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An analysis of the place of literacy in poverty reduction strategy papers

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An analysis of the place of literacy in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers

By Emmanuelle Suso

Introduction

The extent to which PRSPs or their interim version (I-PRSPs) recognise the significance of literacy for the achievement of the MDGs, and for development goals more generally, is one indication of the extent to which weight is, or is not given to literacy in public policy. While youth literacy (15-24) is used as an MDG indicator as a measure of the success of basic school education, literacy, taken as the meaningful acquisition, development and use of written language, is not related specifically neither to children, youth or adult but to all of them. It can be acquired in and out the formal education system. Being key to the creation of a literate environment, it is expected to contribute directly to economic and social development. The Dakar framework for action has a goal specifically related to adult literacy, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for adult. The aim of this analysis is to determine where literacy fits in national poverty strategies and whether any note is taken of the Dakar literacy goal.

Literacy measure and the international agenda

Literacy is often measured through youth literacy (age group 15-24) and through adult literacy (age group 15 and above). While the first ratio relates measures more particularly the success of the education policy in terms of school coverage and learning achievement, the second ratio focuses on adults, as citizens and productive member of the workforce.

The two Millennium development goals (MDGs) on education are both relevant to literacy: MDG 2 because it deals with Universal primary education (UPE), the touchstone for youth literacy; and MDG 3 because one of its attached indicator (indicator 10) measures the ratio of literate females to literate males. MDGs are not preoccupied with adult literacy. This is not the case of the Dakar goals, especially Goal 4, which caters for adult literacy. It specifies that illiteracy should be halved by 2015. Bearing in mind the focus on women of both sets of goals, proper monitoring at country-level would imply disaggregation of data by gender.

About PRSPs

PRSPs are the implementation documents of the Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS). Both are concepts innovated by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to better deliver international aid and provide debt relief to countries who meet criteria set by the Bank and Fund. With this new approach, poverty is no longer restricted to the sole economic dimension. The multidimensional aspect of poverty is fully recognized and interrelations between the economic and social aspects are fully integrated. Countries are encouraged to undertake a holistic analysis of poverty in order to tackle it in a comprehensive fashion.

The approach favours multi-sectoral strategies, involving all the components of government; is iterative and favours participatory processes, the PRSp being (in principle) in consultation with by the poor themselves.

Interim PRSps are a first step in the process of completing the full document. They identify the major problems and issues and provide some indication as to the relevant policies and measures as well as to the use of external assistance. I-PRSps allow countries to obtain some concessional assistance. The preparation of full PRSps begins once the I PRSPS has been adopted . The full PRSP has to be adopted by the government and be submitted to the Board of the World Bank and the IMF: they are a requirement for receiving debt relief. They describe a framework for action which is evaluated on an annual basis (on average). The PRSP generally follow a similar outline : they have different chapters: on the process ; on the diagnosis of poverty (source, scope, magnitude) ; on the proposed strategies (also called pillars) to achieving growth and reducing poverty : the macroeconomic framework, the Human development chapter and the institutional development pillar. Education -and therefore literacy- is normally included in the human development chapter but it can be mentioned in several other chapters.

What is the breadth of the documents examined?

Fifty-six PRSps and I-PRSps have been examined, out of the 57 available documents on the World Bank website as of 29 April 2005¹ (cf. Annex 1). Because I-PRSps are more limited in scope and breadth than PRSps, it is frequently the case that literacy is barely mentioned in these documents, though one would expect that it be raised as an issue in the full document. The table below recapitulates the availability of PRSps at that date and identifies those documents which have not been analysed due to time constraints.

Table 1. Availability of PRSps as of 29 April 2005

	Total	I-PRSP	PRSP	Not analysed
AFR	30	8	22	
EAP	4	0	4	
ECA	10	1	9	
LAC	5	1	4	
MENA	2	0	2	
SAR	5	1	4	Bangladesh

Mapping literacy in the PRSps

Literacy in PRSps

Out of 56 PRSps examined ,17 mention illiteracy as a major problem; 9 assimilate literacy to a development issue; 28 mention it in their diagnosis of the educational system and 34 propose specific actions to fight against it. The table below summarises these figures:

¹ PRSps and I-PRSps available can be consulted at the following URL :
 <<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/EXTPRS/0,,contentMDK:20200608~pagePK:210058~piPK:210062~theSitePK:384201,00.html#U>>

Table 2: Literacy in PRSps

Illiteracy as a major problem	Literacy as a development issue	Literacy in the ed. diagnosis	Literacy in the ed. strategy
Benin	Benin	Albania	Benin
Burkina Faso	Bhutan	Armenia	Bhutan
Cambodia	Cambodia	Bhutan	Bolivia
Chad	Chad	Cambodia	Burkina
Congo Rep.	Lao PDR	Cameroon	Burundi
Djibouti	Mauritania	Cap Verde	Cambodia
Ghana	Uganda	Chad	CAR
Guyana	Viet Nam	Congo DR	Chad
Lao PDR	Yemen	Congo Rep	Congo Rep
Malawi		Côte d'Ivoire	Djibouti
Mali		Gambia	Ethiopia
Nicaragua		Guyana	Ghana
Niger		Honduras	Guinea
Rwanda		Lao PDR	Guyana
Senegal		Macedonia	Honduras
Serbia		Malawi	Lao PDR
Yemen		Mali	Madagascar
		Mauritania	Malawi
		Mongolia	Mali
		Montenegro	Mauritania
		Mozambique	Mongolia
		Niger	Mozambique
		Pakistan	Nepal
		Rwanda	Nicaragua
		Sri Lanka	Niger
		Yemen	Rwanda
		Zambia	Senegal
			Serbia
			Sao Tome
			Sri Lanka
			Uganda
			Viet Nam
			Zambia
Total: 17	Total:9	Total:28	Total:34

In fact, PRSps can be grouped into four categories, as far as their treatment of literacy is concerned: countries for which literacy is not an issue (high literacy rate); countries that have some mention literacy i.e. literacy is not a priority; PRSps that develop literacy strategies with different approaches (youth literacy, through

schooling or remedial programmes / adults through NFE, literacy programmes) and scope (programmes/campaigns), and, finally, PRSPs in which literacy is mentioned but in which the countries approach consists of a strategy through enrolment only.

- Countries where literacy is not an issue . Literacy is a barely mentioned in countries having achieved high literacy rates (97% and above) and high enrolment ratios. These countries are mostly found in the Europe and Central Asia region. Some deduce – possibly wrongly – that literacy is not an issue at all (Albania, Azerbaijan). These countries refer to youth literacy rates mostly, and obliterate residual illiteracy.
- Countries where literacy programmes are not a urgent priority. Literacy is an issue but not a priority in such countries as Bolivia, Bosnia, Lesotho, and Sri Lanka. On average, Literacy rates in this group of countries is fairly high: above 80% for adult literacy rates and above 90% for youth literacy rates (except Lesotho : 70.8). Measures to correct literacy rates are mostly linked to formal school or to targeted programmes (drop-outs, work training)
- For a third group of countries, literacy is an issue that calls for a full fledged strategy. In the most severe cases of illiteracy (literacy rates at around 40%,) countries launch campaigns as a mass measure with rapid results. This group of countries also develop other measures to tackle both youth and adult illiteracy with the unfolding of adult programmes, of NFE, and the furthering of increased enrolment ratios (resorting mostly to incentives). Among these countries, the most notable ones are Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Lao PDR, and Nepal).
- The fourth group of countries have 50-70% adult literacy rates. Some of them such as Yemen pose literacy as a serious development issue, others like Côte d’Ivoire state among their chief objectives to curb illiteracy. However, no specific programme is developed to improve. It should also be mentioned that neither these two countries provide literacy targets. In that same category, one could add Cameroon, Bhutan (who states being in keeping with the MDGs), Burundi (but the document is an I-PRSp) and the Gambia (37% adult literacy rate and only 0.1% of its educational budget on adult education). In last resort, these countries are essentially relying on schooling and increased enrolment rates to raise their literacy rates.

Table 3: Prioritisation of literacy I-PRSPs and PRSPs available at as of 29 April 2005

Country	Youth lit. rate*	Adult lit. rate*	Not an issue	Soft priority	High priority	Prioritised action is essentially through formal education
Albania	99.4	98.7	√			
Armenia	99.8	99.4	√			
Azerbaijan	--	--	√			
Benin	55.5	39.8			√	
Bhutan	--	--				√
Bolivia	97.3	86.7		√		
Bosnia	99.6	94.6		√		
Burkina Faso	19.4	12.8			√	
Burundi**	66.1	50.4				√
Cambodia	80.3	69.4				√

Table 3: Prioritisation of literacy I-PRSs and PRSs available at as of 29 April 2005

Country	Youth lit. rate*	Adult lit. rate*	Not an issue	Soft priority	High priority	Prioritised action is essentially through formal education
Cameroon	--	67.9				√
Cap Verde	89.1	75.7		√		
CAR**	58.5	48.6			√	
Chad	69.9	45.8			√	
Congo, DR**	--	--			√	
Congo, Rep.**	97.8	82.8				√
Côte d'Ivoire**	59.9	--			√ (adults)	
Djibouti	--	--			√	
Dominica**	--	--				√
Ethiopia	57.4	41.5			√ (adults)	
Gambia	--	--				√
Georgia	--	--	√			
Ghana	92.2	73.8		√		
Guinea	--	--			√	
Guinea-Bissau**	--	--				
Guyana	--	--		√		
Honduras	88.9	80		√		
Indonesia**	98	87.9				
Kenya	95.8	84.3				√
Kyrgyz Rep.	--	--	√			
Lao PRD	79.3	66.4			√	
Lesotho**	70.8	81.4				√
Macedonia**	--	--	√			
Madagascar	--	--			√ (adults)	
Malawi	72.52	68.1			√ (adults)	√
Mali	24.2	29				√
Mauritania	49.6	41.2			√	
Moldova	99.8	99	√			
Mongolia	97.7	97.8	√			
Mozambique	62.8	46.5			√ (adults)	
Nepal	62.7	44				√
Nicaragua	86.2	76.7		√		
Niger	24.5	17.1				√
Rwanda	84.9	69.2		√		
Pakistan	33.9	41.5			√	
Sao Tome	--	--			√	
Senegal	52.9	39.3				√
Sierra Leone**	--	--				√

Table 3: Prioritisation of literacy I-PRSps and PRSps available at as of 29 April 2005

Country	Youth lit. rate*	Adult lit. rate*	Not an issue	Soft priority	High priority	Prioritised action is essentially through formal education
Sri Lanka	97	92.1		√		
Serbia	--	--		√		
Tajikistan	99.8	99.5	√			
Tanzania	91.6	77.1				√
Uganda	80.2	68.9				√
Viet Nam	--	90.3				√
Yemen	67.9	49				√
Zambia	89.2	79.9		√		

NB: * Source for literacy rates: GMR 2005

** These are I-PRSps. Only elements of policies are provided.

Defining literacy

Out of the 56 PRSps examined, 11 documents actually provide a definition- albeit vague- of literacy. These are:

- Cameroon: CM2 is considered the sustainable literacy threshold (fifth year of primary schooling)
- Albania/ Djibouti/ Niger/ Sierra Leone/ Senegal: provide a definition in terms of capacity to read and write
- Ethiopia: percentage of the population aged 10 and above who can read and write and understand a short and simple statement in the course of daily life
- Madagascar: “are considered literate those who can read and write and have basic numeracy skills or those who have reached the fifth year of primary education or higher, out of which they will have completed four years”.² Pakistan fits in that same category (ability to read a newspaper, write a simple letter and perform a simple sum)
- Nicaragua: four years of schooling is defined as being the threshold for reaching basic literacy and mathematical skills.
- Sri Lanka: Minimal language competency

In other words:

- Two definitions are expressed in terms of schooling years only (Cameroon and Nicaragua). The limit of such a definition is that it implies that (i) those that did not attend school are not literate and that (ii) those who have completed the required number of years of schooling are literate- which is not necessarily true. In terms of measurement, the literacy rates stemming from such definitions would use enrolment or attainment data.
- Seven countries use definitions which explicitly mention adult literacy (Albania, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Sri Lanka).

² « Sont déclarés alphabétisés ceux qui savent lire et écrire et faire un petit calcul ou bien ceux qui on atteint la cinquième année d'études primaire ou plus et on fait au moins quatre années d'études. » Madagascar, p. 138 of the French version.

They are based on a competency definition (know how to read and write), although it is not clear as they measure it through survey and tests or through self-declaration. It is to be noted that the latter country incorporates what is traditional youth literacy (15-24) in its age bracket.

- Two country (Madagascar/Pakistan) defines literacy both in terms of schooling years and/or in terms of competencies, escaping therefore the limits of the first two definitions. Measurement combines enrolment rates and other methods.

For all other documents, no definition is provided. One is left making deductions on the basis of the proposed course of action i.e. through formal schooling and enrolment, through non-formal education (NFE), adult education or literacy programmes or campaigns, or through both.

There is finally a small group of countries that refer to IT literacy. These are mostly former European and Central Asian countries. (e.g. Bosnia Herzegovina). The only African mention of IT literacy is found in the PRSp for Kenya, where it is seen as a prerequisite for civil servants to handle e-government.

Measuring literacy

To produce their literacy rates the most common sources are national, (e.g. Bolivia, Ethiopia) and household surveys (e.g. Bhutan, Cameroon, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Malawi). The implementation of literacy surveys is infrequent (Lesotho, Cambodia).

PRSPs and the treatments of the literacy issue

What is the 'use' of having a literate population? PRSPs provide different reasons for seeking better literacy rates. These can be regrouped into three categories:

- **The right approach**. There is a right to literacy as there is a right to education. Such an approach is never formulated as such in the PRSP but it follows from the approach relating literacy to enrolment in formal education. Another indication of such an approach is the fact that illiteracy is closely linked to poverty, of which it is an indicator. Reducing illiteracy will lead to a reduction of poverty since it is a part of the way poverty is measured.
- **The social approach** envisages literacy as a desired outcome that focuses on social or cultural dimensions. It is mostly linked to human development, empowerment (of women and minorities) and personal well-being (e.g. Bolivia, Cambodia, Djibouti). Literacy is there seen as an instrument to fight against social and cultural inequalities, or against domination. These inequalities are redressed through target programmes that use ethnic languages or through such measures as correcting gender bias in curricula.
- **The functional approach** is centred on the skills and competences needed to function adequately in society. This approach tackles mainly preparation for work, self-employment, access to micro-credit (particularly for women), management of the environment for better productivity and sustainability of crops. The aim of this literacy approach is to sustain economic growth and to increase the productivity of the labour force. Bhutan, Burkina Faso,

Cameroon, Lao PDR are among countries linking literacy achievements to this approach.

Occurrences in different part of PRSPs: literacy in the framework of education policy and as a support to other sectors policies .

The section of the PRSPs where literacy is mentioned is hardly anodyne. It determines where countries establish that literacy (or the lack of it) impact a given sector. Occurrences can be summarized thus:

Poverty diagnosis	ED section	Other HD sections	Other
46	38	17	25

Slightly more than 80% of the PRSPs and I-PRSPs examined, literacy first appears in the poverty diagnosis or profile as a determining factor of poverty. The rate used is the adult literacy rate, often disaggregated by gender to show the existing gap. Further analysis of this literacy rate is provided in terms of the dichotomy between urban and rural populations. Certain country provide provincial/district breakdowns.

PRSPs state, from the inception (i) the relation between illiteracy and poverty – e.g. “Poverty is characterized by illiteracy (...)” (Mali, p.1)); literacy is one of the factors qualifying ‘poverty’s social face’ (“illiteracy is a barrier for the poor to improve their lives for they are excluded from the development process”, Cambodia, p.iii)., and (ii) the incidence of illiteracy on poverty – Burundi establishes how literacy rates follow the socio-economic distribution of household heads : 87,4% of the children born to a family where the head of household serves in the public or the para-public sector are literate. On the other hand this figure is down at 44% in the case of households headed by farmers or unemployed persons (Burundi, p.12); in Djibouti, illiteracy is among the factors that explain the dire situation of the rural Djiboutians (p. 83); Mozambique correlates child mortality, illiteracy and gender disparities as an indication of high human poverty (p.11).

Adult literacy rates are mentioned as being one of the socio-economic indicators of poverty. They are also mentioned as being an element allowing for the compilation of the human development index (HDI). More broadly speaking, literacy rates are mentioned to be among the indicators of human development (e.g. Congo DR, Honduras, Kenya, Nepal, to mention but a few).

Some countries (e.g. Burundi, Chad, Mauritania, Lao PDR) present the curbing of their population’s illiteracy as in overall development goal. The following two examples provide further examples of that:

“The Royal Government of Cambodia’s vision of Cambodia is a socially connected, educationally advanced, and culturally vibrant society. This requires dealing with the problems of poverty, illiteracy, and health.” (Cambodia, p. ii.)

“It [the Poverty eradication action plan] also views ignorance as a particularly constraining feature of the lives of poor people, and is concerned to improve literacy and educational achievement among the population at large.” (Uganda, p.8)

Literacy is also directly correlated with countries’ human resources, human development, or human capital, depending on the terminology used. This accounts

for the predominant references to literacy rates (both youths' and adults') being made under the Human development pillar (HD) i.e. the one describing the actions to be undertaken in the areas of health, education, and gender issues – when gender is not isolated as a cross-cutting theme. These references to literacy relate to the diagnosis of the sector and to the proposals made to improve the access of the poor to social services. For instance, the literacy gap between men and women is acknowledged (diagnosis) but remedial measures are also proposed to correct the gap (e.g. Women's learning centres in Mali, increased scholarships for girls in Nepal, functional literacy programmes for girls and women in Zambia). Bolivia and Nicaragua both diagnose that poverty and lack of education adversely impact the abilities to prepare adequate meals, hence the correcting measure of developing literacy programmes with nutrition components.

However, the bulk of references to literacy under the HD pillar comes under the section on education (38 as per the table above), education being considered as the principal means to develop human capacities. The following few quotes provide an idea of how literacy appears as a goal of the education policies:

"The Government's goals for education are to reduce illiteracy rates, reduce drop-out and repetition rates, especially at the primary level, increase secondary school enrolment, and improve the quality and relevance of education for all Guyanese, especially children." (Guyana, p. 36)

Lao's Poverty focused education development plan foresees the *"eradication of illiteracy, thus providing for poor people with a means of helping to improve their quality of life. "* (p. 68)

"Guided by the objective of EFA, the Education sector in the Tenth plan aims at improving the access to and quality of primary education. The plan has among others, the objective of expanding literacy programs to improve the livelihoods of deprived groups, especially girls, dalits³, and disadvantaged children." (Nepal, p.53)

The education sections of the PRSps tackle both youth literacy (mostly related to achieving UPE) and adult literacy.

But adult literacy is also often treated in other HD developments of the PRSps (such as gender, health and nutrition) or in relation to supporting growth and productive sectors (agriculture and employment being the most frequent). On a scarcer basis, countries associated literacy with governance, civic awareness, and participation (Honduras, Lao PDR for instance). Some also relate environment, management of resources and literacy (Lao PDR, Malawi).

The multiple occurrences of adult literacy is due to the inherent cross-cutting aspect of literacy. When mentions are found elsewhere than in the education section, literacy can more often than not be tagged as functional literacy. It aims chiefly at ensuring that literate people will be provided with the possibility of bettering their livelihood through e.g. better productivity and employability (e.g. Djibouti, Kenya).

³ Formerly known as the Untouchables

The Characteristics of the illiterate population

The statistics given provide a certain vision of the population: by gender, by socio-economic profile, by geographical area, by ethnic groups, etc. Disaggregating the data allow policy-makers to have a finer vision of the situation and to propose targeted actionable measures. An interesting case in that respect is Nepal's PRSp that has come up with literacy breakdowns of its population according to ecology zones (mountain, hill, terai⁴); urban/rural/national; and development regions (eastern, western, midwest, far-west). Literacy rates are also disaggregated by castes and ethnicity and a by gender – which allows for an image of the gender gap. Examples of other sophisticated breakdowns can be drawn from the PRSps of Cameroon, Cap Verde, Lao PRD, Mozambique, etc. They serve the purpose of poverty profile and diagnosis. It is to be noted that this level of sophistication is not taken on board the monitoring section of the PRSps.

Literacy as a significant development challenge for particular groups (gender, severely disadvantaged groups etc.)?

In view of the importance given to gender as an established cross-cutting issue, PRSps often provide a comparison of literacy rates disaggregated by gender. In the poverty diagnoses, it is recurrently stressed that women are among the most vulnerable as regards poverty. Just as literacy rates are established as one of the indicators of human poverty, they serve the purpose of measuring countries' gender gaps. Virtually all PRSps identify literacy as a factor impeding women's empowerment:

“Women in Burkina Faso are less literate than men (12.9%) than men (24.8%). And whatever their social status, there is discrimination to women's disadvantage. This discrimination is in fact quite pronounced at the level of the first quintile.” (Burkina Faso, p. 20 sq).

“Illiteracy is still an obstacle to the women's socio-economic advancement” (Mali, p. 28)

Literacy is also often mentioned with regards to other vulnerable groups. The incidence of poverty on persons pertaining to a minority group for instance is also approached. Bolivia correlates urban poverty, indigenous households and the level of education (p.37). Bosnia establishes a similar link with regards to its Roma population which is declared as having nearly 100% unemployment, 23% illiteracy and about 33% school attendance (from a survey conducted in Sarajevo on a sample of 582 children, p. 23). The same applies to minorities in Burundi (p.59). “In the education sector, gender gaps in literacy and school enrolment and completion rates, particularly among ethnic minority groups, must be reduce.” (Lao PDR, p.114).

Overall, all these mentions give a recurrent image of the main target groups for literacy action, whatever the mean chosen by countries to improve the literacy situation of their population: women, rural people, out of school children, drop-outs, adult youths, and ethnic or religious minorities.

⁴ Terai: swampy grass jungle generally between the Himalayan foothills and the plains of India.

Literacy strategies in PRSPs

The following preliminary remarks can be made. Generally speaking, PRSPs tend not to provide detailed and complete strategies to curb illiteracy, though illiteracy is a broad concern and a broad area for action. By complete strategy we mean the conception of the steps to implement the strategy devised, but also the means to ensure their sustainability with detailed costing and support monitoring measures.

PRSPs illustrate several strategies to increase literacy :

- schooling : literacy as an integral part of basic education
- non formal education for out-of-school youth and young adults
- adult education and training
- literacy campaign
- post literacy programmes

Most countries combine several approaches. But few have a comprehensive approach which ranges from enrolment of school-age children to remedial action focused on drop-outs, and out-of school youth, and to adults who never had the opportunity to receive some form of education and training. Even fewer countries propose literacy from the viewpoint of lifelong learning process.

Some countries refer to residual illiteracy, when enrolment rates and literacy rates are high . The consultation process in Nicaragua explicitly requested that attention be paid to residual illiteracy through adult education (p. 88). For most countries from the Europe and Central Asia region declaring a 98%-99% literacy rate, illiteracy is no longer an issue. The hypothesis that can be laid is that residual illiteracy rests with the older chunk of the population, i.e. the non-productive portion, or with some marginal groups: the definition of literacy goes beyond simply being able to read and write to being functionally literate in a somewhat more advanced and literate environment .

The following selected strategies provide an insight as to how literacy related actions have been planned :

- **Mauritania:** The PRSP acknowledges the fact that literacy campaigns have been hampered by the size of the country and the nomadic trait of part of the population. The long term objective is to eradicate illiteracy and contribute to the advent of a country of well-read citizens. In the medium term, the goal is to rein in the illiteracy rate to 20% by 2004. To that end, the four pillars of the literacy strategy will be: (i) strengthening the financial and logistical resource base; (ii) boosting the skills of the literacy campaign staffs and the literacy programmes; (iii) improving programmes and curricula; (iv) achieving greater participation of the mahadra⁵ in the literacy effort through extension, training, and logistical support. The strategy foresees the extensive involvement of Civil society organizations in the design, execution and monitoring of literacy programmes.” It foresees, among other actions: building and equipment of 10 functional literacy centres and equipping of 10.000 literacy classrooms p/a; establishing an incentive fund for literacy promoters.

⁵ Coranic schools

- **Lao's** education strategy is to achieve EFA by 2015. Among the stated objectives to that end are (i) the reduction of illiteracy specially among adult women and disadvantaged target groups; (ii) the conduction of community-based literacy campaigns, focusing more particularly on women and on the 47 poorest provinces. To this end Lao plans on using formal and non-formal teachers to conduct literacy classes. It will implement literacy training for women, including skills training and will establish and improve Community learning centres (Community learning centres) in sustainable locations.
- **Malawi** has two literacy related objectives. Under the first one, *Improving the quality and the relevance of primary education*, the strategy consists of developing a relevant curriculum with emphasis on literacy, numeracy and skills. It is foreseen that the said curriculum should be revised every ten years. The second objective, *Improve and increase adult literacy and numeracy*, has three strategic components: (i) increase access to adult literacy classes, (ii) promote equitable participation of women in adult literacy classes; and (iii) deliver effective literacy classes. To that end, the Ministry of Gender, youth and Community services will provide adequate learning material and honoraria for trainers. It will also review the adult literacy policy; will undertake social mobilization campaigns; revise adult literacy curriculum; recruit and train additional instructors; strengthen the monitoring of adult literacy; print and distribute adequate adult literacy manuals; open more rural instruction centres (RIC) in existing buildings in communities.
- **Nepal** foresees the delivery of literacy programmes with focus on livelihood improvement. Therefore the strategy aims at integrating literacy programmes with Community-based organizations-based income generated activities that are facilitated by local bodies. Nepal aims at expanding the ongoing literacy campaigns by increasing the enrolment of Community-based organizations, Non-governmental organizations, and local bodies. Additionally, Community learning centres are to be expanded also.

These few examples indicate that literacy strategies essentially fall into two main categories: increased formal schooling and non formal education. Few countries organize campaigns.

Increasing youth literacy through formal schooling and non formal education

Literacy strategies targeting children and youths resort primarily to formal schooling, favouring the completion of UPE as per the international education agenda defined in the MDGs and in the Dakar framework of Action (e.g. Bolivia, Burkina, Guyana, Tanzania, Zambia). Literacy in this context converges with issues related to quality, access, equity, and relevance, again in accordance with the Dakar goals.

Access is here defined in terms of:

- availability of physical facilities (sheer existence of schools or sufficient numbers of classrooms, correlated with the adequate number of teachers, and possibly, of ethnic teachers); and
- the financial accessibility and the possibility that parents have to send their children to school. The accompanying component can be direct financial

incentives in the form of complete or partial abolition of school fees (e.g. Burkina Faso for its 20 poorest provinces and for girls, Lesotho, Tanzania, among others), retribution of families sending their children to school, or of indirect financial incentives such as free school meals (e.g. Kenya, Mali, Mozambique), the provision of free textbooks (e.g. Burkina Faso, Viet Nam), and of free uniforms (e.g. Mongolia, Viet Nam)

Increasing enrolment to achieve UPE is a recurrent strategy of the PRSps. In some cases (e.g. Tanzania, Viet Nam) it is even the only strategy proposed to improve literacy rates that stands out clearly from reading the PRSp.

Some countries however stress the adverse effect of an increased enrolment that cannot be properly absorbed because of lack of capacity. The immediate victim is reported as being quality. In this context, the literacy rate becomes an indicator of the quality of the education system. For those countries about to achieve UPE, some indication is given for the expansion of secondary education.

Furthermore, quality is a recurrent pursuit of educational policies reported on the PRSps analysed. It is mostly tackled from the angle of curriculum reform with the aim of making education more relevant. The aim is to provide a curriculum that is functional and adaptable to the needs of the target population (e.g. Djibouti, Mali, Viet Nam). Quality is also pursued through better recruited, trained and deployed teachers (e.g. Benin, Burundi, Kenya).

Relevance will act as an incentive to send otherwise productive labour to school. It is also pursued either through reform of contents or through the strengthening of technical and vocational schooling. Some countries also seek relevance through the use of national language; this makes the enrolment of children speaking a language different from the official one more straightforward.

Countries acknowledge that not all youth can be enrolled, be retained, or can re-enter the formal system. Actionable measures are devised to capture this portion of youth, mainly through non-formal education (Burkina Faso, Madagascar, Mozambique) and literacy programmes (e.g. Cambodia, Ghana, Honduras). An occasional reference to informal education enabling countries to reach for these target groups is found in such PRSps as Cameroon's, Guinea's, Honduras', or Nepal's. Resorting to distance learning is even less frequent (Ghana, Zambia). It should be pointed out here, that contrary to the case of formal schooling, the measures here are vaguer which makes it more difficult to apprehend precisely what is envisaged.

Non formal education for the young adults and the workforce

Strategies here resort to NFE, literacy programmes and literacy classes, functional or otherwise and to campaigns. In keeping with the cross-cutting dimension of literacy, the needs of this section of the population are not catered for in the education section of the PRSps only. Mentions are also found under other HD headings such as health or gender, and even under other pillars of the PRSps.

Several of these programmes are targeted to reach special groups.

The poverty diagnosis on which these documents open allow for planners and decision-makers to devise measures that are reported to be targeted at the vulnerable group. These range from rural, to those living in disadvantaged zones, to women of course.

It should be however emphasized again that all the reported measures are not clearly defined. PRSps announce the expansion of adult training programmes or the implementation of literacy campaigns without any further information being provided. The most recurrent target groups are : women, rural people, and people pertaining to a minority group.

Possibly the most concrete literacy actions for adults are those relating to functional literacy for women (which imply nutrition components, family planning, sensitisation to health issues such as HIV/AIDS or other STDs, but also business literacy in order to facilitate the access of women to micro-credit).

As previously for literacy targeted at children and the youths, a recurrent reference to quality and relevance can be found. Here too participation is linked to a sense of relevance. “The participation of out-of-school youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training (for example literacy training or livelihood training) is also dependent on perceptions of relevance and utility.” (Lao PRD, p. 74).

To implement their literacy strategies some countries mention the training/increasing of trainers. These countries however are a minority – 10% of the PRSps examined: Benin, Djibouti, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritania)

Campaigns

A third type of strategy relates to the launching of literacy campaigns. Twelve countries announce that they will be implementing such action.

Countries who adopt the campaign approach share the common feature of low levels of literacy. These are countries, such as Chad for instance, who declare an 80% rate illiteracy and who correlate this rate with an impossibility to move the country forward:

The modest economic growth also reflects the weakness of Chad's human resources, whose productivity is limited by the fact that over 80% of the population is illiterate and only a small percentage of people over 15 years of age has received an education. This creates a barrier to assimilation of new technologies that could improve working conditions and thereby improve the standard of living of the people. It also partly explains why ancestral methods continue to be used in the primary sector. A vast literacy campaign is therefore urgently needed to raise the general level of the population and induce changes in behaviour and mentality , and also to ease the constraint imposed by the very high percentage of illiteracy.”
p. 41

In view of campaigns being, possibly, the fastest way of curbing illiteracy, these countries should demonstrate improvements in the coming few years.

Post- literacy programmes

Only four PRSps refer to post-literacy programmes in order to ascertain literacy gains (Benin , Djibouti, Nepal, Sao Tome).

The table below summarizes the different approaches adopted by the countries, as appears in the PRSps examined:

Table 4: Approaches adopted

Country	NFE	Informal	Campaigns	Post literacy prog.s
Albania				
Armenia				
Azerbaijan				
Benin	√		√	√
Bhutan	√			
Bolivia	√		√ w/ nutrition component for women	
Bosnia				
Burkina Faso	√		√ for shepherds and herders	
Burundi			√ for the Batwa	
Cambodia	√			
Cameroon		√ women/girls		
Cap Verde	√	√ (foreseen)		
CAR			√ to be devpd	
Chad	√		√ to be devpd	
Congo, DR			√	
Congo, Rep.	√			
Côte d'Ivoire	√			
Djibouti	√	√	√ for women	√
Dominica	√			
Ethiopia	√			
Gambia	√			
Georgia				
Ghana	√ women /youth			
Guinea	√ producers /rural devpt /unschooled /drop outs	√ girls/adults in most disadvantaged areas NAFA (second chance school)		
Guinea-Bissau				
Guyana	√ drop outs			
Honduras	√ oriented to productive technical training	√ interactive radio		

Table 4: Approaches adopted

Country	NFE	Informal	Campaigns	Post literacy prog.s
Indonesia				
Kenya				
Kyrgyz Rep.				
Lao PRD	√	√	√	
Lesotho				
Macedonia	√ To be introd.			
Madagascar	√			
Malawi	√			
Mali	√			
Mauritania	√	√	√	
Moldova				
Mongolia				
Mozambique	√			
Nepal	√	√ for out of school (age group 6-14)	√	√
Nicaragua	√ (nutrition component)			
Niger	√			
Rwanda	√ (fertility compont for women)			
Pakistan	√			
Sao Tome	√	√	√	√
Sierra Leone	√			
Sri Lanka	√ (drop outs)			
Senegal	√			
Serbia	√ (Roma)			
Tajikistan				
Tanzania				
Uganda	√			
Viet Nam				
Yemen				
Zambia	√ for out of school children and illit. adults functional literacy prg for women and girls			
	NFE	Informal	Campaigns	Post literacy prog.
Total	36	8	12	4

From policy to action : Implementing the strategies

- Partnerships: the principal implementing agent remains the ministry of education. In some instances (such as Ethiopia), other line ministries have the responsibility for specific functional literacy programmes (ministries dealing with women affairs, agriculture...). A few countries refer to a decentralisation of the responsibility to local authorities. It is interesting in this respect to note that a non-negligible number of countries explicitly refer to partnerships with non-governmental organisation, community-based organisations, churches, even the private sector (14 countries in all). Among these countries, Non-governmental organizations or Civil society organizations are often seen as financial partners who would be shouldering the cost of the literacy programme they would implement. Details however are not made available as to the arrangement referred to.
- Financial aspect: too little PRSps make accurate reference to the amounts foreseen to be spent on literacy programmes and measures. Eighteen documents examined mention to some extent a costing exercise. Only 12 actually provide figures. Possibly, the most detailed PRSp in that area is Mozambique's. The following table illustrates the argument:

Table 5. Financing PRSps

Monies explicitly allocated to literacy action in the gvt budget	Project approach to literacy (external finance)	No mention of finance
Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Djibouti (funds available for girls' literacy), Ghana, Guinea (for growth sector and rural development) Honduras, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, Nicaragua, Rwanda, Uganda	Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guyana, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nepal, Nicaragua, Rwanda, Pakistan, Yemen	All others
Total: 12	Total: 14	Total: 38

- Monitoring aspect: Where the monitoring of literacy is concerned, countries state provision for either overall rates or rates disaggregated by gender, but not all. To be noted also that barely a third of the countries whose PRSp documents have been examined actually target their literacy rates (count made disregarding the type of rate targeted). And when targets are provided, the reader has no indication as to the hypothesis that allowed for such estimations to be provided.
- The problematic issue of data collection methods exceeds the scope of this paper. However, a number of countries underline the lack or the insufficient quality of the data collected for a proper monitoring of their PRSps (e.g. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Djibouti, Guinea-Bissau) – which can at times cast some doubts on the purported targets given in the PRSps.
- Legal framework/implementation documents: Passing legislation is a useful instrument of policy implementation. Few countries have explicit reference

to the passing of legislation. Examples of explicit references in this area of implementation are found for Benin (the document acknowledges the need for institutional reform to better implement the PNEAPA), Djibouti (setting up a national literacy strategy with the technical ministries), Malawi (revision of an adult literacy strategy), Pakistan (guidelines under UNLD), Serbia (preparing a literacy strategy document); and Zambia, which plans on passing of a legislation to compel parents and guardians to send children to school.

Concluding remarks

With the exception of some countries, detailed action to curb illiteracy are not sufficiently developed. Financing is hardly ever established and monitoring is unsure, either because countries' themselves underline the lack/poor quality of the data (e.g. Guinea-Bissau) or because there simply are no targets. This would tend to be in line with conclusions from other PRSP reviews.

Perhaps one of the most important implied conditions for success of literacy programmes is a feeling of relevance which a number of PRSPs mention in respect both to youth and adult literacy. Participation of the targeted population will be secured provided they see the utility for the short- to medium-term improvement of their conditions of living and their ability to generate supplementary income through employment or better remunerated work.

In certain PRSPs there is clear indication of the government's commitment to achieving improved literacy, through adequate strategies and identified financial solutions. (e.g. Burkina Faso, Mozambique) The simultaneous occurrence of these two factors is not widespread, which leads to a possible doubt as regards the sustainability of the measures described.

Annex 1: List of PRSPs and I-PRSPs examined

Country	Type of document	Board Presentation
Albania	PRSP	20-Jun-02
Armenia	PRSP	20-nov-03
Azerbaijan	PRSP	27-May-03
Benin	PRSP	20-mars-03
Bhutan	PRSP	8-Feb-05
Bolivia	PRSP	5-Jun-01
Bosnia-Herzegovina	PRSP	15-Jun-04
Burkina Faso	PRSP	30-Jun-00
Burundi	I-PRSP	
Cambodia	PRSP	20-Feb-03
Cameroon	PRSP	31-Jul-03
Cape Verde	PRSP	25-janv-05
CAR	I-PRSP	
Chad	PRSP	13-nov-03
Congo, DR	I-PRSP	
Congo, Republic	I-PRSP	
Cote D'Ivoire	I-PRSP	
Djibouti	PRSP	8-Jun-04
Dominica	I-PRSP	
Ethiopia	PRSP	17-sept-02
Gambia	PRSP	16-Jul-02
Georgia	PRSP	6-nov-03
Ghana	PRSP	8-May-03
Guinea	PRSP	25-Jul-02
Guinea Bissau	I-PRSP	
Guyana	PRSP	19-sept-02
Honduras	PRSP	11-oct-01
Indonesia	I-PRSP	
Kenya	PRSP	6-May-04
Kyrgyz Republic	PRSP	27-Feb-03
Lao	PRSP	30-nov-04
Lesotho	I-PRSP	
Macedonia,	I-PRSP	
Madagascar	PRSP	18-nov-03

Malawi	PRSP	29-Aug-02
Mali	PRSP	6-mars-03
Mauritania	PRSP	6-Feb-01
Moldova	PRSP	11-nov-04
Mongolia	PRSP	9-sept-03
Mozambique	PRSP	25-sept-01
Nepal	PRSP	18-nov-03
Nicaragua	PRSP	25-sept-01
Niger	PRSP	7-Feb-02
Pakistan	PRSP	11-mars-04
Rwanda	PRSP	8-Aug-02
Sao Tome &	PRSP	25-Apr-05
Senegal	PRSP	23-Dec-02
Serbia & Montenegro	PRSP	16-mars-04
Sierra Leone	I-PRSP	25-sept-01
Sri Lanka	PRSP	1-Apr-03
Tajikistan	PRSP	5-Dec-02
Tanzania	PRSP	30-nov-00
Uganda	PRSP	2-May-00
Vietnam	PRSP	2-Jul-02
Yemen	PRSP	1-Aug-02
Zambia	PRSP	23-May-02

Source: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPRS1/Resources/boardlist.pdf>