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Literacy for Life

Real options for literacy policy and practice in Kenya

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

Conceptions about what is literate behaviour have varied over time and place. However, the notion that literacy means working with written language and calculations has remained core to definitions of literacy. At its most basic, literacy is the ability to decode and encode written text and do arithmetic i.e. reading, writing and numeracy. Considerations of the use that literacy is put into, have introduced the concept of functionality in the definition of literacy. Functional literacy is seen to be the ability to use reading, writing and calculation skills to carry out everyday tasks in one's society that require possession of such skills. Situations in which literacy skills are required are multiple and change over time especially with changes in technology, which has led to the concept of multiple 'literacies'. On the other hand, the Freirean concept of critical literacy is borne of the social political considerations of the purpose of literacy, which for Freire¹ is a process and a tool for the self-liberation of the downtrodden of every society.

2.0. MEANING OF LITERACY IN KENYA AND CHANGES OVER TIME

In the 1960s the focus of literacy programmes in Kenya was on basic literacy. Getting the large numbers of illiterate people reading and writing was the goal of literacy campaigns. The 1967 government led National Literacy Campaign for example, was launched in a few pilot districts with the intention of national coverage by 1970. On the other hand, the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) sponsored Experimental World Literacy Programme implemented in 1972 introduced the concept of functional literacy in Kenya. Within this programme, functional literacy was perceived to be the acquisition of basic literacy and practical skills such as in agriculture, health and household management through income generation projects². However, in the 1980s and 1990s literacy provision efforts reverted back to basic literacy approach, which got the endorsement of the Kamunge report³. Kenya became aware of the concept of critical literacy in the 1970s/1980s, but given the single party autocratic governments of the time, the literacy programme did not embrace it at that time. Freire's thinking eventually reached Kenya through international NGO intervention such as Action Aid's REFLECT programme.

Currently, policy pronouncements continue to emphasize functional literacy. On paper, the meaning of functional literacy has not changed much since the 1970s. There is still talk of linking the teaching and learning of literacy to everyday activities of the learners and integrating literacy classes in income generation activities. However, operationalization of functional literacy has not been achieved and practice has continued to reflect a basic literacy approach⁴.

2.1. Measuring Literacy in Kenya

Literacy surveys and national censuses are the two literacy-measuring strategies that have been used in Kenya.

¹ Freire, P. (1991).

² Carron, G., Mwiria, K. & Rigba, G. (1989 pg 30/31)

³ Republic of Kenya (1988 pg 80)

⁴ Macharia, D. Kebathi, J. & Rigba, G. (2001 pg 170).

2.1.1. Literacy surveys

Literacy surveys have measured literacy through either self-reports alone or self-reports and literacy tests. Between 1976 and 1988, the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) carried out a series of three National Rural Literacy Surveys. The 1976 survey targeted persons aged 15 years and above who were not in full time schooling. The survey depended on respondents' reports on whether or not they could read and write. The 1980-1981 survey targeted persons aged 12 years and above and used self-reporting as well as objective tests. In the third survey conducted in 1988 the focus was on persons aged 10 years⁵ and above. The survey also used self-reports and reading and writing tests. In both the 1980-1981 and 1988 literacy surveys, those who claimed they were able to read and write were given tests in the language they indicated they were literate in – the mother tongue, Kiswahili or English⁶. More recently, the 1994 CBS survey targeted those over 15 years of age and used the self-reporting approach.

2.1.2. National population and housing censuses

National population and housing censuses measure literacy through self-reports only. In the 1989 population census, information on the literacy status of persons aged 10 years and above was solicited. On the other hand, although the 1999 census did not have a question on literacy, it had three questions on education from which literacy data were extrapolated.

These methods of measuring literacy have several problems. Firstly, data from self-reports are suspect because self-reporting is influenced by the stigma associated with illiteracy. Secondly, different surveys have targeted different age levels ranging from 10 to 15 years. This makes comparison among the results of different surveys inappropriate. Thirdly, dependence on number of years of schooling is also problematic because the quality of education in the schools varies and hence four years in one school may produce very different literacy learning outcomes from four years in another.

2.1.3. Evaluation of Literacy Achievement

Within the adult literacy programme in Kenya, there are no standardized literacy proficiency tests. Instead, literacy tests based on guidelines provided by the Department of Adult Education (DAE) are constructed, administered and marked at the district level. The tests focus on reading comprehension, writing and arithmetic. The tests are in the mother tongue (the language of intra-ethnic communication) in the rural areas and in Kiswahili (the national language and the lingua franca) in the urban areas.

Literacy achievement in the formal primary education on the other hand is evaluated through a traditional language (English [the official language and the language of upward social mobility] and Kiswahili) norm referenced examination - Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) taken at the end of the eight years primary

⁵ 10 years and above seems to target Std 4 and above since children are expected to start primary school at 6 years. It is not clear what the other ages – 12 and 15 are based on.

⁶ CBS (1988)

cycle. This means that there is no way of knowing what literacy levels those who drop out of school before eight years⁷ have acquired. However, Kenya participated in the 1998 regional South Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) criterion-referenced English reading test⁸. The results of the test are presented later in this paper in the section on improvements in literacy acquisition.

3.0 PROVISION OF LITERACY BEFORE AND AFTER 1990

A holistic assessment of literacy provision dictates consideration of the formal primary education system whose objective is (or at least should be) to ensure that (a) children do not leave school without attaining sustainable literacy levels; (b) adult literacy programmes for illiterate adults whose objective is to reduce and even eradicate illiteracy in the population; and (c) other modes of literacy provision, which Kenya has called Non-formal Education (NFE) and which also have eradication of literacy as an objective. While Kenya recognises the importance of Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) in preparing children for learning in the primary school, this level of education is not expected to teach literacy skills.

3.1 Provision of Primary Education Literacy Before and After 1990

Successive post-independence governments in Kenya have reiterated their commitment to Universal Primary Education (UPE) and consequently used strategies such as increasing the number of schools and teachers and reduction of cost barriers to education to improve access. Primary education provision expanded tremendously in the period between Kenya's attainment of independence in 1963 and 1990. Between 1963 and 1986 the number of primary schools more than doubled and the number of teachers employed increased more than six fold. Also, the government progressively abolished direct school fees - in 1974 for the first four classes, in 1980 for the next two classes, and in 1985 for the final class. Consequently, between 1963 and 1986, the number of pupils enrolled rose from 891,553 to 4, 843, 423 and enrollments reached a peak in 1989 with the gross enrollment ratio (GER) reaching 105.4 percent.

To increase access to children in the Arid and Semi Arid Lands (ASALs) a policy of construction of boarding schools in these areas was introduced and implemented late 1980s and early 1990s⁹. Further, the government has implemented a school-feeding programme for primary school children in the ASALs and in two urban slums in Nairobi¹⁰.

However, 1990 marked the beginning of the decline in primary school literacy provision through primary schools as the GER started falling and reached its lowest of 86.4 percent in 1996 as can be seen in Table 1.

⁷ More than 50 percent

⁸ UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) (2001).

⁹ This policy was found to be ineffective and construction of boarding schools in ASALs discontinued in mid 1990s

¹⁰ The school-feeding programme is reported to have positive impacts on school attendance in these areas (MOEST 2003a pg 46).

Table 1: Primary Enrollment Trends – GER - 1988-2000

	1989	1990	1993	1996	2000
Total	105.4	101.8	87.8	86.4	87.6
Male	107.6	104.0	88.9	87.3	88.1
Female	103.2	99.6	86.7	85.5	87.1

Source: Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MOEST) Statistics

The main reasons for this downward trend included the introduction of cost sharing policies as a result of the structural adjustment policies, which Kenya introduced at the instigation of the World Bank and the IMF, a high cost vocationally oriented curriculum introduced in 1985¹¹ and rising poverty levels among Kenyans.

On a more positive note, primary education provision received a major boost in January 2003, when the newly elected National Rainbow Coalition government (NARC), implemented a free primary education (FPE) policy. Primary education became free of all fees and levies and the government even provided teaching learning materials for all children in the now more than 17,000 primary schools in the country. The GER immediately shot up from 92.7 percent in 2002 to 103 percent. Reports indicate that the FPE initiative has absorbed 1.3 of the previously 3.5 million out of school children and youth¹².

3.1.2. Regional, Gender and Religion-Based Disparities

Traditionally, the more fertile regions of Kenya have posted higher enrollment rates than the ASAL regions whose communities practice a pastoral economy. For example, in 2000, while Central Province, the province with the highest GER, had 105.2 percent the North Eastern Province had the lowest at only 17.8 percent. Notably, as Table 2 shows, with a GER of 49.1 percent, no doubt because of its large population of urban poor, Nairobi City was the second lowest enrollment province in Kenya.

Table 2. Primary Schools Gross Enrolment Rates by Province and Sex, 2000

Province	Boys	Girls	Total
Coast	76.0	62.9	69.5
Central	104.5	106.0	105.2
Eastern	100.4	97.9	99.2
Nairobi	51.2	47.1	49.1
Rift Valley	84.8	82.5	83.6
Western	97.3	98.5	97.9
Nyanza	87.5	91.2	89.2
N/Eastern	22.7	12.1	17.8
National Total	87.0	85.5	86.3

Source MOEST and CBS, Economic Survey, various issues in MOEST (2003b pg 32)

Regional disparities have persisted despite the introduction of FPE. GER for Central Province remained high at 102 percent while that of North Eastern and Nairobi provinces remained low at 27 and 62 percent respectively. Clearly, for the very poor,

¹¹ Popularly referred to as the 8-4-4 (8 years of primary, 4 of secondary and 4 of university) curriculum/system of education

¹² MOEST (2003a pg. 55)

while critically important, direct cost of education is not the only reason that keeps children out of school.

With regard to progress in gender parity, at the national level, Kenya has virtually attained gender parity at the primary school level. However regional gender disparities persist. As Table 2 reveals, while some provinces (Eastern, Rift Valley, and Western) have very small gender disparities (below 3 percentage points) other provinces (Coast and North Eastern) have wide gender disparities of above 10 percentage points. Notably, it is the low enrollment socio-economically and politically neglected largely Islamic Coast and North Eastern provinces that have the highest gender disparities of above 10 percentage points. An explanation for this situation is to be found in (a) the history of neglect (b) the (lack of) provision of social services (c) the (lack of) productivity of large tracts of land and (d) traditional practices that ante-date Islam. On the other hand, Central Province, the province with the highest enrollment rate in 2000 has of late experienced a reversal in gender disparities, which now slightly (1.5 percentage points) favours girls. The loss in boys' enrollment is attributable to boy child labour.

3.1.3. Special Groups Missing out of Formal Education

Newspaper reports indicate that 1.3 million children are still out of school in spite of FPE. These include the most vulnerable children such as street children, orphans whose numbers continue to rise due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, children engaged in child labour and children living under extreme poverty in urban slums and in the rural areas¹³. Refugee children and those of nomadic communities are yet others who remain largely excluded¹⁴.

Further, although enrollment of special needs children increased from 5, 102 in 1986 to 14, 614 in 1999, a large proportion of special needs children continue to miss out of primary education. Of the estimated 750,000 children with special learning needs, only an estimated 90, 000 have been identified and assessed and of these only approximately 30, 000 have been enrolled in special needs schools and integrated into regular schools¹⁵.

3.2. Provision of Adult Education and Literacy Before and After 1990

In the 1960s and the 1970s, a series of three government led adult illiteracy eradication campaigns were undertaken - 1967, 1972 and 1979. Adult literacy provision experienced considerable growth in this period. By 1980, there were 11, 766 adult literacy centers and 13, 204 registered teachers¹⁶. Similarly, enrollment in adult literacy centers increased to peak at 415, 074 in 1979. However, enrollments started to fall in 1980 when 398, 877 were enrolled. Ten years later in 1990, enrollment stood at only 147, 939 – less than half what it was in 1980.

After 1990, adult literacy enrollment continued to fall and reached 93, 052 in 2001 as in Table 4.

¹³ WERK (2004)

¹⁴ However, refugee children in Kakuma are accessing education but not those in Dadaab – and only UNHCR can explain why.

¹⁵ MOEST (2003a)

¹⁶ Carron, G., Mwiria, K. & Rigba, G. (1989).

Table 4: Enrollment in Adult Literacy Programmes by Sex 1990-2001

Year	Men	Women	Total	% Women
1990	37,092	110, 847	147,393	75.2
1994	26, 595	87, 684	114, 279	79.6
1998	26, 180	74, 081	100, 261	73.9
2001	26, 479	66,573	93,053	71.5
2002	41, 341	73, 524	114, 865	64.0

Source: Department of Adult Education

Enrollment in adult literacy classes in the 1990s and in the early 2000s was consistently less than half of what it was in 1980 while enrollment for women remained consistently higher than that of men standing above 70 percent for all the years except in 2002 when it stood at 64 percent.

This decline is attributed to government's loss of interest in and commitment to adult literacy, which led to under funding. The 1997-2001 National Development Plan for example made no budgetary provisions for adult education. Inadequate resources coupled with inadequate and unmotivated teachers, using inappropriate teaching methods have all contributed to the decline. All these factors led to depressed demand for literacy classes manifested by illiterate adults' failure to enroll and high drop out rates¹⁷. In addition to the DAE, other government ministries, NGOs, faith-based organizations and communities provide adult literacy through their own usually very small programmes. Active NGOs include Action-Aid-Kenya, Plan International, Literacy and Evangelism, Bible Translation and Literacy and Kenya Adult Learners Association¹⁸.

3.3. Provision of Literacy Through other Modes of Provision Before and After 1990

In Kenya, the concept 'non-formal education' is not sufficiently defined. The official MOEST definition is '*any organized systematic learning activity outside the formal school system*'¹⁹. This is a very general definition and encompasses all kinds of learning activities including adult education and literacy and even technical vocational skills training.

All the same, Government interest in NFE is recent going back to only 1994-1998 when the Government of Kenya/United Nations Children's Fund (GOK/UNICEF) programme of co-operation conducted needs assessment in nine districts. The chief providers of NFE have been individuals, communities, local authorities, NGOs, and faith-based organizations that have opened centers in urban slums and among pastoralist communities in ASAL districts. NFE targets children and youth 6-17 years²⁰.

Information on the extent of educational provision through the NFE mode is scarce. However, it is reported that a study on NFE in three urban centers found that 82 NFE schools and centers were established between 1980 and 2000 with establishment

¹⁷ Ngau, M. (1997).

¹⁸ Statistical data on these was not available

¹⁹ MOEST (February 2001 pg. 47)

²⁰ This is unlike in countries such as Uganda where non-formal education targets 13/14 – 18 year olds while out of school primary school age children (6-13/14) are catered for through a primary alternative education channel.

increasing notably between 1990 and 2000. The same study reports that there were 116 NFE centers in Nairobi in 1998 with an enrollment of 29, 286 learners 49 percent of them girls²¹. Statistics from rural Samburu District indicate that in 1999, 687 (62.7 percent female)²² were enrolled in NFE centers. However, more information is needed before one can make a categorical statement about gender disparities in NFE.

The foregoing analysis reveals that on the whole, literacy provision was better before than after 1990. Formal primary education increased tremendously from 1963 to 1989 but then dropped beginning 1990 although FPE in 2003 led to an explosive increase. Similarly, provision of adult literacy reached its highest point in 1979 and then started to fall and continued falling in the 1990s and in the early 2000s whereas provision through NFE is a post 1990 phenomenon and therefore can be attributed to Jomtien.

3.4. Improvements in Literacy Acquisition

3.4.1. The primary school system and acquisition of literacy

Whether or not children acquire literacy in school to a large extent depends on how long they stay in school and on the quality of the literacy curriculum. This outcome is demonstrated in performance across various types of assessments.

Unfortunately, primary school drop out rates in Kenya are high. To date, as noted above, less than half of the children who enroll in first grade complete the eight years primary school cycle. Drop out rates vary considerably from region to region. In 1999 for example, while Nairobi had the lowest drop out rate of 1.5 percent, Eastern and North Eastern provinces had the highest at 6.1 and 6.0 percent respectively²³. There is no significant difference in completion rates by gender.

Four years of primary education were previously regarded as necessary for sustainable literacy development²⁴. There has been an improvement in survival rates in the first 4 years of school with the population aged over 15 years reaching Standard 5 increasing from 67.8 percent in 1990 to 88.9 per cent in 2000²⁵.

Performance in KCPE English between 1993 and 1999 was about 50 percent, which would seem to suggest average performance. However, the already referred to 1998 SACMEQ criterion-referenced English reading test administered to a representative national sample indicated that 77 percent of Kenyan Standard 6 pupils had not attained the English reading mastery level deemed desirable for successful learning in Standard 7²⁶.

3.4.2. Quality of primary education

Literacy skills of reading and writing are important tools for learning all school subjects. Getting children to read as quickly as possible should therefore be a major objective of initial literacy policy and practice. Introducing children to literacy in three languages SIMULTANEOUSLY – in mother tongue, Kiswahili and English (as

²¹ Thompson, E. J. D. (2001).

²² MOEST (October and November 1999 pg 52)

²³ MOEST (2003a)

²⁴ People are generally talking about the need for six years minimum now.

²⁵ CBS (2002)

²⁶ UNESCO IIEP (2001)

is the case in Kenya) does not promote fast or effective literacy acquisition. Further, majority of Kenyan children do not enroll in any ECDE programmes (the Pre-primary GER was 33.4 percent in 1999). In addition, the Pre-primary syllabus does not directly teach reading and writing, yet there is an unofficial requirement that Standard 1 children are able to read and write. Consequently, the highest repetition rate of 17.2 percent in 1999 was at Standard 1²⁷.

The official position as regards teaching-learning methodologies favours learner-centered activity based methodologies introduced in the late 1950s. However, a child in primary classes spends most of the time listening to the teachers and/or mindlessly repeating words or sentences after the teacher²⁸. Further, literacy development is not given adequate attention in teacher training programmes. For example, there is no special training for lower primary teachers who are expected to teach initial reading. Low morale and lack of commitment have also characterized the teaching profession for a long time. Gender insensitive and child unfriendly school environments are yet other contributory factors. FPE has compounded the quality issues with issues such as very large classes and increased diversity of pupils and over age emerging²⁹.

The foregoing discussion indicates that large proportions of Kenyan children are not acquiring sustainable literacy levels either because they are not staying in school long enough to do so or because of the poor quality of education.

3.4.3. Improvements in adult literacy acquisition

Very few of those who enroll in adult literacy pass the proficiency tests. From 1979 to 1990, for example, of the 2.5 million learners who enrolled, only 1/10 had passed the proficiency test³⁰. The statistics for the first half of the 1990s were no better as only 38,717 or 6.6 percent of the 582, 664 who enrolled (1991-1995) passed the proficiency tests³¹. However, the tests are voluntary and very few learners take them. In the sample of a 1997 study, only 8.3 percent of those enrolled registered for the test³². All the same, there does not seem to be much increase in literacy rates since 1990 the overall literacy rate having changed by only 0.7 percent from 73 percent in 1988 to 73.7 percent in 2000 (see Table 5).

3.4.4. Use of acquired literacy skills

Research indicates that a fair proportion of the learners use their literacy and numeracy skills, that there is higher use of literacy in the urban areas than in the rural areas and that men use their literacy skills more than women³³.

3.5. Patterns and Trends in Literacy and Illiteracy in Kenya

The 1999 census put the number of illiterate Kenyans at 4.2 million 61.1 percent of whom were women.

²⁷ MOEST (2003a)

²⁸ Bunyi, G. (2001)

²⁹ The oldest learner to take advantage of FPE was the now world famous 85 years old Mzee Maruge who enrolled in Standard 1 and stayed on refusing to go to adult literacy classes arguing that they had no teachers

³⁰ Agba, C. P. (1992)

³¹ Republic of Kenya (1996).

³² Wafula, E. K. (2001 pg 11).

³³ Carron, G. Mwiria, K. & Righa, G. (1989)

Table 5: Literacy Rates in Kenya 1976-2000

Year	Age Group	Total	Men	Women
1976	15+	46	-	46
1980/81	12+	47.2	-	46
1988	12+	54.3	63	47
1989	10+	73	-	-
1994	15+	71	91.3	74.8
2000	15+	73.7%	-	-

Sources:³⁴

Literacy rates in Kenya have risen steadily from 46 percent in 1976 to 73.7 percent in 2000. Male literacy rates have always been higher than those of females. In 1988 the rate for males was 63 percent while that for females was 47 percent and in 1994, the male rate was 91.3 percent while the female rate was 74.8 percent [refer to the table]. On the other hand, the female literacy rates have risen faster than those for males. Between 1960 and 1988 the male rate went up by 110 percent while that for females went up by 370 percent³⁵.

3.5.1. Regional disparities

Regional disparities are evident. In the 1988 literacy survey, whereas the less resource-endowed districts had a literacy rate of 29-39 per cent, the better-endowed districts had much higher rates of 60 -74 percent³⁶. Rural/urban disparities have also been pronounced with rural populations registering only about 69 percent compared to urban populations' 90 percent in 1988.

3.5.2. Literacy/illiteracy and poverty status

Illiteracy is more widespread among the poor than the non-poor. In 1999, while the poor had 73.1 percent literacy rates, at 82.7 percent, the non-poor were almost ten percentage points better off. Further, the rural poor have lower literacy rates than their urban poor counterparts. However, it is the rural poor women who have the lowest literacy rate of 61.5 percent compared to their male counterparts' rate of 78.8 percent or their urban poor female counterparts rate of 86.6 percent as can be seen in Table 6³⁷.

Table 6: Rural/Urban Literacy Rates by Sex and Poverty Status (%) 1999

Rural/Urban	All		Male		Female	
	Poor	Non Poor	Poor	Non Poor	Poor	Non Poor
Rural	69.6	79.9	78.8	87.8	61.5	72.9
Urban	90.1	94.3	93.5	97.7	86.6	90.3
Nation	73.1	82.7	81.4	89.9	65.5	75.9

Extracted from MOEST 2003

³⁴ Sources: 1976, 1980/81 & 1988 data is from the respective Rural Literacy studies, the 1998 data is from the census, the 1994 is from the Welfare Monitoring CBS Survey and the 2000 data is from the Kenya Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (CBS). All the data except the 1980/81 and 1988 data is based on self-reports.

³⁵ CBS (1988 pg 36)

³⁶ CBS (1988 pg 17)

³⁷ CBS (1988)

3.5.3. Age differences

According to the 1988 survey, respondents aged 15-19 years had the highest literacy rates of 80.6 percent with the rates decreasing with age so that the lowest literacy rate of 9.53 percent was found among the 60 + age group. This indicates the positive impact of school education on literacy rates in recent years.

4.0. LONG-TERM OBJECTIVES AND COMMITMENTS

Although Kenya adopted decentralization approach to planning and implementation in 1983, policy and planning have remained highly centralized and district level actors have no powers to formulate policy. Internationally recognized education goals of UPE and education for all (EFA) remain the driving force of educational policy and planning in Kenya. The government has articulated its commitment to EFA in all its current policy and planning documents (MOES 2001, 2003a & b, DAE [ongoing]). What is lacking in the documents are medium term objectives and targets by which EFA is to be attained. For example, in the National Action Plan on EFA (MOEST 2003b), priority targets are articulated in very general and loose terms like *'to improve enrolment of both boys and girls'* and *'to increase the number of trained male and female teachers for adult education'*.

4.1. Relative Targeting of the Formal and NFE Sectors

Within the EFA policy and planning processes, Kenya has taken a holistic approach to education provision within which formal, non-formal and adult education and literacy provisions are considered together³⁸. However, the primary formal sector receives by far the most attention both in terms of policy and resource allocation. Between 1996/7 and 2000/2001 it received over 55 percent of the Ksh 27.9 billion MOEST recurrent expenditure. With the introduction of FPE, an additional Ksh 5.6 billion specifically earmarked for the FPE programme has been added to sector budget³⁹. On the other hand, the DAE has always been located in ministries other than MOEST. Therefore, it does not receive funds from MOEST. Adult education and literacy receives funds from whichever ministry is hosting the DAE. Consequently, if adult education and literacy is not regarded to be close to the core business of the host ministry, it gets little funding. In 1998/99 for example, it received only 9.09 percent (Ksh. 15,165,133) of the recurrent budget of the Ministry of Home Affairs, National Heritage, Culture and Social Services⁴⁰. This is about 0.5 percent of what primary education got between 1996/97 and 2000/2001. On the other hand, although structurally under MOEST⁴¹, NFE does not appear on the ministry's budgets and thus does not receive any funding from the ministry.

4.2. Integration of Literacy Policies in EFA Plans and/or Sector-Wide Education Strategies, and Poverty Reduction Strategies

Literacy policy pronouncements have been part of most major policy documents since independence beginning with Session Paper No. 10 of 1965⁴². Although the DAE continues to be located outside MOEST, commendably, in the EFA policy and

³⁸ MOEST (2001, 2003a & b)

³⁹ Aduda, D. (2003)

⁴⁰ Macharia, D. Kebathi, J. & Righa, G. (2001).

⁴¹ MOEST (2003b pg. 54)

⁴² Republic of Kenya (1965)

planning processes, adult education and literacy has been integrated in the MOEST policy and planning processes and adult literacy and education policy and programmes have taken their place beside primary and secondary education in documents such as ‘National Handbook on EFA 2000 and Beyond’ of February 2001, the ‘Report of the Sector Review and Development’ of September 2003 and ‘the National Action Plan on Education For All’ of 2003. Further, literacy policies are integrated in the ‘Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper’ of 2001 within its human resource development strategy.

5.0. MANAGEMENT AND FINANCING OF LITERACY

5.1. Management

Formal primary education literacy is wholly managed by MOEST, which has offices at province, district, division and zone levels. At institutional level, schools have school management committees, which is an attempt to integrate local communities in the management of their schools. However, the committees have little decision-making role due to the high centralization of management and professional functions such as curriculum development.

On the other hand, established in 1979 in the Ministry of Culture and Social Services and headed by a Director, the Department of Adult Education is responsible for the management and administration of adult education and literacy. At the national level the Director and other professionals develop policy guidelines, provide administrative and professional support and coordinate field services through out the country. Provincial Adult Education Officers on the other hand coordinate the literacy and adult education activities of the districts in their respective provinces and train adult education teachers whereas the District Adult Education Officers are responsible for the implementation of the literacy programme, recruitment of part time literacy teachers and supervision of both full-time and part-time literacy teachers. At the community level, Adult Education Advisory Committees (AEACs) are the managers of literacy programmes. However, the decentralisation management strategy has not been effective due to lack of clarity of functions between the central government and the districts, inadequate resources for implementing programmes at district level and inadequate capacities of implementing officers⁴³. Further research reports that AEACs are un-operational⁴⁴. Thus there is little community participation in adult literacy.

Participation of other government ministries and NGO providers of adult literacy is channelled through representation in the Board of Adult Education established in 1966. The role of the Board is to co-ordinate, advise and regulate the promotion of adult education in the country. However, the board has been described as ‘*weak and ineffective*’ especially as regards co-ordination of literacy provision by multiple providers which has led to duplication of effort⁴⁵. Further, interaction between DAE and other government ministries and with NGOs and other civic bodies is described in vague terms such as ‘*working closely*’⁴⁶ beyond which there doesn’t seem to be much integration. Hence one can deduce that each literacy provider works independently.

⁴³ Macharia, D. Kebathi, J. & Rigba, G. (2001).

⁴⁴ Ngau, M. (1997)

⁴⁵ DAE (ongoing)

⁴⁶ Macharia, D. Kebathi, J. & Rigba, G. (2001 pg 13)

5.2. Financing

Financing of primary education literacy in Kenya has over time been a joint effort of government, communities, donor agencies and NGOs. The government has through the years allocated a substantial portion of its recurrent expenditure to education. Between 1996/1997 and 2000/2001, the MOEST's budget ranged from 30-39 percent of the total government recurrent expenditure. Primary education share over the same period was consistently over 55 percent. Further, with the introduction of FPE donor support to the primary sector has shot up with big funding agencies such as the World Bank providing Ksh. 3.8 billion for purchase of materials and capacity building.

The government is the chief financier of adult literacy. However, although the government's commitment to adult education and literacy has been reiterated in policy document after policy document since 1964, this commitment has not been matched by funding. Indeed, adult education and literacy programmes have been the lowest funded among the government financed Education Sub-sector⁴⁷. Sometimes, adult education and literacy is forgotten altogether as in the 1997-2001 national development plan in which adult education and literacy was not provided for⁴⁸. However, things seem to be changing. Although it continues to be outside MOEST in 2000/2001, according to the Education Sector Review and Development document⁴⁹, DAE received Kshs. 384 million, which was an increase of 12 percent over the previous year's allocation⁵⁰.

Financial and material foreign donor support for the government literacy programme is insignificant and more in kind than in cash. In the 1979 mass literacy campaigns, the British government gave a donation of 200 motorbikes and funded staff training in Britain. Through the recently ended Kenya Government/German Agency for Technical Co-operation (GTZ) Kenya Post Literacy Project⁵¹, the German government provided technical support to the DAE and supported literacy materials development and training for programme implementers⁵². All the same, adult education and literacy continue to receive support through many but generally small literacy programmes run by faith-based organizations, international NGOs such as Action Aid and CBOs.

On the other hand, financing of literacy in the NFE type of provision is entirely the responsibility of the providers who include faith-based organisations (Christian and Moslem), NGOs, communities and donors such as GTZ, and multilateral agencies such as UNICEF and UNESCO since the government does not make any budgetary provisions.

⁴⁷ DAE (ongoing)

⁴⁸ Republic of Kenya (1997)

⁴⁹ MOEST (2003b pg 89)

⁵⁰ Senior officers in DAE could not confirm this.

⁵¹ The project came to an end last year (2004)

⁵² Oluoch, A. (2002)

6.0. INNOVATIONS

6.1. Bible Translation and Literacy (BTL) Programme

Registered in 1981, BTL works among small low literacy minority language groups. BTL's objectives are development of minority languages, promotion of the languages through mother tongue education in primary schools, promotion of basic and transition literacy for both children and adults and integration of literacy and community development. BTL's key activities are: training of literacy workers including orthography developers, teachers and supervisors, materials development and production and supporting integration of literacy and income generation activities. The BTL literacy programme has several innovations. Firstly, literacy promotion goes hand in hand with language development. BTL works with local language communities in developing the orthography. Secondly, BTL offers transitional literacy that is mother tongue literacy to people who are already literate in a second language such as a majority local language, Kiswahili or English. The aim is to enhance sustainable literacy among such people. Thirdly, BTL actualizes the link between literacy and development by incorporating in-come generating activities such as bee keeping, marketing kerosene and water and, spinning and weaving cotton in literacy programs. BTL provides for sustainability by developing Project Advisory Committees into Community Based Organizations so that they own and take responsibility of community development in the community.

However, BTL's most innovative programme is the promotion of use of the mother tongue in local primary schools⁵³. Starting in 2003, and working in partnership with government education officials and local authorities, BTL is currently implementing a linguistically sound, well-designed and carefully implemented mother tongue education programme in Sabaot and Tharaka on a pilot basis. The aim is to improve literacy acquisition and education participation through the teaching of mother tongues. Starting from the scratch by developing orthography for these two languages using local people, BTL has produced materials for ECDC level and for Standard 1-3 in Sabaot and Tharaka languages. The materials are in line with the national syllabuses and were approved by the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE). Implementation of the pilot started with the training of teachers and supervisors in the use of the new materials followed by gradual implementation of the materials in four primary schools starting with the ECDC. Four control schools have also been selected for the purpose of obtaining comparative information. Monitoring tools were developed and are being used. BTL's achievements include developing alphabets for 13 small languages of Kenya and developing initial literacy and post-literacy materials in these languages. BTL's work has been recognized and awarded prizes three years in a row during the International Literacy Day celebrations. BTL has limited funding and has thus not been able to run large-scale literacy programmes among these communities.

6.2. The Kenya Adult Learners' Association (KALA)

In 1990, a group of adult learners led by Margaret Gathoni Motsi came together and founded KALA. Starting her formal education as an adult literacy learner, Margaret had earlier on taken Kenyans by surprise when she obtained her high school certificate. Two of KALA's objectives are to encourage more people to join literacy

⁵³ The government has tried to promote mother tongue teaching in primary schools (standards 1-3) for the last two decades and KIE has produced literacy materials in about 20 languages.

classes and to lobby and advocate for adult literacy and participation of adult learners in decisions that affect them and their education. KALA's activities have included mobilizing illiterates to join literacy classes, supporting literacy classes, capacity building for income generation through skills training and literacy materials development.

KALA's approach to establishing literacy classes is participatory. KALA dialogues with the relevant community in needs assessment. If the community chooses to have a literacy class, KALA assists identify a teacher from the community and with the election of those who will run the literacy center. Similarly, in developing materials KALA works with the community to develop with the content, which is based on the activities the community is engaged in.

Among KALA's successes are: mobilizing 57, 000 adult literacy learners between 1990 and 2003, winning the 1993 UNESCO NOMA award, establishing a secondary school for out of school youth which now has which now has grades nine and ten, producing community based literacy materials and inspiring and supporting formation of adult learners' associations in other African countries including Sierra Leone, South Africa and Zimbabwe. All the same a big concern for KALA is funding which has been dwindling.

7.0. LANGUAGE AND GENDER ISSUES IN LITERACY POLICY AND PRACTICE

7.1. Language Policy and Practice

The big question in literacy provision is the choice of language for initial literacy. In Kenya, the choice lies between one of the estimated 40 mother tongues⁵⁴, Kiswahili and English. The other question is at what point to introduce additional languages. In the formal primary education, the policy and practice is to teach initial literacy in all three languages simultaneously. The language policy in adult literacy is to teach initial literacy in the mother tongue or the language of everyday communication in the catchment area (e.g. Kiswahili in the urban centres) switching to Kiswahili at the Post-literacy stage. English is also to be taught at the post-literacy stage or whenever demanded by the learners. However, the policy is not without problems. Schooled in English, many literacy teachers find it difficult to teach in the mother tongue⁵⁵. In addition, many mother tongues still lack orthographies and hence lack teaching-learning materials⁵⁶, and many adult learners wish to learn English on social mobility considerations.

7.2. Gender policy and practice

Owing to the widespread illiteracy among women particularly in the rural areas, adult literacy policy and practice in Kenya has always favoured women and this continues to be the case⁵⁷. The programme has also tended to concentrate on issues that would

⁵⁴ Abdulaziz, M. H. (1982).

⁵⁵ Macharia, D. Kebathi, J. & Righa, G. (2001)

⁵⁶ The Kenya Institute of Education has produced literacy materials – reading, writing and numeracy in 23 of the estimated 40 mother tongues.

⁵⁷ See for example the DAE (ongoing).

attract women⁵⁸. For example, the curriculum has a heavy orientation towards female topics of interest⁵⁹. The consequence is that men consider the programme a 'women's activity' in which they have no role. Thus male enrollment rates have remained low and drop out rates high⁶⁰.

Adult education and literacy has been marginalized. For one, as already indicated, it has been grossly under funded. Further, DAE lacks a permanent ministry location. Over the years, it has been located in different ministries including Ministry of Labour and Social Services, Ministry of Co-operatives and Social Services, Ministry of Home Affairs, National Heritage, Culture and Social Services and currently in the Ministry of Gender, Sports, Culture and Social Services. Interestingly, DAE is nearly always located in the ministry that hosts social services, which are often seen as charitable programmes for helpless women and children.

8.0. CONCLUSION

Over four million illiterate adults constitute a big challenge for Kenya in meeting the Jomtien EFA goals. Quantitative gains are being made in the formal primary system in the second post Jomtien decade but qualitative issues are becoming formidable barriers to attainment of sustainable levels of literacy through the school. Drawing motivation from the Jomtien conference the legitimation of NFE through policy formulation and development of a pilot curriculum is an important step in the provision of literacy for youth outside the formal education. However, there are conceptual issues to be sorted out beginning with giving NFE better clarity by making distinctions between it and other non-regular school provision modes. More importantly however, draft NFE curriculum documents suggest that NFE is being conceived as education for the poor. Indeed, in one such document, one of the regulations governing admission to NFE is that an applicant's poverty status be verified before admission. Education provision outside the formal system has low status. Tailoring it to the poor can only lead to stigmatization and even rejection by even the poor.

As regards adult education and literacy, the lack of a permanent ministry location for DAE presents an image and an identity problem for the programme and for DAE educators. Also, as noted above, its location in the ministry responsible for social services often associated with women and children - two largely marginalized groups does not help matters. There is need to rethink adult education and literacy so as to rid it of these negative connotations for it to develop into an education programme attracting both men and women and hence strong enough to meet the challenge of making a dent in the population of 4.1 million illiterate adults.

⁵⁸ Macharia, D. Kebathi, J. & Rigga, G. (2001)

⁵⁹ Macharia, D. Kebathi, J. & Rigga, G. (2001)

⁶⁰ Dondo, J. M. C. (1980) and Ngau, M. (1997)

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