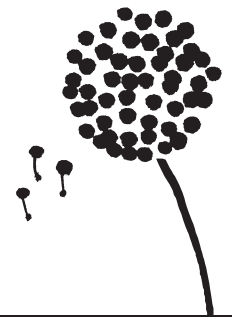


Footsteps

No.62 MARCH 2005

LITERACY



TEARFUND

Literacy – a moving target

by Clinton Robinson

Literacy is often said to be a key to development – but what does that really mean? Does it mean that those who can read and write are better placed to improve their lives? Or that once a community is routinely reading and writing, development can take off? Or does it mean that life is simply better when we can read books and write letters?

Literacy is a complicated issue that links in with many different aspects of life. Also, views about what literacy means have changed in recent years.

Focus on 'ABC'

Many people still think of literacy as simply knowing the alphabet and being able to read words on a page. This was a common view about 50 years ago, when schools and adult literacy classes made sure that people knew their letters and

Acquiring literacy enables people to take a fuller part in society

could write them properly. It did not matter so much what there was to read, or what kind of writing people did. Of course, literacy does involve knowing what the words say, but there is more to it than that.

Focus on learners

More recently, literacy has been seen as empowering. It offers learners and their communities the chance to make a difference in their own lives and to take charge of their own development. This approach starts with the situation of the learners themselves. It looks at how literacy best fits in with what they already know, with how their society works, and with how they can increase their political voice. Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator, is well known for basing literacy training on the knowledge and circumstances of the learners so that they could bring change to their community. Literacy can be considered a condition for democracy and political



Photo: Barbara Lawes, Mothers' Union

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Footsteps

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Footsteps is a quarterly paper, linking health and development workers worldwide. Tearfund, publisher of *Footsteps*, hopes that it will provide the stimulus of new ideas and enthusiasm. It is a way of encouraging Christians of all nations as they work together towards creating wholeness in our communities.

Footsteps is free of charge to individuals working to promote health and development. It is available in English, French, Portuguese and Spanish. Donations are welcomed.

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Photo: Richard Hanson, Tearfund

Literacy offers communities the opportunity to take charge of their own development.

participation. Since people and communities are different, so are the uses of literacy. In recent years, educators have begun to talk about 'literacies' in the plural – because of the many different contexts, purposes and languages in which literacy can be used.

Focus on livelihoods

This empowering view of literacy is developed further by linking it with livelihoods – how will literacy best serve people in order to make a living? This comes from the poverty reduction approach to development. The aim is to enable people to have new productive opportunities through literacy – greater income, jobs, new skills, and enterprise development.

Providing opportunities

What do these different views mean for those working to help others acquire literacy? The evolving views on literacy emphasise what really matters: motivation to learn, and opportunity to use what is learnt. These are closely linked. Where literacy provides new opportunities, people will want to become literate. There are three very important factors in offering relevant opportunities for people to learn to read and write:

Where literacy learning takes place

Instead of organising literacy classes, it is better to link literacy with other skills

people want to learn. So literacy might be combined with learning how to manage micro-credit, with reproductive health education or HIV and AIDS prevention. Women's groups in northern Ghana have been effective in making literacy a tool for learning essential knowledge about community development in this way.

How literacy learning takes place

As adults, we learn best when we can relate new knowledge to what we already know. The Reflect literacy method does this by having learners talk about their area, their health, their yearly farming cycle, or their community decision-making – all things they already know a lot about. Together they create charts and texts to put their knowledge into a written form. The facilitator guides and suggests, but the learners are in charge of the process. They determine both the pace of learning and the content. Reflect also stimulates discussion about how life could or should change and what people themselves can do about it. Reflect is now widely used in literacy learning and community mobilisation around the world.

What people use literacy for In the past people have acquired literacy simply because it seemed a good thing to do. People need real opportunities to use literacy. Are there useful and interesting things to read? Are there possibilities to

write and publish at the local and national levels? These are key questions to ask before organising literacy learning. Children and adults may lose their literacy skills if they have few opportunities to use them. This problem is a major concern where literacy in a minority language is developing for the first time.

The church has often supported literacy training to help people to read the scriptures for themselves. Literacy programmes should include plans for enabling local authors to produce literature that people want to read. As well as useful information on health and development, this should include interesting and amusing stories and news about football, local society and what's going on in the world.

Languages and scripts

One aspect of the many 'litteracies' in the world is the variety of languages and

scripts that people use. In most parts of the world, people need to learn literacy in more than one language, starting with their own local language or mother tongue. Then they add other languages that they may need, such as Hindi and English in India, or Lingala and French in Congo. In most parts of Asia, this involves learning different scripts or writing systems. In China some minorities learn their own language in the Roman script, then add Mandarin in Chinese script. Similarly, in Ethiopia local languages are often in Roman script, but Amharic, a widely used language, is in Ethiopic script. These scripts are very different (see box below).

In our globalised world, there will be an increasing need to become literate both in different languages and different scripts.

Today we know that literacy is far more complex than was once thought. It is more necessary than ever – everyone's



Photo: Richard Hanson, Tearfund

Literacy is a right that should be available to all.

lives are affected by decisions that are made by those who are literate. Literacy can give some people power over others. Literacy enables people to take a fuller part in society, to have an influence and make their voices heard. Computers can be an essential part of making decisions, and knowing how to communicate using written text gives access to these new technologies.

Literacy is not the key to all development, nor will it solve all daily problems at local level. However, it is a right that should be available to everyone so that they can express themselves freely through writing, and look critically and carefully at the written texts that those in power produce. Literacy, in relevant forms, is a means of empowerment, today more than ever.

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Various types of script

ROMAN SCRIPT is an alphabetic script. Each letter or combination of letters represents a sound. Most European and African languages, as well as some Asian languages like Vietnamese, use the Roman alphabet. The Cyrillic alphabet – used for example, in Russia, Bulgaria and Mongolia – is also alphabetic.

English Learning to read and write

Mooré *Ti zams ti karem la ti gulse*

Russian ЧИТАТЬ И ПИСАТЬ

CHINESE SCRIPT is an ideographic script, where each symbol represents a meaning or an idea, not a sound. This is like the number system, where we all write, for example, the number 5, but it is said differently in each language. In practice it is much more complicated than that!

Mandarin 学会读和写

ETHIOPIC SCRIPT This is a syllabic script, where each sign represents a combination of consonant and vowel sounds, so there is one sign for *ba*, another for *be*, *bi*, *bu*, *ka*, *ta*, *ma* and so on. Burmese is similar to syllabic script.

Amharic መጻፍት፡-ጻፍት፡-መጻፍት

Burmese စာရေးစာဖတ်သင်ကြံစို့။

How to spell freedom

by Kuki Rokhum

We did not even ask her name – we were too busy listening to her talk excitedly about the difference literacy classes had made to her life. I could not stop smiling as I listened to her. She was just an ordinary woman from the Korku tribe in a remote part of India. As someone who had spent her life putting her thumbprint on documents that needed her signature, she was very proud of her new literacy skills. Now she can sign her name, and she never needs to ask what number the bus is when she goes to town on market day. She told us how confident this had made her.

She is one of many who attend the adult literacy classes conducted by EFICOR. The Korku people live in isolated villages in the forests of Maharashtra in west India. Most are poor labourers or subsistence farmers. Literacy is not often seen as a priority here, particularly for women. However, these literacy classes are slowly transforming people's lives.

Jasaiah Akhande is 21 years old and lives in Panchdongri village. Like many Korku girls from poor families, she had no education. Her life changed when



Literacy spells freedom to many women.

EFICOR started adult literacy classes in her village in 2001, after raising awareness of the benefits of being literate. She enrolled even though her parents thought it was a waste of time. Jasaiah was determined to learn and attended the classes regularly. She completed the nine-month course and gained good marks in the final examination. Her learning skills and determination surprised even the trainer. Now she could read, write and do simple mathematical calculations.

Inspired by this, she enrolled in a high school far away from her village. Her parents' disapproval and her poverty did not prevent her from pursuing her dream. She took a loan from a savings group in her village who were willing to invest in her, seeing her keenness, confidence and determination. She studied hard and was fifth in her class in the annual examination.

While at school she also took tailoring lessons and is now starting her own tailoring business. Jasaiah's literacy skills and education have given her great confidence. She is now able to keep accounts and avoid being cheated.

Learning at all ages

Signing your own name, recognising a bus number, handling cash and keeping

Literacy and confidence

Nuasiben Gansibhai is a mother of five children living in Halmudi, Gujarat. Her eldest son runs a small shop. When he is away, Nausiben looks after the shop. However, she had difficulty dealing with cash transactions and could not travel alone to get supplies. She was greatly frustrated by this. She eagerly joined EFICOR's literacy classes, in spite of others mocking her.



Nausiben is now a changed person. She says, 'I feel great, now I can do things on my own. I can read, write, keep accounts and run the shop without much difficulty. I really thank God for this opportunity.'



Photo: Geoff Crawford, Tearfund

simple accounts – these are all quite easy tasks for people who had the opportunity to study as children. For women like Jasaiah and Nausiben (see case study above), these skills have enabled them to break out of the frustration and exploitation that often results from a lack of literacy. Many women like them go on to lead self-help groups, where they keep the minutes and accounts themselves.

Their enthusiasm is evidence of the impact that literacy has made in their lives.

Kuki (Lalbiakhlui) Rokhum is an Interserve Partner working with EFICOR as Co-ordinator of Donor Relations. Her address is: EFICOR, 308 Mahatta Tower, B Block Community Centre, Janakpuri, New Delhi – 110 058 India.

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Starting and managing literacy programmes

by Stellah Tumwebaze

LABE (Literacy and Adult Basic Education) is an organisation based in Kampala working in 14 districts of Uganda. It has wide experience in promoting literacy rights. Here they share some of their experience and help us to consider the basic steps to follow when starting a literacy programme.

Beneficiaries Who will benefit from the literacy programme? Who are we targeting? Are they women, youth, prisoners or farmers? Be very clear about this at the beginning.

Assess their literacy needs carefully

Conduct a needs assessment for this target group:

- Do learners need literacy in the local language or in a second language?
- What do they need literacy for?
- How do learners expect to use literacy skills?
- Do learners want to learn numeracy as well, and for what purpose?

Also find out about the likely learning arrangements:

- When and where should lessons be held?
- How long should lessons be?
- Are instructors available? Should they be female or male?

Design a curriculum framework Using the findings from the needs assessment, develop a curriculum that highlights key learning areas including objectives, content (reading, writing and numeracy skills), and expected learning abilities.

This framework can then be used to develop a local curriculum relevant to the particular needs of the learners. It is difficult to prescribe what should be taught in all literacy centres across the region or area.

Develop literacy materials Materials needed will include:

- training manuals
- teaching guides
- learning materials for learners.

Training and teaching materials can be in the language to be used for training instructors. Learners' materials should always be written in the language of instruction.

Try to develop learning materials with the learners as well. Participatory tools and techniques such as maps, seasonal

calendars and drawings, can allow learners to produce their own materials.

Train literacy trainers and instructors

Several different words are used to describe literacy instructors – *teachers, educators, facilitators* or *trainers*. LABE use the term *trainers* for those who train *literacy instructors*. It is important to build a team of trainers to train local instructors. These trainers come in and provide training for the instructors and then leave. It will be the instructors who are then responsible for running regular literacy classes.

Selection criteria Consider carefully criteria for selecting both trainers and instructors. Consider things such as their level of education, literacy ability in the language of instruction, gender, age, religion and where they live.

Train trainers and instructors

We recommend a modular (series of short courses) approach to training. Each module usually lasts for 10 days with 2–3 months in between. The training should equip instructors with the theory of adult literacy, adult education skills and practical skills. If trainers need training, this should obviously be done first so they can use this learning in training instructors.

Enrol learners Once literacy instructors are trained, they should mobilise and encourage potential learners to enrol for classes. When possible, teaching should be integrated with existing groups, rather than forming new classes for learning literacy. Teaching should be based around what people are doing (such as micro-enterprise activities).

Monitoring literacy activities

Training should equip trainers and instructors with basic skills in monitoring and assessing the impact of their literacy learning. Literacy trainers should monitor literacy instructors and instructors should monitor and assess progress with their learners on a regular basis.

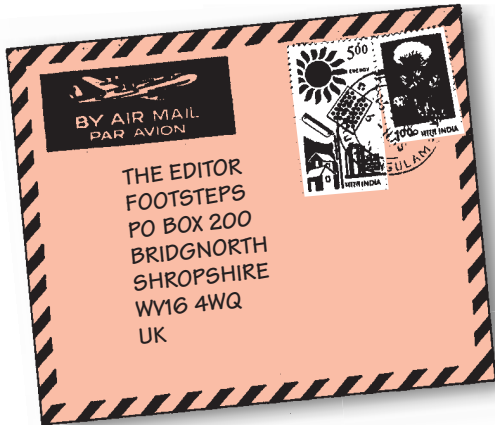
We hope these guidelines will help you to develop a detailed programme.

Stellah Tumwebaze has many years experience in adult literacy work with LABE. LABE's address is PO Box 16176, Wandegeya, Kampala, Uganda.

E-mail: labe@africaonline.com



Photo: LABE



that many young women didn't want to breast-feed because they thought it would spoil the shape of their breasts which they wanted to keep upright in shape. Many left committed to share with other young people the message of the huge benefits of breast-feeding.

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Raising awareness of the importance of breast-feeding

For World Breast-feeding Week in 2004, staff in AJINAA planned to raise awareness about this important issue with our young people.

We held meetings for young people, both girls and youths. They heard about the advantages of breast-feeding for both baby and mother, and the disadvantages of bottles, artificial milk and dummies. They were encouraged not to feel ashamed of breast-feeding.

During the week itself, nearly 600 men and women attended a meeting organised by the NGO AMEGA. We continued with further meetings in health centres and churches. Brochures and T-shirts were given to health centre staff to encourage them to provide information and raise awareness about breast-feeding. Many questions were answered. The brochure helped to clear up many doubts and misunderstandings. For example, we discovered

Protecting vegetables

In the 1960s, I lived with my grandmother. She used to have a small garden near the compound where she planted vegetables. She sprayed a mixture of goat faeces and water on them to prevent animals from eating the plants.



Collect goat faeces in a container, such as a clay pot, and cover with water. After a week, stir it vigorously to form a thick paste. If the paste is too thick, add more

water so as to be easily sprayed. Use a bunch of leaves or shrubs to splash the contents onto the plants.

Try it! During all the years I was at secondary school, I never saw goats or other animals destroying my grandmother's plants. However, do wash the vegetables very thoroughly with running water before cooking and eating them.

Moses Ena Obire
PO Box 1854
Warri
Delta State
Nigeria

Epilepsy awareness

I would like to respond to your reader's letter about children who suffer from epilepsy (Issue 60). In Malawi, the Sue Ryder Foundation serves rural villages and focuses particularly on people who suffer from epilepsy and asthma. We have two main activities. Firstly, we train volunteers in each village that we cover. These are selected by the community and are genuine volunteers who receive no payment of any kind. The Foundation provides them with training in identifying epilepsy and in educating the local community about the condition. We have 490 such volunteers at present.

Our second activity is to provide mobile teams that run 'clinics' on a regular basis. These are mostly held under trees. The volunteers present patients to the staff who carry out the diagnosis and prescribe drugs. It is the volunteer's responsibility to ensure patients take the drugs and to monitor their impact on the epilepsy. Clients are seen about once every six weeks. With the support of the volunteers this has proved satisfactory. Malawi has very few doctors so our staff are experienced nurses who have received a short course on the diagnosis and treatment of epilepsy. We currently serve some 7,000 clients.

If you would like further information please get in touch and I will be glad to help.

Stephen Carr
Chairman, Sue Ryder Foundation in Malawi
E-mail: scarr@sdsn.org.mw

Malaria vaccine shows promising results

The World Health Organisation has welcomed the results of a clinical trial showing that a new malaria vaccine has protected young children from malaria. Though much more work on this vaccine is still needed, it could be a breakthrough.

Many malaria vaccines have been developed over the past 25 years, but this one (the RTS, S/AS02A vaccine) is the first to show significant results. It has given protection against malaria in children one to four years old in Africa.

Globally, there are 300–500 million cases of malaria each year, resulting in more than one million deaths. Malaria is Africa's leading cause of death for children under five years old. It kills one African child every 30 seconds. Children who survive severe malaria may suffer from learning difficulties or brain damage.

Protecting children with treated bednets is one of the most effective ways of preventing malaria.

Indian fears over falling female birth ratio

India has recently published the results of their latest census. This revealed a serious problem – the falling numbers of female babies and children. The proportion of girls up to six years of age fell from 945 girls (to 1,000 boys) in 1991 to 927 girls in 2001.

In India's fastest growing and wealthiest states such as Gujarat and Punjab the problem is even more serious. However, Christians have the highest ratio with 1,009 females per 1,000 boys (this is the expected ratio).

Wealthier families can now pay for sex determination tests and abort unwanted female babies (though this is illegal). This practice causes much concern. However, officials believe that the situation may resolve itself over time. If there are fewer women, their value will be more appreciated. Instead of parents having to find huge dowries to marry their daughters, they may instead find the families of boys no longer require a dowry and may instead share in the costs of the wedding.

Young people and small trees

Cambodia, like the USA, celebrates Arbor (Tree) Day. Banners are hung up with slogans about the importance of trees and forests to the country. This year I joined in the festivities. Hundreds of young people met at the Youth Commission offices and travelled by truck to the Toul Kork district of Phnom Penh. Here they sang and had a short devotion. Then they picked up the hundreds of young trees provided by the government, and went out to plant them. People welcomed them – and the trees they carried. Local people called out for them to plant a tree near *their* house and some helped with the planting.

Although these young people were enthusiastic, most knew very little about trees. Were they planted correctly? Were they given enough water? Were they given too much water? Would they



survive until the following week? Who knows!

I looked at one of the little trees just planted, with water poured over it, and wondered if it would survive. Then I suddenly realised what that little tree really represented. Hope for the future! It may have not been properly planted, and it might not be properly cared for. But there is the chance – the God-given potential – that the little tree might just make it. It might live to be 20, 30, or 80

years old. It might provide shade, a home for birds, and beauty to the residents of that stretch of road for many years to come. And that hope was well worth the effort.

Young people, like those little trees, are the hope for Cambodia's future. As staff at the Youth Commission go about our work, we may not do everything perfectly. We march out into the community and try to develop the youth God has given to the churches. Do we give them too much help? Not enough? Do we do things the right way? Who knows.

Maybe not all of the youth that we invest in will grow into effective, Christian leaders. But some of them will! Some of them, by God's sovereign grace, will be the strong pillars of society for many years to come. The Youth Commission is pleased to be one of God's tools, planting hope for the future.

Mark Fender
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EDITORIAL

In our world of increasingly rapid and global communications, it is very challenging to realise that one in every five adults (over 860 million people) lack literacy skills and that two-thirds of these are women. In addition, over 113 million children are unable to attend school and learn literacy skills.

However, basic education (in which literacy is key) was recognised as a human right over 50 years ago, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The United Nations (UN) has declared a Literacy Decade (2003–2012) to try to improve this situation. Their goal is to increase literacy rates by 50% by 2015.

It is particularly important to provide opportunities for girls and women to learn literacy and numeracy skills. Education and literacy bring women confidence and reduce the risk of exploitation of all kinds. Girls who have benefited from education are more likely to marry later, have fewer and healthier children and send children to school.

This issue is full of useful and practical articles to help establish and support literacy training or encourage the literate environment. Literacy can be a key to new freedoms and can strengthen people's ability to communicate in many different ways. However, adult literacy training should always respect people's existing knowledge and be tied into real life situations, rather than a classroom situation.

Literacy circles or groups often develop into long-term groups where members continue to support and encourage each other in new learning. PILLARS Guides (now available in over 30 languages) can provide a useful support for discussion-based learning.

Future issues will look at the Millennium Development Goals and planning for sustainability.



Isabel

Isabel Carter, Editor

Learning literacy skills

Adults often forget how they learnt to read and write as children. This means that the process of teaching literacy can sometimes be difficult and confusing. Where literacy training is available, trained facilitators are the best people to pass on these skills. However, a basic understanding of literacy training may be very helpful to parents and to the family and friends of people learning literacy skills.

Word cards

Word cards are a really good way of helping both children and adults learn. Write out short, familiar words on card or paper. (You can even stick them around the home as labels). Help people to recognise the words and to make short sentences with the cards. Simple pictures can help people to remember the words.

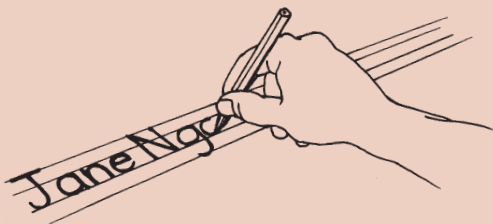


Whole words

Traditionally, children first learnt to recite the letters of their alphabet. Today people usually first learn to recognise the shape of whole short words. Later they learn the sounds of letters to enable them to recognise longer words.

Letter shapes

As people learn to recognise words, they need to practise writing them. At first, a few grid lines can help people to recognise the different shapes made by letters. Learners can copy them and learn to write words – usually starting with their name.



Dealing with longer words

Once people gain confidence in recognising and reading short words, they need to learn how to break up longer words they do not recognise. By making the sounds of the letters, they can then work out the new word. One very useful technique is to take a long word that has been discussed during the literacy meeting and break it up. For example, take the word **educate**:

Work out how many different vowels the word contains (vowels are **a, e, i, o, u**) and write these along the top of the grid.

Work out how many different consonants there are and write these down the side of the grid:

	e		u		a	
d	de	ed	du	ud	da	ad
c	ce	ec	cu	uc	ca	ac
t	te	et	tu	ut	ta	at

Practise saying each of these combinations. If possible, make new words from the combinations and letters – cat, data, date. Then go back and practise saying and writing the original word.

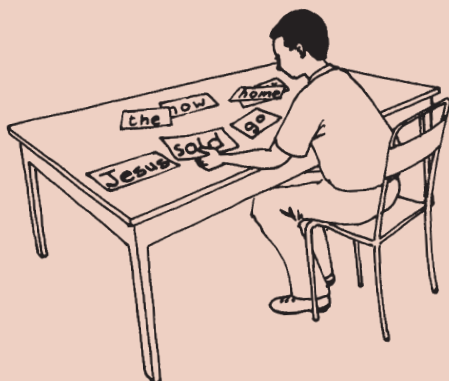
Capital letters

This applies only to the Roman script. People often make the mistake of thinking that capital letters are easier for people to read. In fact, learning capital letters is like learning a second language. Words should always be written in lower case except for names.



New words

Once learners have basic skills in reading and writing, new groups of words can be learnt, each word related by a particular theme, such as the family, the house, vegetables. This helps learners remember new words and their meaning. Emphasis should be given to helping learners to understand and reproduce new words as well as recognise them. Learning to read and write should be fun! Games and songs are an enjoyable way for learners to practise their new skills and communicate with others.



Ways of practising literacy

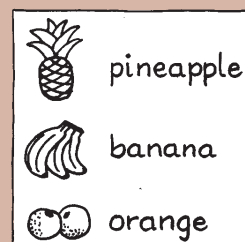
Posters

The best posters use very few words. Posters that share information using a few necessary words are a good way to give confidence to people learning literacy skills. People can design the poster together, decide what writing is needed and practise the words before writing them on the poster.



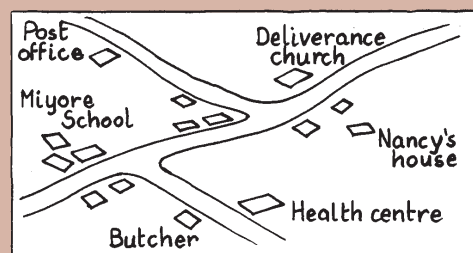
Charts

All kinds of charts can be prepared. The leaves of useful trees can be collected and labelled. Simple drawings of vegetables or fruit can be labelled. Charts can also show different seasonal activities – for example, how people's income changes through the year or health concerns through the year. All of these require labels and information to be written.



Maps

Maps are a very useful way for people to find practical uses for their new literacy skills. Learners can work together to produce maps. These could be maps of their local area, to show water resources or health risks. When the maps are completed, people can agree on helpful labels and additional information. These could include the names of people living in particular houses, or the names of crops, vegetation, streams or community buildings.



‘Now the blackboard is looking at me!’

by Barbara Lawes



Photo: Barbara Lawes, Mothers' Union

Mothers' Union members and workers worldwide know that a lack of literacy skills is one of the main problems facing women and girls, especially in rural areas. Without literacy skills, women find it much harder to improve conditions in their homes, families and communities and to participate fully in community affairs and administration. Literacy is key to accessing the few local initiatives and opportunities available. Literacy enables women's voices and concerns to be heard by decision-makers locally, nationally and internationally.

In response to this the Mothers' Union researched, developed and implemented the Mothers' Union Literacy and Development Programme (MULD). The programme had to be affordable, sustainable and appropriate for adult learners. It needed to make use of local skills and knowledge, and be usable with any language. Above all, it had to tackle the inequalities in society, which so often keep women powerless, voiceless and unseen in their families and communities.

The Mothers' Union is a Christian organisation working in 76 countries around the world through an extensive network of volunteers and paid staff,

and which follows the Anglican church structure from province to grassroots church communities. This gives Mothers' Union an almost unique contact with families and communities in the poorest places, where adult literacy levels are likely to be lowest.

Forming literacy circles

Adult literacy programmes have a high failure rate. Our extensive research showed this is partly due to unsustainable learning methods, lack of funding and lack of continuity on the part of the local facilitators. We have tried to avoid these problems where possible.

Burundi, Malawi and Sudan have some of the lowest adult literacy rates in Sub Saharan Africa. Since they are also countries where the Mothers' Union is strong, we began work there. A pilot programme was developed with the help of LABE, Uganda (see page 5) and we began work in eight dioceses. After careful explanations about how the programme would work, each diocese appointed two literacy trainers. These 16 women were trained in Uganda by LABE and Mothers' Union and returned to their countries to begin the three-year pilot programme.

Communities that agreed to participate had to form a local steering committee and find a suitable local person to be trained as the facilitator. The facilitator should be able to read and write in the local language and be acceptable to the local learners.

Once 12 communities had been selected, the facilitators were brought together for a week and trained in group formation, Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) techniques and how to introduce literacy using these techniques. As soon as they returned to their communities, enrolment began and the literacy circle began its work. The trainers visited the facilitators and their literacy circles every two weeks until they were well established and the circle was really going well.



A literacy group in Shombo.

Photo: Barbara Lawes, Mothers' Union

The programme involves sharing the knowledge and wisdom of participants on various topics through discussion. Key words to learn are taken from this discussion. In many ways the discussion is as important as learning literacy skills.

Making things work

A number of problems were found:

- People who had participated in previous literacy programmes that had failed were reluctant to join as they did not want to risk further disappointment.
- Some learners dropped out because the Participatory Learning and Action approach did not fit their expectations of 'proper schooling'. When they realised that people were becoming literate they tried to rejoin, but had to wait until a new circle formed.
- Many parents wanted their children to be enrolled, as they wanted to give them the opportunity to learn.
- Each circle is limited to no more than 30 learners, but sometimes many more people wanted to enrol.
- When literacy circles are formed in clusters of three or four (as requested), visiting and support is much easier. However, this had not always happened.

All of these challenges were met either by the trainers or during visits by Mothers' Union staff.

Once the circles were functioning well, the trainers continued to visit occasionally but moved their main focus to new communities. Now there is a regular pattern where the trainers train 12 facilitators twice a year. All facilitators come together for a few days each year to enable them to share experiences and receive further training.

Spreading the word

The trainers are full time Mothers' Union staff employed by their dioceses with support from the Mothers' Union. The facilitators receive small financial incentives, respect and some assistance from their communities. They also know they are providing a very valuable service for their friends and neighbours.

It takes between 160 and 200 hours in a literacy circle for a learner to become



Photo: Barbara Lawes, Mothers' Union

A post-literacy project in Malawi.

functionally literate and numerate. There are many factors which affect this. Some displaced people with few outside opportunities learn fast, as they cannot go to cultivate gardens or do any other activity. Communities which traditionally move a long distance to cultivate may have a gap of three or four months when there are no meetings. They need extra time to remember what they have learned previously.

Once people are literate and numerate they quickly move into community action and income-generating activities. The amount of such activity has amazed us. Post-literacy circles have also proved important. These provide people with a chance to use their new skills for reading, letter writing, community notice

boards, helping in clinics and further study.

In June 2003 a final evaluation took place and the programme was expanded into a further five dioceses. There are now 26 trained trainers and 600 facilitators, with more in training. Facilitators can come from any faith or none. There are 15,000 learners in active circles with many more in post-literacy activities. At present this programme is only used in Burundi, Malawi and Sudan but requests are coming from many parts of the world. We are keen to help but funds are proving difficult to find. This is an effective and sustainable programme that changes lives for the better. It costs just £20 to enable one person to read, write and count. There cannot be many better bargains than that!

In addition to the advantages literacy and numeracy bring to the community, the participatory methods are leading to improved communication within families and between neighbours. Health issues are tackled at community level and income-generating schemes begun, usually without the need for outside funding. Civil society is strengthened and able to take advantage of any possible opportunities.

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Learners' comments

'All my life I just saw the blackboard through the window. But now I am seeing it and it is looking at me.' *Eva Wajo*

'I work as a cleaner. On payday I would just take my pay without being able to check if it was correct or not, using my thumbprint to sign for it. Now I cannot be deceived any more. I am happy.' *Margaret Keji*

'I joined as a learner and was shy and had no confidence. I learnt to read and write very fast, and now I'm a facilitator. I am full of pride because I am now helping others to read and write too.' *Donatile, Malawi*

Language committees

by Noé Nguesso

'I care very much about developing my mother tongue because I don't want to die culturally'



Photo: Richard Hanson, Tearfund

Cameroon has two official languages – French and English – and about 250 local languages. With a population of 15 million, Cameroon has an official literacy rate of 63%. Several communities have formed their own local language committees to help people learn to read and write.

So far, 77 communities in Cameroon have set up language committees. These are organised and managed by the community. These local committees have come together to form the National Association of Cameroonian Language Committees (NACALCO). This co-ordinates their efforts and provides training.

Language committee activities

The committee's main goal is teaching people to read and write, first in their own mother tongue, and then in the official language, and to use these literacy skills for community development. Everyone who speaks the local language is encouraged to join their local language committee, whatever their religion, age, sex or social status.

A team co-ordinates the work and should include representatives of all the

various dialects if possible. This team usually meets twice a year to plan activities, action, report on achievements and discuss any other matters. Special effort is made to encourage women to take leading roles within each committee. Their involvement prompts other women and girls to register in literacy centres and should improve the

present low literacy levels among women.

Training members is a key role for each committee. Members understand the importance of giving some of their time to the literacy programme of their community. This may include teaching literacy, helping to produce literacy manuals and post-literacy materials, providing supervision and follow-up to help literacy teachers or raising community awareness of the importance of literacy.

The training of trainers

Training of literacy trainers is a priority for the language committees to ensure the success and sustainability of their work. NACALCO staff, in partnership with SIL Cameroon, provide initial training. Later, each committee selects members for further training in various aspects of the work. All training is passed on to others in the community. This system increases the number of literacy workers rapidly. Much of the work is done on a voluntary basis and people's time is limited. The more people are trained, the more the burden of work is shared.

Most of these volunteers earn their living through farming, carpentry and crafts.

Using proverbs to raise awareness

The Yemba Language Committee has a useful way of raising awareness and encouraging mother tongue literacy. They put up a board in the village square. Every few weeks, they write out a proverb in the mother tongue. When a small crowd gathers (mostly on market days), somebody from the language committee reads out the proverb and asks if someone can help the young people there to understand its meaning. This gives older people a chance to show their knowledge of their language and culture. The committee member explains that knowledge like this is useful to younger generations, but is not shared because it is not written down. If they attend a literacy centre, they will be able to write all this knowledge down, and so pass it on to their children and grandchildren. Then the volunteer tells them where to find the literacy centres and how to join the language committee, and gives out the class schedules.

Many have little formal education. They get involved because they want to help develop their mother tongue language, and to pass it on to their children. One volunteer said recently, 'I care very much about developing my mother tongue because I don't want to die culturally.'

On training courses, the volunteers are shown how to teach literacy in a participatory way, which involves the learners in the process. They get teaching practice and advice, and prepare texts in their mother tongue to use as material for literacy classes.

Funding for language committees

NACALCO promotes local contributions – money raised from individuals, local councils and organisations – as the most reliable and sustainable source of funding for language committee activities. When a training course is held, some families will offer lodging for the trainers and trainees from other villages. Other people will contribute by providing or preparing the food. According to an African proverb, 'An individual can be poor, but a community is never poor'.

This means that by joining hands together, poor people can achieve a lot.

It can be hard to prioritise literacy when people face more urgent problems such as hunger and poor health. However, language committees contribute to the struggle for sustainable development in Cameroon, by promoting literacy skills and encouraging self-reliance.

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The value of literacy to the Énxet

by Tim Curtis

The Énxet (or Lengua) people of Paraguay are an indigenous hunter-gatherer people numbering about 6,000. Some of them still practise hunter-gathering, despite the loss of most of their lands in the 1930s when the Chaco region was opened up for logging and farming.

Missionaries established a school at Makxawáya over 100 years ago and began work on translating the Bible into the Énxet language. Their first translation of the Gospels and Acts, together with a hymn-book, was published in 1911. Literacy primers for Énxet were developed and a small group became literate. Some of this first group became church leaders and shared the Christian message. Work on translating the Bible still continues. A revised New Testament was produced in 1997 and work on translating the Old Testament into Énxet began in 2003.

During the early part of the 20th century, indigenous people were almost totally marginalised. The encouragement brought by the Christian message and the emergence of a small, but significant, group of literate leaders was very important. The Énxet people felt that they mattered – and the feeling persists.

Today, most literate Énxet are still attached to the church. However, levels of literacy remain low because of the complicated situation regarding languages in the Chaco.



Photo: Jim Leong, Tearfund

Guaraní is more commonly spoken than Spanish in this part of Paraguay. However, things are changing. Many young people now use Spanish, and this may one day replace Guaraní as the second language of many Énxet speakers. There is a slow improvement in government-run primary schools as a result of major reform in the country's education system. Where possible, indigenous schoolchildren now learn to read and write in their mother tongue, before making the transition to Spanish.

Other factors have encouraged a growth in literacy. There are many NGOs in the Chaco. These organisations are involved with land rights issues, small-scale agricultural projects and community health programmes. There are also government ministries as well as political organisations, different religious groups, and anthropologists. The presence of all these organisations helps indigenous groups to believe that they really matter as a people. These newcomers provide a strong incentive to learn Spanish, and to become literate in that language. People who are literate can relate more to these different organisations. They are better able to take part in national and international conferences concerning 'indigenous issues' and to evaluate the mixed, and often conflicting, motives of these numerous groups.

Literacy skills allow the small numbers of Énxet speakers to participate more fully and with growing confidence in the decisions that affect their lives and those of their people. In doing this, they are beginning to integrate into Paraguayan society – without losing their identity as a people.

Tim Curtis trained in modern languages and linguistics. He has worked in Paraguay with the Iglesia Anglicana Paraguaya for over 20 years, supporting education programmes among the indigenous peoples and leading the Bible translation team.

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Books Newsletters Training materials

Adult Literacy:

A handbook for development workers

by Paul Fordham, Deryn Holland and Juliet Millican

This is a book for development workers with no formal training in adult education or literacy, but who find themselves having to respond to requests for 'literacy'. It describes the different stages in planning and teaching a small-scale literacy programme and offers practical suggestions for assessing needs, evaluation and providing materials.

It explores in detail the debate about the role of literacy in development. A number of case studies from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean illustrate the consequences of introducing literacy to individuals, groups or communities. The book contains 184 pages and costs £9.95 plus postage and packaging, and can be ordered from:

Oxfam, BEBC Distribution
15 Albion Close, Parkstone, Poole
Dorset, BH12 3YD
UK

E-mail: oxfam@bebc.co.uk
Website: publications.oxfam.org.uk

A Guide to Advocacy for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

This advocacy sourcebook is produced by Water Aid and WSSCC. It draws on many useful advocacy guides and manuals published in recent years. It contains four sections. Section one introduces advocacy work. Section two looks at the planning process for undertaking advocacy work, describing the various tools and approaches which can be used. Section three discusses the links between advocacy and practical field work. The final section lists available resources, publications, networks and other organisations involved in advocacy work.

The book is available free of charge. To order copies, please e-mail: ciprianoc@who.int

Understanding Organisational Sustainability through African Proverbs:

Insights for leaders of change

by Chiku Malunga

African proverbs contain much humour and wisdom! This book is produced by CADECO (Capacity Development Consultancies) and published by Impact Alliance Press. Using insights from African proverbs, the book discusses what organisations are, how they function, how they grow and develop and what makes them effective. African proverbs are used to show how NGOs and development organisations can achieve more integrity, sustainability and impact.



To order a copy of the book, please contact Margaret Johnson:

E-mail: mjohnson@pacthq.org
Website: www.cadeco.mw

Urban Health and Development

by Beverley Booth, Kiran Martin and Ted Lankester

This is a practical manual for use in developing countries, covering all kinds of issues which affect urban health. It is full of useful information for improving the quality of life for poor people in urban areas. Copies of this book are available to *Footsteps* readers free of charge. Please contact TALC (and mention *Footsteps*).

TALC
PO Box 49, St Albans, Herts, AL1 5TX
UK

Email: info@talcuk.org

Local literacies: theory and practice

by Glenys Waters

This book provides detailed and practical information on how to plan and organise a community literacy programme. It looks at tackling the barriers of language, culture and communication and the need to work with the local community as an active partner in the literacy process. It covers literacy

theories and focuses on the development of instructional methods and materials in reading, writing, and basic maths.

This book costs \$55, including postage and packaging, and is available from:

International Academic Bookstore
7500 West Camp Wisdom Road
Dallas, TX 75236
USA

E-mail: academic_books@sil.org
Website: www.ethnologue.com

WHO Medicines Bookshelf CD-ROM

This is the latest version of the WHO Medicines Bookshelf CD-ROM, and contains over 350 medicine-related publications in English, French and Spanish. Most of these are published by the Department of Essential Drugs and Medicines Policy. The bookshelf includes topics on:

- access to essential medicines
- national drug policy
- quality and safety issues
- traditional medicines.

For those with good web access, the CD-ROM acts as a gateway to a wide range of useful web sites. The Bookshelf is available free of charge and can be ordered from:

EDM Documentation Centre
World Health Organisation
20 Avenue Appia, CH-1211 Geneva 27
Switzerland

E-mail: edmdoccentre@who.int

Communication and Power: Reflect practical resource materials

by David Archer and Kate Newman

This resource pack shares ideas and inputs from people around the world with experience of using the Reflect approach to literacy. It is full of practical ideas and examples, and includes

sections on the written word, numbers, spoken word and images. The book can be downloaded free of charge from: www.actionaid.org.uk/787/reflect.html



The pack costs £23 including postage and packing. It can be ordered from Action Aid.

E-mail: Egigayehu.Summers@actionaid.org

Reflect Mother Manual

by David Archer and Sarah Cottingham

This manual draws on the experiences of the three Reflect pilot projects, and contains practical ideas about how to use Reflect techniques. It is available to download free of charge in English (without graphics) from the Resources section of the website:

www.reflect-action.org

The manual costs £29 including postage (£15 in UK), and can be ordered in English, Portuguese, Bangla, Spanish and French. To order, e-mail: reflectaction@yahoo.co.uk

APPEAL Training Materials

APPEAL have developed a wide range of training materials by literacy experts in the Asia Pacific region. They cover all the elements needed to develop literacy programmes, such as needs analysis, curriculum development, materials production and monitoring and evaluation, in an all-inclusive package of

12 volumes. The materials have been translated and adapted in eleven countries in Asia and the Pacific. For more information contact:

APPEAL
UNESCO, PROAP
920 Sukhumvit Road, Bangkok 10110
Thailand

E-mail: appeal@unesco.org
Website: [www.unesco.org/education/](http://www.unesco.org/education/appeal/publicat.htm)
[appeal/publicat.htm](http://www.unesco.org/education/appeal/publicat.htm)

The Right Change

This video about the MU Literacy and Development Programme is available on either DVD or video. It shows how the programme is transforming the lives of the learners, their families and their communities. Copies are available for £7 each, including postage and packing, from:

Mothers' Union, Mary Sumner House
24 Tufton Street, London, SW1P 3RB,
UK.

E-mail: mu@themothersunion.org



Useful websites and contacts

Actionaid Engaged in adult literacy in many countries.

Website: www.actionaid.org.uk/787/reflect.html

Literacy and Adult Basic Education (LABE), Kampala, Uganda, working with literacy training and programme development in East Africa.

E-mail: LABE@africaonline.co.ug

Website: LABE.8k.com

Asia South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE), based in Mumbai, India – a network of national organisations and producer of resources.

Website: www.aspbae.org

Literacy and Evangelism International, based in USA – works all over the world in support of church-based literacy efforts.

Website: www.literacyevangelism.org

SIL International work with hundreds of local languages around the world, producing Bible translations.

Website: www.sil.org

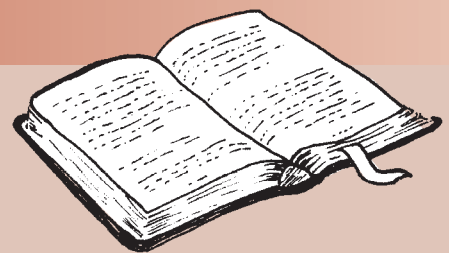
UNESCO The UN organisation promoting education and literacy with many useful articles and resources to download.

Website: www.unesco.org/education

BIBLE STUDY

Languages and communication: God's plan for mankind

by Noé Nguesso



People working to develop literacy in local languages in many communities around the world play a full part in God's plan for mankind. This is because literacy helps ensure clear communication between people and God through reading the Bible, and between individual people and their neighbours.

• What is the link between clear communication with our neighbours, and loving them as we love ourselves according to God's command?

Read Genesis 11:1-9

• In building the Tower of Babel, did people want to improve communication between God and themselves, or to challenge him?

• What are the consequences?

Thousands of different languages are spoken all over the world, many of which are still unwritten. The lowest rates of literacy are recorded in communities where education is carried out exclusively in foreign languages. People often struggle to speak them

well, let alone learn to read and write in them. In such areas, people suffer a lot from ignorance, poverty, and illness. So low rates of literacy coincide with low areas of development. And yet God did not create people for them to live unhappy lives while on earth.

• How can Christian literature in mother tongue languages help people understand God's plan for us better?

Tearfund, through its partners, promotes the use of local languages for literacy and development and encourages people to work together in taking action to improve their use.

• What role are we taking to support this?

Noé Nguesso is a linguist who works with the Ministry of Scientific and Technical Research. He is Director of NACALCO, BP 8110, Yaoundé, Cameroon.

Preparing materials for translation

by Nyomi Graef and Ross James

We were involved in a translation project to provide training materials for health workers for use in radio programmes. Our task was to prepare the original English materials for translation by making them easier to read and understand.

The SMOG formula (see box) is a common method used to measure the readability of printed materials. It can be used to reduce the number of words with three or more syllables, as shorter words are easier to read.

We also found three very useful editing techniques. These were to simplify technical words, modify grammar and consider the socio-cultural context.

Simplify technical words Either replace jargon or difficult technical terms with similar, simpler words, or explain them fully, if readers need to use them.

Modify grammar Remove unnecessary verbs and keep the number of actions in a sentence to a minimum. For example:

Interviewers should be able to demonstrate friendliness, sincerity, and familiarity with the purpose and background of the study.

could be simplified to

Interviewers should be friendly, sincere, and familiar with the purpose and background of the study.

Change negatively-worded phrases to the positive and remove double negatives. Use the 'active tense' instead of the 'passive tense'. For example:

Choose friendly and sincere interviewers.

Many nouns close together could be presented as a list. For example:

The components of interviewing are planning, preparation, forming and asking questions, introducing an interview...

becomes

The parts of interviewing are:

Plan

Prepare

Form and ask questions

Introduce an interview.



Photo: Richard Hanson, Tearfund

Socio-cultural context Keep in mind the purpose of simplifying the text and the target audience.

Our revised materials had to:

- keep the theory of health promotion and communication.
- use technical terms used by health professionals
- be easy to understand without being patronising
- be culturally neutral – replace terms that are distinctly Australian or British (replace 'the patient is as fit as a fiddle' with 'the patient is really well'), or which may have different meanings in different cultural, ethnic and religious contexts.

We hope our experience will help both in preparing materials for translation and for newly literate people.

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Tearfund staff spend considerable time dealing with many thousands of funding requests that we are unable to support. This is taking them away from their work of bringing good news to the poor through current partnerships. **Please note** that all funding proposals will be rejected unless they are from current Tearfund partners.

To discover the SMOG formula

- Select 30 sentences from an article or book (ten consecutive sentences from the beginning, ten from the middle and ten from the end).
- Circle all words containing three or more syllables (break each word into the number of separate sounds to find out how many syllables it contains. For example, the word **readability** has five: **read / a / bil / it / y**, and **printed** has two – **print / ed**).
- Add the total number of words with three or more syllables and find the SMOG score in the table below.

Number of words with three or more syllables	91–110	73–90	57–72	43–56	31–42	21–30	13–20	7–12	1–6
SMOG score	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5

This table gives the SMOG (or reading grade) level* a person needs to fully understand the text being assessed. A score of 10 or less gives a level that most people could understand. For new readers the score should be as low as possible.

*This is calculated as the nearest perfect square root for the total of circled words, plus a constant of three.

