

Public Disclosure Authorized

Abdun Noor

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# Managing Adult Literacy Training

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## The context

Literacy—in its most elementary definition, the ability to read and write—is seen in many ways. It is considered a fundamental human right, a basic human need, an instrument for social and economic development, and a means to politicize a generation. Though each of these interpretations may justify a widespread effort to increase literacy, none of them explains entirely the benefit that arises from becoming literate. It is, essentially, the liberation of a mind from the bondage of dependence. Nevertheless, each of the above understandings of literacy is critical in determining the structure, content, method, effect and ultimate use of literacy programmes in a neo-literate society.

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## CONCEPTIONS OF LITERACY

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The right to education is embedded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recognizes that ignorance is an obstacle to the self-fulfilment of an individual.<sup>1</sup> By remaining a victim of ignorance, an individual limits his contribution to the productive work of, and draws little benefit from, the society to which he belongs. The International Symposium for Literacy sponsored by Unesco in Iran (September 1975) expanded on literacy as a right:

Thus conceived, literacy creates the conditions for the acquisition of a critical consciousness of the contradictions of society in which man lives and of

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its aims; it also stimulates initiative and his participation in the creation of projects capable of acting upon the world, of transforming it, and of defining the aims of an authentic human development. It should open the way to a mastery of techniques and human relations. Literacy is not an end in itself. It is a fundamental human right.<sup>2</sup>

One sense of a right is that it is an ideal, however legalistic, and this sense does not carry the immediacy of a basic need. Satisfaction of a right may often await the creation of optimal societal conditions, but fulfilment of a basic need cannot. Seen from this point of view, illiteracy has isolated a large part of humankind, who are at once the poorest, the worst fed, and the least cared for by their various societies. Non-fulfilment of their basic needs becomes incompatible with the objective of fundamental distributive justice.

The interpretation that would see in literacy an instrument for social and economic development is fairly complex. This view makes use of three distinct correlations: first, the way in which attainment of a high level of literacy affects economic growth and development; second, the way in which the process of achieving high literacy affects the rate of growth and development; and, third, how economic growth itself affects the attainment of universal literacy.

Recent studies have clarified these complex but tenuous relations but have not explained them fully. For instance, literacy has an important effect on life expectancy and infant mor-

<sup>\*</sup> This article is an edited version of a study prepared by the author for an International Institute for Educational Planning workshop on Planning and Administration of National Literacy Programmes (Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania, 27 November–2 December 1980).

tality. Results of a recent regression analysis suggest that the levels of literacy explain the variations in life expectancy among countries more fully than do variables such as gross national product (GNP), caloric and protein consumption, the number of doctors per capita, and the accessibility of clean drinking water.<sup>3</sup> Greater literacy could aid in the understanding of the causes of ill and the causal links among inadequate sanitation, infection and disease. In Sri Lanka, for instance, improved health practices seem to be closely related to the high status of literacy. Infant mortality, which is closely linked with waterborne diseases,<sup>4</sup> was highest in those areas where education was lowest (that is, the tea estates). It could be assumed that literacy increases knowledgeability and thus the ability to screen and evaluate new information about changing home hygiene and health and nutritional practices.<sup>5</sup>

Knowledgeability has also been positively linked with growth in agricultural production. Literacy increases the adoption of improved agricultural practices, and this increased knowledgeability appears helpful to farmers' absorbing, accurately recalling and evaluating the new technologies.<sup>6</sup> It may also have an effect on farmers' attitudes towards innovations. High literacy could well be one of the reasons why rice yields in Sri Lanka were the highest in South Asia in 1960 and why Sri Lankan rice production increased by 5.8 per cent annually during the 1960s.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, literacy is also seen as a catalyst for political and ideological change. This view finds in the literate worker an asset of importance in assisting the political and developmental processes. The Cuban Government has, for example, stated that the politicization of its work force is the primary purpose of its literacy campaign.<sup>8</sup> The Indian Government has said that the rationale behind its current programme to educate 100 million illiterates is the redistribution of justice. India's sixth Five-year Plan (1978-83) calls for the organization of the literate poor and the lowly castes because 'their vigilance alone can ensure that the benefits of various laws, policies, and schemes designed to

benefit them do produce their intended effect'.<sup>9</sup>

A neo-literate society contains within it the prospect of a challenge to the existing socio-economic equilibrium and may seriously question the legitimacy of the privileged class. Iran may be only one example of many that could emerge in the future.<sup>10</sup> Given the potential instability literacy engenders, the obvious question might be: 'How can a government and an élite, who have a vested interest in the status quo, sponsor and promote such programmes?'<sup>11</sup> There simply may be no other option, if the correlations between knowledgeability and improved well-being, just discussed, are to be attained. Literacy is a means by which the poor and the deprived become aware that they are not receiving a fair deal from the fruits of development, and sense that they can influence their own future. Isolating them from this process—from what, as we have seen, is also considered a basic need—may breed even broader social volatility and more disruptive social unrest.

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#### LITERACY AND INTEGRATED BASIC EDUCATION

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Literacy and basic education are intimately linked. Basic education has three essential objectives: the imparting of skills to communicate, skills to improve the quality of living, and skills to contribute to, and to increase, economic production. The communication skills, at the minimum, include literacy, numeracy and general civic, scientific and cultural knowledge, values and attitudes. The living skills embrace knowledge of health, sanitation, nutrition, family-planning, the environment, management of the family economy, and creation and maintenance of a home. The production skills encompass all forms of activity directed towards making a living or producing goods and services, at whatever level of economic sophistication.

Basic education, therefore, is a relative, and not an absolute, process. The character, degree and method of basic education will vary according to the country, the group selected for education (whether it is children in school, children

not in school, youth or adults), and their particular needs. Basic education is similarly diverse in its levels of planned activities, comprising formal, non-formal and informal offerings. Its different elements are assimilated over a lifetime and can lead, incrementally, to an individual's material welfare, increased productivity, and ability to earn a living from self-employment.

Literacy training, as the concepts given above would suggest, is only one component skill of an integrated, basic education. By itself, it neither fulfils the requisites of a basic education nor satisfies the myriad learning needs of an individual seeking growth and development; but without it, other elements of a thorough basic education will suffer and other needs will go unmet.

Yet, for lack of valid measures, literacy rates alone have often been used in development planning as a surrogate measurement for the whole of basic education. Therefore, although literacy training is not interchangeable with basic education, many planners have conceived it as such. They have associated the need for literacy training with the objective of spreading developmental knowledge, when in fact they should have linked the need for a fuller, basic education with development. To this way of thinking, literacy training soon became an absolute prerequisite for acquiring knowledge that would lead to development. In the absence of a comprehensive, widespread motivation to acquire literacy skills, the literacy campaigns mounted by planners of this opinion turned into iron gates, barring the attainment of the developmental knowledge that the ignorant so urgently need for survival in an ever more highly competitive and economic world. This narrow view of education and development, albeit well intentioned, ultimately proved self-defeating.

It is true that endemic illiteracy slows developmental efforts. Nevertheless, ingenious, non-formal educational and communications techniques can be used to speed up the developmental process until higher levels of literacy can be achieved. The urgency of increasing food production or of eradicating debilitating, communicable diseases cannot and may not be

held up until functional levels of literacy prevail. Such demanding, immediate efforts are made more difficult and are slowed by widespread illiteracy, but they should still go on.

What is suggested in this article is that although the place of literacy training is foremost among the myriad of human needs the timing of its acquisition may differ in specific situations and within broader social programmes. Literacy training may not be the first in a series of many learning sequences that an integrated basic education should comprise. It may come in the midst, or at the tail end, of such a series of learning sequences. But whenever it is introduced, literacy training must coincide with that period during which an illiterate person is genuinely motivated to receive it.

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#### NOT A WANING INTEREST

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Interest in, and commitment to, promoting literacy is not declining in the developing world. Rather, it is gaining momentum and can be seen in the plans of many developing countries and international agencies. A few examples are illustrative. India has initiated a National Adult Education Programme (1979) to eradicate illiteracy within five years among 100 million youth and women of the poor and the lowly castes.<sup>12</sup> Afghanistan has proposed to enrol about half of its adult illiterates (about 8 million people) in six-month, part-time literacy courses over the years 1979-83.<sup>13</sup> Bangladesh plans to use its primary schools and teachers to eradicate illiteracy, primarily that of youth and women in rural areas, during its second Five-year Plan (1980-85).<sup>14</sup> Saudi Arabia is considering an accelerated literacy plan drawn up with assistance from the World Bank.<sup>15</sup>

During their recent policy meetings, international agencies and donors of bilateral aid have also taken strong positions towards developing efforts to increase literacy. The Third Alexandria Literacy Conference, held at Baghdad (December 1976), called for the formulation of a strategy to eliminate illiteracy in the Arab world over a period of fifteen years. The experts at the

International Conference in Education, sponsored in Geneva (August 1977) by the International Bureau of Education (IBE), advised the adoption of an interdisciplinary and intersectoral approach to eradicating illiteracy. The Fourth Regional Conference of Ministers of Education and Ministers Responsible for Economic Planning in the Arab States (Abu Dhabi, November 1977) sought to expand basic education, and to free all its citizens from illiteracy, by linking the effort for literacy with economic development. This meeting also emphasized the need for stepped-up, international co-operation and the delineation of effective proposals that would be particularly suited to the needs of individual countries and societies.

The Unesco General Conference (1978) called upon its Member States to pursue their efforts to improve literacy within the framework of the development of education as a whole and to plan for these efforts in close conjunction with rural development projects.<sup>16</sup> The Conference also requested that the Unesco Secretariat contemplate the possibilities of launching a Unesco 'literacy decade' and of creating an international 'literacy fund'. The World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (Rome, 1979)—realizing the importance of literacy for world development in general, and for rural development in particular—recommended that, in formulating policies and programmes, the governments attending should give high priority to the achievement and maintenance of universal primary education and universal literacy as functionally related to other aspects of development. By the year 2000, the conference concluded, governments should 'either achieve it or attain and maintain a level that is close to it'.<sup>17</sup>

Professional institutions have also been preparing themselves to address the challenge of universal literacy. The International Institute of Education Planning (IIEP) will organize an international seminar on planning for literacy training during November 1980. The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement conducted, in late 1981, an international workshop on the methods of

evaluating achievement of literacy. Unesco has already sponsored an Interagency Working Group to co-ordinate and synchronize the measures to be taken against illiteracy by a number of aid agencies, including the World Bank. The International Council of Adult Education (ICAE)—on behalf of, and in co-operation with, Unesco—is studying the results of national campaigns for literacy in the twentieth century to define the historical relations between such programmes and literacy.

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### The principal issues

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The commitment to forge ahead with mass literacy campaigns is growing among the leaders of the developing world. Yet many of these policy-makers may be set on a course that will only have them retread those same tracks that have previously led to inadequate results. Experience suggests that there have been several defects in the conceptualization and planning of many past efforts to increase literacy. National commitment for implementing such campaigns may not have been deep enough to sustain these programmes over the long period of waiting for their results to become evident. The economic benefits from becoming literate, incremental in nature, may not have been sufficiently perceptible. The choice of groups to be given priority in these efforts often overlooked the very group (for example, women) most motivated to attain literacy. Insufficient preparatory work—to provide support services and to develop adequate learning environments during literacy campaigns—has often induced relapses to illiteracy.

What follows in this chapter is a review of those issues that have confronted efforts to improve literacy and that can determine the course of planning for future campaigns. Such an assessment is imperative because literacy efforts are on trial all over the Third World. Their success and the reasons for their failure are being scrutinized by all concerned—by learners and users of educational products, teachers, potential learners, communities and

governments. The prevailing concepts that have directed literacy training are under challenge, and new concepts are emerging.

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#### COMMITMENT

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Analysis of the motivation essential to the success of literacy training is difficult because, as has been remarked above, literacy is seen in many ways by many groups within a society. To some, it is a fundamental right conducive to the unlocking of human potential. To others, literacy is as much a basic need as it is an instrument to assist the process of development. And there are still others who view literacy as a welfare activity primarily directed towards the poor, towards increasing their potential for a better income and quality of life. Although these groups may have seemingly contradictory notions on the societal contributions newly literate persons may make, they still have one thing in common—a nearly total commitment to the cause of literacy. And it is this commitment that will support future programmes, whatever their rationale.

Literacy may evoke various interpretations in a society, but the central direction of a literacy effort—its nature, scope and the eventual use of the neo-literates—is determined by a nation's political authority. Politicization of the masses was seen as the basic rationale of the Cuban literacy movement.<sup>18</sup> The Vietnamese, however, gave importance to the values of production and national cohesion that are likely to be fostered by a literate citizenry.<sup>19</sup> The United Republic of Tanzania sought to extend basic rights, whereas India's primary goal was and is the emancipation of the poor and the lower castes.<sup>20</sup>

Political will, though a necessary condition for launching a mass literacy effort, is not sufficient in itself to succeed. It must also be accompanied by a national will, a consensus that, especially, includes the willingness of the élite—the administrators, bureaucrats, and power brokers—to accept the *raison d'être* of literacy programmes and to extend to these

efforts their support. To elicit this support, however, the political forces must appear to be stable, to be capable of allowing the continuity of prescribed policies and designed programmes.<sup>21</sup>

In some situations a national will may fail to materialize despite the existence of political will and the stability of the political forces. Even if such a national will does cohere, it may not be forceful enough to bring about substantive, structural changes to alter illiteracy because the power behind a national commitment is necessarily drawn from a number of determinants. For example, the scope, nature, costs and sheer logistics of embarking upon a literacy effort influence the degree of national commitment. Bangladesh is a case in point. Its mass literacy plans were advanced on the ebb of a liberation war (1972); they received political support but evoked limited national will. The priority accorded nationally—and justifiably so—to the reconstruction of a war-ravaged economy made the literacy campaign a secondary concern, and it soon fell into oblivion.

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#### APPROACH

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Literacy campaigns assume several forms and vary widely in their scope, content and ideological purposes. Some campaigns are organized on a selective basis to reach specific social groups, whereas others are intended as undifferentiated efforts toward the mass eradication of illiteracy.

##### *Selective literacy*

Selective programmes are usually designed by agencies that need literate people to foster the objectives of their own programmes and are advanced with or without a political blessing. In many countries the voluntary agencies, the religious institutions, private employers or public social sectors spearhead such selective efforts, often against considerable barriers. Programmes are designed to produce incentives to, and to provide services for, a specific clientele (such as women, youth, employees or farmers). For example, in Bangladesh the Bureau of Cottage

Industry conducts women's literacy classes because experience has shown that literate women are more imaginative in designing pottery and more efficient in organizing grass-roots co-operatives.<sup>22</sup> In Ethiopia, the Orthodox Church has about 15,000 literacy classes to teach children of ages 5 to 7 to read religious books.<sup>23</sup> Selective literacy programmes have generally been successful, but are much too expensive for mass implementation.

#### *Mass campaigns*

The national, mass campaign is an intensive attempt usually made with the support of political will and the deployment of substantial national resources. Almost all newly independent developing nations opted for mass literacy efforts during the 1950s and 1960s. Two conceptions prevailed and helped fuel this involvement. First, the idea of 'each one teach one' was influential. That each literate person could teach at least one illiterate over a six- to nine-month period caught the imagination of the new leaders and contributed to the belief that, given political direction and guidance, a massive mobilization of literate volunteers over an extended period was possible. Second, it was assumed that illiterates would have an innate motivation to become literate and would avail themselves of all opportunities to learn if these chances were merely made available to them. Unfortunately, time and results disproved both these ideas.

Nevertheless, a few of the approximately fifty such mass literacy campaigns were noteworthy. For example, Cuba eradicated illiteracy among 700,000 of its population within nine months.<sup>24</sup> The Tanzanian Government reported the addition of 4 million new literates over a four-year period. Similarly, Somalia reported that 43 per cent of its population, or about 1.5 million people, participated in its mass literacy campaign. It is not yet possible to ascertain, however, what percentage of these neo-literates have retained their skills and are pursuing post-literate activities.

The apparent failure of the undifferentiated, mass approaches can be attributed to a number

of causes originating in the realms of politics, economics, social science, or logistical planning. These will be further elaborated later in the paper, but two—one political, the other economic—merit attention here.

#### *Political failure*

A mass literacy effort that is dependent upon mobilization of the educated and privileged groups apparently has a better chance of success if the government is authoritarian and centrally controlled. This has proved true in the USSR and China. Both succeeded in the compulsory mobilization of their literates' resources and in inducing mandatory participation of the illiterate work-forces to carry out literacy programmes. Their example was followed by Cuba, which claims to have received voluntary assistance in its campaigns from the literate segments of its population. Similarly, but from the opposite end of the political spectrum, during the military dictatorship of the 1960s Burma succeeded in reducing the magnitude of its population's illiteracy. The effort slowed considerably, however, during the 1970s.

The experience of India substantiates the view that those countries having a less authoritarian government are the least successful in advancing the cause of their illiterates. For example, India designed a mass literacy effort in 1970. Since then, it has tried repeatedly to augment its effort by adopting various strategies—such as the use of Panchayat leaders, block teachers, village helpers, and civil servants imparting the 'three Rs' to domestic servants—but as yet it has not succeeded in mobilizing all of its literate population to assist its effort.<sup>25</sup> Ironically, India has the largest illiterate group, in absolute numbers, in the Third World. Some states in India—Kerala, Maharashtra and Madras, for instance—have succeeded in reducing the incidence of illiteracy, but this success has been achieved through formal schooling at the primary level over a considerable period of time.

#### *Economic failure*

Mass literacy requires intensive use of available economic resources. Unless properly planned, it

may become not only expensive but economically disruptive—expensive because of the diversion of needed manpower to literacy work and the consequent cost of forgone production; disruptive because it may bring the national operational process to a standstill. The direct cost of mass literacy efforts may also be high. The Cuban literacy campaign (1969) had an outlay of \$52 million.<sup>26</sup> This translated into \$73 per literate successfully trained and was equivalent to about one-tenth of the GNP per capita at the time. Perhaps this ratio of costs was manageable for Cuba, but in many developing countries with a per capita income of less than \$200 the recurrent costs for initiating a mass literacy effort may equal or exceed the recurrent and capital budget of the education sector. For example, planners in Afghanistan estimated that the cost of that country's massive literacy programme initiated in 1979—about \$125 million over the following five years and covering a modest honorarium for instructors of about \$8 per capita—could exceed the budget for the entire education sector by about 20 per cent.<sup>27</sup> The cost of India's current literacy programme is about \$10 per learner, or about 7 per cent of the GNP per capita.<sup>28</sup> Measured against the requirement of about \$850 million for the entire National Adult Education Programme campaign, however, India's present allocation for literacy training in its sixth Five-Year Plan is small—only \$250 million.<sup>29</sup> The allocation is, however, about 10 per cent of the total educational plan's outlay of about \$2,500 million. If the figure of \$850 million is met, it will draw off about 40 per cent of the total outlay, and this will occur at the expense of other educational efforts.

The orientation of many literacy efforts carried out in the early 1930s at the behest of the League of Nations was fundamental education. The intent was to mobilize the literate population of a country to impart a basic reading, writing and numerical ability to the illiterate. This goal of 'pure literacy', most commonly aspired to in developing countries, was offered as a 'compensation to the adults for the failure of the normal education system'—offered by the very same system and using the same

pedagogical methods that had failed the adult illiterates when they were children. In fact, in many countries a map showing major centres of adult literacy was hardly distinguishable from a map showing the locations of formal schools. Few economic incentives were given in these programmes. Moral support was given, but more from a benevolent, moralistic dictum than from the desire to create a widespread, positive attitude toward the literate life.

In the early 1960s Unesco introduced a modification to the pure literacy effort, a work-oriented programme. The functional idea was to combine pure literacy programmes with training in basic vocational skills directly linked to the occupational needs of the participants.<sup>30</sup> In other words, the functional approach strove to associate literacy with economic awareness and hence with development.

A subsequent modification was advanced by the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire.<sup>31</sup> The functional approach is restrictive, claimed the partisans of what became known as the psychosocial approach to literacy (or, in the Latin American context, *conscientización*—'consciousness-raising'), because it emphasized only selected aspects of literacy and vocational skills and ignored the learner's need for an integral and greater political awareness. The central purpose of literacy, those holding Freire's view contended, is to transform neo-literates into active, critical, and creative beings; to raise their consciousness and ability to think; and to enable them to become a social force for desired political change. The Government of Guinea-Bissau is widely using Freire's concepts, and these concepts have influenced some selective programmes in the United Republic of Tanzania and in Kenya in a limited way.

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#### ORGANIZATION

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The organization of literacy programmes involves issues of responsibility, the interdependence of the educational and other sectors, decentralization of programme planning, the linkage of literacy training with the formal

educational, system, and the equivalency of literacy training to certified, formal, primary-school education. Each of these issues will be discussed in turn.

#### *Responsible authority*

The public sector assumes the responsibility and leadership for organizing mass literacy efforts in most developing countries. Sporadic leadership by the private sector has been either to compensate the failure of the public sector or to supplement a very weak and insignificant public effort. For example, in Ethiopia the effort of the Yemissrach Dimts Church is directed primarily towards youth in the 15–25 age-group. By 1975, some 536,000 Ethiopian youths had participated in the Church's literacy campaigns.<sup>32</sup> In Burundi, the Yagamukama Catechism centres run by the Church offer literacy training over a six-year period by organizing classes twice a week for about 45 per cent of the eligible children of primary-school age.<sup>33</sup> In many countries the contribution of the private sector is relatively small but is sharply slanted towards the attainment of specific objectives or the meeting of needs among specifically selected groups. Church efforts directed towards the young, for example, may offer sponsors the opportunity of proselytizing new church members.

In the public sector, the ministry of education has been traditionally charged with carrying out literacy efforts, which often have been accorded its least priority. In many countries development programmes for adult education are considered less prestigious than those for higher education. The most innovative and creative intelligences are thus taken away from adult and primary education in an internal 'brain drain'. Policy-makers often find adult education simply an extracurricular appendage that must be carried in order to accommodate the priorities of international and bilateral funding agencies, and the task is entrusted to persons who are the least motivated for the job.

Recognizing such limitations, many countries have recently decided to bestow a separate identity and importance to literacy work by charging ministries other than the ministry of

education with the responsibility for adult education. Countries such as Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ghana, Haiti, Indonesia, the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and Peru have entrusted this responsibility to a number of varied ministries, such as those for the interior, national and rural development, and youth and community development. On the other hand, the Tanzanian Government returned the responsibility to its ministry of education in 1970, having recognized that a mutual development and sharing of resources by all educational subsectors is vital for systematic national growth.

Despite the divestiture of responsibility for literacy programmes from the ministry of education, in most countries all ministries have continued a cohesive and co-operative relationship with it for concurrent curriculum development and for the training and use of teachers. In addition, almost all countries have instituted interministerial steering and co-ordinating committees at the highest levels to design policies and provide an overview of national literacy efforts.

#### *Interdependence*

The basic rationale for advancing adult literacy training along intersectoral lines is the mutual interdependence of the education sector and other sectors in development. Yet the actual integration of sectors has been difficult to attain in literacy training. Theoretically, co-ordination of literacy training, farmer training and rural broadcasting should have been easy because each of these programmes plans to reach similar (and often the same) groups and because each of the delivering ministries—the ministries of education, agriculture, and broadcasting—could establish lines of communication extending to grass-roots levels. But experience in Pakistan and Bangladesh has shown that, despite pledges of active co-ordination, each ministry operated in isolation. At least three causes can be suggested for this lack of integration. First, the rationale of mutual interdependence is not fully understood. Each agency sees its programme as a priority and an essential contribution to other programmes, rather than accepting the fact that

its own success depends on the advancement of the related programmes of others. Second, the concept of integration is alien to an administrative culture that expands vertically. Third, integration can be threatening because the change it implies may produce a challenge to vested interests and direct privileges.

#### *Decentralization*

Implementation of a literacy programme lies with leadership at the lowest level, which has proved more successful in bringing about integration than leadership at the upper strata. The view that decentralization of planning is an important process in a literacy effort has been formed by this experience. Decentralization facilitates the participation by the beneficiaries of programmes in the preparation and implementation of those efforts that concern them and enables grass-roots planners to attach appropriate emphasis to the problems peculiar to a specific region. Decentralization normally includes the delegation of the power to appoint instructors, organize their training, select suitable teaching and learning materials, make changes in learning programmes, and ensure community support and resources for the formation and continuance of literacy classes at the local level.

Some centralized planning is, however, needed to keep up the momentum of a literacy effort and to attain economies of scale in areas where fragmentary approaches would lead to duplication and waste of scarce resources. It is also needed in areas where the central authority has a comparative advantage. Under centralized direction, literacy efforts are concentrated on the training of teachers at national and regional levels; production of teaching materials; evaluation of programmes; research, development and modification of programmes to reflect the evaluation; and the integration of the neo-literate into society.

#### *Linkage with the formal system*

Literacy programmes—whether they are conceived according to a selective or mass approach, a pure or functional approach, or simply for

consciousness-raising—have been pursued in a non-formal setting. The reluctance to institutionalize literacy training in a formal context has arisen from many infrastructural difficulties. For example, the inability of the formal system to deliver even basic education to all the primary-school population made it an unlikely candidate to assume additional responsibility. Furthermore, many societies located other, highly visible places in which literacy training could be systematically pursued—the family, the religious institutions, the marketing institutions, the development institutions, for instance. The operations of these alternative institutions do not lend themselves to the rigid mechanics of a formal school system.

And yet literacy efforts have traditionally relied on the experience of the formal educational system, specifically that for primary education, to determine how to achieve pure literacy. Such efforts have borrowed the curricula as well as the instructional methods of formal education and have depended upon the mechanistic pedagogy of traditional schoolteachers to bring about universal literacy. None of these borrowings has been structural or systematic, and none has, therefore, been able to support and sustain a programme that, as we have seen, requires high motivation of all its participants. As a result, the linkage between the formal educational system and literacy training for adults as a non-formal activity has remained tenuous. In at least four ways, planning in literacy training can take into account the formal system of schooling. First, the formal system can provide some channels and resources for non-formal efforts. Second, in some instances it may be possible to integrate the two systems structurally to guard against costly duplications. Third, the continuing concern that the existing, entrenched and often powerful formal system might absorb, undercut or alter non-formal efforts can be dismissed by proper analysis. Finally, in some instances a 'natural' continuum can be established for incorporating efforts of a non-formal origin into a formalized structure. There appear to be some fairly major incompatibilities between the two systems, but the formal/non-formal interface is

a disjuncture that can be minimized by careful management.

#### *Equivalency to primary-school certificate*

The concept that literacy training for adults should be equivalent in some way to the primary-school programme has prevailed among policy-makers despite successive changes in the approaches to mass literacy and the need to consider such integrations structurally. The idea of adult education as a distinct and continuous form of learning that is not bound by certificates and that should be extended over a lifetime has not yet spread beyond a few progressive thinkers. The primary-school certificate is still the main goal for illiterates, and provision of such an equivalency certificate by literacy training fulfils their inherent desire to compensate for their lack of childhood schooling. Furthermore, many government planners clearly visualize adult education as a 'first chance' for those who were unable to obtain the opportunities of formal education earlier. In addition, equivalency certificates not only add prestige to the learners but also become a prerequisite in most countries for employment, promotions or salary increases. For example, the national literacy effort in Thailand is directed at providing an equivalency to Grade 4 of primary school for both rural and urban illiterates. The rural illiterates attend two courses of six months each that are drawn from the primary-school curriculum and include training in vocational skills for 30 per cent of the time. Upon successful completion of the first six-month course, the learners receive an equivalency for Grade 2, which is followed by the certificate for Grade 4 after the second course. The programme for urban illiterates is similar except that the component of basic vocational training is excluded. The certificates are only indications that the learners have been through the literacy programme; they cannot be used as formal school diplomas, nor do they allow the student to enter the formal system at the succeeding Grade 5 level.

Argentina also provides primary-school equivalency to adults in about four thousand adult

education centres. The learners study for three cycles, each an eight-month course, and upon completing the programme are awarded a certificate that also allows them to join the post-primary, formal educational system. In addition to the condensed primary curriculum, special attention is given to geography, the natural environment, communications skills and labour legislation. During the 1960s at least sixty-five countries were offering literacy courses as an alternative to primary schooling, and many are still continuing the practice.

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#### RESOURCES

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#### *The learning premises*

During early literacy-training efforts, classes were held in primary schools and, in some countries, in junior and middle schools. But it soon became apparent that adults were reluctant to obtain instruction in schools that were designed for children. There were several reasons for this reluctance. Evening classes are usually neglected by school administrators and service personnel because they find these programmes burdensome. Audio-visual and other teaching equipment is usually unavailable in primary schools. Classroom facilities, such as chairs and desks, are built to a scale for children, not adults. Adults may feel that learning in a child's environment that does not recognize their own distinctive needs may not be productive because it seems to minimize and negate their aspirations.

Policy-makers and administrators, however, have favoured using formal primary-school facilities on the grounds that educational expenditures are thereby reduced substantially. They also submit that the primary schools, often newly constructed, are far more attractive than the environments in which the adults normally work or live. The process of lifelong education means that educational services should be widely available. This implies a wider use of all existing facilities, not merely primary schools; it is the contention of some that such a limited

use fosters the father-and-son paternal relation within the educational process.

The Montreal Conference on Adult Education (1960) considered the use of formal schools for adult education purposes and recommended that, pending the erection of specific premises for adult learning, full use of the existing facilities should be continued. Ideally, adults prefer to have separate, adult educational centres in their communities, as is the case in Brazil. The MOBREAL program, by establishing separate classrooms and workrooms in Brazilian communities, has given a distinct and significant identity to the adult as learner. Some states, such as the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, have built independent adult blocks within school campuses, with some common facilities shared. Others have provided instructional units in factories.

#### *Learning materials based on need*

Adults require learning materials based on common adult needs and aspirations. Usually, however, in the learning content considered fundamental by the élite of a society, who often design curricula, much depends upon the cultural practices of the society as perceived by this group. Under normal practice, a few educational philosophers and planners design the content of learning materials for primary education by associating with a group of multi-disciplinary experts, including curriculum planners, and by undertaking limited socio-economic studies. These materials are, in turn, condensed and adapted for the training of adults. In fact, most of the curricula of literacy programmes during the 1960s were adapted from prevailing primary-school curricula in this manner, with the perceived needs of adults added almost as an afterthought.

This gave rise to further confusion between needs and demands. Planners who determine needs belong to one culture, and the illiterate adults who determine their own demands belong to another. Literacy projects failed because the projects' concepts of beneficiary needs were at odds with the actual, felt needs of the beneficiaries. The poor—that is, the rural

peasants—have an uncanny ability to discern what kind of knowledge will meet their critical needs and what will not. Hence, they desire learning materials that will allow a rational use of their creative faculties, enable their coherent economic functioning and decision-making, and correspond to their varying needs at different stages of adult life.

The learning needs of the beneficiaries of literacy programmes, if discerned from the bottom up, appear to be substantially different from those conceived by the central planners. Yet such bottom-up assessments have been rare.<sup>34</sup> For example, in Uganda the participants of the Namutumba project gave priority to knowledge for cultivating cash crops, understanding health and nutritional practices, animal rearing, and appropriate rural technology. In the United Republic of Tanzania, the members of the Kwamsisi community education centres sought knowledge of health care, water use, and cultivation of cash crops.

Four steps for designing learning materials based on need can be suggested. First, planners should study the environment and identify the population to be reached and their socio-cultural characteristics (such as social habits, attitudes, values, aspirations and motivations). Second, planners should identify problems and issues that may impede or assist the process of economic and social development in the selected community and discuss these observations with the community to ascertain that all such conclusions have been correctly perceived. Third, planners should design an educational content based on the first and second steps, above, and finalize it after consultation with the selected group. This process should determine whether the educational content satisfies the aspirations of the group and whether further modification, relating to the availability of community resources, is necessary. Finally, planners should select a regular instructor (preferably a teacher from the community milieu); explore supplementary use of other, non-conventional and non-professional teachers, and participate fully in the development of the curriculum for the community.<sup>35</sup>

### *Post-literacy educational opportunities*

The issue of post-literacy educational opportunities has attracted considerable attention. There has been increasing recognition that neo-literates should be offered an opportunity for continuing their education and should be provided with follow-up reading materials to support their integration into the literate society from which they have so far been excluded. Furthermore, in order to retain their acquired literacy skills, the newly literate should also be given the opportunity to practise the skills attained during literacy instruction and to enjoy their cultural enrichment.

Even though these supportive measures may seem an obvious need, post-literacy efforts have been sporadic. Thailand has experimented with village reading centres. India, Nigeria and Zambia have introduced mobile libraries. East African countries have tried to publish materials relevant to adult needs. But all of these have been ad hoc efforts. The most successful post-literacy efforts appear to have been in Cuba—which has produced 25 million textbooks on about 120 topics from the public funds—and in the United Republic of Tanzania, which is planning to introduce a complementary workers' education scheme for neo-literates and adults.<sup>36</sup>

Opportunities for continuing education are also limited for neo-literates, even though they may have completed a primary equivalency course. Some of the Eastern European countries, such as Hungary and Poland, have allowed neo-literates to join the formal system at the post-primary level, but only in vocational-training courses. Brazil has designed a form of supplementary education designed to integrate the new literates into primary education. The learners take tests upon completing the intensive literacy courses, which range in length from six to eight months, and if successful are allowed to join the integrated primary-education course for a period of twelve months, which provides them with a Grade-4 equivalency. They are also encouraged to enter the vocational-training programmes developed by the Minis-

tries of Labour and Industry. Senegal has instituted deliberate policies to channel neo-literates into vocational training, and in Nigeria the new literates assist in the co-operative movement.

### *Information media*

Mass media have assumed a significant importance in literacy efforts. The potential use of radio, television and newspapers—as systematic and recognized methods to assist the ongoing literacy classes and to sustain post-literacy activities—caught the imagination of the development planners early on. Developing countries with constraints on resources, however, have indicated an explicit preference for the use of radio and newspapers over television, mainly because of the cost involved in undertaking an extensive instructional television programme, which appears to be beyond the means of many developing Third World countries. Whenever instructional television has been used, it has been deployed on a selective basis to attain specific objectives in conjunction with other instructional media. Of the Third World countries, the Ivory Coast and Tunisia appear to have succeeded with their 'tele-club' programmes, but Guatemala has apparently failed in the use of instructional television. The Tanzanian Government, which has a strong literacy drive, has no plans to use instructional television.

By contrast, radio literacy schools have been quite successful in many Latin American countries. In such schools, the illiterates receive an hour of instruction over the radio with tutorial support provided by auxiliary or voluntary teachers. These teachers are usually youths 18–25 years old with a primary-school education and who belong to a religious group undertaking missionary work. The Philippines has introduced radio literacy schools for remote rural areas, with support from the literate segments of the communities reached, and Sweden has used them for immigrant workers. It is also evident that literacy efforts by mass media tend to achieve better results when the broadcast materials are systematically supplemented by printed media in the form of manuals, booklets, teaching guides and the like.

## TEACHERS

*A cadre of literacy instructors*

Should developing countries create a cadre of literacy instructors competent to bridge the social and psychological gap that exists between the learner and the literate society? Undoubtedly the concept has its merits. Full-time literacy teachers from the community milieu would be able to establish a rapport and to identify with learners. But they would also need to receive sophisticated training in andragogy and recurrent in-service training during their literacy work.<sup>37</sup> Few developing countries would be able to organize the logistics of such a sophisticated approach.

Brazil has created the largest cadre of full-time literacy personnel, who have been dispersed at all regional levels. Some of them are employed by the municipalities and are recognized as agents for change in the community. About 47 per cent of the literacy corps have less than four years of education, and 65 per cent of them are youths 18–24 years old. The programme has, however, a high turnover rate of about 32 per cent yearly. The cause for this heavy turnover can be attributed either to the fact that youths accept the literacy career as a stepping-stone to other careers or as a means of spanning the generation gap that prevents the youths from challenging adults in other contexts within the community. In most other countries, however, full-time literacy teachers are negligible in number and, where practising, are resented by traditional teachers.

*Use of primary-school teachers*

In fostering their literacy efforts, most developing countries are mostly dependent on the use of primary-school teachers. Of 100 countries with literacy programmes, about 60 are using such teachers exclusively. This would seem to be pragmatic, because these teachers are accustomed to teaching and would therefore be more productive. Moreover, they understand the learning process, have access to teaching ma-

terials, and are respected members of the community.

But these teachers have perceived their role differently from the way policy-makers assumed they would. Teachers accepted the programmes as only a secondary function—a supplement necessary to augment their low income—and their participation did not upgrade their social position. In fact, in some countries the young and less experienced teachers were singled out for literacy work. And the Unesco-sponsored functional literacy programme in India has shown that the experienced, senior teachers—who were often unable to modify their style of classroom teaching—lacked motivation for literacy teaching.

Although primary-school teachers have been the mainstay of literacy efforts (often out of administrative or economic compulsion), some progress is being made in altering the attitude to their role. The National Adult Education Programme in India has asserted that school-teachers would not be forced to function as literacy teachers but would be free to do so as volunteers.<sup>38</sup> This policy was the outcome of a realization that primary-school teachers are not the only instruments for transferring knowledge and skills to adults.

*Non-professional teachers*

Most countries experimenting with functional literacy programmes have used non-professional teachers—such as agricultural extension workers, public health workers, and population and nutrition education workers. Because these workers are used to serving adults, they seem to be naturally amenable to adult psychological and behavioural patterns, and they have been able to induce motivational responses from the learners. Some experiments have even shown that non-professional teachers appear to teach the three Rs more effectively and within a shorter period than professional teachers.

In some selected projects, a team approach using two instructors was followed. In such instances, the primary-school teachers taught the three Rs and were supported by professionals in work-related instruction. These

procedures, however, often ran into difficulties because of personality conflicts and lack of instructional co-ordination. Furthermore, the team approach required deployment of more than one literacy instructor. In countries in which the literate population is limited, it is often difficult to shift literate resources from a productive sector to relatively unproductive 'soft' sectors such as adult education. Some planners emphasize that, in countries with resource constraints, the use of professionals should be optimized by deploying them to the most productive functions in society, among which the instruction of adults is not included.

#### *Non-conventional teachers*

Comparatively better success has been achieved by using non-conventional teachers in literacy programmes. Many countries use volunteers and youths to organize literacy classes; these personnel range in age from 16 to 25, are usually drop-outs from the primary or intermediate schools, and, in most cases, belong to a political party. Few have training in teaching. In countries in which the political parties are involved in such efforts, the need for the training of literacy workers has been recognized. The training programmes that have been instituted are from two to three days to about two weeks in duration. Political education is the main feature of such training programmes. In Senegal and Zambia, groups of secondary-school students and youths organize literacy classes in the villages, raise contributions for materials, and assist in the construction of the schools, but do not participate in the actual instruction of adults.

Madagascar has a voluntary programme to enlist the services of youths. They enrol for a month of training, which is followed by ten months of service in literacy and community development. Tanzanian youths in such programmes belong to the ruling party and direct their attention towards increasing agricultural production and nutrition and political education, in addition to instructing in the three Rs. In India, the youth wing of the Congress Party, comprising drop-outs and youth leaving sec-

ondary school, organizes literacy classes in selected districts but has been unable to generate much enthusiasm from its illiterate clientele. Monarchal Iran used soldiers for literacy education. After receiving four months of training, the soldiers were deployed to remote regions of the country for a period varying from one to three years. On completion of their duty, they were given an option of joining the cadre of primary-school teachers or returning to the barracks. The same principle was also applied to social and medical workers and para-professionals.

However successful these varied programmes may be, the use of non-conventional teachers implies three essential conditions to be met by these workers: a minimum standard of competence in the instructional process, a basic knowledge of the subjects to be taught, and a willingness to work in difficult and unpredictable circumstances.

#### *Teachers from the milieu*

Ideally, teachers either originating from or largely sharing the social, cultural and economic background of the learners should organize adult literacy classes. A former student of a literacy class trained in andragogy is an asset to a literacy programme because such a 'graduate' is capable of continuing a meaningful communication with new learners that is based on a deeper understanding of their work, experience, problems and aspirations. In some European countries—especially the Federal Republic of Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom—immigrants are taught by advanced immigrant workers who have become literate.

Few developing countries, however, have used graduates of literacy programmes as literacy teachers. Algeria has employed some, and from the experience of this country one may generalize that such teachers should at least possess primary-school competence, should have had about five years' experience in adult work, and should be reinforced by pre- or post-service training. Furthermore, the potential of such teachers should be optimized by adequate assistance in their teaching methods, followed

by appropriate guidance, counselling and systematic supervision.

#### *Training of literacy teachers*

All developing countries experiencing mass or functional literacy programmes have shown a need for pre-service and in-service training of literacy workers. Yet adequate measures to incorporate such training in the larger development plans have not been taken. As it stands now, literacy teachers receive insignificant training in adult work, and most of their instructional experience is related to classroom teaching in primary schools.

Despite this limitation, some progress towards the training of literacy teachers is evident. Many developing countries are planning to introduce an adult-education component in their training curriculum for teachers. The United Republic of Tanzania has made such a component compulsory in its teacher-training institutes, especially for multidisciplinary teachers. In addition to their theoretical lessons, the primary-school teachers in Guatemala must obtain practical training by making six adults literate as a condition for graduation from the teacher-training institutions. Nigeria introduced the study of adult education not only to the teacher-training colleges but also to the secondary schools and to intermediate colleges.

Some other countries have established separate literacy institutions to provide intensive courses for a duration ranging from a few weeks to an academic year. The Philippines and India have operating, full-fledged national centres, which in addition to training undertake research and development of literacy and post-literacy learning materials. Argentina established such a centre in 1972 for providing pre-service literacy training. In Senegal, extension workers are selected from among the natural leaders of the community and trained for a limited duration at rural development centres.

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#### LANGUAGE FOR LITERACY INSTRUCTION

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Choosing a specific language as a medium for literacy instruction is both a political and tech-

nical act. This task is particularly sensitive in multilingual countries because the choice influences the cultural identity, the economic power, and the learning competence of the people affected. Linguistic minorities may also be among the poorer segments of a society; conversely, a linguistic minority that is also an economic élite may wish to protect its vested interests.

Afghanistan and Guinea both have 8 indigenous languages, India has 21 distinct languages with more than 100 dialects, Nigeria has 395 separate languages. Most of these languages are used locally or are understood by isolated, indigenous cultural groups. Some of them develop as 'contact' languages, which are used and understood by a number of cultural and ethnic entities—for example, Hindi in India, Swahili in Eastern Africa, and Quechua in the Andean nations of Latin America. Besides these, there are 'world' languages used for official and international communication—such as English, French, Arabic and Spanish.

Use of the mother tongue of a region as the medium of instruction may foster cultural identity, assist in better learning, enhance self-image, belonging, and ethnic identity. But it may not allow sufficient economic power. In multilingual societies, the group that speaks the official or the contact language, and perhaps belongs to a minority but élite tribe, wields the political power and therefore has better access to economic power. The desire to have ready access to economic power has led the hill tribes in Thailand, for example, to learn in languages other than their own.

The bilingual approach to literacy training may be an important step to counter economic disadvantage. But the task of teaching the mother tongue first, then shifting learning to a second language, is likely to be complex and even unproductive. Moreover, the population selected for training may not like this approach. The constant dilemma between cultural identity and economic power has led countries to adapt literacy programmes to their specific needs. The strong need of a linguistic mass to communicate with the rest of the country has

led to the rapid progress of Hausa in Nigeria, Hindi in India, and Urdu in Pakistan. The ethnic groups that have shifted their cultural identity to that of the contact-language groups seem to have obtained more fully the fruits of development.

Adoption of a language for literacy training, especially when it leads to linguistic unification, is a continuous and time-consuming process. Bahasa-Indonesia has been modernized from a mainly spoken language into a medium suitable even for secondary and higher education. The development of Urdu—mainly a contact language with a written heritage—as the chosen national language in Pakistan may have fostered cultural unity and identity. Modernization also encourages cultures accustomed to using language only in its oral form to use it in its written form. The attempt to do this is still progressing for Hausa in West Africa and Quechua in the Andes.

The greatest obstacle to converting a spoken language into a written form is not the long period required for research, experimentation and adaptation, but the selection of a written script. An acute sense of nationalism in determining scripts appears to have pervaded many developing countries. Where these objections have been surmounted, the Roman alphabet has been popular and has been used since missionaries began transcribing the Bible for proselytized linguistic populations: Swahili, Quechua and Somali are all written in Roman scripts.

Romanization of languages, however, may be seen as an instrument of cultural exploitation and neo-colonialism. This may be true historically, but ignores the fact that language is a living means of communication whose properties may transcend historical and political change. Quoc Ngu (Vietnamese written in the Roman script), for example, introduced by European missionaries for purposes of proselytization, was spread by the French colonial regime as an official language to counter the influence of the Vietnamese liberationists. But the liberationists who opposed Quoc Ngu during the revolutionary struggle later discovered that

it was a simple and convenient form of communication and adopted it for their universal literacy movement.<sup>39</sup>

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### A strategy for literacy planning

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In this section an attempt will be made to reply to two urgent questions: Can a strategy for literacy planning be drawn from the experience of the worldwide assault on illiteracy? Would such a strategy lead to a universal, standardized programme?

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#### LESSONS FROM EXPERIENCE

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Systematic assessments of literacy efforts are few and far between. Most of the achievement reports that are available have been written by the initiators of programmes and have included their biases. Reports by outsiders have often been based on secondary information. Few reporters have used scientific and statistical techniques of evaluation; none have monitored their progress consistently. Lessons from accumulated experiences are necessarily subjective and may not be useful in developing and defending a universal model for literacy action.

A few thematic generalizations, however, are possible. Each of these generalizations may open several possibilities for action that, when adapted to specific social and political processes in the developing countries, may improve the chances of success of these nations' literacy efforts. It is also possible that the unique implications of one generalization drawn from experience may contradict some other generalizations, also drawn from experience. It is the totality of the experiential spectrum that provides the indication for future actions. Given the limitations of the documentation of literacy programmes, not all of such generalizations can be the product of careful research. Some are based on expert judgements, some on field experiences, and some on research. In fact, each of the ten generalizations that are elaborated below could be the centre-piece of a

follow-up in-depth study, which would attempt to document the general findings by scientific research or would indicate the direction for such further research. Andragogy, an emerging discipline whose concern is how adults learn, could much benefit, from this analysis.

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#### GENERALIZATIONS

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The generalizations concerning the planning of effective literacy training programmes, broadly drawn from past successes and failures, include the following.

1. *Adults usually learn faster than children.* Their learning speed is influenced by the methods and style of instruction—for example, when the learner communicates meaningfully with the instructor, his speed of learning picks up, and the chance of success improves significantly.

2. *Speed of learning appears to be influenced by the cultural as well as by the political setting of the society.* The level of basic training that could be acquired by a primary-school pupil over a period of two years, or about 3,000 hours of instruction, was achieved by adult learners during periods varying from 270 hours to 750 hours. Even in the slowest case, adult learning took about a quarter of the time required by children. The curriculum and the quality of the teaching also have an influence. In monarchical Iran a five-year equivalency was by adults in two different programmes having durations varying from a minimum of 200 hours to a maximum of 500 hours. The National Adult Education Programme (NAEP) in India proposes to obtain a primary-school equivalency for its participants after about 300 to 350 hours of instruction offered over a nine- to ten-month period.<sup>40</sup>

Basic questions, however, remain unanswered: Are these levels of skills in the new literates self-sustaining? If not, what is the basic level of attainment of literacy that would prevent new literates from relapsing? Conventional wisdom so far has suggested that the threshold is at least equivalent to four years of primary

schooling, but the validity of such an assumption has recently been questioned.<sup>41</sup>

3. *Teaching materials based on need facilitate learning.* Teaching materials developed from baseline surveys and related to critical problems familiar to learners have a higher probability of their content being retained. In other words, if the learning materials correspond to the aspirations of the adult learners, are developed in their own language and idiom, and are delivered within their environment, there is a higher probability that such materials will engage adults throughout the duration of training. The notion that the learning materials should correspond to adult needs does not, however, necessarily mean that these materials should be related only to occupational needs. Adults possess creative minds and are capable of transferring acquired learning to a variety of applications; the authors of programmes must be careful not to limit their potential effectiveness by appearing to be condescending to adults. This notion stipulates that the content of learning materials should be culturally oriented and sufficiently relevant to adult perceptions. Indeed, topics designed to be too specific to functional work needs may alienate a potential group of learners who may not be particularly interested in occupational information.

4. *The need felt by a learner for literacy training is of higher value than the curriculum's content in the attainment of literacy.* Whether a curriculum is intensely work-oriented or not, learners tend to persevere and succeed when they are aware of the need they feel for learning.<sup>42</sup> The need thus felt could spring from social values, economic incentives, or a work requirement. This suggests that literacy programmes should be advanced only when the community has understood the limitations that illiteracy implies for its quality of life and has become sufficiently motivated to overcome these limitations.

5. *Literacy teachers can come from all walks of life.* Primary-school teachers are no longer the sole agents for the transmission of literacy skills and knowledge to adults. Though primary-school teachers will continue to be the mainstay

of a literacy effort, the transmittal process will have to be assisted by the efforts of a cross-section of other literate groups. Countries opting to eradicate illiteracy over a 15-20-year period will probably prefer to develop a cadre of full-time literacy instructors who will work in parallel with the cadre of primary-school teachers. This cadre of instructors, capable of establishing a better rapport with voluntary groups and youth, could achieve substantial progress and, as a result, be more cost-effective.

6. *Adult learning can take place in any physical setting.* The myth that a minimal physical facility is a priority for transferring a minimum of basic skills has been shattered. It is now accepted that the acquirement of skills can take place in a variety of settings—such as school classrooms, community centers, factories, mosques, churches, private houses and in the open air—but that optimal results are attained only when such settings are free of noise and disturbance and a calm climate for learning has been created.

7. *Group pressure reinforced by community encouragement induces learners to succeed.* Adult learners prefer to learn in groups and may be averse to self-learning. A higher drop-out rate is evident among adults participating in self-instruction or correspondence programmes compared with those in organized classes. The rate of success in programmes of self-instruction is also less among all societies, including the developed ones. Despite wide variations in age, occupation, and aspiration, adults prefer to stay in group literacy training. As if connected by a group purpose, they reinforce each other's attempts to succeed.

8. *Economic and social incentives exert strong influences on perseverance.* A strong trait in learners is their need for immediate gratification and validation of their efforts. Incentives that reinforce this trait—and, hence, the learners' perseverance—may take the form of economic incentives, such as the prospect of a salary increase; fringe benefits, such as time off the job for learners to attend classes or arrangements to transport learners to and from evening classes; and an accessible instructional facility

(such as a factory, mill, or the working premises of the learners) where classes are held.

The duration and order of the teaching sequence also affect the perseverance of the learners. Short, intensive courses are preferable to overlong courses, although shorter courses may not entirely diminish the incidence of drop-outs. Continuous courses tend to hold the learners together and decelerate the drop-out rate; all programmes tend to lose a higher proportion of learners during vacations or breaks. Long gaps in instruction may diminish the interest of learners because the gaps themselves interrupt the daily pattern of their lives. At the same time, an overly long course certainly taxes the patience of learners. Timely distribution of learning materials also influences the overall effectiveness of literacy programmes. Delay or slackness in the provision of curricular materials loosens the learners' interest and hastens the process of withdrawal from the classes.

9. *New literates demonstrate a higher desire for technical information than illiterates.* Neo-literates are thirsty for knowledge and will pursue a number of paths to satisfy their increased needs. They usually apply the knowledge they have recently acquired to derive economic benefits and to gain access to an increased consumption of material goods.

Newspapers can be the main instrument for satisfying this increased demand for information. Newspapers also have another, psychological advantage. They integrate the neo-literates with the literate segments of the society through a common medium that blurs the distinctions between the two groups. Newspapers have the further advantage of being widely available and affordable. The materials devoted to neo-literates should, however, be presented in the tone, style, and vocabularily appropriate to their levels of proficiency without appearing elementary or inferior to the popular press.

10. *The style of political government determines the process of delivering training.* The degree of delegation of responsibility to the grass-roots level depends on the prevailing political process. Countries having a history of a centralized

authority seem to do better with a limited decentralization of responsibility to local leaders. In any case, strong local leadership is a priority for literacy progress and can be cultivated regardless of the direction of authority. In large, federally structured societies with a minimum of centralization, however, the need for co-ordination becomes of paramount importance. Failure in such societies to establish an effective co-ordinating mechanism to achieve vertical and horizontal working relations among the ministries and administrative levels may seriously impede progress in literacy. Within inter-ministerial projects, the monopoly of decision-making by a single ministry should not be favoured, though a dominant leadership within a single agency is essential to achieve successful implementation.

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#### IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE PLANNING

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If the generalizations made in the preceding section—drawn as they are from past worldwide efforts to increase literacy—can suggest any single counsel for such campaigns in the future, it is that the strengthening of the planning process and not the meeting of a programme's eventual numerical targets is what counts. The object for literacy programmes should be to incorporate the quality of planning and implementation that nourishes the selective, successful literacy programme into a massive literacy effort. Experience has indicated that literacy campaigns that are myopically oriented to reach only a certain number by a certain date tend to bypass the very process by which the infrastructure for a massive literacy programme can be built. Manipulation of numbers is not uncommon in a narrowly goal-oriented programme, and statistics cannot be a surrogate for the will and commitment that can be engendered by process-oriented planning. The rigours of planning that enliven a selective effort cannot be allowed to be dissipated by the very act of setting narrow goals.

Several guidelines can be suggested for the strengthening of literacy planning. First, a

process-oriented programme seeks to create systematic, professional expertise at the operational level for the purpose of policy-planning, decision-making, programme delineation, content development and support services. Further, through this process such a programme seeks to develop a structure for learning that will co-ordinate the activities of disparate agencies, each ploughing its own furrow and each trying to reach its own goal. The task is no less demanding than the comparable management of the formal educational system itself, especially when the aim of process-oriented planning is to avoid unnecessary duplication, wastage and unstandardized performance.

Second, the time needed for achieving the object of a fully literate society should remain flexible. The goal of literacy training is broad indeed: to convert minds to face the realities of life. The task of creating a cultural environment that is conducive to the acquisition of literacy skills is confronted by an essential conflict. The overall task itself is a time-consuming and open-ended process because each of the elements—political and national will especially—that supports the creation of such an environment does not lend itself to the discipline of time. The quality and potential contribution of each of the determining factors—such as the development of an instructional structure, preparation of need-based learning materials, training of instructors, logistics for delivery and meeting of costs—are, however, profoundly influenced by constraints of time. Yet goals for these component elements that are set over a short period—one, two, even five years—skirt many complex issues. Countries that have sought an improved quality of life through literacy training have been prepared to wait for a longer period. For example, more than thirty years after its people's revolution, China is still clearing pockets of illiteracy. The Vietnamese war on ignorance continued for more than thirteen years, from 1945 to 1958.

Third, and in keeping with the need for temporal flexibility for long-range goals, programmes must be phased, with priorities distributed among deserving groups. Eradication

of illiteracy across the board with one broad stroke of the brush is neither feasible nor advocated, especially in countries having an extraordinary concentration of illiterates. There are several criteria for attaching priorities to members of the selected population within a society: by socio-economic status—for example, the poorest of the poor; by economic groups—for example, small landholders; by development target—for example, the total population covered by a rural development project; by age—for example, the core vocational group that will provide the maximal multiplier effect; or by conventional criteria such as sex or ethnic or geographical origin—for example, preference for women, nomads, or landless rural peasants. Traditionally, societies in a hurry to develop have given preference to young adults for literacy training. China started literacy efforts in the community primarily for the youth. The Vietnamese literacy programme was initially confined to the 18–25 age-group. Today, India confines its adult literacy programmes to the 15–35 age group. Unmistakably, the young have received priority in development. The right priority of needs may dictate a mix of all or some of the above—each society must make its own decision—but the process used to identify the priority group must reflect the collective forces of political sensitivity, economic efficiency, and social harmony operating in the society.

Fourth, the systematic integration of the neo-literates in society—by a broad but self-sustaining and process-oriented educational programme—should be built into the literacy campaigns themselves. Neo-literates demand programmes that lead to formal schooling, vocational training, or self-employment, and incorporate living and production, as well as communication, skills. The task of such an integration of different modes of learning is perhaps more demanding, and requires more planning skills, than the task of planning a literacy campaign itself. Besides, if the social integration of neo-literates is not a component of the programme, the financial cost of creating a separate post-literacy system could exceed the

total outlay of the mass literacy campaign itself.

Fifth, and finally, many aspects of a mass literacy programme lend by themselves to the decentralization of responsibility to the grass-roots level. Some obviously cannot function without such delegation of authority. Earlier, three basic characteristics of a mass literacy effort structured in this way were advocated: that it should not be perceived as a subsystem of formal education; that non-public agencies—such as voluntary agencies, mass mobilization organizations, and political parties—should assume the responsibilities of delivery, and that flexibility in the setting of goals and in the development of content should inform the spirit of planning. In a decentralized structure, each of these elements could bring about a wider participation by committed workers and learners. Nevertheless, each of these elements should be assessed against the quality of decentralization that can be expected at the national, regional, local and project levels. ■

## Notes

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3. Norman L. Hicks, *A Note on the Linkage between Basic Needs and Growth*, Washington, D.C., World Bank, March 1979. (Mimeo.)
4. Cholera, infectious hepatitis, and typhoid—contracted from pathogen-contaminated water. See G. F. White, D. J. Bradley and A. U. White, *Drawers of Water*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1972, cited in James E. Austin, *Confronting Urban Malnutrition*, World Bank Staff Occasional Papers, No. 28, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980, p. 81.
5. Paul Isenman, *The Relationship of Bank Needs to Growth, Income Distribution, and Employment: The Case of Sri Lanka*, Washington, D.C., World Bank, June 1978. (Mimeo.)
6. Finis Welch, 'Human Capital: Incentives and Response', in T. Schultz (ed.), *Distortions of Agricultural Incentives*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, in press.
7. Isenman, *op. cit.*

8. World Bank Education Department, *Cuba Education Study Mission, Full Report*, Washington, D.C., February 1979. (Mimeo.)
9. Government of India, *Draft Five Year Plan 1978-83*, New Delhi, Planning Commission, p. 221. It further states, 'While literacy has a special place of its own in this programme, meant essentially for the poor illiterate people, its principal objective is to increase the awareness of these people about themselves and about the social reality around them, to organize them, to assist them to understand and strive to solve the different problems in their day-to-day life and to involve them in meaningful and challenging tasks of social and national development.'
10. Although recent events in Iran await the judgement of history, well-publicized governmental efforts to increase national literacy preceded the fall of the Pahlavi monarchy. The turning away of the educated middle class from support of the monarchy, the political and informational activities of students and the clergy, and the politicization of the 'dispossessed' contributed, it seems clear, to the rapid success of the Iranian revolution.
11. Bordia raises this theme question as one of the justifications of the NAEP. The impact of this statement, to my mind, goes beyond that of India. See Anil Bordia, *The National Adult Education Programme: The Background and the Prospect*, New Delhi, Ministry of Education, May 1979. (Mimeo.)
12. Government of India, *National Adult Education Programme: An Outline*, New Delhi, Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, 1978.
13. World Bank, *Afghanistan, Basic Sector Study, Preliminary Report*, Washington, D.C., 1979. (Mimeo.)
14. Oral report from the members of the negotiating team visiting the World Bank for the Universal Primary Education Project, May 1980.
15. World Bank, Technical Assistance Division, *Accelerated Literacy Program*, Washington, D.C., January 1980. (Mimeo.)
16. See documents relating to Resolution 1/6, 1/2, which requests the Director-General to ensure that 'literacy shall be a basic component of the Third United Nations Development Decade', Unesco, Paris, 1978.
17. The importance of this recommendation should, perhaps, be underscored. Several heads of state of the Third World participated in the conference: delegates came from 145 governments, 17 intergovernmental organizations, 40 non-governmental organizations, and 22 United Nations organizations or specialized agencies.
18. Jonathan Kozol, 'A New Look at the Literacy Campaigns in Cuba', *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 48, No. 3, August 1978, pp. 341-77.
19. Le Thanh Khoi, 'Literacy Training and Revolution: The Vietnamese Experience', *Prospects*, Vol. VI, No. 1, 1976, pp. 111-20.
20. Government of India, *National Adult Education Programme*, op. cit., pp. 2-24.
21. Countries that have been able to bring literacy to a substantial segment of their population seem to have one common element: the continuity and stability of their political leadership over a long period of time. The history of China, Cuba and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam bears ample testimony to this observation.
22. Personal interview with the Director of the Bureau of Cottage Industry, Dacca, June 1979.
23. Richard O. Niehoff and Bernard Wilder, *Nonformal Education in Ethiopia: Literacy Programs*, East Lansing, Michigan State University, 1973.
24. In January 1961, about 20 per cent of the Cuban population (6.9 million people) were considered illiterate. By December 1961, the literacy campaign had brought the figure down to 4 per cent. Of the adult population (about 5.5 million people), nearly 272,000 remained partially illiterate. See Kozol, op. cit.
25. S. N. Saraf, *Literacy in a Non-Literacy Milieu—Its Planning and Implementation: The Indian Scenario*, Paris, International Institute for Educational Planning, November 1979, pp. 4-79.
26. World Bank Education Department, *Cuba Education Study Mission*, full report, Washington, D.C., February 1979. (Mimeo.)
27. World Bank, EMENA, *Afghanistan Education Sector Survey Mission, Preliminary Report*, Washington, D.C., March 1979. (Mimeo.)
28. This article has not fully addressed the cost aspects of the literacy training due to paucity of authentic cross-cultural data. There are apparently huge differences in costs. But there is very little research on why such differences occur, how they compare with primary-school costs in the same countries, and whether we can begin to think about cost-effectiveness. Research in this area is warranted.
29. Government of India, Planning Commission, *Draft Five-Year Plan, 1978-83*, New Delhi, 1978, pp. 212-29.
30. Unesco, *The Experimental World Literacy Programme: A Critical Assessment*, Paris, The Unesco Press/UNDP, 1976, pp. 115-30.
31. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau*, London, Writers and Readers' Publishing Co-operative, 1978.
32. Margareta and Rolf Sjostrom, *Literacy Schools in a Rural Society*, Uppsala, The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1977, p. 9.
33. World Bank, East Africa Education Division, *Burundi—Education II: Project Brief*, Washington, D.C., October 1978. (Mimeo.)
34. Personal interviews with World Bank staff dealing with such projects in Uganda (1978) and the United Republic of Tanzania (1977).
35. This issue is discussed in more detail in the section 'Teachers' on page 175.

36. Oral reports from World Bank staff returning from missions to Cuba (1978) and the United Republic of Tanzania (1979).
37. 'Andragogy' has been coined by adult educators to mean 'the art and science of teaching adults'. It has yet to be found in the dictionary.
38. Anil Bordia, *The National Adult Education Programme: the Background and the Prospect*, New Delhi, Ministry of Education, May 1979. (Mimeo.)
39. Le Thanh Khoi, op. cit., pp. 123-36.
40. Government of India, *National Adult Education Programme*, op. cit., p. 4.
41. A multicultural study funded by the World Bank and other donor agencies is examining whether such a threshold could be established across cultures and, if so, what factors could contribute to the retention of literacy at such a universal threshold. See World Bank, Technical Assistance Division, *Retention of Literacy and Numeracy Skills Among School Leavers*, Washington, D.C., internal document.
42. To some extent, this conflicts with the second generalization, above, in which curriculum is considered to be an important determinant, at least for the speed of learning. Nevertheless, it suggests that, whenever given the will and felt need, there is a way to overcome curricular limitations.