employment possibilities that might enable new literates to make systematic use of the knowledge acquired or to create new economic ventures of sufficient scope and durability that then require them. Those responsible for design and implementation of literacy programs have at least become increasingly conscious of the dilemma over the years and have moved from an initial concern with lifelong learning in the early 1970s to a recognition of the problem of "post literacy" later in that decade and onward to a more recent and broader concern with the creation of "literate environments" that lend themselves to – and support – the exercise of new literate competence while creating a true basis for lifelong learning.

7.1. THE NATURE OF A LITERATE ENVIRONMENT

Dooley jën dox
The strength of the fish lies in the water.
Wolof /Senegal

60.   What constitutes a "literate environment?" There are arguably four principal and interrelated types of opportunity for application and use of new literate skills:

(a) *Access to reading material* of direct interest to the neo-literate: books, brochures, newspapers, magazines, messages, letters, and other practical documents – which supposes publishing facilities and use of the language in question in relevant media of communication;

(b) *The availability of continuing education* in one or both of two forms:

   i.   sequences of <u>formal schooling</u> to which the learner may accede by establishment of equivalence between the skills already acquired and a given level of that system -- and by virtue of open or age-neutral enrollment policies; or

   ii. varieties of organized <u>nonformal training</u> (such as organized trade apprenticeship) that confer other skills or elements of knowledge of interest to the learner;

(c) *Opportunities to assume sustainable new functions* in existing organizations or institutional structures (like local governments, agricultural cooperatives or extension systems) that require and exercise literate skills; and

(d) *Opportunities to start and help manage sustainable new business or nonprofit endeavors* that likewise require and exercise literate skills.

61.   It is the combination of all four, in forms and to degrees dictated by circumstances, human imagination and available resources, that constitutes a truly "literate environment" and creates

the strongest and most durable demand for literacy training – "effective demand" in the terminology of economics.[27]

7.2. DISSECTING "POST-LITERACY"

62. Since literacy is in fact a *continuum* and "literacies" should be thought of in the plural, the term "post-literacy," some have remarked, is an oxymoron (Lind 2004). There is no end point "after" literacy where learning is complete and when the question is simply what to do with the skills acquired. Learning is instead lifelong.

63. In one sense, that is certainly true, but the argument misses a critical point. The notion of "post-literacy" puts the spotlight on the literate environment and highlights its deficiencies. There is often little to read and, more important still, little in the way of economic and social activity that requires literacy, that rewards it or that "underwrites" and stimulates publication of reading material.

7.2.1. LITERACY AND LOCAL MANAGEMENT OF DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

64. Literacy, it is worth remembering, was first invented some 4000 years ago on the irrigation schemes and in the farming communities of the Fertile Crescent when managing transactions for large scale water allocation and surplus food exchange became too complex to handle by oral means alone (e.g., Tuman 1987). Though it soon acquired important political, religious and cultural functions, the initial motivations and uses for literacy have remained closely linked to the exercise of supervisory and managerial responsibility, as witness its frequent paring with local credit and marketing initiatives in current development work.

65. There is an important lesson here for "post-literacy" planning and for the creation of a literate environment: What most reliably creates the need, the "effective demand" and the local resources for written communication – by creating at the same time the employments that require it – is *assumption of new powers and resource management responsibilities,* whether in commerce, local government, public service delivery, political development, organized religious ministry or a mix of these. And what is most likely to multiply the volume of written material that passes under the nose of new literates or must be prepared by them is communication among these nodes of new activity and the exchange with the outside world that it requires. But if one has few resources and no complex social responsibilities, then the prime stimulus both for literacy and for the spread of written communication is lacking. Most low-literacy environments in Africa are in precisely that low-power and low-resource situation.

7.2.2. CONTINUING EDUCATION AND USE OF THE WRITTEN WORD

> *Tupu agu enwe onye na ako akuko ifo ya, akuko nta ka na eto ndi na achu nta.*
> The stories of the hunt will be tales of glory until the day when the lions have their own historians.
> Igbo/Nigeria

66. Better and more varied provision of reading material in the languages of literacy, adoption of these languages in official documents and media alongside the relevant language of international communication, introduction of them into the formal school curriculum as vehicle and/or

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[27] "Effective demand" means simply demand that can and will be satisfied, because it is backed by the resources necessary to pay for the product or service in question. It is therefore often distinguished from our general wants and desires: things that we might like to have or that others think we ought to have, but that no one is willing or able to underwrite. If there is *effective* demand for literacy, that signifies that those wishing to become literate are ready to devote the time and effort required and that they – or their benefactors – are able to provide the other funds and resources entailed. It is most likely to materialize in situations where the acquisition of literacy yields enough in the way of benefits to new literates (and/or to the institutions to which they belong) to make it worthwhile sacrificing the resources required, including enough in the way of eventual economic benefit to defray the costs of instruction. Thus as "worthwhile" employments for literate skills emerge – i.e. uses in activities that yield returns to participants – or as entitlements of local people increase to the point where they can underwrite non-economic activities they judge particularly valuable, the "effective demand" for literacy instruction increases. The criterion is not necessarily a socially just one: it is no more just than the current distribution of income or configuration of political alliances in society and may only give satisfactory results to the extent that those other important parameters are also modified. But it does reveal like litmus paper what will and won't provide a sustainable basis for adult education.

subject of study, availability of continuing education and trade training to which new literates can gain access, the creation of bridges and equivalencies between literacy instruction and formal primary schooling -- all such initiatives help "flesh out" the post-literacy domain and create sufficient effective demand to drive the literacy effort. They are very worth pursuing. There now are instances of encouraging progress in each of these domains.

67. There nonetheless remain many difficulties to overcome. African language publication, for example, is constrained by the fact that few new literates have the resources to pay for books and newspapers in any quantity; and wealthier population groups tend to prefer or exclusively demand material in international languages (English, French, Portuguese or Arabic). Publishers generally doubt their ability to sell African language titles and have their hands full with the important task of popularizing African authors writing in international languages. Ingenious solutions must be found for increasing the volume of the written word in African languages. ARED-Senegal has developed one creative formula by tapping into the emigrant population of Pulaar speakers interested in the conservation of their own heritage and language.[28]

68. At the same time, though introduction of African languages into primary education has given encouraging results in experimental programs across West Africa and is current practice in at least the lower grades in much of East and Southern Africa, these languages still have distinctly junior status in the educational system (Alidou 2006). The problem of well-navigated transitions between African and international languages is one of the factors that makes the encouraging examples of bridges from literacy and adult basic education to continuing education in upper primary, middle or secondary school still difficult to generalize.

69. Each of these avenues for developing the continuing (and hopefully lifelong) learning opportunities open to newly literate adults stands to gain a great deal from increased assumption of social and economic responsibility at the local level – the flip side of post-literacy discussed above – for it is achievements in this practical domain that can multiply at one and the same time the amount of written material in circulation, the effective demand for publication in African languages and the pressure for new types of continuing education. The two axes of a "literate environment" sketched above (a-b and c-d) are thus intimately related.[29]

7.3. THE KEY ROLE OF LOCAL CAPACITY BUILDING

70. The problem most frequently encountered in developing post-literacy and enhancing *both* major dimensions of the literate environment is that the issues of commerce, power, governance and social organization that determine much of the nature and density of post-literacy opportunity are not in the habitual domain of educators, who tend therefore to be a bit tone deaf when it comes to categories (c) and (d) above. They are, however, very much in the realm of local development itself. In fact, most of the important opportunities for the application of literate skills *lie in other sectors of development* like agriculture, natural resource management, health, governance, credit and banking, public works and – yes – even the local management of formal education, though they tend to lie there fallow until a confluence of political will, new seed resources and the availability of appropriate training brings them to fruition. Literacy programs have sometimes tried to *simulate* socio-economic applications for former students, by starting, for example, small-scale credit schemes or agricultural cooperatives within the framework of the educational agency. Though worthwhile in themselves as experimental sites for new curricula, these efforts seldom attain the level of sophistication or the scope of real development projects, which are naturally more than literacy personnel, even those underwritten by generous outside aid, can sustain.

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[28] For more relevant detail on the ARED experience, see Fagerberg-Diallo (2006), one of the component studies for the ADEA Biennial Meeting.

[29] For a fuller discussion of interactions between nonformal and formal education in Africa today, see Katahoire (2006), one of the component studies for the ADEA Biennial Meeting.

7.3.1. NEEDS BORN OF DECENTRALIZED DEVELOPMENT

71.   This situation might seem bleak indeed, if it weren't for the fact that – conversely -- most of the other development sectors in question are presently *in very sore need of reliable means to create local capacity for management* within their own spheres. Due both to restricted budgets and the impetus to promote local assumption of development initiatives, decentralization and transfer of responsibility into qualified local hands are increasingly on the agenda of technical ministries and international organizations alike. The UN Millennium Project places "training large quantities of village workers in health, farming and infrastructure" sixth among seventeen priority investments; the World Bank speaks of "rural development from below"; USAID emphasizes "empowering local populations for community-based forest management"; and NEPAD stresses "broad and deep participation [in development governance] by all strata and sectors of society."

72.   In short, "local capacity building" is becoming a practical necessity in other sectors of development. The more democratically-oriented the strategies in those different sectors – that is, the more local participation in decision-making as well as technical execution is structurally provided for – the *broader* the training needs entailed. Though a local organization governed top-down can make do with a few of its own bureaucrats and technicians, one more democratically governed requires not only people to fill managerial and technical positions, but others able to replace them in case of incapacitation or malfeasance, plus a membership sufficiently aware and knowledgeable concerning the organization's operations to monitor its performance and hold its leadership accountable.[30]

73.   In fact, *this is no less true of formal primary education than it is in other sectors of development*. In the education sector as well, there is growing demand for "local capacity building" – revolving in particular around increased participation of parents and other local stakeholders in educational governance and financing. Potentials in this regard have been foreshadowed in important ways by the community school movement; but realizing them will likely require coupling the adult training and lifelong learning resources of literacy and nonformal education programs with the childhood education vocation of primary schools, and relating both in some way to the kind of local savings-generating economic and social initiatives that new literate skills can enable people to establish or take over.

7.3.2. REVERSING OUR THINKING

74.   Strategies for successful articulation of literacy training on capacity building needs and local resource accumulation schemes in other sectors are best worked out *before* literacy programs themselves are launched. More than 25 years ago, in completing a participatory evaluation of literacy programs in one West African country, the national team with which I worked formulated a counter-intuitive but critical recommendation for future programming: Henceforth *implement post-literacy before literacy!* In short, they encouraged decision-makers to verify, nurture or upgrade the literate environment before undertaking actual instruction. The advice has not been much heeded.

75.   Of course, practical strategies are a good deal more iterative and recursive than this "iron law" of X before Y suggests (it was principally a device for reversing our own thinking); but the main point remains valid. Success in literacy depends as much on *the quality of the literate environment* – including most definitely the state of policies designed to transfer development responsibilities and related resource entitlements into local hands and to link training programs to these initiatives -- as it does on either the innate capacities of participants or the effectiveness of instructional design. And perhaps the key ingredient for durably linking literacy programs to development and poverty reduction needs lies in promoting transfer and capitalization of resources and development management opportunities to the local level and organizing literacy programs around the needs that such challenges create.[31]

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[30] See Easton (2006) among the other studies prepared for the ADEA Biennial.

[31] This point was empirically demonstrated in the PADLOS-Education Study, cited earlier (Easton et al., 1998). It documented a series of cases where the establishment of new locally-managed enterprise in Sahelian villages had served both as a venue for application of earlier learning by local adults – men and women – and as a stimulus to further organized study.

7.4. EMPOWERMENT AS ALTERNATE STRATEGY

76.   The relative success of women's literacy programs – even in places where the post-literacy environment does not seem very supportive -- has taught us that under certain circumstances effective programs can create their own sources of demand, at least for a while. This is not so much thanks to the attempts of oversight agencies, NGOs or donors to provide participants with some reading material and follow-up activities, useful though these initiatives are, as because the women themselves discover major benefits in their cooperative experience. Given the situation and potentials of African women in many areas of Sub-Saharan Africa, women's literacy programs often, in effect, *contain their own post-literacy*. The opportunity to consult with each other, to organize their own associations, to raise their own voices, to forge a new identity and to begin establishing their own forms of investment and business – even if initially very limited – may constitute a sufficient field of application to fuel strong and sustained motivation.

77.   The general rule that this example seems to reveal illustrates the great pertinence of human rights and related forms of conscientization to literacy work. Programs that directly address key issues of human rights, including factors of inequity that help to explain the dearth of investment, employment and post-literacy opportunity in a given region and to illuminate gender roles, can both awaken and sustain the motivation required to complete training without many clear functional outlets. To these we should doubtless add certain cultural revitalization programs, like ARED in Senegal (Fagerberg-Diallo 2006), which assert the rights and literary heritage of vibrant minorities in particularly effective form. The Tostan program in Senegal and several other African countries provides a particular striking example, as it has enabled village women to set their own agenda for eliminating female genital circumcision as both prelude and consequence of their literacy training and to start a movement that has brought about real change (e.g., Easton & Monkman 2001).

78.   These important exceptions or parallel principles also contain the seed of a warning, however. If deprivation of human rights and consciousness of this injustice are the principal motivation for literacy, that may serve both to fuel the program and to help organize participants – but they will be organized to claim rightful entitlements that they have so far been denied. What was first an educational movement then becomes a political reality, perhaps a necessary one. But as a Kirundi proverb puts it, *Mu-nda haraara inzara hakavyuka ka inzigo* – "If hunger passes all night in the belly, resentment awakes in the morning." Better to combine the effects of empowerment and a literate environment than to pit the first against the forces that obstruct the second.

7.5. GETTING OUTSIDE THE "EDUCATION BOX"

79.   The preceding arguments make it clear that strengthening the critical domain of literacy application requires that proponents and sponsors of these programs somehow "get outside the education box" and devise living linkages with the functions and activities in other sectors of development that can put acquired skills to durable use and generate new "literacies" to boot. As we will have occasion to note in the next section, the current disarticulation between education and its potential partners is as much, if not more, a failing of governmental or donor agencies, where the related functions remain largely stove-piped and balkanized, as it is of actors at the local level, where the different sectors involved tend to be in any case inextricably intertwined. Though a good part of this is simple institutional inertia, one must also ask "*A qui profite le crime?*"

80.   It constitutes at the same time the most important shortcoming of the EFA Global Monitoring Report on literacy (UNESCO 2005). Though admirable in its scope and its statistical portrayal of current conditions and trends, that document itself remains, alas, prisoner of a largely unisectoral frame of reference – tributary to the supply-side preoccupations of EFA in general -- and thus provides scant analysis of the vital connections that make literacy both essential and replicable in so many other sectors of development. It remains, in effect, a bit "tone deaf" in the same manner described above.

8. EXTERNAL SUPPORT WHERE IT COUNTS

Sên gâe-a a to pîirê gâee tênga
The one who sleeps on a borrowed mat should remember that he is sleeping on the cold hard ground
Mooré (Burkina Faso)

81.   "External support" means the assistance provided to literacy programs by governments, donor organizations and NGOs of varying descriptions. Three varieties are of particular interest: financial, political and technical.

8.1. MAKING BRICKS WITH LIMITED STRAW

82.   Literacy – like adult education – has generally been and continues to be the "poor cousin" of the development (and even the education) family. If particular projects have been well funded, the subsector as a whole has seldom been the target of much strategic attention. For years the World Bank refused to invest in literacy and nonformal education programming, seeing few convincing outcomes from UNESCO functional literacy programs and fearful that attention devoted to literacy programs would detract from the priority given to basic primary education – if not that the more radical Freirian variety would take root. National governments have adopted similar attitudes, encouraged if not impelled by donor agency policy and cornered by the constraints of structural adjustment as well as their own operational limitations. There are exceptions to this rule, but no contrary movement. Literacy and nonformal adult education seldom garner more than 1% of national education budgets, whereas the share of these in overall budgets of African countries frequently exceeds 20%.

83.   Though the title of this paper is "Investing in Literacy" and though increased financial support is amply warranted, in fact the support that seems the most important – from governments first, and from donors and NGOs next -- is *political* or policy-based. Three kinds seem particularly critical:

>   supporting the development and use of written African languages as media of communication, alongside and in fruitful symbiosis with relevant international languages;

>   creating new opportunities for the continuing education of new literates by bridging the gap between formal and nonformal education; and

>   implementing across sectors the decentralization and local investment initiatives required to jump-start grassroots development and to make literacy programming an instrument of local capacity building.

Insofar as the third will, in effect, require the other two, if a choice had to be made, -- hopefully not the case -- it should doubtless be accorded priority.

8.2. SHORTFALLS IN COORDINATION

Su fukk di gas, fukk di suul, pënday bare, waaye pax du am
Ten digging, ten filling – lots of dust, no hole.
Wolof (Senegal)

84.   But at present this priority does not seem evident, except in the circumscribed case of certain NGOs, not always highly replicable. One core problem of long date is the classic bureaucratic one already mentioned: whereas development sectors are closely interwoven, in fact inseparable, at the field level, they too often remain "stove-piped" within government Ministries and donor organizations. Conceiving and supporting investments that cut across these partitions proves extremely difficult.

85.   International institutions provide ample examples. The Education Sector (and Human Development Network) in the World Bank, for instance, remains quite divorced from the units working on other aspects of local development. In a sense, the Bank has turned a corner over the last

decade in both sponsoring a greater number of literacy and adult education projects – though still a very minor part of its portfolio -- and drawing some useful lessons from them. But it still resists engaging in the effort most needed to put literacy to work in poverty reduction, an activity for which it would seem admirably equipped: bridging the gaps between literacy and local capacity building strategies in other sectors and between adult education programs and primary schooling.[32] It is not alone in this apparent allergy to intersectoral work: models for productive collaboration among relevant UN agencies – UNESCO, UNICEF, FAO, UNDP, WHO, ILO and UNEP, for example – are hard to find and harder yet to mobilize in support of integrated strategies for literacy and local capacity building.

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[32] The former President of the Bank did help initiate – and generously fund – a cross-cutting program within the Institution devoted to Commmunity-Driven Development. Its documents and activities are in fact designed to support local capacity development and to introduce bottom-up approaches in different sectors. There has been next to no collaboration between CDD and literacy or adult education programming, however. Significantly enough, the impression I got from conversations with CDD staff in 2003-2004 was that they were in fact downplaying the "educational" aspects of their work for fear that educators who knew nothing of local development work would come in and muck things up.

9.   COSTS AND BENEFITS

Ku la abal i tànk, nga dem fa ko neex
If someone loans you his legs, you go where he wants you to.
Wolof/Senegal

86.   The title of this document frames the assessment and development of African literacy programs in the language of investment: what to bet on, why to do it and how to go about it. One way to sum up the results of the assessment thus far is therefore in *cost-benefit* terms. Of course, as pointed out earlier, the resources that have been or will be invested in literacy programming are not solely financial and the benefits reaped are themselves more than monetary. Nonetheless,, cost-benefit analysis (CBA) supplies one valuable "template" for beginning to draw conclusions.

87.   What then can be said about the costs and benefits of literacy programs?

9.1.   MEASURING THE COSTS

Silga ràt bùuga là-pàn-dîkd-kà yé
The hawk would love [to catch] a goat, but doesn't have enough strength.
Mooré (Burkina Faso)

88.   Tracking the costs of literacy programs is important not just as a means of measuring effectiveness and contributing to cost-benefit calculations but out of simple concern for good management and fiscal accountability as well. Determining *which* figures to put in the numerator of a unit cost ratio, however, and how to include expenditures and resource uses to which monetary price tags are not necessarily assigned is more difficult. Cost analysis is therefore very worth performing in such programs, though its outcomes must also be critically assessed. They should be as precise as possible from an accountability standpoint, but interpreted with some circumspection for policy purposes. It is best in that latter regard to stick with orders of magnitude.

89.   From a policy perspective, the indicator that typically interests decision-makers and outside stakeholders is a unit cost figure: the amount per literacy student (good), per person made literate (better), or per person by unit of "pre-post" increase in literacy level achieved (best). Such data are rarely available. To the extent that they are, the cost-effectiveness of alternate literacy programs may be compared and the range and average of those figures stacked up against similar estimates for primary education.

90.   The interest of comparing different methods and approaches to literacy among themselves on the basis of their unit costs, as skeletal and approximate as these figures generally are, is evident: it helps to keep the scarce resource issue in focus and may enable us to spot areas where savings could be made and more people reached, as well as places where too little is being reinvested and quality may soon take a nosedive. The utility and significance of comparing these figures *between* literacy programming on the one hand and formal primary education on the other is less clear, because the two meet different needs and perform different functions; but at times there are transversal lessons to draw.

91.   Data of this sort are hard to come by, though there is decent indication of their order of magnitude. The 2006 Global Monitoring Report presents results from a convenience sample of 14 programs across as many Sub-Saharan countries, all assessed in the last five years. Unit costs per learner ranged from a low of US$20 in the Burkina Faso and Ghana programs to a high of US$118 in the Lesotho program, averaging US$47. Unit costs per "successful" (and presumably literate) learner ranged from US$30 to US$130, averaging US$68. These tend, however, to be "best case" scenarios. Nordveit (2005, pp. 254-287) carries out a much more detailed analysis for the World Bank women's literacy project in Senegal – the testing ground of *faire faire* strategy -- and comes up with "public costs" (excluding those to the participants themselves) of US$92 per enrollee, US$140 per completer

and US\$378 per "successful completer" or actual literate.[33] If one compares this to Colclough's (2000) estimates for public unit costs of primary schooling across Sub-Saharan Africa (about \$65 per student-year or \$250-\$300 for the four years putatively necessary for a child to become durably literate and somewhere in the neighborhood of \$500 when wastage is taken into account), it is evident that the two are roughly comparable.

92. This is the main point and the one that is "robust" to the order of magnitude or margin of error issue. Both systems could attain better efficiency, but they operate with roughly comparable effectiveness at present, though on two largely different population groups. The variation *within* each system is at least as great as the differences *between* them. The fact to retain is simply that, from a cost-effectiveness point of view, primary schooling and nonformal literacy programs are approximate equivalents and the important complementarity to be worked out between them does not need to address largely irrelevant debates about differential social utility, but should be based on the mutually supportive vocations of each.

9.2. ASSESSING THE BENEFITS

Teka nunu kafunta ntalo kunzaiko
The person who bargains away an elder ignores the great value of things not sold in the market.
KiKongo (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of the Congo, Angloa)

93. Arguments for the benefits of literacy tend to be composed of a laundry list of goodies – plausible individual effects across a number of domains like health, communication, political behavior and agricultural innovation, not to speak of continuing education. One can almost hear *sotto voce,* "And if you won't subscribe to that, would you believe this?"

94. The case is supported by the results of correlational studies showing that people who have become literate or have undergone a given type of programming are indeed more likely to do "x" or "y" than those who have not. And many of the claims are both plausible and encouraging. The indication, for example, that the children of literate women are more likely to attend school and remain in good health than those who have not undergone such training is intriguing and heartening, even if most studies of this type beg the question of whether the effects were in fact *caused* by participation in the program and acquisition of literacy or instead by some other trait or experience which also characterizes most program completers.

95. But such discussions, important as they are, tend to leave aside the whole domain of *the collective, structural and tactical effects of literacy programming*: that is, what happens when – deliberately or spontaneously – people who have gotten a new vision of their own future as well as a new set of skills in literacy or nonformal education programs set about to change their circumstances and find enough support internally and externally to modify their environment in fundamental ways. There are numerous examples of such outcomes, though they are sooner or later dependent on a favorable policy environment. Locally-initiated experiences in multiple locations in West Africa are detailed in the PADLOS-Education Study (Easton et al. 1998). Examples from the sectors of public administration, health, national resource management, agriculture and humanitarian aid for the entire continent are reviewed in a subsequent study for the World Bank (Easton et al. 2004).[34]

96. What this strongly suggests is that literacy can have a major effect on reducing poverty, redeeming rights and upgrading human welfare, but only if a threshold is reached: not just a threshold reading speed (Abadzi 2002, 2003) but a threshold of *application opportunity* that allows people to "reinvest" the intellectual capital they have acquired – to use terms dear to the economists but no worse than any others – and to reap its yield in enhanced capacity to manage their own enterprises and grow new ones. Nurturing such application opportunity requires either firm policy decisions to divert

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[33] The increasing unit costs along this spectrum are explained by the fact that only about 1/4th of women initially enrolled in fact complete the program and can be deemed functionally literate.

[34] Other interesting cases may be found in Belloncle (1985), Bingen (1999), Bingen, Serrano and Howard (2003), CND (2004), Donnelly-Roarke (2001) and Hopper (1997).

seed resources of varying types into local arenas and adopt the laws that ensure access to them, or a collective movement in favor of human rights and self-made opportunity. And it works best where the two converge.

9.3.   COMPARING COSTS AND BENEFITS

In ba k'ira, me ya ci gawai?
If nothing has been forged, where then did the charcoal go?
Hausa/Niger, Nigeria

97.   Where do these considerations lead us? In the formative realm, there is every reason to promote more careful cost accounting as a precondition and concomitant of new funding and to continually upgrade monitoring and formative evaluation capacities within agencies responsible for literacy programming. Both of these measures are essential to true accountability, which, paradoxically, is even more important if one wishes literacy programs to be a stimulus to democratization and local development than when such efforts simply target the spread of literacy and are funded top-down by benevolent national or international organizations.[35]

98.   In the summative realm, no single figure like a rate of return can or should be cited to cinch the case and trump the opposition. But the cumulative evidence of very reasonable costs on the one hand and major structural as well as individual benefits for well-conceived programs on the other – structural benefits like creating much needed linkage between education and development, offering a means for participatory achievement of the MDGs and for adding a self-propelling force to Education For All, giving new voice to women and building up African languages – strongly suggests that this subsector of the educational system merits increased support. Literacy programming certainly works *if you get it right*. There are a number of ways of getting it right, but some important insights in this regard emerge from the data prepared for the ADEA Biennial and partly recapitulated in the preceding portions of this document. The next section of the paper is devoted to summarizing some of these lessons and the last to a few recommendations based upon them.

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[35] The proverb cited above refers to a context where blacksmithing is handled by traditional craftsmen using charcoal to heat and work metal. It is interesting that this expression was much more frequently heard in Niger when democratization and community-driven development efforts intensified.

10. CONCLUSIONS: NEW DIRECTIONS, NEW HOPES

Sila kilin té sìla tì
A single road is not the road.
Malinké (Guinea/Mali)

99.   Experience is worth a great deal. *"Bàda mà ké" là nyàxa mèe diya*, the Malinké people say: The party for something never done before is not much fun. Fifty years and more of literacy work in Africa have produced much experience, real progress and a better understanding of how to advance toward Education For All. This section is devoted to drawing a few key lessons and conclusions from the experience summarized in the preceding ones. It will lay the groundwork for the recommendations to be made in the final chapter. In this one, we begin with a summary assessment of the achievement and potentials of literacy programming in Africa to date and then move on to highlight some of the most hopeful new approaches that have emerged in recent years.

10.1.   THE OVERALL PICTURE

Abin da ya kada kusu wuta, ya hi wuta zafi
Whatever caused the mouse to jump into the fire must have been hotter than fire itself.
Hausa (Niger/Nigeria)

100.   What overall picture emerges from our attempt to examine practices, problems and progress in the four interrelated domains of literacy programming sketched in Figure 1 above: the upstream administrative and policy functions, the core processes of instruction and curriculum, the downstream domain of application and post-literacy and relations with the surrounding environment?

101.   Though problems and real successes can be found in each arena, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the biggest obstacle to expanding literacy programs and raising literacy rates in under-served areas lies in the *lack of a literate environment and related deficiencies in the post-literacy domain*: on the one hand, the dearth of reading material, media resources and continuing education opportunities in the languages of literacy; and, on the other – and still more fundamentally -- the lack of linkage between literacy programs and other development activities in the region that require literate skills, that use them to participants' benefit and that can help underwrite further expansion of learning and greater intensification of written communication.

102.   The principal reason for the absence of post literacy opportunity may be the low level of investment in the regions concerned, a persisting pattern of disarticulation between literacy programs and the sectors where such opportunities lie, or – most often -- some combination of the two. It is certainly not a lack of "need" or potential applicability: other development programs increasingly require means for training participants and creating the local capacity that makes genuine decentralization or full "devolution" possible; and, without effective strategies for enlisting local actors in the direction and management of new development ventures, there seems to be little hope of accomplishing the MDGs or securing Education For All in the foreseeable future. What is more, this is in good part a "policy-malleable" problem – i.e., one that can be addressed by governments and donors, because it stems from decisions about where and how to invest development funding, from policies about the level of responsibility to be given to local actors and from strategies regarding the connections to promote between literacy and training requirements in other sectors and between the nonformal and formal branches of the education system.

103.   Whether deliberate or not, current policies in such realms too often make literacy programs appear like "poor education for poor people" by –

>   dividing these programs from local capacity building needs and potentials in other sectors or offering them as a sort of recompense to regions where nothing else will be done;

>   keeping formal and nonformal education tightly sequestered from each other;

leaving African languages in a linguistic ghetto; and

allocating less than 1% of education budgets to adult education.

> **"Investing in literacy" therefore means, first and foremost, addressing such policies.**

10.2. NEW BEGINNINGS AND PROMISING INNOVATION

Zamani riga ne – in ta zo, kowa na sa ta.
Modern times are like a robe. If it comes [into fashion], everyone puts in on.
Hausa (Niger/Nigeria)

104.   But if policy neglect is the "bad news," there is definitely good news as well. It lies not just in the considerable achievements of literacy programs over the last half-century – *contre vent et marées*, as the French saying goes ("against wind and high tides") -- but also in the new directions and approaches that have emerged in the field over recent years despite relative policy neglect and that underscore its potential for increased investment. Several of particular interest are recapitulated below: partnership with civil society, publication in African languages, the increased participation of women, improved training of staff, cross-fertilization with human rights and democracy movements and "hybridization" with other sectors of development.

☆ *Partnership with civil society.* The alliances developed in recent years with NGOs, community-based organizations and commercial service providers to extend and better support literacy work in the field have often had the result not just of enabling programs to grow and reach localities or strata of the population previously neglected but also of better adapting offerings to local conditions. They have also created, willy-nilly, a local apparatus that could be of major assistance in accomplishing the MDGs and further propagating primary schooling itself. Thanks to such partnerships, literacy and NFE programs constitute in a sense the most dense and capable local network or labor pool of qualified (if under-utilized) development agents in African countries – provided one knows how to put this "human capital" to use.

☆ *Publication in African languages:* Publication in African languages remains heavily constrained by economics, and by the underlying policies that reinforce those limitations (Altbach & Teferra 1999). While the spread of African language literacy is increasingly noteworthy – through literacy programs per se, via the adoption of written African languages as a medium of instruction or subject matter in at least the early grades of formal schooling and by more general osmosis -- few of the beneficiaries have the resources to pay for books and newspapers in any quantity; and wealthier population groups tend to prefer or exclusively demand material in international languages (English, French, Portuguese or Arabic). There is a slowly rising tide of *awareness and communication* in written African languages, but *publication* has for the most part not followed suit. Publishers generally doubt their ability to sell African language titles and have enough to do with the important task of popularizing African authors writing in international languages. In the still imposing edifice of Western language publication, however, important breaches have been opened by projects that have focused on the publication of post-literacy materials, by organizations like ARED that have cultivated new sources of support for African language publication and by the gradual spread of information and communications technology (ICT), which makes it easier year by year to disseminate written material in alternate scripts and languages and to circumvent existing monopolies.

☆ *Increased participation of women:* The upsurge in women's participation in literacy programs continent-wide over recent years has created a series of new potentials. At the same time as it opens new avenues toward gender equity, this movement has positioned literacy programs to support fundamental changes in health, nutrition and children's

education more effectively and more locally than they have been supported to date. Women who have completed literacy programs with success are increasingly vigilant with respect to their children's education and have in a number of places, like Mali's community schools and South Africa's preschool centers, taken remarkable initiative to demand and provide good quality service.

☆ *Improved training of staff* .The establishment of new programs for advanced training of literacy and adult education staff in African Universities and the deepening of those programs that existed already – though distinctly more pronounced in Anglophone that Francophone or Lusophone countries --leave the region better equipped to meet the challenges of change and increased impact that face agencies involved in African literacy. At the same time, Universities and academic institutions in Africa are themselves becoming involved in literacy, adult education and development in other ways that add new capacity to those efforts. Many of the NGOs working in literacy provision are in fact the creation of students or ex-students: young people enrolled in the University of Kenya, for example, were highly instrumental in the establishment and success of LABE, one of the pre-eminent NGOs working in literacy in that country.

☆ *Hybridization:* The development of "livelihood" approaches to literacy has enabled programs to gain practice with the concrete applications of learning, to begin consolidating affiliations with organizations from other sectors that need means for enhancing local technical and managerial capacity and to start creating alliances that may furnish a new funding base for literacy and training work.

☆ A *host of innovative program directions* for new categories of participants facing special needs and opportunities. The flexibility of literacy and nonformal education programming has made it possible for Ministries and NGOs to create approaches tailored to particular needs and to make of literacy programs an instrument of liberation, training and assistance for clientele as diverse and important as victims of civil conflict, unemployed youth, newly elected local officials and tradesmen and women of the informal economy.

☆ *Infusion of human rights:* Spurred in some instances by the greater representation of women, literacy programs have undergone an increasing infusion of human rights and empowerment curricula, which help participants to develop their own visions of "another" development and to begin promoting what might be called "bottom-up democratization" -- the establishment of electoral, accountability and participation mechanisms in local institutions. As remarked before, when this potential is joined to the capacity to generate, capitalize and manage new local resources, a particular effective form of empowerment results.

105.   In general, the picture in this sector that has so often been considered marginal to development work – even when official rhetoric maintained the contrary -- is therefore one of great and growing potential, thanks both to the maturation of conditions on the ground and to new directions and encouraging innovations like the ones noted above. For a long time, the dearth of downstream applications has been for literacy programs the major impediment that would scarcely say its name, so deeply was it rooted in the political economy of underdevelopment. But that logjam is beginning to clear, under the pressure of democratization, decentralization, human rights and field initiatives like those cited. The course of African development is itself creating new opportunities and requirements for effective literacy -- and so worthwhile targets for investment, provided that the lessons of experience are allowed to furnish guidance.

11. LEARN FROM THE PAST, LOOK TO THE FUTURE

Ka xoxoa nu wogbia yeyea d'o.
A new rope is woven at the end of the old one.
Ewe (Ghana/Togo)

106.   New rope is woven at the end of the old, a Ewe saying reminds us. There is a store of great value in the work done for African literacy over the last fifty years and there are many achievements to be proud of. At the same time, today's dilemmas cry out for new directions that take full account of lessons learned. Literacy programs have the potential for breaking the logjam in accomplishment of EFA and the Millennium Development Goals and turning them into effective local movements -- but not without better support and more imaginative planning.

107.   Considerations of current strengths and weaknesses in the various subsystems of literacy programming reviewed in the preceding pages suggest a number of detailed recommendations for improvement of design and implementation methodology. Many of these are offered by the individual studies prepared for the ADEA Biennial Meeting. Here, though, it is perhaps more important to keep the focus on conclusions that have larger scale policy implications. In fact, as the UN Millennium Project report avers, "areas of policy neglect" constitute one of the five principal reasons why we are not on better track for accomplishing Millennium Development Goals (Sachs 2005).

11.1.   CEMENTING THE LINK BETWEEN LITERACY AND DEVELOPMENT

108.   This section could as well be subtitled, "BUILDING LOCAL CAPACITY TO ACHIEVE THE MDGS" because so much of what literacy programs can contribute to reducing poverty and promoting development involves *equipping people to assume new responsibilities in those efforts* – presuming they have the leeway and resources to do so; and it lies sterile if they don't. Critics have frequently remarked that the chief problem with the MDGs is that they specify desirable goals *but say little or nothing about how to get there*. Building local capacity is one of the key ways to do so.

109.   None of the MDGs can be reached continent-wide without local leadership in each of the component sectors, plus strategies of intervention and support that promote local initiative. But that means starting in each sector with policy changes and initiatives that provide for progressive, carefully-staged and contingent transfer of resources and management responsibility into the hands of local associations and communities, plus seed funding of local businesses. *It is in support of such efforts -- and to qualify and equip the leadership <u>and</u> membership of such local groups -- that literacy programs not only make sense*; *<u>they become absolutely essential</u>*.

110.   This in no way diminishes the non-political, non-economic and "non-managerial" benefits of literacy programs, in the realms of culture, personal development and education itself. They are very real and very important and worth promoting whenever possible. But they cannot simply be conferred from on high, and without local resource to cultivate new activities, they risk remaining stillborn in too many cases. *Ohia na ma odece ye akoa*, Ijo speakers say: "Poverty will turn a free man into a slave." Yet *Ivya gusa bitera ubwenge buke,* the Rundi of East Africa respond: "Things received free diminish one's intelligence."

111.   From this point of view, perhaps the most valuable resolution that we could adopt at the ADEA Biennial Meeting would be for the Ministers of Education there present to do three things:

> first, discuss and become convinced of the weight of at least some of the arguments made heretofore regarding the importance of local initiative to achievement of EFA and the MDGs and the key role that literacy programs must play in training wave upon wave of local leadership;

second, solemnly resolve to obtain an audience, once back home, with each of the other Ministries of development in order to address the role of literacy and nonformal education in local capacity building – and the role of community-driven development in accomplishing Education for All; and,

finally (and just as solemnly), enjoin the bilateral and multilateral donor agencies represented in Libreville to follow this example and report back on their progress!

> **THE BOTTOM LINE: If sustainable development and genuine human welfare are the goal – and if we really want to accomplish the MDGs – then literacy must be much better dovetailed with the other local development initiatives that create uses for it and that require it.**

11.2. EDUCATION _BY_ ALL THROUGH BETTER COORDINATION OF FORMAL AND NONFORMAL SYSTEMS

112.   Democracy has been defined as "government of the people, for the people and by the people" -- not simply an arrangement conceived *for* the public and dedicated to its welfare. The same point seems valid with respect to EFA. It cannot really be Education *For* All if it is not also in some sense education *of* and *by* all.

11.2.1. ESCAPING THE SUPPLY SIDE FIXATION

113.   Literacy programs are an integral part of the worldwide campaign in favor of Education For All – whether by 2015 or 2030 -- even if they seem at times, from national and international perspectives, to constitute at most a second front. But they also offer a critical means of remedying some of the major limitations and weaknesses of EFA as presently conceived and implemented. One of these, of course, is its nearly unilateral emphasis on children. Another and perhaps more important one lies in the fact that *EFA tends to be strictly a supply-side strategy*: in short, we must somehow *provide* educational opportunity to all. This injunction responds well to the principle of human rights and entitlements discussed earlier, though it does overlook the insight of the Rundi proverb just cited (namely, that free things dull the intelligence). But it makes no provision for demand.

114.   Perhaps this is because, in the case of primary schooling, the demand side of the equation and the returns to related investments are assumed or seem self-evident. No one questions the importance of primary schooling. Numerous studies by the World Bank and others have been devoted to demonstrating the high rate of return to primary education and in fact – with a few interesting exceptions – the demand for schooling is indeed very strong and growing. The fact that formal education is relatively well articulated on national labor markets, that it grants marketable diplomas (or at least a chance to compete for them) and that it generally confers a level of fluency in national and international languages – certainly much more so than literacy or nonformal education programming tends to – explains part of the effect. There are, in fact, some problems with the return side of the question, but they are perceived as too minor to make any difference in demand.[36]

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[36] Rate of return is an incremental tool of analysis drawn from the neoclassical microeconomic tradition: it attempts to calculate what the financial return would be to the next person to get the level of education in question (or to society after that next student completes the primary level), given current prices and market conditions, both national and international. It is much less indicative of what the economic return, let alone the social consequences, of providing a given level of education to the next 5%, 20% or 50% of the population might be – either under present conditions or under those than might obtain were such an eventuality to rapidly come to pass. I, like you, feel confident that these would be globally very positive; but they might not be positive from everyone's perspective or fit particularly well within current structures of power, influence and wealth, either domestic or international. And that may in turn be a reason why they are not likely to come to pass, however much they are endorsed in international tribunes.

115.   Literacy and nonformal education programs, however, *cannot* assume the viability of effective demand for their services. To a considerable extent, they must locate it or create it by active analysis of the local labor market and coordination with worthwhile uses of new skills. As a consequence, to approach literacy planning strictly from a supply-side Education For All perspective is, in the case of such programs, a potentially fatal trap. They *must* identify effective demand, nurture it and adapt their programs to it, region by region and locality by locality, for all the reasons already stated. To carry out a strategy of prospecting and developing outlets for training and diagnosing current local needs for new skills at ground level requires a good practice of participatory assessment and research and entails the involvement of a variety of stakeholders as well as the promise of a supportive policy environment. Good literacy and adult education programs cannot escape doing this, as they are far less "chartered" and assured of central labor market outcomes than is formal schooling.

11.2.2.   RECONNECTING SCHOOLING TO ITS ENVIRONMENT

116.   In fact, these habits acquired under duress may turn out to be critically important to EFA and to the universalization of primary schooling as well. That goal, twice postponed, is not likely to be attained by 2015 either, in part because you cannot simply pour education out like syrup to cover every nook and cranny of the territory;[37] in part because, as the proportion of coverage rises, the incremental cost of further progress rises as well; and in part, too, because "Education For Some" seems to serve certain well-entrenched interests. Attaining EFA will arguably require a local boost from the demand side: that is, communities and groups organizing to provide much of their own education with state supervision and support, but with a good measure of local control as well: *harambee* better conceived and organized, community schooling with clout. And successful community literacy programs, coupled with uses that capitalize local resources and entail management training, are arguably among the best ways to equip communities for running their educational enterprise as well and to add a critical element of Education *By* (and *Of*) All to the existing promises of Education For All.

117.   In short, schooling itself turns out to be another of the sectors of development where local capacity and management experience must be built if innovation is to spread and institutionalize itself in sustainable manner at ground level – particularly in the least favored regions – and where literacy and nonformal education programming may provide a good part of the answer. Building from the ground up the beginnings of a true educational system that integrates formal and nonformal components will certainly be part of the payoff.

> **THE BOTTOM LINE: The most important contribution of literacy programming to Education For All lies in helping turn schooling itself into more of a local movement, governed and supported to an increasing extent at the community level; and in thereby helping the school system to overcome its divorce from local development. But to realize that potential and to transform "Education For All" into "Education By All," the gulf between literacy and schooling must first be closed – by creating bridges and equivalences, by enlisting newly literate adults in propelling schooling at the local level and by emulating the methodology of the best adult literacy programs in adapting instruction to the needs of the environment.**

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[37] …which suggests why metaphors like "coverage" and "eradication" represent a serious over-simplification that can lead policy far astray.

11.3. REINFORCING DEMOCRATIZATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY AT THE GRASSROOTS

118.	The impact of becoming literate on active citizenship and democratic behaviors – or at least the correlation of people's individual level of literacy with such activities -- has been studied, demonstrated and noted among the arguments for support of literacy programs. These tendencies are all to the good and can be very important, cumulatively speaking. At the same time, as earlier sections in this document have maintained, the *tactical* and *structural* dimensions of the relationship between literacy and democratization may be even more important than the individual ones. It is, in a sense, the *process* of becoming increasingly literate -- and in an increasing number of "literacies" -- that seems to have the biggest effect: the opening up to new possibilities that accompanies learning. The process of becoming "literate" in democracy and civil rights has become a powerful adjunct to instructional programs. From field experience, it seems to take one or more of three forms according to circumstances.

a.	*Human rights education* and "conscientization" of various types are always vital and seem absolutely essential as groundwork in those circumstances, noted above, where nearly the only significant resources available for investment are the pooled energies and (meager) resources of the participants.

b.	*Training for newly elected local officials* covers the more and more widely prevalent situations where administrative and political decentralization has led to creation -- or resuscitation -- of elective public positions at community and district levels and where these people have been vested with functions that require new levels of "literacy" on their part. It often then needs to be followed by training for their constituents, most frequently realized by –

c.	*Designs for downward accountability in local associations, businesses and agencies* that ensure enough training and "literacy" (of whatever form applicable) to the membership or stakeholders of these organizations so that they can monitor the performance of those holding positions of responsibility, assume management functions when called upon… and potentially replicate the same patterns in creating new local institutions that disseminate the effects.

119.	It is these latter units that constitute the components of civil society and genuine "loci" of democratic apprenticeship for community members.

> **THE BOTTOM LINE: Literacy and democratization are inextricably linked -- and for more detailed and concrete reasons than usually acknowledged. True democratic accountability and participation are what transform local enterprise initially requiring only the training of a few technicians into stimuli for widespread literacy. And without it the benefits of grassroots development investments are much less general and sustainable.**

11.4. FROM EMPOWERING PEDAGOGIES TO LIFELONG LEARNING

120.	Two levels of empowerment seem integral to successful literacy programming: internally, a curricular and pedagogical one; and, externally, a socio-economic and political one. In cases of best practice, moreover, the two are tightly dovetailed.

121.	Either type of effort, or the conjoint variety that seems most successful, only proves sustainable to the extent that participants and local sponsors are themselves then able to generate,

reinvest and capitalize a stream of new resources (energies and/or funds) that underwrites post-literacy activity and requires, in turn, new learning.

122.   It is this type of empowerment, then, that makes lifelong learning the most likely. Without it, all the rhetoric in the world about lifelong and "lifewide" education will have little meaning. In Africa, the possibilities for lifelong learning are closely wedded to the problem of "post-literacy" and the creation of a literate environment.

> **THE BOTTOM LINE: Literacy programming that both empowers participants to take charge of their own lives and connects them with initiatives in other sectors of development that employ their new skills provides at the same time the surest bridge to – and the most reliable support for – lifelong learning.**

11.5.   VITAL LEAVENING: WOMEN'S KEY ROLES

Uwa na kiwon]anta, can yà sha nono
The mother cares for her child and [if you provide for her, she herself] will provide for the child in due time.
Hausa (Niger/Nigeria)

123.   In many areas of the region, it is really women's literacy that has taken off and given recent literacy programs a much better success rate. That outcome is doubly encouraging – first, because women lagged in literacy rates and continue to lag in educational attainments continent-wide; and second, because, as the headlined proverb suggests and the data about the schooling of the children of literate women help confirm, what is done for the mother is also done for all who depend on her.

124.   In addition, insofar as ways are found to reinforce the literate environment for women as well as for men – another dimension of equity that will be important to mind – then their presence in local income-generating and governance institutions should also rise. To encourage and support that trend – as well as for other evident reasons – it is high time to ensure strong representation of women in the structures with which the new local leaders on the distaff side must deal: school administrations, development service personnel, banking and credit institution agents and local government officials.

> **THE BOTTOM LINE: Literacy programs have increasingly become a force through which woman throughout the region forge new identities and increase their contribution to local development. To that extent, they also have become a basis for new comity between the genders. Though this sort of empowerment strategy has served them well so far, carrying the movement forward requires that they access new "literacies" by enhancing their roles in social governance.**

11.6.   TRAINING THE TRAINERS

Iri guthua ndongoria itikinyagira nyeki
If the lead goat goes lame, none of the others will reach the pasture.
Kikuyu (Kenya)

125.   Capacity upgrading all along the line is needed for literacy personnel to assume the new roles required for their enhanced contributions to accomplishment of EFA and the MDGs. To what degree it is to be secured by giving existing literacy personnel new training, by giving some of those with the needed local development experience instructional skills or by working out new means of collaboration between the two categories of personnel remains to be seen. In any case, what must be progressively formed are units capable not just of designing and facilitating literacy instruction, but adept as well at identifying what local stakeholders with varying levels of previous education need in order to take over and manage new realms of development and at creating the program designs that build instruction and learning into the stages in assumption of new responsibility.

126.   To do this, literacy personnel must themselves master other "literacies" and perfect the roles of instructional designer and multi-purpose trainer that will give them continuing utility in serving the learning needs created by locally-driven development.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Literacy programs cannot be made more effective or equipped for new roles in development unless their staff master the skills involved. The function of literacy agent will increasingly merge with that of trainer for a variety of learning agendas linked to local development.

11.7.   REINFORCING AND UNDERWRITING THE "BOTTOM LINES"

Sai da ruwan ciki a ke ja na rijiya.
It takes water in the belly to draw it from the well.
Hausa (Niger/Nigeria)

127.   Disseminating literacy is finally a local responsibility, because it requires a local awareness of context. *Kunkuru ya san makamar matarshi,* another Hausa proverb reminds us: the tortoise knows how to embrace his wife. That exercise might appear both ticklish and difficult to the uninitiated outsider, but you can be sure that the tortoise and his mate figured it out long ago.

128.   The ADEA Biennial meeting, however, is not a convention of local actors, but principally an assemblage of support personnel posted at more central levels. The key question to address in concluding this document -- and before adjourning our upcoming meeting -- is less what literacy personnel should do in the field than what *we* should do to create a favorable environment, release new energies and "reduce the impossibilities," as a recent DFID workshop put it. What are the implications of the "bottom lines" just defined?

129.   They can perhaps be grouped into three categories, the same that we used in Section 7 to distinguish the different kinds of resources needed to help literacy programs fulfill their potential: policy support, financial support and technical support.

130.   *In the political realm*, which, Kwame Nkrumah would remind us, holds many of the keys of the kingdom, the priorities appear to involve –

bringing the movement for community-based development and local capitalization to fruition through intersectoral initiative and donor support;

plugging literacy programming and related nonformal education into those efforts as the medium for local capacity building;

supporting the development and wider use of African languages, while building bridges and equivalencies between the formal and nonformal systems;

using women's increasing presence and success in literacy programming as a lever for increased rights and responsibilities in local – and regional – development; and

laying the first foundation stones, at least – *les pierres d'attente* – of a better coordinated educational system that relates and coordinates formal and nonformal modes of learning.

131.   *In the financial realm*, it is clear that literacy programming in general has been distinctly under-funded both as a component of the EFA movement and as a means for attaining the MDGs. Yet the solution is not simply to magnify separate financial streams for literacy and NFE, but to allocate adequately for local capacity building and related training services *within* existing development programs and then to confide their execution in qualified literacy personnel and agencies. *No* local development activity should be without its stakeholder training dimension and most of these should include reinforcement of literacy wherever along its spectrum – or wherever among the various "literacies" required -- the participants may presently be.

132.   *In the technical realm,* we already have much of what we need, given accumulated experience – good and bad -- with technical assistance. Linkages between universities and research institutions in Africa and the North (as well as among those of the South: Asia, Africa and Latin America) could stand to be much developed and reinforced, as could continued support for fiscal management; but the most critical factor in the technical domain is to ensure that the design and choice of functions and types of supports are more and more systematically put to the plebiscite of African stakeholders and subjected to bottom-up accountability.

133.   Finally, enhancement of literacy's contributions to EFA and accomplishment of the MDGs does depend on us – on those in positions of responsibility and influence as much as on those in the field – because it will require renewal of policy and support to realize the vast potential of local effort. As a Tuareg proverb reminds us, "The difference between a garden and a desert is not water; it is people."

THE FINAL LINE: The major contribution that literacy programs can make to achievement of Education For All and the MDGs depends above all on a political decision to empower and invest responsibility, entitlements and resources in local actors and their associations. And that sort of locally driven development cannot succeed without the support of increasingly widespread literacy. Insofar as such conditions are met, *investing in literacy* becomes not only a moral imperative but an activity with unbeatable returns.

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Knowledge knows no end.
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