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Literacy for Life

Literacy: Real options for policy and practice in India

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Abbreviations

AP	:	Andhra Pradesh
AS	:	Akshara Sangam
ASP	:	Akshara Sankranti Programme
AIES	:	Alternative and Innovative School
CABE	:	Central Advisory Board of Education
CE	:	Continuing Education
CEC	:	Continuing Education Centre
CLC	:	Community Learning Centre
DPEP	:	District Primary Education Programme
ECCE	:	Early Childhood Care and Education
EFA	:	Education For All
EFA-NPA	:	Education For All-National Plan of Action
EER	:	External Evaluation Reports
EGS	:	Education Guarantee Scheme
MHRD	:	Ministry of Human Resource Development
MP	:	Madhya Pradesh
NAEP	:	National Adult Education Programme
NLMA	:	National Literacy Mission Authority
NPE	:	National Policy on Education
NSSO	:	National Sample Survey Organisation
PBS	:	Padma Badhna Samiti
PLP	:	Post Literacy Programme
SC	:	Scheduled Caste
SHG	:	Self-Help Group
SLMA	:	State Literacy Mission Authority
SSA	:	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
ST	:	Scheduled Tribe
UEE	:	Universalisation of Elementary Education
WG	:	West Godavari
ZSS	:	Zilla Sakshratha Samiti

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Literacy: Real Options for Policy and Practice in India

1. Notion and Definition of Literacy and Illiteracy in India

As regards the notion and definition of literacy and illiteracy, there have been at least 3 different standpoints in India from three different agencies, viz., (i) Census Department; (ii) educationists and planners and administrators of formal education system; and (iii) those dealing with adult education/literacy.

The common perception about literacy is generally the Census definition, i.e., the ability to read and write in any language. Illiterates, according to Census, are those without this ability of reading and writing. This is the basis on which data about incidence of literacy is gathered by Census in respect of population above 7 years of age, and classified under two categories, viz., literates and illiterates.

The Census notion of literacy was perhaps derived from the understanding of educational planners and administrations and educationists. The notion of literacy among this group had been closely linked with level/grade/years of schooling. Viewing illiteracy (84% in 1951) as India's since and shame, national leadership stressed rapid expansion of primary schooling as the sure and effective method and strategy to bring about universal literacy. The Education Commission (1964-66), treated as the most authoritative opinion about every aspect of education in India till date, made this notion and definition of literacy clear while dealing about adult education. To the Commission, the existence of 144 million adult illiterates in 15-44 age-group was proof of failure of "conventional methods of hastening literacy", implying universal primary education, and the reason why a separate programme of adult literacy became crucial. The Commission felt that "In normal conditions, programmes of adult education presume universal literacy" and, had the "conventional methods" were effective, adult education would not have been needed for imparting the basic literacy skills. There was, thus, no ambiguity among educationists either about the notion and definition of literacy or the method of its acquisition, viz., schooling up to primary level. Adult education, in Education Commission's view, had a different purpose (NCERT, 1971: 770).

Within adult education/literacy circles, the notion and definition of literacy included the basic literacy skills and a larger social agenda of improvement in the condition of illiterate adults (Saraf, 1980; Shah, 1989). Thrust on larger social agenda that was the major focus of adult education earlier was gradually brought on par with the focus on basic literacy skills and in fact, got pushed into a secondary level with the launching of National Literacy Mission (NLM). NLM was set up in 1988, besides other objectives, with the aim of imparting functional literacy to million adult illiterates by 1995. Although larger social objectives were part of "functional literacy" in NLM's conception of literacy for adults (MHRD, 1988), the eradication of illiteracy among adults became the central focus in its nation-wide basic literacy programmes, known as Total Literacy Campaigns (TLCs). The level of proficiency in literacy and numeracy is what is assessed on clearly laid down norms. The other components of functionality relating to larger social agenda of improvement through literacy, nevertheless continue to be an integral part of literacy for adults, in NLM's policy documents.

Although there are different standpoints about what is literacy among three different sets of actors, Census definition of literacy continues to be the officially accepted yardstick when it comes to counting literacy and illiteracy level in India.

1.1 Literacy: Measurement and Estimation in Census and Surveys

The basic source about the country's population, the Census, conducted once in every 10 years, collects a lot of data on socio-economic, religious and other parameters of each family, habitation, village, district, State and country as a whole. The Census also collects data about literacy. In respect of literacy, the Census enumerator goes by the response given by any one in a family to the question "Are you literate" or "Can you read and write". The enumerator merely elicits information and is not required to verify by personally checking/testing the claim (Rao, 2002). Data in respect of population, literates and illiterates are collected for age groups 7-9; 10-14; 15-19 and so on, and along gender, social groups such as Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) and others and rural-urban lines (Prem Chand, 2004: 106-07). The data thus collected forms the basis of Census estimates about literacy position of the country.

The survey conducted by National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO), quinquennially, is the major source of information about literacy rates in the country in between the Censuses. Taking Census definition of literacy, the Survey is conducted on a sample basis, in all States, covering both urban and rural areas. The one major difference of NSSO Survey in 1991 with Census estimation was the literacy test it administered on a smaller sample, to those above 15 years of age reporting to be literate, but not completed Grade V in primary education, in respect of reading, writing and numeracy abilities. As the Survey also collects data on different demographic features, it gives more insight into correlations with other parameters like their economic activity and status, social group, land holding, etc. (Rao, 2002).

1.2 Literacy Achievement Evaluation Approaches and Methods

Although completion of primary education has been viewed essential to acquire stable literacy level, the evaluation and testing system in school education has been fundamentally different and not comparable with the approach and methods adopted in achievement testing in respect of adult literacy. In respect of primary education, there is a well defined system, evolved over a long period of time, of end of the year testing of levels of learning of prescribed competencies.

There is little authentic information about the system of assessing literacy proficiency in adult education/literacy programmes in India prior to National Adult Education Programme (NAEP) in 1978. Assessment of literacy under NAEP was different. Undertaken by well-known institutions of social science research, the evaluations encompassed not only assessment of literacy proficiency achieved but also other objectives like critical social awareness of both the causes of deprivation and its remedies. While these evaluations highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of NAEP –

at least 56 of them were closely analysed by the Education Department, there is no evidence of any common approach to assessment of literacy achievement being followed by these evaluations. Moreover, adult education programmes from the beginning, including even NAEP, never covered a whole district. Thus, there was no possibility of estimating their effect on the literacy rate or level of a district as a whole.

The literacy assessment under NLM has been vastly different. While NLM's conception of adult literacy encompassed basic literacy skills, awareness, knowledge and skills to improve their condition, the evaluation has been confined mainly to assessing the proficiency achieved in basic literacy skills.

The NLM appointed Dave Committee (1992 [headed by Prof. R.H. Dave]), delineated the level of achievement in literacy skills in respect of the 3 R's. These became the NLM norms about literacy achievement level of learners in TLCs (NLM, 1992). The purpose of specifying achievement norms in reading, writing and numeracy was to evolve an assessment system that could be uniform and comparable on literacy achievement across states. But given the scale of sample size of learners to be evaluated in each TLC, in some cases between 5000-10,000 learners, within 3-6 months, most evaluations covered only the writing and numeracy skills and not reading skills. Also, in respect of sample design and selection, serious deficiencies were noticed, raising doubts about the credibility and reliability of percentage of literacy achievement claimed/reported. The Expert Group appointed by NLM in 1993 endorsed the Dave Committee blue print for literacy assessment. However, the Expert Group made specific recommendations regarding the sampling design and size to ensure uniformity and comparability. These recommendations have since become part of NLM's guidelines for evaluation of literacy achievement in a TLC.

2. Increased Provisions for Literacy Before and After 1990

Even the Census notion of literacy in Indian context is viewed as the outcome of schooling up to the primary stage. This was why universalisation of elementary education (UEE) was viewed essential for achieving universal literacy. Thus, in the context of EFA, provision for literacy would include the initiatives for education of 6-14 age children, and particularly 6-11 age group, as well as adults above 15 years of age.

2.1 Increased Efforts for Basic Education of School Age Children in 1990s

The adoption of World Declaration on EFA in Jomtien in 1990, and the deadline set to achieve the goals by 2000, lent unprecedented momentum in India. The 1990s became the most productive period for primary education in India. The emergence of EFA on center stage of India's educational efforts in 1990s was due to a combination of policy commitment and a range of new programmes for universal primary (Grades I-V for 6-11 age group) and elementary (Grades VI-VIII for 12-14 age group) education (Govinda, 2001; Ramachandran, 2002). Through their pioneering initiatives in bringing out of school children into educational mainstream through flexible delivery modes, in

improving retention and quality of learning in schools and teacher competency, the NGO sector also played a vital role in creating a deep impact on the discourse on primary education in the country. In many cases the State Governments not only adopted the NGO approaches as part of the mainstream education system and in fact, up-scaled such models on large scale. The adoption of the M.V. Foundation pioneered bridge courses for working children, and children freed from bonded labour by Government of AP, covering more .2 million children is a clear case in point (Wazir, 1998; NIEPA-UNESCO, 2003). Civil society initiatives, through various grassroots and school-based committees that acted as a watchdog on the functioning of primary and elementary schools also exerted pressure on school/teacher accountability and children's learning guarantee. It is, thus, true that the NGO sector contributed significantly to the UEE endeavour. But, the positive and enabling environment, a product of the NPE, 1986 policy thrust, was a major factor. The EFA policy ethos, with proactive encouragement to the NGO involvement, in the 1990s, was thus a continuation of the NPE emphasis, that received a renewed reiteration with the Global Declaration on EFA and an endorsement at the national policy level.

Being a signatory to World Declaration, India's commitment for EFA, and particularly for primary education and adult literacy became evident from Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), the national policy making body's (a) endorsement of EFA goals, as underlined in India's National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 and its Programme of Action (as revised in 1992); and (b) approval for accepting external funding for primary and elementary education programmes (MHRD-NIEPA, 2000). The different externally funded programmes in 1990s as well as the leading NGO initiatives that imbibed as their central focus the NPE's equity and quality thrusts in primary and elementary education, included:

- The multi-state District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) that, starting 1994 covered, in 2 phases, 271 districts in 18 States by 2001.
- State specific programmes for primary education like Andhra Pradesh (AP) Education Project, Mahila Samakhya (Education for Women's Equality), Bihar Education Project and Uttar Pradesh Education Project. The Mahila Samakhya Programme deserves mention, as it was conceived as a conscious intervention at women's empowerment and equality by organizing women into groups, called Mahila Sangas, and providing the space and gender sensitive inputs to reflect on their lives, identify their needs and evolve collective ways to deal their problems. The article of faith of Mahila Samakhya Programme, implemented in more than 10 States, covering over 9000 villages is: educated and aware mother will change the world of their daughters, their education and their lives (MHRD, 2001).
- The NPE recommended and Centrally sponsored Operation Blackboard (OB) scheme that covered primary schools under government purview, excluding those under externally funded primary education programmes, substantially

improved the physical, infrastructural and academic facilities, number of teachers and their in-service training, Teaching-Learning Materials, etc.

- Different models, within broad government purview, to prove the feasibility for reaching universal primary education through flexible and innovative modes to most disadvantaged groups/communities in smaller, rural and remote habitations, as demonstrated by projects like Shiksha Karmi ([community education worker] 1987) and Lok Jumbish (1992) programmes in States like Rajasthan and Education Guarantee Scheme in Madhya Pradesh (MP), and DPEP.
- Within the non-government sector, getting out-of-school children back into formal schools as a tangible goal set up by NGOs across different states, emulating the pioneering efforts of leading NGOs like M.V. Foundation in Hyderabad (1991) and Dr. Reddy's Foundation in AP, that sought to bring out of school children, such as those engaged in child labour and urban street and slum children, into the educational mainstream through flexible delivery modes like bridge courses, summer programmes, etc. A few other similar prominent NGOs included: Nandi Foundation, Aga Khan Foundation and Azim Premji Foundation in AP (for improving teacher competency); Akshara Foundation in Bangalore city and Azim Premji Foundation in Karnataka; the Pratham initiative to improve quality of children's learning in urban government schools, taken up in Mumbai (1994) and several other States (Ramachandran, 2002; NIEPA-UNESCO, 2003: 25; 90; 93-94; Wazir, 1998).

2.2 Outcome of Improved Efforts in 1990s: Some Quantitative and Equity Dimensions

- The number of recognized primary schools increased (in millions) from .49 to .56 between 1981 and 1991, and further to .65 in 2003. Similarly, the number of recognized upper primary schools increased (in millions) from .11 in 1981 to .15 in 1991 and .24 by 2003. Recognized schools – primary or upper primary – include government, private aided and private unaided but recognized schools. Recognised government schools include those run by Education Departments, Department of Tribal Welfare, schools under Local Bodies such as District, Municipal and Cantonment Boards, Town Area Committees, Panchayat Samities, Zilla Parishads (MHRD, 2004: 1). The break up, i.e., the number of schools by management under government, private aided and private unaided, is not provided, and this also is the case in respect to the number of teachers (MHRD, 2004: 11). Similarly, there is also no authentic data at all India level about the number of unaided and unrecognized schools. Besides recognized primary schools, there were also 70,000 EGS/Alternative and Innovative Education Centres around 2000 with .1 million para teachers (Ghosh, 2002: 86), and .12 million in 2003 (NCERT, 2004: 137). Provision of facilities for primary education within a distance of 1 km was achieved in nearly 95% of India's .86 million habitations by 2000 (Govinda, 2001).

- The number of teachers increased (in million) from 1.36 to 1.61 and 1.91 between 1981, 1991 and 2003 respectively, at primary level, and from .85 to 1.07 and 1.58 millions at upper primary level. This, however, did not include more than .1 million para teachers under EGS/AIES around 2001(Ghosh, 2002: 86), and .12 million in 2003 (NCERT, 2004: 137). The Teacher-Pupil Ratio in primary schools was 1:38 in 1981, 1:43 in 1991 and 1:42 in 2002. The trend at Upper Primary level was no different: it was 1:33, 1:37 and 1:33 in 1981, 1991 and 2002 (MHRD, 2004: 92).
- The enrolment at primary level (Grades I-V) increased (in millions) from 73.8 in 1981 to 97.4 in 1991 and 122.4 in 2003. The enrolment at Upper Primary level (Grades VI-VIII) increased (in millions) from 34.0 to 46.9 between 1991 and 2003 (MHRD, 2004: 17).
- While enrolment of boys in primary stage rose (in millions) from 45.3 to 57 between 1981 and 1991 and 65.1 in 2003, the increase in girls enrolment (in millions) was greater, from 28.5 in 1981 to 40.4 in '91 and 57.3 in 2003 -- 19.8 million boys and 28.8 million girls. At the Upper Primary level, however, the increase in girls' enrolment was relatively less. The increase in the boys enrolment was 12.4 million, while it was 13.8 million in the case of girls, between 1981 and 2003 (MHRD, 2004: 17).

Many limitations about the data, especially lack of clear details about schools, enrolment and teachers under different managements for the different years under review have been indicated. The details available about 853,601 schools imparting Elementary Education (Grades I-VIII) as covered under the District Information for Education (DISE) for 2003, gives an idea about the relative share of recognized schools under different managements, the enrolments and teachers. As the coverage under DISE was confined to 461 districts (out of 593) in 18 (out of 32 States and Union Territories) in 2003, the totals would not tally with the figures for the whole country – the reason for presenting it separately here, more for purpose of giving the trend, rather than the exact numbers.

The details of these 853,601 in respect of the school category are asunder:

**Number and Percentage of of Schools by Category (2002-03)
All Management, and All Areas**

Category	Number (in millions)	Category (%)
Primary	.61	70.51
Primary with Upper Primary	.13	15.41
Primary with Upper Primary, Sec./Hr. Sec.	.018	2.18
Primary Schools/sections	.75	--
Upper Primary only	.050	5.96
Upper Primary with Sec./Hr. Sec.	.035	4.14
Upper Primary Schools/sections	.23	--
No response re: category	.015	1.80
All Schools	.85	

Source: Mehta, Arun C., *Elementary Education in India: Where Do We Stand? Analytical Report 2003*, NIEPA, 2004, pp.32-33.

The picture of these 853,601 recognised schools, by management, shows: 61.06% under Department of Education; 20.61% under Local Bodies; 4.39% under Tribal Welfare Department, that together account for 86% of the total. 12% of the total schools are under private management that include both private aided (4.96%) and 6.74% private unaided schools (Mehta, 2004: 11-12).

As regards teachers, i.e., the 3.16 million in the 853,601 recognised schools, the details available relate to the number of teachers in different categories of schools: Primary Schools (1.59 million); 27.61 million in Upper Primary/Elementary Schools, 5.64 million in integrated Hr. Sec. Schools (with Grades I-XII), and 9.27 million in Upper Primary attached to Sec. and Hr. Sec. Schools (Grades VI-XII) (Mehta, 2004: 1410). The details of teachers, by management category, i.e., government, aided and un-aided private schools, are not provided in DISE data.

The details available in respect of enrolment in the 853,601 schools relate to: (i) enrolment in primary and upper primary classes in 2002-03 in all areas: primary classes – 101.15 million; and upper primary level – 27.66 million; and (ii) enrolment in 86.1% of schools under government management is shown in terms of its percentage share, rather than absolute figures, vis-à-vis the enrolment in private aided and un-aided schools. Percentage of enrolment in government schools to total enrolment by school category is: Primary = 89.9; Primary with UP = 77.6; P with UP and Sec./Hr. Sec. = 34.9; UP only = 80; UP with Sec./Hr. Sec. = 60% (Mehta, 2004: 110; 123). The point underlined is that the enrolment in government schools is not proportionate to the share in management. In other words, private schools, although accounting for less than 14% of the recognized schools, have more children in them, in all but just the first category – primary school

level. The exact number of students under the three categories of management – government, private aided and private unaided, is not indicated.

The share of SC/ST enrolment (21.8% and 9.6%) in the total enrolment at all India level and also separately for the 18 States covered under DISE seems proportionate to their share in total population (Mehta, 2004: 110).

2.3 Spatial, Regional, Social, Gender Dimensions of EFA Tasks Remaining

- Based on the estimates of child population in 6-11 and 11-14 age groups and their enrolment and those out of school, it was shown that that 79% (or 152 million) of the 192 million children in 6-14 age group were attending school in 2000. That left about 40.4 million out of school. Who are these out of these school children and what is their spatial concentration?
- Despite all the focus, backed by an array of incentives, in addition to making primary education cost free, even by 2003, the percentage share of SC/ST children, respectively, in the enrolment at the State level at primary stage, continued to remain low at 19.7 and 10.6 in Andhra Pradesh; 17.8 and 22.4 in Madhya Pradesh; 20.0 and 15.9 in Rajasthan; and 31.9 and 0.2 in Uttar Pradesh. The share of girls' enrolment at primary level, as against the boys, in respect of both communities ranged between 44-48% in all these States, barring Bihar where the SC girls' enrolment share was 39% and UP with 31%. These are the educationally backward States (with literacy rates below the national average) with large concentration of either or both SC/ST populations. States like AP, Bihar, MP, Rajasthan and UP have close to or more than 10 million SCs, and AP, MP, Rajasthan have more than 5 million STs each (Mehta, 2003; NCERT, 2004: 135-36). Their SC/ST literacy rate, in general, and their of their girls, in particular, is way below the national average. Some of these States with a large SC population but very low on their literacy rate are Bihar (28.47%), UP (46.27), as against the national general average of 64.84%. Similarly, the States with large ST population, but very low literacy among STs are AP (37.64%), MP (41.16%), Rajasthan (44.66%) and West Bengal (43.40%). This picture becomes even more clear from a comparative picture between the GER and dropout trends, as compared to the general population.

Gross Enrolment Ratios of Children of All Communities and SC/STs

Level	Year	Children of all Communities	Scheduled Caste Children	Scheduled Tribes Children
Primary	1990-91	100.1	106.4	104.0
	2002-03	95.4	95.8	98.7
Upper Primary				
	1990-91	62.1	52.7	40.7
	2002-03	61.6	56.3	48.2
Drop out Rates				
Primary	Year	Children of all Communities	Scheduled Caste Children	Scheduled Tribe Children
	1990-91	42.6	59.4	62.5
	2002-03	34.9	41.5	51.4
Upper Primary				
	1990-91	60.9	67.8	78.6
	2002-03	52.8	59.9	68.7

Source: Derived from MHRD, GOI, *Selected Educational Statistics 2002-03 (as on 30th September, 2002)*, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 84-84, and 89-90.

The dropout rates among both SC and ST children declined more sharply between 1991 and 2003 as compared to the children of all communities. But, their dropout rate still remains significantly higher, at least by 6 percentage points more than the children of other population. While this is the general trend of difference between the children of general population and SC/STs on an average, the picture of dropouts in some of the educationally backward States with large concentration of SC/ST population is a stark reminder of who the out of school children are and where are they concentrated.

**Drop out Rates in Educationally Backward States with Large SC/ST Population
(2002-03)**

States	Total Population		Dropout Rates					
	SCs (Milln.)	STs (Milln.)	All Communities	Girls	SCs	SC Girls	STs	ST Girls
Primary Level								
All India	166.63	84.32	34.89	33.72	41.47	41.91	51.37	52.10
AP	12.33	5.02	41.71	41.76	46.63	47.63	65.82	68.71
Bihar	13.04	--	62.31	61.66	58.81	62.64	--	--
MP	9.15	12.23	31.43	29.87	35.00	34.52	51.30	50.51
Rajasthan	9.69	7.09	56.93	59.86	53.82	57.52	54.31	59.87
UP	35.14	--	23.55	22.75	51.02	54.74	--	--
West Bengal	18.42	4.40	36.41	35.32	52.32	54.74	55.54	59.26

Source: Calculated from MHRD, GOI, *Selected Educational Statistics 2002-03* (as on 30th September, 2002), New Delhi, 2004, pp. 100-02; 135-36.

At the all India level, among children of all communities, at least 35 leave the primary school without completing it. It is at least 6 more in the case of SC children, at least 16 more among ST children. More than half the ST children who enter primary school discontinue without completing it, at the all India. The position of SC children in Bihar, Rajasthan, UP and West Bengal, and ST children in AP, MP, Rajasthan and West Bengal, with large ST population, as could be seen in the highlighted figures in the table above, sums up the picture, as who and where are the out of school children, in India. This is why Tenth Plan felt that “Those outside the school system are mostly SC/ST girls, working children, children of poor families, disabled children and children in difficult circumstances” (Planning Commission, 2002; Nambissan and Sedwal, 2002).

2.4 Adult Literacy: Evidence of Increased Provisions and Increase

On its launch in 1988, the National Literacy Mission took up the mandate of making 80 million adults literate in 15-35 age group by 1995 (revised to 100 million in 1992). Finding that there was no reduction in number of adult illiterates despite a nationwide programme of adult education since 1977-78, NLM was relentlessly exploring for a new approach, strategy and method that could lend the requisite mass character and urgency to achieve its target. Total Literacy Campaigns (TLC), started initially as an experiment, proved eminently appropriate for its area-specific, time-bound, volunteer-based, outcome-oriented and mass programme character. Beginning in 1988-89, the TLCs that took the whole district in one go, were expanded in quick succession to 156 districts in 1992, 561 in December 2000 and 587 out of 600 districts by March 2003. The increase in provision for literacy is evident from the fact that 95% of India’s villages and people have been covered by the adult (basic) literacy programmes by March 2003

(MHRD, 2003). Nearly 400 of these districts have, after completing TLC, moved on to Post-Literacy and subsequently to Continuing Education stage.

The number of adult illiterates (15 years and above) was 270.78 million in 1991. NLM reckoned that as a result of TLCs and other types of literacy programmes, addressed mainly to 15-35 age group, 91.51 million adults were made literate by December 2000 (71.45 million by TLCs and 20.08 million under other schemes), and 98 million by March 2003, as against an estimated 263 million adult illiterates, as per 2001 Census data (NLM, 2001; MHRD, 2003; Prem Chand, 2004). Against the backdrop of a sharp increase of nearly 33 million during 1981-91, the estimated sharp decline in the number of illiterates by nearly 8 million by 2001, from 1991, is said to be proof of result of the adult literacy/education programmes, besides primary education.

NLM claims of number of adults made literate is based on figures reported by the districts implementing TLCs. In regard to its credibility, the Expert Group's reactions are relevant. "The Group is constrained to note, however, that these progress reports (from each TLC district) are normally based on information gathered through the routine channels within the district and are not always equally dependable for all districts. Quite a few of the reports give a picture far removed from the reality". Evaluations of TLCs done by independent agencies, what is called External Evaluation Reports (EERs) could be presumed to give a more reliable picture. Referring to the 41 EERs of TLCs, as analysed by NLM, which showed 58% achievement against the target, the Expert Group said it "has reasons to record serious reservations about the above claim as a large number of EERs (included here) are deficient in terms of coverage, sample design, size of sample and, above all, in the estimation procedures adopted to arrive at district level estimates." (NLM, 1994: 21). The Expert Group did indeed suggest a more scientific evaluation system. Not that the EERs undertaken after the Expert Group's Report, and adopted by NLM, could be said to be above the needle of suspicion in respect of the results reported. But NLM's figures about numbers made literate are not based on the EERs, but on the internal progress reported by the districts. The public credibility dimension at least in regard to the numbers claimed to have been made literate never seemed to influence or affect NLM claims.

2.5 Illiteracy Trends and Patterns

Based on Census 2001, there are 66 Districts in 11 States with less than 35% female literacy. Some of these States are: Bihar (with 21 districts); Jharkhand (7); Orissa (7); Rajasthan (6), and Uttar Pradesh (10). Together these account for 56 of the 66 such districts (Prem Chand, 2004). Besides the concentration of female illiteracy, these are also the States lowest in literacy in rural areas, and among their SC/ST population. Out of 166.63 million SC population in India, more than 64.51% of them live in States like AP, Bihar, MP, Orissa, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. The literacy rate among SCs in these States (between 45-53%) is at least 10 percentage points less than the national literacy rate. The literacy rate among SC women ranges between 15-43% in these States as against the national average of 53.7% female literacy. Bihar has an SC population share of 16.%, but its SC female literacy is 15.58%. Similarly, the share of SCs in total

population is more than 15% in States like MP, Orissa and Rajasthan. But their SC female literacy rate ranges from 33-43%. It is obvious that their share among India's illiterates is far greater than their population share. This is much more so in the case of STs. AP, Jharkhand, MP and Orisa are States with ST population share ranging between 15-26% in their state population. (Prem Chand, 2004). While nearly one of 2 women is illiterate in India, in the case of ST women, it must at least be 3 out of every 4.

3. Long-term Objectives and Commitments for Literacy

3.1 National Level

With the global EFA 2000 Assessment and Dakar Forum occurring in between, the Ninth Plan (1977-2002) marks a transition phase that witnessed a new set of objectives and target deadlines set up for literacy in India. With most districts in the country getting covered under TLC, NLM focus during IX Plan shifted to reorganizing Post-Literacy Programmes. On Continuing Education front, NLM was trying to figure out ways of providing sustained support to CE programmes. These shifts in focus were facilitated by the Cabinet approving some very significant changes in NLM's activities, described as "revamping of NLM" (MHRD, 2001: 111).

The Cabinet approved changes as reported in its EFA 2000 Assessment, and Dakar Declarations as a reference point, Tenth Plan Working Group identified the priority areas in adult literacy programme: adult illiteracy as basically the problem of disadvantaged social groups like the SCs and STs, including women, and therefore, calling for special efforts to remove the obstacles to their participation in the literacy programmes (MHRD, 2001: 113-14). The same has been endorsed and adopted in the final Plan as well (Planning Commission, 2002: 67).

The goals, targets and strategies approved by Tenth Plan (Planning Commission, 2002: 85) in respect of NLM relate to:

- Achieving ... literacy... level of 75% by 2005;
- Covering all left over districts [through amalgamated TL-PL programmes] by 2005;
- Removing residual illiteracy in the existing [CE] districts by 2004-05;
- Completing Post-Literacy in all districts; and
- Launching CE Programmes in 100 [more] districts before the end of Plan period [it was 152 districts in 2002].

3.1.1 Literacy in EFA-National Plan of Action, 2003: Continuation of “Revamped” Directions and Re-focus in Strategies

In the light of EFA goals and targets set up in Dakar Framework for Action and clearly aligned to social and gender equity thrusts, NLM felt the necessity to effect a certain re-focusing of its strategies pursued since 1999. The EFA-NPA’s new “thrust areas” in literacy include (MHRD, 2003: 85):

- ❖ Achievement of 75 per cent literacy level by 2007.
- ❖ A multi-pronged strategy to address regional, social and gender disparities in literacy.
- ❖ Refocusing literacy, post-literacy and CE programmes to increase and strengthen women’s participation, so as to bridge gender gap in literacy.
- ❖ Encouraging PL and CE districts to pay special attention on mobilization and organization of women into neo-literate and self-help groups (SHGs).
- ❖ Special attention to socially disadvantaged groups like SCs/STs and women.
- ❖ 45 districts with <30 % female literacy rate selected for a multi-pronged strategy to raise female literacy.
- ❖ Special stress with ZSS to specifically highlight strategies to take up literacy and skill upgradation programmes for SCs/STs and women in particular.

The overriding priority of NLM at present is to address the 45 low female literacy districts, and residual illiteracy in other areas, which broadly coincides with illiteracy concentration among socio-economically disadvantaged sections and pockets. But even by doing this, it is doubtful if NLM can bring about 75% literacy rate by 2007, because, by its own estimate, “the present (2003) literacy rate of 64 per cent will improve to around 80 per cent by the year 2015”, and, “India can be placed in the category of countries which are likely to reach adult literacy rates of 70-90 percent in the year 2015”. By the same reckoning, NLM also admits that “to achieve the Dakar goal of halving the illiteracy rate by 2015, India needs to reduce illiteracy rate by 20 per cent” and, “India is likely to reach this goal by 2015 in terms of halving the illiteracy percentage from 40 per cent in 2000 to 20 per cent by 2015” (MHRD, 2003: 84).

3.2 Long-term Commitments and Objectives for Literacy: Some States

3.2.1 Andhra Pradesh

As part of its commitment to make Andhra Pradesh (AP) not just a literate state but a knowledge society, the Government’s primary goal since 2000 has been to increase overall literacy level to over 95% by 2005. Taking stock of the literacy scenario in the year 2000, and with a view to accelerate the pace to achieve the literacy target by 2005, a

state-wide (district-wise) massive, community-based literacy campaign called Akshara Sankranti Programme (ASP) was launched in October 2000. On actual count, the numbers enrolled in the first round itself – 6 million – turned out to be more than the initial assessment of 5 million in 2000. Including the subsequent mopping up rounds that covered the left outs as well as drop outs and slow learners of earlier rounds, as per official reports, 11.85 million illiterates were enrolled, and 6.45 million of them were made literate between 2000 and 2003. (NIEPA-UNESCO, 2003: 27-28). This programme still continues, taking up residual illiterates. AP is the only State in India that has moved beyond NLM visualized (5 year duration) CE to conceptualizing an institutional framework for lifelong learning, by establishing a Community Learning Centre (CLC) in each village – Gram Panchayat. CLC is visualized as nodal point for converging all activities of open schooling, libraries and CECs. The CLC scheme is still at a nascent stage. (NIEPA-UNESCO, 2003: 28).

3.2.2 Madhya Pradesh

Taking note of the unenviable record of TLC approach which made .54 million adults literate in 9 years, Madhya Pradesh (MP) evolved its own strategy for literacy, moving away from the standardized national model. The new strategy was grounded on the principle of collectivity and incentivisation and convergence of literacy with nascent economic activities – principles chosen, bearing in mind, sustainability of literacy pursuit through PL and CE stages. The programme anchored on these principles was the Literacy-Improvement Campaign (Padhna Badhna Andolan), taken up by their society (Padhna Badhna Samiti [PBS]). Started in 1999, MP reported 217,000 PBS, enrolling 5.18 million learners, and 2.98 million clearing the external evaluation. 57,000 of the 217,000 PBS (over 90% of them being women groups) were subsequently re-positioned as SHGs, taking up their literacy consolidation and savings, and moved from PL to CE stages. As a result of its vigorous EGS and PBA efforts, MP recorded an unprecedented jump of 20% in literacy in 1990s, with the 2001 Census reporting a literacy rate of 64.11%, nearly lifting it out of its erstwhile educationally backward state status. MP also has the unique distinction – of being the first and only State -- of brining in adult education provisions as an integral part of education as a Fundamental Right (NIEPA-UNESCO, 2003: 118-22).

3.3 Formal and Non-formal Education: The Relative Dimension of Long-term Objectives and Commitments

The EFA Goals covering formal and non-formal education adopted in Dakar Framework for Action set up 2015 as deadline. India, however, preferred a deadline far ahead, i.e., 2010 to achieve these same goals. In setting up ambitious targets, and target deadlines, there is no difference in India's EFA-NPA between non-formal and formal education. But this equality of sectors or its targets is not matched either in respect of relative share of funds allocation or fund flows. The funds requirements indicated for elementary education, including mid-day meals and girls education represented 77.65% of the Rs. 952,770 million funds for EFA, and for adult education, with Rs. 6340 million, including Post-Literacy and Continuing Education, it stood at 0.66% (Planning Commission, 2002).

This implies that the education of 167.76 (6-14 age) million children attending school in 2000 (Planning Commission, 2003: 34), the funds requirement indicated in EFA-NPA works out to be Rs. 567 per child. For literacy (100 million) and CE (100 million) of adults, the indicated funds requirement works out to be Rs. 31.7 per person –, indicating the relative priorities of the sectors within EFA. For every Re.1 spent by government on literacy and continuing education of an adult, it spends Rs. 17.8 on a child's schooling.

The relative priority of elementary education and adult education within EFA-NPA can also be seen in the systems of funds flow. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the flagship programme for UEE under EFA directly releases funds to state implementing societies, which in turn transfers it, along with state share, to bank accounts maintained by village education or school management committees, that manage and account for all expenditure of the school (MHRD, 2003: 92). The funds flow system for adult literacy and CE programmes is from NLM to the State Literacy Mission Authority (SLMA) which would then transfer it to Zilla Sakshratha Samiti (ZSS), which is expected to channel it below (SLMA is NLMA's counterpart at the State level and ZSS is the implementing agency at district level). This is a total reversal of the earlier system of funds transfer from NLM directly to ZSS, a model that SSA has borrowed but NLM abandoned, allowing return of the proverbial red tape and perennial uncertainty and delays between sanction and actual receipt of funds, with so many layers in between. Literacy and Continuing Education of adults is an integral part of EFA-NPA, but within EFA, it remains an insignificant entity, with all the priority, in policy and funding, going for the education of school age children --UEE .

3.4 Extent of Integration of Literacy Policies in EFA Plan and Poverty Reduction Strategies

Prior to the EFA Decade of 1990s, education as basic right or entitlement was confined to the education of children. Even the Constitutional mandate to the State was only about providing free and compulsory education to all children up to 14 years of age. It was only after the Jomtien Declaration, namely education as a fundamental right for all people, women and men, of all ages, that such an approach had also become part of India's policy discourse. Even during 1990s, and despite endorsing the rights approach to basic education for "every person – child, youth and adult", India followed the sectoral rather than an integrated or holistic approach in EFA, that entails not only shared perspective, but also inter-sectoral coordination. This, however, changed after Dakar Declaration. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), primary education, literacy and CE and life skills programmes for youth and adults, have come to be treated as an integral part of EFA, as evident in the Tenth Plan document (Planning Commission, 2002). A similar integrated approach has been adopted in India's EFA-NPA (2003) as well. Now, for example, ECCE programmes, although administered by a different Ministry, is treated as an integral part of the EFA endeavour, and so are the initiatives for girls education (MHRD. 2003).

In the matter of education of school age children, there is a pervasive and overarching emphasis and orientation of reaching out to the socio-economically

disadvantaged and marginalized sections and pockets, girls in particular. This is anchored in the understanding that education is an instrument of socio-economic improvement more urgently needed in case of the disadvantaged sections. The very focus of whole range of incentives in universal free elementary education drive across all states is to align and strengthen the poverty-reduction edge in the education of socio-economically disadvantaged sections, without which education would remain an unaffordable luxury. Though not explicitly articulated, this is also the approach in adult literacy and CE programmes.

4. Management and Funding of Literacy

4.1 National Level

National Literacy Mission is the nodal authority at national level in charge of adult education in the country. NLM consists of a General Body and an Executive Committee, the former, headed by Minister of Human Resource Development, and Executive Committee, by Secretary, Department of Elementary Education and Literacy, MHRD. NLM is located in the Bureau of Adult Education, headed by Joint Secretary who also acts as DG (NLM). Within the overall perspective as embodied in EFA-National Plan of Action, NLM manages adult and continuing programmes in the country and all supporting institutions at State (e.g., State Resource Centres) and District levels, like Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS [People's Education Centres] have been set up to undertake vocational and life skills programmes for the educationally and socio-economically disadvantaged youths and adults in urban and rural areas, including neo-literates of the literacy movement). Other than NLM as part of Department of Elementary Education and Literacy, there is no inter-ministerial coordination body in respect of policy and management for adult education at Central level.

4.1.1 State Level

The counterpart of NLMA at State level, the SLMA is headed by Chief Minister and Education Minister, and its Executive Committee headed by Chief Secretary and Education Secretary. Both these bodies at State level are represented by Ministries with line departments like agriculture, health and family welfare, rural/community development, women and child development, social welfare, etc. Major policy decisions and strategies concerning management of adult and continuing education at state level are made in SLMAs, like in NLMA at national level.

4.1.2 Literacy Funding System

The Literacy and Continuing Education programmes for adults in India is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme, an initiative of Central Government, with 2:1 Central and State funding system for initial basic literacy – TLC and PLC, and the five year Continuing Education Programme, with 100% Central Funding for first three years and 50% sharing by State Government for third and fourth year. After its approval, NLM

transfers the funds to SLMA for TLC, PLP and CE proposals submitted by SLMA, which along with state share, sends it to ZSS.

4.1.3 Role of Other Government Departments/Agencies in Adult Education

While there is no explicit policy directive for an inter-ministerial engagement either in management or implementation at Central or State level, such an approach has invariably been adopted at District level as a facilitative mechanism for implementing adult literacy and continuing education programmes. Especially in CE programme at district level, the ZSS makes use of grassroots networks under the aegis of different Ministries like Ministry of Youth Development and Sports (e.g. network of youth clubs known as Nehru Yuvak Kendras), Ministry of Rural Development (e.g. SHGs), etc. This is part of the flexibility in implementation modality left to ZSS, as a deliberate policy measure by NLM (NLM, n.d.).

4.2 Role of Non-Governmental Actors in Literacy

In the strategies to be adopted for achieving EFA, Dakar Framework clearly enjoined national governments to ensure that civil society organizations are systematically represented not only in formulation of EFA-NPA, but also its implementation. In deference to this mandate, EFA-NPA formulation process in India was marked by national level consultations exclusively with NGOs, and also in regional meetings with government education agencies. The inputs received through these consultative meetings were built into developing the national perspectives in respect of the EFA goals (MHRD, 2003: viii). This has been a distinct tradition, in fact, a mandate as perceived by NLM from the very beginning in its engagement in adult education (MHRD, 1988).

The influence of the non-government sector, i.e., people from outside the administration, in shaping the policy and approach to the literacy movement was far greater than that witnessed in primary education. It would be hard to recall a government funded programme with so much say for social activists, NGOs, and progressive minded individuals in civil society in the leadership, planning, management and monitoring as in the TLCs. In fact, the very concept of TLC itself came from the non-government side. The KSSP in Kerala and its counterpart at the national level, the Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti (BGVS) were the architects of this approach, and BGVS remained the official partner of NLM till mid-1990s. This spirit of the people's movement approach and implementation methods of TLCs, especially the partnership between district and NGOs and civil society's different organizations and networks at grassroots levels, continues to inform NLM policy even today and in fact, in a more pronounced manner in the CE programmes (NLM, 1994; Athreya and Chunkat, 1996, Ramachandran, 1998; Mathew, 1999).

The text submitted to the Expert Group on "Evolution of Strategy under the NLM", by the government could be treated as the authentic position regarding the role and involvement of the NGO sector in the literacy movement, and hence could bear a

little detailed mention. Referring to the shift from government-controlled, center-based approach, the government admitted that “the real breakthrough came, not out of wisdom internal to NLM but with an experiment in mass literacy campaign initiated in ... Ernakulum district in Kerala in 1989. This was not a government sponsored programme implemented by the District Administration but under the leadership provided by the District Literacy Society which had a few persons from the District Administration but also people from all different sections and backgrounds. The campaign for total literacy in Ernakulum ... saw a fusion between the district administration headed by its Collector, voluntary groups, social activists and others, and was spearheaded by the Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP [an NGO]).” Referring to those campaigns initiated immediately after the Ernakulum TLC, in States like AP, Karnataka, West Bengal, Union Territory of Pondicherry, etc., the government openly admitted that “A perusal of literacy campaign proposals from the districts of Kerala, ... and others which were placed before ... NLM ... shows that the proposals merely mention that they are submitted for campaigns based on the model of the Ernakulam, [and] ... are indicative of the fact that the Ernakulam campaign strategy was adopted as such by the NLMA in other districts... As of August 1994, ... NLM had approved literacy campaigns in as many as 275 district and post-literacy campaigns in as many as 100 districts. The basic model in all these literacy campaign projects is the same as in the Ernakulam campaign” (NLM, 1994: 8-9).

It is clear that a major non-government say in the approach and strategy and presence in organizational structures and management and monitoring system at District, Block and village levels was the distinct feature of the literacy movement. Social activism and voluntarism and partnership with civil society as the guiding philosophy and principle of the mass literacy campaign provided a new road map even for formal school education, as could be observed in the externally funded primary education programmes in the 1990s. But within the literacy movement, there are innumerable examples of enduring programmes which assiduously strengthened its people’s movement character and facets in its design and implementation methods withstanding the vagaries of irregular funds flow from the state and active support of district administration.

The perspective of partnership with civil society was further reiterated in “NLM Thrust Areas” in EFA-NPA: “The District Literacy Society (ZSS), the autonomous body which implements and oversees the literacy, post-literacy and continuing education programmes would have freedom now to use grassroots participatory networks like youth clubs, mahila mandas (women groups), voluntary agencies and local self-government bodies like Panchayats, cooperatives, etc., as partners in CE implementation.” (MHRD, 2003: 85). In fact, in the implementation of the Accelerated Female Literacy Programmes taken up after 2001 in low female literacy districts by NLM, the NGOs have been the implementing agencies in States like Uttar Pradesh.

4.3 Interaction between Government and Civil Society

In its very genesis, NLM was conceptualized not as a routine government programme but to make literacy as a people’s mission (MHRD, 1988). The mass campaign for literacy undertaken under NLM auspices, called TLC, had come to be

recognized as *literacy movement* and *people's movement* (MHRD, 1992; Mathew, 2000). Certain crucial facets of TLC's planning and implementation illustrated how the plank, the content and substance of government-civil society interaction in literacy programme had transformed it). into a people's movement, marking a fundamental and qualitative change of this interaction, and re-defined it. These included the Environment Building campaign, as part of TLC pre-launch preparations, the participatory organizational-management structure at village, Block and District levels, etc.

The TLC model, as an epitome of people's involvement, and administration-civil society partnership its central implementation approach was acknowledged, endorsed and reiterated in NPE's Programme of Action, 1992 (MHRD, 1992). NLM guidelines on implementation of TLC, PLP and CE have repeatedly emphasized this intent and content of interaction as the very philosophy and the central strategy in the programme's implementation (NLM, 1996 [a]; [b]).

The government-civil society interaction intent was consciously built in Continuing Education programmes, when NLM stressed that "CECs must be perceived by the people as arising from their own initiatives to meet their explicit needs, and developed **as people's institution in the true sense of the term**. And, ZSS was expected to devise all possible ways and means to elicit community support ..." (emphasis added. NLM, 1996 [a]: 27).

4.4 Significance of External Aid Efforts to Improve Literacy Levels

External assistance has mainly been for primary and elementary education sector. Externally funded primary education programmes' focus has been on improving the provision of primary and efficiency of primary education system in retention, participation and successful completion, with less dropouts and greater proportion of students in acquiring minimum levels of learning. The major contribution for the increase in literacy rate between 1991 and 2001 has been primary education (Mehta, 2002) -- primary education programmes as a whole, both externally funded and others under government purview (Ramachandran, 2002; MHRD, 2001).

5. Innovative Programmes

5.1 Continuing Education as People's Programme

Case of West Godavari District in Andhra Pradesh

Taking National Literacy Mission (NLM) Continuing Education (CE) Scheme Guidelines as a broad framework, Government of Andhra Pradesh (AP) evolved its own model for its implementation. The implementation modalities devised present a certain re-definition and refinement over NLM's CE perception and strategies. These were in respect of: (i) creation and involvement of people's participatory structures in implementing the CE Centres (CECs); (ii) aligning CE programmes with the needs and interests of beneficiaries; (iii) linkage with development departments and their

programmes; and (iv) lending “peoples institution” character to CECs, not only in regard to community support but also in incorporating their involvement in management of CE programmes itself.

5.1.1 CE in West Godavari District: Embodiment of a People’s Programme

West Godavari (WG) was one of the premier districts to take up CE Scheme in 1997, with preparations having started right from 1996. WG-CE Programme was conceptualized primarily as a people’s programme in which community participation, ownership and management of CECs and its activities would be the central features. The role of ZSS – the implementing agency at district level, was seen as one of a catalyst and facilitator, conceptualizing the critical parameters of people’s ownership and management characteristics of CE Scheme and facilitating its operationalisation through financial, technical and academic resource support to CECs (ZSS-WG, 1997 [in Telegu]). Adopted from State Government policy, these critical parameters included:

- Formation of a village Core Group of persons committed to a social cause like literacy and CE and to organize neo-literates to participate in CE Programme;
- Forming an association of neo-literates (*Akshar Sangam* [AS]) by paying a membership fee of Rs. 10 per annum, and each AS, seeking a CEC, to have at least 250 members; and electing a 9-Member EC from amongst AS members, five of them being neo-literates and 4 of whom, women.
- Collection of Corpus Fund of not less than Rs. 10,000 for each village; and after fulfilling these formalities, applying to ZSS for a CEC.
- Specific provisions for de-recognition and discontinuation of funding and closing down of CECs found not satisfactory by the ZSS.
- Opening and maintaining a separate Bank Account by AS, operated jointly by President and Convener (HM of village Primary or Middle School) and money withdrawal only on the resolution of AS;
- Selection and appointment of *Preraks* by Village CE Committee, not by ZSS as elsewhere; *Prerak* being accountable to AS and it dealing directly with ZSS; *Prerak* not a functionary of ZSS but a part-time Volunteer.
- The AS entering into an MOU with ZSS to abide by its rules, such as conducting ZSS prescribed weekly activities in CECs, submission of quarterly utilization certificates of funds received from ZSS, etc;
- AS being allowed flexibility by ZSS to organize such activities of their choice for one week in a month, after conducting activities prescribed by ZSS for first three weeks.

NLM allowed flexibility to ZSS to devise CE programmes and activities in harmony with local requirements. WG-ZSS devolved these flexibilities on the AS, and thus, went beyond mere trappings and made CE as a **partnership** with the community not only in respect of ownership and management of CECs, but also its programmes.

5.1.2 Launching a People’s Participation-based CE: The Strategies Adopted

A well orchestrated awareness, training and orientation and publicity campaign was undertaken for over 3 months to reach out to every village, section of society and organised groups. At least 5000 people received such training and orientation. More than three-fourths of them were people’s representatives and leaders of people’s associations of women, youth, teachers, NGOs and voluntary agencies. Through all these efforts, CE as a people’s programme, implemented by AS with government help became widely known and accepted by people.

Elsewhere in India, it has not been all that easy to secure beneficiaries’ participation in CE even when a hefty fare of awareness, knowledge and skill-based programmes were offered free. What made the .22 million people, majority of them from the weaker sections, take a membership in AS by paying a subscription fee, was their perception and valuing of people’s participation and ownership of the programme, in which they felt, they had both a space and stake (Rao, 1999). It was also this large membership that gave the programme the image of people’s partnership, and, in hindsight, one that made possible to continue the CE programme with people’s involvement for over 3 years even when the CE direction at State level went astray and funds were not released.

5.1.3 CE Activities in WG District 1997-1999

Based on NLM Guidelines, WG-ZSS devised five types of programmes, and activities, as below, and planned them in such a way that some were compulsory and others optional.

Educational Programmes	Commenced in 1997, Library and Reading Room activities continue till date in all 1095 CECs.
(i) Library & Reading Room	
(ii) Literacy Classes	As part of CEC’s regular activity, 2910 sub-centres were opened to teach basic literacy to non-literates. These continued till 2000 when a second generation TLC (<i>Akshar Sankranti</i>) was taken up for which the CEC Volunteers (<i>Preraks</i>) were re-deployed for monitoring.
(iii) <i>Varam Varam Vignanam</i> [VVV](a weekly lecture-cum-discussion programme) on development issues by development departments	The VVV programme was conducted non-stop for 108 weeks in all CECs up to September 2000.

Awareness Programmes	Publication of a Neo-literate Borad-sheet, a fortnightly newsletter and reaching it to every CEC was part of awareness programmes. Known as <i>Akshar Deeksha</i> , the 4 page neo-literates newsletter had over 5000 circulation. Considered as the pride of WG-CE, <i>Akshar Deeksha</i> was the most effective communication and dialogue channel between CECs and ZSS, with at least 100 letters a fortnight from readers and <i>Preraks</i> . ZSS was planning to convert it into a self-financing venture by pricing it, but was not fortunate to get the gestation period with subsidy.
Quality of Life Improvement Programmes (QLIP)	QLIPs included activities on food and nutrition, health, hygiene and sanitation, expenditure and savings.
Skill Development Programmes (SDPs)	SDPs introduced in 830 CECs included preparation of pain balms, detergents, soaps, basket weaving, lace making, embroidery, candle making, etc.
Recreational Programmes	Sports and games and cultural competitions were organized and national days and events were celebrated by <i>Akshar Sangams</i> wholly through community initiative and contributions.

5.2 Sustainability of Innovative Programmes

People's CE Programme: Promising Features, Partnership Failures and Consequences

The Community Involvement-endearing features of WG's CE Programme that were critical for its success are worth noting:

- Crystal clear policy that sanction of CEC only to such villages which forms an association of neo-literates – *Akshar Sangam*, with at least 250 members.
- Membership to AS only by paying a fee and this as the only basis of forming an AS.
- A clear set of rules from ZSS, governing formation of AS, including the election to its EC and its composition of 9 members.
- The election to the AS-EC, of mainly those people who took an active interest in forming the AS, canvassing membership and collecting Corpus Funds.
- Affiliation to, and eligibility to receive funds from ZSS only those AS that fulfilled all formalities indicated in ZSS rules.

- A separate set of rules governing funds management, AS being required to submit a quarterly report of their accounts to the ZSS.
- In Corpus Fund collection, a clear policy against collecting large donations from one or two individuals or naming the CEC after them so that the principle of collective leadership is not compromised.
- Stipulation of a critical minimum of amount of Rs. 10,000, for Corpus Fund, to have an adequate amount, kept in a 5 year fixed bank deposit, the interest from which, along with annual membership fee, could help CECs to carry on its activities when state funding ends.
- All CECs, as did in WG, to function in government or public premises -- a conscious decision, to facilitate people to access the CECs without any inhibition and create an atmosphere conducive to increase people's participation and management.

By all accounts and especially in respect of community response, the WG-CE had a glorious run for over 3 years. This despite with only 50% of first year (1997) grant from NLM, and similarly, only the first installment from ZSS to AS in charge of each CEC. Procedural wrangles that seemed to mark NLM's emerging approach to literacy movement delayed funds release for well over three years, and thereby sapped the motivation of even the most ardent activists of CE.

The lessons, when Government's partnership role fails, as seen from WG's CE experience, point to the following – much the same in CE Programmes elsewhere:

- Local initiatives for a programme like CE cannot be sustained for long period without the back up support and inputs at every stage, especially for expanding and strengthening the scope of people's management, in respect of funds, programme flexibility and autonomy of CE association.
- The initial understanding of CE Scheme with flexibility in programmes and certain autonomy in financial matters implied a facilitative role by government – the ZSS. This autonomy and flexibility was replaced with government control.
- A vision of fully equipped CEC with a five year assured funding and timely flow of funds for an activity packed CE, as in NLM CE Guidelines -- was canvassed. Zss' release of funds was partial, the reason being non-receipt of grants from NLM or State government. Ill-equipped CECs and inability to take up the programmes promised, created credibility crisis of ZSS among the public.
- Library in CEC as the basis to sustain a reading environment could be some achievement even if target specific programmes could not be undertaken. The inability to develop library with a good collection of interesting books, rendered it unattractive.

- Target specific programmes not taking off due to its non-sanction and/or non-release of funds disappointed the organized groups like the SHGs, which mobilized members for AS. Beneficiaries' disillusion led to drop in their participation in CE activities, as happened in WG.
- A voluntary informal group is essential to mobilize people's participation in a non-formal sector like literacy and CE. This idea was taken forward with greater social sanctity in WG through fee linked membership to *Akshar Sangam* and election for its EC. The principle of election did not violate ASS' voluntary character, and its 9 member EC allowed for wider representation. The substitution of this voluntary body by an officially constituted committee by State Government, took away autonomy and flexibility of *Akshar Sangam* and its EC and brought in bureaucratization of the programme and stringency about use of funds. This typified the emerging trend everywhere (Mathew, 2002).

The policy trend towards the literacy movement has been characterized by (a) a certain loss of priority to the programme and turning it into yet another routine government programme at national, state and district levels; and (b) a slow down in funds flow. WG-CE was fortunate to receive the second installment by 2000 end. CE programmes elsewhere were not so fortunate. Initial grant for first 6 months was all they had, and languished for 3-4 years before receiving next installment and may now be battling to pick up broken threads in the pursuit of creating a learning society.

6. Literacy Policy and Practice: Issues of Language and Gender

6.1 Language in Primary-Elementary Stages

Education in mother tongue – this has been the national policy, particularly at primary and elementary levels, from the beginning. The National Policy on Education, 1968 and 1986 have been emphatic on this issue. In respect of ethnic groups like the tribals, the policy stressed the need to develop curricula and devise instructional materials in tribal languages at the initial stage, with arrangements for switching over to the regional language” (MHRD, 1986: 7).

6.1.1 Language in Adult Literacy

The language of teaching-learning (or medium of instruction) in adult literacy programmes has, as a conscious policy, been the mother tongue from the beginning. After TLC became the dominant approach and strategy, NLM adopted the approach of leaving the issue of language of instruction, to ZSS -- the reason being the language preference of learners, their numbers and feasibility of literacy primers development and transaction as the main considerations. Within a State there are many languages and dialects with or without a written script, spoken by sizeable number of people. There are cases of TLCs that used primers in 6-7 languages, as per their demographic composition

and language preference of the learners. In some cases, learners not knowing regional language – language of administration, may like to become literate in that language. There are also districts with large tribal population, speaking a dialect that may or may not have a written script. In such cases, learners are initiated into literacy by using the first primer in the local dialect and switching over to regional language in second and their primers used in TLC. The reading materials in PL and CE stages are generally in regional languages.

6.2 Gender in Literacy Policy and Practice

6.2.1 Adult Literacy

The gender focus (to reduce gender gaps in access/provision, participation, achievement, etc., that have a more quantitative dimension) and addressing the gender bias i.e., age-old socio-economic and culturally embedded gender inequities, have been the two distinct, but inter-related dimensions of India's literacy movement since early 1990s. Gender focus was obviously warranted by their two-thirds share in illiteracy. The gender focus of TLCs (viz., paying greater attention in proportion to their number), however, did not come by a pre-design. It emerged from actual experience seen in the massive response of women who perceived the social sanction for their participation as an opportunity to realize their aspirations for literacy, empowerment and improvement. But the hurdles of gender inequities were pervasive, in the socio-cultural outlook, in the content of literacy primers about the role of women in society, in development, position within family, solidarity and collective assertion for their equality, and so on. The literacy movement was the first to address these issues of gender in early 1990s which lent an effective model for the gender focused primary education programmes later.

6.2.2 Gender Focus in Primary Education

In planning and implementation of adult literacy and primary and elementary education of 6-14 age children, gender has come to be treated as a critical issue not just because illiterates are nearly twice more among women as among men. It is more because of the age-old socio-cultural and educational discrimination and deprivation they had to endure. Thus, much before international commitment to girls education was expressed following World Declaration on EFA in 1990, policy environment in India recognized the criticality of educating girls if UEE were to be achieved. In addressing the gender inequities in education, educational planners and policy makers went beyond the gender focus of increasing educational opportunities for girls. In the education of women and girls, the equity edge needed to be even more shaper, as emphasized in NPE, 1986: "Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favour of women... This will be an act of faith and social engineering... The removal of women's illiteracy and obstacles inhibiting their access to, and retention in elementary education will receive overriding priority, through provision of special support services setting time targets and effective monitoring (MHRD, 1986: 6).

Since 1980s, all primary and elementary education programmes were designed to incorporate the gender focus and it gained greater momentum in 1990s in all externally funded primary education programmes in States like AP, Bihar, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, etc. However, the programme that took the gender focus to scale, has been DPEP, that initially had even its selection criteria as the low female literacy districts. In all these programmes the focus, as underlined in NPE, 1986, was on reducing gender disparities in enrolment, retention and learning. This intent has been totally imbibed in SSA, the national programme of UEE in EFA since 2000.

Mainstreaming gender in every aspect of educational planning and implementation, backed by focused increase in educational opportunities for girls has become the national approach as evident in SSA. Some specific facets of the gender focus and its mainstreaming in SSA include:

- A comprehensive and well designed package to make girls education totally free;
- Gender sensitivity in curriculum and its transaction; in teacher education; teachers in/pre-service trainings; and training/orientation of educational planners and administrators;
- Increasing the number of women teachers;
- Special campaigns on girls enrolment and special camps, bridge courses, alternative schools to cover un-enrolled girls for their mainstreaming in formal schools, etc (MHRD, 2001: 8-9; MHRD, 2003: 48-49).

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