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Literacy Policies and Strategies in the Maghreb:

Comparative Perspectives from Algeria, Mauritania and Morocco

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Literacy skills are essential components of basic education. Indeed, one of the most fundamental ways in which education systems may contribute to poverty reduction, social change and sustainable development is through expanded access to basic education and literacy skills. As a result, the principle of ensuring equitable access to basic education has been central to educational development discourse and policies worldwide in the second half of the twentieth century.

This study provides an overview of literacy policies and strategies among three countries within the Maghreb region, namely, Algeria, Mauritania, and Morocco. The study underlines changes in vision and approach, presenting strategic options and institutional arrangements for literacy provision, identifying main strengths and challenges in approach, and suggesting recommendations to accelerate the pace of progress being made.

This study is based on a critical review of national literacy strategy documents, as well as other relevant literature pertaining to the status and provision of literacy within the three countries of the sub-region. The study is also informed by first-hand experience in cooperation and technical support undertaken as part of the UNESCO Education Programme for the Maghreb, within the framework of the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE). Given the LIFE priority within countries in which the literacy challenge is the greatest, the wealth of data available for Morocco and Mauritania was first reviewed, before collecting additional data for Algeria, where cooperation in the area of literacy has only recently been initiated between the government of Algeria and UNESCO.

After preliminary considerations on the definition and measurement of literacy, the first section of the paper characterizes patterns of illiteracy within the Maghreb region, recalling the steady pattern of decline over the past decades, while highlighting the scale of the challenge that remains, the persistence of knowledge gaps and the continued reproduction of illiteracy among youth. The study then goes on to track evolving policy orientations for national literacy action, including reaffirmed political commitment at the highest levels, an enlarged vision based on more integrated approaches, the critical review or development of strategic frameworks, as well as trends towards increased (if still inadequate) funding. The following section then presents some of the emerging strategic options, including the diversification of providers, and enhanced civil society partnerships. Afterwards, the following section outlines the main features of learning strategies as regards curriculum development and renewal, the training and qualification of facilitators, the linkages between formal and non-formal education, the literate environment, and the role of monitoring and evaluation. The last section charts the way forward, providing recommendations for accelerating literacy action on the basis of an assessment of achievements and an identification of obstacles yet to be overcome.

Definition and measurement of Literacy

Conceptualisations of Literacy

Defining and measuring literacy in any context is no easy endeavour. The difficulties are related both to the definition of what is actually meant by literacy, and what constitutes 'functional' literacy in any given context. When examining current practice in public action within the Maghreb region, literacy is generally used to refer to the provision of basic education for segments of the population that are outside the formal education system. The 1990 World Conference on Education for All defined basic education as encompassing both…

> […] *essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy and problem-solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, to continue learning* (UNESCO, 1990, p. 3).

The term literacy in this paper is thus used in its narrower traditional acceptation; i.e. as a set of basic instrumental learning skills in reading, writing, and numeracy acquired through non-formal education

channels. It does not relate to concepts of information and computer literacy that have recently informed a wider conception of literacy in increasingly knowledge-driven economies. Although such wider conceptions are being increasingly considered in national literacy action within the region, the national data reported continue to pertain to narrower definitions.

Defining and Measuring Literacy

Countries within the Maghreb generally adopt an *indirect measure of literacy* during household surveys based on self reported data. In Algeria, for instance, adults interviewed during household health surveys report on their perceived 'ability to read and write' (UNESCO, 2005, p. 285). Likewise, during household surveys conducted to collect population census data in Mauritania, adults report on their 'ability to read and write in the language specified' (UNESCO, 2005, p. 287). Finally, in Morocco, adults surveyed report on their own literacy skill levels, as well as on those of other members of their household based on their perceived ability to read, write, and understand, a simple sentence in any language.[1] These indirect measures of literacy are thus generally based on household survey and population census data.

If conceptualisations and measures of literacy appear to be similar in Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania, the operational definitions adopted within the context of specific national strategies differ from country to country. In Algeria, for instance, in order to be considered literate, an adult needs to acquire skills levels equivalent to those defined as the minimal threshold for the end of the primary education cycle. In Morocco, on the other hand, no reference is made to reading and writing skills levels defined within the formal education system. Rather, becoming literate supposes the acquisition of basic competencies required for everyday life. Finally, in Mauritania, literacy action, once seen essentially as a process of sensitization and initiation to pre-literacy skills, is now defined in the 2006 strategy as a process of acquisition of basic competencies and their application to everyday life through the creation of literate environments that promote life-long learning.[2]

Direct Measurement of Arabic Literacy Skill Levels

Experience with *direct measurement* of Arabic literacy skill levels has been limited within the Maghreb region. While there have been a number of experiences in the direct measure of Arabic literacy skills levels among students in formal schooling within the context of national and international surveys on learning achievement, there has been very little experience with direct measurement of literacy skill levels among the general population as a whole. It is to be noted, however, that Morocco first experimented with direct assessment of literacy skill levels among the adult population as part of the first Living Standards Measurement Survey (ENNVM) of 1990/91. More importantly, Morocco is piloting the international Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP) that is validating an adapted version of direct measurement tools and methodologies used in OECD countries. LAMP aims to respond to the gap observed between the broader conceptualisation of literacy adopted in policy discourse and the methods used to measure the scale and distribution of illiteracy. Indeed, while national strategies increasingly refer to broader conceptualisations of literacy as a societal phenomenon[3], its measurement continues to be based on a dichotomous vision of literacy/illiteracy, defined narrowly as the ability to read, write and understand a simple sentence, and measured through self reporting techniques. The direct measurement methodology proposed by LAMP aims to overcome these limits by defining literacy as the ability of using written information in everyday life and measures these skill levels on a scale of competencies.

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[1] Sources of such data include Living Standards Measurement Surveys (Ennvm 1990/91 and 1998/99) as well as demographic censuses (RGPH 1960, 1971, 1982, 1994 and 2004).
[2] A UNESCO-supported evaluation of literacy programmes in Mauritania is foreseen for 2007 in view of informing the design of new curricula and learning materials based on new strategic orientations.
[3] Reference to the acquisition and utilisation of competencies required for individuals to fully participate in their community and contribute to sustainable development within the broader context of the development of knowledge societies.

Finally, it is important to underline the challenge of cross-national comparability of literacy data.[4] While the figures cited is this study hope to reflect the most accurate and up-to-date figures for each context, their main aim is to highlight general patterns and challenges within the region. They are not definitive statements about the exact status of literacy in any one of the countries studied.

Patterns of Illiteracy within the Maghreb

While patterns of literacy vary widely between countries within the Maghreb region, adult illiteracy continues to pose a serious challenge to national development efforts for each of the countries within the region. Regardless of what measurement methods are used, an examination of nationally reported data over time suggests three trends with regard to patterns of illiteracy within the Maghreb region.

The Scale of the Challenge

It must be stated at the outset that a steady and remarkable decrease in adult illiteracy (15+) may be observed in the Maghreb over the past decades. Algeria, Mauritania and Morocco have made great strides in expanding access to basic education and literacy since independence when each country inherited dismally low levels of educational development from the colonial period.

Despite this historical decrease, however, patterns of literacy within the Maghreb region remain problematic with some of the countries continuing to record some of the highest rates of adult illiteracy in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Mauritania, for instance, records the highest rates of adult illiteracy within the Maghreb estimated at some 50 percent[5]. Likewise, in Morocco, the 10+ illiteracy rate is still at a high of almost 40 percent[6], despite significant efforts that have been made since independence in 1956 to reduce the rate of illiteracy estimated at 87 percent in 1960 (RGPH, 1960). Some 9-10 million adults are consequently considered to be illiterate and denied the right to basic education in Morocco. Although the average estimated 10+ illiteracy rate is lower in Algeria (26.5 percent)[7], the number of adult persons considered to be illiterate is estimated to be over six million.

The sheer scale of the challenge thus becomes clear when examining both literacy rates, as well as absolute numbers of illiterate adults within the Maghreb. This is clearly reflected in the fact that Algeria and Morocco are two of the five Arab countries (together with Egypt, Sudan and Yemen) in which 70 percent of the some 70 million illiterate adults in the Arab world are concentrated. Moreover, much like in the Sudan and Yemen, adult literacy rates observed in Mauritania and Morocco are below the already low regional Arab average. Not only do these levels of illiteracy remain high, the absolute numbers of illiterate adults had continued to grow despite reductions in the average rates of illiteracy. In the fifty years since independence in Morocco, for instance, the absolute number of illiterate adults has grown from six to nine million persons, and this, despite the fact that the rate of illiteracy has been dramatically reduced from 87 percent in 1957 to below 40 percent in 2007.

Three factors may help explain such trends. Firstly, the educational situation inherited from the colonial period in each of the three countries examined here was one of widespread illiteracy with the vast majority of the population being unable to read and write in any language. Despite significant progress

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[4] Developing accurate and cross-nationally comparable measures of literacy is precisely the objective of the Literacy Assessment Measurement Programme (LAMP) being undertaken by the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) in Montreal. Morocco is one of the pilot countries involved in this programme.

[5] Rates vary between 47 percent (10+) and 51.2 percent (15+) as reported in the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006.

[6] 38,45% in 2007 according to the results of the National Survey on Illiteracy : Enquête nationale sur l'analphabétisme, la non scolarisation, et la déscolarisation (Secrétariat d'Etat, 2007). The rate was reported to be 43% in the most recent (2004) population census - Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat (RGPH) 2004.

[7] According to a 2002 survey based on a sample of 20,000 households. According to projections based on these survey results, the Office National des Statistiques (ONS) estimates the rate to be at 21.4 percent for 2005.

made since independence, the pace has not allowed for the historical transition to literate societies. While the situation is progressively being reversed, illiteracy remains a mass phenomenon in all three countries. Secondly, the absolute numbers of illiterate adults has continued to grow, as a result of a combination of both high population growth rates, as well as of the difficulties in ensuring universal basic schooling. Finally, the absence of objective conditions that allow for the sustainable acquisition of skills considerably increases the probability of relapse into illiteracy among beneficiaries of literacy programmes.

The Persistence of Knowledge Gaps within Countries

In all cases, however, these national estimates do not account for significant disparities based on gender, urban/rural residence, region, household income levels within each country. Most prominent among these gaps are those based on gender. Average rates of illiteracy for women within the Maghreb range from almost 70 percent in Mauritania (according to GMR 2006, the rate of female adult (10+) illiteracy was estimated at 68.7), to close to 55 percent of all women in Morocco (RGPH, 2004), and 35 percent in Algeria, according to 2002 Household Survey. This gender bias is further exacerbated when considering other factors of discrimination in access to basic education, such as rural and/or regional residence, and levels of household income. In rural Morocco, for instance, three quarters of women were considered to be illiterate in 2004. In Mauritania, where regional disparities are very pronounced, average rates of illiteracy range differ between Wilayas (provinces) from a low of 24 percent in Nouakchott to a high of 71 percent in Gorgol, where an estimated 80 percent of all women are illiterate.

Reproduction of Illiteracy among Youth

Literacy action remains challenged by the potential for the reproduction of illiteracy among children at the source, as well as among adult beneficiaries of literacy programmes. The objective of ensuring the right to education for all children through universal compulsory schooling is still far from being reached in the three countries under examination. While significant progress has been made in expanding access to primary education, retention rates remain low. In Morocco alone an estimated 370,000 grade 1-12 students dropped out during the 2005-06 school year. In Mauritania, primary retention rates are among the lowest observed in the Arab world. In addition to low retention, the decline in levels of learning outcomes has been deteriorating suggests that the primary schooling cycle, even when complete, does not guarantee the acquisition of sustainable literacy skills.

The quality and sustainability of learning outcomes is also a challenge for literacy programmes. While the retention rates are improving in Morocco, they remain low and generally overlooked in public discourse in which numbers of adults enrolled in programmes are equated with total number of beneficiaries. In order to gain greater insight into the outcomes of literacy action, a distinction would have to be made between the numbers of initial enrolments, of those having completed the full literacy cycle, and finally, the numbers of those having successfully passed the final evaluation of literacy skill levels acquired. It would be safe to say that the sustainability of learning outcomes is challenged by the fact that a significant portion of beneficiaries are from poorer socio-economic backgrounds characterized by poor literate environments that do not allow for the consolidation and development of skills acquired. Literacy relapse is thus a real risk that affects adults having recently completed literacy programmes.

Enlarged vision and integrated policies

In recent years, there has been a clear reaffirmation of political commitment to literacy action within the Maghreb countries examined here. Morocco officially adopted its national literacy and non-formal education strategy in 2004. At the time of writing, the Mauritanian National Strategy for the Eradication of Illiteracy (SNEA, 2006) was being translated into an operational work plan for implementation, while the 2006 Algerian national strategy was yet to be validated and implemented (September 2007). This section then examines policy discourse as they are articulated in national strategy documents.

Linking literacy, education and development frameworks

One of the trends emerging in Mauritania and Morocco national strategy documents is the *evolving vision and policy orientations* for national literacy action as reflected in recently developed or revised strategy frameworks. This *enlarged vision* is based on more *integrated approaches* that link literacy more clearly with larger education and development frameworks. While this is very explicit in the case of Mauritania and Morocco, it is much less so in the case of Algeria.

In Mauritania, for instance, the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Framework* (Cadre Stratégique de Lutte Contre la Pauvreté-CSLP) adopted in 2000 is the overall reference within which all development strategies are integrated (CSLP, 2000). This is the case for the *National Programme for the Development of the Education System* (PNDSE 2001-2010) which provides a coordinated framework for the reform and development of all levels of formal and non-formal education. The PNDSE ensures the coordination of national and international efforts to support the reform of education, making the country a model of harmonisation and efficiency in the area of aid to education. The PNDSE has thus been an integral part of the first phase of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Framework (CSLP I – 2000-2006).

The recently adopted Mauritanian *National Strategy for the Eradication of Illiteracy* (SNEA, 2006) reinforces the importance of literacy action within the overall reform process. This is particularly true for the second phase of the PNDSE (2006-2010) in which literacy appears prominently as a full-fledged component of the reform process for 2006-2010. As a result, the revised Poverty Reduction Strategy Framework for 2006-2015 now also places increased emphasis on national literacy action as an essential ingredient of sustainable development.

In Morocco, the *National Charter on Education and Training* (CNEF, 2000) articulates renewed vision up to 2020. The CNEF constitutes the overall framework within which all public action in the area of education and training is integrated. This includes all sub-sectors of the national education and training system ranging from pre-primary to higher education, vocational education and training, as well as literacy and non-formal education. The *National Literacy and Non-Formal Education Strategy* adopted in 2004 is articulated around the literacy goals set by the Charter for 2010 and 2015. One of the 10 components around which the 2004 strategy is structured is the promotion of integrated social development that aims to integrate literacy programmes within all poverty reduction interventions undertaken by its partners.

This integrated vision of literacy, development and poverty reduction was later strengthened by the *National Initiative for Human Development* (INDH)[8] launched by the King Mohammed VI in May 2005. The INDH reflects the level of political commitment that Moroccan authorities have adopted in terms of an integrated approach and a holistic concept of human development. It is based on a bottom-up vision of partnerships at the local level, targeting 360 of the poorest rural communes and 240 of the poorest peri-urban neighbourhoods as priority areas for intervention. INDH - which considers basic education to be one of the most important means for the reduction of poverty and exclusion - now constitutes the cornerstone and the reference framework for social policies in Morocco. Within this framework, literacy action is increasingly integrated into local development projects aimed at the promotion of income-generating activities and health awareness, specifically for women. Literacy action is now seen within a comprehensive perspective that integrates post-literacy training and basic schooling into the dual preventative and curative approach.

Halting the Reproduction of Illiteracy

Another positive trend emerging in terms of literacy policies and strategies in Mauritania and Morocco is the comprehensive approach to literacy action that examines linkages with the critical patterns of school dropout observed within the region, as well as with the low levels of learning outcomes at the primary level. This reproduction of illiteracy is essentially a testimony of the failure of schooling to ensure universal quality education for all. Indeed, the sources of reproduction of illiteracy are directly related to the continued exclusion of significant numbers of children from access to primary education, the continued high rates of dropout, and the low average levels of learning achievement in basic schooling that do not guarantee sustainable acquisition of basic literacy skills.

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[8] Initiative Nationale pour le Développement Humain (2005).

Increasing access and declining retention in primary education in Mauritania

Mauritania has achieved substantial progress in universalising access to schooling, and in reducing significant gender gaps in primary education within the first phase of the PNDSE (2001-2006). Despite this, a number of challenges remain. Among these challenges is the fact that Mauritania has one of the lowest retention rates in primary education observed within the Arab world. More dramatically, analysis of access to, and participation in, primary education reveal contradictory trends of steady increase in access (as monitored by grade 1 admissions) and declining retention in primary education (as monitored by dropout rates). Indeed, results of the 2006 World Bank sector analysis, and the 2006 household living standards survey (ECVM, 2006), suggest a decline in the retention rate from 90% in 1990 to 46% in 2006. Only an estimated 50% of children enrolled in grade 1 actually reach grade 6.
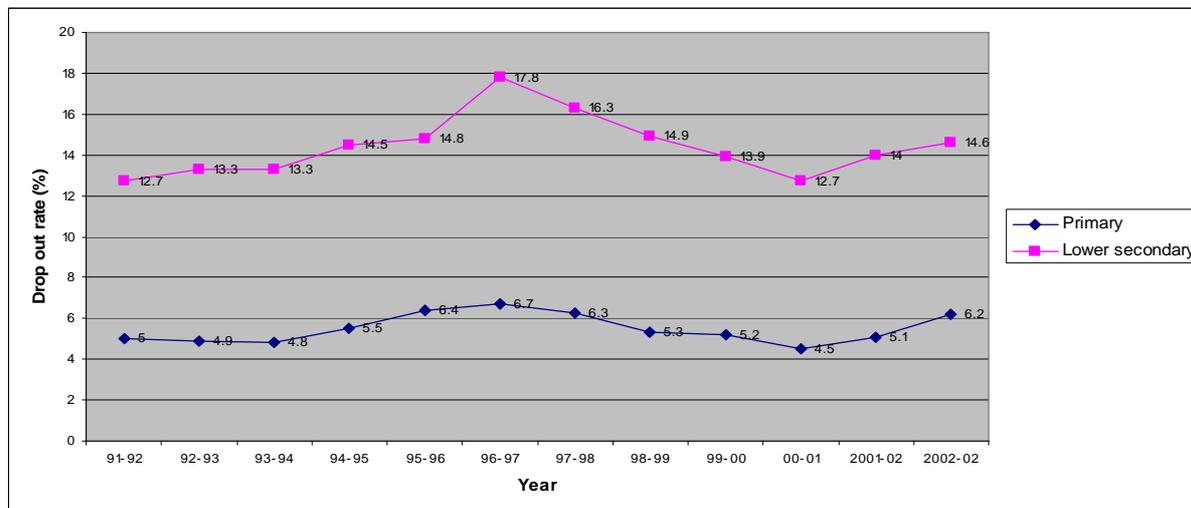
These patterns and their role in the reproduction of illiteracy among youth have now been fully acknowledged by national literacy authorities. The Mauritanian SNEA 2006 adopts a dynamic approach that strengthens links with basic school education through efforts to reduce of patterns of school dropout and the consequent reproduction of illiteracy among young adults. Indeed, one of the six components of the national action plan developed for 2007-09 aims to improve the supply, quality and retention of primary education.

The Challenge of Increasing Rates of Dropout in Morocco

In 2003, dropout rates of 6.2% in primary education (and 14.6% in lower secondary education) observed in Morocco were among the highest observed in the Arab world. There are now an estimated 1.5 million children out-of-school.[9] Another 250,000 drop out of school every year before completing the cycle of basic and compulsory schooling. Current patterns of school dropout, for both primary and lower secondary education, are all the more worrying that they appear to be on the increase since 2000 – the year in which the reform was launched.

Figure 1 -   Patterns of dropout in Morocco (1991-2003)

Growth of dropout rates in primary and lower secondary education (1991-2003)

Source: Data collected from *Cadre stratégique du système éducatif* (2005: 122-123).

As is the case in Mauritania, there is also growing recognition of the dramatic patterns of school dropouts in Morocco and of their role in the reproduction of illiteracy among youth and adults. The CNEF has set, as one of its objectives, the reduction of dropout rates to 2% by 2010. One of the innovative features of the 2004 national literacy policy strategy is thus the explicit recognition of the link between low levels of achievement and the volume of the illiterate population.

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[9] This is the figure that is still habitually cited by the Ministry of Education.

National literacy authorities have consequently enriched their modalities of intervention upstream. In addition to literacy provision among adults and out-of-school children, the State Secretariat has recently initiated (2005-06) an innovative in-school programme aimed at reducing dropout rates in primary education. School-based committees, composed of representatives of teachers, students, parents and civil society stakeholders, have been piloted in a number of schools. These committees are monitoring children at risk of repeating, failing or dropping out and attempting to prevent this through pedagogical support. Some 130,000 children are claimed to have benefited from this programme of prevention in 2005-06. As yet, no systematic evaluation allows for any measurement of the impact of these efforts on the reduction of patterns of school dropout.

Concluding remarks

In short, one of the positive emerging trends in recent literacy policy discourse in Mauritania and Morocco is an enlarged vision of literacy policy that is integrated into overall education sector planning and into wider integrated development frameworks. In both Morocco and Mauritania, at least, there appears to be a coherent and integrated vision of public action in the area of literacy that is linking literacy action with wider education development and human development and poverty reduction strategies. This is the case for the Moroccan national literacy and non-formal education strategy that has translated into more integrated interventions since its adoption in 2004. It is also the case for the recently developed Literacy Eradication Literacy Strategy adopted in Mauritania in 2006. In both cases, recent literacy policy developments are very much in line with the three-pronged approach proposed by UNESCO to ensure the transition towards literate societies, namely: (1) ensuring quality schooling for all children, (ii) scaling up youth and adult literacy programmes, (iii) development of environments conducive to the meaningful use of literacy (UNESCO, 2005).

Funding of Literacy

Institutional mechanisms: In Algeria, the newly-developed strategy document envisages the establishment of a Fund for the Promotion of Literacy[10] which could mobilise resources in one of two ways: either through a complete integration of literacy action in overall State budget, or through mixed financing combining State support with additional sources of revenue linked to enterprise-based continuous training tax, the contribution of public institutions and administrations, donations, as well as the contribution of technical and financial partners. The strategy document also presents several simulations of provisional budget estimated at some 42 billion Algerian Dinars (DZA), or approximately US\$605 million for the period spanning 2007-2015 in the minimalist scenario (unique recourse to primary school teachers at an estimated hourly wage of 135 DZA, or approximately US\$2). This amount includes the following costs: (i) remuneration of literacy instructors, (ii) design, printing and distribution of didactic material, and (iii) recurrent costs, including the necessary credits for the decentralized annexes of the National Office for Literacy and Adult Education (ONAEA).

In Mauritania, the budget allocated to adult literacy action is equivalent to 0.6% of overall public expenditure. This limited budget is dominated by recurrent and personnel expenditures, to the detriment of investment budget which represents a mere 1/8 of total resources available for literacy action. While the Ministry of Islamic Orientation, Original Education, and Literacy was created to manage literacy programmes (until May 06), funding is derived from a variety of providers. The High Commission for Poverty Reduction, for instance, funds part of these programmes by covering the direct costs of literacy instructors. Other ministerial departments, such as those of Youth and of Women's Condition, fund their own programmes either through their own budgets or through projects financed by international cooperation agencies. One of the challenges inherent in this situation is the difficulty of coordinating planning and ensuring synergy of literacy provision among these various providers. While the newly adopted illiteracy eradication strategy of 2006 calls for the creation of a national fund devoted to literacy action, the necessary steps for its establishment had not yet been undertaken at the time of writing.

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[10] Fonds pour la Promotion de l'Alphabétisation.

Having said this, the National Programme for the Development of the Education Sector (PNDSE), established to monitor the implementation of the education reform initiated in 2000, provides an excellent framework within which to pool resources for coordinated literacy action.

Finally, in Morocco, notwithstanding several exceptions, the budget allocated for adult literacy action has grown steadily and has been practically multiplied by four since 1998. Between 2001 and 2006, we observed a rate of increase of almost 40% for 2005-06 alone, literacy budgets increased from 93 million to 103 million Moroccan Dirhams (MAD), equivalent to US$12.7 to 14.1 million, for 2005-06 alone (or an increase of almost 11%). Budgets for NFE programmes for out-of-school children have also increased sharply in the past year going from 24 to 33 million MAD (equivalent to 3 to 4 million US$) between 2005 and 2006.[11] Despite this increase, however, resources available remain dramatically insufficient to reach the objective of providing literacy skills to one million persons per year. This gap between funding required and actually available explains the call formulated in the 2004 national strategy for the diversification of sources of funding to go beyond those of the SECAENF and to include other ministerial departments (Islamic Affairs, Agriculture, Social Development…), private sector contributions through NGOs, individual and institutional sponsors, private enterprise, international cooperation partners, as well as individual sponsorship.

As for the management of funding available for national literacy action, all resources derived from State budget or from donors, are centralized at the level of the State Secretariat for Literacy and Non-formal Education (SECAENF). The one exception to this is the financing of in-company literacy programmes. The latter are funded through a Special Training Contracts fund managed by the Office for Vocational Training and promotion of Employment and which is sustained through a vocational training tax levied on private businesses. The SECAENF therefore plays a key role in the planning, management and orientation of financial resources available for national literacy action.

Data on average costs per learner: Average unit costs per learner are typically computed on the basis of the following categories of costs: (1) provision of qualified personnel on the ground: i.e. recruited through selective procedures, having undergone pre-service training complemented by in-service training; (2) the necessary equipment of literacy centres to create a literate environment and allow for the provision of basic education; (3) provision of quality learning materials for beneficiaries; (4) the timely and adequate supply of didactic support materials adapted to functional needs of learners; (5) establishment of a permanent monitoring-supervisory-evaluation system; (6) management and other recurrent costs, including the remuneration of instructors. Clearly, computation of average annual costs per learner and by type of provider is an important contribution to strategic planning and management of literacy action.

Data on average costs per adult learner in literacy programmes for the three countries is limited or incomplete, and does not consequently allow for any meaningful comparison between them. The only country in which average annual cost per learner has been clearly established is Algeria, where it is calculated to be 3,280 DZA, or the equivalent of approximately US$48. It must, however, be noted that this estimated cost is based only on programmes delivered by the Ministry of National Education, and do not account for programmes delivered by NGOs. The average cost per learner in Morocco remains difficult to determine because of the significant differences between the cost of the four types of programmes and providers (general programme, programme of public operators, programme of associations, and private sector programme). Nevertheless, the average estimated cost per adult learner provided by the State Secretariat is very similar to that cited for Algeria (400 MAD, or approximately US$48).[12] But this average cost can reach as much as 2,000 MAD (or approximately US$244) per learner when it comes to in-company literacy programmes provided to employees. While no data on average annual costs per learner are available for Mauritania, it is to be noted that the Ministry has begun providing subsidies to NGOs (of some 10,000 MRO or approximately US$41 per learner), within the framework of partnership programmes launched in November 2006. Producing accurate data on cost per learner by type of provider within each of the countries examined here could clearly enhance the planning of more efficient national literacy action.

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[11] This increase was decided upon largely in view of responding to the need for the re-editing of NFE manuals, as well as for the launching of the programme for the prevention of school dropouts.

[12] It is worth noting, however, that the average cost per child learner in the non-formal education programme is much higher (1,000 MAD, or approximately US$122).

Strategic options

Quantitative Objectives

Considering the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action objective of raising literacy levels by 50% by 2015 to be minimalist, the three Maghreb countries examined have set more ambitious strategic objectives with 2015/16 being set as the date for the total eradication of adult illiteracy (see Figure 2 below). As indicated in the table below, the three countries have defined general quantitative objectives that are more ambitious than EFA goal 4 adopted within the Dakar Framework of Action that aims for a 50 percent increase in the adult literacy rates by 2015.

Figure 2:   **Strategic national objectives for the eradication of illiteracy**
Algeria, Mauritania and Morocco

Year	Country		
	Algeria	**Mauritania**	**Morocco**
2010			Ensuring universal basic education for all children (9-14). Reduction of national adult illiteracy to 20% Reduction of illiteracy among active population to 10%.
2012	50% reduction in the rate of adult illiteracy		
2015		Total eradication of adult (14+) illiteracy.	Quasi total eradication of adult illiteracy.
2016	Total eradication of adult illiteracy		

Prioritization/targeting categories of beneficiaries

The definition of categories of beneficiaries often structures national literacy responses. In Algeria, for instance, a distinction is made between the 'structured sector', representing civil servants and salaried staff to be catered for by public and private employers' organizations, and the so-called 'autonomous sector', representing non-organized segments of the population (housewives, self-employed workers, unemployed workers…) that are to be catered for through associations. A dual approach has been adopted, including: (i) a non-formal primary education programme for nomadic children, street children, working children, and other children living in difficult circumstances and which aims at their reintegration in formal schooling and/or in vocational training (MOE), and (ii) a literacy and training programme for adolescents and adults provided for by the MOE, as well as by other ministerial departments and civil society organizations.

In Morocco, too, literacy action is structured around these two categories of the population: (i) out-of-school children who have either never been enrolled or have dropped out, and who are provided with adapted NFE programmes in view of their social inclusion either through their reintegration into formal schooling or into professional training. In addition, a recent innovative development (2005-2006) has been the initiation of an in-school programme aimed at children at risk of dropping out and who are provided with preventative pedagogical support. This programme reflects the growing recognition of the dramatic patterns of school dropouts in Morocco[13] and of their role in the reproduction of illiteracy among youth

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[13] An estimated 250,000 children drop out of basic schooling each year and feed into the stock of the illiterate adult population.

and adults. (ii) Youth (15+) and adults who may benefit from adult literacy programmes in view of acquiring basic reading writing and numeracy skills, as well as basic knowledge and awareness of health and citizenship issues. Within this general framework, priority is given to the active population, as well as to women, particularly in rural areas.

Finally, in Mauritania, the objective of eradicating illiteracy among the estimated 800,000 adults is mentioned without a clear definition of priority groups to be targeted. However, what the 2006 national strategy does offer in the way of an implicit definition of priority groups is the need to diversify literacy provision to meet the specific needs of vulnerable groups.

While in some countries categories of beneficiaries have been defined for literacy action, there generally appears to be very little explicit targeting of specific categories of the population as priority groups, whether in terms of gender, age groups, or role in economic productivity. The fact that the majority of beneficiaries of adult literacy programmes tend to be women (over 80% in Morocco) generally appears to be a reflection of the traditional gender bias in access to basic education, and less the result of specific targeting of women in national literacy efforts. Having said this, this is less true in Morocco where conventions established between the State Secretariat and NGOs focus on rural women in the 15-45 age range. Also, there is a clear recognition of specific demands for literacy that informs the diversification of literacy provision and the design of specific manuals for diverse categories of the population. While the eradication of illiteracy among the active population in Morocco (under 10% by 2010) is an objective that been explicitly defined by the 2000 National Charter of Education and Training, this does not translate into results.

Generally speaking, however, it is safe to say that, beyond the recognition of the urgent need to reduce disparities in access to basic education, national strategies offer a weak explicit definition of priority groups and a weak formulation of specific quantitative objectives.

Institutional Arrangements for Public Provision

Structures

In the three countries examined, national departments responsible for literacy action are now all integrated in some way within the Ministry of Education. The National Literacy and Adult Education Office (ONAEA) in Algeria, for instance, is part of the Ministry of Education. The ONAEA's function of political orientation of the national strategy is intended to be inter-sectoral, involving a number of different ministerial departments. Beyond the ONAEA, a National Algerian Literacy Forum (FO.N.ALPH) with a permanent Secretariat based at the Ministry of Education at the central of local (Wilaya/communal) levels (Municipal literacy Committees - CANALPH) is the broader coordinating and piloting structure. In Mauritania, a central division for Literacy was part of the Ministry of Islamic Orientation, Original Education and of Literacy until May 2007. Following the establishment of the new government in May 2007, however, this division was integrated into the Ministry of Education thus announcing an enlarged vision of literacy action within the broader educational development agenda. In Morocco, a State Secretariat responsible for Literacy and Non-formal Education was created in November 2002 and is linked to the Ministry of Education.

Decentralization

While decentralisation is announced as a strategic option in each of the three countries, the nature of this process and the degree of implementation varies from country to country. Indeed, Algeria has made the choice of regionalised literacy provision through the ONAEA annexes in each of the fifty Wilayas. The functions of these ONAEA annexes is sensitization and mobilization of local partners around the national literacy programme, contracting local associations for programme delivery, monitoring and evaluation, as well as capacity building for literacy instructors. At present, the level of development of these annexes varies across the country and depends, to a large extent, on the dynamism of the director in charge.

In Morocco, we note at the central, regional, and local levels the creation of structures able to assume the essential role assigned to the State Secretariat which is to plan, direct, coordinate, evaluate and readjust

any activity relating to literacy and non-formal education. These structures installed at the Regional Academies of Education and Training and at the provincial Delegations of National Education have benefited from a broad training scheme. The creation of these structures was also accompanied, by an important delegation of authority and budgets dedicated to the delivery of literacy and non-formal education programmes at the local levels.

Intersectorality

In Algeria, the national strategy document does not explicitly specify the role of the other ministries and departments beyond the Ministry of Education. Admittedly, the strategy grants an important role for NGOs and private sector enterprise, but more could be done in the way of coordinating mechanisms that could facilitate cooperation among the various actors and ensure the effective involvement of all the components of society.

In Morocco, the State Secretariat adopts a policy of delegation to partners in all its intervention strategy. Among the several actors that ensure the implementation of literacy programmes, we may cite Ministries and public departments other than the Ministry of Education, private enterprise, and civil society associations. The following section on diversification provides more detail on the nature of the programmes provided by each of these partners. In order to ensure coordination between these various national actors, a Ministerial Commission presided by the Prime Minister brings together all actors, including representatives of local provincial committees.

In Mauritania, the recently adopted literacy strategy marks the opening of the Ministry in charge of literacy to other actors, primarily civil society. Nevertheless, much as is the case in Algeria, this strategy maintains the role of the Ministry in direct intervention in literacy action. It is also important to note the significant role played by the Quranic schools with regard to literacy action, both because of the extensive network that spans the country, as well as because of its capacity to meet the literacy demand of certain segments of the population and whose motivations for literacy are closely tied to religious practice.

Diversification of Providers and Enhanced Civil Society Partnerships

A commonality in literacy policies and strategies within the Maghreb is the trend towards greater civil society partnerships. Throughout the region, national and local associations are playing an increasingly important role in meeting national objectives through the delivery of literacy and of non-formal primary education. This increasingly important role is a result of their greater flexibility for literacy delivery and their ability to respond more adequately to the needs of local populations.

The diversification of literacy providers, and the prominent role of civil society associations, is perhaps nowhere as evident as in Morocco, where NGOs account for more than half of literacy provision as compared to Ministry of Education, other public, and private sector providers. Indeed, there has recently been a significant increase in the number of conventions signed between the State and associations active in the field of literacy. This important role of associations in national literacy action has been recognized at the highest levels both through the Royal Letter of 13 October 2003, as well as through the 2003 circular of the Prime Minister which regulates the framework for this partnership. The State Secretariat has continued on this path by providing associations with a number of services based on criteria of eligibility defined in the national partnership framework.

The diversification of national partners involved in the delivery of literacy in Morocco is inherent to the four main types of programmes:

- First and foremost among these is the vast *NGO Programme* launched in 1988 that delivers literacy to 54% of all learners enrolled in adult literacy programmes. The State Secretariat provides these NGOs with manuals, training of literacy instructors and a budgetary contribution per learner (approximately 250 MAD (US$27) per learner).
- The *Ministerial Programme* linked to various ministries that, either deliver literacy programmes themselves within the framework of their own development action, and/or provide support (infrastructure and human resources) for the realisation of specific programmes[14].

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[14] Agriculture, Justice, Youth, Crafts. Social Affairs…

- The *General Programme* refers to community-based literacy delivered in public schools. Once the main vector for literacy delivery, this programme is progressively being replaced by civil society and selected ministerial programmes.
- *In-Company Programmes* catering to the literacy needs of the active population have been encouraged through significant financial incentives (see section on financing). These programmes are in Arabic, as well as in foreign languages (essentially French) depending on the needs of illiterate salaried personnel. Although these programmes are designed to constitute a basic foundation for continuous in-company training, evidence indicates that mobilisation of private sector partners remains weak.

In Mauritania, the Association of Ulema has by far been the main provider, and the newly adopted national strategy (SNEA 06) articulates the need to clearly define the distribution of tasks between the various partners concerned (administrations, private sector, civil society organizations, communities…) to ensure optimal synergy between their respective interventions. Efforts are currently being made to establish a repertoire of all partners interested in contributing to national literacy action in view of involving them in programme delivery through a contractual system. Much like Morocco, Mauritania has adopted a strategy of delegation in programme design and delivery based on local educational demands as expressed on the ground by recognized and capable partners willing to work within the reference framework established by the government. By deciding on a bottom-up approach in the design and delivery of literacy programmes, the newly adopted Mauritanian strategy has defined local communities as being central to the new literacy policy. The status of the National Literacy Council has consequently been revised in view of providing a mechanism for broad consultation, orientation and coordination between governmental departments and civil society.

Although national literacy action in Algeria has tended to be dominated by more centralized public provision, new strategic orientations are seeking to enhance civil society participation. Civil society participation in literacy provision in Algeria is weak and an estimated 300 associations out of a total of some 60,000 are involved in some way in literacy provision. While there is a clear intention to enhance such partnerships, the framework for the implementation of such partnerships - much like the professional upgrading of the staff of decentralized of national literacy units – is still not yet fully in place. Another strategic option is the involvement of public and private employers' organizations which is somewhat similar to the Ministerial and In-Company Programmes initiated in Morocco. Finally, partnerships with schools constitutes an important vector for literacy action in Algeria with two teachers deployed as literacy instructors in each of the 19,044 primary and lower secondary schools throughout the country.

Learning Strategies

Curriculum

Increased instructional time in Algeria and Morocco: In all three countries examined, one notes processes of curriculum revision characterised by an increase in instructional time, a reorganisation of learning domains and cycles, as well as a concern with the acquisition of life-skills and the improvement of learning outcomes. In Algeria, for example, instructional time was recently increased from 300 to 756 hours.

Figure 3: Levels and instructional time In Algerian literacy programmes

Level	Objectives	Instructional Time	Frequency
1	Acquisition of basic reading and writing skills	324 hrs.	9 hrs/wk x 9 months
2	Consolidation of Level 1 skills and writing	432 hrs.	12 hrs/wk x 9 months
3	Fluency in reading, writing and grammar		

Total	756 hrs.	

Instructional time in Morocco has also been increased from a total of 200 (2004-2005) to 300 hours in order to ensure proper acquisition of basic literacy skills.

Figure 4: Levels and instructional time In Moroccan literacy programmes

Level	Objectives	Instructional Time
1	Acquisition of basic reading, writing, numeracy and oral communication skills	120 hrs.
2	Acquisition of life-skills related to civic participation, rural development, population and environment	180 hrs.
	Total	300 hrs.

Curriculum renewal in Morocco: In addition to the common basic course designed for all beneficiaries, a number of specialized literacy manuals have been developed in Morocco in order to respond to the learning needs of specific segments of the population. These include: (1) an agricultural literacy manual containing three modules for farmers and their families that deal with issues related to natural resources, protection of the environment, rural development techniques, as well as principles of management for agricultural production, (2) a literacy manual for members of dairy cooperatives and their families providing three manuals on various aspects of the management of dairy production, (3) a literacy manual for detainees with two modules on the prevention of delinquency, re-education and social-professional integration, and (4) a literacy manual for those involved in the fishing sector with a guide for literacy instructors.

Curriculum development is currently underway with new manuals being designed for other departments involved in literacy action, including those of Tourism, Crafts, and Construction. Regional manuals are also being designed so as to ensure that content is adapted to the specific geographical, socio-economic, and socio-cultural environments of beneficiaries. Moreover, generic multimedia tools are also being designed. Finally, a newly-developed minimal competency framework designed for all literacy programmes is currently being validated.

Development of curricula and reform of original education in Mauritania: Literacy action in Mauritania - at least until the adoption of the 2006 national strategy - was conceived more as sensitization and awareness raising campaigns, rather than as literacy programmes per se. As a result, the 2006 strategy places great emphasis on the development of new curricula and learning materials. It is worth noting, however, that the 2006 strategy offers an orientation for the role to be placed by original religious education, particularly as concerns the reduction of the reproduction of illiteracy among youth. Indeed, *Mahadras*, or Quranic schools, absorb a significant share of the children who drop out of school before completing the full cycles of compulsory education. The current reform of Quranic education aims to integrate new learning areas such as mathematics, natural sciences and foreign languages, to motivate and upgrade teaching staff, and to improve teaching/learning conditions in these schools.

Status, Training and Qualification of Facilitators: While the status, qualification, and training of literacy facilitators is a key element in the provision of quality literacy programmes, a great deal remains to be developed in the three countries examined here. The fact that the profile of literacy trainers range from volunteer primary school teachers, to social workers, to unemployed university graduates points to the absence of any clear status and of any explicit policy of minimum standards of qualification.

Algeria is currently reviewing the professional status of facilitators to move from away form the deployment of volunteer teachers to the recruitment of professionals with an adequate academic level and on the basis of appropriate training. While there is no formally defined level of minimal qualifications required for the recruitment of literacy trainers in Morocco, in practice all possess at least a secondary school certificate. In the General Programme delivered by the Ministry of Education, literacy instructors

are volunteer primary school teachers, while in programmes delivered by other ministerial departments, social workers, rural development agents, or unemployed graduates may be deployed as literacy instructors. In the NGO Programme, associations recruit literacy instructors most often among unemployed university graduates, some of which may hold graduate or postgraduate degrees. Finally, in Mauritania, facilitators operating in centres managed by the literacy department are basically primary school teachers deployed by the Ministry of Education. Programmes implemented by other ministerial departments and/or NGOs deploy unemployed graduates. Lack of information on training of trainers reflects the data deficit in this particular area of literacy action in Mauritania.

Non-formal/Formal Linkages: Linkages between formal and non-formal education in Algeria, Mauritania, and Morocco are generally weak and there is little explicit validation of non-formal learning. The links that do exist tend to be at the level of the primary education cycle. In Algeria, for instance, the programme for out-of-school children in the primary school-going age aims to mainstream learners back into the school system or into vocational education. In Morocco, too, formal and non-formal education links are not very formalized and learning acquired through accelerated non-formal primary education or through literacy programmes is not sanctioned by any certificate that is recognized in the formal system. Having said this, bridges between non-formal and formal education in Morocco are possible in two cases. Firstly, reintegration into formal schooling is possible for children under 11 years of age who have benefited from non-formal education programmes. Secondly, beneficiaries of adult literacy programmes may (theoretically) sit for the primary school leaving examination (Certificat d'Etudes Primaires), although this latter possibility is very rarely exploited. Finally, in Mauritania, the intention of the 2006 strategy is improve of the quality of literacy programmes in view of reintegrating youth into the formal education and training system. This implies the establishment of appropriate coordinating mechanisms between the literacy department and other ministerial departments that delivery vocational education. At present, such mechanisms are lacking in Mauritania.

Language Policy: The three countries of the Maghreb are characterised by linguistic diversity. While the official language is Arabic in all three countries, colloquial Arabic coexists with other national languages such as Kabyle and other Tamazight dialects in Algeria, Hassaniya, Pulaar, Soninke and Wolof in Mauritania, and Amazigh dialects in Morocco. In addition, French continues to be widely used in education and administration in all three countries. It is important to note that the national literacy strategy documents in Algeria, Mauritania and Morocco make very little mention of this linguistic diversity. Indeed, while the Moroccan 2004 strategy document defines Arabic, the official language, as the medium for adult literacy, the Algerian strategy documents make no mention of any language policy for literacy action. While official documents make no mention of the use of local languages in literacy programmes in Mauritania, in practice, local languages such as Wolof, Pulaar, Soninke and Hassaniya are used in literacy programmes, particularly in the South of the country. The fact that these are languages common to both Senegal and Mauritania, and that many literacy experts of Mauritanian origin are involved in Senegalese NGOs that provide non-formal education, one may suppose some unofficial sharing of experiences in research and design of materials relative to these local languages. This is surprising given that Tamazight in Algeria and Amazigh in Morocco have been officially introduced into the respective formal education systems. The language strategy for adult literacy programmes in Morocco is a little more nuanced than in Algeria and Mauritania in that French is often used for in-company literacy programmes in the private sector. More significantly, perhaps, is the experimental introduction of colloquial Arabic (Darija) and the three Amazigh dialects in the acquisition of pre-literacy skills. This experimental phase aims to enhance the effective acquisition of reading and writing skills by facilitating the transition from oral languages used in the daily lives of adult learners to classical written Arabic, the official language of instruction, administration and media.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Monitoring and evaluation are key ingredients for the design and implementation of efficient and targeted literacy strategies and are dependent on the availability of reliable and timely data. Data for the monitoring of literacy programmes may be grouped into three types each corresponding to a level of evaluation:

- Data pertaining to the quality of learning outcomes or the cost-efficiency of one or more literacy programmes;

- Data pertaining to the management of literacy programmes, including infrastructure outlays, characteristics of instructors, beneficiaries, and managers;
- Data pertaining to the distribution of levels of literacy skills among the population as a whole which serve both for the definition of target groups, as well as benchmarks to assess the effects of literacy action over time.

An examination of the literacy data situation in Algeria, Mauritania and Morocco points to a deficit in the availability of reliable data at all three levels, albeit to differing degrees. As far as Algeria is concerned, the most recent literacy data available are those resulting from a 2002 survey of 20,000 households indicating a 10+ illiteracy rate of 26.5% (18.2% for men and 35% for women). Other figures cited in official documents are simple extrapolations based on presumed improvement of literacy levels equivalent to 5 percentage points within a four year period (rate of illiteracy of 21.4 % in 2005). Based on projections of the National Statistical Office (ONS), the official estimate of the absolute numbers of illiterate persons for 2005 was 6.2 million. Given the absence of an exhaustive system of data collection and analysis, the lack of any clear distinction made between those enrolled in adult literacy or NFE programmes, and those individuals that can demonstrate minimal levels of language and numeracy competencies, the available data are to be treated with a certain degree of caution until validated by the planned information management system. The data deficit in the area of literacy in Mauritania is such that available data do not allow for an adequate measure of quantitative and qualitative aspects of literacy, nor of trends in literacy patterns. A number of variables relative to the distribution of literacy levels among the adult population were estimated for 2004 based on results of the most recent household living measurement survey (EPCV, 2004)[15], as well as on the situation analysis undertaken in the region of Dar-naim. When combined with data and projections resulting from the 2000 population census (RGPH, 2000)[16], the results of EPCV 2004 provide a baseline reference for the evaluation of the impact of current and/or future literacy action. Given the fact that the Moroccan experience is based on several years' experience in the implementation of the 2004 national strategy, it comes as no surprise that monitoring and evaluation data are perhaps the most developed among the three countries examined here. Indeed, the 2004 strategy has defined the development and implementation of an information system as the first of its strategic axes and a priority for informed decision making in the area of literacy delivery. More concretely, Morocco has undertaken the following actions to improve the availability of reliable and timely data:

- The development, by the State Secretariat, jointly with the Ministry of Education (Direction du Suivi Informatique) and UNESCO[17], of an information management system that allows for the collection and analysis of data pertaining to beneficiaries, instructors and infrastructure, outlays for the management of adult literacy and non-formal education programmes for out-of-school children at the provincial, regional, and central levels;
- The development of a system of external assessment of literacy programmes delivered by civil society partners;
- Pilot testing of the International Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP) in partnership with the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Based on direct measurement techniques, the programme aims to produce data on the national distribution of literacy skill levels among the adult population;
- Research studies on a range of issues including; National Survey on Illiteracy (2007); Costs of Non-universal Schooling (2006); Assessment of Post-literacy Experiences (underway); Comparative Effectiveness of Literacy Programmes in Marrakech (underway); Impact assessment of literacy programmes (underway).

Challenges

This chapter sets out to assess the challenges that each of the three Maghreb countries are experiencing in the implementation of their national strategies. The analysis of challenges in the case of Algeria and

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[15] Enquête Permanents sur les Conditions de Vie des Ménages (EPCV 2004).

[16] Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat (RGPH 2000).

[17] UNESCO provided the generic software and technical assistance to build the capacity of central and local teams.

Mauritania pertain to the translation of recently adopted national policies into the formulation of implementation strategies. As for Morocco, the analysis will be based on the past four years of experience in the implementation of the 2004 national strategy and the challenges posed to accelerate the pace of progress in view of reaching the objectives set. In all three cases, the analysis is organised around strategic, technical, quality and funding challenges.

The Case of Algeria: In examining the feasibility of the national literacy strategy in Algeria, it is important to recall the targets set; that is, 50% reduction in rate of illiteracy by 2012, and total eradication by 2016. It also worth recalling that there are some 6.2 million adults considered to be illiterate according to official 2005 estimates. Reservations concerning the feasibility of reaching these targets through the implementation of the current strategy formulation are as follows:

Linking adult literacy action with more effective schooling: Despite improvement in gross primary enrolment ratios now estimated at over 93%, low primary completion rates and a 5% dropout rate (2004/2005), if unchecked, will continue contributing to the reproduction of youth and adult illiteracy. It therefore is crucial that the literacy strategy for the reduction of illiteracy among adults be more strongly linked to efforts at reducing patterns of dropout in basic schooling.

Incomplete institutional reform and decentralisation: The currently incomplete reform of institutional arrangements for literacy action hinder effective delivery as it relates to partnership, decentralisation, and inter-sectoral coordination. Decentralisation of the delivery of literacy through the establishment of ONAEA annexes in each Wilaya is, as yet, incomplete and heterogeneous as to the capacities of each of these local annexes. The current revision of the status of the ONAEA defines a function of policy orientation for the implementation of the new national strategy through an intersectoral approach. This implies the creation of a coordinating mechanism in partnership with the National Algerian Forum for Literacy - Forum National Algérien pour l'Alphabétisation (FO.N.ALPH).

Data deficits: In the absence of a comprehensive information system on literacy in Algeria, and the lack of any distinction made between those enrolled in literacy programmes and those that possess demonstrable literacy skills, current data on literacy remain crude indicators that hamper effective programme design and delivery.

The limits of primary school teachers as literacy instructors: Recourse to primary school teachers for the analysis of demand and the provision of literacy is likely to reduce the effectiveness of programmes for a number of reasons. These include weak ownership on the part of beneficiaries in the design of programme delivery, inflexible structures defined by the administrative constraints of public service and not by the needs of adult learners, and an administrative focus on delivery, rather than on results, effective learning outcomes, and impact.

Funding challenges: Inadequate levels of funding remain a major challenge. Several simulations have been undertaken relative to the provisional 42 billion DZA (approximately US$605 million) budget for the period 2007-2015, and this, based on the least costly unit cost scenario of 135 DZA (approximately US$2) per hour for the sole recourse to primary school teachers as literacy instructors. It is also important to mention in this connection that the national literacy budget currently represents a mere 0.035% of the national education budget which, in turn, represents 20% of public expenditure.

The Case of Mauritania[18]: The 2006 National Strategy (SNEA) breaks new ground on a number of levels in adopting the following changes:

- A broader conceptualisation of literacy that goes beyond the traditional dichotomy of literate/illiterate and which now considers a scale of levels of literacy skill.
- An integrated vision of literacy action that (i) links low rates of retention in basic schooling with the reproduction of illiteracy among youth and adults, (ii) the need to diversify literacy

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[18] The analysis that follows is based on the results of a number of diagnostic missions undertaken in 2006 and 2007 by the UNESCO Cluster Office for the Maghreb to assess literacy policy and practice in Mauritania. The results of the analysis were shared with representatives of all national and international partners during a seminar in Nouakchott (January 2007).

supply in view of responding to multiple demands, and (iii) focus on literate environments that encourage the utilisation and consolidation of newly acquired literacy skills.

- Enlarged partnerships, particularly with civil society organisations, with the target of reaching 35,000 beneficiaries (representing a total of 58% of all beneficiaries) for 2006-2007.
- Increased importance placed on monitoring and evaluation. Implementing these new policy orientations and reaching the targets set, however, implies a number of strategic, technical and funding challenges.

The challenge of coordination: The new mandate conferred on the literacy department goes beyond the traditional delivery through literacy centres and encompasses a new policy based on broad cooperation with other public, private and civil society partners. In addition to ensuring commitment of all potential providers at the national and local levels, effective implementation of this new strategic orientation requires the strengthening of institutional structures capable of ensuring coordination and synergy between the actions of the various partners. This new strategic orientation also implies a clear definition and distribution of roles of the various partners. Examination of the current situation suggests several areas of overlap, particularly as concerns funding. The functions of planning, steering, managing, monitoring and evaluating literacy action should be the preserve of the literacy department. Other partners can act as direct providers, through their own structures and sectoral programmes.

The challenge of quality

Since 1987, literacy action has been undertaken within the framework of mass campaigns (ranging from 45 days in 1987 to 9 months in 2004) aimed at reaching the widest number of beneficiaries. The association of religious scholars (Association des Oulémas) played a key role in these basic literacy campaigns that are now considered to have been inadequate.[19] The only programme to have yielded satisfactory results is the National Functional Literacy Programme undertaken by the High Commission for Poverty Reduction and which mobilizes unemployed university graduates as literacy instructors.[20] Based on this observation of the widespread historical deficiency in the quality of adult literacy provision, an evaluation of literacy programmes is planned for 2007. Such evaluation shall serve as the basis for the development of new curricula planned within the framework of the 2007 Plan of Action of the National Programme for the Development of the Education System (PNDSE).

The challenge of funding

The inclusion of literacy as a full-fledged component of the National Programme for the Development of the Education Sector (PNDSE) as of 2007 reflects the political commitment to support the sector. However, current budgets representing a mere 0.6% of overall State budget indicate that the issue of funding remains a major challenge for the effective implementation of the National Literacy Eradication Strategy (SNEA, 2006). Inadequate funding is all the more an issue of concern given that current expenditure is centred on remuneration of instructors deployed in literacy centres and does not include any investment budget for training, monitoring and evaluation, or research that are implicit in the new steering and coordinating functions defined by the 2006 Strategy.

International partners represent an important source of potential complementary funding for national literacy action in Mauritania. However, effective resource mobilisation among international partners requires a clear and transparent policy on the part of the literacy department – a policy that seeks to ensure synergy between the specialisations and areas of interventions of the various partners. One of the major challenges is the effective pooling of potential resources among the various national and

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[19] National Strategy for the Eradication of Illiteracy (SNEA 2006); Ministry of Islamic Orientation, Original Education and Literacy.
[20] ibid.

international partners for the direct funding of literacy action. If SNEA 2006 foresees the creation of a national fund, the modalities of establishing and managing such a fund have not been defined.

Data deficits and the challenge of monitoring and evaluation

While SNEA 2006 places great importance on monitoring and evaluation, such a system is quasi-absent at the time of writing. As a result, there are major data deficits as regards the actual distribution of illiteracy in terms of gender, urban/rural residence, and the active population. This data deficit on adult illiteracy is compounded by the weak data base on patterns of school participation, school dropout, and literacy relapse. In an effort to overcome these data deficits, a UNESCO-supported baseline assessment on national patterns of illiteracy is planned for 2007. [21] Beyond an accurate mapping of illiteracy resulting from a baseline assessment, a reliable system of monitoring and evaluation requires the establishment of an information system able to produce data on literacy provision delivered by all partners, including NGOs.

The Case of Morocco

Morocco has recently made undeniable progress in reducing the rate of adult illiteracy. This is the result of efforts in both expansions of primary enrolments and of adult literacy programmes. The numbers of beneficiaries of adult literacy programmes have grown steadily since 1998-1999, going from over 180,000 to over 660,000 adults enrolled in 2006-07. During this 8-year period, close to three million adults have been enrolled in literacy programmes (a rate of increase of some 262%), with almost two million of these enrolments registered in the past four years alone. Rates of (10+) illiteracy, now estimated to be 38.45%, have gone down by four percentage points between 2004 and 2007 (Government of Morocco, 2007).

Strategic challenges

Despite this undeniable progress, an assessment of current trends and recent achievements in Morocco suggests that reaching the quantitative targets set in the 2000 National Charter of Education and Training poses a number of challenges. The main challenge that Morocco faces in the implementation of the 2004 national literacy and non-formal education strategy is reaching the target of one million adults to be enrolled annually in literacy programmes. What are the implications in terms of (re-)organisation of the literacy sector, human and financial resources and funding mechanisms?

The quality/quantity tradeoff

The objective of reducing the national adult illiteracy to 20% by 2010 and quasi-total eradication of adult illiteracy by 2016 (or 2015) implies the challenge of a potential quantity-quality tradeoff. At the quantitative level, achieving this objective presupposes the acceleration of the annual pace of achievement to reach one million beneficiaries per year. While such acceleration is theoretically possible given the mobilizing of additional financial and human resources, the challenge is to maintain the quality of literacy provision in the face of increased pace of enrolments.

The challenge of reducing illiteracy among the active population

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[21] To be financed by the PNDSE with a UNESCO contribution through the PADEM (Programme d'Appui au Développement de l'Education en Mauritanie).

Reducing illiteracy among active population to less than 10% by 2010 - one of the targets set by the National Charter for Education and Training – seems very difficult to reach. The nature of the challenge involved in reaching this target varies depending on whether one considers the active population within the structured sector, or within the informal sector of the labour market. In the former, while resource mobilization through the professional training tax theoretically solves the financial problem[22], the challenge lies in the mobilization of employers to implement this in-company literacy policy. The low levels of mobilization of the productive sector in the provision of in-company literacy training reflect the low level of awareness of the positive impact of literacy on worker productivity. In the case of the active population working in the non-structured informal sector of the economy the challenge is more serious. It involves the establishment of a system of financing as well as incentives to motivate workers to take up literacy classes in a regular and sustained manner. This is particularly important given that the bulk of workers in the informal sector are subject to conditions of professional and economic vulnerability that makes literacy rather secondary to daily short-term survival strategies.

Ensuring universal quality schooling: An important challenge in reaching the literacy targets set by the Charter is that of the continued reproduction of illiteracy at the source. Non-universal basic schooling for children in the 6-14 age group and the low levels of primary retention rates (it is estimated that more than 250,000 children drop out yearly at the primary and lower secondary levels) continues to contribute to the reproduction of the stock of illiterate youth and adults. Ensuring universal basic education for all children (6-14) implies equity in access, participation in full primary and lower secondary cycles, and production of learning outcomes that meet minimal national standards. While ensuring universal access to grade one is within reach, that is far from being the case for access to the first year of the lower secondary cycle, particularly in rural areas. More importantly, there is no indication that the low retention rates will improve in any significant manner in the coming years, nor that the quality of learning outcomes will rise substantially, and this, despite the curriculum reform introduced following the adoption of the National Charter for Education and Training.

Post literacy and non-formal education: Effective implementation of the 2004 national strategy will require the adoption of new intervention strategies, particularly in the area of post-literacy training and the strengthening of post-literacy environments that encourage the use of reading and writing skills in daily life. In doing so, it appears important to develop broader conceptualisations of non-formal education as they are currently in use in Morocco, as well as a broader vision of literacy training that is integrated into life-long learning processes.

Harmonizing monitoring and evaluation: Three conditions are required for successful monitoring and evaluation: (1) the development of indicators, tools and approaches; (2) the development of an information management system allowing for data gathering, management and monitoring of programmes; and (3) a specialized structure responsible for the orientation and coordination of monitoring and evaluation. The challenge in the case of Morocco is the harmonisation and integration of the various actions currently being undertaken.

The challenge of funding: There are three main aspects to the funding challenge in Morocco. First and foremost amongst these is the sensitive issue of costs per learner. As discussed in earlier sections, while there are no accurate figures on costs per learner for the four main types of programmes, a generic estimate of some 400 MAD or approximately US$45 per learner have been advanced for the direct cost of literacy provision and which do not include management, monitoring and evaluation costs. Based on this restricted unit cost, an estimated 400 million MAD would be required annually to provide literacy training for the one million adults targeted. In comparison, the 2006 budget for literacy and non-formal education was only 136 million MAD, only 36% of the actual budget required. The second aspect of the funding challenge is the competition for limited resources among the various educational sub-sectors. Seven percent of GDP (or 26.5 % of national budget) has been earmarked for education (including literacy) in Morocco. In such a framework, any increase in budgetary resources allocated to literacy would translate into a reduction in the share of the national budget for other educational sub-sectors. Arbitrations in budget allocations in favour of literacy are therefore not always easy to manage. Similarly, literacy department officials do not necessarily welcome direct education budget support or education sector-wide

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[22] In-company literacy programmes are considered to be continuous education options, thus benefiting form the same funding mechanisms within the framework of the professional training tax. Cost per learner is estimated to be 2000 MAD (approximately US$244) of which 80% is covered by the Professional Training Tax.

approaches, as the state secretariat in Morocco is part of the Ministry of Education. Direct budget support to literacy would go into the general budget of the Ministry of Education and would not necessarily translate into an increase of the specific budget of the state secretariat. Finally, one may add the Moroccan authorities' reluctance to establish a special literacy fund.

Concluding Remarks

Recent policy developments in the three Maghreb countries examined indicate positive trends towards accelerated literacy action. Having said this, political commitment needs to translate into realistic strategies based on a sound and diversified policy that explicitly links efforts undertaken in formal and non-formal education. Ensuring education for all children implies concerted efforts to provide quality basic schooling at the primary and lower secondary levels, as well as through non-formal educational delivery that is adapted to the specific needs of children living in difficult circumstances. In addition to low average levels of educational attainment, to disparities in levels of educational attainment across the region, and significant disparities within countries based on gender and income, low scores in first language literacy in international tests point to a very serious quality deficit in educational processes in the Arab world. While the focus on access to educational opportunities is important, there is an urgent need to reconsider the quality and relevance of basic education provided, whether in formal schooling or in the area of adult literacy. This is also reflected in the worrying issue of relapse into illiteracy that has been observed in certain contexts. Sound literacy also implies overcoming the significant data deficits observed, and the establishment of monitoring and evaluation systems that are capable of providing reliable and timely data for programme design and delivery. Finally, the issue of funding is one that is intimately related to institutional arrangements for literacy provision, and the need for transparent mechanisms of coordination of national and international partners in view of harnessing all resources available for the effective acceleration of the pace of literacy action able to meet the targets set by national strategies.

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