



Association for the Development of Education in Africa

**Biennale on Education in Africa
(Libreville, Gabon, March 27-31, 2006)**

Plenary Session 2

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

Education *By All*: A Brief for Literacy Investment

by Peter B. Easton

**Working Document
DRAFT**

PLEASE DO NOT DISSEMINATE

PL-2.1

This document was prepared by ADEA for its Biennial Meeting (Libreville, Gabon, March 27-31, 2006). The views and opinions expressed in this volume are those of the authors and should not be attributed to ADEA, to its members or affiliated organizations or to any individual acting on behalf of ADEA.

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.

© Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) – 2006

Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA)

International Institute for Educational Planning

7-9 rue Eugène Delacroix

75116 Paris, France

Tel.: +33(0)1 45 03 77 57

Fax: +33(0)1 45 03 39 65

adea@iiep.unesco.org

web site: www.ADEAnet.org

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING THE STAKES.....	7
1.1. What, where, why and how.....	7
1.1.1. Literacy and “literacies”	7
1.1.2. Where it is acquired: Multiple venues	8
1.1.3. Why invest: Human rights and economic returns.....	8
1.1.4. How to go about it: Identifying effective strategies.....	8
1.2. Remembering the context	9
1.2.1. A capsule history of literacy in Africa.....	9
1.2.2. Current indicators of progress.....	10
2. EXAMINING THE RECORD.....	10
2.1. Upstream factors: Planning and provision.....	10
2.1.1. Diversification of supply.....	11
2.1.2. Challenges of language planning	11
2.2. Core processes: Participation and learning.....	12
2.2.1. Trends in participation	12
2.2.2. Trends in instruction	12
2.2.3. Upgrading teacher training and instructional design	13
2.2.4. Strengthening learning assessment and evaluation.....	13
2.3. Downstream factors: Application and use	14
2.3.1. The nature of a literate environment.....	14
2.3.2. Dissecting “post-literacy”	14
2.3.3. Empowerment as alternate strategy	16
2.4. External support where it counts.....	17
3. DRAWING CONCLUSIONS.....	17
3.1. Costs and Benefits.....	17
3.1.1. Measuring the costs.....	17
3.1.2. Assessing the benefits	18
3.2. The overall picture: New Directions, New Hopes	18
3.3. Post-literacy as bottleneck	18
3.4. Innovation as hope	19
4. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATION FOR THE FUTURE	20

Acronyms and Abbreviations

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'Éducation des Adultes [Regional Bureau for Adult Education] (UNESCO/Dakar)
CBA	Cost-Benefit Analysis
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CDD	Community-Driven Development (World Bank)
CILSS	Comité inter-état de lutte contre la sécheresse au Sahel
CONFINTEA	Conférence Internationale sur l'Éducation des Adultes [International Conference on Adult Education]
CSO	Community Service Organization
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
EFA	Education for All
FTI	Fast Track Initiative
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMR	Global Monitoring Report
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
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
OUA	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)
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (World Bank)
UIE	UNESCO Institute for Education
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US\$	United States dollars
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization (UN)

Preface

The present document represents an abbreviated version and Executive Summary of the much longer study entitled “Investing in Literacy: Where, Why and How” prepared for the ADEA Biennial Meeting. As such, it contains limited amounts of data and few references. Supporting material should be sought in the longer study, which is likewise being distributed to delegates to the meeting.

Abstract

1. We are unlikely either to achieve Education For All or to accomplish the Millennium Development Goals in Sub-Saharan Africa in the next decade if ways are not found to associate local actors more thoroughly in the effort. Literacy and nonformal education programs, which have grown and diversified considerably in recent years throughout the region, constitute in effect the broadest potential reservoir of local capacity for taking over, leading and supporting this critical effort and for bringing decentralization to real fruition by rendering possible the devolution of a full range of development responsibilities into local hands.

2. This paper, which represents a modified Executive Summary of the longer study on “Investing in Literacy” prepared for the Biennial Meeting, is devoted to outlining concisely the lessons learned from 50 years of literacy work in Africa and the new hopes and new directions that have come to birth in the last decade or two. The current situation of literacy on the sub-continent is first summarized. Sections are then devoted to best practice and new departures in the design and administration of literacy programs, in the methodologies of instruction and participant empowerment used to carry them out, in the practical application of the knowledge and skills acquired and in the relations between such programs and the other sectors and concerns of local development.

3. Despite limited funding and recognition in most countries, literacy programs have had the great merit of transcribing and beginning to popularize written African languages, of offering alternate and effective means of learning to citizens who could not get the schooling they might have wanted and of providing a critical stimulus and resource for local initiative in many other sectors of development. An important contributor to the EFA campaign, literacy programs offer at the same time a means for achieving Education *BY All* – that is, disseminating learning throughout disadvantage strata of African countries by enrolling learners as teachers and by engaging newly-literate adults in the local activities and enterprises that alone can ensure full accomplishment of the Millennium Goals.

Introduction: Understanding the stakes

1.1. WHAT, WHERE, WHY AND HOW

Nyìninkàlikèla te fili

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

4. 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.

5. The situation therefore remains dramatic. We are in the midst of the United Nations' Literacy Decade and the period chosen for implementation of UNESCO's Literacy for Empowerment (LIFE) strategy, designed to boost attainments in the countries in greatest need² before the next EFA deadline in 2015. Much remains to be done.

1.1.1. LITERACY AND "LITERACIES"

6. "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).

7. In fact, definitions differ a bit from country to country³; 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: information literacy, civic literacy, media literacy and a host of others. For related reasons, researchers have taken in recent years to speaking of "literacies" in the plural rather than "literacy" in the singular.

8. For the most part, we will be talking in the pages to follow about the basic forms of written or numeric literacy, but others should be kept in mind. The ABCs do not always come first and the other "literacies" that follow constitute much of the substance of lifelong learning.

1.1.2. WHERE IT IS ACQUIRED: MULTIPLE VENUES

9. "Literacies" are acquired in multiple ways in Africa, from age group initiations to traditional apprenticeships, from religious instruction to military training, from media exposure to

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 is 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).

travel, from literacy 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. All these venues and styles of instruction contribute in one way or another to attaining the goal of literacy and education for all.

10. 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.

11. 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 (sometimes referred to as “aliterates”). We will continue to refer to all organized efforts addressing their learning needs – including national campaigns and small projects --as “literacy programs.”

1.1.3. WHY INVEST: HUMAN RIGHTS AND ECONOMIC RETURNS

12. 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 brings to learners, their families and their communities. There has been a regrettable tendency to put the two in opposition to each other, though they are, in fact, close complements.

13. The “basic human rights” argument -- 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. 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 multiple occasions.

14. Yet if half of the battle is *recognizing rights*, the other half is *rendering them truly effective*. For the “right to literacy” to mean something, recognition of this entitlement must be paired with *the commitment to create an environment in which the right to literacy can be readily exercised* and in which the literacy or “literacies” acquired can be used to the genuine benefit of those concerned. And that means dealing with the individual and collective “returns” to literacy as well. We shall try to do both.

1.1.4. HOW TO GO ABOUT IT: IDENTIFYING EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

15. *How* most effectively to promote widespread literacy is therefore the crux of the question and will be the focus of the rest of the document. We consider first the continuing challenge of development in Sub-Saharan Africa and a capsule portrayal of historical trends and current conditions in African literacy. The central portion of the document is then devoted to examining very synoptically the operation of literacy programs across the region: their administrative and planning functions, the instructional methods used, the way in which lessons learned are applied and the relations between programs and their larger environment. The last major portion of the document then considers the costs and benefits of literacy work, the conclusions that can be drawn from the foregoing analysis and recommendations for future practice.

1.2. 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)

16. Adult education and literacy cannot be divorced from their context – the continuing challenge of African development and its many cultural, economic and political aspects.

17. 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). Since then the news has been a bit better. The average economic growth rate for the 1990-2003 period was +0.1% and performance in 2004 reached a 5% rate.

18. Yet Sub-Saharan Africa remains both the poorest region of the globe and the one characterized by the greatest income inequality:⁴ It also has the fastest growing population: 2.7% per annum from 1990 through 2003. 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.

19. Overall, the picture remains one of great duress, underscored by real human strength and traversed by definite rays of hope. Yet as the epigraph above⁵ reminds us, what can be accomplished by actors on the ground is often severely constrained by the legacy of burdens under which they labor.⁶

1.2.1. A CAPSULE HISTORY OF LITERACY IN AFRICA

20. 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: religious and scholastic literacy, functional literacy, integrated rural development, Freirian “conscientization,” NGO provision and more recent trends of increasing participation by women and new linkages between literacy and livelihoods. The successive phases are not mutually exclusive. They also have more than purely historical interest, because they continue to influence – in their original or a revised form – the implementation of current programs and the design of new ones.

21. 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 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 and the different uses people make of it. The question in these “new literacy studies” is not just what literacy can do for people but what people can (and do) in fact do with literacy.

22. Thought there have been several international policy meetings about literacy on African soil, only a few African countries have specific and explicit policies with respect to literacy. Botswana, Rwanda, South Africa and Tanzania are among these exceptions. In general, as Maruatona

⁴ 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).

⁵ 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.

⁶ For a discussion of the interactions of globalization and literacy, see Hoppers (2006), one of the component studies for the ADEA Biennial Meeting.

notes in his ADEA Study on the topic, the visions of African nations regarding literacy “are mostly integrated into the national planning framework through [strategies for] expanding formal schooling.”

23. 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.

1.2.2. CURRENT INDICATORS OF PROGRESS

24. Considerable data on current and historical levels of adult literacy in Sub-Saharan Africa are presented in the Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2005). Selected portions are excerpted here.

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 just under one-half (45%) to nearly three quarters (75%). There are in addition 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 nearly 90% (near parity in others).

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.

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.

25. 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.

Examining the record

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

26. We turn now to an examination of lessons learned from several decades of experience with literacy and nonformal education in Africa. We begin “upstream” of the realm of teaching and learning *per se* in the administrative domain, where resources necessary for the program are generated and deployed (Section 2.1). We then follow the progress of that impetus through actual instructional activities (Section 2.2) to application of the new knowledge acquired (Section 2.3) and thence onward to the impact that literacy programs exercise on the surrounding environment and the support that they receive from it (Section 2.4). Of course, these activities all in fact take place simultaneously and influence each other in many ways. The scheme of four interlocking domains is therefore not meant as a photograph of reality, but simply as a template for organizing presentation and analysis.

2.1. UPSTREAM FACTORS: PLANNING AND PROVISION

27. “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 and marked efforts to promote local ownership and adaptation of programs.

2.1.1. DIVERSIFICATION OF SUPPLY

28. The institution of cooperative arrangements with NGOs, community service organizations (CSOs) and private grassroots providers and the outsourcing to them of service delivery responsibilities in recent years constitute the most important innovation 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.

29. Where well designed, implemented and monitored, outsourcing or decentralization systems like this have proven to have a number of virtues: improved adaptation of provision to local needs, closer supervision and support of local communities, greater ease at going to scale and reaching a broad range of localities. At the same time, problems with such schemes have arisen when they are not thoughtfully designed, well implemented or closely supervised. Involvement of NGOs or “local partners” is scarcely a panacea. The term “partner” may cover everything from international organizations like Action Aid 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. And they are not always in evidence.

30. 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.

31. An essentially different but potentially complementary strategy for diversification of supply is constituted by the ongoing development and experimentation of “National Qualification Frameworks” (NQFs) in South Africa, Namibia, Kenya and Uganda. NQFs define levels of basic skills and knowledge that bridge across formal, nonformal and informal education and they establish means by which learners can validate knowledge and skill acquired and transport this qualification from one system to another. Such schemes at the same time make it possible for people to obtain recognition for things learned in alternate ways – including through informal education and self-directed learning – and so can have the effect of further diversifying supply. The implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks has also encountered its share of problems, however, and is only complete in one country. Yet a new environment for literacy provision – and for post-literacy -- is gradually being created.

2.1.2. CHALLENGES OF LANGUAGE PLANNING

32. 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. For example, a perfectly outsourced program in a region where there are few uses for literacy can have real difficulties.

33. High on the list of such issues are the challenges of language planning and of developing appropriate educational language policy. From a human rights perspective, all people are entitled to acquire and use 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; and how best to arrange “commerce” between these languages and the international ones that many learners also need to master remains an issue.

2.2. CORE PROCESSES: PARTICIPATION AND LEARNING

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

34. The great diversity of programs and clientele 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.

2.2.1. TRENDS IN PARTICIPATION

35. In most countries of the region, literacy programming has grown and diversified over the last several decades and participation has broadened with it. At the same time, considerable wastage and dropout continue to be the norm in these programs, 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 1/10th and one-half of original enrollments.

36. Other signal trends in the nature of program participation are worth noting:

Women make up an increasing proportion – and in many countries an outright majority – *of literacy students*. In most regions, they have heretofore had distinctly less access to formal schooling than men and with increasing frequency they are facing situations where they must manage homes and communities in the absence of male family members. Perhaps as a consequence, women have generally been quick to respond to opportunities for instruction and have prized and put to good use the opportunity to meet with other women, share experiences, extend networks and formalize them into associations.

At the same time, *the average age of participants*, both male and female, *has tended to decrease over the years* – and in the history of individual programs – due to an influx of adolescent (and younger) school dropouts, who hope by this means to resume their education or gain access to new employment possibilities.

Programs have been increasingly developed for or adapted to -- and have increasingly enrolled -- *special populations that face particular needs and opportunities*. These include groups like street and working children, refugees from zones of conflict or famine and victims (direct or indirect) of HIV/AIDS. They also include newly elected local officials, informal economy artisans and managers of start-up local businesses, many of whom can benefit greatly from literacy enhancement and training.

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.

2.2.2. TRENDS IN INSTRUCTION

37. In the early stages of most programs, literacy instruction remains as a rule quite traditional and didactic, wedded to a 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) *Increasing adoption of participatory and even “conscientizing” methods.* Once they have some experience under their belt, literacy programs tend to adopt methods that promote active participation of students in learning. Full-fledged or “strong” participation, of course, goes beyond this and means learning to play a role in decision-making – first about the content and conduct of programs and then about application activities in the real world. Human rights curricula have increasingly become a means of helping participants to discover their capacity for enhanced roles in society, often borrowing from Freireian pedagogy the notion that adults can learn to read – and write – “the world as well as the word.”
- (b) *From scholastic models to livelihood and empowerment strategies:* 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. Livelihood programming *plus* conscientization or a human rights focus like those just mentioned often produces a uniquely effective empowerment approach.
- (c) *From chalk talk to varied technologies:* The technologies used in instruction have typically been limited to a restricted supply of chalkboards, dog-eared manuals, notebooks and pens, not to speak of dilapidated infrastructure. Solutions found for such material constraints have ranged from initiating instruction with more accessible “literacies” like group problem-solving skills or skill apprenticeship to undertaking full Freireian dialogue through which participants can both identify and critique these obstacles. 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 data-basing of information and teacher training.

2.2.3. UPGRADING TEACHER TRAINING AND INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

38. 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. 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. But each level of the structure will require increased capability in order to respond to the challenges sketched above.

39. 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 other “literacies” required to effectively manage their own affairs and durably achieve the MDGs. As a consequence, staff of literacy and nonformal education agencies must be equipped to play enhanced roles as professional training consultants and instructional design specialists who can effectively assist other agencies in devising, administering and monitoring a variety of types of instruction in a variety of practical curricular areas.

2.2.4. STRENGTHENING LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

40. 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 of program

improvement and a way to turn the mix of strategies and curricula in any region or country into a laboratory for identifying best practice.

41. There have been laudable if sporadic efforts by government ministries and external donors to bolster the competence of staff in evaluation methods. More is needed, and methods that combine solid professional skills with participatory design will be the most valuable.

2.3. 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)

42. We turn now to the realm of application “downstream” from the instructional domain though largely overlapping with it: the realm of daily life in which lessons learned are – or should be – used to the benefit of participants, their families and their communities. 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 largely 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 to 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.

2.3.1. THE NATURE OF A LITERATE ENVIRONMENT

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

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

- I *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;
- II *The availability of continuing education* in one or both of two forms:
 - A. sequences of formal schooling 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
 - B. varieties of organized nonformal training (such as organized trade apprenticeship) that confer other skills or elements of knowledge of interest to the learner;
- III *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
- IV *Opportunities to start and help manage sustainable new business or nonprofit endeavors* that likewise require and exercise literate skills.

44. 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.

2.3.2. DISSECTING “POST-LITERACY”

Tupu agu enwe onye na ako akuko ifo ya, akuko nta ka na eto ndi na achu nta.

The story of the hunt will be tales of glory until the day when the lions have their own historians.
Igbo (Nigeria)

45. 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. There is no end point “after” literacy where learning is complete and the question is simply what to do with the skills acquired. Learning is instead lifelong.

46. 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.

47. 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. 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 resource management responsibility, as witness its frequent paring with local credit and marketing initiatives in current development work.

48. 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 or organized religious ministry. And what is most likely to multiply the volume of written material that passes beneath 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.

49. But when people have few resources and no complex organizational 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. What means are available and what methods have proved successful for escaping that trap? The remarks about post-literacy above suggest at least two important categories:

- (a) *Providing reading materials and opportunities for continuing education* (categories I and II in the scheme above): Initiatives that help “flesh out” the post-literacy domain and create sufficient effective demand to drive the literacy effort include the following:

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 subject of study;

design and provision of continuing education and trade training opportunities to which new literates can gain access; and

the creation of bridges and equivalencies between literacy instruction and formal primary schooling.

Such initiatives are very much worth pursuing, and there now are instances of encouraging progress in each of these areas. At the same time, approaches that restrict themselves to the first two domains of a “literate environment” exemplified above are afflicted with inherent

problems. The basic one is that literacy agencies simply cannot create a dense and durable enough “literate environment” on their own to meet the needs of their potential students. At the most, they can offer prototypes and “prime the pump.” Establishment of a literate environment depends most fundamentally on parallel development of locally-managed enterprises, functions and services that must communicate with each other and continually upgrade the capacities of their personnel, their stakeholders and their clientele. In short, it depends on domains III and IV in the scheme above and requires -

- (b) - *Promoting locally-driven development and then creating inter-sectoral linkage* so that literacy and NFE programs serve to nurture, broaden and continually upgrade the local capacity required (categories III and IV above). In fact, an acute need for local capacity building (LCB) exists already. The increasing disparity between State budgets and development needs on the one hand and movements for decentralization and democratization on the other have put the issue of transferring responsibilities and resources into qualified local hands on the agenda of most technical ministries and related donor organizations. 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.”

In short, LCB 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.

Unfortunately, these activities are not in the habitual domain of educators, who tend therefore to be a bit tone deaf when it comes to perceiving or exploiting opportunities in categories III and IV above. In fact, however, most of the important opportunities for post-literacy *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 schooling. Yet few mechanisms exist at present, outside of selected NGOs with a multi-sectoral approach, for effectively linking literacy programs to these capacity-building needs.

50. A truly “literate” environment, therefore, unites these two sides of the post-literacy coin. Strategies that do so have a chance of making the largest contribution that literacy programming can to accomplishing EFA and the MDGs. They help create a new layer of local civil society – organizations, communities and businesses managed by literate people of many varieties – without whose active intervention there is little hope of attaining the Millennium Development Goals. And the same groups offer the best means of transforming Education For All – a noble objective but a deficient and uniquely supply-side strategy – into the sort of *Education By and Of All* as well, the sort of locally-rooted and supported schooling movement, that alone will close the gap.

2.3.3. EMPOWERMENT AS ALTERNATE STRATEGY

51. This is not to say either that management is the only viable application of literate competence – far from it – or that literacy never succeeds in the absence of such opportunities. If we didn’t already know it, women’s literacy programs have taught us otherwise. Given the situation and potentials of African women in many areas of Sub-Saharan Africa, these programs often, in effect, *contain their own initial post-literacy*. The opportunity to consult with each other, to organize their own associations, to forge new identities and to begin 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, at least in the medium-term.

52. The example of these efforts 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 or help to illuminate and renew gender roles, can both

awaken and sustain the motivation required to complete training without many immediate functional outlets. In that case, however, what was first an educational movement necessarily becomes a political reality; and, 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.

53. In short, 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. Experience suggests that true “empowerment” necessarily has both internal and external components and weaves them together – the personal transformation that comes from facing limit situations, creating new identities and discovering new solidarities on the one hand, and the social transformation that comes from establishing new institutions, assuming new roles and managing new resources.

2.4. EXTERNAL SUPPORT WHERE IT COUNTS

Sên gâe-a a to piirê gâee tênga

The one who sleeps on a borrowed mat should remember that he is sleeping on the cold hard ground
Mooré (Burkina Faso)

54. “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.

55. Literacy – like adult education – has generally been the “poor cousin” of the development (and even the education) family. If particular projects have been well funded, the sub sector as a whole has seldom been the target of much strategic attention. Literacy and nonformal adult education seldom garner more than 1% of national budgets, whereas formal education may account for more than 40%.

56. Increased support is richly warranted, given the strategic importance of literacy and nonformal education in local capacity building for development, evoked above. Yet though the title of this paper is “Investing in Literacy,” in fact the support that seems the most important – from governments first, and from donors and NGOs next -- is *political* or policy-based: endorsement for the development and use of written African languages as media of communication, alongside and in fruitful symbiosis with relevant international languages, on the one hand; and, on the other, implementation across sectors of 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 second will, in effect, require the first, if a choice had to be made, -- hopefully not the case -- it should doubtless be accorded priority.

57. 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: 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 and demands competencies that many educators do not yet have.

Drawing conclusions

3.1. 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 go.

Wolof (Senegal)

58. The title of this document frames the assessment and development of African literacy programs in the language of “investment”: what to invest, 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.

3.1.1. MEASURING THE COSTS

59. 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. 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 not often available.

60. 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. Calculations on these and somewhat more realistic figures from other current studies outlined in the full-length version of this document yield an estimate of between \$100 and \$400 per durably literate program completer, depending on circumstances. 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. Given the margin of error associated with such calculations, not much more can be said – but that much is very significant.

61. Both systems certainly could and should attain better efficiency, but they operate at roughly comparable levels of performance 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.

3.1.2. ASSESSING THE BENEFITS

62. 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, generally based on correlation studies. Many of the effects – as for example the linkage between women’s literacy and their children’s health and schooling – are both encouraging and intriguing.

63. 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 enough examples of this happening to remove doubt about its possibility.

64. The most reasonable conclusion 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, 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.

3.2. THE OVERALL PICTURE: NEW DIRECTIONS, NEW HOPES

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

65. What overall picture emerges from our attempt to examine practices, problems and progress in the four interrelated domains of literacy proposed 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?

3.3. POST-LITERACY AS BOTTLENECK

66. Though persistent problems and real successes can be found in each component area of literacy programming, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the biggest obstacle to expansion and improved performance 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.

67. Whether deliberate or not, current policies in such realms too often make literacy programs appear to be “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 adult education.

“Investing in literacy” therefore means, first and foremost, addressing such policies.

3.4. INNOVATION AS HOPE

68. 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. New departures like the following underscore the potential for increased investment – and increased return:

- ☆ *New partnerships with civil society* in providing literacy services plus the improved division of labor and enhanced “reach” that they make possible.
- ☆ *Increased use of written African languages*, even though progress is hampered by lack of policy support and the economics of publication, which incline publishers and the reading public toward material in international languages.
- ☆ *Greatly increased participation of women* in literacy programs and the benefits that portends for the next generation.
- ☆ *Improved training of staff*, thanks to the establishment of new programs for advanced training of literacy and adult education personnel in African Universities and the deepening of those programs that existed already
- ☆ *Further experience with livelihood training* and the “hybridization” of literacy programs with development projects in other sectors.
- ☆ *Numerous innovative program directions* for new categories of participants facing special needs and opportunities, like HIV/AIDS patients and families, newly elected local officials and refugees from civil conflict.
- ☆ *Infusion of human rights into literacy programs*, spurred in some instances by the greater representation of women. These help participants to develop their own visions of “another” development and to begin promoting bottom-up democratization through the establishment of electoral, accountability and participation mechanisms in local institutions.

Lessons learned and recommendation for the future

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

69. 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.

70. Consideration of current strengths and weaknesses in the various subsystems of literacy programming reviewed in the preceding pages suggests 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.

This document concludes with seven major recommendations.

I. CEMENT THE LINK BETWEEN LITERACY AND DEVELOPMENT

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. This entails ensuring that policies are in place in relevant neighboring sectors to empower local communities and actors, and to equip literacy workers for the critical training tasks they must accomplish.

II. PROMOTE “EDUCATION BY ALL” THROUGH BETTER COORDINATION OF FORMAL AND NONFORMAL SYSTEMS

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 and Of 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.

III. REINFORCE DEMOCRATIZATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY AT THE GRASSROOTS BY SUPERVISED TRANSFER OF POWERS AND NEW RESOURCES TO LOCAL INSTITUTIONS

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. Without them, the benefits of grassroots development investments are much less equitably distributed and much less sustainable. But local actors must have something to account for and literacy workers must be able to assist them in learning the ropes of democratic management.

IV. PROGRESS FROM EMPOWERING PEDAGOGIES TO LIFELONG LEARNING

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.

V. SHARING HALF THE SKY: PROMOTE NEW ROLES FOR WOMEN

Uwa na kiwon Janta, 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)

Literacy programs have increasingly become a means through which woman throughout the region forge new identities and increase their contributions 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.

VI. TRAIN THE TRAINERS FOR BROADENED ROLES AND CROSS-SECTORAL INTERVENTION

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.

VII. INVEST IN LITERACY – BOTH FINANCIALLY AND POLITICALLY

Sai da ruwan ciki a ke ja na rijiya.

It takes water in the belly to draw it from the well.
Hausa (Niger/Nigeria)

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. 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.

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.”

BIBLIOGRAPHY

EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006 (UNESCO 2005, Paris, France)