



The power of women's literacy

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- THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA whose generous support has made it possible to award the UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy since 2005.

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The winners of the UNESCO
 International Literacy Prizes

2010

The power of women's literacy

Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO



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Message from Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, on the occasion of International Literacy Day 8 September 2010

When a woman is literate, she can make choices to dramatically change her life for the better.

But ten years into the 21st century, two in every three of the world's 759 million illiterate adults are women. This is an intolerable situation reflecting one of the most persistent injustices of our times: unequal access to education.

There is no justification – be it cultural, economic or social – for denying girls and women an education. It is a basic right and an absolute condition for reaching all the internationally agreed development goals.

Illiteracy keeps women marginalized and constitutes a foremost obstacle to reducing extreme poverty in a technology-driven world where reading, writing and numeracy are indispensable for enjoying basic rights and opportunities.

For all these reasons, this year's International Literacy Day puts the spotlight on the highly influential role that literacy plays in empowering women.

Acquiring literacy skills gives women a sense of self-confidence and control over their life and future. This is what empowerment is about: gaining the knowledge to make informed decisions, sharing power in the household and in wider political life. Testimonies from newly literate women bear witness to the far-reaching transformation that new knowledge and skills have on all aspects of their lives.

As the first woman elected to the post of Director-General of UNESCO, I am profoundly committed to advancing the rights of girls and women everywhere, especially through education. Gender equality is one of our global strategic priorities because there can be no sustainable development when women do not enjoy equal rights and opportunities.

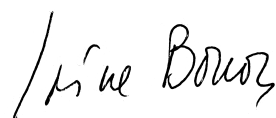
Investing in women's literacy carries very high returns: it improves livelihoods, leads to better child and maternal health, and favours girls' access to education. In short newly literate women have a positive ripple effect on all development indicators.

This international day aims to mobilize everyone's attention to the urgent need for increased commitment to literacy, especially for girls and women. UNESCO's International Literacy Prizes provide inspiring and creative examples of programmes that have had a profound impact on individuals and their communities. They show what works and how well.

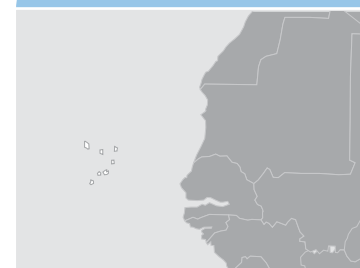
Over the past decade, the gender gap in education has narrowed in many countries. Gender parity in literacy has also improved, but all too slowly. Far more has to be done.

I take this occasion to call upon governments, international organizations, civil society and the private sector to scale up their support to literacy. I am confident that the momentum exists to make women's literacy a priority: we have seen in the past months a bid to accelerate progress towards gender equality with the creation of UN Women.

Literacy gives women a voice – in their families, in political life and on the world stage. It is a first step towards personal freedom and broader prosperity. When women are literate, it is all society that gains.



Irina Bokova



CAPE VERDE

Cape Verde's Directorate-General for Literacy and Adult Education (DGEFA) has been awarded the 2010 UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize for its Adult Education and Training Programme.

Literacy education making big strides in Cape Verde



Direction Générale de l'Éducation et la Formation des Adultes (DGEFA), 2010. ©

Literacy is making rapid progress among the population of Cape Verde. The illiteracy rate has plummeted from some 60% in 1975, when this Portuguese-speaking archipelago in West Africa acceded to sovereignty, to roughly 20%. The education policy is implemented by the Directorate-General for Literacy and Adult Education (DGEFA), the department in the Ministry of Education and Higher Education that is responsible for non-formal education. Its mission is to provide basic education and basic vocational training for adults.

In addition to boosting confidence and self-esteem through the acquisition of reading, writing and arithmetic skills, the programme aims to empower people to exercise a profession and thus combat poverty. It is also a lifelong community learning programme based on four pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together – and even to establish common-interest associations. It also covers gender equality and HIV/AIDS prevention issues.

The poverty rate nonetheless remains high in a country where 30% of the population lack adequate resources (41% are rural dwellers). Concomitantly, the illiteracy rate is higher in rural areas, especially among people in the 35-49 age group and among women. The government literacy programme targets women first and foremost. One woman, Lourença de Brito, who lives in Ribeira Grande de Santiago, the cradle of the Cape Verdean people, says: "If I had been



Direction Générale de l'Éducation et la Formation des Adultes (DGEFA), 2010, ©



sent to school when I was a little girl, I would certainly be somebody today because I'm inquisitive. But I wasn't sent to school because I had to work on the farm, tend the animals and fetch wood. Now I am really happy and only God knows what joy I feel!"

The teaching method is based on the work of the Brazilian teacher Paulo Freire, whose best-known work is his *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Portuguese language lessons draw on real life in Cape Verde and are held in the national

language, Crioulo, in all of the 17 education and adult education centres scattered throughout the archipelago. The trainers are required to adapt the coursework to the communities in which they teach. They use ICTs and the Internet extensively to facilitate exchanges in this geographically fragmented country.

On average 2,000 people complete the training course each year. Since 1979 nearly 100,000 Cape Verdians, out of a population of 500,000, have passed the end-of-course exam.

Courses are divided into three phases, each lasting one academic year, and a fourth optional phase is held to consolidate learning in an attempt to combat "relapse in illiteracy".

The annual cost of the programme, 440,000,000 escudos (€4,000,000), is defrayed by the State of Cape Verde, official development aid, the African Development Bank and the United Nations.

Bernard GIANSETTO



GERMANY

Building bridges between school, communities and parents

The State Institute for Teacher Training and School Development in Hamburg, Germany, is awarded the 2010 UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize for its Family Literacy Project (FLY).



State Institute for Teacher Training and School Development, 2010, ©

“Use the picture of one of your parents or a group photograph to write your family history so that it can be told to your children”. That is one of the exercises done by the mothers taking part with their children in the Family Literacy (FLY) project run in Hamburg, Germany. Launched in 2004 in several deprived districts by the State Institute for Teacher Training and School Development, this project is one of the winners of the 2010 UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize.

In Hamburg, where immigrants make up 14% of the population, the FLY project is being implemented for parents from immigrant communities, mainly mothers, and their children below the age of six. The first few years of life are indeed crucial to the child's attitudes to learning and future approach to education. During that period, parents play a key role in children's acquisition of literacy skills. It is also a time when many of them make steps to learn or re-learn to read and write in order to help their children with their schoolwork.

For two years, mothers go to school once a week with their children. Some activities, such as games centred on books, are done together. In others, conversely, children and mothers are separated. The point is not merely to learn to read and write, but also to become familiar with books, to stimulate pleasure in reading and to learn to write texts in German, in the parents' mother tongue or in both.

Meanwhile, each year nearly 1,000 parents and as many children learn under the FLY project. From an initial nine districts, the project has grown to include 33 districts, and each year 25 additional schools join the adventure.



State Institute for Teacher Training and School Development, 2010. ©

Down the years the project has successfully built bridges between schools, families and communities. It fosters communications between parents and teachers and has gradually changed the culture of participating schools. In several schools, rooms have been fitted to accommodate the mothers. After the two-year course, many of them have improved their self-esteem and confidence.

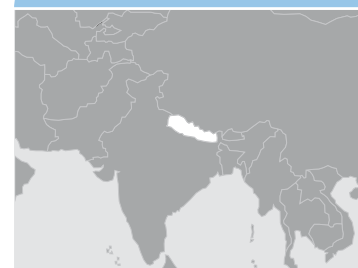
Sometimes the project uncovers talents such as Ümmühan, a mother of Turkish origin who found that she had a gift for writing. Her poems have been published and her collection is now used in literacy courses for immigrant women. “My poems, notebooks and pencils are my best friends. They are always there for me, even when there’s an emergency!” (Ümmühan E., mother in the Hamburg FLY-Project) “Family Literacy is a great strategy to build a strong bond between mother and child. This will not only strengthen the mother’s literacy skills, but provide opportunity to observe the child very closely and enjoy every step of the child’s growing and development.”

Sumon Thuladar and Gabriele Rabkin started a cooperation on Family Literacy in 2009 and they are



presently trying to transfer the Hamburg approach to the specific needs in Nepal.

Agnès BARDON



NEPAL

The Non-Formal Education Centre in Nepal, has been awarded the 2010 UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy.

Non-formal education to boost literacy in Nepal



Aliza Shrestha Dhungana ©

How can an entire population be taught literacy in a land of hills and mountains lost valleys and deep forests? Rising to this challenge, Nepal’s Ministry of Education mandated the Non-Formal Education Centre (NFEC) to draw up a national outreach programme for marginalized population groups, especially women. According to most recent statistics, 37% of Nepalis could not read or write in 2007-2008. While the first National Literacy Campaign is believed to have reached 2.8 million people there are still some 5 million people to be taught literacy by 2012.

The Community Learning Centres (CLC) of which there are more than 1000, has a key role to play. Their work affects all sections of the public: adults, with a special course for women, additional courses to consolidate what the newly literate have learned and, of course, children who have dropped out of school or not even had the opportunity to attend school. CLCs are also providing library facilities and life long learning opportunities to the neo-literates.



Non-Formal Education Centre, 2010, ©

The adults and adolescents' programme has been designed for a very wide age-group from 15 to 45 years and was launched immediately after democracy was established in 2006. It is geared to people who have not been to school. Classes consist of at least 20 adults. Lessons are two hours long and are held six days per week. The purpose is not merely to learn to read and write in Nepali but also to deal with problems that anyone may encounter in daily life. It aims to teach democratic principles and to provide tools to enable people to engage in economic activity.

It is estimated that 7% of primary school going age children do not attend school while 12% drop out early. These children are mainly young Nepalese in the 6 to 14 age group, belonging to ethnic minorities, poor classes or castes, or live in remote geographic regions. After three years of classes, successful pupils may be admitted to the formal school system at the level four for School Outreach Programme (SOP) and the level six for Flexible School Programme (FSP). Moreover, there are opportunities for neo-literates to enroll in academic courses through adult schools and open learning programmes.

Similarly, neo-literates are highly engaged in income generating activities with proper need based skill training.

Through these various programmes, the authorities have shown that education can be acquired at any age and everywhere. The point is not merely to learn to read, write and do arithmetic, but also to receive civic education, to acquire knowledge about maternal and child health and family planning, not to mention maintaining cultural traditions. The promoters of these programmes are convinced that full literacy within the population is bound up with the country's development.

Bernard GIANSETTO



EGYPT

Abu-Ashur, Egypt: where girls lead community development

The 2010 UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy was awarded to the Governorate of Ismailia in Egypt for its Females for Families programme.



Governorate of Ismailia, 2010, ©

If the family is the basic unit of society, then it makes sense for literacy programmes to target families. This is the reasoning behind the Egyptian *Females for Families* literacy programme in the remote Egyptian town of Abu-Ashur.

The Ismailia Governorate has a population of 1 million and an overall literacy rate of 78%, which it wants to raise to 93% in five years with the help of its partners - and a group of girls from Abu-Ashur.

None of the 4,000 families in Abu-Ashur earn more than US \$60 a month. Their main occupation is farming land reclaimed from the desert. The 30,000 inhabitants suffer from inadequate health and education services; high illiteracy, ill health, early marriage and child labour are widespread.

The Governorate launched its development programme in Abu-Ashur with a participatory study covering everything from basic personal information – birth dates, levels of education, occupations of family members – to attitudes towards the education of girls. A database was developed and the data analysed.

“We want to have a better life”, was how people from Abu-Ashur summed up their development goals: higher income, improved life skills and more efficient services. It emerged that “family”, with its associations of trust and interaction, was the most significant word in the community. Family-based development was born.



Governorate of Ismailia, 2010. ©

Local families designated 120 girls for an intensive six-month training as development leaders: this included literacy, health, human rights, income-generation and administrative and communication skills. After training, the girls returned to Abu-Ashur to work with family members on a tailored, customized basis.

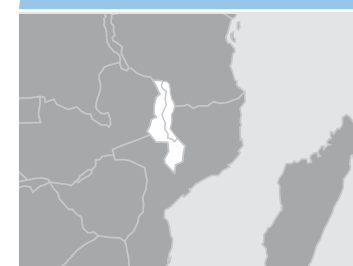
The group of girls – one per ten families – was the pillar of the programme. The other was a permanent resource centre in the town, staffed with a doctor, a vet, an education specialist, a loan officer and other professionals. The Governorate held regular information meetings, built partnerships and financed micro-enterprises.

The girls established home literacy classes which addressed daily problems. They imparted information on health, hygiene and family planning, trained people in cooking, crafts or agriculture, accompanied them to the doctor or vet, encouraged drop-outs to return to school and helped secure small loans. They became focal points for the administration, helping family members obtain

identity cards, election cards and driving licenses, as well as entitlements such as disability benefits.

The local people's increased self-esteem can be deduced from their own words: "Ours is the best village in Egypt". *Females for Families* is a genuine social and cultural breakthrough which goes beyond reading and writing or even integrating literacy as a part of everyday life. Perhaps the most striking feature is that it has transformed local girls into leaders in their community and swept away its prejudices about women in public life. As the learners remarked, "We can do anything now – we can make any dream come true!"

Jean O'SULLIVAN



MALAWI

The Coalition of Women Farmers (COWFA) in Malawi is awarded the 2010 Honourable Mention of the UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy for its Women Land Rights Project (WOLAR)

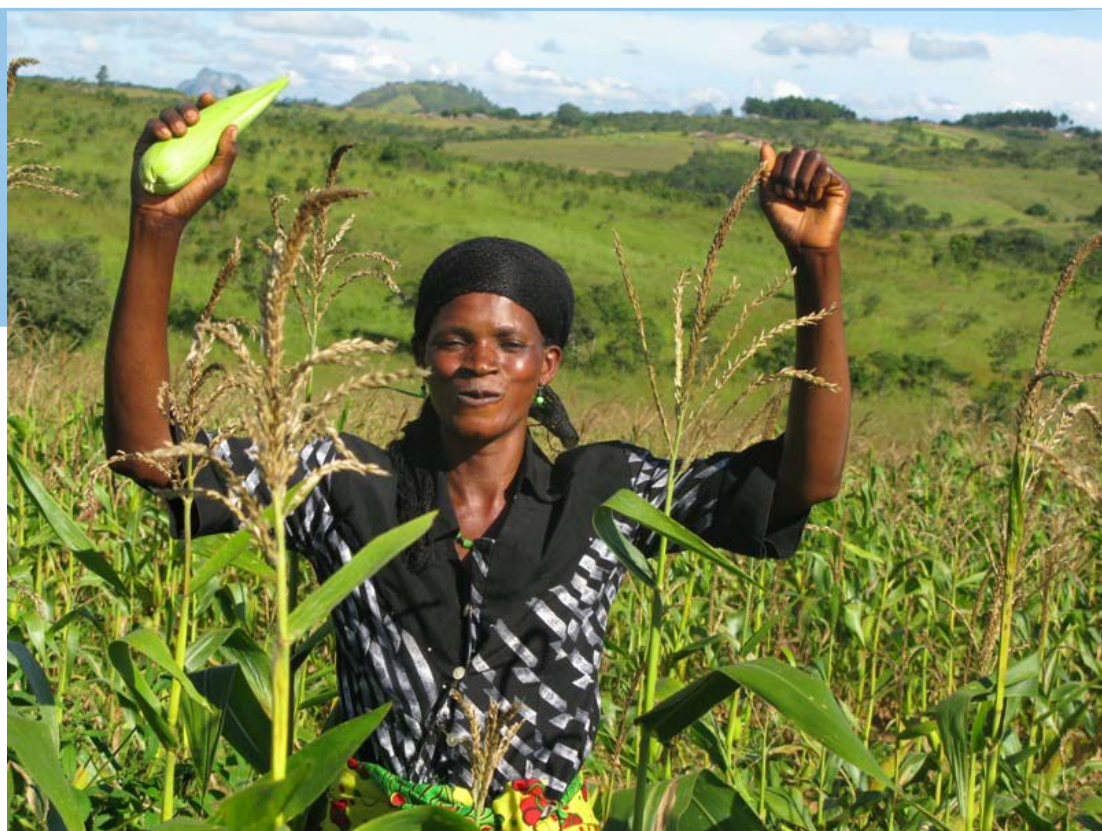


COWFA, 2010. ©

Around the world, women are the major producers of food and have a critical role in providing for their households. However, it is men who own and administer land and the income it generates. Disparities in land ownership is among the main causes for gender inequalities, thus endangering food security as well as the well-being of individuals and their families.

In Malawi, where four out of every five people live in rural areas, women provide most of the agricultural labour and the food. Seven out of ten agricultural workers are women. But the number of women with full access to the means of production – land and seeds – is insignificant. Only four per cent of Malawian women own the land they work on. And even though Malawian women are by tradition foodproducers, they are the most vulnerable to hunger. Portions are served to men and children first, women eat last. In a country where agriculture forms the backbone of the national economy, recognizing women's right to land is crucial to fighting hunger and ultimately contributing to poverty alleviation and development.

Many national constitutions recognize that men and women have equal rights to land, but the everyday reality is quite different. Due to strong application of patriarchal values and practices, women are treated as less than equal and women's illiteracy tends to perpetuate gender inequality. This is where the Women Land Rights Project comes in. It assists poor women farmers in



COWFA, 2010, ©



Malawi to acquire ownership and control over land and promotes their economic independence and food security. By acquiring literacy skills and by participating in briefing circles, Malawian women are learning to challenge discriminatory practices and gaining confidence to change power relations on land issues. As Nobel Prize Laureate, Amartya Sen states, “Women’s education strengthens women’s agency and also tends to make it more informed

and skilled. The ownership of property can also make women more powerful in family decisions.”

“The association has taught us to be self-reliant,” says Evelyn Mwafuiriwa, a farmer from the Coalition of Women Farmers. “There’s no difference between the women who are on their own and women with husbands.” Thabo Chidimba, who is also part of the COWFA, adds “What I like most about this group is that we can share our technical knowledge. We support one another and, most importantly, grow enough food to eat.”

Reinforcing Amartya Sen’s words, the Women Land Rights Project shows how land ownership and management represent real economic empowerment for women, thus impacting on the well being of everyone – men, women and children – in rural communities and society as a whole.

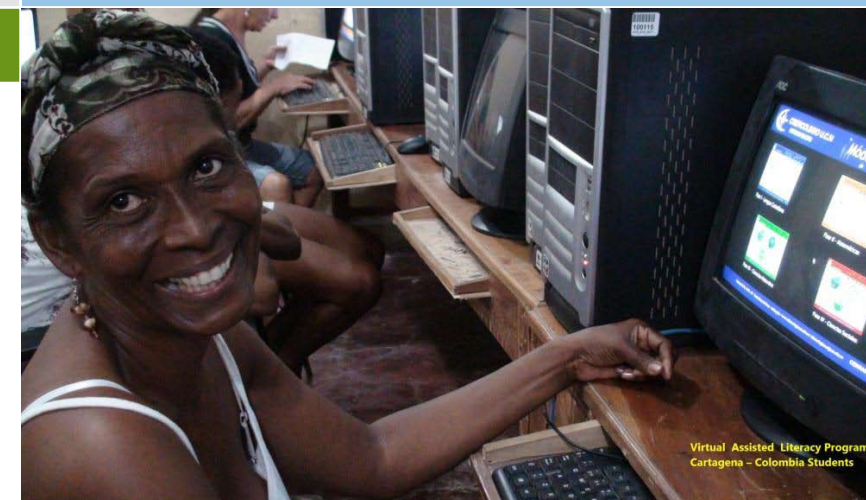
Camilla ADDEY



COLOMBIA

The North Catholic University Foundation in Antioquia, Colombia is awarded the 2010 Honourable Mention of the UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize for its Virtual Assisted Literacy Programme.

Literacy through ICTs: improving social cohesion in multilingual contexts



North Catholic University Foundation, 2010, ©

Bringing learning opportunities to remote areas and marginalized people requires innovative solutions. The North Catholic University Foundation in Antioquia, Colombia, has found one which manages to reach the unreached, narrow the digital gap and bring communities together at the same time as it tackles illiteracy.

The Virtual Assisted Literacy Programme is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for indigenous populations, displaced people, marginalized ethnic groups, single mothers, abused women and victims of subversive groups. First implemented in La Guajira, a northern Colombian department inhabited by Wayuu Indians, the programme breaks through geographical distances and greatly improves social cohesion. In 2008, the programme started out with 327 participants, but by 2010 the programme was already benefitting 13,864 learners.

Because adults have different learning needs and thus make up a heterogeneous group of learners, they are difficult to provide for. The Virtual Assisted Literacy Programme responds to their different needs, aspirations, availability and provides a solution to limited access due to geographical location. Learners attend literacy classes, which are reinforced by online resources and are also given the opportunity to learn and use their newly acquired skills in their mother tongue. Increasing communication through the Internet in multilingual contexts opens new horizons whilst allowing people to maintain close connections with cultural traditions. One learner told a facilitator, “I had never held a pencil in my hand.



the programme also stimulates communication amongst family members, guiding them to solve family problems and conflicts and turn their backs on violence. Relevant discussion topics include conflict resolution and protecting and defending human rights.

This model is already being replicated in the Dominican Republic. Properly contextualized and adequately supported, it could very well represent an important leap forward in literacy practices and techniques.

Camilla ADDEY

Now, as an old man, I know I have the possibility to learn more. I hope that all the people in the La Guajira can do the same as I did”.

The Virtual Assisted Literacy Programme is a true example of how ICTs can effectively be used in today’s knowledge societies and knowledge-based economies. As communication is increasingly computer-based and multi-dimensional, it requires advanced levels of literacy acquired through ICTs. The Colombian programme has pioneered providing literacy through the so-called “many to many” communication provided by the Internet. It gives learners the chance to learn by using fora, blogs, Twitter, YouTube and chats, whilst increasing their knowledge and their abilities to read, write and interact “many to many”. Even as it facilitates contact with the wider world,



Governorate of Ismailia, 2010, ©



COWFA, 2010, ©



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The Non-Formal Education Centre in Nepal. Aliza Shrestha Dhungana ©



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The winners of the UNESCO
International Literacy Prizes

2010

The General Directorate of Adult Training (Cape Verde)
Adult Education and Training Programm (EdFoA)
Winner of the UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize

The State Institute for Teacher Training and School Development (Hamburg, Germany)
FLY – the Family Literacy Project
Winner of the UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize

The Non-Formal Education Centre (Nepal)
National Literacy Campaign
Winner of the UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy

The Governorate of Ismailia (Egypt)
Females for Families
Winner of the UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy

The Coalition of Women Farmers - COWFA (Malawi)
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