



2006/ED/EFA/MRT/PI/66
Original: Portuguese

Background paper prepared for the
Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2006
Literacy for Life

Literacy in Mozambique: education for all challenges

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2005

This paper was commissioned by the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* as background information to assist in drafting the 2006 report. It has not been edited by the team. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and should not be attributed to the *EFA Global Monitoring Report* or to UNESCO. The papers can be cited with the following reference: "Paper commissioned for the *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006, Literacy for Life*". For further information, please contact efareport@unesco.org

Literacy in Mozambique: Education for All Challenges

Requested by "EFA Global Monitoring 2006", UNESCO, Paris

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Introduction

Mozambique, with almost 17.5 million inhabitants living in an area of approximately 801,590 km², has the highest population of the former Portuguese African colonies. Its economy is based on agriculture. More than 70% of the population live in rural areas and work mainly in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Half of the population is aged between 6 and 24 and women are in the majority. Almost 80% of public investment is earmarked for the social sector (education, health and water supply), and for agriculture, transport and rural infrastructure.

Since 1987, the Mozambican Government has been implementing a structural adjustment and macro-economic stabilization programme aimed at stimulating economic growth and alleviating poverty in the country. The outcome of these policies has been a reduction in absolute poverty from about 69.4% in 1997 to 54.1% in 2003. Despite this improvement, poverty rates are still rather high, with notable differences between urban and rural areas. Indeed, while poverty stood at about 55.3% in rural areas, the figure for urban areas was around 51.5%. As shall be seen later, these levels of poverty are linked, *inter alia*, to population and education patterns.

An educated population is essential to national development. Education, combined with sound macro-economic policies, is considered a key factor in promoting social well-being and in poverty reduction because it can have a positive impact on national productivity and, hence, shape life styles and the ability of nations to compete in the global economy. Nowadays, it is an internationally held belief that education is one of the pillars of national development and that global poverty will not decline unless everyone everywhere can enjoy the benefits of quality basic education.

Mozambique, consistent with this premise, has ratified various international instruments, pledging its best efforts to make education a top priority. These instruments include are the Jomtien Declaration, CONFINTEA, the World Declaration on Education for All (Dakar) and the World Declaration on Population and Development. Following those commitments, all of which contain an adult education component among their goals, and the implementation of the government's first five-year plan in a time of peace, stability and national reconciliation, there has been a national renewal of adult education, in both formal and non-formal settings. This revival should lead to greater investment in adult literacy and, *inter alia*, should raise the sector's profile.

The History of Literacy in Mozambique

Mário (2002) identified three phases in the provision of adult literacy and education programmes in Mozambique. The first began in 1975, after the proclamation of national independence, and continued until the mid 1980s. Its hallmark was recognition of adult education as one of the pillars of the National Education System. As Mario has written:

This phase was marked by a dynamic and multifaceted process in which the people were mobilized in national reconstruction tasks, forging national unity and affirming their Mozambican identity. Accordingly:

- *a number of nationwide adult literacy and education campaigns were conducted;*

- *a series of planned and agreed adult education and training schemes involving particular enterprises, communities and social sectors considered "strategic" for the social and economic development of the country were launched.*

As a result of this concerted effort, within five years, adult illiteracy rates fell by almost 25%, from 97% in 1974 to almost 72% in 1982¹

The second phase began in the mid 1980s and continued until 1995. It was marked by a substantial reduction in adult literacy and education activities owing to the escalation in the destabilization war waged by the South African "apartheid" regime. In addition to the destruction of infrastructure and the loss of human life, the war was directly responsible for the influx of millions of Mozambican refugees into neighbouring countries and the internal displacement of millions more throughout the country. Adult literacy and education efforts were then confined to large cities. The only exceptions were those taken by non-government or religious institutions or private individuals who continued on a small scale and, in any cases, did innovative work such as holding literacy classes in local languages. This phase ended with the disbanding of the National Adult Education Department (Direcção Nacional de Educação de Adultos-DNEA), whose activities were taken over by the National Basic Education Department (Direcção Nacional do Ensino Básico).

The third and last phase began in 1995 and is still in progress. It can be described as a process of rediscovery and rescue of adult literacy and education *"in a context of peace and social stability in the country and as a necessary instrument in sustainable economic and social development centred on men and women"*.²

Literacy and Education for All policies in Mozambique

Literacy and basic education are governed by various legal instruments and development policies. The most outstanding instruments are the Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique which stipulates that every citizen has a right to education (Article 88) and that education constitutes a means of achieving national unity, eradicating illiteracy, mastering science and technology, and providing citizens with moral and civil values (Article 113); the government's 2000-2004 programme, which provided for a wide-ranging and realistic relaunch of literacy and aimed to cut rates by 10%; Law No. 6/92, which modernized the National Education System (SNE) bringing it into line with the new economic and political model enshrined in the 1990 Constitution; the 2001-2005 Action Plan for the Reduction of Absolute Poverty - PARPA, which defined literacy and adult education as primary goals in the education programme; the National Strategy for Adult Literacy and Education and for Non-Formal Education (AEA/ENF), designed mainly to eradicate illiteracy in the country; and the new Government Programme (2005-2009) reaffirming the 10% poverty reduction goal. All these standard-setting and political documents reflect the combined will of the government and society to ensure that literacy plays an ever-increasing role in poverty reduction and in the development of the country. This is very much in keeping with the international commitments undertaken in the Jomtien, Dakar and other Declarations.

These latter documents define literacy as learning reading, writing and numeracy in a way that allows them to be used effectively in learning to learn and in meeting basic needs.³ The idea of *learning to learn* as part of this concept of literacy is a key element of the Education for All commitment and is itself one of the Dakar goals.⁴ It is internationally recognized that this concept is of itself instrumental in achieving all the other goals set in the Education for All programme and it is also part of the Adult Literacy and Education Strategy and the Literacy Curricula Plan adopted by the Ministry of Education of Mozambique in 2000 and 2003 respectively. The Plan states that:

*Literacy is regarded, on the one hand, as the acquisition of the basic notions of reading, writing and numeracy and, on the other hand, as a process that stimulates participation in social, political and economic activities and lays the foundation for **continuing education**. The concept also reflects a form of functional literacy that is an integral part of local development.*⁵

¹ Mário (2002) p. 129-130.

² Mário (2002) p.130.

³ ICAE (2003) p. 29-31.

⁴ Goal 4,EFA, Dakar: Achieving a 50% improvement in adult literacy levels of by 2005, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

⁵ MINED (2003a) p.57.

The concept of continuing education contained in this definition calls to mind the life long learning approach, a prerequisite for human development and for taking up the future challenges of a globalized economy and meeting the individual and collective demands of a constantly changing labour market. That approach is addressed in the draft Strategic Education Plan (Plano Estrategico da Educaçao),⁶ which suggests direct links between cutting illiteracy rates, sustainable development and poverty reduction. Everyone agrees that poverty is not just a matter of education. However, education must be the preferred instrument in effecting both political and economic restructuring. As Bhola writes,

*Given the current context and conditions prevailing in developing and developed countries, adult educators seem to offer the best hope to the world's poor.*⁷

As literacy is central to learning, it emerges as a vital component of Education for All (EFA). Consequently, in 1999, the Mozambique Education for All Movement (Movimento de Educaçao para Todos de Moçambique, MEPT) was established. It has more than 70 members, including non-government organizations, religious institutions and trade unions. MEPT's main goal is to afford civil society opportunities to take an active part in education in the country. Since 2001, MEPT has also been a founding member and convener of SANEFA (the Southern Africa ANCEFA - African Networks Campaigns for EFA), which promotes the goals of Education for All through country partnerships in the region.

The Strategic Plan of the Mozambique Education for All Movement (MEPT) highlights the role of literacy as a key to development, particularly as regards the following points:

- *MEPT's vision: MEPT intends to be part of the ongoing construction of a country in which children, young people and adults have access to quality basic education, without any form of discrimination.*⁸
- *Specific goal 8.2: encouraging members to take specific action to ensure that more and more women and girls are enrolled in formal and non-formal education, literacy and adult education.*⁹

Despite this, the MEPT Strategic Plan does not indicate clearly what is to be done about adult illiteracy. Mozambique is not the only country facing this problem. Various studies show that literacy has been pushed into second place in Education for All programmes, mainly since the introduction of the Fast Track Initiative,¹⁰ whose activities are centred on gender equality and the completion of primary education and thus constantly exclude young and adult illiterates. In Mozambique, this initiative aims to raise primary education completion rates, reduce school building costs, support HIV/ AIDS orphans, recruit teachers, promote dialogue between donors and the government, and build planning and execution capacities and multisectoral linkages. Consequently, although adult literacy and education are among the goals mentioned above, MEPT has done little or nothing about them in terms of specific action.

The participants in the United Nations Millennium Conference adopted to the "Millennium Declaration", subsequently ratified by Mozambique, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Although literacy impinges on the goals in that it is instrumental in reducing poverty, it is not one of the goals. In Mozambique, the MDG Action Plan does not make any reference whatsoever to literacy; it merely provides for universal primary education.¹¹

The exclusion of adult literacy from the Millennium Goals may be explained in several ways. On the one hand, as Torres (2003) suggests, literacy programmes serve a poor, politically underrepresented constituency; literacy programmes rank lowest in educational prestige, as they do not generally carry high academic credentials; the connection between literacy and jobs is always hard to pin down. This is compounded by the difficulty experienced by literacy workers in making the importance of literacy clear to political planners and managers, often because they have little understanding of international and global politics.

⁶ MINED (2005)

⁷ Bhola, Harbans(2004) authors' translation.

⁸ MEPT (2003) p.17.

⁹ MEPT (2003) p.21

¹⁰ Torres, C.A. (2003).

¹¹ World Bank (2003).

However, despite the many constraints and the multifarious problems encountered in the area of literacy, some steps have been taken and the government's political will has increased, as can be seen from the 2005-2009 Strategic Plan, which provides for a 40% reduction in illiteracy rates, with special emphasis on women.

One of the reasons for this sustained political will lies in the renewed commitments undertaken in conjunction with the launch, in 2003, of the United Nations Literacy Decade. This new breath of life could be the starting point for the sustainable revitalization of the sector and for achieving the goals set in both national and international policies.

State of Play of Literacy in Mozambique

Nearly 18% of the world's population is illiterate; of these approximately 64% are women. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the percentage of illiterates is about 38%, 61% of whom are women. The world illiteracy rate among young people (15-24 years old) is 12%; 23% of the people in the Sub-Saharan region, 59% of whom are women, can neither read nor write.¹²

Mozambique has rates higher than the average for the Sub-Saharan region. According to data recently published by the National Institute of Statistics (Instituto Nacional de Estadística),¹³ the average rate of illiteracy among adults nationwide is about 53.6%; it is higher in rural areas (65.7%) than in urban districts (30.3%) and more marked among women (68%) than men (37.7%). In a country as large and diverse as Mozambique, regional variations are to be expected; for instance rates range from 15.1% in Maputo Province (in the south of the country) to 68.4% in Cabo Delgado Province (in the north). The figures for young people are alarming, with rates of up to 37.9% in the 15 to 19 years age cohort (48% among young women) and 50.7% in the 20 to 29 years age cohort (61% among young women).

These rates, as illustrated in Table 1, are monitored on an annual basis, by means of indicators recommended by the Conference on Population and Development and the efforts made by the government to reduce illiteracy in the country can be measured on the basis of this data.

Table 1: Educational indicators on progress towards the quantitative and qualitative goals set at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).

Year	Educational Indicators							
	Entrants at primary level (%)		% in the final year of primary level		Entrants at secondary level (%)		% illiterate (> 15 years)	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1996	69	52	-	-	9	6	55	79
1997	69	52	-	-	9	6	42	77
1998	69	52	-	-	9	6	42	77
1999	70	50	52	39	9	6	46	77
2000	70	50	52	39	9	5	41	73
2001	70	50	52	39	9	5	39	70
2002	83	60	43	29	11	7	38	69
2003	104	79	62	54	14	9	40	71
2004	110	87	56	47	16	10	38	69

Source: The State of World Population, Monitoring ICPD Goals. 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004

Despite the progress achieved in reducing illiteracy rates, the comparison **between** men and women (24 percentage points in 1996 compared with 31 in 2004) shows a widening gap between men and women.

There may be several reasons for this. On the one hand, the numbers may mean that efforts to enrol and retain illiterate women in existing programmes are failing.

¹² UNESCO (2004).

¹³ INE (2004) p.66.

On the other hand, the figures may imply that, despite gender equity initiatives in the education sector, more and more girls either do not enrol or drop out of school, swelling ranks of illiterate women over the years.

When the available data are compared with those of the region, they point to similar imbalances in terms of the literacy opportunities offered men and women in Africa.¹⁴

There is another factor, in addition unequal opportunities, which may discourage women from taking part in adult literacy and education programmes, namely the type of programme on offer. This is a source of concern, since, according to Lind (2004), women seem to be more interested in programmes designed to improve their lives and the well-being of their families. PARPA¹⁵ promotes adult literacy and education as key components of poverty reduction in the country and links successful action to programmes that specifically target women and rural areas.

Government initiatives to redress disparities in terms of access and retention have fallen far short of achieving gender parity. The rates of access and, even more markedly, of retention of women and girls in literacy programmes remain relatively low. The available data¹⁶ show, for instance, that, in 2002, 60% of entrants at the first and second levels were girls, while at the third level, the intake fell to 48% and the drop out rate was approximately 40%.

Literacy programmes are currently delivered by the government and national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The NGOs work in different places and have different working hours and are part of the broad non-formal education movement within society. The programmes developed by both groups have led to an increase in the number of participants and to the provision of more literacy units. Data from the Ministry of Education data show that 259,435 adults were enrolled in 2002 and at the end of the first level,¹⁷ the drop out rate was 36% while the pass rate was 76%. According to Ling & Kristensen,¹⁸ 406,309 adults were attending literacy programmes.

Furthermore, data compiled by Mário (2002) indicate that in 2001 there were 558 adult literacy and basic education units in the country. By 2004,¹⁹ the number had risen substantially and it was estimated that there were then a total of 5,000.

One of the factors contributing to the low enrolment and high drop-out rates in adult literacy and education programmes in Mozambique is the fact that most of the population is of Bantu extraction and does not have an adequate command of Portuguese, which is the country's official language and language of instruction. In 1997, only 40% of the Mozambican population could read and write Portuguese. Most of them were men living in urban areas.²⁰ In 1991, the Mozambican Government, concerned by this state of affairs, decided to introduce a Literacy Programme in Mozambican languages (Programa de Alfabetização em Línguas Moçambicanas) as part of the Women's Bilingual Education Project (Projecto de Educação Bilingue de Mulheres). Initially, two languages from the north of the country (*Emakhwa* and *Nyandja*), two from the central region (*Sena* and *Ndau*) and one from the south (*Changana*) were selected. Similarly, the Strategy of the Adult Literacy and Education Subsector (Estratégia do Subsector de Alfabetização e Educação de Adultos) 2001-2005²¹ required the teaching materials available mainly in the following languages: Portuguese, *Emakhuwa*, *Changana*, *Rhonga*, *Nyanja*, *Mwani*, *Sena*, *Ndau*, *Makonde* and *Yao* to be reviewed, updated and increased and materials to be produced in more Mozambican languages, namely *Lomwé*, *Nyungwe*, *Tewe*, *Bárue*, *Copi*, *Tonga*, *Tshwa* and *Chuwabo* and thus acknowledging the relevance of national languages in the various learning settings.

Although the Government of Mozambique has repeatedly stated its intention to increase funding for adult literacy and education programmes, the amounts budgeted have in fact, remained the same for five years.

¹⁴ Indabawa, S.; Oduaran, A; Afrik, T. & Walters, S. (2000).

¹⁵ PARPA (2001)

¹⁶ MINED (2003b).

¹⁷ Mozambican literacy programmes offer three year courses.

¹⁸ Lind, A & Kristensen, V. (2004).

¹⁹ MINED (2004).

²⁰ INE (2000).

²¹ MINED (2001)

For instance, recent data from the Ministry of Education and Culture²² show that 4.1% of the 2003 education budget had been earmarked for adult education. However, information provided by the National Adult Literacy and Education Department (Direção Nacional de Alfabetização e Educação de Adultos) reveals that a mere 1% actually went to the adult education subsector.

In sum, despite efforts by the government and civil society as reflected in the 1995 to 1999 and 2000 to 2004 five-year plans, in which priority was given to adult literacy and education, illiteracy rates remain high and well above the average for Sub-Saharan African countries. The formal education system is unable to cater for all children of school age; some 50% are excluded and thus contribute to the ever-increasing number of illiterates in the country.²³

Conclusion

There are many reasons why illiteracy rates in the country remain stubbornly high and they can be analysed in various ways. In our opinion, one of the causes is the lack of integration between government initiatives and schemes on the one hand and, on the other, MEPT, whose Strategic Plan has not yet been translated into tangible action in terms of adult literacy and education.

An analysis carried out by the Ministry of Education and Culture in the proposed 2005-2009 Strategic Plan²⁴ reviewed some successes and challenges in non-formal and adult education. The successes include the expansion of literacy units and the development of a strategy for adult literacy and education. The challenges include partnership and inadequate coordination,²⁵ the lack of relevance of the programmes, poor retention, particularly of women and girls, and inadequate supervision, monitoring and evaluation. The analysis points to other failings such as poorly qualified staff, lack of funding guarantees for implementing the programmes, incompetence on the part of INEA²⁶ in discharging its duties, especially as regards the implementation of payment regulations for literacy workers. This scheme underpins the contracting process and remuneration of literacy workers but, when it fails to operate properly, it can discourage both literacy workers and learners.

In our opinion, all the challenges and constraints referred to above can and must be addressed, not by formulating new policies, but by implementing the existing policies, which, for the most part, have never amounted to more than declarations of intent. It is paramount to remember that the direct consequence of excluding children from primary school is a rise in the illiterate adult population and that ever higher and sustained levels of adult illiteracy can do tremendous harm to the country's development.

To prevent this from happening, the government, international agencies and other stakeholders will have to improve the coordination of their activities. In this connection, MEPT's role in creating conditions for all children, young people and adults to gain access to quality basic education is crucial.

²² MEC (2005) and MINED (2005).

²³ UNDP (2001)

²⁴ MINED (2005)

²⁵ Mário (2002) points out that the Ministry of Education is responsible for coordinating activities. Nonetheless, other stakeholders are involved either in research or development (e.g. Eduardo Mondlane University (UEM), The Pedagogic University (Universidade Pedagógica-UP), National Institute for the Development of Education (Instituto Nacional de Desenvolvimento da Educação-INDE)), or in the delivery of civil society programmes through NGOs, religious institutions and grassroots community associations and also international agencies and NGOs, which are mostly involved in funding such projects or programmes.

²⁶ National Institute for Adult Education (Instituto Nacional de Educação de Adultos), whose main purpose is to train competent staff to provide adult education throughout the country.

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