



ED/UNP/UNLD/2008/PI/H/6

United Nations Literacy Decade

Research paper prepared for the UNESCO Regional Conferences in
Support of Global Literacy
(Doha, 12 - 14 March 2007)

Adult Literacy and Adult Education in the Arab States: Bahrain, Egypt, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen

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2007

This paper was commissioned by the United Nations Literacy Decade Unit for the Conference 'Literacy Challenges in the Arab States Region: Building Partnerships and Promoting Innovative Approaches', held in Doha on 12-14 March 2007. 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 UNESCO. The paper can be cited with the following reference: "Research paper commissioned within the United Nations Literacy Decade". For further information, please contact literacy@unesco.org

The purpose of this paper is to shed some light on the literacy situation in seven of the Arab States: The Kingdom of Bahrain, Egypt, The Sultanate of Oman, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. The number of youth and adults, 15 years and over, who are basically illiterate is estimated at 68 million, of which 63% are females. 70 percent of the 68 million illiterates are found in five countries in the Region: Egypt, Algeria, Sudan, Morocco and Yemen. A common feature which these five countries share, besides the high rate of illiteracy, is the fact that they all have to deal with high rates of population growth, poverty and a concentration of population in rural areas.

In January 2000, the Arab Ministers of Education met in Cairo to discuss the 'Framework for Action' to ensure basic learning needs in the Arab States in the years 2000 – 2010. They agreed that literacy and gender equality were a priority on their agenda for action. With respect to literacy the Framework for Action stated that, 'universalizing literacy among adolescents and decreasing illiteracy rates among adults by setting realistic, yet still ambitious targets which would lead to significant progress' (UNESCO, 2000), and this is one of the main objectives and targets for achieving the ultimate goal of education for all in the Arab States.

With respect to gender the 'Framework for Action' stated the following:

Although various studies have highlighted the importance of educating females as a positive investment factor, girls and women have not sufficiently benefited from the allocated resources. Where girls do complete primary education, there is often a large gender gap in the transition rate to secondary school. The gap between males and females becomes wider when literacy is concerned. (ibid.).

Challenges and Achievements in the region

The 'Framework for Action' underlines the fact that available studies on literacy work in the region suggest that the region has made...

[...] great strides and much progress over the past 20 years. National councils and commissions, and regional committees have been set up to draw up strategies and action plans, to oversee, supervise and coordinate implementation, and to monitor activities and evaluate results. Combating illiteracy is considered a national responsibility in every country which required the coordinated efforts of all sectors: governmental and non-governmental, public and private (UNESCO, 2003a).

The 'Framework for Action' stated that these efforts 'have contributed greatly to reducing the levels of illiteracy since 1990 in the region as a whole from 48.7% in 1990 to 38.5% in 2000. Among women aged 15 – 24 in 17 countries the illiteracy rates were down from 44.9% in 1980 to 29.9% in 1990 to 19.4% in 2000 (ibid.).

The Framework for Action was categorical about the importance of literacy for the region:

To say that literacy is the pressing issue on the adult education agenda for the Arab region would be an understatement. If we consider that the Arab region has entered the twenty-first century burdened with over 70 million illiterates out of a population of 280 million, and that there are approximately 10 million out-of-school children who will, in no time at all, swell the ranks of the illiterates in the Region, then we know we are talking about a catastrophe in the making. Literacy rates vary widely in the region from country to country (ibid.).

The education systems in the Arab region are not without deficiencies. The Framework for Action lists a number of those deficiencies which are particularly related to the decade 1990 – 2000. The poor quality of primary education, the theoretical inclusion in the curricula of skills for life have not received sufficient attention in practice, teachers of primary education are inadequately trained and some have no training at all, persistence of high rates of repetition and dropout, and poor management of the systems. Expenditure on primary education is, according to the Framework for Action, suffering from a number of problems, among which are: inadequacy of resources both human and financial, inadequacy of educational requirements and a weakness in budgeting technique.

Challenges and priorities of the Twenty-First Century

The Framework for Action enumerates a number of those challenges which included the effects of globalization on the employment market, the impact of the new technologies on society and on education, and demographic growth, in addition to various conflicts that bedevil the region.

The Framework for Action underlines two main priorities for all Arab States, the Improvement of the quality of education and the improvement of educational governance and good management.

As for the priority within the education sector itself, the Framework for Action has emphatically put the eradication of adult illiteracy at the top:

[...] the greatest problem for the Arab States is, in general, that of illiteracy. There are two reasons for this: the first relates to the number of illiterates in these countries (around 68 million or 38.5 percent of the population 15 years of age or older) and with the wide gender gap in literacy (parity index = 0.69). The second relates to the multiplier effect of literacy [...]. Therefore, the eradication of illiteracy is today (in the year 2000) a high priority in the Arab States for national, regional and international mobilization of resources to achieve EFA goals (ibid.).

In 2007, the meeting in Cairo was in preparation for Dakar Forum (2000). Seven years on, the situation in the Region has definitely improved. More children are enrolled in primary schools including girls, more youth and adults (males and females) have joined – and some successfully completed – literacy and post-literacy courses.

The UNDP Arab Human Development Report 2005 draws a not-so-encouraging picture of the situation in the region nearly six years after the Cairo meeting. It states:

Despite the spread of girls' education in Arab Countries in the last five decades, Arab women remain poorly prepared to participate effectively in public life by acquiring knowledge through education. The Arab region has one of the lowest rates of female education; i.e. one of the highest rates of illiteracy (one half of females are illiterate compared to only one-third of males), and of enrolment opportunities at the various levels of education, especially that of higher education ... (UNDP, 2005, pp. 73-74).

The Report acknowledges that the situation fluctuates from one country to another. While, for example, some countries like Syria, Tunisia and Bahrain report more than 95% enrolment for girls in primary schools, other countries such as Sudan and Yemen have less than 50% female enrolment rates.

According to the Report, 'the rate of illiteracy in the Arab World is higher than the world average, and higher even than the average for developing nations. Arab countries are entering the twenty-first century weighed down by the burden of about 60 million illiterate adults most of them impoverished or rural women' (UNDP, 2005, p. 80).

However, in the case of female education, the consolation is probably that the Report is confirming that girls when they are given a chance to learn are better learners.

The UNESCO 2006 Global Monitoring Report underlines the same realities that are mentioned in the UNDP Arab Human Development Report. Although it acknowledged that 'the regional literacy rate has increased by about thirteen percentage points since 1990, and most countries have made considerable progress, increasing their chances of achieving the EFA Adult Literacy target of reducing current levels of illiteracy by 50% by 2015 (with Bahrain, Jordan, and the Palestinian Autonomous Territories likely to do so),'² (UNESCO, 2006a, p. 1), the Report was clear in stating:

On average only about 63% of the total adult population in the Arab States can read and write with understanding – one of the lowest literacy rates in the world. The levels are below the regional average in Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco, the Sudan and Yemen ... evidence from direct assessments suggest that actual literacy levels may be much lower than reflected in data presented there (UNESCO, 2006a, p. 1).

On the issue of gender disparities the Report states:

Women still account for nearly two-thirds of the region's adult illiterates with only 69 literate women for every 100 literate men. Most countries show substantial gender disparities in literacy, with the gender parity (GPI) below the regional average in Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco and Yemen, all countries which are also among those with the lowest overall literacy rates (UNESCO, 2006a, p. 1).

Adult Literacy and Adult Education in the Kingdom of Bahrain

Organized activities in the field of literacy and adult education in Bahrain were started by the Bahraini Young Women's Association in the 1930s. The association managed to mobilize the whole nation in a campaign for combating illiteracy. The momentum was maintained by a number of non-governmental organizations and the private sector until 1973 when the Ministry of Education was charged with the responsibility for literacy and adult education within its overall mandate. The recent Education Act (2005) stated in Article 9 that, 'the eradication of illiteracy and the provision of adult education is a national responsibility whose objective is to raise the standards of the citizens culturally, socially, and professionally. The Ministry of Education is charged with the responsibility for formulating and implementing the plans that are necessary for the eradication of illiteracy.' The Ministry has given the responsibility for literacy and adult education to the Directorate of Continuing Education which is an integral part of the structure of the Ministry, headed by an Assistant Undersecretary for Continuing Education.

The Directorate's programme is divided into three categories and each category represents a stage as follows:

1. Stage one deals with basic literacy for those who cannot read or write. It takes two years to complete during which period the learner receives instruction in reading, writing in the Arabic language, mathematics, and Islamic religion. This level is equivalent to the fourth grade of the primary formal education level.
2. Stage two is the follow-up stage which also takes two years to complete. This stage aims at reinforcing the basic skills acquired by the learner during the previous stage. The subjects taught include: Islamic religion, Arabic language, Mathematics, English language, Sciences and History and Geography. Those are the same subjects of the fifth and sixth grades of the formal primary education level, with adjustment to suit the adult learner's needs. The learner who successfully completes this stage will obtain the equivalent of the primary school certificate.
3. Stage three is the consolidation stage, which comes after the follow-up stage. It also takes two academic years to complete. It is considered equivalent to the intermediate school level (lower secondary level). There are two types of learners in this stage: those who have successfully completed the follow-up stage, and those who have dropped out of the formal system before completing the basic education compulsory level.

Although the policy of the Ministry of Education since the inception of the literacy activities in 1973 has been to cater to the educational needs of all youth and adults irrespective of age, a decision was made in the late 1970's to focus the ministry's efforts on the group of citizens in the age bracket 10 – 44 which was considered the potentially most productive segment of the population. The programme targeted both males and females. Parallel to that ran government plans to universalize primary education first as a right of every child, and secondly as an effective way to block a major source of illiteracy.

Today, that policy has achieved its objectives: The net enrolment rate in primary schools is 97% for boys, 96% for girls and 97% for both sexes. The illiteracy rate among the 10 – 44 age group is, according to the last population census of 2001, 1.4% for males and 4% for females and the rate for both sexes was 2.7%. With the coming into force of the general education Act of 2005, education for children below 15 years of age has become compulsory. That will consequently remove children between 10 and 15 years of age from the risk of being left out of school (Ministry of Education, 2004-2005).

The Literacy programmes put a great deal of emphasis on the participation of women. Some of the important aspects of this policy include:

- The decision in 1988/89 to establish childcare centres for children whose mothers are attending literacy classes;
- Granting a certificate to candidates who pass the test to determine the level of proficiency for joining the post-literacy or the consolidation stage to make them eligible for joining the continuing education programmes of their choice;
- Learners are given the freedom to select the subjects they wish to study in the post-literacy stage if they do not wish to take the full course for the purpose of obtaining the certificate which is equivalent to the 6th grade;

- Introducing computer study as an option to encourage learners to use the computer as a source for knowledge and information that can enrich the experience of the learner.

The family education programme at the post-literacy level (stage two) was established in 1990/1991. Two of the main objectives of the programme are to help women reinforce the literacy skills they had acquired during the first stage (basic literacy) and to help them deal with the changing economic and social situation in general.

Other important services that the Ministry is providing to facilitate the participation of women in literacy and continuing education classes include:

- Organizing literacy classes in the workplace for workers (male and female) in the different Ministries and in companies that belong to the public sector (continuing since 1987);
- Organizing literacy classes during the morning as an alternative for those females who cannot attend evening classes;
- Authorizing and encouraging adult learners to make use of the schools' educational resource centres during the working hours of the school. These centres are used for literacy and continuing education classes in the evenings;
- Providing free transportation for learners from specific rallying points in their residential areas to the learning centres;
- Acknowledgement by H.E. the Prime Minister on Graduation Day during the official ceremony, of the most distinguished oldest learners who have either obtained the highest grade in the literacy stage or have continued their education at the university level after graduating from literacy and continuing education programmes.

The programme also helps women become self-reliant in dealing with matters that affect their lives and the lives of their families such as child protection, nutrition, housing and maternity. The programme is currently being implemented in more than 20 centres in the country.

Although the Administrative Structure of the Directorate of Continuing Education is integrated into the general structure of the Ministry of Education, the teaching staff is hired by the Ministry from among the existing trained teachers who work in the formal education sector and from part-timers or who are either university graduates or those who have at least a secondary school certificate.

The Directorate organizes training workshops and seminars for literacy teachers and supervisors to prepare them for the task. There are currently (2006 – 2007) 216 teachers of whom 111 are females and 105 are males; 20 of the females and 105 of the males are school teachers, while 91 of the females are part-timers from outside the body of existing teachers in the Ministry of Education. The total number of learners enrolled during the school year 2005 – 2006 was as follows:

1. Basic Literacy Level

	<u>Enrolled</u>	<u>Dropped out</u>
Male	89	22 (24.7%)
Female	402	62 (15.42%)

2. Post-Literacy

	<u>Enrolled</u>	<u>Dropped out</u>
Male	190	47 (24.7%)
Female	206	39 (18.9%)

3. Consolidation Stage

	<u>Enrolled</u>	<u>Dropped out</u>
Male	1,172	186 (15.8%)
Female	333	51 (15.3%)

This shows that out of the total number of females enrolled in the three stages during the school year 2005 – 2006 which was 1,451 males and 941 females, 255 males and 152 females dropped out, giving an average dropout rate of 17.5% for males and 16.1% for females. A discussion of this issue will be included in Part III of this document. The teacher / learner ratio during 2006 was 1 teacher for every 14 male learners, and 1 female teacher for every 10 female learners. The average for the programme as a whole for both sexes is 1 teacher for every 12 learners. At the level of supervision there were in 2006, 55 supervisors, 25 females and 30 males 19 females out of the 55 are among the existing staff of the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education provides the necessary budget for the Directorate of continuing education within the total financial allocation for the Ministry. The annual budget is around 500,000,000 BHD (equivalent to 1.37 million US\$) for services and honoraria, excluding salaries of the regular staff of the Directorate. The budget is used to cover the following items which consume 90% of the budget: the teachers, the Centre supervisors, the teachers in the Kindergartens attached to Adult Learning Centres, the drivers and the counsellors.

In the past (up to 2002) a number of individuals and financial institutions and companies contributed to the National Fund for Literacy. Many institutions and NGOs took it upon themselves to implement literacy programmes for their own employees/members. The Report submitted to UNESCO by Bahrain on the EFA 2000 Assessment referred to the need for the country to continue to give priority to literacy with special attention to women, because of the important role, women can and are playing in Bahraini society at both the social and the professional levels. A notable characteristic of literacy programmes in Bahrain is the fact that those programmes have, over the years, succeeded in responding to a reasonable degree to the changing educational and training needs of the population.

Pilot Literacy and Continuing Education Projects

Within the framework of its development strategy, the Ministry sponsors a series of pilot projects in literacy and continuing education in response to real needs expressed by learners. These projects cover a wide spectrum of specializations and address different educational and training needs. We present below a list of such projects to illustrate the range of interests they cover:

- Teaching Arabic language for non-Arabic speakers;
- A new approach to building reading skills at the post-literacy level;
- Eradication of illiteracy among parents of children who are enrolled in the formal system of education;
- Computer literacy;
- Methods and Techniques in teaching adult literacy;
- The principles for reciting the Holy Quran;
- Teaching Literacy through the integrated curriculum approach.

The cycles of the projects vary from 6 months to four years, and they are provided free of charge and open to all. UNESCO and the Ministry of Education jointly sponsor four of the projects.

A Vision for the Future

A report of the project on the comprehensive evaluation of the quality of education in Bahrain, which was sponsored by the Ministry of Education, the UNDP office in Bahrain and UNESCO / IIEP, offers a set of proposals for future direction regarding Adult Education. It focuses attention on improvement of the quality of Adult Education, a term used in the Report to refer to the programmes that are carried out by the Directorate of Continuing Education, dealing with five areas of concern which can be summarized as follows:

- To improve the quality of the programmes so that they may respond to the needs dictated by the labour market;
- Management of the programme within the context of a strategy that can guarantee relevance and effective coordination;

- Designing curricula that can meet the practical needs of adult learners using methodology that suits adult learning;
- Taking assessment and evaluation beyond the level of memorization;
- Professionally preparing teachers of adult learners for a task that is complex and needs to be treated differently from the way children are taught.

The Ministry of Education is currently studying these proposals for the purpose of incorporating some of them in the Directorate of Continuing Education future plans.

Adult Literacy and Adult Education in Egypt

In 1989 President Mubarak of Egypt declared the 1990's a 'National Decade for Literacy and Adult Education'. In his view 'literacy and adult education are an essential objective for realizing development and increasing production.' It was, according to President Mubarak, 'important to enhance and mobilize all potentials for the eradication of illiteracy by the beginning of the new century.'

In 1991 the Egyptian Government introduced a new literacy act known as Act Number 8 aimed at regulating the work in the domain of literacy and adult education. The Act led to the establishment in 1992 of the General Organization of Literacy and Adult Education. The first major task of the new organization was to plan a national literacy campaign within the framework of a national plan for the decade (1992 – 2001). The main objectives of literacy as stated by the then Minister of Education were:

Providing illiterates with the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic that may enable them to cope with the professional levels of the various institutions and participate in the different fields of comprehensive development. In addition they are provided with necessary skills and experiences in vocational fields as well as the basic knowledge in different subjects. Religious beliefs should be intensified in addition to instilling the right concepts and behavioural conducts which help illiterates acquire the scientific attitudes and practical skills for solving life problems (Ministry of Education, 1999).

The Egyptian EFA 2000 assessment report stated that among the objectives of literacy then was:

[...] reviving and emphasizing the traditional social trends of the Egyptians and intensifying their application through various everyday activities while formulating sound attitudes towards continuous education and self-learning skills. Illiterates are supposed to reach the level of primary education certificates as a compulsory stage where from they can proceed to the following educational stages (Ministry of Education, 1999).

There were in Egypt at that time, according to the EFA 2000 assessment report, 17,347,745 illiterate adults, 5,245,554 in urban areas, representing 30.24 percent of the total and 12,102,191 in rural areas, representing 69.76% of the total. The total number of illiterate women was 10,357,000. The overall rate of illiteracy in the country was 38.6 of the population 15 – 35 years old. Those illiterates who are over 35 years of age were left free to decide whether they wished to join the literacy classes or not. Priority within the workplace was given to women, the poor and the rural population. The government report on EFA 2000 claims that there was a reduction in the rate of illiteracy of about 15% between 1986 and 1999, from 49.4% in 1986 to 33.1% in 1999.

In terms of the strategy used for literacy classes, the General Organization of Literacy and Adult Education used a number of approaches as follows:

- Recruitment of instructors from among student teachers in the faculties of education, young graduates from those faculties as well as religious leaders to teach literacy classes. The duration of the literacy course was six months to be followed by an examination;
- Organization of mobile educational caravans to visit the remote areas for the purpose of raising awareness among the inhabitants about the importance of literacy;
- Businessmen were invited to support literacy and training for inhabitants of the areas where those businessmen lived. The model they were encouraged to follow was to establish a multi-purpose centre for literacy, vocational training and cultural activities;
- The use of radio and television for broadcasting literacy lessons;

- Encouraging the participation of non-governmental organizations in sponsoring literacy classes;
- Organization of special programmes for blind persons using Braille method;
- Organization of literacy classes for special categories of the population in a number of locations which included: prisons, orphanages, health centres, women's clubs, youth centres and centres of worship such as mosques and churches.

The curricula were built around the concept of blending theory with the learner's interests and experience in life. The content of the syllabus must be a genuine reflection of the environment in which the learner lived. A department for evaluation was established within the General Organization of Literacy and Adult Education for monitoring and evaluation of performance in literacy activities at both national and local levels.

Cooperation between the Organization of Literacy and other partners in the literacy domain took a number of forms which included:

- Support for the strategy of the Ministry of Education to achieve a hundred percent enrolment in primary school for children of school age. To this end the Organization of Literacy adopted the project of one-class schools for the enrolment of girls between 8 and 14 years old;
- Cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs in establishing literacy classes supervised and run by over 600 non-governmental organizations;
- Cooperation with the National Council for Motherhood and Childhood in the implementation of an illiteracy project for women in the age range of 16 – 35;
- Cooperation with the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Interior in establishing Literacy programmes for soldiers and policemen.

In fact the Organization of Literacy and Adult Education cooperated with a number of other Ministries and institutions in Egypt including the Ministries of Information, Health, Population and Manpower. It has also cooperated with regional and international organizations. An important aspect of the Literacy activities in Egypt was the inclusion in the literacy programme in some areas of a dimension of vocational skills through the provision of training in handicraft such as carpet weaving, leather, woodwork, sewing and embroidery, carpentry, electricity, and small project management.

To ensure the retention and reinforcement of the skills that neo-literates have acquired, the organization of literacy gave a lot of attention to the post-literacy stage of learning. A special department was created for that purpose. It organized post-literacy classes in a variety of subjects including English language, computer, small project management, agriculture, health matters and environment protection. In what looked like a reflection on the way it had worked, the Organization of Literacy and Adult Education stressed the need for its future actions to ensure:

- Coordination among participating institutions;
- Literacy should always be linked to vocational training;
- Local institutions should be more intensively involved in the mobilization for literacy in terms of getting more illiterates to join literacy classes;
- Continuous education should be made available for all;
- More use of TV Channels;
- Encouraging more workers and more women clubs to participate in literacy campaigns;
- Establishing reading clubs for the new-literates and expanding the library services in the country.

The Current Situation

According to the new Government Literacy Authority which replaced the General Organization of Literacy and Adult Education, as the body responsible for Literacy, the number of adult illiterates on 1/1/2006 was 14 million comprising 4.3 million males, and 9.7 million females. The rate of illiteracy was 31% for males and 69% for women. The percentage for rural areas was 64 and for urban areas was 36. In terms of age groups the rate was 55% for adults below 45 years of age, and 45% for adults over 45 years

of age. The total number of illiterates for the former was 7.7 million, and for the latter the number was 6.3 million.

The National Strategy

A document on the national strategy was issued by the Government Literacy Authority to chart the new path for development as follows (Government Literacy Authority, 2006):

Vision: Empowerment and engagement of illiterate population through a holistic development approach;

Strategic Objective: To lower illiteracy rate to 10% within 4 years;

Related Objective: To eradicate illiteracy of 8 million persons within 4 years.

Policies and Determinants

- Strong political commitment empowered by societal support;
- A supporting legal framework;
- A creative and strong institutional and organizational framework;
- A holistic and integrated approach;
- National campaign with coordinated roles between public, NGOs, private and international organizations;
- Decentralized approach (competition between local administrations).

Re-engineering of the Existing Programmes

- Achieving full enrolment rate and zero dropout rate;
- Flexible financial and economic framework to deal with realities of the problem;
- An information system for planning, monitoring, and assessment;
- Strong media campaign to create societal pressure and motivate partnership;
- Complete reliance on new and well educated religious personnel to motivate enrolments;
- A check and balance system for full accountability.

Dimensions of the Plan

Closing Illiteracy Sources

- Use of non-traditional schools (Girl-friendly Schools, Community Schools, One-Class School);
- Quality of education: improve quality to achieve literacy by 3rd grade;
- Social and economic interventions to provide support to the poor (new social contract).

Empowering the Illiterates

- Private-public partnership;
- Decentralization;
- Social marketing and motivation programmes;
- Empowerment programmes;
- New programmes to prepare adult teachers;
- Adult education versus illiteracy eradication;
- Turn literacy classes to community development centres.

Post-Literacy Programme

- Back to school programme for young people;
- Micro finance and job opportunities;
- Social and cultural activities;
- Neo-literates library programme.

PROPOSED PROGRAMMES

Project	Executing Organizations	Targeted Number of Illiterates (in million)	Budget Required in Million Egyptian Pounds (in million US\$)
Each one teach one	Supreme Council for Universities	3	300 (US\$52.6242)
Civil Society Programme	General Federation for NGOs/Civil Society Organizations	1.7	170 (US\$29.8203)
Community service programme	Ministry of Social Solidarity	1	100 (US\$17.5414)
Government Partners Programme	Governmental Agencies	1	100 (US\$17.5414)
Military Service for Literacy Programmes	Ministry of Defence	1.3	130 (US\$22.8038)
Total		8	800 (US\$140.3312)

PROPOSED SUPPORT PROJECTS	
Programme	Budget Required in Million Egyptian Pounds (in million US\$)
Increasing motivation	160 (US\$28.0662)
Illiteracy database	10 (US\$1.7541)
Lower Relapse	90 (US\$15.7872)
Monitoring and quality systems and active assessment	8 (US\$1.4033)
Closing illiteracy sources	MOE budget
TOTAL	268 (US\$47.0109)

Successful Partnership

- A governorate illiteracy free: Damietta 2005 / Three governorates in 2006;
- Five universities participating in 'Each one teach one programme';
- Increased role of civil society: Aletihad / Caritas / Almustakbal / Rotary / Inner Wheel;
- Ministries: Defence / Interior Affairs / Communications / Administrative Development / Planning and local development / Health / Social Fund;
- Private Sector: Loutfi Mansour.

The Involvement of Non-governmental Organizations in Literacy

It is estimated that there are in Egypt about 600 non-governmental bodies involved in literacy and adult education. Some of these organizations work in close association with government departments. But many are working independently. In a paper by Laila Iskandar entitled 'Egypt: where and who are the world's illiterates?' we read:

A new participatory literacy paradigm has emerged among the NGO sector, which does not regard illiteracy simply as a deficit, or speak of 'eradicating illiteracy'. They view the acquisition and use of literacy as part of a long term process, in which a community or a society seeks to effect its own cultural and social transformation. Thus there is a need to revise the traditional paradigm which considers literacy as input for development and which tends to see the issue primarily in terms of measurable literacy skills to be attained and the numbers to be made literate – central to the new paradigm is the notion of societal literacy. Reading and writing are embedded in social practice, thus they become meaningful only when they are backed by social institutions that give legitimacy to written documents (Iskandar, 2005).

This is certainly a radical view that seeks to move away from the traditional concept and approach to literacy by resorting to the Paulo Freire philosophy. This kind of approach is, according to the records, not reflected in the government's concept and strategy.

Adult Literacy and Adult Education in the Sultanate of Oman

Organized government work in the field of adult literacy started in 1973. The first government decree to regularize the work was issued in 1975, followed by another decree in 1981 based on the government philosophy of equal opportunity for all citizens. That decree defined the illiterate as being 'any person over 10 years of age and who is not enrolled in any educational institution, and has not reached a functional standard in reading and writing in Arabic, neither has he reached a functional standard in arithmetic and in other fields of knowledge.' The decree defined the minimum functional standard as being the ability to read correctly and understand a daily newspaper, and the ability to write a correct paragraph and to express an idea clearly in writing, and the ability to read and write numbers and to do basic mathematical operations that are essential for everyday life. The decree also included the system of teaching and management of literacy programmes. The length of a literacy course was limited to two school years leading to a certificate equivalent to the level of the 4th grade in the formal system of education. This model was operational until the school year 2005/2006. It was replaced by a new model which extended the period of study in a literacy course to three years instead of two, leading to a certificate equivalent to the completion of the sixth grade in basic education and qualifies the adult learner to join the seventh grade (Ministry of Education, 2006).

The curriculum for the three years included: Arabic language; Mathematics; Islamic religion; English language; Social studies; Cultural studies; General science. The basic literacy course is followed by a post-literacy programme to help the neo-literates consolidate the skills and knowledge they had acquired during the basic level. Those who cannot continue their education through the formal system can join a variety of adult education courses in different areas of interest. An important service related to post-literacy education is a project known as 'the adult library' which started in 1981. The main objective was to prepare and disseminate a set of reading materials including newspapers, pamphlets and books in a wide range of subjects at a level suitable to that of the neo-literates. While the original plan was to establish an 'adult library' in every adult education centre in the country, in reality that was not possible for two reasons: the lack of suitable space in many of the centres in rural areas, and the difficulty in gathering together the neo-literates in one place to benefit from the library. For those reasons the Ministry decided to offer the set of books (30) as a gift to every neo-literate to use at home. However, the Ministry of Education believes that in view of the evaluation of the Adult Library project, it was found to be not very effective for the following reasons (ibid.):

- The standard reached by some of the neo-literates does not enable them to continue to study on their own;
- Some of the neo-literates have no time for independent learning;
- The content of the 5th and the 6th grades were not quite relevant to the needs of some learners, accordingly they were unable to move forward on their own.

The literacy programme is managed by the Department of Literacy and Special Education which is responsible for the planning and the implementation of literacy programmes in the entire country through a network of local units in every region of the country.

Teaching in literacy classes is done by formal school teachers, and school leavers. Both categories are exposed to training courses in adult learning. The recruitment of secondary school leavers to teach in literacy classes was the subject of a special project which was launched during the school year 2000/2001 in seven areas in different parts of the country. The project was evaluated at the end of the first year. The authorities concluded that it was a success; and consequently the government decided to adopt a policy of using secondary school leavers for teaching literacy classes all over the country. The Ministry of Education believes that the outcome of applying that policy has been very positive for the following reasons:

- The expansion of the network of literacy centres to cover remote parts of the country;
- An increase in the rate of enrolment in literacy classes and a reduction in the dropout rate;
- The secondary school leavers represented a cadre of full-time teachers who were committed to the cause of literacy;
- The possibility of organizing literacy classes within residential areas where both teachers and learners lived;
- A number of citizens offered furnished space in their homes to be used as classrooms;
- The impact of this policy on the expansion of the literacy programmes in the country has constituted a major leap forward as the number of centres increased from 290 in the school year 1999 – 2000 to 828 in 2005 – 2006 and the number of learners increased from 4,205 to 10,727 during the same period.

In addition to this project, the Ministry of Education introduced another project for involving volunteers from among the educated segment of society to support the national drive for combating illiteracy. Some of those volunteers worked as teachers while others helped in administration and mobilization. The Ministry of Education believes that this project was also a success.

The Literacy Village Project

This is a truly innovative project that has been launched by the Ministry of Education during the school year 2004-2005 in the village of Al-Maraisi, 'an attractive coastal village on the Gulf of Oman, in the Barkaa Wilayat (province) of Al Batnah North Region.' This village was chosen because of the high illiteracy rate among both the male and female population, in addition to its convenient geographical location that facilitates follow-up and assessment of the project. In addition, its location makes for easier provision of infrastructure services and programme – support management such as health, municipality matters, water resources, religious and social counselling and development.

In 2005-2006 the project was implemented in a second village which is the village of Birkat Al Moaz in Al Dakhila Region and sits at the foot of Jebel – Akhdhar, a range of mountains in the interior of Oman (Ministry of Education, 2005a). The reasons for choosing this village were given by the Ministry of Education as follows:

Because of the high illiteracy rate amongst both the male and the female population. In addition, the large number of existing schools in the village facilitated the opening of a greater number of illiteracy eradication classes. Other reasons included the availability of a number of general secondary school graduates who can teach in these classes after having undergone rudimentary training, the level of support that can be generated from both private and government institutions in addition to the fact that Birkat Al Moaz is located close to the main Muscat-Nizwa Road making for easy access (ibid.).

The Concept behind the Project: The implementation manual states: *The Literacy Village Project is a very recent concept aimed at decreasing the number of illiterate people within a short space of time. It aims to encourage all sections*

of society to participate in the battle against illiteracy and to help ensure that no member of society is adversely affected by being illiterate.

The curriculum is the same as that used in the Ministry of Education day schools in addition to some support programmes related to life-skills. The life-skills curriculum is delivered by the parties concerned: Religious Affairs, Ministry of Health, Royal Oman Police, Civil Defence, and the other organizations in or close to the village. The project in both villages will be funded jointly by the Ministry of Education which will:

- Provide textbooks and other reading or audio-visual materials;
- Train teachers;
- Provide technical support for teachers and learners;
- Supervise the assessment of learners;
- Supervise the overall performance, draw up school timetables and design different types of forms.

The project committee will be responsible for contacting companies, factories and individuals to fund the following aspects of the project:

- Transportation;
- Incentives and financial rewards, to teachers, learners and parents;
- Inauguration and end-of-the year ceremonies;
- Documentation of the project using various techniques such as video, photography, tape-recording and written documents and reports.

The preliminary assessment of the performance of the project in the first village Al Maraisi is, according to the Ministry of Education, very positive. The project started with 12 classes with a total of 198 learners, males and females, with a group of 26 teachers. The curriculum used was that of other literacy centres comprising of the basic subjects, Arabic language, mathematics, Islamic studies and general culture, in addition to other supporting programmes that are delivered by the institutions and the Ministries concerned. The Ministry of Education is planning to replicate the project in other parts of the country.

Revising the Literacy Curriculum: As part of the policy of the Ministry of Education to regularly revise and update the curricula, the school year 2005-2006 witnessed the introduction of new curricula for literacy in all subjects with the exception of the mathematics curricula for the first and second literacy classes.

A forward-looking national programme (2007/2008 – 2015/2016) is in place for achieving 50% reduction of illiteracy for the 15 – 44 age group (Ministry of Education). This programme is based on a national plan that was developed in 2001 for combating illiteracy among the 15 – 44 age group totalling 107,830 males and females. The new programme is also based on the objectives of the Arab Literacy Strategy and the Dakar Commitment to increase literacy by 50% of its rate at the time of the Dakar Forum (2000) by 2015. The main objective of the programme is the reduction of illiteracy by 50% for the age group 15 – 44 within the context of the country's plan for 'Education for All'.

The operational objectives of the project are:

- Providing the illiterates with the opportunity to acquire the skills of reading and writing and hence give them access to the sixth grade in the formal programme of basic education;
- Developing new curricula to meet the needs of the learners;
- Recruitment of secondary school leavers, university graduates and volunteers to participate in the achievement of the objectives of the programme, as teachers and organizers;
- Developing an effective media campaign;
- Defining the role of each partner in the campaign;
- Making use of all new trends proposed by the Arab project for the use of the new technology in education.

The programme will be implemented in two phases:

Phase 1 (preparatory 2006 -2007):

- Building a data base;
- Drawing up lists of potential learners in different parts of the country;
- Mobilizing the necessary material resources;
- Training teachers;
- Coordinating the work with the various Ministries and institutions that will join in for implementation of the programme;
- Costing the programme and identifying the sources of funding.

Phase 2 (implementation):

This phase is envisaged to last 9 years from the academic year 2007/2008 – 2015/2016 by the end of which the main objective of reducing illiteracy by 50% should be achieved. The number of the target group to be reached is 32,417 males and females. The implementation process will involve, besides the Ministry of Education, other institutions in both, the public and the private sectors, the civil society, the Sultan Qaboos University as well as other organizations.

Training Literacy Personnel: Aware of the special requirements of teachers of adults, and aware of the fact that the teachers it has been using in its literacy classes were all part-timers, the Ministry of Education has set up a training programme for the secondary school leavers who constituted a sizeable group (95%) of literacy teachers. These young men and women had no pedagogical training before they came into the literacy domain. They are given a two-week training course which included an introduction to the literacy curriculum and its content, adult psychology and methods and techniques of teaching adults. There are other training programmes directed to administrators, supervisors, organizers and counsellors at both national and local levels. The training takes a variety of models and involves, besides the Ministry of Education senior staff, specialists from Sultan Qaboos University and from the colleges of education.

Research and Studies: Research and studies in the fields of Literacy and Adult Education received a great deal of attention from the Ministry of Education. They dealt with areas of concern:

- The different requirements for a literacy programme such as planning curriculum, teaching and evaluation, and how they can be developed;
- The relationship between literacy and development;
- Learners' attitudes and motivation.

Obstacles and Challenges: Despite the intensive efforts that have been put into Literacy and Adult Education programmes which can be demonstrated by the remarkable achievements that have been made, there are still some obstacles and some challenges that will have to be dealt with. Those are, briefly, the following:

- Literacy programmes have so far been funded by the Ministry of Education alone. But as literacy is a societal problem, other sources of funding must be found;
- The number of staff in charge of managing the Literacy programmes is very small. The expansion that has taken place in recent years calls for an increase in the force particularly in the field;
- There is a need for a new strategy to encourage illiterate males to join literacy classes as their rate of enrolment now is relatively low;
- There is a need for more intensive and effective awareness campaign to galvanize public opinion in favour of combating illiteracy.

A Future Vision: Based on its experience in dealing with literacy for three decades, the Ministry of Education considers that a strategy for the future should address the following requirements:

- The allocation of adequate financial resources contributed by both the public and the private sectors;

- Taking the necessary measures to ensure that children of school age who are enrolled in primary school will be retained in school until the age of 15 in order to avoid any backsliding into illiteracy;
- Ensuring the efficient implementation of the literacy project for reducing the rate of illiteracy by 50% reference to which was made earlier;
- Providing continuous on-the-job training for teachers and other personnel to help them keep up to date with their work;
- The revision of literacy curricula on a regular basis to make them more relevant to the needs of the learners;
- The provision of various alternative routes for neo-literates to continue their education to the highest level.

Adult Literacy and Adult Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Like the rest of the seven countries under review, the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has followed a dual strategy in its approach to 'Education for All', introducing primary education for children of school age on one hand and literacy for adults on the other within the framework of a national plan.

An adult illiterate is defined as 'the person who does not know how to read nor how to write, and who is more than the acceptable age for primary education and less than forty five years old' (Ministry of Education, 2000).. Article six of government regulations for combating illiteracy contained both the policy and the strategy. The first step taken by the Ministry of Education was the setting up of a High-Level committee on education policy chaired by the Minister of Education with membership of other government Ministries and institutions including: The General Presidency for Girls' Education (dissolved in 2003 and its functions were integrated into the Ministry of Education); The Ministry of Defence and Aviation; The Ministry of Planning; The Ministry of Interior and The National Guards.

The plan that the Ministry has followed was based on four main elements:

- Organization of regular literacy classes for teaching adults throughout the country;
- Mapping difficult-to-reach areas such as the Bedouin regions and remote areas with the view to estimating the time span needed to overcome illiteracy in those parts of the country;
- Preparing good literacy programmes to be broadcast over radio and television;
- Using mosques, clubs, and other social centres for literacy activities.

A Call for Partnership

The government called on all citizens to participate in the national drive to combat illiteracy. The regulations governing the work in the field of literacy stipulated that:

- Working for literacy is a national obligation that every citizen must fulfil;
- Every government body or public institution should take the necessary measures to combat illiteracy among its employees within a space of six years with the possibility of extending that period upon a decision by the Council of Ministers;
- The private companies and institutions must provide the Ministry of Education with the data it requires with regard to illiterate employees of those companies and institutions together with information on the steps that the company or the institution has undertaken to combat illiteracy;
- Volunteers can participate in literacy activities in accordance with the procedures determined by the High-Level Committee on Literacy and Adult-Education.
-

The objectives to be achieved were set by the government as follows (ibid.):

- To provide quality literacy programmes;

- To take the necessary measures for attracting adult learners to literacy and adult education centres;
- To take the necessary measures for reducing the dropout rate in literacy classes;
- To work towards a realization of opportunities for adult learners to continue their education at intermediate and secondary school levels.

The government decided on an ambitious twenty-year literacy plan to be implemented in partnership among the five major players: The Ministry of Education; The General Presidency for Girls' Education; The National Guards; The Ministry of Defence and Aviation; The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. We shall describe briefly the role that each of the four has played as reflected by the EFA 2000 Reports.

Ministry of Education: A major undertaking by the Ministry of Education was the development of a literacy plan of action in cooperation with the World Bank. The plan was implemented during the school year 1991 – 1992. The outcome was satisfactory. Consequently the Ministry of Planning agreed to fund a three-year literacy programme that offered illiterates a Primary Education certificate upon completion of the 3-year course. The Ministry of Education used a wide variety of incentives to attract adult learners and to reward teachers and organizers who took part in the implementation of literacy programmes.

General Presidency for Girls' Education: The Presidency which was until 2003 charged with the responsibility for female education played an important role in raising awareness among women and encouraged them to join literacy classes. The Presidency was successful in organizing post-literacy programmes of a vocational nature such as dress-making, home economics and child care. These programmes were accompanied by general programmes on religious, cultural and social affairs. According to a statement by the Ministry of Education, the General Presidency for Girls' Education was dissolved early in 2003 and its functions were taken over by the Ministry of Education which now administers the girls' schools and colleges, supervises kindergartens and nursery schools and sponsors literacy programmes for females (Ministry of Education).

National Guards: The National Guards consider Education to be one of its priority areas of concern. They look after the education of its members and that of their children. The National Guards provide well equipped centres for literacy and adult education classes, as well as teachers for those classes. Opportunities are actually provided for those who do well in literacy and post-literacy classes to continue their education in secondary night schools. There are cases of distinguished learners who succeeded in going on to university and graduating with university degrees. The National Guards are also involved in female education. The first centre for female adult learners was opened in the capital city of Riyadh in 1992. This was followed by many other similar centres. By 1998 there were seven such centres.

It is important to note that the National Guards' literacy and adult education centres are open to the public as well. In 1996, the National Guards received the UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize for their contribution to literacy and post-literacy work in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Ministry of Defence and Aviation: The activities of the Ministry of Defence and Aviation are mainly in the domain of adult education as they sponsor intermediate and secondary night schools in the regions where employees of the Ministry and their families live. However, they make their schools available for literacy and post-literacy programmes.

Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs: The involvement of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in social development goes back to 1960 when a centre for community development was established in the town of Derhyah in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Agriculture. The success of the experiment in this first centre encouraged the government to open other similar centres in all the regions. These centres number over 20 today. The centres work through a number of local social development committees which reached over 80 committees by 1996.

Challenges

The government of Saudi Arabia has, no doubt, made excellent progress in providing basic education for both children and adults, males and females, as statistics can show. It is an impressive record for a country in which formal schooling had only started in 1930. It is also a vast country with deeply rooted social traditions that take time to modify particularly in rural areas. It is important to state here that progress in the adult literacy domain was achieved primarily through the spread of formal basic education for boys and girls, an effort that has worked in favour of partly blocking an important source of illiteracy. However, progress in the field of education as a whole and in elementary education in particular, has not been without problems.

The 6th development plan maintained the same order of top priority to education. Furthermore, it referred to remedial measures that had to be taken during the 6th plan period so that the education sector can fully realize its development objectives. Some of the issues involved are:

- Continuous high repetition rates, particularly in the first and fourth grades of the elementary stage, the second grade of the intermediate stage, and the third grade of the secondary stage;
- Continuous high rates of dropout, particularly in the first and fourth grades of the elementary stage, and notwithstanding the minor improvements in the internal efficiency of education compared with earlier years, this phenomenon does not conform with the sixth basic strategic principle that calls for mandatory primary education for all boys and girls;
- A decline in the internal efficiency of the system as a result of high repetition and dropout rates;
- An increase in the average number of years invested in graduating students from the elementary stage to the secondary stage (UNDP, 2005);
- The implications of these shortcomings in the general education system will inevitably lead to an increase of the number of illiterates in the country unless all those dropouts are either enrolled into an alternative learning programme or brought back into the main stream of the formal system;
- The development strategy for the education sector within the 6th plan pledged to ‘reduce illiteracy rates.’

Adult Literacy and Adult Education in the Sudan

The responsibility for Adult Literacy and Adult Education is given by the government to the National Council for Literacy and Adult Education (NCLAE) an autonomous body linked to the Ministry of Education through the Ministry’s Department of Adult Education. Its membership includes representatives of some of the Ministries concerned with public services and development, representatives of non-governmental organizations as well as representatives of some of the higher education institutions. The Council formulates policies and strategies for literacy and adult education for the whole country. The main thrust of its approach to the issue of illiteracy is the organization of mass literacy campaigns for a duration of 3 – 5 years. The Council develops plans to be implemented within the framework of the campaigns. In addition to the engagement of trained school teachers for teaching literacy classes, the council makes use of university graduates who can teach literacy classes, in fulfilment of the national service obligation.

For reasons to do with the unstable situation in the Southern part of the country, resulting from the civil war which ended in January 2005, the campaigns that the Council had organized were confined to the 16 Northern States, including Darfur region. According to Abu Zeid and Akarim (2006),

The overall impacts of these campaigns are considered far below expectations. This is mainly attributed to the traditional teaching methods adopted by literacy teachers, who lack modern skills in adult education and rely on lecturing, repetition and instructing; as well as to the syllabuses used, which fail to address subjects of real life concerns of the learners. Hence, rates of absorption are low and rates of dropouts are high. Nevertheless, exceptional examples of individuals have succeeded and are able to sustain learning in the formal system (Abu Zeid and Akarim, 2006).

However, despite the obvious shortcomings indicated by Abu Zeid's statement, the Government claims that during the decade 1990 – 1999 the overall rate of illiteracy had fallen by over 15 percentage points (from 72.9% in 1990 to 57.2% in 1999). The illiteracy rate among women had dropped from 83.3% in 1990 to 52.9% in 1999. The illiteracy rate among males in 1999 was 32.7% (UNESCO, 2001).

One of the showcase programmes which the council has sponsored for many years is the Adolescent Education Programme which enjoys the support of many of the national NGOs as well as UNICEF. The Council encourages the involvement of both national and international NGOs to join in literacy and adult education activities. The outcome has been satisfactory.

Moving away from conventional approaches to literacy, Abu Zeid refers in his paper to a widespread REFLECT (Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques) approach which is the essence of the philosophy of the great Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. Abu Zeid believes that this approach was introduced in the Sudan in the mid-eighties of the last century in the State of El-Gedarif. In his view, 'the impact of the approach indicated higher retention and attendance rates attributed to the freedom participants practise in selection of the subjects as well as to the stimulating and participatory methods adopted by REFLECT facilitators – currently the approach is adopted by many NGOs in different parts of the Sudan ...' Some of the NGOs applying the REFLECT approach are : GOAL (an international humanitarian organization), ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency), SOLO (Sudan Open Learning Organization) and PAMOJA (an Africa REFLECT network).

The Adolescent Education Programme

As mentioned earlier, this programme is sponsored by the NCLAE with the objective of providing basic education for adolescents in the age group of 9 – 15, who are either not enrolled in formal schools or dropped out of school. The main objective of the project was, according to Abu Zeid...

[...] to equip them (adolescents) with essential life-skills, to express themselves and to address their problems. The project started as a pilot project in 5 States; by the year 2000 it was operational in all states. According to Abu Zeid, the programme content includes reading and writing, arithmetic, religion, social studies and vocational training. It is organized into two cycles, each lasting for one year and contains two levels. The programme is implemented with great flexibility in time, methods and syllabuses and with a high degree of participation from government, community, parents and adolescents (ibid.).

A particular target group addressed by the project is the group of adolescents who are school dropouts most of whom are child soldiers who were demobilized as a result of the Peace Agreement between the Government and the Southern rebels in January 2005. The objective of the programme which was specifically designed for this group of adolescents was to use education as a vehicle for rehabilitating and integrating them into the main stream of society.

The programme is supported by UNDP, UNICEF and some other humanitarian organizations. It is interesting to note that while the government campaign for the education of adolescents (9 – 45 years of age) targets those adolescents who live in the main urban centres and surrounding villages, the NGO programmes for the same target group are concentrated in rural areas and in remote and poor communities. The focus of the curricula in the two situations is different. Each one of the sponsors of the programmes seeks to adapt the content to the actual needs of the learners, as he has conceived them.

The Role of NGOs in Literacy and Adult Education

Sudan is famous for being a country of thousands of all shades and shapes of non-governmental organizations in every aspect of life; social, economic, political, religious, literacy, cultural and environmental. They have all contributed, over the years, to the education movement in the country, particularly to the dissemination of literacy and adult education. The first literacy campaign in the country was carried out by volunteer teachers in Umjar village on the White Nile in 1944. The most prominent players in the literacy domain have been the Women's Association, the Workers' Union, the Students' Union and the Teachers' Union.

A number of religious and charity organizations have also been active in the adult literacy domain. Among the currently active NGOs that have left a mark on the national scene by applying contemporary concepts and tried-out techniques are the following:

1. GOAL which has, among its activities, an important project for women in a displacement camp known as MAYO camp, which is the largest camp of its kind with a mixture of ethnic groups from different parts of the Sudan. It was started in 1998. The objective of the project was three-tier: provide literacy, health awareness, and life-skills for the improvement of the standard of living of the participants. Some of the points of strength of the project include well-trained personnel, particularly the facilitators; an environment that facilitates interaction among the different ethnic groups in the camp and the realization of self-confidence among learners. The REFLECT approach to which the success of the project is attributed, is now followed by GOAL in other parts of the country, namely in Darfur in the west, Kassala in the east, Malakal in the south and Abyei in the south-west.

In the REFLECT approach which GOAL is using, there is no textbook and no standard printed materials; there is simply a locally devised manual for literacy facilitators which is regularly reviewed to incorporate improvements from lessons learned. It is based on an analysis of a socio-economic and socio-cultural survey carried out in the target area. Each unit deals with a specific subject related to community life, and starts with the construction of graphic displaying characteristics of the members of the community.

2. SOLO (Sudan Open Learning Organization) is another important player in the field of literacy and post-literacy education. One of its famous activities is the 'Building Literacy' project which is a post-literacy project that has been running for over five years (by 2007) in a number of communities. Its main objective is to build literacy through discussion among learners and through writing of what they discuss. The project has three important points of strength: it uses imaginative texts; it employs well-trained facilitators and it makes use of distance learning techniques.

The Situation in Southern Sudan

This part of the country has been devastated by a second civil war that lasted for more than 25 years, during which the major part of the infrastructure, particularly that of education, had been destroyed. Lack of security led to a lack of stability among the population, and consequently mass migration and mass displacement were a common feature of the situation. The disruption, and sometimes the absence of regular educational services in the majority of the south was inevitable as the national system of education was, and still is, characterized by a three-tiered decentralized system in which basic education is the responsibility of the local authorities; secondary is that of the states; and tertiary is that of the federal government. The Federal Ministry of Education (FMOE) serves as the technical body in charge of planning, policy, training, educational personnel, research, curricula development and monitoring the quality of instruction. There was very little that the FMOE or the local authorities could do in the war-stricken south, apart from limited activities in some of the few safe areas.

A new situation has now been created, thanks to the agreement that ended the civil war, signed in January 2005. Education has been declared by the government of the South the most important priority preceded only by security. The Southern Education System is now managed by the Secretariat of Education (SOE) and through regional education offices, country education offices (CEO) and the Payams (communities). The situation is aptly described in Box 1.

Box 1: A Description of the Situation of Education in Southern Sudan.

The education sector is dramatically under-resourced and has been almost exclusively dependent on outside funding. Because of this lack of resources, most of the times administrative positions are not filled and schools are often funded and operated by parents and NGOs. More than the North, the South faces tough challenges with regards to coverage, quality and equity. Moreover, particular attention needs to address increasing needs with the anticipated flow of the large majority of internally displaced persons (IDP) into the region.

Enrolment is marked by extremely limited access, especially for girls, and particularly low quality system-wide. The people of Southern Sudan have the lowest access to primary education in the world; their gross enrolment ratio (20%) is the world's lowest, as is the female to male enrolment (35%). Only 2% of the population completes primary education and the adult literacy rate is 24%. Of the few schools that do exist (there is one school per 1,000 children), only 10% are in permanent buildings; 80% of schoolchildren have no bench to sit on and only one third of schools have latrines; just half have access to

water; and 62% have no health facilities in the vicinity. An entire generation has missed out on education during two decades of war.

Educating this generation and its children is a massive task. The trend in enrolment is also alarming: since 1990, improvements in the rate of enrolment per year have averaged only 1.1%. For Sudan to achieve MDG 3 targets, given the current rate of enrolment, future enrolment would have to grow by at least 4.5% per year. Reducing and eventually closing the gender gap per MDG 4 remains one of the most difficult challenges in Southern Sudan. It is estimated that girls account for only 27% of total enrolment.

Policy is guided by the principles that education shall be the right of every child; be accessible to any citizen of Sudan; achieve equality, including gender equality, through awareness-raising; foster nation-building through integration, peace, self-reliance, patriotism and promoting respect and tolerance for other cultures, traditions, opinions and beliefs; and promote national socio-economic sustainable development. Although a curriculum has been developed for basic education, many schools are still using a foreign curriculum (from Uganda and Kenya) that is often culturally irrelevant – this is assumed to contribute to the high dropout rate. There exists no unified secondary school curriculum, syllabus or examination. Most schools continue to follow the curricula of neighbouring countries. Textbook availability is an issue throughout the South and there is currently no textbook production capacity.

Currently, there are approximately 1,800 schools; 33 of these are secondary schools with an estimated enrolment of 8,000 students. As such, the number of secondary education graduates is insufficient even compared only to the need for new teachers. Existing schools have inadequate facilities and sanitation and are unsuitable for learning. About 38% of classes are taught outdoors, and 61% in local material structures in varying states of disrepair. Only 48% of Southern schools enjoy access to safe water and 68% do not have latrines.

Only an estimated 6% of teachers are qualified. Their remuneration is unpredictable, with 89% of school PTAs reporting paying teachers a maximum rate of \$ 90 annually. Teacher absenteeism is high and the academic year is often short. In Bahr el Ghazal, the recorded average school year is only six months. Moreover, training opportunities are limited to short-term training courses provided by NGOs.

Existing capacity in management and administration is limited, as much of the education system was destroyed and did not function properly during the war, and now continues to be under-resourced. The sector does not possess an adequate, functioning system to assess quality, outcomes and resources. There is limited information as to what constitutes achievement of outcomes and limited baseline data to measure programme and intervention efficacy.

Source: The UN Joint Assessment Mission (Jam Sudan), March 2005 Volume III, pages 161 – 167 and 171 – 172.

A Vision for the Future in Southern Sudan

According to the UN Joint Assessment Mission (2005), the Secretariat of Education is ‘fully committed to meeting the EFA targets and MDGs by 2015. It believes that these goals are a fair reflection of the aspirations of the people of Southern Sudan and can be achieved if there is full commitment at every level, including the international community’ (JAM Sudan, 2005, p. 174):

The SOE is hoping that by 2011, the following will be achieved:

Enrolment in Primary School will be raised from 20% in 2003 to 55%;

Enrol 15% of out-of-school youth in alternative education systems;

Improve the quality of basic education and make education contextually and culturally relevant;

Increasing Girls’ primary enrolment from 11% to 40% of the out-of-school age group;

Increasing the number of village schools for girls to more than 3,000 by 2011;

Provide a cumulative 15% of adults with access to literacy campaigns over the six-year period, with a focus on young women.

The list of priorities within the education sector included the following statement:

Complete the development of accelerated learning opportunities for young people and adults who are now beyond the age of normal entry to basic education and to develop a plan for the establishment of vocational training centres for out-of-school youths, including demobilized soldiers. A comprehensive examination of a more technical vocational education system should be undertaken in this phase (JAM Sudan, 2005, p. 177).

A Future Vision for the Sudan as a Whole

The basic components of the Sudanese government national policies on education have, since the 1990's, echoed the recommendations of the international conferences, such as Jomtien (1990) and Dakar (2000). Such policies include access to quality basic education for all children aged 6 – 13 by 2015, the elimination of gender disparities and the improvement of education quality for disadvantaged groups. To achieve those goals, the government is relying on both public and private education sectors.

Although the education system is poorly funded with expenditure at only 1% of GDP, when compared with other sub-Saharan African countries where expenditure on education is 3% – 5% of GDP, Sudan's basic education system, according to the Joint Assessment Mission Report, has gradually reduced gender disparities over the years, maintained a high survival rate to sixth grade and has relatively low unit costs (see p. 165 volume III).

However, one should remember that there is wide disparity among the different states. For example in 2003, while the GER for Northern Sudan was 62%, the highest enrolment was in Northern State (100%), River Nile (86%) and El Gazira (84%). The lowest was in South Darfur (33%).

With reference to gender, while it is true to say that the overall gender disparities are not so wide, gender issues in certain states and communities continue to pose a major challenge. Both supply and demand factors hinder girls' participation in primary education. In sparsely populated areas long distances to school make parents particularly concerned for the safety of their daughters. Some of the other factors that hinder girls' education include:

- The belief among some parents, especially in rural communities, that girls do not need education, at least not beyond the basic level;
- Early marriages (starting at 12 years of age) in some communities;
- The high level of adult illiteracy particularly among women.

In addition to the issue of girls' education, the government has future strategies to deal with marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities, nomads, out-of-school children, demobilized child soldiers, and the disabled.

In response to the demands imposed by the Peace Agreement which has put both North and South Sudan on a six-year interim period for the application of certain components of the agreement, the Federal Government is hoping that by the year 2011 it will make major progress towards the achievement of universal primary education and gender equality. This means that the GER will have to progress from its current rate of 62% to about 88% by 2011, and the access rate to grade one should increase from 75% currently to about 90%.

The Joint Assessment Mission Report underlines the fact:

In addition to basic education programmes, the FMOE operates special needs and Television Education Programmes. Special needs programmes target adult literacy and non-formal education for out-of-school children, especially among nomads, Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) and refugees [...] Adult Literacy will be of great assistance in achieving education goals for children in low enrolment areas (Joint Mission Report, vol 3, p. 168).

The current five-year development plan will target a cumulative figure of two million illiterates annually in Khartoum and the River Nile States. The plan also seeks to eradicate illiteracy among males in eight other States. The government, through the National Council for Adult Education will endeavour to strengthen further its partnership with NGOs particularly those who have shown ability in dealing with groups of illiterates that are generally difficult to reach.

Adult Literacy and Adult Education in the Syrian Arab Republic

The responsibility for combating adult illiteracy is given to the Ministry of Culture in accordance with Law No. 7 of 7/2/1972. Only in the year 2003 had another Law (No. 16 dated 23/2/2003) been introduced by the Government on the basis of which the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture became jointly responsible for literacy.

An illiterate person is defined as 'every woman and man ignoring (ignorant of) the three basic skills: Writing, Reading and Calculating.' Literacy was actually conceived by the Government as an element in

the wider concept of 'Mass Culture' which can be realized through the creation of a national awareness of social, economic, environmental, demographic and health issues. Mass culture, according to the policy maker, can be diffused through literacy classes, cultural centres and the mass media (Ministry of Education, 2006).

The Ministry of Culture has over the years, been successful in building strong partnerships with other Ministries as well as with non-governmental organizations. The key partners among the Ministries were:

- The Ministry of Education, at the beginning, contributed to the technical preparation of curricula and learning materials, and made government schools available for literacy classes. After the year 2000 it played a more prominent role as we shall see later in this document;
- The Ministry of Agriculture provided post-literacy training for young farmers above 16 years of age who had completed the basic literacy phase. It operated through a number of rural education centres;
- The Ministry of Industry also organized post literacy life-skills training programmes for young adults between 15 and 18 years of age;
- The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour provides through its community development centres, courses and activities such as home economics, nursing education, veterinary medicine and film shows.

On the NGO side, the key players were:

1. The General Women's Union which ran a vast programme of education and training for women in basic literacy as well as in post-literacy level programmes ranging from life-skills to issues of gender;
2. The Workers' Union;
3. The General Peasants' Union;
4. The Revolutionary Youth Union;
5. The National Union of Syrian Students;
6. The Teachers' Union.

At the top of the policy making hierarchy is the Supreme Committee for Literacy. According to the EFA 2000 Assessment Report, the Committee approved a national plan for the eradication of adult illiteracy by the year 2000. The general objective of the plan was to provide adult illiterates in Syria with the opportunity to learn and to achieve a level of literacy that can enable them to continue to learn on their own, to improve their living conditions, and to enable them to contribute to the development of their society. That Committee was replaced in 2003 by the 'National Advisory Council on Literacy and Adult Education' chaired by the Minister of Culture. Its members are representatives from Ministries and NGOs and Trade Unions. It has a branch in every Governorate, chaired by the Governor and included a membership similar to that of the Advisory Council.

Other objectives were:

- To provide adequate educational opportunities for illiterates (male and female) in the age bracket (13 – 45), as well as for semi-literates in the same age group. The period of study for illiterates was 6 months for the basic literacy phase, and 3 months for post-literacy. The semi-literates were required to attend the post-literacy phase only. The plan stipulated that special attention would be given to provinces that had a high illiteracy rate, particularly among young girls in the 13 – 19 age group, and young mothers in the 20 – 29 age group;
- To evaluate and promote the post-literacy programmes and encourage neo-literates to practice self-teaching;
- To improve the quality of the post-literacy programmes in terms of relevance to the actual needs of the learners;
- Ensure collaboration between official and popular authorities to improve the quality of coordination among them and to consolidate their common responsibility in eradicating illiteracy;
- Ensure practical training for teachers.

Literacy Teachers

Literacy teaching was done by three categories of teachers: full-time teachers, part-time teachers, and volunteers. Training courses were regularly organized for literacy teachers. According to the EFA 2000 Assessment Report,

Training sessions were organized for male and female teachers of literacy classes. The Ministry of Culture endeavours, in collaboration with the literacy offices in the provinces and the concerned popular organizations, to organize training sessions for two weeks. The objective of the session is to train teachers in accordance with an appropriate programme focusing on the scientific aspect but also tackling the theoretical aspect relative to basic subjects of literacy and adult education. It is noteworthy that the majority of participants in these sessions were females (Ministry of Education, 1999).

Literacy Budget

According to the EFA 2000 Assessment Report, ‘the budget reserved for education amounts to 12% of the state’s general budget, among which 6% are reserved for primary education, and around 1.6% for spending on the primary education from the global national revenue ...’ The Report does not make a reference to any specific budget for literacy and adult education.

An Assessment of Achievements

The EFA 2000 Assessment Report which was prepared by the Syrian Government authority presented a short account of what had been achieved in adult literacy (Ministry of Education, 1999):

- First, there was an increase in the literacy rate among the age group 15 years and over, from 72% in 1994 – 1995 to 82% in 1998 – 1999;
- Second, there was also an increase in the literacy rate among youth (15 – 24 years old) from 87.9% in 1994-1995 to 95.1% in 1998-1999;
- Third, there was an increase in the literacy rate among females from 60.1% to 73% over the previous five years.

A Vision for the Future

A recently released report by the Ministry of Education states that the government is planning to achieve, by 2015, the Dakar goals by providing quality education to every child of school age. By so doing, it will, according to the Report, block one of the major sources of illiteracy. At the same time efforts will be doubled to achieve another Dakar goal, which is the reduction of adult illiteracy rates by 50% of their current levels (17.1%) by 2015, particularly among females by ensuring equality of opportunity between genders in basic and non-formal continuing education for children and adults.

Some of the practical steps that the government will take include the following:

- Reducing the existing gap in illiteracy rates between male (9%) and female (25.8%);
- Drawing up of a literacy map for all the provinces to determine the degree of concentration of illiteracy in every province, in preparation for intensive work to be done;
- Developing the literacy curricula to make them more relevant to the needs of the adult learner;
- Publishing a specialized journal to address the various concerns of adult learners, and issues in adult literacy and adult education.

Another aspect of the plan will be to focus on the needs of three categories of women, rural women, illiterate women, and women who are handicapped. Special educational and welfare services will be provided to those three categories.

The plan will also include what it calls ‘societal education’ which will be directed to female dropouts. The curriculum will seek to emphasize the importance of education for girls in order to be able to contribute to the development of their country. It also warns girls about the negative aspects of marriage at a young age.

On the question of the link between the plan of education for all and the eradication of poverty, the proposed plan of action stressed the need for literacy and post literacy education and training to be functional. This notion is illustrated by a special project on the education of girls in the North and North-Eastern provinces where illiteracy rates are the highest in the country, especially among females. The project was implemented with support from UNICEF (see box 2).

Box 2: Girls' Education Project in Syria

1. Sponsors: The Ministry of Education and UNICEF.
2. Location: Aleppo, Deir Al-Zour, Edleb, Al Hasaka and Al-Rakka
3. Target Group: Girls in the age group of 10 – 17.
4. Objectives:
 - To encourage girls to enrol in school and to bring back to school those who have dropped out.
 - To teach life-skills to groups of girls during the school day or after.
5. Project justification: as result of a survey carried out by the Ministry of Education and UNICEF in the above-mentioned provinces, it was discovered that a high percentage of girls in those provinces drop out of school and that many of them relapse into illiteracy.
6. The duration of the project: 5 years starting from 2001 – 2002.
7. Plan of implementation: a project task force was set up at the Ministry to manage the project in cooperation with local teams that were set up in the provinces.

The following actions were completed between 2001 and 2005:

- A survey to compile lists of dropout girls in each province. The following figures were arrived at:

Aleppo	3,238
Edleb	5,414
Deir Al-Zour	8,284
Al-Rakka	3,933
Al Hasaka	3,529
TOTAL	24,398

- Training sessions were organized for teachers and members of the local teams (2001)
- The curricula were developed (2001)
- 2001 and 2002: the project was started in all provinces.
- 2003 and 2004: training sessions were organized for teachers and supervisors.
- 2004: an initial monitoring of the project indicated that it was making remarkable progress. Accordingly, the Ministry decided to reward distinguished teachers and students who had done very well.

Note: The final evaluation of the project is awaited.

Adult Literacy and Adult Education in Yemen

Education is among the highest priorities for the government who considers education a right for all citizens irrespective of their age.

The Ministry of Education has the dual responsibility of providing formal and non-formal education. Formal basic education is directed to children in the age group 6 – 14 for a duration of 9 years. However, the efforts made by the government for the universalization of basic education have fallen short of the expectations for a number of reasons, chief among which are the following (Ministry of Education, 2005):

- Inadequacy of the facilities made available particularly in rural areas, as more than 29% of children of school age in the country remain out of school;
- The high rate of population growth (3.02%), the insufficient capacity of the basic education facilities left a large number of children of school age out of school rendering them a source of illiteracy. The situation is further complicated by the fact that the formal system of basic education suffers from internal inefficiency that led to an alarming increase in repetition and dropout rates adding another source of illiteracy.

As far back as the mid 1960s the governments of Yemen introduced the non-formal sub-system of education to benefit citizens in the age group of 10 – 45 who had not had the opportunity to benefit from the formal system when they were of school age. The non-formal sub-system operated on two levels: the adult basic literacy level and the post-literacy continuing education level. The 1980s witnessed a major drive for literacy through a number of mass literacy campaigns and the establishment of a number of basic training centres for men and women. However, the outcome was modest. In the 1990s the government made a firm commitment to a national policy on 'Education for All' in the wake-up of Jomtien Conference (March 1990). Some of the concrete actions taken by the government in support of adult literacy were:

- The establishment of an infrastructure for literacy and adult education within the Ministry of Education;
- Specifying the objectives of non-formal education and defining its programmes;
- Approving the literacy and adult education Act which regulated the work of the Ministry of Education.

The Current Situation

According to the population census there was in Yemen in the year 2005, a total of 4,198,740 illiterates in the age group of 10 – 45 male and female. The total number of the males was 1,213,530 while that of the females was 2,985,210. These figures are augmented by about 300,000 every year from three main sources:

- Children who have not been absorbed in basic formal education;
- An estimated rate of 42% dropped out of the basic education level during the school years 2002 – 2003, and 2003 – 2004;
- A large number of dropouts from literacy classes relapses into illiteracy.

The current government policy on literacy and adult education has the following objectives:

- Increase the number of adult learners (males and females) in literacy classes;
- Reduce the rates of failures and dropouts;
- Improve the quality of literacy and adult education programmes;
- Work in partnership with civil society organizations and local communities;
- Diversify basic training programmes for women with the objective of helping them to acquire life-skills that they can use to improve their living conditions in a self-reliance manner;
- Provide basic education for 95% of the 10 – 14 age group, and reduce the gap between males and females and between rural and urban areas by the year 2015;
- Realize equity in education services between males and females, and between rural and urban areas, and for the marginalized groups;

- Improve the quality of basic education by making both the teacher and the student the centre of attention within the system of education and in society;
- Improve the internal efficiency in basic education and reinforce the capacity of the Ministry of Education and its various provincial offices within the context of the government policy of decentralization.

In view of the fact that the poverty reduction strategy depends, among other things, on the involvement of qualified and competent human resources, the government believed that the existence of a high illiteracy rate among the productive segments of the population in the country, constituted a negative element in the strategy. Thus the government is committed to a policy of universalization of basic education for all citizens by the year 2015. That includes literacy for youth and adults.

The first national report by Yemen on the Millennium Development Goals (1990 – 2015) states clearly that the achievement of the 8 MDGs largely depends on achievement of the goals of education for all. One of the obstacles that stand in the way to achieving the MDGs by 2015 is the shortage of funds earmarked for basic education in Yemen. The Ministry of Education estimates that the cost would be around 29.352 million US\$, while the present budget for basic education is only 9.246 million US\$. There is a deficit of 20.111 million US\$.

Current literacy programmes

The literacy and adult education Act specified the following programmes as essential for the achievement of the objectives of literacy and adult education.

1. Literacy and Continuing Education Programme

This is a programme that seeks to offer a two-tier type of education: basic literacy training and a type of education parallel and complementary to formal basic education. The programme is to be implemented in three phases: the basic literacy phase, the post-literacy phase and the complementary phase. The basic literacy phase lasts for two academic years of seven months each. The objective is to make learners literate, and to help them attain an education level equivalent to grade 4 in formal basic education. The programme has three main objectives that the neo-literates must achieve:

- The correct understanding of Islamic principles;
- Attainment of basic skills in reading, writing and arithmetic, at a level equivalent to the 4th grade in basic formal education, and the application of those skills in the learners' daily life;
- The acquisition of general and practical scientific knowledge, and essential information in the domain of economic, social and political affairs at a level that would enable the neo-literate to participate in the process of development in his/her community.

The post-literacy phase consists in a a one-year continuation phase to enable the learner to consolidate the skills and the amount of knowledge he/she had acquired during the basic literacy phase. The skills and knowledge provided during this phase are equivalent to the sixth grade level in basic formal education. It aims at helping the learner achieve three objectives:

- Raising the standard of awareness about the Islamic faith and about social, economic political, health, environmental and population issues;
- Completion and consolidation of skills and knowledge attained during the basic literacy phase;
- Acquisition of knowledge about matters that relate to the learners daily life.

The complementary phase lasts two academic years. Its targets are youths. It prepares the learner for joining grade 9 in the formal basic education level. It provides the learner with the opportunity to achieve the following objectives:

- Acquisition of information about Islamic culture, about public health, nutrition, the environment and the population, in addition to providing the learner with skills for self-teaching and continuing education in order to be able to participate in different social, economic and political activities in his/her community;
- Taking advantage of a diversity of opportunities to benefit from available educational options that can provide the learner with the kind of training that can equip him/her for joining the employment market.

2. The Skill Training Programme: This is a programme that combines literacy training with skill training. It covers a wide range of vocations for men and women. The training course lasts between three to twelve months in the basic training centres that were established in 1973. There are 14 basic training centres now in 14 provinces, and 492 women's training centres throughout the country. It is noted that the basic training centres are currently not as effective as they used to be when they were first established in the 1970s. They lack the necessary equipment for training as well as the necessary funding for mounting relevant programmes.

Partnership for literacy: The responsibility for literacy and adult education is given by government to the Ministry of Education which created an independent body (financially and administratively) known as the Literacy and Adult Education organization under the chairmanship of the Minister of Education. The organization is responsible for the planning, implementation and evaluation of literacy programmes. There is a branch for the organization in every province. It has attempted to develop some partnership with a variety of agencies in civil society and the universities; but the response has so far been very minimal. Some of the national agencies that are interested in literacy work include some charitable organizations and some of the women's organizations. The Ministry of Education has received financial support from a number of bilateral and multilateral agencies, both regional and international.

Staffing the literacy and adult education organization: The organization has 74 employees at its headquarters, including professionals and administrators. There are only 9 females among them. At the field level, there is a branch for the organization in each province, but the number of professionals is not specified. As for the teaching staff in literacy classes, the bulk of the teaching force comes from amongst the formal schoolteachers. Another group of teachers is made up of secondary school leavers who are given training courses before they started teaching.

Funding literacy programmes: According to the Ministry of Education, the monthly operational budget for the provincial activities is around 2,695,110 Yemeni Riyals (YER), equivalent to US\$13,600, which is far below the required level of funding. Financial support has come from some of the Arab regional organizations as well as from international agencies including UNESCO, UNICEF and UNDP. These contributions are mainly used for training of personnel and for the purchase of equipment for the basic training centres. It is generally felt that donors are more concerned with supporting formal basic education programmes and are not so much concerned about adult literacy programmes.

Enrolment in literacy and adult education classes: During the academic years 2001/2002 – 2005/2006 the numbers enrolled in first year literacy level was 57,389 out of whom there were 7,514 males and 49,875 females, which shows that the ratio was only 13% males and 87% females. These figures represent only 19% of the target potential learners foreseen in the national strategy which is 300,000 participants. A comparison between the number enrolled in first year (57,389) and the number of those who graduated at the end of the second year (36,531) shows that 37% of the learners had dropped out before the completion of the two-year literacy course. The rate of those who dropped out of the post-literacy one-year programme was 56%. These figures are alarming as they reflect a serious lack of internal efficiency of the system and a low level of motivation among learners, particularly among men.

A Vision for the Future

The future strategy for literacy in Yemen can be summarized as follows:

1. The organizing principles will be:

- The adoption of new and diversified approaches for overcoming obstacles that had hampered progress in the past;
- Expansion of the basic literacy programmes as well as training programmes to cover remote areas, and to facilitate the enrolment of girls;
- Improving the internal efficiency of the programmes in order to achieve better results;

- Provision of the necessary financial and human resources needed for the implementation of the programmes.
2. The procedures to be followed:
- a) In the area of planning and follow-up
- Literacy and adult education plans should be conceived as an integral part of the national social and economic plans; and literacy and adult education programmes should respond to the needs of the adult learners and should relate to the national and local development projects;
 - Coordination with civil society organizations including those organizations which look after special need groups of citizens;
 - Reinforcement of links with regional and international agencies.
- b) In the area of curriculum and educational materials
- Curriculum development should be based on research outcome relevant to the actual needs of adult learners and the needs of their environments;
 - The modernization of the curricula for the basic training centres and women's centres to make them more responsive to the requirements of the employment market, and the efforts to reduce poverty;
 - The introduction of new programmes for the neo-literates to be based on the concepts of self-instruction and continuing education.
- c) In the area of using the media for publicity and mobilization
- Building an informed public opinion in favour of literacy, and encouraging voluntary participation for combating illiteracy;
 - Defining the role of each partner and their contribution to combating illiteracy;
 - The organization of major publicity campaigns at the national and the local levels;
 - Linking religious and political awareness to the importance of the education of women.

Analysis of the Situation in the Seven Countries

All of the seven countries are applying a dual strategy approach for the universalization of basic education for children through the formal school system, and for adults through literacy and adult education programmes. The objective is to enrol all children of school age in primary school, and by so doing the major source of illiteracy will be blocked, and to offer literacy as an alternative learning avenue for those youth and adults who missed the opportunity to go to school when they were ready for it, because there were either no schools to go to, or because some social, political or economic barriers stood in the way. This dual strategy has been in place for more than two decades in all of the seven countries. It was reinforced after the 1990 Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, which underlined the need for an expanded concept of adult education to cover basic learning needs of children, youth and adults. Despite the intensified efforts, the outcome of the dual strategy in the seven countries has not been a great success. The outcome is varied for two main reasons. The first is the fact that the extension of school education in all of these countries has come up against serious obstacles which had on the one hand adversely affected the quantitative expansion in most of them, and on the other, adversely affected the quality in all of them. In addition to the shortage of adequate financial resources, and adequately trained personnel, the school system has not been very successful in retaining all children who enrolled. There has been an alarming level of wastage that pushed many of the children back into the space of illiteracy. The external factors of traditions, poverty and bias against girls have also played a role in keeping thousands of children, especially girls out of school. It must however be said that Bahrain is an exception to these trends.

The other side of the dual strategy, which is adult literacy, has certainly improved with literacy rates increasing in all of the seven countries among age groups that ranged from 10 – 45 some of whom are school dropouts and others who are citizens who never had a chance to go to school when they were ready for it. However, adult literacy programmes, like the formal primary education programmes, have not been performing as expected for reasons that are more complex than those faced by the formal system.

The obstacles that adult literacy efforts have faced and are still facing are actually built into the main components of the literacy programmes. Those components included: the concept of literacy; objectives of literacy programmes; structures for literacy and adult education; curricula; personnel; programme effectiveness; finance and costs.

Concept of literacy

In 1958 UNESCO adopted a recommendation, which was sent to all its member states, on the International Standardization of Educational Statistics which defined an illiterate person as a person 'who cannot, with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his everyday life.'

Twenty years later the UNESCO General Conference at its twentieth session, in 1978 adopted a Revised Recommendation concerning the International Standardization of Educational Statistics, which declares that 'a person is functionally illiterate who cannot engage those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community's development.' Since that date, 1978, UNESCO and the world educators have moved a long way in their attempts to find an all-embracing understanding of literacy in a globalized and rapidly changing world. To avoid opening that Pandora box, we should simply report here that with the passage of time, and the evolution of the concepts of development, cultural diversity and sustainable development, the issue of literacy has become intertwined with larger issues such as: Social and political action; Economic development; Social equity; The use and abuse of power.

Many questions are raised by educators all over the world on the meaning of literacy: Is it a cognitive skill? Is it an intellectual transformation? Is it a competence? Is there more than one form of literacy? The debate is continuing. But there is no doubt that this debate has broadened our understanding of the nature of literacy in the social context. An examination of the theoretical definition of literacy in the seven countries will reveal that the practice in all of them, with the exception of Sudan and Egypt, has not been particularly influenced by the wide debate on the meaning of literacy. But even in Egypt and Sudan it is the NGOs that have adopted a more progressive understanding of literacy and applied the Paulo Freire theory as embodied in the REFLECT approach. What is really very striking here is the fact that the concept of literacy in government programmes in all of the seven countries is still limited to teaching, reading and writing with numeracy rarely mentioned on an equal footing with the other two skills.

UNESCO has not yet taken a formal step to revise its instruments on literacy and adult education. However, in the recent EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006 focusing on literacy, the issue of understanding literacy has been raised. The international trend is to expand the concept and to talk more of community learning and of livelihood skills.

Objectives of Literacy Programmes

The objectives in all of the seven countries are stated in a very general way such as:

- To provide adult illiterates with the opportunity to learn and to achieve the skills of reading, writing and calculating (Syria).
- The eradication of illiteracy is a national responsibility aiming at raising the standard of the citizenry socially, culturally and professionally (Bahrain).
- To work towards the realization of opportunities for adult learners to continue their education at intermediate and secondary school levels (Saudi Arabia).

As a result of these general and sometimes vague kinds of statements which are obviously not based on any needs assessment exercise to determine the nature of the demand for literacy and the motivation behind the demand, the governments design the supply according to the objectives they believe are relevant, and not in response to actual needs of the adult learners and their communities. Consequently, the curricula are built around the assumption that 'one size fits all'. But because that is a false assumption, the outcome of literacy programmes is, to say the least, modest.

Structures for Literacy and Adult Education

There is in each of the seven countries a high-level policy making body referred to as the National Council (Sudan), the National Authority, (Egypt) or a High-Level Committee, as is the case in the remaining five countries. They are also responsible for planning and implementing literacy activities including literacy campaigns, in collaboration and coordination with other players in the field of literacy.

This national policy-making body is chaired by the Ministry of Education in most of these countries. Syria is the exception as it is the Minister of Culture who chairs the High-Level Advisory Committee because the Ministry of Culture has historically been in charge of literacy work.

The establishment of a National Council or a High-Level Committee in each of the seven countries is an important step which indicates that the policy makers acknowledge the need for such mechanisms. It is also an acknowledgement of the fact that literacy as a national commitment cannot be undertaken by government alone. Partners will have to be involved. NGOs have been an important partner in Sudan, Yemen, Egypt and Syria. They had not only accepted a significant share of the work, but had also added quality to the work. In addition to NGOs, membership of the Council/Committee included, besides the Ministry of Education, all the Ministries concerned with social services such as Health, Labour and Social Welfare, as well as all the Ministries concerned with development such as Agriculture, Industry and Economics. In addition to the ministries, the membership also included representatives of the private sector and the universities. Each Council/Committee has, in all of the seven countries, a branch at the state or the provincial level with a similar composition.

Universities and research centres as partners

Although the universities are represented on the national councils/committees, there has been no more than casual reference to Universities and Research Centres in connection with literacy work. There are universities, teacher training colleges and research centres in all of the seven countries. Some of these universities have extension service departments and agricultural extension departments, whose functions cut across the field of literacy and adult education, nevertheless no country report on any of the seven countries has indicated that these universities had played any role in, for example, training literacy teachers, managers, organizers or any other category of literacy personnel. The same state of affairs applies to research centres. We have not come across any major study on any aspect of literacy that had been undertaken by a research centre.

In fact literacy policies in all of these countries do not include research as a tool for knowing how to understand better the rules of the game, and how to improve effectiveness. Applied research is needed in particular to determine which methods are more effective and how the costs and benefits compare. There is also a need to know how adults learn, how to deal with language issues, and how to build the link between literacy and productivity, etc. These are only some of the domains where research can make an important contribution to literacy work.

The Curricula

As an inevitable domino reaction, the curricula have in most cases been a true mirror of those narrow objectives. They are either borrowed from school text books that were intended for primary school children (with some modifications to suit adults in some countries), or they could be specifically tailored to suit adult literacy classes in which case they follow a theoretical approach which is often detached from the reality of everyday life. Even those texts that may succeed in helping the learner read the words are far away from helping her/him 'to read the world' as Paulo Freire once said. The exception here is what NGOs have done in Sudan (GOAL, SOLO, PAMOJA and ADRA), and what some NGOs are doing in Egypt. The situation in all of the seven countries is very much improved at the post-literacy level where the emphasis is on consolidating the skills that had been acquired during the basic literacy stage (reading, writing and calculating) within a livelihood skills framework. The degree of generalizing this approach varies from one country to the other.

Three common important observations can be made on curricula with respect to the seven countries:

- For basic literacy, the rule seems to be in government-sponsored programmes to develop one curriculum to fit all interests – 'one size fits all'. Standard texts are used across the country. But at the post-literacy level, some attention is given to developing different

curricula to suit particular groups with particular occupations or interests. Post-literacy programmes for women and rural groups in Syria are a good example;

- Teaching methods are a replica of conventional school methods. They emphasize drilling, and leave little room for learners' interaction. The exception once more is the REFLECT approach used by NGOs, particularly in the Sudan;
- There was no evidence in any of the seven countries that would suggest the application of modern information and communication technologies in teaching literacy or post-literacy classes on a wide scale. In fact what exists in some of the countries is a limited use of radio and television for teaching literacy or for enriching general knowledge.

The Personnel

Each one of the seven countries has confirmed that teaching adult literacy and post-literacy classes is done by part-time teachers who came from two categories:

- Trained formal school (mainly primary) teachers. They receive short training courses in adult teaching methods;
- Volunteers whose level of education differed widely.

In Oman and Yemen the bulk of teachers in this category are secondary school leavers from within the local community. They are given some short training courses on how to teach adults.

The two categories of teachers are not well remunerated, and many are not motivated enough to exert the necessary effort in situations where extra effort is needed to assist certain types of learners.

At the post-literacy level, the situation is different as teaching and training is done by staff members who are specialists in the subject. Some of these teachers at literacy and post-literacy levels, especially those volunteers who work for NGOs, are highly motivated and deeply committed to the task of teaching adults. There is little reference in the country reports to any long-term professional training, either for teachers or for supervisors and organizers of literacy programmes.

Programme Effectiveness

The question to ask is: are the adult learners at the basic literacy level receiving enough training to master the basic skills of reading, writing and calculating? Reports by the seven countries claim that the literacy programmes are by and large fulfilling their objectives with regard to those learners who stay the course to the end. But the same reports indicate an alarming level of dropout rates at both basic and post-literacy levels. Examples of dropout rates are evident in the country reports in Part B of this document.

The reports from Bahrain and Syria indicate the reasons behind the alarming dropout rates. A statement by Mahmoud El-Sayed, the former Minister of Education, enumerated the major reasons for dropout from literacy classes as follows (Al-Sadiq, 2003):

1. Ineffectiveness of literacy programme because of:

- The careless attitude of some instructors who do not know how to deal with adult learners due to the fact that these instructors are primary school teachers;
- The feeling among some adult learners that the lessons they are offered are not relevant to their present nor to their future needs;
- Unsuitability of teaching methods;
- Unsuitability of the content of lessons to the needs of the adult learners;

2. Inadequacy of the resources earmarked for literacy. For example:

- Classrooms are poorly lit;
- Classrooms are fitted with pieces of furniture that are not suitable for adults;
- Textbooks and study materials are of poor quality printing.

3. Other problems that learners encountered included:

- The feeling among some learners that the instructors are not treating them in a serious manner;
- The teaching style is not attractive;
- The timetable does not suit some of the learners.

Hajir Al-Sadiq (2003) added in her paper the following reasons for dropping out:

- Girls drop out because their families want them to assist with domestic work or to look after younger children;
- The conviction among some families that education is not important for girls;
- The tradition of early marriages, especially in rural areas and among uneducated families;
- Problems of transportation from home to literacy classes.

She believed that there were reasons which were specific to the rural areas and the Bedouin communities:

- Economic reasons related to the continuous occupation of farmers throughout the year. They could not afford to spend the time required for following literacy classes;
- The low level of awareness of the social and cultural value of education;
- The lack of legislation which gives weight to the certificate of graduation from literacy classes to be used either for employment or for access to the formal system of education.

In Bahrain, the reasons behind the dropout phenomenon are the following, according to Abdul-Majid Mufiz, Chief of the Continuing Education Department:

- Health problems that may interrupt the continuity of attendance among some adults;
- Unwillingness of some husbands to allow their wives to go out to the study centres;
- Shyness among adult learners who find themselves sharing the same classroom with younger people;
- The lack of sufficient time for some learners to follow a literacy course which lasts for two years;
- There is, in some cases (for females) a conflict between the timetable for literacy classes and the time when children come home from school;
- Lack of awareness of the importance of education;
- Some of the learners drop out because they feel that the course would be too difficult for them to follow;
- Some learners expect to be given some material incentives to attend literacy classes.

Finance and Costs

This is an area where information is lacking in all of the seven countries. The only country that has provided the author with information on the annual budget for literacy and adult continuing education is Bahrain, which was a total of around 500,000 Bahraini Dinars (BHD), or approximately US\$1.3 million.

A report issued by ARLO (Arab Regional Literacy Organization) for the year 1999 – 2000 contained some general figures on some Arab countries which included the Sultanate of Oman where the budget for literacy was 506,060 Omani Rial (OMR), equivalent to US\$1,314,783. We assume that this budget is for current expenditure. But no breakdown is given.

On Egypt the only relevant reference we could find in the UNDP 1998/1999 Report on Egypt which stated the following:

Since the early 1990s the government has directed increasing resources to eliminate illiteracy. To this end, the General Authority for Literacy and Adult Education (GALAE) was established in 1991. GALAE has appropriated increasing funds during the period 1991/1997.

These funds totaled E£ 253 millions (approximately 50 million U.S. Dollars) of which E£ 148 million were budget allocations and 105 million from donors, Social Fund for Development (SFD) and Development Aid. The effectiveness of government literacy programme is questioned, since the number of illiterates has increased during the same period.

The lack of information is an indicator of the lack of accountability on the part of those who are responsible for the management of the literacy and adult education programmes. At the same time it can be concluded that governments refrain from publicizing the budget allocated for literacy to avoid possible comparisons between formal and non-formal education on a national scale of priorities.

The experience of other countries may serve as a guide for Arab countries to follow. Helen Abadzi (2004) quotes a study by Oxenham (2004) comparing formal and non-formal education costs which showed that data...

...from eight programmes indicated that the unit costs of a program range from a high of half those of a country's primary school annual unit costs to a low of about one-seventh. In Nepal, a graduate of a 9-month adult literacy programme can master the skills of a 5th or 6th grade primary school student. Data from Ghana, Bangladesh, and Senegal ... indicate that adult literacy courses cost only 26 – 66 percent of primary school costs, but this is only under the assumption that adults will become and stay literate through courses of 360 – 400 hours compared to children's courses that last in principle about 3,000 – 4,000 hours (Abadzi, 2004, p. 14).

Cost analysis for literacy programmes is more complicated than analysis of school programmes because in literacy there are a number of factors that are literacy-specific. One of those factors is the cost of the facilitator which varies considerably depending on whether he or she is full-time, part-time or a volunteer who charged a nominal fee or offered his/her services free of charge. Another important factor is the duration of the literacy course. We have seen a variation of length of courses in the seven countries which ranged from three months to two years. Another factor is the high cost incurred through repetition of classes by many learners who fail the tests more than once, and the fact that a sizeable number of those adults who become literate relapse into illiteracy for sheer lack of opportunities to practice the skills they had acquired.

Abadzi (2004) believed that 'if most participants became literate and stayed literate, governments might be willing to spend more. But the limited effectiveness of the programmes urges caution, and there is continuing ambivalence towards financing such activities despite rhetoric to the contrary. Thus literacy budgets in many countries are just 1% - 2% of education budgets' (ibid.).

Research into this area is urgently needed. In addition to the difficulty posed by the lack of adequate reliable data on budgets and expenditure on literacy, there is the technical side of the process itself. As David Archer has said, 'costs cannot be established in isolation of a clear set of principles about how programmes should work – only by establishing reference points or benchmarks on key issues like facilitators' pay could we reasonably define the costs of programmes per learner. Costs also need to put in the context of the benefits that come from literacy' (David Archer, 2006. p. 4).

Reporting on a survey ActionAid and the Global Campaign for Education undertook in 2005 'to systematize experience of what works in adult literacy and how much quality literacy programmes cost.' Archer mentioned that, 'the results show a significant diversity across regions but perhaps not as large as one might expect. We find that the average cost per learner in Africa is US\$ 47, in Asia it is US\$ 30 and in Latin America it is US\$ 61' ... (ibid.).

Although no figure is shown for the Arab Region, Archer makes a reference to five Arab States (Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Sudan and Morocco) to whom the following statement was attributed, 'Based on our experience the cost varies between US\$ 10 and US\$ 150 depending on the country of work in the Arab World' (ibid.). He also shares the view that was endorsed by the CONFINTEA (International Conference on Adult Education) mid-term review which argued for a minimum of 3% of government education budgets to go to adult learning (UNESCO, 2003b).

Conclusions

Over the past two decades, the countries under review have made good progress towards achieving universal primary education and decreasing the rates of adult illiteracy. A number of excellent programmes have been developed in every country. However, the battle for universal primary education and for a fully literate society is far from over.

There are complex issues of quantity and quality on both sides of the coin (primary education and literacy). While the lack of adequate financial and human resources has limited the quantitative expansion, internal inefficiency and poor quality inputs have adversely affected the quality of outputs of both literacy and formal primary education programmes. Thus, six of the seven countries are not likely to meet the Dakar target for reducing illiteracy rates by 50% of the 2000 level, or meet the other target of universalizing basic primary education by 2015. Bahrain will be the exception as it is, according to the 2007 EFA Global Monitoring Report, the only Arab State which is likely to meet the 2015 target.

Translating the political commitment into implementable plans with adequate financial and human resources requires an understanding that the political commitment will involve mobilization of resources, expertise in the domains of management, mobilization of public support, teaching methods, curriculum development and monitoring and evaluation. None of the seven countries under review seems to have the adequate amount or level of expertise in any of these areas.

Literacy in the countries under review is understood by government in the traditional sense of acquiring the skills of reading, writing and calculating – a poor imitation of what goes on in the traditional primary school system. Literacy is also seen as an end in itself. There is a need to move away from this narrow understanding of literacy into a wider concept that can encompass the demands and the aspirations of individual learners and the demands and aspirations of their communities in a rapidly changing globalized world in which information is the key tool for progress.

While all of the seven countries have broadly applied a dual strategy to universalize primary education and to reduce adult illiteracy rates, they have, with respect to adult literacy, applied a variety of strategies and methods to achieve the literacy objectives. Those strategies were a combination of mass literacy campaigns, functional literacy and what ARLO calls the ‘total confrontation strategy’ which looks at literacy in its cultural context. Those strategies were designed for both stages of literacy, basic and post-literacy. The latter was meant to create opportunities for further learning either through continuing non-formal education or through links with formal education. It was found necessary to ensure the availability of reading material through libraries and newspapers to help neo-literates consolidate what they had achieved in the basic literacy stage.

A common problem in all of the seven countries is the high dropout rate in literacy classes ranging from 15% - 60%. The common finding is that adults will first enrol enthusiastically in literacy classes and then rapidly drop out for a variety of reasons which have been mentioned in this paper. Suffice it to mention here the fact that the quality of the programmes is one of the major reasons for dropping out. This has to do with the curricula, the methodology, the teachers’ attitude, and the relevance of the entire programme to the adult learner’s needs. There is also some doubt about how many of those who attend literacy classes really become literate and how many of them remain literate.

While the national structures for literacy and adult education in the seven countries are excellent in terms of allowing representation of all the stakeholders, and working in coordination with local and regional councils and committees; the national structures have shown the need for improvement in three aspects:

- Reinforcing partnership with NGOs and the private sector;
- Decentralizing more authority and more decision-making to the local and regional committees;
- Building their professional capacity through the recruitment of high level expertise.

The gender gap in literacy is alarming in six of the seven countries, the exception being Bahrain. The issue is, therefore, how to deal with this problem in its multi-dimensional nature which is a combination of tradition, backwardness, poverty, and limitations and even scarcity of resources in some of the countries. Girls and women are treated as a priority within the identified target group which is in the range of 10 – 45 years of age in the seven countries. Women have shown greater interest in attending literacy classes. In some cases special programmes have been designed for them taking into account their

particular situation especially those women in rural areas who are overburdened with productive and domestic work. However, women still face numerous constraints in their endeavour to complete literacy and post-literacy classes. Some of the countries have introduced some measures of flexibility and incentives to attract women to literacy classes. But the challenge to reach more women remains. It is important for every country to develop within the structure of the Ministry of Education a special high-level committee for that purpose. Its membership should include NGOs and representatives of the private sector.

The seven countries need seriously to consider how many well qualified and highly motivated managers and teachers their literacy programmes need. It was not clear in the country reports what criteria were used to select literacy managers and teachers. It was clear that teachers were not adequately prepared for the job, were underpaid, and received little supervision.

Very limited research is being done to search for better strategies to address the different aspects of literacy in contemporary societies. Currently, research has little impact because either the existing research does not relate to literacy needs, or those who control the literacy programmes do not see the need for research. The programmes seem to allow very little room for the use of research findings to produce change.

There is limited use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in literacy and adult education, in teaching and in management. Even the use of radio and television is very limited. The exception is SOLO in Sudan where it is using distance learning techniques to deliver its post-literacy programmes.

Universities in many countries of the world are strongly involved in literacy and adult education on two levels:

- They undertake research in all sorts of issues that relate to literacy and the illiterates;
- They train literacy personnel.

It is noted that in the seven countries under review universities are rarely linked to any major activity that relates to literacy work.

As regards to data on Literacy, building a reliable data base on literacy and adult education is a prerequisite for any scientific work in this domain. There is no problem finding raw literacy data in any of the seven countries, but it is very difficult to find data that include more complex information about the way different literacy courses operate, and the results they achieve, let alone finding data on needs assessment surveys, students' motivation or the cost-effectiveness of literacy programmes. Further, accountability is a related issue that seems to have almost no place in literacy work. It is important for the national authorities to know whether the policies and strategies used are relevant, whether youth and adults are actually learning and acquiring skills and knowledge, whether they are receiving the kind of support and facilities that will help them sustain and improve the knowledge and the skills they have acquired, and whether they are using those skills and knowledge for improving their situation and that of their families.

Finance and Cost: How much is literacy receiving by way of funding? Is the expenditure justified in terms of the outcome? This was an area that was difficult to assess because, apart from limited information given by Bahrain and Oman, reports from the other five countries were practically silent about finance and cost. It was, therefore, impossible to know the level of funding that is earmarked for literacy from governments as well as from other sources.

Future directions

The Concept of Literacy: It is important for the seven countries to revise the concept of literacy to take it beyond the acquisition of the skills of reading, writing and calculating in order to focus attention on the nature and function of literacy in a social system, and the role it should play in reshaping the world in which one lives and works. Literacy learning is not simply a technical exercise. It affects a whole range of cognitive processes and attitudes. Illiteracy, on the other hand, is a product of socio-political and socio-cultural factors that take time to change.

From Rhetoric to Action: To ensure that the political commitment of the government and civil society is translated into implementable plans of action, illiteracy must be recognized not as a problem to be left to the Ministry of Education or to any other department, but as an issue demanding the total

commitment of society. Literacy should not be seen as an end in itself but as an element in a broader scheme of national development. Hence it should be placed as a high priority on the national agenda and must receive the necessary resources, both human and financial.

Research and Training of Personnel: Investing more in research and the training of personnel, and revising the system of remuneration and incentives are essential for improving the quality of the programmes, and for getting higher returns.

Gender Equality: Gender equality must have a much higher priority, entailing setting up well-researched and adequately funded and staffed projects for the education and training of out-of-school girls and illiterate women, particularly those in rural and difficult-to-reach areas.

Regional Cooperation: The Arab States Region as a whole including the seven countries under review has a lot of valuable experience in the field of literacy and adult education. The time may be right now to think of establishing a mechanism for regional cooperation.

A regional Fund for Literacy: Attempts to establish such a fund in the past were not successful. The complexity of the issues that the region is facing underlines the urgency for collective action to liberate the seventy million illiterate adults of whom two thirds are women.

ANNEX

Statistics in Brief

SOURCE: UNESCO INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS

1. Bahrain

Literacy rates		1990	2000-2004	2000-2004 Regional average
Adult (15+)%	MF	82.1	86.5	68.6
	M	86.8	88.6	78.5
	F	74.6	83.6	58.7
Youth (15-24)%	MF	95.6	97.0	84.9
	M	96.2	96.8	89.9
	F	95.0	97.3	80.1

2. Egypt

Literacy rates		1990	2000-2004	2000-2004 Regional average
Adult (15+)%	MF	47.1	71.4	68.6
	M	60.4	83.0	78.5
	F	33.6	59.4	58.7
Youth (15-24)%	MF	61.3	84.9	84.9
	M	70.9	90.1	89.9
	F	51.0	78.9	80.1

3. Oman

Literacy rates		1990	2000-2004	2000-2004 Regional average
Adult (15+)%	MF	54.7	81.4	68.6
	M	67.3	86.9	78.5
	F	38.3	73.5	58.7
Youth	MF	85.6	97.3	84.9

(15-24)%	M	95.4	97.9	89.9
	F	75.4	96.7	80.1

4. Saudi Arabia

Literacy rates		1990	2000-2004	2000-2004 Regional average
Adult (15+)%	MF	66.2	79.4	68.6
	M	76.2	87.1	78.5
	F	50.2	69.3	58.7
Youth (15-24)%	MF	85.4	95.9	84.9
	M	91.2	98.1	89.9
	F	78.6	93.7	80.1

5. Sudan

Literacy rates		1990	2000	2005 Regional average
Adult (15+)%	MF	-	60.9	70.5
	M	-	71.1	80.7
	F	-	51.8	59.7
Youth (15-24)%	MF	-	77.2	85.1
	M	-	84.6	90.6
	F	-	71.4	79.5

6. Syria

Literacy rates		1990	2000-2004	2000-2004 Regional average
Adult (15+)%	MF	-	79.6	68.6
	M	-	86.0	78.5
	F	-	73.6	58.7
Youth (15-24)%	MF	-	92.2	84.9
	M	-	94.3	89.9
	F	-	90.2	80.1

7. Yemen

Literacy rates		1990	2000-2004	2000-2004 Regional average
Adult (15+)%	MF	50.0	-	68.6
	M	63.7	-	78.5
	F	35.6	-	58.7
Youth (15-24)%	MF	66.6	-	84.9
	M	77.3	-	89.9
	F	55.3	-	80.1

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