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"Project in Support of the National Initiative  
to Combat Illiteracy"

**Project name: Project in Support of the National Initiative to Combat Illiteracy  
Implemented by: Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Original Education and Literacy,  
Mauritania**

### **Basic facts**

Country: Mauritania

Starting year: 2002

Outreach: approximately 6,200 per year

Target Population: Adult illiterates (over 16 years), mostly women

Language of instruction: Arabic

Operating in: 4 districts (Nouakchott, Nouadhibou, Rosso, Aleg)

Main Funding: Spanish Agency for International Cooperation

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### **Brief Description**

The radio distance education project in Mauritania is a clear example of successful replication. The programme was initially developed by the Spanish NGO *Fondation Radio Eccca* to combat illiteracy in the Canary Islands (Spain). Implemented by the Mauritanian Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Original Education and Literacy, after being adapted to the needs of the country, it has now been fully integrated into the national plan to eradicate illiteracy. The majority of the learners are women.

### **Rationale**

In Mauritania, 47.7 % of the population is illiterate, the majority of which are women (year 2000 census). Hence the need to place literacy at the heart of national initiatives. Literacy is an essential tool for reducing poverty, promoting equal opportunities amongst citizens and ensuring sustainable economic and social development. It also encourages a stable environment, participation and respect for differences.

### **Objective**

The overarching objective of the programme is to support the national initiative to combat illiteracy, led by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Original Education and Literacy.

This is achieved, *inter alia*, by (i) improving the organisation and supervision of Ministry personnel (establishing an organisational chart and clearly defining the functions of each post); (ii) Building the institutional capacity of the Ministry by improving the training of personnel; (iii) supporting the finalisation of the National Initiative for Combating Illiteracy, of which the distance learning project is a component (iv) sensitising public opinion so that the population may become aware of the importance of literacy in improving their daily lives; (v) implementing literacy classes using the radio distance learning method developed by Radio Eccca; and (vi) enhancing the monitoring and evaluation mechanism to ensure a good quality of the classes and improve the completion rate.

### **Conceptual Model and Methodology**

The distance literacy classes have three main components: the session delivered by radio, the learning materials, and the weekly encounter between the learners and the tutors (facilitators). Learners ordinarily work between 1 to 4 hours per week, including 30 minute classes which are followed by 30 minutes completing their workbook. Once a week they meet with their tutor, which should help them meet the objectives they had set together for that week. The team of tutors also accompanies the learners during the week so as to sensitise them and sustain their motivation.

Based on the Paolo Freire methodology, the lessons focus on the interests and needs of the learners, drawing from their daily lives and cultural background to help them develop their reading and writing skills. These interests are also the focus of the weekly discussions, leading to greater awareness of their surroundings and helping each one to gain greater independence and autonomy. Finally, it develops their analytical and critical thinking and their desire to evolve and bring about change.

The radio distance programme makes participation easier since learners are not required to leave their homes other than once a week. The weekly encounter with the other learners and facilitators allows them to discuss with fellow learners, ask questions and apply new knowledge.

### **Innovative features**

Great attention is given to ensure that the programme is tailored to the needs and the way of life of the learners. This is carried out thanks to close and careful monitoring of the learners, a key component of the programme and a strong element of its success. It also offers a better insight into the reality of the everyday lives of the learners and makes it easier to identify their personal objectives and find ways to motivate them to stay in the classes.

The programme is also testing the use of sun-powered radios, so as to raise awareness concerning the need to respect one's environment.