Asia-South Pacific Education Watch

EDUCATION WATCH TOOLKIT

A RESOURCE PACK FOR EFA RESEARCH AND MONITORING

Module 2: Literacy Assessment

About ASPBAE

The Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) is a regional association of more than 200 organisations and individuals working towards promoting quality education for all and transformative and liberating, life-long adult education and learning. It strives to forge and sustain an Asia-Pacific movement dedicated to mobilising and supporting community and people's organisations, national education coalitions, teachers' associations, campaign networks, and other civil society groups and institutions in holding governments and the international donor community accountable in meeting education targets and commitments, ensuring the right of all to education, and upholding education as an empowering tool for combating poverty and all forms of exclusion and discrimination, pursuing sustainable development, enabling active and meaningful participation in governance, and building a culture of peace and international understanding.

ASPBAE publications form an integral part of ASPBAE's information, education, and advocacy activities and efforts, and seek to support sharing and learning among education stakeholders, advocates, practitioners, analysts, and policy-makers. The reader is therefore encouraged to write to ASPBAE if they wish to use the material contained herein for reproduction, adaptation, and translation and to provide feedback that could help in further improving these publications.

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Asia South Pacific Association
for Basic and Adult Education
Learning Beyond Boundaries

Education Watch Toolkit

A Resource Pack for EFA Research and Monitoring

Module 2:
Literacy Assessment

Asia-South Pacific
EdWatch

OTHER MODULES IN THE SERIES

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Acronyms

ASPBAE – Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education
CAMPE – Campaign for Popular Education (Bangladesh)
COESI – Coalition on Education Solomon Islands
EdWatch – Education Watch
EFA – Education for All
E-NET – Education Network for Justice (Indonesia)
E-Net Philippines – Civil Society Network for Education Reforms (Philippines)
GMR – Global Monitoring Report
NGO – Non-Government Organisation
NSO – National Statistics Office
PEAN – PNG Education Advocacy Network
PNG – Papua New Guinea
PTR – Pupil/Teacher Ratio
SMC – School Management Committees
SPSS – Statistical Package for Social Science
TEWN – Thai Education Watch Network
UIS – UNESCO Institute of Statistics
UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Surveyors training, Papua New Guinea Education Advocacy Network *(PEAN)*

Literacy Assessment

THE REGIONAL CONTEXT[1]

The Education for All Goal 4 aims to achieve, by 2015, a 50 percent improvement in levels of adult literacy, especially for women. While literacy level has improved globally through the years, the number of adult illiterates remains high at 759 million, two-thirds of whom are in the Asia-Pacific region. South Asia, the sub-region with the biggest concentration of adult illiterates and housing about half of the world's total, has the lowest literacy rates and the highest gender disparities in adult literacy. About two-thirds of the world's adult illiterates are women. This has been the situation for over the last two decades and is projected to remain the same by 2015 unless decisive actions are taken.

Overall, illiteracy rates are highest among the poorest countries and population groups, a link observed even down to the household level. ASPBAE's EdWatch surveys showed that within countries, wide disparities in literacy levels remain across gender, age groups, income levels, locations and family backgrounds. Individuals who are poor, older

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[1] All data, unless otherwise indicated, were taken from *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010, Reaching the marginalized.* (Paris, UNESCO/Oxford University Press, 2010). http://www.unesco.org/en/efareport/reports/2010-marginalization/

and residing in rural areas are more likely to be illiterate than the non-poor, younger and urban residents. The EdWatch literacy surveys using actual testing conducted in the Pacific States of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands revealed even significantly higher rates of illiteracy among youth and adults[2]. Earlier, the Education Watch literacy survey conducted by the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) Bangladesh also generated higher rates of illiteracy compared to official statistics[3].

There is growing evidence culled from different country experiences showing that literacy impacts positively on human capabilities, enhances productivity, broadens earning opportunities and improves personal well-being. It contributes to engendering a healthy, equitable, gender-aware and democratic environment. Literacy is crucial for promoting women's rights and achieving empowerment. It is a critical first step for lifelong learning to build capacities, reduce vulnerabilities and improve the quality of life.

Yet, adult literacy remains one of the most neglected of the EFA goals. Progress in reducing adult illiteracy has been quite slow and largely uneven. The UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) predicts that given current trends, based on estimates derived using the conventional, self-reporting method, there will still be 710 million adult illiterates by 2015. This is way below the target that EFA seeks to reach.

THE CHALLENGE OF MEASURING LITERACY

Questions have been raised on the reliability and comparability of literacy figures generated using conventional methods which can be either of the following:

a) Self-declaration – respondents report their literacy level in response to a census or survey questionnaire
b) Third-party assessment – another individual, usually the household head, reports on the literacy level of household members
c) Educational attainment proxy – literacy level is determined based on the educational attainment or grade level completed by the individual

An estimate of the total number of 'literates' and 'illiterates' is computed using any of the above methods, and is then compared with the corresponding population size to obtain the literacy rate. The use of these conventional methods for calculating literacy rates is widely acknowledged to be flawed. Census-derived literacy statistics that rely mainly on self-declaration were found to be grossly overstated based on surveys that

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[2] ASPBAE Education Watch Reports on the Philippines, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia found at http://www.aspbae.org
[3] Ahmed, Manzoor, et. al. Literacy in Bangladesh: Need for a New Vision (Education Watch 2002). Campaign for Popular Education. June 2003. http://www.campebd.org/download/PopularEW2002English.pdf accessed December 12, 2009

used actual individual testing and assessment. Census data are generally provided by heads of households on behalf of other members of the family and are more likely a household opinion rather than an accurate, individual estimation.

Varying definitions of literacy and age specification for "adults" add further to the confusion. Given all these limitations, it will be difficult to track progress and meet the EFA target on literacy.

Responding to this problem, governments are increasingly relying on household-based surveys that include direct measurement of literacy. UNESCO and international development agencies have also supported the development of more reliable monitoring of the literacy situation. The *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006, Literacy for Life* (UNESCO 2005) noted that almost 40% of official literacy rates in its statistical annex were based on household surveys.

Nonetheless, the demand for comprehensive, updated and reliable literacy statistics remains. A majority of countries in the Asia-Pacific region still rely on the conventional methods of measuring literacy. Household surveys are quite expensive and are therefore undertaken at long intervals. Literacy surveys using direct measurement are seldom done at the local level or for specific disadvantaged groups because local governments, communities and civil society organisations do not have the capacity to undertake such initiatives.

ASPBAE's EdWatch initiative demonstrates that civil society organisations can manage and carry out a literacy survey with rigour and respectable outcome. As an example, the EdWatch literacy assessment survey carried out in the Solomon Islands discovered the existing "literacy crisis" in the country, with a literacy rate of only 17% and semi-literacy rate of 42.7%. The assessment study classified literacy into three levels: (1) Non-literate - unable to read or write simple words, or count objects, or use these skills in everyday life; (2) Semi-literate – able to read simple words and sentences, write an understandable simple sentence with mostly accurate spelling, count objects and perform basic calculations, and use these skills in a limited way; (3) Literate - able to read and comprehend text, write complete simple sentences with correct spelling, count objects and perform calculations, and use these skills[4]. The literacy rates derived from this study show a big difference from the reported literacy rate of 76.6% in the official national census[5]. Literacy surveys conducted by civil society groups can

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[4]   For the scoring system, classification and other details, readers may contact directly the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE).

[5]   Government reports on literacy usually classify individuals as either literate or illiterate. Thus, the official literacy figure of 76.6% (1999 National Census, Solomon Islands) includes both literate and semi-literate based on the EdWatch classification. The corresponding figure using the EdWatch survey data is 59.7% (17% literate and 42.7% semi-literate).

prompt governments to produce updated and more accurate assessments as bases for education policy-making.

This module is culled from the EdWatch experience and designed to encourage the replication of literacy surveys to support policies and literacy programmes, particularly for women and other disadvantaged groups.

LITERACY ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS

The literacy assessment instruments are designed to determine the proportion of the population possessing different levels of literacy skills. Apart from estimating the literacy rates of the youth and adult population, the instruments also aim to assess how literacy has been acquired, how it is used, and what factors contributed to or hindered the acquisition and development of literacy skills.

UNESCO has long defined literacy as the "ability to read and write, with understanding, a simple short statement related to his/her everyday life." Countries, however, have come up with their specific definitions, a summary of which has been reported in the GMR 2006. Civil society groups have likewise come up with definitions that underscore the relevance of literacy skills within the context of the local community. Particular

Literacy test in Solomon Islands, Coalition on Education Solomon Islands *(COESI)*

focus is given to generating data on indigenous knowledge, particularly among ethnic and disadvantaged groups.

In the Education Watch study undertaken by the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) for Bangladesh in 2002, literacy was defined as the possession of skills in reading, writing and numeracy related to familiar contents and contexts and the ability to use these skills in everyday life in order to function effectively in society.

For the EdWatch studies conducted by several national coalitions affiliated with ASPBAE, literacy survey instruments were developed, building on previous initiatives of civil society organisations and UNESCO. Literacy and survey specialists were consulted and the instruments pilot-tested to assess their validity under actual field situations. The discussion below presents the core content of the literacy instruments and the implementation method for the conduct of the survey.

Basic Content of the Instruments

1. *The Literacy Test*

   1) Reading skills. *Word recognition; ability to read simple sentences and paragraphs in familiar and varying contexts*
   2) Writing skills. *Ability to write words and simple sentences and to describe something with a few sentences*
   3) Numeracy skills. *Counting, performing simple arithmetic operations and simple problem solving*
   4) Application of literacy skills. *Examples are recognizing time, understanding road signs and simple billboard messages, knowing directions given in simple maps and preparation of simple expense reports*

2. *Individual and Household Profile*

   Apart from the literacy test instrument, the survey may include other questionnaires to obtain the profile of the individual respondent and the household. These are important information which can tell more about the factors and circumstances that contribute to or hinder literacy. Information on family background, household economic status and the literacy environment are important to determine impact on literacy. The following topics may be included in these questionnaires:

   1) Demographic profile
   2) Education experience
   3) Language experience
   4) Economic activities

5) Parents' educational background
6) Household income or economic/wealth status
7) Access to and sources of information
8) Attitudes to literacy and education

3. *Community/Village Profile*

Information concerning the community provides insight on factors that impact on education and literacy. The following topics may be included in the questionnaires:

1) Location and accessibility
2) Demographic characteristics
3) Main economic activities
4) School information
5) Other educational institutions
6) Information facilities

Basic Methodology

The literacy status of the target population is determined by the results of the literacy test administered to eligible respondents for selected households. Household selection is done through the probability sampling method that is appropriate and cost effective. In most cases, a stratified random sampling[6] is the most appropriate to cover different geographical and administrative divisions.

The eligible participants for the literacy test may vary from one country to another depending on existing definitions and practices. The international norm for adult literacy is for ages 15 years and above which include the youth covering individuals 15 to 24 years old. For comparability, therefore, these two age groups (15 years and above, and the subset 15 to 24 years) should be included in the target participants for the literacy test.

Literacy level is assessed based on the scores obtained in the literacy test. In most cases of direct assessment of literacy, the categories are more than the dichotomous classification (literate and illiterate) which is usual in the conventional methodology. In the actual studies done under the EdWatch initiative, literacy levels varied from three to six levels. The Pacific categorised literacy into three levels – Literate, Semi-literate and Illiterate. For Bangladesh, four levels were used - non-literate, semi-literate, literate at the initial level and literate at the advanced level. For Indonesia, six categories were

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[6] For a detailed discussion of sampling methods, refer to *Overview of the Research Process* (Annexure of *Education Watch Toolkit: A Resource Pack for EFA Research and Monitoring*).

originally used and later collapsed into three levels. The literacy rate for the specific country, area or population is determined by comparing the number of individuals found to be literate to the population base.

Language is an important issue in determining the literacy situation. It is recommended that survey and literacy test be conducted in several languages to accommodate as many eligible participants as possible. However, there are financial and technical constraints. The recommendation, therefore, is to be as inclusive as possible, giving space to population groups that have never been or are seldom covered by literacy surveys.

Finally, the results of the literacy survey should be disaggregated by gender, age group, geographic location, ethnicity, economic status, educational experience and so on as these will have implications on policies and programmes. Moreover, determinants of literacy skills can be analysed using basic statistical tests to identify factors that contribute to or hinder the acquisition and development of literacy skills.

Sample Literacy Assessment instrument

The sample literacy assessment instrument presented in the Annexure was used in the EdWatch literacy survey on educational, language and literacy experience conducted in the Solomon Islands in 2006/2007. Similar instruments were developed for the other Pacific States.

Literacy test conducted in Wonokerto village, East Java *(E-NET for Justice, Indonesia)*

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Annexure

COALITION FOR EDUCATION SOLOMON ISLANDS (COESI) - *SURVEY OF EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE*[7]

EXTRACT FROM THE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE[8]

Literacy Assessment

Note: The Literacy Assessment is administered only to eligible persons who declared they can read an official language

	Reading Skills	
32[9]	Can you match the pictures and words? Iu save matsim olketa piksa ia wetem olketa wods ia?. [show participant this page and ask him/her to draw a line matching the correct words and pictures] **Eye** **Ae** **Bird** **Bed** **Fish** **Fis** [0 points for incorrect or no matches; 2 points for one correct match; 4 points for two correct; 6 points for three correct] **IF '0 POINTS', GO TO Q. 37**	

33	Can you read these two sentences out loud?
	Iu save ridim aot laod tufala setens ia?
	[show participant this page & point to the sentences]
	
	1. **Today I saw a bird flying in the sky.**
	
	    Tude mi lukim wan fala bed flae long skae.
	
	2. **Yesterday I caught a fish in the river.**
	
	    Yestede mi kasim wan fala fis long riva.
	
	[0 points for unable to read; 2 points for partial reading of one sentence; 4 points for partial reading of two sentences; 6 points for accurate reading of both sentences]
	IF '0 POINTS', GO TO Q. 37	

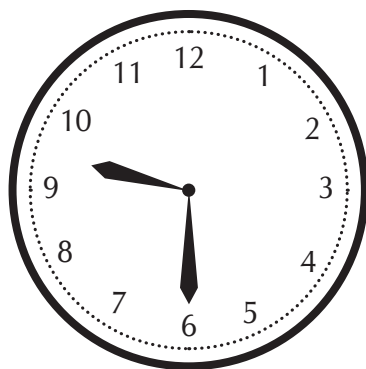
[7] No part of the questionnaires in the annexures can be used or reproduced without the written permission from the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE).
[8] The complete set of survey questionnaires used in the EdWatch studies is available upon request from ASPBAE.
[9] The original numbering has been retained in the extracted part of the survey questionnaire.

34	Can you read the following story and answer the following questions?
	Iu save ridim dis fala stori an givim ansa blong iu long olketa koestin abaotim stori ia?
	[show participant this page, allow them to read the story & questions, and then ask for oral answers]
	
	Story
	
	Jane is 12 years old. When she was young her father died. She was unable to go to school because her mother could not afford the school fees.
	
	Jane wanted to learn to read and at age 9 joined classes at her local church. She worked hard and two years ago her mother was able to raise enough money from her market garden to send Jane to primary school.
	
	Now she is in Grade 5 and has been appointed class captain.
	
	Jane hemi 12 ias ol. Taem Jane hemi smol iet, dadi blong hem hemi dae. So hemi no save go long skul bikos mami blong hem no save fo peim skul fi blong hem.
	
	Jane laek fo save hao fo rid so taem hemi 9 ias ol hemi joinim olketa riding klas long siosi blong hem. Hemi woaka had an afta 2 ias mami blong hem faedim inaf seleni from salem kaikai from gaden blong hem. So hemi sendim Jane fo go long praemari skul.
	
	Dis taem Jane hemi long klas 5 an olketa susim hem kapten fo klas blong hem.
	
	Questions
	
	1. Why couldn't Jane go to school at first?
	
	   Waswe nao Jane no save go long skul long fes taem?
	
	2. Where did Jane begin to learn to read?
	
	   Wea nao Jane hemi fes lane hao fo rid?
	
	[0 points for incorrect or no answers; 4 points for one correct answer; 6 points for two correct answers]	

	Writing Skills	
35	Can you write the names for these animals? Iu save raetem nem blong olketa animol ia? [show participant this page and allow them to write the names in the space below] [0 points for unrecognisable or no answers; 2 points for one word with incorrect but recognisable spelling; 4 points for two words with incorrect but recognisable spelling; 6 points for two words with correct spelling] **IF '0 POINTS', GO TO Q. 37**	
36	Can you write two short sentences – one about a fish & one about a bird? Iu save raetem tu fala sot sentens. Wan fala sentens abaotim wanem wan fala fis bin duim tude? Nara wan abaotim wanem wan fala bed duim tude? [allow participant to write in the space below]	

	[0 points for unable to write; 2 points for one understandable sentence with mostly recognisable spelling; 4 points for two understandable sentences with mostly accurate spelling; 6 points for two complete sentences with accurate spelling]	
	Numeracy Skills	
37	How many fish and how many birds are there in the picture? Hao meni fis an hao meni beds naoi u save lukim long dis fala piksa? [show participant this page and ask for oral answers] [0 points for incorrect or no answers; 4 points for one correct answer; 6 points for two correct answers] **IF '0 POINTS', THE SURVEY IS COMPLETE**	
38	Can you name the missing number in this sequence? Iu save talem wanem nao namba hemi mis from olketa ia? [show participant this page and ask for oral answer] 5, 7, 9, 11, _ , 15, 17 [0 points for incorrect or no answer; 6 points for correct answer] **IF '0 POINTS', GO TO Q. 40**	
39	Can you answer the following questions? Iu save ansam olketa koestins ia? [read each question and ask for oral answers - if participants want to see the questions, show them this page] 1. If 1 kilo of rice costs K3, how much will 2 kilos cost? Sapos wan fala paket raes kostim $6, hao mas nao babae tufala paket kostim? 2. If 3 people share equally a bunch of 18 bananas, how many bananas will each person receive? Sapos 3 fala pipol searem 18 bananas semsem bituin olketa seleva, hao meni banana nao babae its wan long olketa qarem? [0 points for incorrect or no answers; 4 points for one correct answer; 6 points for two correct answers]	
	Application of Literacy Skills	
40	Can you read the time on the clock face? Wanem taem nao dis fala kiloko hemi soum? [show participant this page and ask for an oral answer]	

[0 points for incorrect or no answer; 6 points for correct answer]

41	Can you answer the following questions?

Iu save ansam olketa koestins ia?

[show participants this page and ask for oral answers]

November 2006

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

1. What day of the week will it be on November 10?
   Wanem dei long wuik nao Novemba 10 long dis fala kalenda?

2. What will the date be on the first Sunday of the month?
   Long dis fala kalenda, wanem nao namba (det) blong fes sande long manis?

[0 points for incorrect or no answers; 4 points for one correct answer; 6 points for two correct answers]

42	What is the main message that the poster trying to convey?

Wanem nao meseg posta ia hemi trae fo talem?

[show participant the poster and ask for an oral answer]

[0 points for incorrect or no answers; 2 points for partial description of some elements of message; 4 points for partial description of most elements of message; 6 points for full and accurate description of the message]