# THE POWER OF LITERACY:

## Women's Journeys in India, Indonesia, Philippines and Papua New Guinea

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# 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.

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# ABOUT DVV INTERNATIONAL

*dvv international* is the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association (Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband e.V., DVV), which in turn, is the federal umbrella association for the 16 regional associations of Germany's community adult education centres (*Volkshochschulen*, VHS). DVV and its Institute represent the interests of the association's members, together with those of over 1000 *Volkshochschulen*, at the national, European, and international level. Guided by a commitment to human rights and the promotion of women and gender equality, *dvv international* works in youth and adult education and lifelong learning for the reduction of poverty and sustainable development, and is active on a worldwide basis, cooperating with more than 200 partners in over 40 countries.

# ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

The European Union is made up of 27 Member States who have decided to gradually link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, during a period of expansion of 50 years, they built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms.

The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders.

# ABOUT THE PROJECT

The project, *Innovating Advocacy Approaches in Promoting Adult Female Literacy*, is a two-year (2010-2012) undertaking of ASPBAE in collaboration with *dvv international*/Institut für Internationale Zusammenarbeit and country partners in India, Indonesia, Philippines and Papua New Guinea under the *Investing in People* programme of the European Union. The project aims to build capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) and education advocates to influence policies and actions related to women's literacy.

In the run up to the Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) 2015 deadline, the project affirms the call to fast track actions in order to achieve the promises on education especially in relation to women's and girls' literacy and learning. The project will catalyse a process where a consensus and partnerships are fostered to effectively advocate policies and mandates to address female illiteracy at local, national and regional levels. This project builds on the momentum set by the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) process by ensuring that commitments are translated into concrete policies, sustained partnership and collective action,

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# PREFACE

This study is part of the continuing initiative of the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) and its members in strengthening the capacities of civil society organisations and their constituencies towards influencing policies, programs and budgets related to adult education and literacy, focusing specifically on poor women from socially excluded groups.

Literacy is a human right and recognised as a critical step to lifelong learning and women's empowerment. This has been affirmed in a succession of mandates from the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, through to the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action defining specific goals on adult literacy and gender parity. Momentum built up further during the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) held in Belem, Brazil in December 2009 where governments agreed to focus literacy actions and investment in lifelong learning on women and highly disadvantaged population groups.

Most countries, including the poorest among them, have made significant progress in meeting the Education for All (EFA) goals as indicated by the consistent expansion of pre-primary education; the dramatic rise in primary and secondary school enrolment; the development of life skills programmes; higher literacy rates especially among the youth; achieving gender parity in primary education in most countries; and more resources invested to improve education quality.

Yet, critical gaps remain with adult literacy as one of the most neglected EFA goals. Today, 793 million youth and adults lack basic literacy skills, the first requisites to learning. This figure (widely believed to be grossly understated) has not changed much in the last 22 years since the Jomtien Conference in 1990 that first adopted the EFA declaration. Even more alarming is the fact that women comprise two-thirds of the world's adult illiterates. This has been the situation over the last 40 years and is projected to remain the same by 2015 unless decisive actions are taken.

A broader consensus for innovative approaches, sustained initiatives and bolder actions are needed to decisively address the persisting problem of adult illiteracy especially among vulnerable women. There is apparently, poor understanding and little appreciation of the issue of women's illiteracy and its impact on people's lives and social progress. Policies designed specifically for women are generally weak or virtually non-existent in most countries; programmes lack resources and suffer from poor implementation;

and the push and support from international agencies and donors remain insufficient and unpredictable. Clearly, efforts are falling short or simply missing the point.

This study hopes to contribute to the ongoing discourse on literacy and women's empowerment. A set of recommendations is offered in the concluding section, which discusses the challenges, the policy options, the strategies and the agenda for pursuing women's literacy that is empowering and transformative. It will certainly take more than mere provisioning for girls' schooling, learning materials and literacy programmes to address the problem. Affirmative action and social support are necessary to overcome the economic and socio-cultural barriers, which in the first place have kept women from attending school or literacy classes and from acquiring functional literacy. Goals that ensure equity across gender, ethnicity, social classes and wealth status should be set at the center of the political agenda for education and literacy.

However, beyond policies and programmes, there is likewise a compelling need for solidarity, organisation and collective action among women learners, civil society groups, women's organisations and education coalitions to jointly pursue such agenda on women's literacy for empowerment and social transformation.

Maria Lourdes Almazan Khan
*Secretary General*
*Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE)*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

# ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| ADR | Average Dropout rate |
| ASPBAE | Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education |
| ARMM | Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (Philippines) |
| ASPPUK | Association For Women in Small Business Assistance (Indonesia) |
| BALS | Bureau of Alternative Learning System (Philippines) |
| BPS | *Badan Pusat Statistik*/Statistics Indonesia |
| CEDAW | Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women |
| CHED | Commission on Higher Education (Philippines) |
| CLC | Community Learning Centre |
| CSO | Civil Society Organisation |
| CONFINTEA | International Conference on Adult Education |
| DepEd | Department of Education (Philippines) |
| DOH | Department of Health (Philippines) |
| DVV | *dvv international* – Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association |
| ECCD | Early Childhood Care and Development |
| EFA | Education for All |
| EFA GMR | Education for All Global Monitoring Report |
| E-NET | Civil Society Network for Education Reforms (Philippines) |
| FGD | focused group discussion |
| FITRA | Indonesian Forum for Budget Transparency |
| FLEMMS | Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey Philippines |
| FPIC | Free and Prior Informed Consent |
| GAD | Gender and Development |
| GCE | Global Campaign for Education |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GeDI | Gender Disparity Index |
| GER | Gross Enrolment Rate |
| GDI | Gender Development Index |
| GII | Gender Inequality Index |
| GoP | Government of PNG |
| HDI | Human Development Index |
| ICESCR | International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights |
| IDR | Indonesian Rupiah |
| IP | Indigenous People |

| | |
|---|---|
| IPRA | Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997(Philippines) |
| IRR | Implementing Rules and Regulations (Philippines) |
| JRL | Joint Regulation Letter (Indonesia) |
| KK | *Kishori Kunj* (India) |
| KPACIO | Konkokyo Peace Activity Center Information Office (Philippines) |
| KBPVA | Kapit Barangay Pasig Volunteers Association (Philippines) |
| KRA | key result area |
| KUMPAS | *Kilusan at Ugnayan ng Maralitang Pasigueño/* |
| | Movement of Urban Poor in Pasig |
| LAKAS | Lubos Alyansa ng mga Katutubong Ayta ng Sambales (Philippines) |
| LCC | Literacy Coordinating Council (Philippines) |
| LGU | Local Government Unit (Philippines) |
| LIFE | Literacy Initiative for Empowerment |
| LSB | Local School Board (Philippines) |
| MCW | Magna Carta of Women (Philippines) |
| MDG | Millennium Development Goals |
| MGNREGA | Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (India) |
| MLE | Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education |
| MoU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| MS | *Mahila Samakhya* (India) |
| MSK | *Mahila Shikshan Kendra* (India) |
| MTDP | PNG Medium Term Development Plan |
| NCIP | National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (Philippines) |
| NCR | National Capital Region (Philippines) |
| NCRFW | National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women |
| NEDA | National Economic and Development Authority (Philippines) |
| NEP | National Education Plan (Papua New Guinea) |
| NER | Net Enrolment Rate |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| NHEP | National Higher Education Plan (PNG) |
| NLAC | National Literacy and Awareness Council (PNG) |
| NLAS | National Literacy and Awareness Secretariat (PNG) |
| NMHFAI | National Movement to Hasten Compulsory Nine-Year Basic Education |
| | and the Fight Against Illiteracy (Indonesia) |
| NTB | *Nusa Tenggara Barat* (Indonesia) |
| ODA | Official Development Assistance |
| OFW | Overseas Filipino Workers |
| OHE | Office of Higher Education (PNG) |
| PAR | participatory action research |
| PB | *Peraturan Bersama* (Indonesia) |
| PBAZ | Paaralang Bayan ng mga Ayta sa Zambales (Philippines) |
| PCW | Philippine Commission on Women |

| | |
|---|---|
| PEAN | PNG Education Advocacy Network |
| PNG DoE | PNG Department of Education |
| PNG NSO | Papua New Guinea National Statistics Office |
| PO | people's organisation |
| PPGD | Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development |
| PPSW | Center for Women's Resources Development – |
| | Pusat Pengembangam Sumberdaya Wanita (Indonesia) |
| PTCA | Parents-Teachers-Community Association (Philippines) |
| SC | Scheduled Castes (India) |
| SEF | Special Education Fund (Philippines) |
| SHG | Self-help group |
| ST | Scheduled Tribes (India) |
| TESDA | Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (Philippines) |
| UDHR | Universal Declaration of Human Rights |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| UIS | UNESCO Institute for Statistics |
| UNLD | United Nations Literacy Decade |
| UNSD | United Nations Statistics Division |
| USD | US Dollar |
| VAW | Violence Against Women |
| Vision 2050 | Papua New Guinea Vision 2050 |
| WID | Women in Development |
| YWCA | Young Women's Christian Association |

# THE POWER OF LITERACY:
## WOMEN'S JOURNEYS in INDIA, INDONESIA, PHILIPPINES and PAPUA NEW GUINEA

# INTRODUCTION

'I came from a poor family that could not afford to send me to school. Going to the Mahila Shikshan Kendra[1] was an experience that changed my life. It gave me the confidence to make decisions. The experience also enabled me to travel independently. Today my daughter-in-law, granddaughter and grandson are studying. I am now the president of a collective [of Dalit women raising issues on women's rights and the rights of Dalits and other marginalised communities].'

- Rajmuniya, India

'I was not able to study after the Kishori Kunj[2]. There were several reasons for this. I came from a poor family and my parents could only afford to send my brothers to school. In addition, there was a lot of work at home. I was also not able to get a job after completing the course, which was quite disappointing. I almost lost interest in pursuing my studies.'

- Nafisa, India

'I was always ridiculed because I could not read, write nor count. I stayed away from people and felt embarrassed when my children asked me to tutor them. But life changed when a community group encouraged and supported me to join their literacy class. With this new learning, I gained confidence and encouraged other women to enlist. Now I can vote and face the world full of hope and enthusiasm.'

- Paz, Philippines

'I wanted to be a teacher but in accordance with customs and traditions, I was betrothed at 11 and got married at 14. I have not returned to school since. That was part of our culture and is a way to save me from harassment by men. My parents were afraid of this teacher who has a reputation of molesting and raping lumad (indigenous) girls. Lumads are discriminated in our school. My fiancé fetched me from school to prevent other boys from pursuing me. I got married at 14 and have not gone back to school since then.'

- Dolores, Philippines

Quotes from women's stories in country case studies

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[1] *Mahila Shikshan Kendra (MSK)* is an institution that carries out adult literacy classes for women in Chitrakoot, Uttar Pradesh.

[2] *Kishori Kunj* is also an institution similar to MSK that provides literacy and life skills programmes for women in Uttar Pradesh.

Two out of three of the millions of adults in the world today who cannot read or write, are women. A majority or about 65 per cent locates in the Asia-Pacific region, with South and West Asia accounting for over half of the world's total illiterates. Many socio-economic and cultural issues still stand in the way of women's education and literacy, though these already enjoy broad consensus as requisites to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment.

Improvements in opportunities for women's and girls' education followed the adoption of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Upholding the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), it strongly emphasised education for women and girls as an empowering necessity. It also laid the basis for the United Nations to call for commitment to gender equality and to encourage action among member-states and regional organisations (Beijing+5 Review 1999)[3].

Five international conferences on adult education since 1949 have established adult education and literacy as essential elements of the right to education. As such, they form part of the human rights discourse that recognises education's fundamental role in the realisation of human development goals. It is furthermore covered by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that asserts the right of every human being to education that shall be free and compulsory at least at the elementary and the fundamental stages, and that 'education shall be directed towards the full development of human personality and for the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms' (UDHR Article 26, 1949, para. 2).

Another milestone came with the Education for All (EFA) movement, starting in 1990 in Jomtien. This global commitment was reiterated in 2000 during the World Education Forum in Dakar where 164 governments signed on the promise to provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults by 2015. EFA goals include 'achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults'.

Literacy has likewise been cited as critically determining a person's full and long term development. Literacy allows greater access to information and knowledge in improving and enhancing one's skills for both survival and productivity, improves one's capacity to communicate and develop social relations and promotes better understanding among people. It significantly increases individual persons' sense of self-worth and self-esteem and allows them to develop the capacities to improve their overall quality of life, and their role and contribution to their family and community. The lack of literacy has been integrally associated with poverty and the lack of human and social development.

**Literacy significantly increases individual persons' sense of self-worth and self-esteem and allows them to develop the capacities to improve their overall quality of life, and their role and contribution to their family and community.**

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[3] Beijing+5 Review, 1999, an event leading up to the 23rd Special Session of the UN General Assembly on 'Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century'

Literacy as a human right and women's enjoyment of their right to literacy is key to their empowerment and to gender equality, as well as to the achievement of the EFA goals and MDGs.

## Rationale and Objectives of the Study

It is within this context of persistent and significant gaps in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment in the Asia-Pacific region that the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) embarked on the two-year action project 'Innovating Advocacy Approaches in Promoting Adult Female Literacy' with partners in India, the Philippines, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.

Female illiteracy remains a serious problem in the region. In these countries covered by the project, less than one per cent of their respective education budgets are spent on adult education and literacy, far below the recommended global benchmark of at least three per cent of the education budget. Except for the Philippines, the three other countries included in this initiative have female illiteracy levels that rank among the highest in the world, thus their targeting by UNESCO's Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) program, which identifies countries with no fewer than 10 million adult illiterates or where adult illiteracy is at least 50 per cent or more.

A shared premise of the participating organisations in this initiative is that literacy as a human right and women's enjoyment of their right to literacy is key to their empowerment and to gender equality, as well as to the achievement of the EFA goals and MDGs. Under CEDAW, this right covers functional literacy and has been expanded further to include access to continuing education. It is also a legal obligation under CEDAW, binding state parties to its protection, fulfilment and realisation. In 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action would invoke the mandate of the CEDAW Women's Convention in seeking high-level commitment, resulting among others in the setting up of national gender mechanisms charged with the comprehensive mainstreaming of gender equality, including those areas concerning women's education and literacy.

These instruments provide the normative standards against which missed EFA goals are assessed. Sadly, policies and programs, if not totally absent, continue to be found largely weak in both content and implementation. An added challenge is the inconsistency and unpredictability in translating commitments of donor organisations, governments and other international bodies into actual resources. While there may be a proliferation of various programs around adult and women's literacy, they exist as unfunded mandates, unable to keep up with the demands of the situation, and weaker still in terms of effective enforcement.

Overall, this initiative sought to build the knowledge and capacities of civil society organisations in these countries towards enabling them to substantively and effectively advocate policies, budgets and other resources that advance and ensure female literacy as a crucial contribution to gender equality and women's empowerment.

Specifically, it aimed to:

1) facilitate sharing of experiences, knowledge and practices and to build new skills to scale up monitoring and advocacy efforts related to female literacy;

2) lay the grounds for the formulation and development of a rights-based policy action agenda that identifies strategic areas for change and action to overcome major barriers to female literacy and close gaps in the achievement of targets and goals;

3) build constituency around this agenda to advocate for policies and programs on women's literacy that effectively lead to their empowerment and development; and,

4) safeguard and strengthen existing policies that have contributed to advancing female literacy targets at the local, national and international levels.

## Scope of the Study

This paper integrates country-based researches that present the results of the situation analysis, policy scanning and impact analysis of adult literacy in Indonesia, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea (PNG) and India. It builds on earlier studies and evaluations of literacy campaigns and programmes primarily in the Asia-Pacific region.

While female illiteracy seriously manifests in many countries across the region, this initiative focused on these four countries for a number of reasons. First, in geographic terms, the countries covered give a sense of literacy conditions in the three sub-regions of South Asia, Southeast Asia and South Pacific. Second, the study sets as priorities three of the four countries, which currently face serious challenges in adult illiteracy and gender disparity. India, Indonesia and PNG are countries targeted by UNESCO's Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) because of adult illiteracy levels that rank among the highest in the world in absolute and relative terms. The Philippines, with better literacy levels, has its share of the problem particularly among poor, minority and Muslim women in socially depressed regions and provinces of the country. Third is the presence in these countries of ASPBAE partners actively conducting advocacy for women's education and literacy. Civil society organisations particularly in these countries have initiated pioneering researches and advocacies on women's education and literacy. These groups have actively engaged state authorities on education and women's rights and engaged in policy bodies related to education and literacy as civil society representatives.

The project partners in the four countries initially prepared the research designs and finalised these after reviewing the available data and literature and after a series of consultations with the project team. The preliminary results of the country studies were shared with participants during national consultations and trainings held in the four countries. Finally, the key findings of the same studies, along with the regional integrated paper, were presented and discussed during a regional conference attended by participants and resource persons from 13 countries in Asia-Pacific, including representatives from UNESCO and UNGEI (UN Girls' Education Initiative). The critiques and suggestions raised during the

Civil society organisations particularly in India, Indonesia, Philippines and Papua New Gunea have initiated pioneering researches and advocacies on women's education and literacy.

said conference guided the project team in finalising the studies. Designated readers and ASPBAE's editorial group reviewed the final drafts before publication.

## Description of the Country Studies

*INDIA*
*Literacy and Women's Empowerment: A Tracer Study*
by Nirantar, Centre for Gender and Education, New Delhi

*Nirantar is a resource centre for gender and education. It works towards empowering women through education, specifically by enabling access to information, promoting literacy and engendering education processes. It was established in 1993 and has since been engaged in direct field interventions, creating educational resources, research and advocacy, and training.*

The research conducted by Nirantar is a tracer study that sought to understand the impact of education on the lives of women who were part of the *Mahila Shikshan Kendra* (MSK), an eight-month residential educational programme ran by the *Mahila Samakhya* (MS) in two districts of Uttar Pradesh in North India. MS or education for women's equality is a government programme under the Ministry of Human Resources Development.

Women and adolescent girls had attended the course. Apart from language and math, the curriculum also included health, geography, history and legal information and had focused on building a gender perspective. Nirantar worked on establishing contact with as many women and girls who had studied at the MSK between 1994 and 2000.

As many as 50 women attended the two workshops organised as part of the study which also provided the opportunity to hold focused group discussions. Women shared their life stories and recalled highlights and impacts of their experience with the MSK programme.

The study developed a questionnaire designed to assess women's current socio-economic status, their educational level, engagement with government and NGO programmes, and impacts of the MSK on various aspects of their lives, such as mobility, engagement in decision making, access to resources and participation in governance. Questionnaires on language and math were also developed to assess the learners' current literacy levels.

*INDONESIA*
*Women's Literacy in Indonesia: An Action Research Study*
by KAPAL Perempuan (Women Learning Center for Gender Justice and Pluralism)

*KAPAL Perempuan is a centre for women's learning that aims to promote social justice, pluralistic values and women's leadership, and to facilitate the growth of women's learning communities in Indonesia. The organisation is involved in community organising, research and information, capacity-*

*building and advocacy on education and women's empowerment. It is concerned with issues of women's alternative education, poverty, feminism and multiculturalism. It aims to develop critical and pluralistic thinking among its members and staff.*

As designed, the study investigated the situation of women's literacy in Indonesia, identified relevant policies and their corresponding fund allocations, and looked at opportunities and strategies for civil society interventions.

A review of documents and studies conducted by concerned government agencies, civil society organisations, and international humanitarian organisations. This was done in an effort to present different views and perspectives in assessing women's literacy in Indonesia.

Local level researches were also conducted in two districts, Maros District in South Sulawesi Province and East Lombok District in West Nusa Tenggara Province. These studies added information from the ground to data needed for an assessment of the national literacy situation and the policy environment.

The key findings of the study were presented in a public forum attended by women's groups, education advocates and government officials, and were discussed further in a workshop participated in by women's literacy advocates from across the country.

*PHILIPPINES*
Women's Stories: Building the Case for Women's Literacy in the Philippines
by the Civil Society Network for Education Reforms

*E-Net Philippines, founded in 2000, is a network of civil society groups working for education reforms to achieve good quality education for all and eradicate illiteracy especially among disadvantaged groups. E-Net provides a venue for complementing, consolidating and integrating various initiatives of civil society organisations to realise the EFA goals.*

*Today, E-Net Philippines has more than 150 member-organisations around the country. It sits as a co-chair of the National EFA Committee. It is an active member of the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) and the Global Campaign for Education (GCE).*

The study looked into the realities of women's illiteracy in the Philippines, weighing them against education indicators showing more girls participating and performing better in schools in the past decade. Research findings show that despite the high literacy rate, achieving functional literacy remains an urgent issue for marginalised groups such as indigenous, Moro and rural-urban poor communities. Based on an analysis of contributing factors and a scan of policy opportunities/mandates for advocacy, it puts forward an agenda for government actions.

In looking at the situation of women and literacy in the country, the paper examined three major areas of interest: first, the conditions of marginalised women and the factors that affect their access to literacy and basic education; second, how the formal educational system caters to girls' and women's needs and contributes to women's participation

in other spheres of life such as labour and employment, governance and political participation (outcomes of education on women); and third, the policy environment or mandates for women's literacy and empowerment that women can use to claim their right to an enabling, empowering education.

E-Net Philippines conducted the research through a desk review of government surveys to reveal gaps in access to functional literacy; a review of related literature on education, literacy and life skills; and a Participatory Action Research (PAR). Indigenous and Moro women from Tulunan in North Cotabato, Columbio in Sultan Kudarat, Tagum in Davao del Norte, Botolan in Zambales, and urban poor women from the cities of Quezon and Pasig in the Metro Manila region participated in the FGDs under PAR. Conducted from May to September 2010, the FGDs generated multi-level data on barriers to their completion of formal schooling, the difficulties they experienced in the pursuit of adult learning, and their dreams and aspirations of pursuing lifelong learning as adult learners.

The study results were presented in a series of workshops and trainings participated in by E-Net members, resource persons from government and academe, and women learners from the communities covered by the research.

*PAPUA NEW GUINEA*
Female Literacy in PNG: Getting Better?
by the Papua New Guinea Advocacy Network (PEAN)

*The Papua New Guinea Education Advocacy Network (PEAN) is a non-profit association of civil society organisations and serves as a focal point for information, research and advocacy on education policy issues. PEAN also works to strengthen the capacity of its members and other civil society groups to effectively participate in public debates on education in Papua New Guinea (PNG).*

The paper examined women's literacy in the context of global and national commitments made by the Government of Papua New Guinea (GoPNG) to have a literate population contributing productively to the development of the country. It provides a situation analysis of the adult literacy situation in PNG, with a purposive focus on the inequality of learning opportunities between women and men, and the barriers that impact on women's education and literacy.

Several initiatives went into developing the research paper. A review of literature designed to identify barriers hindering adult female learning was undertaken by a partner organisation. These covered the examination of government policies and strategies for articulations on women's education and literacy. PEAN culled gender-disaggregated data from previous literacy surveys it had undertaken in five provinces and analysed trends with respect to women's access to information, education and training and the impact on

gender disparity in literacy. Barriers to women's education and literacy were identified to validate the findings of studies included in the literature review.

The research findings were presented, discussed and enriched in a workshop attended by representatives of women's groups and educators. The workshop and interviews subsequently conducted with workshop participants also yielded information on NGO initiatives on women's literacy and skills development. Recommendations were developed based on the research findings to direct advocacy actions during the implementation of this project.

## Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged.

First, the country studies did not follow a common research design owing to the different country contexts, the varying research experience and capacities of country partners, and the particular advocacies of the partners and their local constituencies.

Second, time and budget considerations limited the coverage, sample size and key informants interviewed for the country studies. Primary data were collected from specific local areas and supported by data from available secondary sources, primarily government statistics and existing related literature. As such, the country studies do not claim to be national in scope and representative of the countries included in this project. Nonetheless, valuable inferences, lessons and conclusions can be drawn which substantiate and validate previous related studies.

The integrated research paper draws the integrated research paper draws no regional conclusions as it covered only four countries in Asia-Pacific. However, useful insights of regional issues and trends can also be drawn from the four country studies and the Asia-Pacific context can be sensed from secondary sources presenting regional perspectives and statistical data.

Third, the availability of updated, reliable, adequate and gender-disaggregated data is a continuing challenge particularly for researches focusing on women and disadvantaged groups. The country studies and the integrated regional paper were completed under these constraints of inadequate data that could be used for background information, statistical inferences and validation. Official statistics on the literacy situation presents a major limitation for this study since most are derived from national censuses that rely mainly on self-reporting methods[4] in determining individual literacy levels.

Finally, language and translation difficulties were encountered because of the hundreds of local languages used in the countries involved in the study. The lack of experienced interpreters at the local level may have affected the documentation of interviews, group discussions and workshop proceedings. Translation of key documents and the research papers from the local language to English also presented particular limitations.

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[4] Census-derived literacy statistics rely mainly on self-reported data provided by heads of household on behalf of other family members.

# REGIONAL OVERVIEW:
## ADULT AND FEMALE LITERACY SITUATION IN ASIA-PACIFIC

### Literacy Situation and Trends

Globally, literacy rates improved gradually from 76 to 82 per cent for the period 1985-1994 to 2005-2009 (Table 1), meaning that the magnitude or the number of adult illiterates dropped by 94 million. However, illiteracy remains high at 17 per cent of the world's adult population. Hundreds of millions of adults remain illiterate in the world today.

A review of the current situation and trends immediately raises questions as to how far and how deep investments have been made into realising successive mandates, from the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action targeting goals to improve adult literacy.

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) cites disturbing figures of 793 million illiterate youth and adults in the world, two-thirds of whom are women. Asia-Pacific, home to 70 per cent of the world's population, has a relatively high rate of illiteracy with two out of every three adult illiterates found in the region. Most of them reside in the Asia-Pacific region, which ranks highest in terms of magnitude at 513 million people or almost two-thirds (65 per cent) of adult illiterates. Among the sub-regions, South and West Asia hosted the biggest number with 411 million adult illiterates, or more than half of the world's total. These sub-regions also registered the widest gender disparities in adult literacy with a gender gap of 22 percentage points (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2011).

Table 1. Adult Literacy Rate and Illiterate Population (15 years and over) by Sub-Region

| | ADULT LITERACY RATE 15 Years and Over (%) | | | | ADULT ILLITERATES 15 Years and Over (Total Number, In Millions) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1985-1994* | 1995-2004* | 2005-2009* | Projected 2015 | 1985-1994* | 1995-2004* | 2005-2009* | Projected 2015 |
| World | 76 | 82 | 84 | 86 | 887 | 792 | 793 | 725 |
| North America and Western Europe | 99 | 99 | 99 | 100 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 3 |
| Central and Eastern Europe | 96 | 97 | 98 | 98 | 12 | 9 | 7 | 7 |
| Arab States | 55 | 67 | 73 | 78 | 59 | 60 | 60 | 58 |
| Latin America and the Caribbean | 84 | 90 | 91 | 92 | 46 | 39 | 37 | 31 |
| Sub-Saharan Africa | 53 | 57 | 62 | 71 | 134 | 158 | 170 | 167 |
| Central Asia | 98 | 99 | 99 | 99 | 0.9 | 0.5 | 0.3 | 0.3 |
| East Asia and the Pacific | 82 | 92 | 94 | 95 | 229 | 126 | 102 | 84 |
| South and West Asia | 47 | 59 | 62 | 73 | 398 | 393 | 411 | 388 |

Sources: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Data Centre, 2011 and UNESCO, 2011, Education for All Global Monitoring Report
* Data are for the most recent year available during the period specified

The situation varies across sub-regions, with Central Asia exhibiting almost universal adult literacy in nearly all countries (UNESCO, 2011).

Behind the aggregates are the more dismal disparities between South and West Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa on one hand, and other subregions of the world. These two regions in Asia and Africa account for a further increase of 48.3 million adult illiterates during the same period. Rapid population growth, recurring social unrest, persisting poverty and inadequate funding eroded efforts in reducing illiteracy in these regions so that while literacy rates improved significantly, the absolute number of illiterates increased.

Literacy rates in East Asia and the Pacific are relatively higher but the combined number of adult illiterates is still considered large at 105.3 million, or 13 per cent of the world's total.

The actual number of adult illiterates is without doubt much higher than the officially reported literacy figures particularly if functional literacy, which covers numeracy and simple comprehension, is included as part of the measuring standard. Census-derived literacy statistics rely mainly on self-reported data provided by heads of household on behalf of other family members. These were found to be grossly overstated when compared to surveys that used actual individual testing and assessment. Literacy statistics generated through the conventional self-reporting method must, therefore, be considered only as 'indicative' and treated

with caution. In the Asia-Pacific region, a majority of countries still rely on self-reporting methods for measuring literacy.[5]

### Figure 1. Adult Literacy Rate, Asia-Pacific (2006-2010)
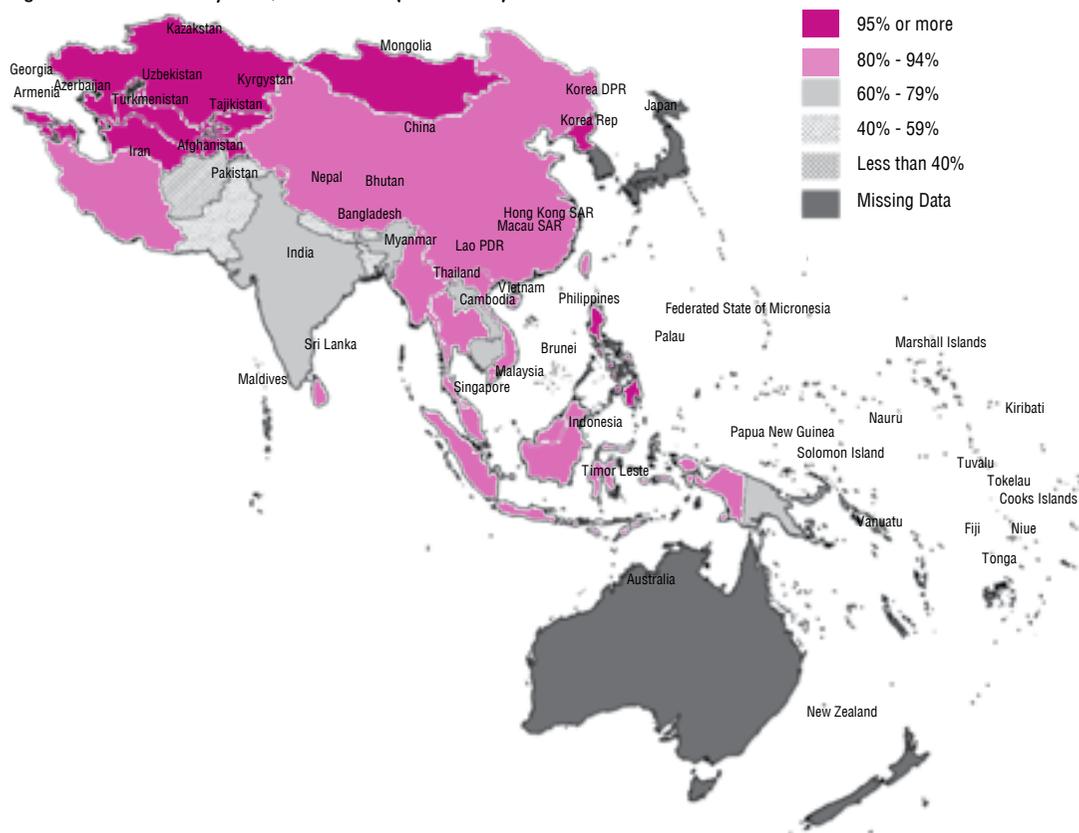


| Legend | |
|---|---|
| ■ | 95% or more |
| ■ | 80% - 94% |
| ■ | 60% - 79% |
| ▒ | 40% - 59% |
| ▒ | Less than 40% |
| ■ | Missing Data |

| Countries with Lowest Literacy Rates | Literacy Rate | Countries with Biggest Number of Adult Illiterates | Number of Adult Illiterates (000) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Afghanistan | 26 | India | 287,355 |
| Bhutan | 53 | China | 61,882 |
| Pakistan | 55 | Pakistan | 49,507 |
| Bangladesh | 57 | Bangladesh | 44,149 |
| Timor-Leste | 58 | Indonesia | 12,709 |
| Nepal | 60 | Afghanistan | 11,000 |
| Papua New Guinea | 61 | Iran, Islamic Rep. | 8,256 |
| India | 63 | Nepal | 7,587 |
| Lao PDR | 73 | Viet Nam | 4,579 |
| Cambodia | 74 | Thailand | 3,298 |

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012

[5] The Global Campaign for Education (GCE) estimated the actual number of adult illiterates at about twice the officially reported literacy statistics (ActionAid International and Global Campaign for Education, 2005). In the Philippines, the 2008 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) reported functional literacy rate at 86.4 per cent based on actual individual testing which is much lower than the official literacy rate of 96 per cent based on self-declaration (National Statistics Office, 2012). Similarly, the education and literacy surveys conducted by ASPBAE in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands show actual literacy levels at much lower levels compared to the official government statistics. (see Education Watch publications in ASPBAE website : www.aspbae.org)

By country, the number of adult illiterates ranked highest in India (287 million), China (62 million), Pakistan (49.5 million), Bangladesh (44 million), Indonesia (13 million) and Afghanistan (11 million). Iran and Nepal follow with an estimated 7 to 9 million in each country. Vietnam, Philippines, Thailand and Myanmar have a moderate number of adult illiterates at two to five million per country (UIS, 2012).

ASPBAE's Education Watch studies[6], with data disaggregated for gender, age, income level, location of residence and family background, show disparities growing starker within countries. Individuals who are poor, older and residing in rural areas tend to be illiterate than comparatively more economically advantaged, younger and urban residents.

As UNESCO data above indicate, the overall literacy situation in the region is expected to improve by 2015. Except for some Pacific States, adult literacy rates are projected to increase for most countries, particularly China, Indonesia and the rest of East Asia. An increase in adult literacy rates in South and West Asia is also projected, from the current estimate of 62 per cent covering the period 1995 to 2004, to 73 per cent by 2015 (Table 1).

However, unless intervention is sustained and more resources mobilised for adult literacy, it is likely that *most countries in the Asia-Pacific region will fail to attain EFA Goal 4 of achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women*. The actual reduction in the number of adult illiterates at the country level is bound to be marginal, except for China, Iran and Thailand. If anything, an increase in the number of adult illiterates is feared for such countries as Pakistan, Philippines and Papua New Guinea, where efforts and resources have long been falling short of targets (UNESCO, 2011).

*Youth Literacy Trends*

Literacy levels among the youth aged 15 to 24 years show advances in all regions and countries of the world (Table 2). In the past several decades, international mandates on literacy and education backed by higher international donor support, pushed countries to universalise their primary education. Globally, youth literacy improved from 83 to 89 per cent around the periods 1985-1994 and 2005-2009, respectively. Average youth literacy rates are projected to move even farther, at 92 per cent by 2015.

In the Asia-Pacific region, the difference between youth and adult literacy rates were found to be highest in Nepal, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Iran, Vanuatu and Cambodia.

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[6] ASPBAE Education Watch Reports were prepared by E-Net Philippines, Coalition on Education Solomon Islands, PNG Education Advocacy Network (Papua New Guinea) and Education Network for Justice (Indonesia). The reports can be found at the ASPBAE website: www.aspbae.org

Table 2. Youth Literacy Rate (Age 15 and 24), World and Asia-Pacific

| | Youth LITERACY RATE (%) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1985-1994* | 1995-2004* | 2005-2009* | Projected 2015 |
| World | 83 | 87 | 89 | 92 |
| Central Asia | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| East Asia and the Pacific | 95 | 98 | 99 | 99 |
| South and West Asia | 60 | 74 | 80 | 88 |

Sources: UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2011 and UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 2012
* Data are for the most recent year available during the period specified

*Literacy Trends among Women*

Appallingly, estimates of women comprising two-thirds of the world's total adult illiterates have remained unchanged in the last 40 years. In 1970, it was estimated that women comprised 59.3 per cent of approximately 742 million adult illiterates. Ten years later, in 1980, this rose to 62.8 per cent of the 877 million adult illiterate population estimated at the time. Even as advocacy for gender and women's inclusion and eventually, integration in development gained momentum in the 1980s and 1990s, gender disparity in literacy did not significantly change for the better. Recent data show women still constituting up to 64 per cent of all adult illiterates, and if no interventions alter UNESCO's latest projections, the ratio will remain by 2015, the deadline set by both the EFA and the MDG for achieving gender equality targets. UNESCO data further show that girls account for 53 per cent of the world's 67 million children not attending school (UNESCO, 2011).

Table 3. Number of Illiterates in Millions and Per Cent Female (15 Years and Over) (1970-2015)

| | Number of Illiterates and Per cent Female (%F) (15 Years and Over) | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1970* | | 1980* | | 1985-1994** | | 1995-2004** | | 2005-2009** | | 2015*** (Projected) | |
| | No. | % F | No. | % F | No. | % F | No. | % F | No. | % F | No. | % F |
| World | 742 | 59.3% | 877 | 62.8% | 887 | 63.3% | 792 | 63.8% | 793 | 64.1% | 737 | 64% |
| Central Asia | -- | -- | -- | -- | 0.9 | 76.8% | 0.5 | 71.8% | 0.3 | 66.7% | 0.3 | 59% |
| East Asia & Pacific | -- | -- | -- | -- | 229.4 | 69.3% | 126.4 | 70.5% | 101.5 | 71.0% | 84.3 | 70% |
| South and West Asia | -- | -- | -- | -- | 397.6 | 60.8% | 392.5 | 62.8% | 410.5 | 63.6% | 388.1 | 64% |

Sources: *UNESCO, Compendium of Statistics on Illiteracy, 1995
**UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Data Centre, 2011
***UNESCO, 2011, EFA Global Monitoring Report

Female literacy rates improved over the same period, from the global average of 69.2 per cent to 79.2 per cent (Table 3). All regions reflected this trend, although the increments proved inadequate to significantly narrow the literacy gap between men and women in Sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia and the Arab states. Female literacy levels remain low with only around half of the adult women population in these areas equipped with basic literacy skills. In sharp contrast to the 22.3 per cent gender disparity in South and West Asia, the highest in the world, Central Asia has achieved basic parity while gender disparity in East Asia and the Pacific has gone down to 5.2 per cent.

**Table 4. Gender Gap in Adult Literacy (15 Years and Over)**
**(1985-1994; 1995-2004; 2005-2009)**

| | ADULT LITERACY RATE (%) 15 Years and Over | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1985-1994* | | | 1995-2004* | | | 2005-2009* | | |
| | Male | Female | Gap** | Male | Female | Gap | Male | Female | Gap |
| World | 82.1 | 69.2 | 12.9 | 86.8 | 76.8 | 10.0 | 88.3 | 79.2 | 9.1 |
| North America and Western Europe | 98.9 | 98.4 | 0.5 | 98.9 | 98.7 | 0.3 | 99.1 | 98.9 | 0.2 |
| Central and Eastern Europe | 98.1 | 93.9 | 4.2 | 98.8 | 96.0 | 2.8 | 99.0 | 96.9 | 2.0 |
| Arab States | 68.2 | 42.0 | 26.2 | 77.2 | 56.1 | 21.2 | 81.4 | 63.5 | 17.9 |
| Latin America and the Caribbean | 85.8 | 82.8 | 3.1 | 90.5 | 88.9 | 1.7 | 91.9 | 90.4 | 1.5 |
| Sub-Saharan Africa | 63.4 | 43.3 | 20.1 | 67.3 | 48.0 | 19.3 | 70.7 | 53.4 | 17.3 |
| Central Asia | 99.0 | 97.0 | 2.0 | 99.4 | 98.6 | 0.8 | 99.6 | 99.3 | 0.3 |
| East Asia and the Pacific | 89.1 | 74.8 | 14.3 | 95.1 | 88.0 | 7.0 | 96.5 | 91.4 | 5.2 |
| South and West Asia | 60.1 | 33.5 | 26.7 | 70.3 | 46.8 | 23.5 | 73.5 | 51.3 | 22.3 |

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Data Centre, 2011
* Data are for the most recent year available during the period specified
** Gaps are expressed as percentage points

By country, the biggest gender disparities in literacy were recorded in Pakistan, Nepal, India, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea, Iran and Indonesia. Updated literacy statistics would have placed Afghanistan and Lao PDR in this list as well, given their high gender disparities as measured by UNDP's Gender Inequality Index. On the other hand, gender parity is

reported to have been achieved in Mongolia, Philippines, Tonga and Maldives, with females having a slight edge in literacy levels (UNESCO, 2011).

Poverty, location of residence and age level are key social indicators strongly associated with women's literacy. Data culled and processed from the demographic and health surveys conducted in selected Asian countries clearly indicate that older women from the poorest wealth quintile and those residing in rural areas are among the least literate in the population (Table 5). In India, for example, literacy rates between the poorest and richest wealth quintiles vary from 18.6 per cent to 90.4 per cent or a very wide gap of 71.8 percentage points. Cambodia also posted a significant gender disparity in literacy figures of 45 per cent for the poorest and 89.8 per cent for the richest quintile, representing a gap of 44.8 percentage points. Although not as wide, similar gender gaps show up in the literacy levels of other countries in the region (Table 5).

Table 5. Female Literacy Level by Age Group, Residency and Wealth Status in Select Asian Countries Per cent

| | Percentage Literate* | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Cambodia (2010) | India (2006) | Indonesia (2007) | Nepal (2006) | Philippines (2008) |
| Age | | | | | |
| 15-24 | 77.4 | 69.1 | 95.2 | 74.8 | 98.4 |
| 25-49 | 63.7 | 44.9 | 85.2 | 37.3 | 96.1 |
| Gap (Younger-Older) | 13.7 | 24.2 | 10.0 | 37.4 | 2.3 |
| Residence | | | | | |
| Urban | 80.7 | 74.8 | 93.7 | 75.8 | 98.7 |
| Rural | 67.0 | 45.5 | 82.8 | 50.6 | 94.9 |
| Gap (Urban-Rural) | 13.7 | 29.3 | 10.9 | 25.2 | 3.8 |
| Wealth Index | | | | | |
| Lowest | 45.0 | 18.6 | 73.8 | 36.7 | 87.9 |
| Second | 56.1 | 34.6 | 81.9 | 42.6 | 97.2 |
| Middle | 67.5 | 50.2 | 88.5 | 45.9 | 98.5 |
| Fourth | 81.2 | 70.9 | 93.8 | 62.0 | 99.3 |
| Highest | 89.8 | 90.4 | 97.8 | 81.4 | 99.6 |
| Gap (Highest-Lowest) | 44.8 | 71.8 | 24.0 | 44.7 | 11.7 |

Sources:
National Institute of Statistics, Directorate General for Health, and ICF Macro, 2011; International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and Macro International, 2007; National Statistics Office (NSO) [Philippines], and ICF Macro, 2009; Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP) [Nepal], New ERA, and Macro International Inc., 2007; Statistics Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik—BPS) and Macro International, 2008.
* Literate persons are those who have completed or reached at least secondary level or those who can read a simple sentence or part of a sentence in any preferred language.

Across the five countries, the literacy gap is evident between those residing in the rural and urban areas, with India and Nepal having the largest gaps. By age group, older women are less literate compared to younger ones, indicating that a large number of older women in the productive age group of 25-49 years are not literate. Older women of poorer incomes, living in remote rural communities, are some of the most disadvantaged and neglected population groups. On the other hand, this can also signify a positive turn in terms of greater access for girls and young women to formal education and longer periods of time spent in school.

## Country Contexts

### INDIA

The 2001 Census of India reported literacy rates rising (for the 7+ age group) from 52 to 65 per cent over a 10-year period from 1991 to 2001. It also noted literacy rates increasing faster for females (15 per cent) than males (12 per cent). These developed in a generally hopeful context of declining numbers in the absolute number of illiterates from 328 to 304 million and in marked improvements in the literacy situation of marginalised and/or excluded groups such as the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST).

These forward steps, however, did not go far and wide enough to substantially reduce the magnitude of non-literate women in India today, estimated at nearly 189 million. The gender gap persists at an unacceptably high level of over 20 per cent (with the male and female literacy rates at 75 per cent and 54 per cent, respectively). Socially, economically and culturally disadvantaged groups, the SCs and the STs[7] fare worse –literacy rates fall below the national average and the gender gap in these communities is at 24 per cent. Differences in terms of regions are even starker.

For the first time in India's history, the 2001 Census provided literacy data disaggregated by religion. It showed religious minorities, such as the Muslim community, having the least access to educational opportunities. Women in all categories of caste and religion emerged as the most disadvantaged in terms of access to literacy and education.

Recent data show some progress but generally, indicators remain bleak. The provisional results of the 2011 Census reported a further increase to 74 per cent in national literacy rates and a reduction in the gender gap in literacy to 16.7 per cent. Provisional census data on literacy rates of SCs, STs and Minorities are not yet available as of writing. However, based on trends, the social disparities may not have reduced significantly.

These forward steps, however, did not go far and wide enough to substantially reduce the magnitude of non-literate women in India today, estimated at nearly 189 million. The gender gap persists at an unacceptably high level of over 20 per cent.

[7] Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are Indian population groupings that are explicitly recognised by the Constitution of India, and are eligible for certain affirmative action measures. Scheduled Castes are also known as Dalits and Scheduled Tribes are referred to as Adivasis.

Indian women taking a stand for literacy and empowerment (Nirantar)

As for budgetary allocations for adult education, these have been extremely low as compared to allocations for elementary education. The XIth Five Year Plan (2007-2012) earmarked an outlay of only Rs 6,000 crores (USD 1.3 billion) for adult education as compared to Rs 1,25,380 crores (USD 27.3 billion) in elementary education. The actual allocation made is usually much lower for adult education.

*Saakshar Bharat*, the Government of India's initiative for adult education was launched only a few years ago, in September 2009. This is the only government programme focusing on reaching out to non-literate adult women, particularly those from marginalised communities. For several reasons, the programme has not yet taken off in several states, including those with high concentrations of non-literate women.

Recent reports suggesting a growing demand for literacy inputs from women have encouraged organisations to consider integrating literacy into their existing programmes. At a national level consultation on literacy organised by Nirantar *(*Nirantar 2009-2010), several participating organisations discussed the need to combine literacy teaching and learning with issues women are engaged with such as *panchayati raj (*local self governance), livelihoods, microcredit and health. The idea of thematic literacy or literacy programmes aimed at specific interest groups, where literacy is integrated with issues that women are already mobilising around, is being endorsed as a way forward and has been included in the new government strategy as well.

Feminist groups, however, caution against adopting an overwhelmingly functional framework that they believe would not be enabling of a transformative educational process. For example, self-help group members require literacy to mean being able to perform a large number of visible, practical tasks, which include financial transactions, reading pass books and ledgers. They point out that there are less explicit but equally valuable contributions of literacy such as instilling democratic principles in group processes and ensuring that self-help groups become independent and sustainable in the long-term. Programmes that stress only the functional aspects of literacy miss out on its potential to build other important skills such as critical thinking and analysis, and effective communication.

## INDONESIA

The EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2011) notes that for 2008, nearly three quarters of the world's 796 million illiterates were concentrated in only 10 countries that also registered the biggest number of adult illiterates. Indonesia is included in the list, although there have been improvements in Indonesia's literacy data, particularly the significant drop in illiteracy rates for the 15 years and above age group from 10.21 per cent in 2003 to 7.42 per cent in 2009. Progress

was also recorded in reducing illiteracy among girls and boys in the younger population group. Improvements are clearly linked to the enactment of the Nine Years Compulsory Basic Education law in 1990, which mandates compulsory basic education starting at age five with pre-school until age 13 with junior secondary school. The country's basic education net enrolment reached a high of 94.37 per cent in 2009 (BPS-Statistics Indonesia, 2009a). Efforts at illiteracy reduction also made headway as well in the 45 years and above age group, as illiteracy rates declined from 25.43 to 18.68 per cent for the same period (BPS-Statistics Indonesia, 2009b).

However, literacy rates disaggregated by income and geographic location reveal large disparities. Papua province records the highest illiteracy rate at 29.71 per cent of its population, or four times higher than the national average rate of 7.42 per cent. In addition, seven other provinces have consistently logged illiteracy rates of more than 10 per cent in the last seven years (BPS-Statistics Indonesia, 2009b).

These wide disparities strongly implicate poverty as a major impediment to education and literacy. The lowest quintiles account for the highest proportion of illiterates, at 17 per cent and 25 per cent for the fourth and fifth quantile, respectively (BPS-Statistics Indonesia and Macro International, 2008). Illiteracy is still widespread in many poor and remote local areas of the country such as East Lombok District province of West Nusa Tenggara where only 42 per cent of the population aged 10 years and above was found literate as of 2007.

Access to education and other learning opportunities are made more difficult for women by stringent political, economic and socio-cultural barriers (UN Division for the Advancement of Women, 2004, p. 3). Women comprised an overwhelming 70 per cent of the total illiterate population in 2008 (EFA Global Monitoring Team, 2011, p. 276), indicating that women did not significantly benefit from increasing literacy rates over the years and that female illiteracy is a persistently serious concern.

Across age groups, the gender gap is much higher among older men and women. Females in the age group 45 years and above comprised 26.03 per cent of the total while younger women in the age group 15 years and above stood at 10.32 per cent, falling behind by six per cent of the young males' literacy rate of 4.35 per cent. Consistent with rates by province, women fared worse in the seven provinces that recorded the highest illiteracy rates.

These apparently unyielding figures call attention to factors other than economic and geographic barriers (Ministry of Education of Indonesia, 2010, pp. 4-5) to addressing illiteracy and sustaining gains. Gender biases perpetuate stereotypical views of women's domestic and social reproduction roles, which socio-culturally bar them from accessing learning opportunities. These biases take hold early in women's lives, as reflected in Indonesia's demographic



Community meeting of women in Ciliwung, Indonesia (KAPAL Perempuan)

**Illiterate women bear the highest number of children as compared to women with higher education.**

**The 2008 FLEMMS results show that females registered higher rates in terms of both functional and simple literacy.**

health survey data, showing the tendency of women with low education levels to marry at a young age. The survey also revealed direct links between early marriage and low educational attainment among Indonesian Muslim women.

Illiteracy shapes progress in other markers of women's development such as reproductive health. Illiterate women bear the highest number of children as compared to women with higher education (BPS-Statistics Indonesia, 2007). Illiteracy intersects with and aggravates the effect of other gender-marginalising barriers such that the recorded high awareness level of modern contraceptive methods (92 per cent) does not translate into actual use (45 per cent) among illiterate women. They also register the lowest levels of awareness about sexually transmitted infections (15 per cent) and HIV/AIDS (12 per cent).

### PHILIPPINES

The Philippines has relatively high basic literacy levels among youth and adults, with females having a better rating compared with their male counterparts. While data on basic and functional literacy improved from 2003 to 2008, further scrutiny of data surfaces disparity in access as well as stagnation in the country's literacy situation.

The 2008 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey[8] (FLEMMS) shows basic literacy rising among Filipinos between 10-64 years old from 94.1 per cent in 2003 to 95.6 per cent in 2008. This translates to 58 million Filipinos who self-reported that they can read and write.

However, functional literacy (defined as the ability to read, write and solve basic mathematical operations in a word problem) is much lower at 84.1 per cent in 2003 and 86.4 per cent in 2008. The survey showed further that those who cannot compute comprise about 14 per cent of the 10-64 years age group and those who lack basic reading comprehension comprise 30 per cent of the same age group. In absolute figures, non-numerate Filipinos in 2008 numbered 9.1 million, almost the same in 2003. Those who lack comprehension abilities increased from 19.6 million in 2003 to 20.1 million individuals in 2008.

The 2008 FLEMMS results show that females registered higher rates in terms of both functional and simple literacy. More women than men emerged as functionally literate at 88.7 per cent and 84.2 per cent, respectively. At 96.1 per cent, women also slightly outnumbered the men (95.1 per cent) for simple literacy.

Community women in a literacy workshop in Tagum, Davao del Norte, Philippines (E-Net Philippines)

[8] The 2008 FLEMMS is the fourth in a series of functional literacy surveys conducted by the National Statistics Office. The previous rounds were conducted in 1989, 1994, and 2003. In the 2008 FLEMMS, a self-administered questionnaire was accomplished by 69,482 individuals aged 10 to 64 years in 25,505 households sampled for the survey. The survey aimed to provide information on basic and functional literacy status and exposure to mass media of the population. The 2008 FLEMMS was conducted in coordination with the Literacy Coordinating Council (LCC) and the Department of Education (DepEd).

Literacy levels vary widely across income groups and geographical areas. There are pockets of the general population such as the informal settlers in highly urbanised and urbanising centres, the indigenous peoples' communities and Muslims who continue to be disadvantaged in education access and literacy. The 2008 survey estimates the average functional literacy rate of non-poor Filipinos (the upper 60 per cent income group) at 91.2 per cent while the poor (or lower 40 per cent income group) registered only an average of 72.9 per cent or a difference of nearly 20 percentage points.

Wide gaps surface by regionally disaggregating data. The Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) posted the lowest literacy level at 71.6 per cent while the National Capital Region (NCR) was highest at 94.0 per cent.

Another survey (2008 Demographic and Health Survey[9]) further reveals the high incidence of illiteracy at the basic level among women from indigenous people's groups – Iraya (35.9 per cent), Maguindanawon (35 per cent), Mandaya (20.8 per cent), Maranao (22.0 per cent) and Tausog (36.6 per cent).

*PAPUA NEW GUINEA*

Papua New Guinea is a country of diverse culture and traditions with over 800 languages, making it the country with the most number of languages in the world. About 87 per cent of the population is dispersed widely in rural areas across the country, mostly located in difficult terrain that is inaccessible by road. These are some of the development challenges that impact on the country's education and literacy situation.

Adult literacy in PNG remains low with significant gaps by gender and geographical location. Progress in improving the literacy situation has been generally slow, placing the country at risk of not meeting the EFA targets on adult literacy and gender parity. Based on the 2000 National Population Census, the government estimated that 56.2 per cent of the adult population is literate – 63.4 per cent for male and 50.9 per cent for women. Disparity across provinces is huge, ranging from a literacy level of 35 per cent (Enga) to 90 per cent (National Capital District) (PNG NDO, 2004). UNESCO estimates that in 2008, adult literacy increased but only marginally to 59.6 per cent. In fact, the number of illiterates actually increased from 1.33 million in 2000 to 1.592 million by 2008 (UNESCO, 2011).

**Adult literacy in PNG remains low with significant gaps by gender and geographical location.**

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[9] Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) are nationally-representative household surveys that provide data and information on the population, health, and nutrition. Education indicators are also generated and more recent surveys already collects data on violence against women. Partially funded by the USAID since 1984, DHS has been implemented in over 90 countries. Data generated from these surveys are comparable across countries.

Table 6. Literacy Rates (15 years of age and above, by gender and location) (2000)

|  | Male (%) | Female (%) | Total (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| National | 61.2 | 50.9 | 56.2 |
| Urban | 88.6 | 83.3 | 86.2 |
| Rural | 56.8 | 46.3 | 51.7 |

Source: PNG National Statistics Office (NSO), 2004, Education Statistics from the 2000 Census



Adults in a community consultation in Chimbu Province, PNG (ASPBAE)

Consistent with the above data, the 1990 and 2000 Census report disparities in figures disaggregated by gender and province with the literacy rate of females lower than males in every province. Eight of the 20 provinces in the 2000 Census recorded female literacy levels below 50 per cent compared to only four provinces for males. While the 1990 and 2000 Census report increases in literacy levels for both males and females, they also present a widening of gender gaps in 10 provinces. Nationally, the gender gap was documented as growing from 9.2 to 10.3 per cent. This situation is particularly serious for the highly populated highland provinces of Simbu, Enga, Eastern, Southern and Western Highlands, where literacy is consistently lowest. The PNG Department of Education itself cited this information, stating in its report that the 'literacy level of people on the coast and islands is better than those of the highlands and most parts of the northern end of the mainland' (PNG Department of Education, 2008, p. 39).

It should be noted that the nationally declared figures cited above were generated from a self-declaration/self-reported question in the Census and not based on demonstrated literacy competency. There is widespread evidence that self-declaration methodology, as used in PNG, is inaccurate and typically produces inflated literacy rates (UIS, 2009, UNSD, 2011 and ASPBAE, 2011). Unfortunately, little research has been undertaken to determine the actual level of literacy of males and females in PNG.

The results of ASPBAE's language experience survey and literacy assessments in five PNG provinces supplements the Government of PNG's declared literacy rates. In addition to a self-declaration survey, the ASPBAE and PEAN (PNG Education Advocacy Network) jointly undertook a detailed literacy assessment focusing on component skills of functional literacy such as reading, writing and numeracy as well as comprehension evidenced by the ability to apply these skills in familiar contexts in everyday life (ASPBAE, 2011, p. 2).

The majority of individuals surveyed across the five provinces were classified as either semi-literate or non-literate and highlighted gender disparities with a smaller proportion of females assessed as literate compared to males. Conversely, a higher proportion of females were assessed as non-literate in comparison to males.

In Chimbu province, the rate of non-literacy among females was assessed to be 40.9 per cent, or double the male non-literacy rate of 21.3 per cent (ASPBAE, 2011, p. 6). The ASPBAE survey also found women less confident than men in their literacy skills, and further strengthened government reports of higher illiteracy rates among women than men in PNG.

# GLOBAL POLICY CONTEXT AND PLATFORMS ON ADULT LITERACY

### Global Policy Context

For over four decades now, numerous initiatives and efforts of the international community have addressed the challenge of adult illiteracy in the Asia-Pacific region. Among the earliest milestones in this history was the recognition by UNESCO in 1947 of a wide range of skills, including the acquisition of literacy, as fundamental aspects of individual development and human rights (UNESCO, 1947). In 1975, the International Symposium for Literacy in Persepolis, which adopted the Persepolis Declaration, further strengthened the discourse on literacy by framing it as a fundamental human right, ranked with other means for human liberation from oppressive social structures, and an essential instrument for social change.

The year 1990 proved to be another historic milestone in the pursuit of universal primary education and the elimination of adult illiteracy as more than 150 governments, intergovernmental bodies, civil society organisations and individual advocates gathered in March in Jomtien, Thailand for the World Conference on Education for All. Adopting the World Declaration on Education for All, the body specifically targeted reduction of adult illiteracy to half its level in 1990 by year 2000 and gave the 'the most urgent priority' to ensuring access to and improving the quality of education for women and girls. This covers '…[removing] every obstacle that hampers their active participation' and the elimination of all gender stereotyping in education'.

Ten years after Jomtien, a similar conference was held in Dakar, Senegal in 2000, reaffirming global commitments to achieve universal access to basic education and massive reduction of illiteracy as contained in the 'Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments'. This time, however, governments agreed to a timeframe of meeting these education targets by 2015.

Both conferences pushed the Education for All (EFA) campaign, a global movement geared at achieving six education goals by 2015, namely: expanding early childhood care and education; providing free and compulsory primary education for all; promoting learning and life skills for young people and adults; increase adult literacy by 50 per cent; achieving gender parity by 2005, gender equality by 2015; and, improving overall quality of education.

These two global conferences from which the EFA campaigns emerged, produced the most significant and categorical policy statements on adult and female literacy. The Dakar Framework for Action in particular purposively targeted women under EFA Goal 4 of achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015 and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults. Two other EFA goals indirectly support women's literacy – Goal 3 ensuring access of adults to life-skills programs and Goal 5 aiming for gender equality.

The onset of the new century saw high level commitments being made again to specific human development targets. In 2000, a global conference adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), an eight-point programme of action to be accomplished by 2015. Two of the Goals focus on education: Goal 2 which aims to achieve universal primary education and ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling and Goal 3 which aims to eliminate gender disparities in primary education by 2005, and at all levels by 2015. However, no reference was made to adult and women's literacy. Goal 3 focuses exclusively on achieving gender parity in formal education.

By 2005, the global monitoring report on progress on EFA goals called on the international community to take a serious look at the gender disparities in adult literacy, noting hardly any movement in advancing women's literacy. The proportion of adult women illiterates had practically remained the same, from 63 per cent in 1990 to 64 per cent at the time the report was made. One reason offered by the report is the focus on goals related to schooling and the corresponding 'neglect' of literacy.

The Fifth International Conference on Adult Education held in Hamburg (CONFINTEA V) in 1997 steered adult education as 'more than a right; it is a key to the twenty-first century'. It defined adult education as '…both a consequence of active citizenship and a condition for full participation in society'. It further stated that the objectives of youth and adult education, viewed as a lifelong learning process, is 'to enable people and communities to take control of their destiny and society to face the

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CONFINTEA VI held in 2009 in Brazil adopted the Belem Framework for Action which asserts that literacy, as an essential element of the right to education, is the 'most significant foundation upon which to build a comprehensive, inclusive and integrated lifelong and life-wide learning for the young and the adults alike'.

challenges ahead and that 'approaches to adult learning must be based on the people's heritage, culture, values and prior experiences, and that the diverse ways in which these approaches are implemented enable and encourage every citizen to be actively involved and to have a voice' (The Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning, 1997, para. 2-3, 5).

The succeeding CONFINTEA VI held in 2009 in Brazil adopted the Belem Framework for Action which asserts that literacy, as an essential element of the right to education, is the 'most significant foundation upon which to build a comprehensive, inclusive and integrated lifelong and life-wide learning for the young and the adults alike'. It recognises the key role of adult literacy and education, especially in relation to women, in the achievement of the MDGs, the EFA Goals and the UN agenda for sustainable human, social, economic, cultural, political and environmental development, including gender equality as enshrined in the CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action. It states that 'lifelong learning plays a critical role in addressing global and educational issues and challenges thus, adult education and literacy must equip adults with the necessary knowledge, skills, capabilities and values to exercise and advance their human rights and take control of their destinies' (The Belem Framework for Action, 2009, pp. 1, 6). CONFINTEA VI pledged a redoubling of efforts towards halving illiteracy levels in 2000 by 2015.

UNESCO led in 2003 the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) with the theme 'Literacy as Freedom'. A global effort again aiming to increase literacy levels and empower people everywhere, the UNLD 2003-2012 supports EFA's literacy goal. Worldwide advocacy and awareness-raising has contributed to greater understanding of literacy as a benefit to everyone's interest and as integral to the efforts towards peace, respect and exchange in a globalizing world. Thus, UNESCO launched the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) in 2005 as a global framework within UNLD to support the countries with the greatest literacy deficits for achieving the Decade's goals. The EFA goal of increasing literacy rates by 50 per cent in 2015 provides the overall target for the Decade while the MDGs set the Decade in the context of poverty alleviation.

LIFE goals are fundamentally an expression of the collective will of the international community to address the continuing challenge of illiteracy, especially among the most disadvantaged groups and in the developing countries, and a reassertion of the basic human right to literacy.

*Adult Literacy Defined*

Numerous literacy campaigns in many countries have been launched using UNESCO's definition of literacy as 'the ability to read and write with understanding a simple statement related to one's daily life' (Wagner, 2005, p.

25). The substantiation that literacy must go beyond the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, and should contribute to the 'liberation of man and to his full development' came with the Persepolis Declaration of 1975.

In 1978, UNESCO's General Conference concretised the definition of literacy by describing a functionally literate individual as one '…who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community's development'.



Dr. Huma Masood of UNESCO, New Delhi on functional literacy for women (ASPBAE)

Several years later, the definition of literacy broadened with the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS, 2008) referring to it as:

...the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve his or her goals, develop his or her knowledge and potentials, and participate fully in the community and wider society (p. 25).

UNESCO (2005) sets its own definition as follows:

Literacy equips people young and old with the key skill to use written words in daily life to continue learning and to effectively communicate with others. Literacy is at once an outcome (reading, writing, and numeracy), a process (teaching and learning), and an input that paves the way for future development (cognitive skill development, participation in lifelong learning opportunities, and broader societal development). (p. 34).

This broader view of literacy resonates with calls of the UNLD Proposal and Plan for an expanded vision of literacy. 'Literacy policies and programmes today require going beyond the limited view of literacy that has dominated in the past. Literacy for all requires a renewed vision of literacy, which will foster cultural identity, democratic participation and citizenship, tolerance and respect for others, social development, peace and progress. It must admit that literacy is not confined to any particular age (childhood or adulthood), institution (i.e. the school system) or sector (i.e. education); that it is related to various dimensions of personal and social life and development; and that it is a life learning process. Such renewed vision towards literacy for all calls for renewed modalities of operations, monitoring and accountability procedures and mechanisms' (UNESCO Bangkok, 2005, p. 25).

Today, global consensus has been generally reached on a definition of literacy that includes the purposes of and benefits to learners. Along those lines, adult literacy is currently framed within the broader adult education and lifelong learning perspective that sees learners in a continuous process of knowledge building to effectively respond and adapt to different situations

Young woman leading a discussion in a literacy workshop in Tagum, Davao del Norte, Philippines (E-Net Philippines)

confronting them. Literacy is appreciated from an instrumentalist point of view where skills acquired result in enabling access to employment opportunities, greater productivity and better job performance; and it is also viewed from an empowerment perspective where adult learners develop critical awareness of their life situation and become imbued with a sense of power to control and decide their future. Such awareness is seen not so much as an outcome of acquiring literacy skills but as a result of the process of becoming literate.

It is important to note that 'numeracy' is usually neglected in the literacy discourse and research, though there is clear evidence on the importance of numeracy skills in everyday life for effective functioning in society. While UNESCO has incorporated 'numeracy' in its International Standard Classification of Education in 1997, the research literature contains no universally accepted definition of numeracy and its relation to mathematics and literacy (Gal, et al., 2005, cited in Coben). Countries adopt their own understanding and definitions of numeracy and most of them have only limited data on the numeracy skills level of its population.

Doronila of the Education Forum in the Philippines posited a fairly universal, straightforward and immediately operational definition of basic numeracy as 'the ability to count orally, understand place value, write numerals, do the four fundamental operations, count money and use common standards of measurement' (Doronila, 1996, p. 13). The Philippine National Statistics Office (2003) refers to numeracy as the ability to solve word problems involving simple arithmetic. The Bangladesh Literacy Assessment Survey (2008) included the ability of individuals to count, understand number series, perform the four arithmetic operations, solve word problems, tell time and appreciate a simple map.

Numeracy assessments now encompass a range of calculating skills including working with and understanding measurements, weights, distances, ratios, proportions, percentages, prices, discounts, income, budgets and expenses (UNESCO, 2006). More broadly, numeracy has evolved and has been referred to as the 'ability to process, interpret and communicate numerical, quantitative, spatial, statistical and even mathematical information in ways that are appropriate for a variety of contexts' (Evans, 2000, p. 236).

## Adult Literacy and Education defined within the Lifelong Learning Framework

The Lifelong Learning Framework puts premium on empowerment as a literacy outcome. It understands empowerment as a critical awareness of one's situation of poverty, oppression, exploitation and marginalisation, the ability to identify needs and articulate aspirations, and the exercise of agency to effect the changes that would lead to better, less precarious lives.

Literacy then goes beyond being useful and productive in everyday life; it is ultimately a tool with which to liberate oneself from oppression and

exploitation. In this sense, literacy and education is not a static condition confined in time to a fixed set of competencies, but a continuing, dynamic process of learning new, higher-level, multifaceted competencies that enable better adaptive responses to daily tasks and situations, effective communication with others, efficient problem-solving and contribute to collective causes.

Along with the self-empowerment framework, Nirantar argued for literacy programmes enabling communities of women to challenge and transform the socio-cultural and political structures that have disenfranchised them from their right to education and development. With this framework, empowering literacy programmes therefore must expose and contribute to transforming belief systems and structural factors that perpetuate inequities borne by women (Nirantar, 2007, p. 12). Importantly, within an empowerment framework, literacy programmes are designed with women as active participants who decide on their learning and actions and are not treated as passive learners who merely acquire knowledge and skills and accept whatever programmes are given.

National reports submitted for the CONFINTEA VI tracks some level of progress and innovation in adult learning and education from the perspective of lifelong learning. A few member states in the South for instance have introduced comprehensive adult learning policies and legislations and more systematized approaches to adult learning and education.

However, though there is an apparent abundance of policies and issuances in all the four countries in this study to support and promote adult literacy, the need for coherent national government actions to mobilise duty-bearers, the private sector and civil society at large continues to be pronounced. Despite commitments made in many international conferences, resource allocations remain grossly inadequate at less than one per cent of education budgets, too insignificant to meet ever-mounting challenges of totally eradicating illiteracy especially among the women.

The four countries in this study are all state parties to the CEDAW and are also signatories to other human rights treaties and declarations. Yet, they also share the concern of serious inadequacies in policy provisions and strategies addressing women's literacy needs. Except for India, the rest have, at best, limited affirmative action policies and programs for women and adult literacy, or none at all.

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# COUNTRY LEVEL POLICY CONTEXTS

### India

India formally commits to addressing adult literacy and gender issues as reflected by their inclusion in each of its five-year national development plans since 1951. In line with these plans, the Government of India implemented various programs made towards meeting adult education and literacy goals. India is also a signatory to several important international conventions that address issues of gender and education.

The National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1986 (revised in 1992) took a mass approach, targeting the eradication of illiteracy among the 15-35 age group. Among the strategies it rolled out was the setting up of the National Literacy Mission (NLM) in 1988 and the launching of the Total Literacy Campaign. It further linked women's literacy and education as agents of change towards the empowerment of women.

Policy prescriptions were also translated into action through national level programmes. In 1988 government launched a pilot project called Mahila Samakhya (Education for Women's Equality). It also set up the National Literacy Mission as a societal and technical mission to reach out to 80 million illiterate adults through the Total Literacy Campaigns. However, the campaign failed to consider and respond to the distinct needs and interests of the various ethnic groups. Consequently, illiteracy among women took hold again.

In September 2009, the government launched the *Saakshar Bharat* Mission through the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The effort covered all districts in the country with adult female literacy rates of 50 per cent or less. It was designed through an elaborate process of extensive in-house and external review and evaluation of previous literacy programmes and a series of consultative meetings across the country with the relevant government organisations, NGOs, literacy practitioners, managers, administrators, universities, social activists and other stakeholder groups. The Saakshar Bharat Programme was launched as the new literacy initiative for bridging gaps, ensuring sustainable literacy and empowerment and undertaking functional literacy programmes not only for women, but also SCs, STs, minorities and other disadvantaged groups in several districts and states.

The Programme espoused a clear human resource development plan with several components: 1) a trainers' training of literacy facilitators and supervisors using learner-centered, learning-by-doing, participatory techniques, training of key resource persons at district level and managerial training for literacy managers; 2) Total Quality Management that emphasise quality of literacy works and literacy educators; 3) volunteer teachers given intensive pre-and in-service training in andragogy in local languages; and 4) model manuals and resource books with participatory training techniques distributed for adaptation by resource learning centres.

Signs of a revival in political commitment seemed forthcoming with the launching of the Saakshar Bharat programme which sought to build on the lessons of the previous phase and focuses on women. However, after two years, no programme impact had been reported on the ground.

Literacy largely continues to be a marginal concern within the education sector. Formal schooling and adult literacy and education are often commonly seen as competing constituencies, i.e., if all children were in school, there would gradually be no need for adult literacy programmes. The fact that adult literacy and learning opportunities go beyond basic literacy and encompass the need to access information, exercise rights or enable women's empowerment and ensure gender justice requires constant reiteration. The reality that young adults, even after getting through the school system, are not equipped with sustainable literacy skills suggests that adult and elementary education needs to be recognised as complementary sectors and that literacy be seen as part of a robust system of providing lifelong learning opportunities.

The concern today is not so much the lack of policy frameworks on women's literacy but translating these into action, creating the momentum for implementation and wielding genuine political will, establishing an institutional mechanism and deepening the current understanding of gender.

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### Indonesia

Efforts at eradicating illiteracy began before Indonesia declared independence in 1949. At the time, 90 per cent of the population was considered illiterate and only three per cent were in formal schools. Aware of the situation, drafters of the 1945 Constitution of Indonesia ensured a constitutional mandate for at least 20 per cent of the state budget to be earmarked for the education needs of the population.

In 1951, government launched the Ten-Year Community Education Plan but by the time the program came to a close in 1960, the illiteracy rate had not budged from 40 per cent. This prompted the government to adopt from 1966 to 1979 UNESCO's Traditional Literacy or Functional Literacy Program, an approach combining literacy and productivity or livelihood skills (Jalal and Sardjunani, 2005, p.11).

During this period, the government implemented another literacy campaign called the 'Package A Program'. Inspired by the idea of *Lingkaran Spiral* (spiral circle), the programme began to teach and to promote learning from the starting point of personal, daily life issues that eventually broadened to include family and community concerns. It also committed each learner to pass on learnings to 10 other illiterates. This programme proved effective as it brought illiteracy down from nearly 40 to 16 per cent of the Indonesian population 10 years old and above (Jalal and Sardjunani, 2005, p.5).

The Nine Years (1990-2000) Compulsory Basic Education programme which shifted government focus to formal basic education was complemented by a functional literacy programme in 1995 that emphasised the importance of literacy in improving social conditions for those without access to formal education. The Presidential Instruction on the National Movement for the Acceleration of Completion of Compulsory Education and Eradication of Illiteracy aimed to reduce the illiteracy rate to five per cent by 2009. The Ministry of National Education Guidelines of 2006 guided implementation of this Presidential Instruction.

The Joint Regulation Letter (JRL) for Eradicating Illiteracy Among Women in 2005 specifically addressed illiteracy in the country's female population. The JRL directed three government ministries -- Women's Empowerment, Interior and National Education -- to coordinate programmes, seeking to end female illiteracy in the country. In addition, the Ministry of National Education initiated a Gender Mainstreaming Program Action to ensure that women and girls would be given equal opportunities. This included the establishment of a Gender Working Group in Education composed of representatives from various governmental and non-governmental organisations, provision of

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gender budgeting in education with a steady increase each year, gender analysis in education, revision of textbooks and illustrations for gender sensitivity; and, advocacy, socialisation and capacity building for those involved in education.

In terms of funding education and literacy programmes, the government allocates an amount that is consistently less than 20 per cent of the national budget contrary to what has been mandated by the 1945 Constitution and the National Education Law of 2003. The budget is even smaller for women's literacy programmes and is expected to further decline as a result of the cutbacks in education expenditure.

## Philippines

Three landmark legislations and executive issuances integrate women's literacy and adult education in development strategies, namely, 1) Republic Act (RA) No. 7192, the Women in Development and National Building Act of 1992; 2) Executive Order 273, or the 1995 Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development 1995-2025; and 3) RA No. 9710, the Magna Carta of Women passed in 2009.

Several other education policies support EFA commitments. Among these are 1) RA 7165 (amended by RA 10122), the law creating the Literacy Coordinating Council; 2) the Executive Order 358 Philippine EFA Plan 2015 signed in 2006; 3) Executive Order 356 Renaming the Bureau of Non-Formal Education to Bureau of Alternative Learning System (BALS) issued in September 2004; and 4) the Philippine Education Highway. Though affirmative measures are not explicit in these measures, they nonetheless provide mandates that can be invoked to give more attention to women's continuing education and literacy.

Indigenous women in particular are covered by RA 8371 or the 1997 Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997 (IPRA). It contains provisions by which women of indigenous communities can assert and claim their right to education and literacy.

Many other mechanisms and structures both at the national and local levels of government provide spaces for civil society to engage government on women and literacy issues. These include the national gender mechanism or the Philippine Commission of Women (formerly the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women), Gender and Development Focal Points in national line agencies and local government units (LGUs), the National EFA Committee, the Literacy Coordinating Council (LCC) and the local LCCs. Other structures at the local level include the Local EFA Committees such as the Local School Boards (LSB) and other LGU special bodies such as the Municipal, City, or Provincial Development Councils. Integrated in the mandates of these bodies is the commitment to



An Aeta woman participating in a focused group discussion with indigenous people in Zambales, Philippines (E-Net Philipines)

**Partnerships of national and local governments with civil society organisations and institutions undertaking literacy can be further strengthened.**

eradicate illiteracy in the country through policies and programmes in non-formal, informal and indigenous learning systems as well as self-learning, independent and out-of-school study.

While there exists a coordinating mechanism for literacy at the national level, this structure has yet to be fully mobilised for monitoring and analysis of the literacy situation, including gender gaps. It should be able to develop and build consensus around strategies and programmes to accelerate the achievement of desired outcomes on a sustained, progressive basis, with special focus on regions and communities with the highest literacy deficits.

On the part of civil society, Philippine NGOs are often involved in non-formal education, in particular, as part of 'capacity building for empowerment' efforts within social movements. Groups conducting functional literacy programmes view this not as ends in themselves but as means to gain broader learning on various development and social justice concerns (e.g., agrarian reform, environmental education, women's empowerment). Such initiatives—often referred to as popular, mass or community-based education—are derived from the present contexts of the people and thus have no set centre.

Partnerships of national and local governments with civil society organisations and institutions undertaking literacy can be further strengthened. For one, there remains a lack of policy and institutional support for the education work being done by NGOs and other civil society organisations, including university and faith-based organisations. Successive national governments have not prioritised literacy and other non-formal education programmes in the country, hence the insufficiency of budgetary allocations for the implementation of an organised, well-coordinated and coherent literacy programme.

## Papua New Guinea

The Government of PNG has made public commitments to improving the education situation and ensuring equality for all since independence. Within the Constitution, the right to literacy is enshrined for all citizens and there is a clear commitment to gender equality (GoPNG, 1975). The commitments made within the constitution are further preserved by the government's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1995 and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2008. In addition to these, the Government of PNG has also committed to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and Education for All (EFA) goals by 2015.

The blueprint for achieving commitments to improved literacy and gender equality is outlined by the Government of PNG in a range of long term planning documents. 'Vision 2050' places strong emphasis on the central role

education will play in ensuring a prosperous future for PNG (GoPNG, 2009). The 40-year plan places emphasis on free basic education, literacy for all and gender equality. The government's development plans cite the importance of gender as a cross-cutting issue, but sadly provide little detail on funding allocation to literacy and gender actions (GoPNG, 2010B 7and 2010A).

The Department of Education and Office of Higher Education provides more detail on priorities and actions relating to achieving improved literacy and gender equality in education. The National Education Plan and Universal Basic Education Plan both place a strong emphasis on the need to ensure gender equality and expand literacy, but unfortunately gender issues are not mainstreamed and there is almost no detail on funding commitments for action to drive change (PNG DoE, 2004A and 2009A). Similarly the National Literacy Policy makes strong commitments to improve the literacy situation, but does not take into consideration the situation for the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups (PNG DoE, 2000). Further, through its Gender Equity Education Policy and Strategic Plan, the Department of Education emphasises the need to mainstream gender into education but takes a narrow view of education and does not include non-formal education (2009B and 2009C). In contrast, the Office of Higher Education has explicitly identified targets and allocated funds for actions to expand female participation in university (PNG OHE, 2011).

In summary, the PNG has developed many policies and plans that emphasise the importance of improving education and gender equality. However, these laudable commitments are not supported by mainstreamed targets, concrete actions or funding allocations.

# THE BENEFITS OF WOMEN'S LITERACY, A LITERATURE REVIEW

The social and economic benefits derived from formal education of girls are well documented. Numerous studies report on the high social returns of education and its positive impact on women's productivity, reproductive health, child survival and long-term economic growth. (See, for example, Psacharopoulos, 1989; Herz, et al, 1991; King and Hill, 1991; Burchfield, 2002a; Herz and Sperling, 2004; Tembon and Fort, 2008)

In contrast, the literature on the impact of adult literacy programmes on women learners and the larger society is far more limited. Burchfield (2002a, p. 1) pointed out that while investments in literacy training increased, there were fewer studies assessing the 'effects of these programs' on women's participation in 'social and economic development'. Carr-Hill (2001) affirms that empirical evidence on the benefits of literacy is generally weak, and that adult literacy is a neglected area in terms of information availability, data collection and research.

Robinson-Pant (2005, p. 4) likewise notes 'the relative lack of research evidence' for analysing how literacy programmes benefit society. Robinson-Pant, citing the works of other researchers, further argued that there are still few large-scale surveys of literacy programmes at national level and that most studies were small-scale and programme specific which may not be useful in a national or international context.

Robinson-Pant also stressed that the majority of the studies done focused on women's literacy since most programmes targeted women learners, thereby, excluding men in the research consideration. Abadzi (2003) observed the weak monitoring and documentation of the outcomes of literacy programmes, with actual competencies rarely tested. The results of the programmes thus proved difficult to appraise because of the failure of the monitoring systems to collect data needed for thorough evaluations.

Notwithstanding the limited studies, coverage and shortcomings in the methodologies, Oxenham (2008) asserted that there is a growing body of empirical evidence showing how literacy and numeracy contribute to the achievement of key human development targets articulated in the EFA and the MDGs. Small-scale studies undertaken since 1975 covering at least 32 countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America can be considered representative of the global community. These studies underscored the importance and positive impact of literacy on the lives of women, children and communities as shown in the works of Oxenham (2005, 2008), Burchfield et al (2002, 2002a), Nordtveit (2004) and Carr-Hill (2001), among others.

Oxenham (2008) argues that 'investment in adult education with literacy is as productive as investing in primary, secondary or university education'. He asserted that literacy education contributes to the reduction of poverty and hunger, and the improvement of livelihoods and productivity. Literacy education promotes women's empowerment and gender equality, and improves knowledge, attitude and practices on personal and family health. In addition, literacy education programs facilitate stronger and more confident social and political participation by poor, unschooled people, particularly poor women.

Longitudinal studies done by Burchfield et al (2002a, 2002b) in Nepal and Bolivia examined the effects of integrated literacy and basic education programs on women's participation in social and economic development. These studies noted that women who participated in the programmes showed improvements in terms of larger roles in decision-making at home, income-earning activities, reproductive and overall health practice, political participation, and community involvement. Nepalese women, for instance, developed greater confidence as skills and knowledge increased. The programs contributed to a higher awareness on family planning and sexually transmitted diseases and the prevention of HIV/AIDS.

Findings of studies in Bolivia echoed similar gains among women learners of adult literacy programs initiated in Nepal. The study suggests that Bolivian women who attended the programs enhanced knowledge and



Women creatively express their ideas in a literacy class of Mahila Shikshan Kendra (MSK) in India (Nirantar)

Literacy education promotes women's empowerment and gender equality, and improves knowledge, attitude and practices on personal and family health.

improved behaviour on health related matters compared to women who did not receive any similar training (Burchfield, 2002a). These women learners were found to be more active in accessing medical services such as seeking immunisation for children and family planning assistance. They also exerted greater influence in important household decisions concerning health and education spending and allocation of self-earned income. In addition, Bolivian women learners also exercised greater decision-making in the use of family-planning methods and in protecting themselves from domestic violence.

The evaluation study in Uganda (Carr-Hill, 2001) showed that literacy supports women's empowerment through better income from economic activities, shared decision-making at the household level and increased mobility due to their ability to read instructions, labels, street signs and signage. Those who attended the programme showed improvement in terms of family health care as indicated by proper nutrition for children and disease prevention through immunisation of children. The women learners who benefited from the literacy classes were more likely to send their children to school and assist the latter in their schoolwork.

In Senegal, an evaluation study of a multi-donor assisted project on a pilot female literacy programme conducted by Nordtveit (2004) looked into the practice and lessons learned from outsourcing literacy courses to local community-based organisations. The study documented better health through vaccination, improved hygiene, HIV/AIDs awareness; personal development through access to writing and reading religious, entertainment and cultural literature; skills for broadening livelihood engagement and accessing better jobs (Nordtveit, 2004)

A World Bank (2007) report on the completion of the literacy project in Ghana showed the positive effects of its programme among more than a million learners. It further reported that in addition to improvements in reading, writing and numeracy skills of participants to the literacy programme, these learners exhibited better attitudes towards education, health and hygiene. The report noted that women learners tended to send their children to primary school. The learners were observed to prefer breastfeeding, understand family planning better and became mindful of their children's immunisation. Participation in community development activities increased; awareness improved with regard civic responsibilities through voting, participation in election campaigns and membership in local associations; income-generating skills increased as learners managed their money better and succeeded in generating additional income.

World Bank evaluation studies completed in countries outside of Africa showed similar positive findings. The tracer study in Bangladesh, for

example, indicated that gains were achieved in empowering neo-literate women in terms of increasing household incomes by broadening livelihood options and facilitating employment. Given the higher incomes, women learners gained confidence in getting involved in family decision-making particularly for household budgeting, family hygiene, children's education and participation in community activities (World Bank, 2008, p. 11).

Lauglo (2001) made an extensive review of studies done on the impact of adult basic education with literacy component and noted the benefits in terms of improved self-confidence among women, better health practices, reduced child mortality, increased livelihood engagement, acquiring financial literacy, higher participation in political and community activities and increased support for children's schooling. Lauglo cited the large scale longitudinal study in Nicaragua done by Sandiford et al. in 1995 which found a significant drop in infant mortality among unschooled women who participated in the literacy campaign. The study concluded that the reduced-mortality effect of adult basic education appears to be 'equivalent to about two years of formal schooling...could be greater' (Lauglo, 2001, p. 19). Robinson-Pant (2005, p.7) further noted that participation of women in adult literacy programmes enables them to challenge traditional 'male' domains including gaining access to occupations previously dominated by males and to have a stronger voice in household discussions and decision-making.

Though evidence on the positive effects of literacy is gaining ground, other studies argue that available data and evidence are not conclusive enough. Cameron and Cameron (2006, p. 2), for example, assert that claims of economic benefits from literacy are not solidly grounded on 'formal economic analysis'. They specifically noted the 'lack of attention to the opportunity costs involved in providing adult literacy as well as a lack of rigorous measurement of the outputs and outcomes'. Patel (2005, p. 12), on the other hand, contends that the effects of literacy are determined more by 'formal schooling, socialisation, and the cultural practices' rather than by literacy per se. In the same vein, Stromquist (2005) argues that the political outcomes of literacy rely on literacy acquired over time, which should include participation in formal schooling. Robinson-Pant (2005) further notes that knowledge obtained from literacy programmes do not automatically translate into actual practice. Thus, awareness on domestic violence or access to further education does not necessarily result in changes at the household level.

Abadzi (2003, p. 21) discloses an internal debate within the World Bank. One school of thought asserts literacy as a public good that should be made available to all regardless of age, particularly given the benefits of literacy for women. The other end questions the perceived low unit

Robinson-Pant noted that participation of women in adult literacy programmes enables them to challenge traditional 'male' domains including gaining access to occupations previously dominated by males and to have a stronger voice in household discussions and decision-making.

...'literacy skills have to be constantly honed so that as new vistas open up to women, the desire to continue beyond basic literacy becomes a felt need'.

costs of non-formal education, pointing out that if development and organisational costs are factored in the computation, it really becomes more expensive; it suggests instead that 'expenditures on children should be preferred over expenditures to adults, who have a more limited lifespan'. This latter view ignores the results of studies proving that investing in literacy programmes can be as productive as investments in formal education. It also begs the question as to whether World Bank fully recognises education and literacy as basic rights, the violation of which is known to cause greater marginalisation and wilful neglect of adult illiterates.

The literature on the social benefits of literacy emphasises the point that literacy alone does not automatically translate to development of individual learners and the larger society. Acquiring basic literacy is the first step of many steps which must be sustained and constantly nurtured, and used to access information and knowledge.

Lind (2008) notes that literacy is only a potential asset that can easily be lost or become meaningless if not applied. The effect of literacy will depend on the process of acquisition, the context and extent and purpose of usage. Along this line, Dighe (2005, p. 43) emphasises the importance of working out appropriate post-literacy strategies for women, arguing that literacy is not an end in itself but a means to enable women to have better control over their lives. Literacy gives women access to information and knowledge that has been denied to them. Dighe (2005) further stresses that 'literacy skills have to be constantly honed so that as new vistas open up to women, the desire to continue beyond basic literacy becomes a felt need'. (p. 43)

Studies have also underscored the critical importance of linking literacy programmes with other development initiatives. Doronila (1997), sharing the lessons learned from their study on functional literacy in marginal communities in the Philippines, noted the importance of including livelihood and development components in literacy programs, arguing that 'community activities provide the social support which prevents the loss of literacy skills and enhances their expansion into literate practice'. Other experiences, specifically in South Africa as cited by Oxenham (2002), show that better results can be achieved when livelihood programmes are enriched with numeracy/literacy component than literacy-led programs with livelihood component.

Robinson-Pant (2005) likewise asserts that the relationship between women's education and health outcomes suggest that change in the health-related behaviours among women is 'more dependent on the changing attitudes and values, than on learning new knowledge' (p. 7). Citing the works of Lauglo (1999) and other researchers, she

emphasized that 'the social benefits of literacy are even more enhanced when programmes are accompanied by supportive interventions such as credit facilities, skills training and in the health context, access to family planning facilities or maternal and child health centres'(p. 12). Citing Smith (1997), she notes that the integrated health and literacy programmes implemented in Nepal resulted to 'greater effect on women's health, than literacy alone or health alone' (p. 13). Robinson-Pant (2005) noted further that 'programs work best when embedded with social and political reform programs' (p. 13).

Finally, Oxenham (2008) stressed that literacy programmes must be part of a broader development effort, noting that the full effects of such programmes will depend on the supportive social, political, institutional and infrastructural environment. This is similar to the proposition of Dighe (1995), asserting that an effective literacy programme should be participatory, culture-sensitive, empowering and linked to the broader movement for social change. It should evoke curiosity, questions, analysis and help sustain learner interest.

The four country studies undertaken in this study affirm all these findings. Although specific examples vary in form and extent from one context to another, they tell a shared story of literacy's key contributions to building women's empowerment – increasing women's awareness of themselves, their immediate surroundings, their communities and society at large, and enabling them in different degrees to negotiate and even widen their range of choices in these spaces, which are so oftentimes severely constricted by historical structures of oppression and deeply embedded systems of discrimination. The findings from this study thus contribute to the growing evidence of the importance of literacy for women and its potential to empower them to act and transform their own lives.

An effective literacy programme should be participatory, culture-sensitive, empowering and linked to the broader movement for social change. It should evoke curiosity, questions, analysis and help sustain learner interest.

# COST IMPLICATIONS OF EFA TARGETS ON LITERACY

Addressing female illiteracy to achieve the EFA literacy targets is a huge undertaking entailing substantial financial investment but not an impossible task. The benefits derived from literacy as discussed in the previous section far outweigh the cost that it will entail to implement literacy programmes of good quality. Positive externalities are strongly associated with literacy acquired through formal or nonformal education, including literacy and life skills programmes designed for youth and adult illiterates. Literacy helps improve livelihoods and productivity and, thus, helps in reducing poverty, particularly when accompanied by broader anti-poverty efforts. It contributes to better child nutrition and supports the attainment of most of the other Millennium Development Goals.

Unfortunately, current expenditure levels of most governments appear to indicate a tendency to under-invest in adult education, including adult literacy. Only a few developing countries come close to the recommended spending level for adult literacy equivalent to three to six per cent of the national education budget. Moreover, financing programmes on adult education and literacy hardly consider gender disaggregated targets and resource allocation.

An earlier study completed by ASPBAE in 2009 as part of civil society engagement in the CONFINTEA VI process estimated that

Asia-Pacific countries need to invest USD 9 billion per year for the period 2011-2015 or a total of USD 45 billion to meet the EFA literacy targets of reducing adult illiteracy by 50 per cent and achieving gender parity in literacy.

The study added a new dimension to the discourse on literacy costing by disaggregating the target adult illiterates by gender and by factoring a higher cost for adult female learners to take into account the multiple barriers faced by women. Noting this, the 2009 Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) Report underscored further that adult education remains a non-priority for many countries as it receives an allocation that is much less than the international benchmark (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, GRALE, 2009).

This study adopted the benchmark established by the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) that three years is required to ensure a quality literacy programme, with a focus on the development of life skills in the third year (ActionAid International and GCE, 2005). Adding a third year in a literacy programme is essential to integrate training courses stressing the development of life skills, including lessons in gender awareness, orientation on electoral processes and practical skills that can broaden options for livelihood engagement.

Table 7 presents an updated version of the resource requirement needed by countries in the Asia-Pacific region to meet the EFA literacy targets. The estimated cost needed to meet the EFA literacy targets were computed using the same methodology based on the most recent available data. Cost estimates were generated for a total of 22 countries with updated data on literacy, per capita income and public expenditure on education.

**The 2009 Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) Report underscored further that adult education remains a non-priority for many countries as it receives an allocation that is much less than the international benchmark.**

Table 7. Estimated Number of Adult Illiterates in Year 2012 and Target Number of Adult Illiterates for Year 2015 to Achieve EFA Literacy Goals[*]

| Country | Year | Number of Adult Illiterates (1995-2004) ('000) | | | Year | Number of Adult Illiterates (2005-2009) ('000) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Total | Male | Female | | Total | Male | Female |
| Bangladesh | 2001 | 48,059 | 21,287 | 26,772 | 2009 | 49,037 | 22,036 | 27,000 |
| Brunei Darussalam | 2001 | 17 | 6 | 11 | 2009 | 14 | 5 | 9 |
| Cambodia | 1998 | 2,234 | 653 | 1,581 | 2008 | 2,143 | 684 | 1,460 |
| China | 2000 | 85,307 | 23,449 | 61,858 | 2009 | 64,604 | 17,128 | 47,477 |
| India | 2001 | 269,823 | 95,150 | 174,673 | 2006 | 283,105 | 98,798 | 184,308 |
| Indonesia | 2004 | 14,824 | 4,562 | 10,262 | 2008 | 12,859 | 3,779 | 9,080 |
| Iran Isl. Rep. | 2002 | 11,099 | 4,057 | 7,042 | 2008 | 8,292 | 3,014 | 5,277 |
| Lao PDR | 2000 | 930 | 283 | 647 | 2005 | 961 | 303 | 659 |
| Macao | 2001 | 31 | 8 | 23 | 2006 | 28 | 7 | 21 |
| Malaysia | 2000 | 1,749 | 630 | 1,119 | 2009 | 1,461 | 531 | 930 |
| Maldives | 2000 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 2006 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Myanmar | 2000 | 3,229 | 969 | 2,260 | 2009 | 2,918 | 933 | 1,985 |
| Nepal | 2001 | 7,646 | 2,699 | 4,947 | 2009 | 7,604 | 2,534 | 5,070 |
| Pakistan | 1998 | 46,625 | 18,881 | 27,743 | 2008 | 50,020 | 17,817 | 32,203 |
| Papua New Guinea | 2000 | 1,351 | 586 | 765 | 2009 | 1,618 | 741 | 877 |
| Philippines | 2000 | 3,578 | 1,802 | 1,776 | 2008 | 2,720 | 1,480 | 1,240 |
| Samoa | 2004 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2009 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Singapore | 2000 | 233 | 54 | 179 | 2009 | 210 | 50 | 160 |
| Sri Lanka | 2001 | 1,301 | 533 | 768 | 2008 | 1,425 | 574 | 851 |
| Thailand | 2000 | 3,433 | 1,154 | 2,279 | 2005 | 3,298 | 1,088 | 2,210 |
| Tonga | 1996 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2006 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Viet Nam | 2000 | 5,169 | 1,523 | 3,646 | 2009 | 4,723 | 1,534 | 3,189 |

Source of Basic Data: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), Data Centre, 2011
[*]See Annex: Table A for the complete tables and detailed computation.

Table 8. Cost of Delivering Quality Literacy Programme to Achieve EFA Literacy Goals by 2015 in Select Asia-Pacific Countries[*]

| Country | Target Number of Adult Illiterates[1] ('000) | | | Unit Cost[2] per year (US$) | Cost Male Learners (US$ '000) | Cost Female Learners[3] (US$ '000) | Total Cost per year (US$ '000) | US$ Equivalent of Education Budget[4] (US$ '000) (2012 Estimate) | % of Education Budget |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | Male | Female | | | | | | |
| | | | | | Col.2 x Col.4 | Col.3 x Col.4 x 120% | Col.5 + Col.6 | | Col.7/Col.8 |
| | (Col.1) | (Col.2) | (Col.3) | (Col.4) | (Col.5) | (Col.6) | (Col.7) | (Col.8) | (Col.9) |
| Bangladesh | 25,379 | 10,307 | 15,072 | 33.92 | 349,614 | 613,472 | 963,086 | 2,520,168 | 38.2% |
| Brunei Darussalam | 4 | 0 | 4 | 1,652.54 | 240 | 7,960 | 8,200 | 1,379,063 | 0.6% |
| Cambodia | 995 | 135 | 859 | 40.28 | 5,440 | 41,542 | 46,982 | 313,435 | 15.0% |
| China | 28,272 | | 28,272 | 225.78 | 0 | 7,659,986 | 7,659,986 | 84,074,169 | 9.1% |
| India | 164,999 | 35,882 | 129,117 | 71.02 | 2,548,309 | 11,003,871 | 13,552,181 | 46,060,818 | 29.4% |
| Indonesia | 5,106 | | 5,106 | 136.74 | 0 | 837,764 | 837,764 | 30,444,812 | 2.8% |
| Iran Islamic. Rep. | 1,931 | | 1,931 | 240.09 | 0 | 556,427 | 556,427 | 22,560,390 | 2.5% |
| Lao PDR | 534 | 94 | 439 | 53.53 | 5,051 | 28,231 | 33,282 | 264,522 | 12.6% |
| Macao SAR | 13 | | 13 | 2,094.56 | 0 | 32,276 | 32,276 | 662,376 | 4.9% |
| Malaysia | 509 | 67 | 442 | 418.70 | 28,049 | 222,273 | 250,322 | 11,336,291 | 2.2% |
| Maldives | 0 | 0 | 0 | 226.31 | | | 0 | 194,781 | 0.0% |
| Myanmar | 1,216 | 115 | 1,101 | 16.59 | 1,903 | 21,926 | 23,829 | 19,079,419 | 0.1% |
| Nepal | 3,767 | 567 | 3,201 | 25.97 | 14,716 | 99,741 | 114,457 | 1,150,973 | 9.9% |
| Pakistan | 28,003 | 5,662 | 22,340 | 55.65 | 315,112 | 1,491,893 | 1,807,005 | 6,817,822 | 26.5% |
| Papua New Guinea | 1,032 | 456 | 576 | 68.90 | 31,444 | 47,592 | 79,036 | | |
| Philippines | 618 | 456 | 162 | 108.65 | 49,545 | 21,179 | 70,724 | 6,205,176 | 1.1% |
| Samoa | 0.47 | 0.15 | 0.32 | 155.29 | 23 | 60 | 83 | 111,584 | 0.1% |
| Singapore | 105 | | 105 | 2,168.76 | 0 | 273,789 | 273,789 | 11,787,365 | 2.3% |
| Sri Lanka | 841 | 271 | 570 | 121.37 | 32,915 | 83,025 | 115,939 | | |
| Thailand | 1,429 | 157 | 1,273 | 223.13 | 34,949 | 340,796 | 375,745 | 14,031,163 | 2.7% |
| Tonga | 0.30 | 0.17 | 0.13 | 179.14 | 31 | 28 | 58 | 9,613 | 0.6% |
| Viet Nam | 2,012 | 241 | 1,771 | 58.30 | 14,030 | 123,914 | 137,944 | | |
| Total for Asia-Pacific[5] | 266,766 | 54,410 | 212,356 | | 3,431,372 | 23,507,745 | 26,939,117 | — | — |

Source of Basic Data: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), Data Centre, 2011
*See Annex: Table B for the complete tables and detailed computation.
[1]The figures represent the number of adult illiterates that must be reached to meet the 50 per cent reduction target in adult illiteracy and to achieve gender parity in literacy by 2015.
[2]Unit cost of delivering quality literacy programme is computed based on the literacy costing study of Van Ravens and Aggio(2006) which computed the Unit cost as 0.053 x per capita Gross National Income [GNI] (see Box 1: Literacy Costing Methodology).
[3]A higher unit cost (additional 20 per cent) is imputed for women learners.
[4]The 2012 Education budget is estimated based on the UIS Data Centre figures on education expenditure as percentage of Gross National Income (GNI).
[5]Sum of columns does not tally with Total for Asia-Pacific since not all countries in the region are included in this table.

**Meeting the EFA targets of reducing adult illiteracy by half and achieving gender parity in literacy by 2015 mean reaching a total of 260 million adult illiterates.**

There were about 520 million adult illiterates in Asia-Pacific around the year 2000 when governments, meeting in Dakar, Senegal, recommitted to achieve Education for All goals by 2015. Meeting the EFA targets of reducing adult illiteracy by half and achieving gender parity in literacy by 2015 mean reaching a total of 260 million adult illiterates. Progress has been slow in meeting these targets. To fast track and achieve the literacy targets by 2015, 267 million adult illiterates must be reached in the next three years, 2013-2015 – 212 million females and 54 million males.

Countries such as Brunei, China, Indonesia, Iran, Macao, Maldives, Malaysia, Myanmar, Samoa, Singapore, Thailand and Tonga have made significant strides in reducing adult illiteracy in the last 10 years and hold much potential for meeting the EFA goal on literacy. In fact, Brunei, China, Indonesia, Macao and Singapore have already reduced male illiteracy by over 50 per cent. Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and Iran will most likely achieve the same by 2015.

However, the EFA goal of achieving gender parity in literacy by 2015 has not caught up, and female illiteracy in these countries remains significantly large. Apart from Maldives, Philippines and a few microstates in the Pacific, none of the countries in the Asia-Pacific region is poised to achieve gender parity in literacy by 2015. This underscores the importance and urgency of increasing investments to address female illiteracy.

Estimates needed to realise the EFA goals in the region run up to annual investments of approximately USD 27 billion (or USD 81 billion for the three-year period 2013-2015). A much larger share of USD 23.5 billion is supposed to fund programmes responding to the problem of female illiteracy. This redounds to earmarking USD 87 dollars for every 100 dollars allocated to adult literacy.

For the majority of the countries in the Asia-Pacific region, the required investment level falls within the benchmark range of three to six per cent of their education budgets. However, a number of developing countries will need more substantive investments, sustained over longer timeframes, to make significant progress in achieving the EFA targets on literacy. These include such countries as Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Iran, Lao PDR, Nepal and Pakistan. They will have to draw up programmes well beyond 2015 with clearly costed targets and financing strategies. South Asia in particular faces a tough challenge, owing to its large gender gap in mobilising the required resources.

The recommended annual investments of USD 27 billion is definitely much lower if compared to the cost of illiteracy in terms of foregone income, lower productivity, higher health expenditures, and greater incidence of social conflicts. Illiteracy is strongly linked to poverty, poor health and social exclusion, with significant adverse economic and social impacts on the community. The World Literacy Foundation (2012) estimates

the cost of illiteracy at two per cent of global Gross Domestic Product or a staggering USD 1.19 trillion annually. The same study of the World Literacy Foundation calculated the cost of illiteracy for 17 Asian countries at approximately USD 259.8 billion annually, or nearly ten times the estimated USD 27 million needed to meet the EFA literacy targets in the region.[10]

Table 9. Estimated Cost of Illiteracy for Selected Asian Countries

| Country | Gross Domestic Product (USD billions) | Cost of illiteracy (USD billions) |
|---|---|---|
| Afghanistan | 30.0 | 0.15 |
| Bangladesh | 282.5 | 1.41 |
| Cambodia | 33.0 | 0.16 |
| China | 11,300.0 | 135.60 |
| India | 4,463.0 | 53.56 |
| Indonesia | 1,121.0 | 13.45 |
| Iran | 918.9 | 11.03 |
| Laos | 17.4 | 0.09 |
| Malaysia | 447.0 | 5.36 |
| Myanmar | 82.7 | 0.41 |
| Nepal | 37.7 | 0.19 |
| Pakistan | 488.0 | 5.86 |
| Philippines | 393.4 | 4.72 |
| Singapore | 314.5 | 6.29 |
| Taiwan | 885.3 | 10.62 |
| Thailand | 609.8 | 7.32 |
| Vietnam | 299.2 | 3.59 |
| Total | | 259.82 |

Source: Data culled from The Economic & Social Cost of Illiteracy
(World Literacy Foundation, 2012, pp. 7-9)

The cost of illiteracy for India is estimated at USD 53.6 billion per year, when it needs only an annual investment of USD 7.6 billion to address adult illiteracy with gender parity. The corresponding cost estimate for Indonesia is USD 13.5 billion per year as compared to the recommended annual investment of only USD 818 million. For the Philippines, the corresponding cost estimate is USD 4.7 billion, far from the annual investment of only USD 61 million to address adult illiteracy with gender parity.

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[10] These figures were generated based on UNESCO's mathematical formula for calculating the economic impact of illiteracy (Martinez, R. and Fernandez, P., 2010)

Addressing adult illiteracy will require strong political will on the part of governments to strengthen policies, increase financial investments, scale-up existing programmes and fast track their implementation to reach out to adult illiterates, particularly female and disadvantaged learners. As this costing exercise has shown, a significantly higher level of investment is needed to address female illiteracy and to make gender parity in literacy a reality across countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

## Literacy Costing Methodology

The literacy costing methodology built on two studies: "Adult Literacy – A New Fast Track Initiative?" by David Archer (n.d.), and "The Costs of Dakar Goal 4 for Developing and LIFE Countries" by Jan van Ravens and Carlos Aggio (2006). The benchmarks established in the Global Campaign for Education/ActionAid International (GCE/AAI) study "Writing the Wrongs" also provided relevant parameters in the cost computation. (ActionAid International and Global Campaign for Education, 2005)

The costing study entailed the following steps:
• Estimating the number of adult illiterates that must be served in order to meet the EFA target on adult literacy.
• Determining the unit cost of implementing an appropriate adult literacy program for each country in the region.
• Factoring a premium cost for adult female learners
• Generating the total cost per country based on the unit cost and the estimated number of illiterates that must be addressed.

*Estimating the target number of adult illiterates*

The target number of adult illiterates, disaggregated by gender, is estimated using the literacy data culled from UNESCO's EFA Global Monitoring Reports and the database of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) for base year 2000 and for the latest available data. The data were sourced by UNESCO primarily from official national reports although estimates were also generated for certain countries where data for specific years are not available.

Based on these data, estimates were derived for each country to determine the number of male and female illiterates that must be reached to meet the EFA target of reducing illiteracy by 50 per cent and achieving gender parity in literacy by 2015.

*Determining the unit cost of an appropriate quality literacy programme*

The estimated unit cost per year of delivering appropriate quality literacy courses to adult illiterates were derived for each country based on the benchmarks (ActionAid International and Global Campaign for Education. 2005, pp. 1-3) and the Van Ravens/Aggio costing study (Ravens and Aggio, 2006), specifically the following:
• Facilitators should be paid at least the equivalent of the minimum wage of a primary school teacher for all hours worked.

- The literacy programme should adopt a ratio of at least one facilitator to 30 learners and at least one trainer or supervisor to 15 learner groups.
- A good quality literacy programme will require at least three years—two for initial learning, plus another one to ensure that further learning opportunities are available to all.
- Using the Van Ravens/Aggio approach, the cost per learner is estimated as a percentage of per capita GNI of the particular country.

The Van Ravens and Aggio literacy costing study (Ravens and Aggio, 2006, p.10) used the following parameters for the "Standard Variant" in estimating the unit cost for Asia and the Arab States:

| | |
|---|---|
| Instructional time needed to acquire a basic level of mastery | 400 hours |
| Instructor's annual salary Asia and Arab States (IAS) | 3 times average per capita GNI |
| Working hours per year | 1800 |
| Number of courses an instructor can deliver per year (NC) | 4 |
| % of instructors salary on total cost (WC/TC) | 70% |
| Group size (GS) | 20 |

The unit cost per year for delivering literacy programmes was derived by using these parameters according to the formula below which yields the value equivalent to 0.053 times per capita GNI.[11]

$$Unit\ Cost = [IAS/NC] * [1/(WC/TC)] * [1/GS]$$

*Factoring a premium cost for female adult learners*

A higher unit cost for female adult learners is assumed to factor in the added cost of reaching out to women learners, including the needed support system and incentives to complete the literacy course. For the current exercise, a premium of 20 per cent is added to the cost of delivering literacy programmes to adult female learners. The 20 per cent premium is based on a few examples of incentive programmes for girls to improve gender equity in education. Thus, two unit costs were used in this exercise: the basic unit cost for male learners and the premium unit cost for female learners.

*Generating the total and annual cost per country of an appropriate quality literacy programme*

The annual cost of implementing an appropriate quality literacy program is computed by simply multiplying the units cost for male and female learners with the estimated target number of male and female illiterates to achieve the EFA literacy targets. This computation reflects the cost of implementing the program for one year. Since the benchmarks specify that at least three years is required to ensure a quality literacy programme, the total cost is derived by multiplying the annual cost by 3 years. Plotting the costing estimate to meet the EFA target by 2015, the annual expenditure is generated for years 2013, 2014 and 2015.

The annual expenditure level for implementing an appropriate quality literacy programme per country is compared with the current level of education expenditure to assess the internal capability and external support needed to achieve the EFA literacy targets.

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[11] For the complete and detailed explanation of the methodology used in deriving the unit cost, readers can consult the study done by Van Ravens and Aggio (2006).

# KEY FINDINGS:
## GAPS, DISPARITIES AND BARRIERS

Globally and regionally, historic strides have been made over the last three decades to formally secure high-level government commitments to achieving universal education and literacy. In turn, these developments have led to more states building enabling policy environments for literacy and education through the enactment of various policies and laws. The four countries in this study, for instance, though in varying degrees of compliance with international commitments, have domestic legislation and other policy measures in place towards a fuller enjoyment of the right to education and literacy by their populations.

The findings of this study in the four focus countries however, show much cause for alarm, particularly where women's and girls' rights to literacy and education are concerned. Across all four country studies, there are social, cultural, political and economic barriers that seriously hamper implementation of obligations and commitments to literacy and education. For women and girls, barriers are especially thick with discriminatory socio-cultural factors that intersect with disadvantaged political-economic positions, causing millions among them to fall through the cracks of slow-paced, gender-blind interventions. As findings show, girls and women in India, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea still have less access to formal education and have a higher incidence of illiteracy as compared to boys and men. The Philippines is the exception, having reached gender parity in education, but functional literacy remains an

urgent issue for marginalised groups such as indigenous, Moro and rural-urban poor communities.

Literacy rates have gone up in India, with the female rate increasing faster than the male. However, hundreds of millions of non-literate women remain and the gender gap persists at more than 20 per cent especially among such disadvantaged groups as the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. In Indonesia as well, a significant gender gap still exists even as literacy levels were generally improving as of 2010. Women were found to comprise up to 64 per cent of illiterates, with the 45-year old group accounting for the highest number. A similar trend mars 10 years of generally decreasing illiteracy in PNG. From 1990-2000, gender disparities persisted both at the provincial and national levels, with 40 per cent of its 20 provinces having less than 50 per cent literate women.

These gaps call in question the effectiveness of major, large-scale literacy campaigns and programmes conducted specifically in India and Indonesia in at least the last four decades. Inspired by the wealth of evidence proving the benefits to both individuals and societies of literate women, governments had launched these programmes and campaigns. Sadly though, they failed to meet their goals in the unrelenting growth of women illiterates as shown by largely unchanging figures in the past 20 years. The donor-driven, government-led and top-down approaches nature of these interventions is frequently associated with the paucity of substantive gains.

All four countries, the Philippines included, commonly report the greatest presence of women illiterates in the poorest households that locate in remote rural areas where the provision of social services is not prioritised and access exceedingly difficult. Other women who had some level of formal education were constrained from completion because of socio-cultural and economic barriers in their youth. With little or no adult learning courses made available to them, many eventually relapsed to illiteracy. Gender-based discrimination remains deeply embedded in other social spheres, such that positive learning outcomes in countries like the Philippines where gender parity in education access and literacy has been reached, face serious threats of being eroded later in women's lives.

National governments of all the four countries have signed and ratified international agreements and made official policy declarations in harmonising domestic policies and laws. However, with the exception of India, there is little evidence to show sufficient appreciation of the need for broad, wide-scale, systematised and sustained literacy efforts and their importance to women. The Philippines is one case where literacy programmes for vulnerable women and communities with high incidence of poverty remain an imperative despite high literacy rates and achievement of gender parity in education. The participatory action research of E-Net



Community consultation with adult women in Chimbu Province, PNG (ASPBAE)

All four countries, the Philippines included, commonly report the greatest presence of women illiterates in the poorest households that locate in remote rural areas where the provision of social services is not prioritised and access exceedingly difficult.

Though many of the international instruments have found expression in national legislation, poor implementation of programmes to realise what they promise generally continues to plague all four countries.

Philippines showed that indigenous, impoverished, Moro and urban poor women have been denied access to literacy and education. While the Philippine government has committed itself to functional literacy for all and amidst active volunteerism in the country, adult illiteracy rates of women (and men) in difficult circumstances remain high. In the Philippines, save for the creation of a national literacy coordinating council, no substantive developments can be cited to show that literacy remains a serious educational or developmental concern, particularly for traditionally marginalised groups and communities. In Indonesia, implementation targets of literacy programmes lack the necessary gender-focused indicators.

Though many of the international instruments have found expression in national legislation, poor implementation of programmes to realise what they promise generally continues to plague all four countries. Coordination among state and non-state agencies and institutions involved in literacy remains poor and inconsistent. Moreover, the development of gender-sensitive and learner-centred programmes and other interventions for greater relevance and effectiveness are far from adequate. Minimal and insufficient budgetary commitments further aggravate these conditions. Local governments in Indonesia and the Philippines have mandates and resources to accelerate literacy campaigns targeting women, but these are often superseded by other local priorities.

Where there are high literacy deficits in Indonesia, India and PNG, targets in improving literacy are not being met, and in cases where literacy has improved, disparities between genders stubbornly endure, and may even have widened. The same holds true in the area of formal education where attempts at broadening access to basic formal education in the four countries have been exerted but gender gaps still exist in education and literacy.

In a region such as Asia-Pacific, with vastly diverse cultures, traditions and languages, sensitivity to differences in ethnicity become critically important. There are cases, for instance, of groups losing interest in attending learning activities using the official state language. In PNG for example, with over 800 languages spoken by its people, strong political commitment is needed to ensure that disadvantaged groups are reached in the context of low completion and transition to secondary school (PNG DoE, 2004a). Parents interviewed in the four countries generally believe that with scarce resources and little government support, educating sons rather than daughters is a more worthy investment. There is little to show thus far that this trend will soon be reversed. In India, parents ask girls to stop attending school for safety concerns given the distances of school from home and a lack of financial resources; boys, on the other hand, drop out of school for lack of interest.

Women who drop out of school and get married hardly ever get the opportunity to pursue their education later in life. Parents in Indonesia usually invoke religious teachings and uphold cultural norms on the place of women in society as 'moral benchmarks'. This means that women should primarily keep to their domestic duties, activities which do not necessarily require having a formal education. Among the indigenous peoples and informal settlers in the Philippines, many parents believe that despite widening roles in the economic domain, women are still better positioned to carry out domestic responsibilities. This contributes to entrenching views that women do not need as much education as men who have to work outside the home for a living. As experienced in PNG, parents continue to prioritise boys for schooling over girls, on the assumption that they will be the family income earners in the future. Similar to India, women in PNG rarely get a second chance at becoming literate.

# BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S LITERACY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

Why then does illiteracy among women remain a serious education and developmental challenge for developing nations, as exemplified by the four countries in this study? Barriers to female education and literacy are found not only in the home, but in school and in the workplace, and in society at large. These reflect society's prejudicial and stereotypical attitudes towards women, stemming from the non- or lowly valuation of women's work and contributions to society, and which in turn leads to their marginalisation and exclusion.

## Poverty and other economic-related reasons

Poverty underpins women's lack of access to education in general and to literacy in particular, in all four countries in the study. For a time, in their childhood, they accessed the free public education system, but eventually their families could no longer afford related costs such as food and transportation, and even bigger 'hidden' expenses and fees, such as uniforms, school supplies and projects. Parents would even be asked for 'compulsory donations' or subsidies to pay for facilities and equipment that schools themselves could not afford to purchase or maintain.

As resources shrink in poor households, education becomes a privilege for which boys are prioritised, in the belief that they will be the breadwinners while girls will be homemakers. Poor households also need to protect girls from threats of sexual violence on their way to

and from school, and end up shelling more of their limited resources for secure transportation. Girls in these circumstances discontinue school even before they can attain the knowledge and skills necessary for them to fully claim and enjoy rights and entitlements later in life.

More frequently, women and girls disproportionately absorb the consequences of changes in family circumstances, such as the death or illness of a breadwinner. When a parent gets sick or dies, there appears to be a socio-culturally higher expectation from girls to make the sacrifice of dropping out of school to be able to assume responsibilities left behind, such as caring for younger siblings and sick or elderly family members. Many of the mothers who were not able to attend or finish school tend to prod their daughters into a similar course, dissuading them from pursuing an education. Interestingly, while both Filipino boys and girls cited poverty as a factor for dropping out of school, more boys added 'lack of interest' as a reason for not finishing their schooling.

Poverty, being an encompassing condition, further depresses the quality of learning environments, which includes not only the availability of time and physical space, but also the existence of a nurturing family atmosphere. In poor communities and households, where spaces are cramped and congested, and parents who are usually of little education themselves spend much of their time in trying to eke out a living, these non-tangible but important resources are much wanting. Other poverty-related reasons for dropping out include distance of schools from pupils' homes and pressures to mobilise all family members, including children, in income-generating activities to augment household incomes.

## Language and Ethnicity

Low female education generally attends membership in socially excluded or marginalised groups or classes whose participation in schooling is severely hampered by discrimination.

Socially and economically disadvantaged groups such as the Scheduled Castes and Tribes[12] in India experience gender gaps in literacy of 24 per cent, lower than the national average of 20 per cent. PNG, with an estimated population of 5.5 million in 2010, pegged illiteracy at about 43 per cent of people aged 15 years and over; disaggregated by region, the proportion of the illiterate population was found much higher in mountainous and hard-to-reach areas where indigenous and ethnic groups reside (SPC, 2011 and PNG DoE, 2008). In the Philippines, living with discrimination results in parents themselves setting up the constraints.
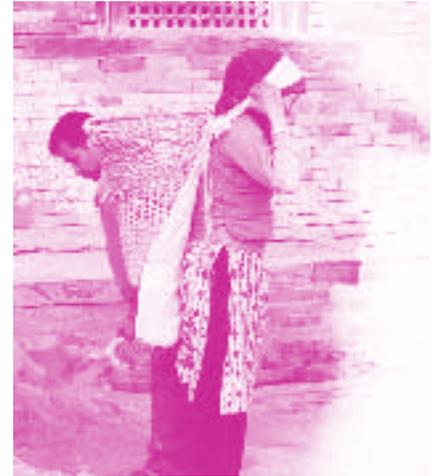


Nepali woman struggles for a living for her family (ASPBAE)

**Poverty, being an encompassing condition, further depresses the quality of learning environments, which includes not only the availability of time and physical space, but also the existence of a nurturing family atmosphere.**

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[12] Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) are Indian population groupings that are explicitly recognised by the constitution of India and are eligible for certain affirmative action measures, previously called the depressed classes by the British. SCs are also known as *dalits* (or so called "untouchables") and STs are referred to as *Adivasis*.

Community women in a Mahila Shikshan Kendra (MSK)
literacy class in India (Nirantar)

The indigenous *T'boli* tribe in Southern Mindanao, for example, discourage girls from attending formal schooling in fear that they will be abused or made fun of by pupils from lowland communities.

Girls in these communities or classes are doubly disadvantaged than those in the general population. Having less contact with the external environment (as social customs often dictate) than boys, girls are found to be usually more uncomfortable in the dominant language. Adding to the difficulties is the non-utilisation and non-recognition of the mother tongue of ethnic communities.

### Greater Costs of Educating Girls and Women—Perceived or Real

While direct costs such as tuition and miscellaneous fees are the same for both boys and girls, actual expenses turn out much higher for girls due to the impositions of society and culture. Muslim families in Indonesia, for example, further shoulder additional indirect costs for girl students in terms of providing culturally compliant modes of dress and appearance. In all four countries, parents have to spend more on transportation to ensure the safety of girls going to and returning from school.

Further, since adult education and literacy are not considered priority social programmes, they are simply seen as time and opportunity taken away from other activities deemed more productive or useful. Specifically for women, time spent on education and literacy is considered time lost from performing traditional domestic roles. The belief that it is better for women and their households if they stayed home then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Since women's domestic work is given more (albeit unpaid) value, spending time away from home and in getting an education appear in the accounting as opportunities lost, not as investments gained for a better future. In this manner, women also self-inhibit from accessing education and/or literacy opportunities, or pursuing higher learning.

The saying 'why water the plants in another garden?' illustrates, for example, how women are discouraged from attending school because they are bound to marry anyway and move into another household. This attitude female education is viewed as an opportunity loss and thus, a bad investment.

While poverty and economic-related factors figure as the dominant reason for children dropping out of school, boys appear to be still more favoured by their parents to finish school as is apparent in all four country studies. The same holds for adult women who did not complete schooling and have not attended any form of adult education; as tradition holds, there is no sound rationale for them to return to school as their role and status in the family and in the community do not require knowledge and skills acquired from literacy or having an education.

*While direct costs such as tuition and miscellaneous fees are the same for both boys and girls, actual expenses turn out much higher for girls due to the impositions of society and culture.*

## Marriage, Early Marriage and Teenage Pregnancies

The institution of marriage adds another layer of disabling conditions to women's literacy and access to education. It is often the case that after girls leave school or forego adult education classes to bring up a family, opportunities to continue learning become very scarce. In India, girls are pulled out of their own birth families to marry and serve a husband and his family. Many of these young female learners often fail to pursue their learning and education beyond the government-sponsored residential literacy program Mahila Samakhya because of domestic burdens that they solely bear. Female learners find little support for further education from in-laws who may not also have benefited from an education, and who support socio-cultural norms limiting women's roles to the domestic sphere. The gender bias is similarly stacked against Filipino girls in school who become pregnant and end up giving up on their education to take care of their children; fathers are not subjected to the same socio-cultural expectations and still have more options open to them, such as continuing their education or finding employment. In communities with few organised literacy classes for adult women, women tend to relapse to illiteracy. Similarly, in Indonesia, a significant number of young women drop out of school due to early marriage, which is known to severely constrict opportunities of accessing a second chance to pursue their education.

Many indigenous tribal communities scattered across the region still observe the practice of fixed or arranged child marriages, which has been shown in all four countries as causing the premature removal of adolescent girls from school. Further, in countries with dowries, education increases a girl's dowry price which can result in reducing her options for a marriage partner. It is thus hardly surprising that many women remain illiterate their entire lives.

For various mutually reinforcing reasons, early marriages are also prevalent among non-indigenous/ethnic rural communities, especially in remote areas. A daughter given away in early marriage means a poor household has fewer mouths to feed, while another gains in additional unpaid labour power. This finds support in deeply rooted traditional notions of women's destiny and roles, which gender-tracks girls into marriage and motherhood.

In more urbanising communities, early marriage can often be the consequence of unplanned pregnancies (linked to limited information on reproductive health) and the cultural compulsion to save face for the family of the girl. Other adolescent girls elope to escape violent homes or conditions of poverty, only to find their domestic roles unchanged and their education options further constrained in their husbands' households,

In communities with few organised literacy classes for adult women, women tend to relapse to illiteracy.



T'boli women in a literacy training programme in Lake Sebu, Mindanao, Philippines (Popular Education for Peoples' Empowerment [PEPE])

The potential of education to empower women is strongly suggested in the experience of Indian women attending literacy classes where they also learn to understand the issue of VAW and the rights and legal processes they can claim to defend themselves against it.

especially when they become young mothers. Though not insurmountable, these circumstances are difficult to overcome and add to the many disincentives for young women to return to their schooling. Years of care-labour in the home, and in child-bearing and rearing eventually pile up such that by the time they gain more time for themselves, they are held back from returning to school by their age. Programmes that offer second chance of going back to school varies from dim to dimmer for many women in the four countries in this study, and may be, for the most part, nil for women in India and PNG.

## Violence against Women (VAW)

Many women who have completed or have started attending literacy programmes share a common experience of domestic violence that they face daily. The disabling effects of VAW on women's capacity for communication, participation and social interaction in various activities, learning processes included, are well documented. The stories from India and the Philippines evince the comparatively greater vulnerabilities of illiterate women to male authority figures, such as partners/husbands, fathers, brothers, male in-laws, public officials, etc., who exercise domination and control through various means, from economic deprivation to verbal, physical and sexual abuse, including marital rape.

Imposing both mental and physical restraints to their mobility and inflicting untold damage to their self-esteem, VAW figures frequently among the factors causing girls and women to drop out of school or totally forego school and adult learning opportunities. For young girls, domestic violence frequently crops up as a reason for running away from home and whatever limited opportunity exists for an education. They move into new situations of precarity, as portrayed for instance by Filipino girls who are trafficked for domestic work in urban centres or for sexual slavery.

The potential of education to empower women is strongly suggested in the experience of Indian women attending literacy classes where they also learn to understand the issue of VAW and the rights and legal processes they can claim to defend themselves against it. In these safe spaces, they openly shared their experiences of domestic violence and other forms of abuse in other social institutions. They learned from each other's narratives of negotiating the issue or speaking out against violence. By their continued attendance in adult literacy classes, they constituted the political act of resisting VAW. Some, especially the older ones, took further steps of intervening outright in episodes of VAW in their villages or by directly seeking assistance from local agencies.

Women's efforts to empower themselves almost always invite backlash, and attempts to access education or simply improvement of literacy skills are no exception. Tolerance to domestic violence has also been observed to lessen as women gain in literacy, which could lead to challenging unequal power relations at home and threatening the position of the dominant male abuser. Anecdotal evidence depicts such women being subjected to increased frequency and intensity of VAW by spouses or partners and other dominant male family members. The triggers for the abuse are limitless, from changes in dress and appearance as women venture out of the home and defaulting on traditional chores, to speaking more assertively and expressing opinions.

The challenge for women-focused literacy programmes is to break gender-based assumptions about women and men and surface how these promote and perpetuate inequalities in women's lives. Truly women-empowering literacy programmes greatly value not only imparting the standard functional skills but developing critical thinking about their lives and the world around them. They must also take into account the risk of continuing or graver acts of violence against these women and ensure the provision of support services or mechanisms to respond to or combat the same. Literacy teachers take on more expansive roles than regular schoolteachers. In their interest as well as their students', they need to be equipped with the knowledge and understanding of women's rights, laws and the legal recourse open to women, gender-sensitive or feminist counselling skills and other basic competencies to deal with VAW-related psycho-social trauma and stress.

Truly women-empowering literacy programmes greatly value not only imparting the standard functional skills but developing critical thinking about their lives and the world around them.

# INCREASING OPTIONS, IMPROVING LIVES THROUGH LITERACY

Notwithstanding the barriers to and costs of literacy for women, countries such as India, Indonesia, Philippines and PNG report benefits gained by adult women learners, their families and communities from participation in adult literacy programmes. These foreground the potential for greater development contributions from scaled-up, predictable, sustained and well-funded interventions in adult literacy.

At the household level, acquired skills in reading, comprehension, writing and computing added significantly to women's confidence in going about their daily tasks, such as assisting children in their homework, recording expenses, figuring out utility bills and making various transactions. They could also understand and respond to letters, keep abreast of news in the papers, follow signs and directions, appreciate religious books, and the like. They shared a high interest in topics concerning health and social studies because of the relevance to their lives and their children's.

Women attending literacy classes in India and the Philippines reported improved self-image and sense of self-worth. They held such strengthening of self-esteem with as much value as advancements in income and social

Pasig Barangay (Village) Volunteers Inc. (PBVI) is an all-women organisation based in Pasig City, one of the 16 cities of Metro Manila earning high revenues from commercial and industrial districts. Yet more than a third of the city's population locates in informal settlements or slums and urban poor communities.

PBVI works to address women's concerns, specifically their literacy and livelihood needs. In 2009, PBVI organised Alternative Learning System (ALS) classes exclusively for women. Thirty-eight learners came, of whom two-thirds or 26 were women 50 to 84 years old. More than half had managed to reach only Grade II some four decades ago. They told a familiar story of rural poverty forcing them to try their luck in Manila, which had a familiar ending in poverty, exploitation and misery at the hands of unscrupulous business establishments and abusive employers in the city.

The ALS classes were held twice a week for 10 months to prepare learners for the Accreditation and Equivalency Examination. Literacy classes were also held twice a week for 10 months to teach learners basic reading and writing skills while livelihood skills training were held twice a week for three weeks where participants choose the skills they want to learn. Among the skills being taught are sewing, haircutting, laundry and soap making, cooking and baking, and making cleaning rags.

The women participated actively in these classes. They learned to read instructions and street signs, follow directions, write their names to avail of government programmes, and for many, to exercise their right to vote for the first time. They said the ALS classes gave them a sense of independence, having learned skills to sustain themselves and perhaps even support children and grandchildren, as well as greater control and responsibility over their actions and decisions.

status. Moreover, they linked it to the growth of other capacities, which includes the ability to reason out and assert themselves at home and in seeking assistance from institutions such as hospitals. They sensed that household members and neighbours began holding them in higher degree of regard and taking them more seriously. Increasingly, they found their own voice – now heard in various spaces, beyond the first 'public' space of the literacy class.

Being literate further opened opportunities for social interaction at the community level, which in turn resulted in these women gaining access to information and to social/political institutions such as banks, health centres, local governments and schools, in connection with different needs such as finding a job, participating in civic action, engaging in public discussions, taking leadership roles in organisations, voting and holding public office, or just generally claiming entitlements and rights.

Mahila Samakhya or "education for women's equality" is a programme of the Government of India under the Ministry of Human Resources Development. It started as a pilot project in 10 districts in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Karnataka from 1988-1989 . Today, it is a nationwide programme covering nearly all less developed districts, or 30,000 villages in 10 states. Drawn up by feminist activities, the Programme's blueprint has some unique aspects. It defines education very broadly, entrusting agenda-setting in the hands of poor, rural women who are after all the main constituency of the intervention, and providing a space for women's organisations to collaborate with the Programme. It looks at education as an empowering tool and as a process for women to validate their own knowledge, think critically, question and analyse their lived experiences, and demand and access information and skills needed for them to plan and act collectively around their agenda for change. The Programme has been in operation for two decades now and has contributed significantly towards greater understanding of the linkages between literacy, education and empowerment and developing alternative models for women's education.

However, while these women may have gained awareness about domestic violence or access to further education, the lack or inadequacy of social support still makes it more difficult for them to actually improve their lives. Community organisations and women's groups should mediate between learning and critical awareness and its translation into individual and/or collective emancipation and action.

In the Philippines, adult learning sessions provided women from informal settlers' communities, a bridge to participate in alternative learning systems, both to gain credentials in a formal school system and learn livelihood-related skills. They had given up on the lost years of formal schooling in the past and many even relapsed to illiteracy, but through literacy classes, they found a vehicle to learn new skills that increased capacities for productive livelihoods or employment to improve their lives. India's residential literacy programme provided women learners access to work and livelihoods, resulting in their local employment as NGO workers, public officials, journalists, hand pump mechanics and implementers themselves of education programmes. Learners are also part of self-help groups and community-based collectives addressing issues of VAW and caste-based violence. Some women were not able to pursue adult learning after their literacy programmes, but other women in their family and community whom they succeeded in inspiring, moved on to continue and complete secondary school and college education.

India's experience of enhancing literacy classes with supportive interventions related, among others, to health and nutrition, livelihoods,

and understanding and enforcement of laws proved effective. It may be argued that many of these classes reinforced their traditional roles as wives and mothers, but these are far outweighed by the benefits gained in developing a sense of dignity, acquiring self-esteem, finding meaning and a greater purpose in their lives – elements that may also lead to a deeper self-consciousness about their position as women, and the ability to question and challenge gender-biased expectations and roles.

# LITERACY FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Gender biases differ in their intensity and specific forms from one context to another but in current societies the world over, they generally exist everywhere and affect all aspects and stages of women's lives. Women are caught in this host of gender-based prejudices, experiencing their adverse effects in varying degrees at home, in school, at work, in their communities and society at large.

In the four developing countries under study, gender-based discrimination intersects with other layers of disadvantage such as poverty and ethnicity, and contributes to inflicting more damaging impact among poor women and households. Typically restricted by entrenched cultural norms to non-valuated/ unpaid social reproductive work, they occupy socially lower and subordinate positions to men.

Over the years, gains in women's rights advocacy have started to erode discriminatory stereotypes. Rising economic growth of some developing countries and the pursuit of the lowest wages possible have also conceded openings for women in the workplace. However, in many communities in the region and the four countries in the study, educating women continues to be viewed as a threat to what is deemed their highest and only purpose in life; women's identities and roles continue to be circumscribed by the institutions of marriage, motherhood and family.

Thus, even with strides made in codifying women's rights to education and in the provision of literacy programmes, other barriers come into play and keep them from pursuing them or from receiving the same benefits from education as men.

The India country study showed that while a majority of girls or women who succeed in completing a basic literacy course move to formal schooling, many were still unable to go beyond the primary level because of the responsibilities attached to their roles as wives and mothers. In the Philippines, illiterate older women interviewed for the study recounted that despite their industry in study and their desire to go to school, they had to drop out of school in their younger years because of family role expectations and/or because of the demands of married life. It would appear that marriage and children almost always took away their right to pursue education, and for that matter, even learning. In Indonesia, sending off girls in marriage at an early age has become a way of saving on 'unnecessary' educational expenses and alleviating poverty. The practice is rationalised further by the stigma attached to unmarried older women.

The observed rise in intensity and frequency of domestic violence and VAW experienced by women participating in literacy courses exposes grossly asymmetrical power relations within households and the challenge that these women mount through the assertion of their rights. So threatened, abusive male authority figures retaliate the only way they know how. VAW further exacerbates the low self-esteem observed among women who have wholly internalised sex-role expectations and attributions, dampening aspirations to pursue further learning or complete schooling interrupted by marriage or pregnancy.

Nonetheless, adult literacy programmes, as experiences of women from the various countries exhibit, allowed a personal transformation of the attitudes and perceptions of adult women learners, from a docile and subservient acceptance of their role and status in their families and communities, to an active search for more meaningful ways of participating in decision-making and earning a living. They paved the way for opening mindsets previously bound by male-privileging, discriminatory traditions. In the process of acquiring functional literacy skills, women learners also used the space provided by adult learning programmes to find their voice and heal themselves. They may not have totally freed themselves from conditions of subordination and helplessness, but by claiming their rights through participation in these programmes, they are certainly moving in the direction of their empowerment.

Literacy programmes designed along rights-based and gender-aware lines thus hold transformative and empowering potential to frame female illiteracy and lack of access to education as a political and systemic problem of inequitable power relations and control. The impunity with which certain countries ignore and violate their international commitments to realising the promises of EFA, the MDGs, CEDAW, ICESCR and other instruments demands stronger actions and higher ambitions to progressively change the patriarchal cultures and oppressive structure that impede women's literacy and keep them in poverty. This is no easy task but one that literacy programmes already shows potential for.

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# TOWARDS A COMMON AGENDA ON LITERACY FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

The United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) plan stresses that '[l] iteracy policies and programmes today require going beyond the limited view of literacy that has dominated in the past. Literacy for all requires a renewed vision of literacy which will foster cultural identity, democratic participation and citizenship, tolerance and respect for others, social development, peace and progress' (UNESCO, 2001, para. 8). In a globalising world, it then becomes an imperative for everyone to learn new and innovative forms of addressing the old and chronic problem of illiteracy.

As seen from the country studies, constraints to women's and girls' enjoyment of their rights to education and literacy and the benefits generating therefrom, exist at all levels, from the personal and the public, the family and the community to the state and society. They are comprehensive in nature and implicate other violations of rights in

the economic and socio-cultural spheres. Any reform agenda therefore, that aims to close wide gender gaps in literacy and education, and realise these rights, must give the eradication of these obstacles its highest priority.

## At the community level

Greater ownership and participation of the community in literacy programmes for women and girls must be encouraged through sustained and widespread awareness campaigns and community mobilisations, especially to promote female literacy and education. If implemented successfully at the community level, women learners themselves, and the men as well, can bring the initiative forward by highlighting the importance of educating their children, especially girls, and inspiring other women in the family and the community to access education and literacy opportunities. As the experience in India demonstrates, adult women learners took the lead after completing literacy course to organise community women around literacy concerns. Community organising and mobilisation remain key and central strategies in the process of progressively dismantling cultural barriers to female education and literacy.

Moreover, adult education classes sponsored at the community level must always assess and determine as baseline the literacy capacities of women. Be they livelihood-related, law or policy-based, health or sanitation-focused, literacy can be made an integral component of adult women's continuing learning. Thematic literacies, as this type of literacy approach is called, have been found to be more effective to and relevant for women learners.

Support must be assured for older women who come for literacy classes. These may be in the form of child care while they attend literacy courses, income-generating skills training or enterprise development and gender-aware counselling, especially for those in abusive homes or whose families are not too supportive or resist their efforts.

It is also at the community level where collaborative work with civil society organisations and local governments can be harnessed and maximised. Partnerships can be forged around formulating in participatory ways, viable and innovative strategies to create an enabling environment for girls' and women's education and for literacy programmes to meet their intended outcomes.

Literacy programmes, whether for women and men in the community, must in general be responsive to local conditions and to the needs and interests of the learners. They must also be participatory in processes and gender-sensitive in content. Learning environments and process must increase, and not diminish, women's sense of control and power over their

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Adults take part in a literacy class in PNG (ASPBAE)

**The groundswell of advocacy for adult education within the broader perspective of lifelong learning can only have substance if it is built from strong foundations on the ground.**

lives and their aspirations. As such, they should provide women ways of moving to more formal learning opportunities, if they so desire. The eight-month residential literacy programme in India developed in the early 90s as a response to illiteracy is now a well-accepted model in the Saakstar Bharat program.

Measures must be taken as well at the community level for women to access more opportunities for earning income and accessing other productive resources such as information, credit, technology and inputs. Livelihood-related programmes aiming to increase women's capacities to generate and mobilise their own income can be further enhanced by including a component on literacy.

At the same time, literacy must seamlessly incorporate sensitive examination of culture and tradition and an awareness of gender-based inequities and forms of discrimination that stifle women's creativity. The PNG study underscores this vital learning point.

Integral to undertaking literacy campaigns and programmes is the need to strengthen and build up capacities of local institutions such as local governments and district-level schools, not only for program implementation but more strategically, for direction-setting, planning and policy-making.

The effective implementation of literacy programmes integrated with service programmes for the poor and the marginalised communities also require strong collaborative links and partnerships with private and non-governmental sectors. Thematic literacy programmes, integrating women's education and literacy in community organising, health education, livelihoods and enterprise development, paralegal training, and other actions of civil society organisations can be adopted. Positive results from Indian CSOs' wide use of thematic programmes validate the effectiveness of these approaches.

Building well-grounded networks, alliances and people's movements at the national and regional levels is possible only through vibrant and sustained community organising. The groundswell of advocacy for adult education within the broader perspective of lifelong learning can only have substance if it is built from strong foundations on the ground. Integral in this advocacy is public financing for women's literacy and meaningful participation in the local and national budgeting processes of governments.

### At the national level

Providing and ensuring female education and literacy is a public service and it delivers tremendous public goods. Direct and immediate costs should thus be considered investments in developing citizens actively

participating in development and in building better futures for all. It is thus incumbent on the government, as duty-bearer with public resources at its command, to ensure that all children get the proper education and that no one is left out for reasons of poverty, ethnicity, social status and any other form of cultural barrier. Lifelong learning and education should be made easily available to adults, men and women alike, in the pursuit of their aspirations in life.

Universalising basic education in the Asia-Pacific region has certainly made many steps forward in increasing the number of children in school and in reducing the number of illiterates over time. However, while policies and issuances have been formulated, financing and institutional reforms remain too inadequate to truly improve the quality and benefits of education. In addition, work must be done on integrating adult learning and education in the overall educational policy framework.

There is a need for more strategic, systematised and affirmative actions from governments. This should be differentiated, however, from the urgent need to set policy and implement actions directly targeting girls' schooling and women's literacy where gender imbalances are stark or cultural barriers to female education remain strong. Clear incentives must be provided in the form of subsidies, for example, to encourage the participation of households.

Policies introduced must encourage and provide incentives as well for community mobilisation and participation in literacy campaigns and programmes. These can be integrated in overarching national policies and programmes addressing other development issues such as income generation, enterprise development or skills development with the aim of alleviating poverty.

Policies that increase women's ability to participate in the labour force with greater continuity, adequate social protection and better compensated work encourage increased female participation in education and formal productive work. They could also change expectations about girls' futures and help them to free themselves from being gender-tracked into traditional and discriminatory roles. Policies like these can potentially raise private returns to investing in girls' education. Anti-discrimination measures will have to be instituted to expand employment opportunities for women, as well as provision of subsidies for childcare to make it easier for women to engage in well-remunerated formal employment. This may mean expanding the definitions of literacy and its desired outcomes to include learning vocational skills training and income generating activities.

Efforts at the national level for the development of women-focused literacy programmes must ensure their relevance to and use

**Policies that increase women's ability to participate in the labour force with greater continuity, adequate social protection and better compensated work encourage increased female participation in education and formal productive work.**

**Literacy campaigns need to confront the caste, class and patriarchal structures that work against the illiterate.**

in local contexts, gender-sensitivity and appropriateness to learners' lives and needs.

Literacy campaigns need to confront the caste, class and patriarchal structures that work against the illiterate. Literacy can be organised around actions addressing community issues such as land, water and sanitation, health and nutrition, child care and development, and legal issues. Nirantar's approach of thematic literacies in India is a perfect example of effectively contextualizing campaign strategies to the conditions and interests of socially excluded castes where literacy is lowest. In the thematic literacy approach, women learned basic literacy skills through a specific theme or subject of study that are relevant, practical and useful to their daily lives. These may cover such areas as livelihood development, paralegal training (e.g., on laws to protect and claim land and workers' rights, access justice in relation to VAW, etc.)

If women are to be targeted as the primary learners in literacy programmes, care must be taken to design literacy courses that can easily be adjusted according to the pace and the time allocation of the women concerned. Grassroots women are not only income-poor but are also time-poor. Conditions must be enabling enough to encourage and allow their participation in learning activities that can broaden their choices, increase their options and strengthen their capacities.

Additionally, girls and women can also benefit from integrating discussions on sexuality, sexual and reproductive health and rights in their literacy programmes. Providing health information and services promoting reproductive health services should also be part of interventions addressing the problem of early marriages and teenage pregnancies.

A great source of women's vulnerability to sexual violence and discrimination lies in their lack of control (or men's control) over their bodies and their sexuality. Awareness of one's sexual and reproductive rights is one step towards being able to determine freely and responsibly the exercise of her reproductive capacities, which includes the timing and number of children, and the very decision whether or not to bear children. Ensuring national legislation and implementing guidelines that recognise and protect reproductive health and rights is another way forward, as these ensure the provision of public funds for poor women who have the highest unmet needs for reproductive health care services. It then becomes important that men and boys in the community are included in awareness building efforts that aside from integrating literacy, aim for greater gender equality.

The use of appropriate and accessible technology can be explored as an alternative means for bringing adult learners together in a learning circle. Distance education media such as radio, television and social

networks can be more cost-effective in delivering lessons to hard-to-reach or hard-to-convene groups of individuals who may have competing home and work responsibilities that make consistent attendance to a fixed hour and time impossible.

# OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Achieving adult literacy remains a major challenge in the Asia-Pacific region, but within it, a bigger and persistent challenge stands out – addressing the gender variances that translate to millions of non-literate women and girls. Globally and domestically, consensus has been reached on literacy and education as critical to their survival, and on lifelong learning as key to their overall well-being and development. These are also well-recognised rights protected and guaranteed by many core human rights treaties, and recognised as crucial to the development of communities and the national polity. The exigency of effectively eradicating women's and girls' illiteracy cannot be doubly emphasised. More integrated and holistic approaches to female literacy and education must be adopted to address the interconnected development issues and concerns that women continue to be burdened with. So too must they aim to respond to the vast diversity of women learners in the region, in terms of age, ethnicity, socio-economic status and language. For women, literacy serves a wider purpose that goes beyond practical and functional purposes. Literacy in their hands has been proven to be a tool for individual autonomy and empowerment, as well as a vehicle for generating and reproducing social goods for their households and communities. Governments and civil society groups have specific roles to play in addressing the problem of illiteracy among women, which can achieve greater impact through strengthened partnerships and broader convergence.

Globally and domestically, consensus has been reached on literacy and education as critical to their survival, and on lifelong learning as key to their overall well-being and development. These are also well-

recognised rights protected and guaranteed by many core human rights treaties, and recognised as crucial to the development of communities and the national polity.

The situation has not substantively moved for several decades now, even as more countries have signed and/or ratified core international human rights treaties and agreements that recognise both formal and non-formal education as essential to the full enjoyment of all other rights. Thus even with significant strides made in information exchange and technology, hundreds of millions of women still lack basic literacy skills and are consequently denied the opportunity for further learning and meaningful participation in community and development processes.

This indicates the lack of political will and neglect on the part of governments and donors to decisively act and address the problem, which has grown to such enormous proportions that no less than the involvement and collaboration in urgent action of all stakeholders is required.

It is well-documented that literacy enables women to cope with socio-cultural barriers, as well as present-day multiple crises that range from the economic and financial to the environment and climate change. Affirmative action is needed to improve women's literacy, their life-skills, reproductive health and livelihoods; to strengthen women's participation and leadership in the public sphere; and to ensure gender justice through equal access to education, literacy and lifelong learning programmes. Governments and the international community must redouble efforts to reduce women's illiteracy and achieve gender parity.

The following specific recommendations have been surfaced based on the findings of the study, and are forwarded as contributions towards building a broad consensus for women's literacy.



Ideas shared by participants of the 2011 Asia-Pacific Conference on Women's Literacy held in Chiang Mai, Thailand (ASPBAE)

## The need for long-term visioning and strategies

In consultation with stakeholders, governments must develop and pursue a long term vision and national policy framework for women's literacy and empowerment. Such vision must be concretised into national plans with clear roadmaps that outline the goals, targets and timelines beyond the EFA 2015 deadline.

A categorical policy statement and comprehensive national plans on women's education and literacy must be adopted particularly in countries facing the greatest challenge in meeting the EFA targets on literacy and gender parity. Such national plans must be based on a critical assessment of the current situation, progress made thus far and the challenges ahead. Further, such plans must form part of and be integrated into national education programmes and countries' broader development strategies.

**Governments must demonstrate clear political will by progressively raising levels of spending and recommitting to the CONFINTEA V agreement to allocate at least six per cent of GNP to education.**

## Mobilise adequate resources for women's literacy

Addressing female illiteracy in the Asia-Pacific region to meet the EFA literacy targets needs significant financial investments. Governments must demonstrate clear political will by progressively raising levels of spending and recommitting to the CONFINTEA V agreement to allocate at least six per cent of GNP to education. Governments should, likewise, commit to the international benchmark of allocating six per cent of the education budget for adult education, half of which should be earmarked for adult literacy programmes where required.

Along this line, governments must formulate fully-costed and well-targeted literacy plans as part of the broader development strategy. These plans should be based on clear evidence on literacy levels, gender gaps and priority target groups. Literacy programmes targeting disadvantaged groups must be implemented with greater scale, coverage and quality to ensure a turnaround in decisively addressing female illiteracy.

The costing exercise undertaken as part of this study underscores the need for much larger investments to support quality literacy programmes with a clear bias for reaching out to non-literate women particularly from socially excluded groups. To realise the EFA literacy targets, the Asia-Pacific region requires annual investments of USD 27 billion, around 90 per cent of which must be earmarked for programmes especially catering to women learners. This study has shown that the cost of achieving EFA goal 4 on adult literacy with gender parity is financially feasible for most countries in the region, although some countries will clearly need external assistance and a longer timeframe beyond the 2015 deadline.

Development partners must fulfil the commitments made in Dakar by providing more and better aid to education, covering all six EFA goals with due priority given to the neglected goals – specifically literacy, life skills and gender equality. Processes related to Official Development Assistance (ODA) must be reformed to ensure a responsive, transparent and participatory process.

## Setting a research agenda and monitoring system

Develop a gender-sensitive research agenda that will inform policy and practice related to women's literacy. Ensure wide dissemination and application of research and monitoring results; promote research-based and developmental approach to delivery of adult literacy and education programs; and strengthen research capacity through multi-stakeholder partnerships.

The following research activities may be considered as part of immediate agenda:

• Establish international gender sensitive indicators and targets for literacy and lifelong learning;

• Develop literacy mapping for updated literacy situation analysis to identify the illiterates, establish benchmarks and set doable targets;
• Conduct studies to identify barriers to education and literacy among women, particularly from the most vulnerable groups, and come up with appropriate strategies to decisively address such barriers;
• Undertake more empirical researches, including surveys and literacy assessments that measure actual literacy skills disaggregated by gender, income group, location, ethnicity and religious affiliation;
• Develop valid and sensitive literacy assessment tools based on well-defined literacy competency standards;
• Cooperate with national and local governments to ensure the generation of updated and accurate gender disaggregated data on the literacy situation; and,
• Develop a comprehensive database on women's literacy and life skills to support policy and program development.

*Monitoring activities*
• Establish systematic monitoring and evaluation of progress in the implementation of literacy and life skills training programmes, including the adoption of relevant policies, the allocation and adequacy of public resources and support from development partners;
• Strengthen mechanisms for tracking learner participation and performance in non-formal education, literacy and alternative learning programmes;
• Regularly monitor and conduct gender audit of governments' literacy and non-formal education programs, including efforts to support lifelong learning programmes and enhance a literate environment;
• Support civil society initiatives in monitoring women's literacy policies, programmes and budgets.

## Affirmative action for women's literacy

There is a need for more strategic, systematised and affirmative action on the part of governments to address the gender gap in education and literacy. The research highlighted poverty, security issues, violence, child marriages, traditional practices and cultural barriers as factors that restrict girls' schooling and participation in literacy and skills courses. Continuing studies must be done to identify and analyse these barriers and come up with appropriate strategies to overcome such barriers.

Programmes that offer financial incentives, social support, practical skills and livelihood engagement are effective measures to encourage women's participation. Awareness campaigns targeting both female and male are also effective strategies to encourage women's participation in literacy



Women wrote down their ideas on what education should be in a workshop held in Tagum City, Philippines (E-Net Philippines)

programmes. Scholarship provisions targeting specifically young mothers and single parents have also been proven to be effective.

### Upscale effective practices

Sustained research efforts must be undertaken and supported to improve learning approaches, programme effectiveness and learning outcomes. Literacy programmes that are flexible, participatory and appropriate to women learners need to be encouraged and supported. Sharing of strategies and lessons derived from various local initiatives must be done at national and international levels on a regular basis. Such interactions provide opportunity to learn from different local and country experiences and to identify effective practices which can be replicated and scaled up.

### On Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MLE)

Conducting a careful study and evaluation of the language policy as it relates to appreciation and celebration of multiculturalism is critical. This supports the need to adopt coherent policy on the use of the mother tongue and multiculturalism that encompasses a whole system of educating people based on local knowledge and local languages. Investments should also be made in teacher development programmes that reinforce capacities to handle multicultural, sensitive and non-discriminatory literacy courses.

Support is required for the development of local and indigenous materials, including the production of dictionaries, local histories and folklore. Likewise, recognition must be extended to local and indigenous schools, learning centres and curricula. Governments and development partners must invest in the training and recruitment of teachers, learner-facilitators and trainers from local and indigenous communities.

**Literacy programmes need to be conducted in the mother tongue to ensure that women learn effectively.**

Literacy programmes need to be conducted in the mother tongue to ensure that women learn effectively. The usual conduct of most literacy programmes in the national or regional language ignores the fact that because of women's limited mobility, they are able to communicate only through their mother tongue. Literacy programmes using the mother tongue entails investment in documentation of local language and knowledge, development of learning materials and training of teachers or local educators in implementing literacy programmes in the mother language. With the mother tongue as the foundation in learning literacy, programmes can then introduce literacy in the national or regional language. Most women also consider learning literacy in the national language as an empowering tool, helping them to participate in mainstream/dominant decision-making processes and community affairs.

## Promoting innovative and integrated approaches to literacy

Innovative and appropriate literacy programmes have to be developed to effectively reach out to specific target groups among disadvantaged women. Such programmes should take into account culture, language and the local context to facilitate better learning, strengthen motivation and sustain the interest for continuing education.

Adult learning courses that are integrated with life skills have been shown to produce better results in shorter time. Thus, literacy programmes and courses need to be linked to women's livelihood development, skills enhancement and employment, ensuring better access to credits, production inputs, technology, information, and earning opportunities.

Literacy programmes aiming to close gender gaps should necessarily be gender-sensitive, with structures and processes designed to respond to the local context, needs, and goals and aspirations of the women learners. They must eventually lead to women learners achieving functional and sustainable knowledge, skills and competence.

Literacy programmes need to adopt a holistic approach and linked to education goals and the broader development plans. Such programmes should integrate courses and modules on reproductive health, sex education, gender sensitivity, value formation, confidence-building, social awareness, leadership and development issues.



A community woman taking a lead role in a training in PNG (ASPBAE)

Ensuring awareness of the many gender issues that contribute to women's continued illiteracy, and stifle and repress their creative growth is a key element for women to achieve literacy. At the same time, literacy must be incorporated in a sensitive examination of culture and tradition and in awareness-raising efforts on gender-based inequities and discrimination.

Literacy is a communication skill that needs to be used and nurtured. Experience shows that too often, the literacy skills of individual learners cannot be sustained due to poor literacy environments marked among others by the lack of literacy materials especially in remote communities such as posters, wall writings, notice boards, books, libraries, and even lack of means or social approval for physical mobility. Many individual learners have relapsed into illiteracy and, thus, further lose confidence in their ability to learn beyond the 'formal' age of learning.

Post-literacy and life skills programmes and related initiatives have to be developed to sustain the skills and learning motivation; ensure provisions of and continuing access to learning materials to sustain literacy and strengthen literate environments; encourage periodic meetings, sharing sessions, joint projects and collective actions among learners to sustain the momentum for further learning. The literate environment can further be enriched through planning and implementation of continuing education, training and skills development beyond the basic literacy skills.

Moreover, there is a need to explore the use of appropriate and accessible technology, particularly computers and mobile phones, as alternative means for bringing adults together in a learning circle. Other innovative approaches such as distance education media using radio, television and social networks, for example, can be more cost-effective in delivering lessons to hard-to-reach or hard-to-convene groups of individuals who may have competing home and work responsibilities that make consistent attendance to a fixed hour and time impossible.

## Developing support system for women learners

Apart from providing appropriate literacy programmes and developing a literate environment conducive to learning, it is also crucial to ensure a favourable psychosocial environment that can provide a support system for disadvantaged girls and women and facilitate awareness building and collective action. These are essential elements to overcome the multiple barriers faced by women learners and to motivate them to sustain their interest in further learning.

Examples of effective literacy and alternative education programmes show the critical importance of awareness raising, organisational support systems and continuing education to overcome barriers, sustain the learning process and help provide direction in life.

Learning centres do not function merely as skills training facilities, but also serve as activity centres and venues for sharing and counselling. In this regard, educators and facilitators should be trained in psychosocial counselling since they are regarded as significant persons approached by women for consultations on a variety of issues related to livelihood, reproductive health, family, sex and marital relationships.

Child care service and other assistance must be provided to encourage women to participate in literacy and life skills training programs.

Experience suggests that literacy skills and the learnings acquired from literacy programmes are difficult to sustain, much less, to develop further into critical awareness without the solidarity of an organised, empowered group. Groups formed around livelihood issues show even better results. This is especially true in poor, rural communities where the hold of community pressures and the patriarchal norms that often go with it are strong. Hence, functional literacy, livelihood and organisation may be seen as major keywords in any educational programme that has a social transformatory thrust.

Literacy efforts among women should be accompanied by the process of organisation building from the smallest scale feasible at the initial stages. The organisation of women around learning, livelihood and development provides a space for sharing of experiences, developing critical awareness about their problems, peer group learning providing solidarity and support,

Muslim women participating in an interactive group activity in a workshop in Indonesia (ASPBAE)

fostering strength in action and finally providing the possibility for the sustainability of literacy and empowerment in themselves through assertion of rights provided by way of entitlements to government programs.

## Community Learning Centres (CLC) and community involvement

While transitional, informal learning spaces can be useful, it is important in most literacy programmes to have community learning centres (CLCs) with conducive and sustainable spaces for learning. These CLCs can serve as a repository of learning materials and technologies that can facilitate effective learning among women.

Many CLCs are funded by development organisations. Governments must also invest in developing CLCs especially in remote areas where they are most needed and in developing qualified staff who can maintain the centres.

Local communities must be encouraged to get involved in planning, implementation and evaluation of literacy and life skills training programmes. There must also be support for the creation of multi-purpose community learning spaces and centres to provide venues for sharing sessions, counselling, meetings and group activities.

## Prioritise disadvantaged groups

Literacy is a fundamental right of every individual, female and male, young and adult. There can be no exclusion arising from gender, age, ethnicity, migrant status, language, religion, disability, location, sexual identity or orientation, income status, displacement or imprisonment.

Yet, the universality of this right is not enjoyed by all. Education access and literacy level vary widely across population groups and geographical location. Women and children especially from disadvantaged groups, including those from remote rural areas, minorities, indigenous population groups, urban poor communities, migrant sector, victims of disasters and armed conflict, and those with disabilities, have the least access to education and the biggest number of illiterates. Responding to their needs requires sector-appropriate programs and services, i.e., programs that respond not only to literacy needs but are also supportive of these groups' learning environment given their diverse and unique conditions. In this regard, programmes should support the development of various indigenous languages and recognise the value of indigenous cultures and knowledge.

Also, since most illiterates are poor and found in geographically remote areas, specific policies and programs that prioritise these communities should be in place. The Belem Framework for Action categorically states that literacy actions must focus on women and highly disadvantaged populations including indigenous peoples and prisoners, with an overall focus on rural populations. One strategy of relevance here is integrating literacy programs

The Belem Framework for Action categorically states that literacy actions must focus on women and highly disadvantaged populations including indigenous peoples and prisoners, with an overall focus on rural populations.

School children in Saundaun Province, PNG (ASPBAE)

with services for the poor and marginalised communities where incentives for learning can be provided.

Likewise, the growing numbers of school drop outs and out of school youths show that their condition needs to be strategically and proactively addressed.

### Addressing early marriages

Earlier discussions have shown how early marriage trap women and girls in a vicious cycle of illiteracy and poverty. Addressing this problem needs strategies that will ensure fulfilment of their right to a full education and literacy, and providing them with life skills training to ensure decent livelihood.

One way to protect girls from early marriage is to extend compulsory education to secondary level, thereby prolonging schooling. Another option is to raise the legal age of marriage for girls; this should be strictly enforced in combination with incentives and disincentives.

Early pregnancy is a reality which causes girls to drop out from schooling. Thus, providing full social support for married and/or pregnant girls is key to ensuring that they continue and complete basic education. Policies that prohibit or discourage pregnant women from attending school or literacy classes should be rescinded.

In addition, there should be advocacy and education on early motherhood risks as part of efforts to curb early pregnancy. These include support programs and outreach services that provide counselling and facilitate access to contraceptives. Advocacy that includes providing information on VAW and domestic violence would also complement efforts in promoting women's rights and gender equality.

Lastly, monitoring of child marriage and teenage pregnancy is important in planning preventive campaigns and proactive interventions. Information gathered from these efforts can feed into the design of learning programmes to make them more appropriate for young mothers, single parents and abused women who are non-literate and poorly educated.

### Awareness building and advocacy campaigns

Civil society organisations involved in education, literacy, human rights and women's empowerment, together with local communities and other stakeholders can take the lead in awareness-raising and campaigns to draw greater attention to the problem of female illiteracy. They can further work to generate wider support to place this concern high in the agenda of governments, donors and international organisations.

Women's literacy ranks low in the development priorities of most governments and development agencies. This indicates the lack of awareness, and a poor understanding and appreciation of the situation,

> **Early pregnancy is a reality which causes girls to drop out from schooling.**

the programmes implemented and strategies adopted. These call for the formulation of clear and strong advocacy messages along with an effective communication strategy. Information on literacy issues, achievements and challenges must be widely disseminated to advocacy targets and stakeholders. Discussions on women's literacy and empowerment concerns must be done regularly with policymakers, education administrators and development councils. The active involvement of women learners and their organisations can make these campaigns more effective.

In connection, a strong consensus on women's literacy and empowerment should be developed and a broad alliance organised to engage and shape state authorities and international agencies at local, national and global levels. Such an alliance can spearhead the awareness raising and mobilisation campaigns for women's literacy.



Education and Health for Women Now!: E-Net Philippines solidarity march during Women's Day Rally in the Philippines (E-Net Philippines)

## Institutionalise multi-stakeholder partnership

A multi-stakeholder partnership is indispensable to effectively translating policy into action. This should be harnessed and further maximised in developing innovative strategies favourable to women's learning.

Such partnership should translate organisationally into a multi-stakeholder structure that is institutionalised with government, communities and CSOs working together on policy development, awareness campaigns, curriculum design, materials development and programme implementation related to women's literacy and life skills training.

Civil society organisations have rich experiences in designing and implementing innovative programmes on adult education, literacy and life skills among women and socially excluded groups. Lessons, innovative practices and effective approaches must be supported and replicated. Partnerships with relevant government agencies, international organisations and donors should be pursued. Improved coordination and complementation of government and civil society initiatives at community and national levels must be achieved to fast track efforts in addressing the literacy gap.

Governments must recognise and extend support to civil society initiated literacy programmes and alternative learning systems, including faith-based and community-initiated learning institutions. The use of vernacular languages, cultural practices and local traditions must, likewise, be encouraged and supported.

Coordination mechanisms at the national and local levels should be developed in coordination with interagency government bodies, academic institutions, NGO networks, local governments, donors and the private sector.

Finally, participatory governance is a must for effective literacy campaigns. Representation of women and other disadvantaged groups in

Civil society organisations have rich experiences in designing and implementing innovative programmes on adult education, literacy and life skills among women and socially excluded groups.

policymaking and implementing bodies related to education, literacy and life skills training must be recognised, encouraged and secured.

## Maximising international platforms

There are many international platforms that can be maximised through coordinated efforts. These platforms provide venues and opportunities for information exchange, research, interaction, capacity building, policy development, strategic planning and cooperative actions. Collective actions around these platforms can also add to pressure for obtaining stronger commitments to women's literacy from international bodies and development partners and pushing for their translation into concrete actions and support.

Spaces must be maximised for CSO participation and engagement in programme reviews, policy processes and other global initiatives, specifically in UNESCO and its related agencies, other UN bodies, regional intergovernmental organisations, donor's forums and financial institutions. High-level dialogues must be conducted on a regular basis to remind international partners on the importance of women's literacy and the need to put this high on the policy agenda of governments and international agencies.

Civil society engagements in the post-CONFINTEA VI processes must be pursued to remind governments and international partners of the agreements forged and the bold actions needed to decisively secure the right of all to literacy and lifelong learning, particularly for women and other disadvantaged groups. In particular, the Belem Framework for Action reiterates the critical importance of women's education and literacy to cope with the multiple crises confronting the world today. The Framework underscores the need to focus literacy actions and investments in lifelong learning for women and highly disadvantaged populations, with an overall focus on rural populations. It further calls for the creation of multi-purpose community learning centres that are accessible to more women.

Civil society engagements in the post-CONFINTEA VI processes must be pursued to remind governments and international partners of the agreements forged and the bold actions needed to decisively secure the right of all to literacy and lifelong learning.

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# Annexes

Table A. Estimated Number of Adult Illiterates in Year 2012 and Target Number of Adult Illiterates for Year 2015 to Achieve EFA Literacy Goals[1]

| Country | Year | Number of Adult Illiterates (1995-2004)[1] ('000) | | | Year | Number of Adult Illiterates (2005-2009)[1] ('000) | | |
| | | Total | Male | Female | | Total | Male | Female |
| | | (Col. A1) | (Col. A2) | (Col. A3) | | (Col. A4) | (Col. A5) | (Col. A6) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bangladesh | 2001 | 48,059 | 21,287 | 26,772 | 2009 | 49,037 | 22,036 | 27,000 |
| Brunei Darussalam | 2001 | 17 | 6 | 11 | 2009 | 14 | 5 | 9 |
| Cambodia | 1998 | 2,234 | 653 | 1,581 | 2008 | 2,143 | 684 | 1,460 |
| China | 2000 | 85,307 | 23,449 | 61,858 | 2009 | 64,604 | 17,128 | 47,477 |
| India | 2001 | 269,823 | 95,150 | 174,673 | 2006 | 283,105 | 98,798 | 184,308 |
| Indonesia | 2004 | 14,824 | 4,562 | 10,262 | 2008 | 12,859 | 3,779 | 9,080 |
| Iran Isl. Rep. | 2002 | 11,099 | 4,057 | 7,042 | 2008 | 8,292 | 3,014 | 5,277 |
| Lao PDR | 2000 | 930 | 283 | 647 | 2005 | 961 | 303 | 659 |
| Macao | 2001 | 31 | 8 | 23 | 2006 | 28 | 7 | 21 |
| Malaysia | 2000 | 1,749 | 630 | 1,119 | 2009 | 1,461 | 531 | 930 |
| Maldives | 2000 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 2006 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Myanmar | 2000 | 3,229 | 969 | 2,260 | 2009 | 2,918 | 933 | 1,985 |
| Nepal | 2001 | 7,646 | 2,699 | 4,947 | 2009 | 7,604 | 2,534 | 5,070 |
| Pakistan | 1998 | 46,625 | 18,881 | 27,743 | 2008 | 50,020 | 17,817 | 32,203 |
| Papua New Guinea | 2000 | 1,351 | 586 | 765 | 2009 | 1,618 | 741 | 877 |
| Philippines | 2000 | 3,578 | 1,802 | 1,776 | 2008 | 2,720 | 1,480 | 1,240 |
| Samoa | 2004 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2009 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Singapore | 2000 | 233 | 54 | 179 | 2009 | 210 | 50 | 160 |
| Sri Lanka | 2001 | 1,301 | 533 | 768 | 2008 | 1,425 | 574 | 851 |
| Thailand | 2000 | 3,433 | 1,154 | 2,279 | 2005 | 3,298 | 1,088 | 2,210 |
| Tonga | 1996 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2006 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Viet Nam | 2000 | 5,169 | 1,523 | 3,646 | 2009 | 4,723 | 1,534 | 3,189 |
| Total Asia-Pacific[4] | | 506,647.14 | 178,289.91 | 328,357.23 | | 497,044.16 | 173,038.00 | 324,006.16 |

| Estimated Number of Adult Illiterates for 2012[2] ('000) | | | EFA 2015 Target[3] ('000)   Based on 50% reduction | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female |
| (Col. A7) | (Col. A8) | (Col. A9) | (Col. A10) | (Col. A11) | (Col. A12) |
| 49,408 | 22,322 | 27,086 | 24,030 | 12,015 | 12,015 |
| 13 | 4 | 8 | 9 | 4 | 4 |
| 2,111 | 694 | 1,418 | 1,117 | 558 | 558 |
| 59,435 | 15,582 | 43,854 | 42,653 | 21,327 | 21,327 |
| 299,910 | 103,337 | 196,573 | 134,912 | 67,456 | 67,456 |
| 11,976 | 3,435 | 8,541 | 7,412 | 3,706 | 3,706 |
| 7,019 | 2,544 | 4,475 | 5,550 | 2,775 | 2,775 |
| 999 | 327 | 672 | 465 | 233 | 233 |
| 26 | 7 | 19 | 15 | 8 | 8 |
| 1,384 | 504 | 880 | 875 | 437 | 437 |
| 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| 2,831 | 922 | 1,909 | 1,615 | 807 | 807 |
| 7,590 | 2,478 | 5,112 | 3,823 | 1,911 | 1,911 |
| 51,315 | 17,319 | 33,997 | 23,312 | 11,656 | 11,656 |
| 1,708 | 794 | 913 | 676 | 338 | 338 |
| 2,408 | 1,351 | 1,057 | 1,789 | 895 | 895 |
| 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 204 | 49 | 154 | 116 | 58 | 58 |
| 1,492 | 596 | 895 | 651 | 325 | 325 |
| 3,146 | 1,015 | 2,131 | 1,717 | 858 | 858 |
| 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 4,597 | 1,533 | 3,064 | 2,585 | 1,292 | 1,292 |
| 507,574 | 174,814 | 332,760 | 253,324 | 126,662 | 126,662 |

[1] Source of Basic Data: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), Data Centre, 2011

[2] The 2012 estimates of the number of Adult Illiterates are based on the trend established for literacy data culled from the UIS Data Centre for 1995-2004 and 2005-2009.

[3] The EFA 2015 target is based on 50% reduction in the number of Adult Illiterates for the base period 2000-2004. The target number Adult Illiterates for 2015 is derived by computing 50 per cent of the corresponding number of Adult Illiterates in 2000-2004.

[4] Sum of column does not tally with Total for Asia-Pacific since not all countries in the region are included in this table.

**Table B. Cost of Delivering Quality Literacy Programme to Achieve EFA Literacy Goals by 2015 in Select Asia-Pacific Countries**

| Country | Target Number of Adult Illiterates that must be reached in next 3 years (2013-2015) to meet EFA 50% reduction target[1] ('000) | | | GNI Per Capita 2010 (US$) | Unit Cost[2] per year (US$) | Cost Male Learners (US$ '000) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | Male | Female | | | |
| | Col.A7-Col.A10 (Col. B1) | Col.A8-Col.A11 (Col. B2) | Col.A9-Col.A12 (Col. B3) | (Col. B4) | Col.B4 x 0.053 (Col. B5) | Col.B2 x Col.B5 |
| | | | | | | (Col. B6) |
| Bangladesh | 25,379 | 10,307 | 15,072 | 640 | 33.92 | 349,614 |
| Brunei Darussalam | 4 | 0 | 4 | 31,180 | 1,652.54 | 240 |
| Cambodia | 995 | 135 | 859 | 760 | 40.28 | 5,440 |
| China | 28,272 | | 28,272 | 4,260 | 225.78 | 0 |
| India | 164,999 | 35,882 | 129,117 | 1,340 | 71.02 | 2,548,309 |
| Indonesia | 5,106 | | 5,106 | 2,580 | 136.74 | 0 |
| Iran Islamic. Rep. | 1,931 | | 1,931 | 4,530 | 240.09 | 0 |
| Lao PDR | 534 | 94 | 439 | 1,010 | 53.53 | 5,051 |
| Macao SAR | 13 | | 13 | 39,520 | 2,094.56 | 0 |
| Malaysia | 509 | 67 | 442 | 7,900 | 418.70 | 28,049 |
| Maldives | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4,270 | 226.31 | |
| Myanmar | 1,216 | 115 | 1,101 | 313 | 16.59 | 1,903 |
| Nepal | 3,767 | 567 | 3,201 | 490 | 25.97 | 14,716 |
| Pakistan | 28,003 | 5,662 | 22,340 | 1,050 | 55.65 | 315,112 |
| Papua New Guinea | 1,032 | 456 | 576 | 1,300 | 68.90 | 31,444 |
| Philippines | 618 | 456 | 162 | 2,050 | 108.65 | 49,545 |
| Samoa | 0.47 | .15 | 0.32 | 2,930 | 155.29 | 23 |
| Singapore | 105 | | 105 | 40,920 | 2,168.76 | 0 |
| Sri Lanka | 841 | 271 | 570 | 2,290 | 121.37 | 32,915 |
| Thailand | 1,429 | 157 | 1,273 | 4,210 | 223.13 | 34,949 |
| Tonga | .30 | 0.17 | 0.13 | 3,380 | 179.14 | 31 |
| Viet Nam | 2,012 | 241 | 1,771 | 1,100 | 58.30 | 14,030 |
| Total Asia-Pacific[7] | 266,766 | 54,410 | 212,356 | | | 3,431,372 |

| Cost Female Learners³ (US$ '000) | Total Cost per year (US$ '000) | Total Cost for 3-year course⁴ (US$ '000) | Annual Cost for 2013-2015⁵ (US$ '000) | US$ Equivalent of Education Budget⁶ (US$ '000) (2012 Estimate) | % of Education Budget |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Col.B3 x Col.B5 x 120% | Col.B6 + Col. B7 | Col.B8 X 3 (Col. B9) | Col.B9 / 3 (Col. B10 ) | | Col.10 / Col.B11 |
| (Col. B7) | (Col. B8) | | | (Col. B11) | (Col. B12 ) |
| 613,472 | 963,086 | 2,889,259 | 963,086 | 2,520,168 | 38.2% |
| 7,960 | 8,200 | 24,600 | 8,200 | 1,379,063 | 0.6% |
| 41,542 | 46,982 | 140,947 | 46,982 | 313,435 | 15.0% |
| 7,659,986 | 7,659,986 | 22,979,957 | 7,659,986 | 84,074,169 | 9.1% |
| 11,003,871 | 13,552,181 | 40,656,542 | 13,552,181 | 46,060,818 | 29.4% |
| 837,764 | 837,764 | 2,513,293 | 837,764 | 30,444,812 | 2.8% |
| 556,427 | 556,427 | 1,669,282 | 556,427 | 22,560,390 | 2.5% |
| 28,231 | 33,282 | 99,845 | 33,282 | 264,522 | 12.6% |
| 32,276 | 32,276 | 96,829 | 32,276 | 662,376 | 4.9% |
| 222,273 | 250,322 | 750,966 | 250,322 | 11,336,291 | 2.2% |
| | 0 | 0 | 0 | 194,781 | 0.0% |
| 21,926 | 23,829 | 71,487 | 23,829 | 19,079,419 | 0.1% |
| 99,741 | 114,457 | 343,371 | 114,457 | 1,150,973 | 9.9% |
| 1,491,893 | 1,807,005 | 5,421,016 | 1,807,005 | 6,817,822 | 26.5% |
| 47,592 | 79,036 | 237,108 | 79,036 | | |
| 21,179 | 70,724 | 212,173 | 70,724 | 6,205,176 | 1.1% |
| 60 | 83 | 250 | 83 | 111,584 | 0.1% |
| 273,789 | 273,789 | 821,367 | 273,789 | 11,787,365 | 2.3% |
| 83,025 | 115,939 | 347,817 | 115,939 | | |
| 340,796 | 375,745 | 1,127,234 | 375,745 | 14,031,163 | 2.7% |
| 28 | 58 | 175 | 58 | 9,613 | 0.6% |
| 123,914 | 137,944 | 413,833 | 137,944 | | |
| 23,507,745 | 26,939,117 | 80,817,351 | 26,939,117 | | |

Source of Basic Data: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), Data Centre, 2011

[1]The figures represent the number of adult illiterates that must be reached to meet the 50 per cent reduction target in adult illiteracy and to achieve gender parity in literacy by 2015. The figures are derived from Table A by computing the difference between columns A7-A9 and Columns A10-A12.

[2]Unit cost of delivering quality literacy programme is computed based on the literacy costing study of Van Ravens and Aggio (2006) which computed the Unit Cost as 0.053 x per capita Gross National Income [GNI] (see Box 1: Literacy Costing Methodology).

[3]A higher unit cost (additional 20 per cent) is imputed for women learners.

[4]The Total Cost correspond to the recommended full literacy course with a duration of 3 years.

[5]The figures represent the Annual Cost if the Total Cost is spread over a period of 3 years (2013-2015).

[6]The 2012 Education budget is estimated based on the UIS Data Centre figures on education expenditure as percentage of Gross National Input (GNI).

[7]Sum of column does not tally with Total for Asia-Pacific since not all countries in the region are included in this table.
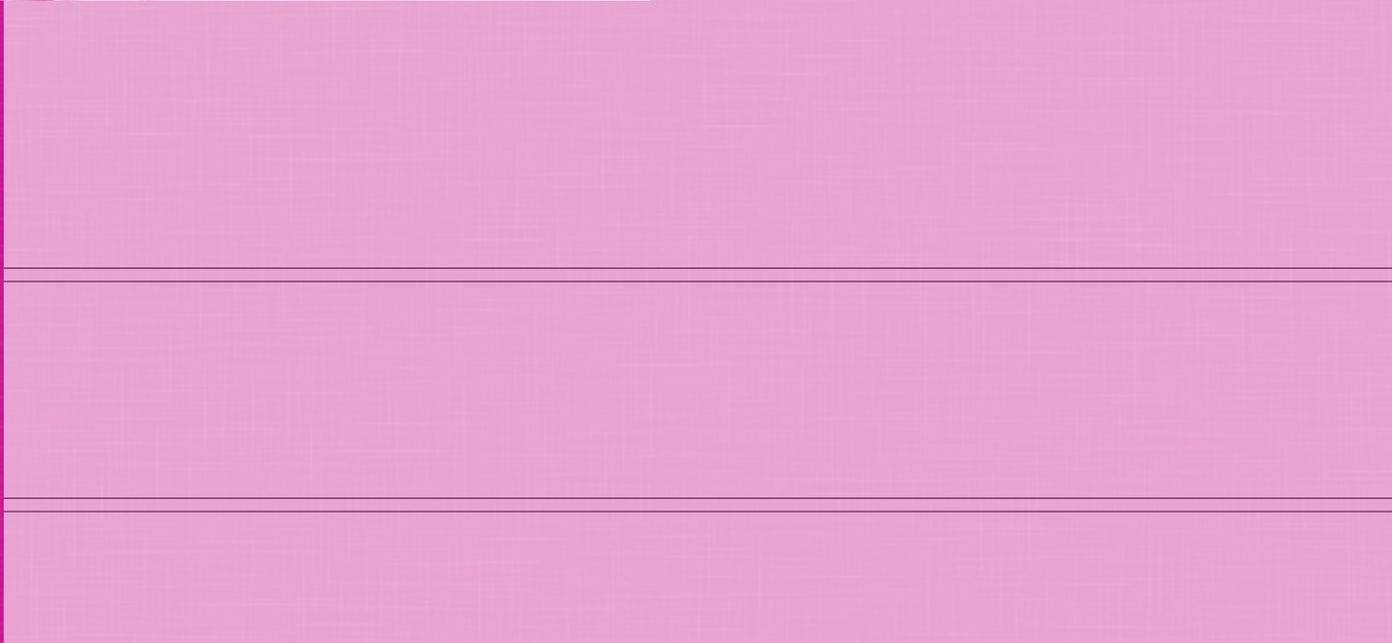
# COUNTRY STUDIES

# INDIA

## Literacy and Women's Empowerment:
## A Tracer Study

STUDY BY:
Nirantar Trust
*Centre for Gender and Education, New Delhi*

RESEARCH DESIGN AND REPORT:
Shalini Joshi
Malini Ghose

SURVEY TEAM:
Swarnlata Mahilkaar *(Nirantar, Delhi)*
Kavita and Pramila of Pahal, Chitrakoot *(Uttar Pradesh)*

FIELD SUPPORT:
Vanangana *(Chitrakoot, Uttar Pradesh)*
Pahal *(Chitrakoot, Uttar Pradesh)*
Sahjani Shiksha Kendra *(Lalitpur, Uttar Pradesh)*

DATA ANALYSIS:
Centre for the Study of Developing Studies *(Delhi)*

# INTRODUCTION

The research conducted by Nirantar, a centre for gender and education, is a tracer study that seeks to understand the impact of education on the lives of women who had been part of a residential educational programme. Through this study Nirantar investigated women's perceptions of the educational experience, the ways they felt it had brought changes in their lives and how they saw it as helping sustain processes of empowerment.

The study traces the experience of women who were part of the *Mahila Shikshan Kendra* (MSK), a residential course ran by the *Mahila Samakhya* (MS) programme in two districts of Uttar Pradesh in North India. MS, a government sponsored programme for women's equality, looked at education as an empowering tool for women. Nirantar's own work on women's literacy and education is informed by a feminist perspective. Nirantar, working closely with the MS programme from 1994 to 1997, also helped developed the curriculum for the MSK course.

# OVERVIEW OF POLICIES RELATED TO GENDER AND LITERACY

### Gender and Literacy: An Introduction

According to the 2001 Census of India, literacy rates went up from 52 per cent in 1991 to 65 per cent in 2001 (for the 7 + age group) and female literacy rates increased faster (15 per cent) than male literacy (12 per cent). Other encouraging statistics include the decline in the absolute number of illiterates from 328 million to 304 million. There has also been marked improvement in the literacy situation of disadvantaged groups such as the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), as Table 1 below indicates.

### Table 1. Literacy: Scheduled Castes and Tribes (1991 and 2001)

| | 1991 | 2001 | Change |
|---|---|---|---|
| Scheduled Castes | % | % | % |
| Literacy rate | 37.41 | 54.69 | + 17.28 |
| Male literacy rate | 49.91 | 66.64 | + 16.73 |
| Female literacy rate | 23.76 | 41.90 | + 18.14 |
| Gender gap | 26.15 | 24.74 | + 1.41 |
| Scheduled Tribes | % | % | % |
| Literacy rate | 29.60 | 47.10 | +17.50 |
| Male Literacy rate | 40.65 | 59.17 | +18.52 |
| Female literacy rate | 18.19 | 34.76 | +16.57 |
| Gender gap | 22.46 | 24.41 | - 1.95 |

Source: Report of the Working Group on Elementary Education and Literacy for 11th Five-Year Plan (Government of India, Planning Commission, New Delhi)

Yet, there remain nearly 189 million non-literate women in India and the gender gap persists at over 20 per cent (with the male literacy rate at 75 per cent and female literacy rate at 54 per cent). The socially and economically disadvantaged SCs and STs[1] fared worse in 2001, with literacy rates below the national average and the gender gap registering at 24 per cent. Comparison across regions reveal stark differences, such as the 54 per cent gap between the female literacy rate of Kerala (87.9 per cent), the state with the highest rate and Bihar (33.6 per cent), which has the lowest. More than 80 per cent of districts with a female literacy rate below 50 per cent are concentrated in nine states, mostly in North India.[2] Not surprisingly, the states with poor development and gender indicators are the very same states with low literacy rates, establishing that literacy status is linked to issues of underdevelopment, poverty and gender relations (Saldanah, 1999).

Disparities in literacy are also correlated with other axes of social inequalities, such as caste, ethnicity and religion. Improvements notwithstanding, the literacy rates of socio-economically disadvantaged groups are still below the national averages. The 2001 gender gap in literacy rates amongst SCs and STs means that 62 per cent of illiterates within SCs and 61 per cent amongst STs groups were comprised of women, or 38.7 million SC women and 21.2 million non-literate ST women. Literacy data disaggregated by religion (provided for the first time in the 2001 Census) points to the Muslim community as having the lowest rates at 59 per cent.[3]

Table 2. Literacy Rates by Religion and Gender (2001)

|         | All   | Hindus | Muslims | Christians | Sikhs | Buddhists | Jains |
|---------|-------|--------|---------|------------|-------|-----------|-------|
| Average | 64.8% | 65.1%  | 59.1%   | 80.3%      | 69.4% | 72.7%     | 94.1% |
| Male    | 75.3% | 76.2%  | 67.1%   | 84.4%      | 75.2% | 83.1%     | 97.4% |
| Female  | 53.7% | 53.2%  | 50.1%   | 76.2%      | 63.1% | 61.7%     | 90.6% |

Source: Census of India, 2001

More importantly, the data also stresses that women experience disadvantage in multiple ways. Thus, for purposes of planning, programme

[1] Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) are Indian population groupings that are explicitly recognised by the Constitution of India, and are eligible for certain affirmative action measures. Previously called "the depressed" classes by the British, Scheduled Castes are also known as dalits (or so called 'untouchables') and Scheduled Tribes are referred to as Adivasis.

[2] The nine states are Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Arunachal Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. The state of Bihar does not have a single district with female literacy rate that is above the national average of 54.2 per cent.

[3] The CEDAW Committee in its Concluding Observations (point 32) expresses concern for the wide disparities in the educational status of schedule caste, schedule tribes and Muslim women and the gender gap (Thirty Seventh Session, 15 January – 2 February 2007).

development and resource allocation, it must be kept in mind that the usual single-pronged interventions are ineffective and that larger socio-political contexts have to be taken into consideration. In developing literacy interventions, the need to creatively use and analyse literacy data disaggregated by gender and other social categories.

*Gender in Policies: A Brief Overview*

Most education policy and programme documents in India formally commit to addressing gender issues. India is also a signatory to several important international conventions that address issues of gender and education. A look at the evolution of discourses on women's literacy and education over the past six decades in national policy formulation is instructive.

In the initial post-independence decades of the 50s and 60s, education was posited as a 'universal good' for both men and women, though the delivery of adult education came through sporadic pilot projects (Patel, 2001). Policy pronouncements at the time called for equality between men and women of educational opportunities and curricula, yet also pointed out that education should not in any way prove threaten family life and that women should be aware of their nurturing and reproductive roles.

The decade of the 70s saw the vision for women's education linked to achieving national demographic and development goals such as better maternal and child health. This position drew criticism for being largely instrumentalist in nature and for failing to challenge gender relations (Ramchandran, 1998 and Bhog, 2005). 'Functional literacy', understood as literacy and numeracy skills enabling people to read, for example, bus numbers, medical prescriptions or help with children's homework, became the mantra at the time.

Significant changes at conceptual, policy and programmatic levels emerged in the 80s and 90s, a period when government prioritised adult women's literacy in its agenda. `Empowerment' had become an important conceptual construct in development discourses, especially with reference to women (Batliwala, 1993 and Patel, 2003), and connections between women's education and empowerment were explicitly made at the national policy level. The National Policy on Education (1986) and subsequently the Programme of Action (1992) brought gender issues centre stage in educational policy.[4] Policy prescriptions were also translated into action through national level programmes. In 1988, government launched a pilot project called Mahila Samakhya (or Education for Women's Equality), the subject of this study, as was the National Literacy Mission, which was set up as a societal and technical mission to impart literacy to 80 million illiterate adults through the Total Literacy Campaigns.

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[4] This document states, '…education will be used as a basic agent of change in the status of women … the National Education System will play a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women.' Government of India, National Policy on Education (1986).

Towards the end of the 90s, government issued several gender-sensitive policies and mobilised unprecedented numbers of women during the literacy campaigns. Eventually, however, literacy fell off the government's agenda and the state began actively prioritising elementary education.

In the new millennium, with globalisation in full swing and privatisation in the education sector growing steadily, literacy programmes have been shifting emphasis from a socially transformative agenda to a market-oriented one (Patel, 2009). Market and economic forces have increasingly been determining the nature of interventions in the social sector, including in education. Thus, skills training to prepare adults for the market are now present in discourses on adult literacy. Throughout the 2000s, there was marginal political commitment to adult literacy and education and little policy or programme renewal.

Initial sparks of a revival in political commitment seemed forthcoming with the launching on 8 September 2009 by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of a new strategy, the *Saakshar Bharat* programme. This new strategy seeks to build on the lessons of the previous phase and focuses on women. However, after two years, there has been no programme impact on the ground.

Despite recent high-level announcements and the launching of Saakshar Bharat as a new strategy for literacy, literacy largely continues to be a marginal concern within the education sector. Formal schooling and adult literacy and education are often commonly seen as competing constituencies, i.e., if all children were in school, there would gradually be no need for adult literacy programmes. The fact that adult literacy and learning opportunities go beyond basic literacy and encompass the need to access information, exercise rights or enable women's empowerment and ensure gender justice require constant reiteration. The reality that young adults even after getting through the school system are not equipped with sustainable literacy skills, suggests that adult and elementary education needs to be recognised as complementary sectors and that literacy be seen as part of a robust system of providing lifelong learning opportunities.

The concern today as far as women's literacy is concerned is not so much the lack of policy frameworks but translating these into action, creating the momentum for implementation and wielding genuine political will, establishing an institutional mechanism and deepening the current understanding of gender. Gender continues to be largely understood as being a biological category, with girls and women being identified as 'target groups'. This leads to the adoption of a programmatic approach (Patel, 2003) through the design of special programmes or one-time gender-sensitisation training programmes, rather than bringing about systemic changes, with gender embedded in all dimensions of educational provisioning. Women's rights activists have argued that gender goes well

beyond access issues and needs to be understood in terms of power relations (Batliwala op cit, Ghose, 2001), which includes interrogating issues of power within education content, classroom practices and structures and ideologies that determine women's lives.

## New directions

One of the directions advocated by women's groups and included in the Saakshar Bharat strategy is thematic literacy or the integration of literacy and numeracy teaching and learning with issues women are already engaged with. Over the past two decades sustained grassroots work with women by several NGOs and women's groups and programmes as well as important policy and legislative measures have brought very large numbers of women into the public domain. They play several important roles within their communities and in establishing grassroots institutions, which require them to engage with various structures of power. Encountering the literate world regularly, they require literacy skills for functional reasons as well as enhancing self-worth or further establishing themselves as empowered leaders. It is these women, often empowered in other domains that are now actively demanding literacy and clearly showing their ability to express their learning needs and goals. These groups of women, numbering among – elected representatives and members and leaders of self-help groups (SHGs) who have been clearly articulating this demand are discussed in the succeeding sections.

### *Literacy and women's political participation*

The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments which came into force in 1993, reserved one-third of the elected seats in the local, three-tier self-governance system (the *panchayati raj* system) for women. Thus, in recent years, more than a million women have come into the political and public sphere through the panchayat system. A large majority are illiterate while others who who possess formal education qualifications are political novices and unfamiliar with governance processes. Several government and non-government organisations work on building capacities of elected leaders, yet there are very few programmes that integrate literacy with such efforts. This area has great potential for further exploration.

### *Literacy and self-help groups (micro-credit)*

Over the past 10 years the micro-credit or self-help group phenomenon has dominated discourses on women's empowerment and poverty alleviation. According to estimates, there are nearly seven million SHGs in India.

While success stories abound, there is growing recognition of the limitations of the approach (Nirantar, 2007a; Batliwala, 2007 and Kannabiran, 2005). For example, feminist activists and scholars have pointed out that in the absence of regular investments in capacity building including literacy inputs,

SHG interventions are not able to ensure women's empowerment or alleviate poverty in substantial ways.

A survey conducted by Nirantar of 2,750 SHGs formed under both government and NGO programmes across 16 states produced some telling data (Nirantar, 2007b) on the connections between literacy, transparency and access to resources. Its findings include the following:

• 61 per cent of SHG members surveyed were non-literate;
• 69 per cent of the women who were in leadership roles were literate, making literacy a critical determinant in women's assumption of leadership roles;
• in 65 per cent of groups, the literate group leaders participated in most of the trainings offered; and
• the group leaders availed of 46 per cent of the large loans, although they comprised only 13 per cent of the total number of group members

The findings establishes literacy's role in enabling access to leadership, which in turn unlocks other opportunities, such as accessing credit facilities and capacity building activities. Equally critical, as evident in the statements of SHG members is the importance of literacy in building self-confidence and establishing greater accountability (Ghose, 2007).

*'When we go to meet forest officers, we are not able to give our demands in writing. We have worked a lot to empower ourselves but still we are dependent on others to write our demands' (SHG member, Gujarat).*

*'We have faith in the accountant and bookkeeper. But if the accountant is doing something incorrect, we can't say anything' (SHG member, Andhra Pradesh).*

Despite such strong evidence, promoters of SHG programmes (whether Government, NGOs and donors), appear to ignore the connections by their failure to invest in literacy and capacity building programmes. Of the 45 NGOs that participated in the abovementioned study, only three had provided literacy skills to SHG members. Up to 47 per cent of groups formed through government programmes had not received any kind of capacity building input in the last two years (Nirantar, 2007b).

The situation today also shows the gap between policy pronouncements and realities on the ground. The need for convergence between programmes and targeted sectors is routinely mentioned in policy documents but this is not backed up by practice.

Recent reports suggest that a growing demand for literacy inputs from women is compelling programmes and organisations to consider integrating literacy into their micro-credit programmes. At a national level consultation on literacy organised by Nirantar (Nirantar, 2009, 2010)[5], several participating

[5] The Nirantar 2009, 2010 reports refer ro Internal Reports of National Consultations on Literacy and Women, held in New Delhi.

organisations talked about the need to combine literacy teaching and learning with issues that women are engaged with, such as *panchayati raj*, livelihoods, SHGs and health. The idea of thematic literacy or literacy programmes aimed at specific interest groups where literacy is integrated with issues that women are already mobilising around, is being endorsed as a way forward and has been included in the new government strategy as well.

Women's groups, however, caution against adopting an overwhelmingly functional framework, as they believe this will block the transformative potential of the educational process. SHG members require literacy to perform a large number of visible practical tasks that include financial transactions, reading pass books and ledgers. A less explicit but equally important outcome of literacy is the way it makes group processes more democratic and helps ensure that SHGs become independent and sustainable in the long-term.

They also warn of the possibility of powerful vested interests taking over SHGs, considering their large memberships and resources. This risk becomes even more imminent where programmes address only the functional aspect of literacy needs, and fail to develop other important skills such as critical thinking, analysis, and communication.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAMME

### Mahila Samakhya: Literacy within broad-based empowerment strategies

Mahila Samakhya (MS) or education for women's equality, a government programme under the Ministry of Human Resources Development, started as a pilot project in 10 districts in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Karnataka from 1988 to 1989. It is now a nationwide programme covering nearly backward districts, 30,000 villages in 10 states (www.education.nic.in/ms).

Drawn up by feminist activists, the programme's blueprint stands out for its unique aspects. For one, the programme defines education very broadly. Poor, rural women, who are the programme's main constituency, take the lead in agenda-setting together with women's organisations who want to collaborate with the programme. It looks at education as an empowering tool and as a process to validate women's own knowledge, think critically, to question and analyse their own reality, to demand and acquire information and skills to enable them to plan and act collectively for change. Literacy is neither seen as an entry point activity nor articulated in instrumental terms (Jandhyala, 2003).

Operational now for almost two decades, the programme has contributed significantly towards developing an understanding of the linkages between literacy, education and empowerment as well as in evolving alternative

models for women's education. A review of MS's literacy interventions shows that typically, the nature of demand and programme response to literacy has varied in keeping with women's empowerment trajectories (Bhog and Ghose forthcoming). Women's initial steps of leaving their homes and engaging with the public domain coincided with the first demands for literacy interventions, which the programme responded to by organising literacy camps or running adult education centres. As this engagement continued, material and curricula were developed in a participatory manner (Ghose, 2001). An innovative experiment at the time was undertaken by the MS programme in Banda district of Uttar Pradesh where literacy was linked with the hand pump training programme for women (Bhog, 1997, Mahila Samakhya and Nirantar, 1996). Some of the women, whose involvement with the programme steadily deepened, became keen on making longer-term investments in their own education. The eight-month residential educational programme (Mahila Shikshan Kendra) is now a well-accepted model in the national strategy (Nirantar, 1997).

## OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

*Nirantar's engagement with MS*

Nirantar worked closely with the MS Programme, particularly in Banda and Chitrakoot districts of Uttar Pradesh (North Indian State). Between 1994 and 1997, Nirantar collaborated with the local MS team to develop the implementation strategy as well as the curriculum for an eight-month residential course called the Mahila Shikshan Kendra (MSK). Women and adolescent girls attended the course. In addition to language and Mathematics, the curriculum was developed in a participatory manner around the themes of land, water, forest, health and society. Gender was embedded in each of the thematics (See Windows to the World).

In this study, Nirantar wanted to establish contact with as many women and girls who had studied at the MSK between 1994 and 2000. The impetus for the study arose from the fact that there are very few tracer studies available. Through this study Nirantar wanted to understand how the women located this educational experience, the ways they felt it had brought about changes in their lives and how it contributed to sustaining processes of empowerment.

*Methodology*

Though operational in the area for 15 years, the MS programme had not been able to maintain any records. Its links with the women were informal. At the time of the study, many of the functionaries who helped implement the programme were no longer working there.

The methodology therefore entailed, first, piecing together lists of women who attended different batches. This was done through records that Nirantar had kept from the time of their involvement with the programme, and talking to teachers who had taught at the time. Several teachers were still in the area and were working with local NGOs. *Vanangana*, a local women's organisation that grew out of the MS programme, assisted Nirantar in an intensive process of visiting villages and tracking the learners. Several of the programme participants had moved to other places for various reasons, including marriage and work. Initial contact information kept track of the basic contact information gathered.

The study was primarily designed as a qualitative study but quantitative tools were applied as well to some of the data collected.

As many as 50 women attended the two workshops organised as part of the study, which also provided the opportunity to hold focused groups discussions. Women shared their life stories and recalled highlights and impacts of their experience with the MSK programme.

As the MSK curriculum had focused on building a gender perspective, activities were designed to encourage women to discuss their views on several gender-related issues such as violence against women, women and work, etc. Another activity focussed on understanding specific areas of empowerment in relation, for instance, to mobility, decision-making, access to information, ability to act as change agents and the like.

The study developed a questionnaire that women filled out during the workshop discussions. These questionnaires were designed to assess the women's current socio-economic status, their educational level, engagement with government and NGO programmes, and impacts of the MSK on various aspects of their lives, such as mobility, engagement in decision making, access to resources, and participation in governance. Questionnaires on language and numeracy were also developed to assess the learners' current literacy levels.

## ISSUES FROM THE RESEARCH

*'I came from a poor family that could not afford to send me to school. Going to the Mahila Shikshan Kendra was an experience that changed my life. It gave me the confidence to make decisions. The experience also enabled me to travel independently. Today my daughter-in-law, granddaughter and grandson are studying. I am now the president of a collective [of Dalit women raising issues on women's rights and the rights of Dalits and other marginalised communities].'*

*- Rajmuniya, Chitrakoot*

*'I gained tremendous respect from people in my village after learning to read and write at the MSK. People now look up to me. I intervene in cases of violence and often, I approach Vanangana with these cases.'*

*- Aitwaria, Chitrakoot*

*'I came to the MSK in 1996-97. After completing the course I appeared for the 5th class exam. I was a teacher at the literacy centre; I also worked as an instructor at the literacy camps organised during that period. After the changes in the Mahila Samakhya programme, I had to give up work for some time. I am now part of the midday meal work that my collective is involved with. If an official visits my area, I present the accounts and other details.'*

*- Sundi, Lodhwara*

*'In the last elections I contested for the post of pradhan but I lost by 15 votes. I was disappointed, but at least, I tried. My husband is addicted to drugs, he does not work. My in-laws and I are supporting the family by doing wage labour.'*

*- Ramdevi, Banda*

The Mahila Shikshan Kendra (MSK) and the Kishori Kunj (KK) are institutions that have shaped the lives of learners in decisive ways. With literacy and empowerment as the unique features of these institutions, it is not surprising that learners have been able to recall the experience of learning to read and write and the impact of education on their lives as a positive one.

All learners, irrespective of their current context or the current use of literacy and other skills acquired in the MSK/KK, articulated the centrality of the MSK/KK experience in their lives. The relevance of the MSK/KK education was also apparent as most learners considered these institutions to be different from formal schools in going beyond providing literacy and schooling.

The study drew generalisations about the impact of the MSK/KK from the perceptions and experiences expressed by the learners. The areas explored here include: experiences related to socio-economic change, role of MSK/KK curriculum and pedagogy, gendered realities of learners in the present context and profiles of some learners. It also looked at the role played by local institutions in the area in enhancing the impact of the MSK/KK experience.

## Background of learners

*Basic information*

This section provides a background to the socio-economic context of the learners that were covered as part of the study. This information will further enable us to understand the educational interventions (Mahila Shikshan Kendra and Kishori Kendra) and the experience of learners who were part of these programmes.

Table 3. Background of MSK/KK Learners

| Location of learners at the time of coming to MSK/KK | Chitrakoot and Banda districts | 88.7% |
|---|---|---|
| Current location of learners | Chitrakoot and Banda districts | 80.6% |
| Age of learners at the time of coming to MSK/KK | Between 10-18 years | 72.6% |
| Current age of learners | Between 19-35 years | 71.5% |
| Religion | Mainly Hindu | 83.9% |
| Caste | Mainly Scheduled Caste | 50% |
| Current marital status | Mainly married, living with husband and in-laws | 51.6% |
| Current employment | Mainly household work | 33.9% |

The Mahila Samakhya programme that ran the MSK and the KK had a strong presence in Tindwari (Banda District) and Manikpur (Chitrakoot District). Thus, the majority of learners who took part in this study came from blocks in these two districts.

Most learners who came to the MSK/KK were in the 19-35 age group at the time of the study. While it is difficult to tell the precise age of women and girls in a rural context, it is estimated that nearly 16 per cent of the women were above 36 years of age when the study was conducted.

A large majority of the MSK/KK learners are engaged in domestic work in their own homes; however, an equal number of learners are also working as wage labour, NGO workers, holding government posts and running small business (50.1 per cent). Nine of the 62 learners are working with NGOs and seven are part of government programmes for the rural poor. Women who found employment in government work in child care centres (*anganwadi sahayika*) and as cooks under the ICDS and midday meal programmes, respectively. The absence of other employment opportunities in the area and large scale migration to urban centres could be a reason for the low rates of unemployment among the MSK/KK learners.

At the time they joined the MSK/KK, most learners were either unmarried or had not gone to their in-laws' home after marriage. A majority of learners have since married and are living with their husbands or in-laws. A significant number of single women (17) and women separated from their husbands or who live on their own, away from the family, were among the learners covered by this research.

*Educational background of learners*

Information on the learners' education experience prior to MSK/KK aided the study's understanding of their educational background and the role of the MSK/KK experience. It further examined the educational background of their parents, siblings in the school-going age, children and other family members. On the basis of this information, gendered patterns in access to education were analysed.

Table 4. Educational Background of MSK/KK Learners

| | |
|---|---|
| Education prior to the MSK/KK | 66.1% |
| Studied prior to the MSK/KK | 22.6% |
| Appeared for mainstream exam immediately after MSK/KK | 27.4% |
| Enrolled in formal school after the MSK/KK | 59.7% |
| Did not enrol in formal school after the MSK/KK | 29.0% |
| Studied up to the 8th standard after the MSK/KK | 19.4% |
| Studied up to the 10th standard after the MSK/KK | 12.9% |

Only 14.5 per cent of the learners had studied in primary school before coming to the MSK/KK. In terms of the main reason for not accessing education prior to the MSK/KK experience, 21 per cent of the learners cited the lack of financial resources; 17.7 per cent mentioned opposition from family members and 9.7 per cent learners attributed this to their work loads. From these responses, it is clear that gendered reasons such as low priority to girls' education, involvement of girls in domestic work and care for siblings are among the main reasons for the learners not having access to formal schooling or for not completing formal education subsequent to the MSK/KK.

A majority of learners enrolled in formal school after completing the six-month course, but met difficulty in completing this beyond the primary level. They identified marriage as the main reason for not completing formal schooling, though lack of financial resources and opposition from family members were also stated as reasons for dropping out of formal school.

Table 5. Educational Background of Family Members

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Mother | Non literate | 72.6% |
| Father | Non literate | 48.4% |
| Brother | Studied up to 6th standard | 21.0% |
| Sister | Non literate | 19.4% |
| Husband | Non literate | 25.8% |
| Daughter | Studied up to 6th standard | 32.3% |
| Son | Studied up to 6th standard | 40.3% |

Table 6. Type of Education

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Learner | Studied in government school | 45.2% |
| Brother | Studied in government school | 50.0% |
| Sister | Studied in government school | 29.0% |
| Daughter | Studied in government school | 24.2% |
| Son | Studied in government school | 33.9% |

Most learners belonged to the first generation of literate members in the family. While there is a significant gender gap in literacy rates for the older generation, this narrows down in the next generation of learners. For the MSK/KK learners, schooling is as important for daughters as it is for sons. However, the distance from home to school emerges as the main reason for fewer girls studying as compared to boys. Government schools, as opposed to private schools are the preferred educational institutions for most families, regardless of the gender of the learner.

### Table 7. Learners Inspiring Others Towards Education

| | |
|---|---|
| Motivated others towards education | 69.4% |
| Motivated sisters towards education | 16.1% |
| Motivated daughters-in-law towards education | 14.5% |
| Motivated friends towards education | 14.5% |

The MSK/KK proved inspiring for the learners, who also motivated other family members and friends to study. Some learners shared that they were determined to provide the same learning opportunity to others in the family/ community. The older women said they encouraged daughters-in-law to study while younger girls shared with friends or sisters their intent/desire to study further. Talking directly to family members helped significantly motivate other learners (46.8 per cent); others joined MSK/KK upon being referred to MS staff.

### Table 8. Reasons for Discontinuing Education

| | |
|---|---|
| Marriage as the reason for learners leaving formal school after MSK/KK | 17.7% |
| Opposition from family member as the reason for leaving formal school after MSK/KK | 9.7% |
| Lack of financial resources as the reason for leaving formal school after MSK/KK | 9.7% |
| Lack of financial resources as the reason for learners not joining formal school after MSK/KK | 21.0% |
| Opposition from family members as the reason for not joining formal school after MSK/KK | 17.7% |
| Not interested in studies as the reason for brothers discontinuing formal schooling | 9.7% |
| Lack of financial resources as the reason for brothers discontinuing formal schooling | 9.7% |
| Marriage as the reason for sisters discontinuing formal schooling | 8.1% |
| Not interested in studies as the reason for sisters discontinuing formal schooling | 3.2% |
| Not interested in studies as the reason for sons discontinuing formal schooling | 3.2% |
| Lack of financial resources as the reason for sons discontinuing formal education | 3.2% |
| Distance of school as the reason for daughters discontinuing formal schooling | 4.8% |
| Not interested in studies as the reason for daughters discontinuing formal schooling | 3.2% |

The gender dimension becomes evident in the reasons cited for discontinuing education. Marriage, distance of schools and lack of financial resources figure as women/girls' main reasons for dropping out, while boys point to lack of interest in education. Similar concerns were shared in the interviews with learners, as documented below:

**Reasons for discontinuing education after MSK/KK**

*'I was not able to study after the KK. There were several reasons for this. I came from a poor family and my parents could only afford to send my brothers to school. In addition, there was a lot of work at home. I was also not able to get a job after completing the course, which was quite disappointing. I almost lost interest in pursuing my studies.' (Nafisa)*

*'I wanted to study, but soon after completing the course at KK, I got married. My in-laws would never send me to study further. That's how I had to give up education, despite my own interest to study further.' (Shani)*

*'I could only appear for the 5th class exam after the MSK. I had children to take care of and there was no one to look after them if I went to school. My family also did not have the resources for my education.' (Shivmani)*

*Joining the MSK/KK*

This section provides information on what motivated the learners to participate in the MSK/KK and their expectations of these centres. The study also studied data disaggregated on the basis of age to see how expectations of women might differ from those of girls participating in the MSK/KK.

**Table 9. Reasons for Participating in MSK/KK**

| | |
|---|---|
| Increase knowledge and information | 30.6% |
| In order to get a job | 25.8% |
| In order to study further in school | 16.1% |

**Table 10. Expectations at the time of joining MSK/KK**

| Age group at the time of joining MSK/KK | Expectations at the time of joining MSK/KK | |
|---|---|---|
| 10-14 years | Enhance levels of information | 46.7% |
| 15-18 years | Access employment opportunities | 33.3% |
| 19-25 years | Enhance levels of information, access employment opportunities | 40.0% |
| 26-35 years | Access employment opportunities | 50.0% |
| Above 36 years | Study further, enhance levels of information | 100% |

Table 11. Current Expectations of the MSK/KK

| Current age group | Expectations of the MSK/KK | |
|---|---|---|
| 15-18 years | Redress the situation of not accessing education in childhood | 100% |
| 19-25 years | Enhance levels of information | 42.3% |
| 26-35 years | Access employment opportunities | 36.8% |
| Above 36 years | Study further | 40.0% |

It is interesting to note that learners looked at the MSK/KK primarily as an intervention that would enable them to enhance their levels of information and provide them access to education. Contrary to popular belief that women/girls access educational opportunities to support their children's education or for better marriage prospects, the data reveals that learners accessed the MSK/KK to remedy their own status and situation. Younger girls viewed the programmes as interventions enabling them to study and access information, while older women appreciated them not only as a means for getting information but also to find employment opportunities. The expectations of learners have also changed over the years while those of older women (above 36 years of age) have remained the same.

Learners said they were completely satisfied with the MSK/KK experience and their expectations have been fulfilled (40.9 per cent). However, an equal number of learners feel satisfied only to a certain extent (41.9 per cent). Unable to study further or access employment opportunities, they believe that the institutions could have played a stronger role after the completion of the course.

### Learners reflecting on time spent with MSK

Kavita, 10-14 years of age during the programme

*'I just wanted to study further; I had not gone to school, but had seen a lot of girls going to school. I had to make it to the MSK somehow, this was my only chance. I knew that my parents would not be able to send me to school. Even though I was younger than most learners who enrolled at the MSK, I was able to make it there because of my own strong desire to study further at any cost.'*

Maina, 16-17 years of age during the programme

*'I got married at a very young age and my husband was unemployed. I had seen the MS programme quite closely, and I thought that studying at the MSK would help me get a job. Besides, I was also interested in studying. I went to study with these expectations. I was not able to work immediately after completing the course, but eventually was hired as an ICDS worker.'*

Sanjo, 26-35 years of age during the programme

*'I had not been to school before joining MSK. I was well aware of the MS programme; I interacted a lot with the staff of the programme as they came to my area regularly. When I heard about the MSK, I wanted to go there; I thought it would enable me to remedy the situation of not accessing school in childhood. It also helped me gain respect for myself and enhance my level of knowledge.'*

Shani, 10-14 years at the time of coming to KK

*'I was keen to get information about a lot of things. As a young girl I was shy and yet I was eager to know more about [my] body and other such things. I thought the Kishori Kunj would be ideal for me to get information. It would also enable me to study further, enrol in formal school, so I came here.'*

*Impact of the MSK/KK*

The study captured the impact of the MSK/KK on the lives of the learners. The findings below show the use of skills acquired by the learners, content of the course that they found relevant and were able to recall and the perceptions of learners on issues of gender and violence.

Table 12. Use of Literacy in Everyday Life

| | |
|---|---|
| Use regularly | 45.2% |
| Sometimes | 37.1% |
| Not used at all | 8.1% |

Table 13. Everyday Use of Literacy

| | |
|---|---|
| Reading children's school books | 6.9% |
| Reading wedding cards | 6.6% |
| Reading letters | 6.5% |
| Reading wall writing | 6.5% |
| Reading newspapers/newsletters | 6% |
| Reading calendar | 6% |
| Reading religious books | 2.9% |

Women gave few answers when asked what they read because they did not have much access to reading materials. However, the everyday use of literacy is quite significant among women. They use their literacy skills for recording their expenses (16.5 per cent) and for correspondence (12.5 per cent). Women evidently employ literacy skills not only to support their children's education or reading religious books but also for other purposes relevant in their daily lives.

### Table 14. Information in the MSK Curriculum that was Most Useful

| | |
|---|---|
| Health | 17.7% |
| Geography | 14.5% |
| History | 11.3% |
| Legal information | 8.1% |

Women remembered a range of information made available to them at the MSK/KK, but those related to health had the highest recall. For instance, they cited the information that '*we have 206 bones in our body*' and recalled the methodology that '*we made models for different parts of the body, such as the eyes, respiratory system.*' They also exhibited immediate recall of information related to the earth and its rotation, volcanoes, the occurrence of earthquakes and change in seasons. Several learners talked about history, including the ancient civilisations, people in pre-historic times and the evolution of patriarchy. Impact of information on shared in MSK/KK on discrimination or violations of rights surfaced in such comments as, '*Gandhi faced discrimination when he went to South Africa to study*', '*the Narmada Bachao Andolan protects the rights of poor people over their ancestral land*', and '*women participated actively in the Chipko Andolan and saved many trees from being felled by contractors*'.

MSK/KK's methodology took guidance from participatory, learner-centred and feminist principles. Learners covered by the study could articulate these principles by providing concrete examples. All of them mentioned with great excitement their exposure visits to a planetarium in Delhi, a fort in Jhansi, places of historical significance in Allahabad and Chitrakoot and a screen printing unit. '*We made soaps and puppets, we were also taught to repair cycles. Where else does one learn such things?*'

They also learned at the MSK/KK to overcome hesitation, develop their confidence and improve communication and analytical skills.

'*The ones who were shy were asked to come in front and read aloud from the board.*'

'*We remember the role plays performed, such as the one on child marriage which gave us the courage to speak against the ritual even in our own families.*'

'*We were encouraged to write letters. I remember expressing myself, sharing with my family what I had learned through these letters.*'

'*We shared the same space. There was absolutely no discrimination on the basis of caste or other identity. We ate, slept and studied together, and even the teachers stayed with us at all times.*'

Table 15. Changes After Studying at the MSK/KK

| | |
|---|---|
| MSK/KK has brought about changes (positive) | 87.1% |
| Greater confidence | 24.2% |
| Greater awareness | 15.7% |
| Access to further education | 9.7% |
| Access to jobs | 4.8% |
| Ability to speak up against violence | 4.4% |
| Awareness of rights | 4.0% |
| Greater mobility | 0.8% |

It is clear from the responses of learners that the MSK/KK has had a positive impact in building their confidence, increasing their levels of awareness and information and in providing access to employment opportunities. The two workshops conducted with learners further gave the study insights into the changes in their lives as a result of the MSK/KK intervention.

## Activity: Picture cards to understand learners' perception of gender issues

PICTURE 1: women sitting on a high charpoy (a type of bed specific to India), reading from a book
RESPONSE: It is rare to see women sitting publicly on a charpoy and reading or relaxing.  This is possible for men, but women would never dare do this. Even 'upper caste' women might sit on a charpoy in the presence of dalit women, but not sit in the presence of men. This is a gender issue, as well as a caste issue, with dalit women ending up worse off in this situation. Some of us who are now working as NGO activists can now sit on a charpoy in a village, and this is a change we see in ourselves.

PICTURE 2: a drunk man beating a woman
RESPONSE: Men get violent when they are drunk, but they can also be violent when they are not drunk.  Women suffer because they have no option; in many cases, they do not even have a place of their own.

*'My father-in-law beat me, and I knew this was wrong.  I turned to the law and filed a case against him.'* (Savita)

*'I retaliated by beating my husband back when he beat me.  I would have done a lot more to stop the violence if I had more information.'* (Chunni)

*'My daughter-in-law's father would beat her a lot; I was able to stop the violence by intervening. My daughter in law now lives with me; she is also studying.'* (Shivkumari)

PICTURE 3: women sitting in a meeting of the gram sabha (local governance structure at the village level)[1]

RESPONSE: It is impossible for women to participate in *gram sabha* meetings. Some magazines show women participating in these meetings, but this is not really happening. In fact, gram sabha meetings don't take place the way they are meant to.  Instead, [the leaders] forge the signatures of the members and make up the paper work [e.g., minutes of the meeting, to show that the process has been completed].

It is the male members who make decisions and represent the women in meetings, even where women are members of panchayats. In situations where it is important for women to attend an activity, their presence has mere tokenistic value as only the men participate.

PICTURE 4: a picture of Mayawati, the Chief Minister (CM) of Uttar Pradesh (the only Dalit woman CM of India's most populous state)

RESPONSE: This is Mayawati, the CM, a Dalit woman. The work that is being done by her government does not reach the people. The projects and schemes she introduced for the rural poor are taken advantage by certain 'upper caste' communities. She started the Mahamaya scheme, but nobody has benefited from this. We are supposed to get Rs. 1 lakh [around USD2,000] for the marriage of our daughters, but people get only half the amount.

PICTURE 5: construction site where men and women are at work

RESPONSE: Women in wage labour are often engaged in activities that require them to work harder than men, such as lifting weights and walking longer distances. Yet, women get lower pay than men. Women are also stronger than men, but people do not accept this. The new scheme MGNREGA [Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act], though intended for both women and men, mainly hires men.

PICTURE 6: girl working at home while boy goes to school

RESPONSE: Girls have to work at home. Since they eventually marry and leave home, parents don't invest in their education. This has changed since our times. We send our daughters to school. While they do have to work at home, we make sure that they are not denied the opportunity to study. We have also encouraged other girls (not just daughters) to go to school.

The learners are well aware of the discrimination that takes place on the basis of gender, caste and other identities. Whether it is discrimination at work, politics and governance, private and public spaces, in access to opportunities and resources, and in the division of labour, the learners have

[1] The *gram sabha*, a forum at the lowest level of governance, is intended to promote inclusiveness and democratic processes through the participation of everyone in the village, including women.

been able to articulate the violations quite clearly. Even in domains that are traditionally not meant for women such as politics and administration, they have been able to intervene or identify the gendered differences. In some situations they have also taken action to remedy the situation through active intervention in specific cases or by dealing with the situation in their own homes and families.

Learners linked to local NGOs have greater access to information on laws, programs, citizens' rights, etc. This awareness has enabled them to take concrete action in cases of violation.

## Learners' perception of change

An overwhelming number of learners talked about the changes they perceived after the MSK/KK experience. Many of them spoke about what they 'could not do' before coming to the centre and how things have changed since. They also shared the fears they had overcome and the ways by which they gained confidence, greater access to information, a stronger sense of self and the ability to speak out against discrimination. Women also felt they had a bigger voice than before in areas of decision-making and in some cases, they made the decisions themselves. The responses below capture some of these perceptions:

*'We learnt to speak up, we learnt about our rights. These are learnings that we will continue to use all our lives.'* (Urmila)

*'People look up to me with respect. I have the confidence to travel on my own, even at night. I used to be scared of lawyers during court cases, but now I can talk to senior officials by myself.'* (Chunni)

*'The MSK experience has given us tremendous courage and this has enabled us to struggle for our rights. I have been able to make decisions in my family. I did not want to work as wage labour because employers pay less wages so I worked in a private school run by an NGO. Later I became part of the NGO, and today I am employed as a midday meal cook.'* (Sonia)

*'I consider the KK to be the most important thing in my life after my parents. I am working as a journalist in a rural newspaper. I also continue to study as I work. I will complete my high school this year.'* (Pramila)

*'When it comes to voting during elections, I am able to decide the candidate of my choice. My family members ask me for advice on these matters.'* (Meera)

*'I have eight bigha [roughly 20,000 square meters] of land in my name. But this is ancestral property that women don't inherit. In my case, I was able to claim this right from my family and also also fought for my sister's right over this property, which otherwise would have been inherited only by my brothers.'* (Surajkali)

*'I could not study after the KK, but I have able to do a lot in my life. I helped my mother during her [kidney] surgery. I have no brothers, but I took on more responsibility than any son could…I work as a chowkidaar (caretaker), and I get Rs. 1,500 [USD30] a month which I use to the support the family.'* (Janaki)

*'I am a gram pradhan. This is the second time that I have ran for office and won in the elections. People elected me because I have worked for them. I have a long list of the developments. I have been able to do for my area. I am also the head of my family. All members of my family seek my advice for decisions, big or small.'* (Sanjo)

*'I am a hand pump mechanic. I am also part of the executive committee of a local organisation and actively working on cases of violence since I completed the six-month course at the MSK. I can read, I have access to government [social welfare] schemes and thus, a lot of people in my community look up to me with respect.'*

### Mobility

Another area where change among learners can be perceived quite clearly as a result of the MSK/KK intervention is the increase in their mobility. Most learners felt that they could travel independently, not only in the village, but also to other places. Mobility also facilitated their access to information, government programmes and laws. They visited public institutions such as banks, health centres and schools for specific work, often to claim their rights.

### Table 16. Mobility of Women

| | |
|---|---|
| Freedom to travel independently (e.g., to attend meetings) | 66.1% |
| Supportive and confident family members | 54.9% |
| Independently visited government health centres | 10.1% |
| Independently visited banks | 8.1% |
| Independently visited schools | 7.8% |
| Visit for specific work or to file a petition | 66.1% |
| Felt fully confident | 59.7% |
| Felt confident to some extent | 22.6% |

### Table 17. Negotiating violence

| | |
|---|---|
| Action taken against violence after the MSK/KK | 27.4% |
| Violence faced after returning from MSK/KK | 33.9% |
| Mental violence | 11.3% |
| Dealt with violence on their own | 16.1% |
| Approached NGO/police | 6.4% |

An overwhelming number of learners spoke about the violence they faced after their MSK/KK involvement. Other learners did not feel comfortable about directly sharing these experiences. They did express the lack of support from family and institutions in their lives after the MSK/KK experience.

**Activity: Discussion on violence against women through a participatory activity with 15 young learners.**

*The participants were asked to react to specific statements. The responses of a some of the learners are noted below:*

Q. I have been able to study as much as I wanted after the KK

*'I got married after the KK. I couldn't study further.' (*Rani)

*'I could study only up to the 8th standard. I got married soon after and had a big family to look after, which is why I had to give up school.'* (Aarti)

*'My mother fell ill after I went home from the KK. She needed looking after, so while I was enrolled in the 6th standard, I was pulled out to take care of her.'* (Aruna)

Q. I have been able to speak out against violence either in my own life or in the life of someone else

*'The staff of a hospital refused to admit a poor woman who was about to give birth. Seeing her condition, I told the hospital staff that I would hold them responsible if anything were to happen to the woman. Upon hearing this, the staff admitted the woman immediately and provided medical attention.'* (Nirmala)

(Rampyari provided a similar example of how she helped a woman during childbirth. Most of the other learners did not respond to this statement.)

Q. I am able to articulate my views in the family and my views are taken seriously

Most learners said that they could not talk about their own illness in the family. If they did, family members would either tell them there wasn't enough money to spend on treatment or that their ailments were not serious enough to warrant a visit to the doctor or the hospital.

*'I had gone to work in the fields during the final stage of my pregnancy. I then felt labour pains but my mother-in-law was also out working in the same place. I called out to her since I was in a lot of pain, but she did not come. Finally, I had to give birth on my own, out in the field.'* (Shivmani)

### Talking about violence in their own lives

*'My husband lives in the city and one day my father-in-law tried to molest me. I could not tell anyone about this. I have now returned to my parents' place. I told my mother and sister about this, but not my father.'* (Aruna)

*'Husbands are violent with wives, but they also care for the family.'* (Chunni)

*'A man once attempted to rape my sister-in-law while she was working in the fields. She shouted for help, and another woman working nearby came to her rescue.'* (Sumila)

Learners deal with violence in different ways, and for some of them the violence continues daily up to the present. Most of them are among the younger women who had come to the KK.

The six-month course provided them a lot of information on issues related to violence, which helped them articulate their views. However, a large number have not been able to concretely translate concepts in their own lives. Some of them even mentioned the absence of spaces to talk about violence.

This is true for the large majority of younger learners from Banda, unlike the learners from Chitrakoot where institutionalised spaces exist in the form of women's collectives and NGOs working against violence. The withdrawal of the MS programme from the district also meant that most of them had not been able to come back to members of MS or to teachers who were involved in the KK in the last decade. Aruna, a learner who has experienced violence in her life said: '*While we were at the KK, there was a sense of security. We could articulate our feelings and concerns, and we had confidence that these would be heard and addressed. Now after so many years, we have no one to talk to.*'

There were also learners who felt no significant changes in their lives despite learning a lot during the MSK/KK. Compared to the older women learners, there was a higher percentage of girl learners who felt that while the KK had been an empowering experience, the demands of marriage, domesticity and family expectations did not allow them to use their learnings the way they would have wanted. In some cases, learners had also internalised gender stereotyped perceptions on the lack of opportunities to girls/women.

*'I came with my father to the workshop. My in-laws have always opposed any kind of decision that I try to make. I have three daughters, so there is not much that I can do now. My husband does petty jobs and supports the family.'* (Phoola)

*'This is one of the rare occasions when I have been able to come to a meeting. I have a very supportive sister in-law, but an extremely violent husband. He doesn't allow me to leave the house. I have sought support from other institutions, but nothing can change my husband.'* (Kiran)

*'My husband is married to someone else, and I now live with my brothers. If my husband were to come back, I would go with him. After all, a woman's life is closely linked to that of her husband's.'*

# SUMMARY OF KEY FINDING AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### MSK learners: first generation literate members

A large number of MSK learners were among the first generation of literate members. There was a significant difference in literacy rates along the lines of gender. Subsequent to the MSK experience, however, learners have inspired female family members and friends to access both formal and non-formal education.

### Accessing mainstream education after the MSK course

The MSK was seen as an intervention that opened up new opportunities for learners to further their education. A majority of learners appeared for the 5th class examination after completing the MSK course. However, a large percentage of the learners could not study beyond the primary level. Marriage, lack of financial resources and opposition from family members were among the major hindrances stated.

### Using literacy skills acquired

A large majority of learners are able to use and apply literacy. They include women who are working in local NGOs and government programmes/schemes as well as members of SHGs. Women use literacy to keep records of expenses, writing letters and reading various materials around them (e.g., children's textbooks, cards, calendars, newspapers, letters, wall writing). This is in contrast to popular belief that women use their literacy primarily to make their children literate. Women practice and use literacy for a range of reasons and consider this skill valuable.

### Empowering education: shaping the lives of learners in meaningful ways

The MSK brought about a range of positive impacts on the lives of learners. These include the following:
• *Providing them access to work and livelihoods.* A significant percentage of the learners are currently working as NGO workers, implementers of government

programmes and schemes, journalists of a rural newspaper, hand pump mechanics and members of local governance institutions and of education programmes. Learners are also members of SHGs and local collectives involved in raising issues of violence against women and caste-based violence.

- *Increasing mobility of women and girls.* Most learners are independently and confidently able to travel long distances.
- *Enhancing levels of confidence.* Learners interact with the community, officials and the literate world with greater confidence and often, as equals. They feel that increased awareness of rights, issues and access to information has given them this confidence.
- *Instilling and strengthening the ability to deal with violence.* Most learners recognise violence and injustice. A significant number of women have been able to speak up against violence and resist. Some women, especially the older ones, have intervened in cases of violence against women in their villages/community by approaching local agencies or acting directly to remedy specific situations.
- *Enabling further education.* Some learners have been able to complete secondary school. A small percentage succeeded in accessing/completing higher education.
- *Enabling decision-making.* A large number of learners showed the capacity to make decisions related to their lives. Most learners felt they could decide over matters in the domestic sphere, but fewer women could say the same about the use of financial assets/money, etc. Some learners shared that while they may not be able to decide independently, they felt they enjoyed a greater voice than before in decision-making in the household.
- *Developing learners to be role models, mediators and sources of information for others in the community.* Several learners feel that the community looks up to them with respect and recognises their skills and abilities.

## MSK: high quality educational institution

Sustained engagement with various aspects of the MSK intervention (curriculum, methodology, teacher training, etc.) and state support enabled the MSK to emerge as a high quality educational institution. The relevance of the MSK education is also apparent as most learners consider this institution to be different from formal schools in the way that it goes beyond providing literacy and schooling.

## Difference in articulation and experiences of learners of different age groups

For the younger learners, marriage and domestic responsibilities acted as major barriers in completing education subsequent to the MSK. Some of the younger women also found it difficult to negotiate violence or make decisions. It proved easier for older women to relate the issues of gender, discrimination, power, etc., introduced during the MSK, as compared to younger girls, for whom some of these concepts may have been too abstract.

### Absence of institutional support and long-term follow-up

The MS programme underwent several changes after 2000 in the two districts where the MSK remained functional. After completion of the MSK course, there was no regular or sustained follow up done with the learners. This resulted in a large number of learners who could not be traced. The study learned that some learners managed to sustain their levels of information and literacy through linkages with other institutions (mainly NGOs/women's groups). However, there was no planned intervention subsequent to the MSK to sustain this, which explains the large number of learners who relapsed into illiteracy.

### Programme and policy recommendations

- *There is a need for more strategic visioning and institutional support for women's literacy and empowerment.* It is important for policy makers and programme implementers to design programmes with a long term vision and plan. Sustaining women's literacy and education require greater investments in terms of adequate resources and sustained programme periods, for instance.
- *It is critical to link literacy to areas that women are engaged with.* Thematic literacy packages those link women's issues and different concerns can open doors for realising the full potential of education interventions. Linking literacy with such themes as health, employment/livelihoods, micro-credit, governance, etc., has been shown to sustain literacy interventions and their impacts over longer terms.
- *Programmes for literacy/education should not simplistically reduce women to a homogenous category.* They should take into account how women and girls are differently situated in varying socio-cultural, political and economic contexts, and thus lead complex and diverse lives. A uniform or one-size-fits-all programme would not be responsive to the needs of its target beneficiaries.
- *Programmes on women's literacy and education should start from and harness the experiences of groups/organisations working on women's issues/ empowerment.* In the context of India, the experience of the MS programme and different elements of the MSK provide valuable insights and learnings that can significantly enhance the design of future literacy interventions.
- *Provision of reading and learning materials to sustain literacy and strengthen literate environments.* In the absence of such materials, learners face limited options for strengthening their literacy skills and eventually relapse into illiteracy. It is important for programmes to provide a variety of materials that are interesting, entertaining and informative as well as linguistically accessible, culturally sensitive and non-discriminatory.

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# INDONESIA

## Women's Literacy in Indonesia:

## An Advocacy Research

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# METHODOLOGY

This study is an action research addressing the following questions:

1. What is the current situation of women literacy in Indonesia?
2. What are the policies in place relevant to women's literacy in Indonesia and the funds allocated for their implementation?
3. What are the opportunities available for interventions by civil society organisations working on women's literacy in Indonesia?

The study sought to reflect the different views in assessing women's literacy in Indonesia. Thus guided by the the research questions above, it conducted a review of literature of policy documents from various government, CSO and international organisations.

Local-level researches were conducted in the two districts of Maros in South Sulawesi Province and East Lombok in West Nusa Tenggara Province. They ground the national level situation and policy scan with assessments of individual and community-level realities.

# CONTEXT

Indonesia's 124th rank in the 2011 Human Development Index (HDI) out of 187 countries indicates difficult socio-economic conditions for its people. The government affirmed this situation in its 2004-2009 National Development Plan and attempted to address political, economic and welfare problems.

However, the government's analysis fell short of providing a complete picture of the condition of its people. It failed to mention, for instance, that despite its attempts in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment through various policies and mechanisms, it still ranked 100th out of 145 countries, with a value of 0.505 in the Gender Inequality Index (GII) of 2011.[1] This underscores the need for government to work harder to ensure a better life for women through gender sensitive policies and programs, and in the process, move closer to achieving gender equality in education and literacy.

Several international agreements recognise education as an essential in enhancing the quality of life for women. Under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), for instance, universal primary education and gender parity in education are identified as key goals, and as basic components in the global effort to eradicate poverty.

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[1] The Gender Inequality Index (GII) is a composite measure reflecting inequality in achievements between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. It varies between zero (when women and men fare equally) and one (when men or women fare poorly compared to the other in all dimensions). The index is generated by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and published in the Human Development Reports. The world average score on the GII is 0.492.

The Indonesian people, however, particularly Indonesian women, continue to fare poorly in this sector. Access to education and other learning opportunities are made more difficult for women by stringent political, economic and socio-cultural barriers (UN Division for the Advancement of Women 2004, 3). Women comprised an overwhelming 70 per cent of the total illiterate population in 2008 (UNESCO, 2011), indicating that women were not significantly benefitting from increasing literacy rates over the years and underscoring female illiteracy as a persistently serious concern.

## LITERACY SITUATION

According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2011), nearly three quarters of the world's 796 million illiterates in 2008 were concentrated in 10 countries with the biggest number of adult illiterates. Indonesia is included in the list, although there have been improvements in Indonesia's literacy situation, shown by data on the significant drop in illiteracy rates for the 15 years and above age group from 10.21 per cent in 2003 to 7.42 per cent in 2009.

Progress was also recorded in reducing illiteracy among girls and boys in the younger population group. Steps in this direction are clearly linked to the enactment of the Nine Years Compulsory Basic Education law in 1990, which mandates compulsory basic education starting at age five with pre-school until age 13 with junior secondary school. The country's basic education net enrolment reached a high of 94.37 per cent in 2009 (BPS- Statistics Indonesia, 2009a). Efforts at illiteracy reduction also made headway in the 45 years and above age group, as illiteracy rates declined from 25.43 to 18.68 per cent for the same period 2003 to 2009 (BPS-Statistics Indonesia, 2009b).

At the start of Indonesia's EFA implementation in 2001, government aimed for a reduction of 50 per cent illiteracy by 2010, a target five years ahead of the 2000 Dakar Convention target.[2] It gave no explanation, however, how this changed the situation of illiteracy among Indonesian women. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics and the Directorate-General for People's Education under the Ministry of National Education, illiterate people aged 15 and above numbered about 9,763,256 (5.97 per cent of the population) as of June 2008. Of this figure, 64 per cent or 6,248,484 women were reported as illiterate.

The situation did not change significantly by the time Indonesia's EFA target fell due in 2009 and 2010. The UNFPA reported that in 2009, Indonesia still had high illiterates among women. The percentage of illiterate

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[2] Cited from the report of the national coordination forum of EFA, "Indonesia Education Development Programs", published by the Coordinating Ministry of People's Welfare, 2011.

women aged 15 and above turned out two times bigger at 10.32 per cent than the men at 4.35 per cent (See Table 1). In 2010, the same office of the Directorate-General for People's Education reported about 5.3 million Indonesian women who still could not read and write and that around 70 per cent of them belonged to the age group 40 years and older. These illiterate women tended to ignore conditions of poor health, nutrition and sanitation, and thus suffered high infant mortality and maternal mortality rates. There also lived in poverty and did not enjoy opportunities for women's political participation.

Table 1. Percentage of Illiterate Males and Females Aged 15 Years and Above in Seven Provinces with Lowest Literacy Rate in 2009

| Province | 15+ | | | 15-24 | | | 25-44 | | | 45+ | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | F | M+F | M | F | M+F | M | F | M+F | M | F | M+F |
| INDONESIA | 4.35 | 10.32 | 7.42 | 0.45 | 0.60 | 0.53 | 1.64 | 3.27 | 2.48 | 10.75 | 26.03 | 18.68 |
| Nusa Tenggara | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Timur | 9.76 | 14.15 | 12.04 | 2.05 | 2.36 | 2.21 | 5.33 | 6.14 | 5.76 | 21.20 | 33.60 | 27.55 |
| Jawa Timur | 7.04 | 16.91 | 12.20 | 0.49 | 0.64 | 0.56 | 2.06 | 4.80 | 3.50 | 15.85 | 37.22 | 27.20 |
| Sulawesi Barat | 9.13 | 15.59 | 12.41 | 2.76 | 1.95 | 2.35 | 6.67 | 8.00 | 7.32 | 19.29 | 38.44 | 29.43 |
| Bali | 7.08 | 18.20 | 12.78 | 0.91 | 0.81 | 0.86 | 2.15 | 5.15 | 3.70 | 16.12 | 41.52 | 29.31 |
| Sulawesi | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Selatan | 9.71 | 5.81 | 12.98 | 1.80 | 1.59 | 1.69 | 5.29 | 7.42 | 6.43 | 22.15 | 36.44 | 30.02 |
| Nusa Tenngara | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Barat | 12.93 | 25.44 | 19.82 | 0.43 | 14.60 | 0.99 | 7.29 | 14.22 | 11.13 | 31.39 | 59.81 | 47.19 |
| Papua | 24.48 | 35.11 | 29.71 | 15.72 | 25.07 | 20.31 | 27.02 | 40.30 | 33.76 | 29.51 | 34.58 | 31.70 |

Source: BPS-Statistics Indonesia, 2009a

Literacy rates disaggregated by income and geographic location reveal large disparities. Based on 2009 figures, Papua province recorded the highest illiteracy rate of 7.42 per cent. In addition, seven other provinces have consistently logged illiteracy rates of more than 10 per cent in the last seven years (BPS-Statistics Indonesia, 2009b).

These wide disparities strongly implicate poverty as a major impediment to education and literacy. The lowest quintiles account for the highest proportion of illiterates, at 17 per cent and 25 per cent for the fourth and fifth respectively (See Table 2). Illiteracy is still widespread in many poor and remote local areas of the country, such as East Lombok District province of West Nusa Tenggara where only 42 per cent of the population aged 10 years and above were found literate as of 2007.

Table 2. Wealth Index by Literacy Level among Currently Married Women 15 Years and Above by Literacy Level, Indonesia (2007)

| Wealth index | Illiterate | Semi-Literate | Literate |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 Poorest | 25% | 14% | 62% |
| 2 Poorer | 17% | 10% | 73% |
| 3 Middle | 11% | 8% | 82% |
| 4 Richer | 5% | 6% | 89% |
| 5 Richest | 2% | 2% | 96% |
| ALL | 12% | 8% | 81% |

Source of basic data: BPS-Statistics Indonesia and Macro International, 2008. Indonesia Demographic and Health Survey, 2007
Note: Illiterate refers to those who cannot read at all; semi-literate to those who can read part of a sentence; and literate to those who can read whole sentences.

A study undertaken by the Education Network for Justice, an education coalition in Indonesia (Muchtar, Y., Pulu, L. and Firdhaus, M., 2007), in three provinces arrived at levels of illiteracy higher than the national rate of 8.8 per cent. Of the 87.2 per cent found literate, 3.9 per cent were basic literate, 14 per cent functionally literate and 69.2 per cent advanced literate (See Table 3). It tracked the concentration of illiterates to poor families who were also more likely to be headed by an illiterate (See Figure 1).

Table 3. Literacy Level of the Informants by Surveyed Provinces (2007)

| | West Java | East Java | North Sumatra | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Illiterate | | 36.3% | 6.5% | 12.8% |
| Basic Literate | 2.1% | 5.3% | 5.9% | 3.9% |
| Functional Literate | 7.5% | 23.6% | 15.8% | 14.0% |
| Advanced Literate | 87.7% | 34.8% | 71.8% | 69.2% |

Source: Data generated from the Education Monitoring Research, E-Net for Justice, 2006-2007.
Notes: BASIC LITERATE means able to read, write, comprehending daily simple words and sentences, count, and perform addition and subtraction for 1 digit.
FUNCTIONAL LITERATE means able to read, write, comprehending one or two paragraphs, count, and perform basic addition, subtraction, multiplication and division for 1 digit.
ADVANCED LITERATE means able to read, write (copy and re-write), comprehending short story, count and perform basic addition, subtraction, multiplication and division for 2 digits.

Figure 1. Illiterate Informants by Literacy Level of Household Heads
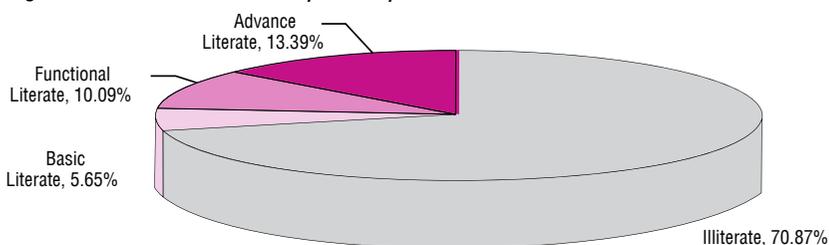


Source: Data generated from the Education Monitoring Research, E-Net for Justice, 2006-2007.

In terms of gender, the study shows a higher proportion of illiterate women (59.5 per cent) as compared to men (40.5 per cent). While there were more women than men found literate at the basic and functional levels, men still edged out women in the advance literate category (See Figure 2).
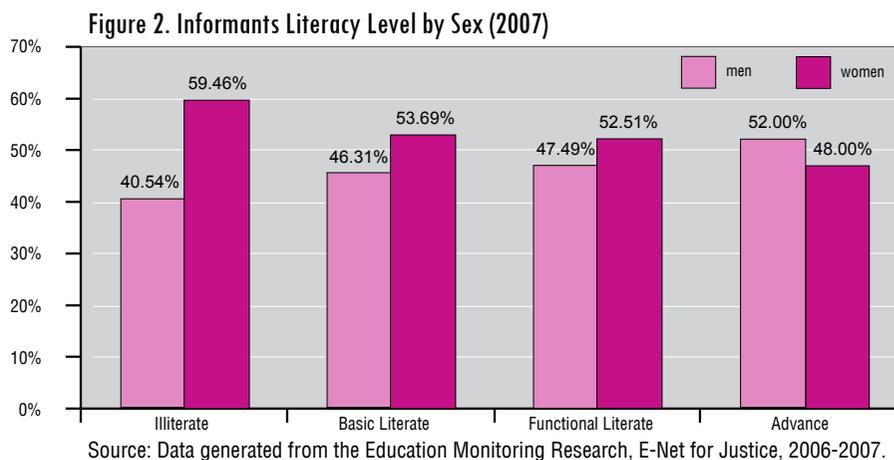
Figure 2. Informants Literacy Level by Sex (2007)



Source: Data generated from the Education Monitoring Research, E-Net for Justice, 2006-2007.

Across age groups, the gender gap is much higher among older men and women. Females in the age group 45 years and above comprised 26.03 of the total while younger women in the age group 15 years and above stood at 10.32 per cent, falling behind by 6 per cent of the young males' literacy rate of 4.35 per cent. Consistent with rates by province, women fared worse in the seven provinces that recorded the highest illiteracy rates.

These apparently unyielding figures call further attention to factors other than economic and geographic barriers (Ministry of Education of Indonesia 2010, pp. 4-5) to eliminating illiteracy and sustaining gains. Gender biases perpetuate stereotypical views of women's domestic and social reproduction roles, which socio-culturally bar them from accessing learning opportunities. These biases take hold early in women's lives, as reflected in Indonesia's demographic health survey data showing the tendency of women with low education levels to marry at a young age. The survey also revealed direct links between early marriage and low educational attainment among Indonesian Muslim women.

Illiteracy shapes progress in other markers of women's development such as reproductive health. Illiterate women bear the highest number of children as compared to women with higher education (See Table 4). Illiteracy intersects with and aggravates the effect of other gender marginalising barriers such that the recorded high awareness level of modern contraceptive methods (92 per cent) does not translate into actual use (45 per cent) among illiterate women. They also register the lowest levels of awareness about sexually transmitted infections (15 per cent) and HIV/AIDS (12 per cent).

Table 4. Marriage, Fertility and Knowledge on Reproductive Health among Currently Married Women 15 Years and Above by Literacy Level, Indonesia (2007)

| | Age at first marriage | Total children ever born | Heard about STD | Heard about AIDS | Knows modern contraceptive methods | Currently using modern contra- ceptive methods |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Illiterate | 17.1 | 4.0 | 15% | 12% | 92% | 45% |
| Semi-Literate | 17.8 | 3.9 | 30% | 27% | 97% | 51% |
| Literate | 19.6 | 3.5 | 74% | 72% | 99% | 60% |
| Tertiary/ University Level | 24.3 | 2.7 | 99% | 99% | 100% | 52% |
| ALL | 18.7 | 3.7 | 64% | 62% | 98% | 58% |

Source of basic data: Statistics Indonesia (BPS) and Macro International. 2008. Indonesia Demographic  and Health Survey, 2007
Note: Illiterate refers to those who cannot read at all; semi-literate to those who can read part of a sentence; and literate to those who can read whole sentences.

# POLICY SCAN

Programmes to eradicate illiteracy in Indonesia began even before independence in 1949; at the time, 90 per cent of its population were considered illiterate and only 3 per cent were in formal schools. In 1951, the government launched the 'Ten Year Community Education Plan' aimed at decreasing illiteracy within 10 years.

When the illiteracy rate dropped to 40 per cent by 1960, the government adopted UNESCO's Traditional Literacy or Functional Literacy Program from 1966 to 1979, combining literacy and productivity or livelihood skills (Jalal and Sardjunani, 2005, p. 11). During this period, the government also implemented the 'Package A Program' that applied 'Lingkaran Spiral' (spiral circle), an approach for teaching and learning starting from personal daily life issues and eventually broadening these to family and community concerns. It also encouraged each participant to pass on their learnings to 10 other illiterates. This program proved effective as it brought illiteracy rates down from nearly 40 to 16 per cent of the population for children and youth aged 10 years and above (Jalal and Sardjunani, 2005, p. 5).

In 1990, government implemented the 'Nine Years Compulsory Basic Education Programme' for children 5-13 years old. Reflecting a shift in government's perspective on education, this later expanded to include a literacy programme.

The literacy programme was complemented by a functional literacy programme in 1995 that emphasised the importance of literacy in improving the social conditions of those with little or no access to formal education. This contributed significantly to the reduction of illiteracy for the younger population group for both male and female in 2000.

In 2003, government passed National Education Law No. 20/2003, which provides for the integration of literacy programmes in non-formal education (Article 26). This law subsequently became the basis for government to issue Presidential Decree No. 7/2005, the measure that prioritised the literacy program in the National Medium Term Development Plan (2004-2009).

Two years later, in 2005, the highest rate ever for women's illiteracy in Indonesia was recorded. Government responded by issuing the Joint Decree on the Acceleration of the Eradication of Woman Illiteracy. Three ministries signed the decree — the Ministry of Women Empowerment, Home Affairs and National Education.

Furthermore, the Ministry of National Education initiated a Gender Mainstreaming Programme Action as part of efforts to ensure that women and girls are given equal opportunities. It included the establishment of a Gender Working Group in Education composed of representatives from governmental and non-governmental organisations; provision of gender budgeting in education with assured annual increases; gender analysis in education; revision of textbooks and illustration to make them more gender sensitive; and, advocacy, socialisation and capacity building for those involved in education (UN Division for the Advancement of Women 2004, p. 5).

However, the focus of the literacy programme remained fixed on reading, calculating/computing and writing skills as revealed in the way the heads of the three ministries defined 'illiterate women' in Joint Resolution (*Peraturan Bersama* No. 1/PB/2005.) They referred to them as those who are not literate in Latin and Arabic scripts, Bahasa Indonesian and basic knowledge. It placed no emphasis on literacy programmes as an important element of promoting and realising genuine women's empowerment.

Presidential Instruction No. 5/2006 on the 'National Movement to Hasten Compulsory Nine-Year Basic Education and the Fight against Illiteracy' (NMHFAI) encapsulated the broad targets of illiteracy eradication. Six ministries were involved in this undertaking: the Coordinating Ministry of Public Welfare, Ministry of National Education, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Women Empowerment. NMHFAI also involved other government agencies and local government

executives, specifically the chief of the National Bureau of Statistics, the governors from each of the 33 provinces and the heads of the municipalities or regencies.

The Minister of National Education provided implementation guidelines at both government and non-government levels on improving literacy levels in Indonesia. For its part, the Minister of Internal Affairs called for the allocation of budgets in support of NMHFAI through letters sent to governors, heads of municipalities/regencies and members of the Assembly at provincial and district levels. In 2007, the Minister of Religious Affairs signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Minister of National Education on the implementation of literacy education and other non-formal education in religious education institutions. In response to the budget call for NMHFAI, the National Education Minister and the governors and heads of districts /regencies of 26 provinces signed the MoU.

However, uniformity and regulation in operationalising national policies on education still vary among regions. The research findings show that the literacy programmes both in South Sulawesi and West Nusa are lumped with the functional literacy programme endorsed by the National Education Ministry.

In East Lombok District, for example, there is a '32 days Functional Literacy Programme' in 20 sub-districts financed by the provincial budget and a 'reguler functional literacy programme' funded from the district budget. As one of 33 provinces with a high illiteracy rate (19 per cent), West Nusa Tenggara (Nusa Tenggara Barat or NTB) enjoys support from the local government through the ABSANO (zero illiteracy) programme in its Local Medium Term Development Plan (2009-2014). It specifically targets the regency of Lombok Timur whose high illiteracy rate translates to about 51,000 individuals, with women comprising the largest group.

Further, the head of East Lombok District issued Circular Letter No. 800/614/pegdiklat/2011 mandating civil servants and civil servant candidates to be involved in the illiteracy eradication programme. Another local regulation, Circular Letter No. 800/1743.4/DIK. IV/2011, mentions the need for university participation in the literacy programme. The ABSANO program has so far spent IDR 355,000/ learner (USD 40.80[3]) on the '32 days Functional Literacy Programme' covering 30,000 illiterate people aged 15 years and above in East Lombok.

The local government of West Nusa Tenggara also issued during the same period, six local regulations relating to Arabic literacy; it requires

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[3] 2011 average exchange rate: IDR 9,000.0= USD 1.00

students, civil servants, bridegrooms and guests who intend to meet the Regent to be able to read Koran (KAPAL Perempuan, 2010). In Maros District, the functional literacy program also initiated efforts on Arabic literacy but these were more focused on facilitating the reading of the Koran as endorsed by the Maros Local Regulation No.15/2005 on the Arabic Literacy Movement.

In terms of funding education and literacy programmes, the government allocates an amount that is consistently less than 20 per cent of the national budget contrary to what has been mandated by the 1945 Constitution and the National Education Law of 2003. The budget is even smaller for women's literacy programmes, and is expected to further decline as a result of the cutbacks in education expenditure.

For 2008, the government allocated IDR 64.029 trillion (USD 7.1 billion) or 7.5 per cent of its IDR 854.66 trillion (USD 94.9 billion) state budget. The 2009 education budget further decreased to 5.9 per cent (IDR 61.5 trillion or US$ 6.8 billion) of the state budget (IDR 1,037 trillion or USD 115 billion) according to the Indonesian Forum for Budget Transparency (FITRA).[4]

Budgets for literacy programmes proved even more insignificant relative to the education budget. In 2008, total allocation for literacy amounted to IDR 772 billion (USD 85.8 million) (Indonesia Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 4) or 1.2 per cent of the IDR 64 trillion (USD 7.1 billion) education budget. The next year, it amounted to a mere 1.27 per cent or IDR 781 million (USD 86.8) of the total education budget of IDR 61.5 trillion (USD 6.8 billion). Most of the provinces with high illiteracy rates had to rely on limited national budget appropriations for literacy programmes; only the East Java and Central Java local governments allocated funds from their own budgets.

## CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION:
### KAPAL PEREMPUAN'S CONTRIBUTION TO GENDER MAINSTREAMING

KAPAL Perempuan developed and implemented the programme 'Gender Justice Learning' in Jakarta from April 2003 to March 2004 to capacitate women in the poor and marginalised communities of Kampung Jati and Ciliwung. Through the programme, they were able to organise themselves, build their negotiating skills and facilitated their involvement in decision-making processes in their communities. The programme led to

[4] SEKNAS FITRA (Indonesia Transparency Budget Forum) is an autonomous, non-profit organisation formed in September 1999 to promote good governance and participatory and transparent budgeting. FITRA programmes and activities were supported by the Ford Foundation and Asia Foundation, among others.

the formation of two women schools in Ciliwung and Kampung Jati with 39-50 members.

KAPAL Perempuan staff and the community itself were actively involved in efforts to launch and strengthen the programme. First, KAPAL Perempuan formed a team especially for this purpose. The team then lived in Ciliwung and Kampung Jati for six months, gaining the communities' trust while gathering local data on social, political, economic and cultural issues. They used in-depth interviews, informal discussions, observation, and secondary data from the formal leaders.

In addition, they did a mapping exercise to identify women who could be recruited as learners based on a set of criteria: 1) being part of a marginalised group (low educational level or illiterate; 2) having little or no economic access; and, 3) limited involvement in both private/domestic and community decision-making.

After the mapping process of the community and potential members, the team started to identify the needs of the Gender Justice Learning programme. It conducted in-depth interviews in the two communities with approximately 50 women from diverse backgrounds.

Regular meetings were subsequently held with the women, which generated more information and deepened the interview results. These meetings also began the process of knowledge exchanges, with the team involving the women in collectively building the module for the programme. It was a participatory process that enabled women to take part in identifying the issues that would be discussed under the programme throughout the year. The issues that eventually formed part of the module were gender, sexuality and reproductive health, organising and economic development.

The module was developed through a workshop attended by some organisations that have already been conducting their own Gender Justice Learning programmes in marginalised communities of peasants, labourers, fishers, mothers, street vendors and domestic workers. These included the following organisations: LP2M Padang, YASVA Bengkulu, Damar Lampung, IP Bandung, SPEK HAM Solo, RTND Yogyakarta, LSPPA Yogyakarta, Anissa Mataran, SIP Jakarta, Persepsi Klaten, UPC, Negaci Medan, RMI Bogor, DPTN Bunaken Sulut, and ASPPUK.

Based on the module, KAPAL developed the systematic methods for the one-year learning process in Kampung Jati and Ciliwung communities. Each community agreed on regular two-hour afternoon meetings twice or thrice weekly. They learned about gender equality, literacy and micro-credit in these meetings.

The women's schools that were eventually established emerged from this intensive process. The first women's school opened in Gang Pelangi in October 2003 and was named the Ciliwung's Women's School while the second was set up as the Kampung Jati Women's School in Jatinegara Kaum in November 2003. These two women schools continue to operate today.

Programme replication followed in succeeding years. In 2005, the Gender Justice Learning module was replicated in two rural poor communities in Nain Island, North Sulawesi. The majority of Kampong Bajo residents are comprised of Bajonese and Muslims, while Kampong Siau is largely populated by Siaunese and Christians. The same methods and approaches were used in these areas from September 2005 to January 2006.  The following year, KAPAL Perempuan started to replicate the programme as well in Aceh during the reconstruction of communities hit by the tsunami disaster.  KAPAL visited 11 evacuation centres and developed the women's group that would undertake the literacy programme.

Furthermore, in 2006, the module of Gender Justice Learning gained recognition and acknowledgement from the central government, specifically the General Directorate of Non-formal and Informal Education (currently the General Directorate of Early Childhood, Non-Formal and Informal Education) under the Ministry of National Education or what is now called the Ministry of Education and Culture, as well as the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Children Protection.

## POLICY SCAN

The research found that women's illiteracy endures as a serious problem in Indonesia. The female illiteracy rate declined over the years but women remain in the worst conditions of illiteracy compared to men. Various social, cultural, political and economic barriers in Indonesian society underpin this situation.

Exacerbating these conditions is the failure of the Indonesian government to provide accurate data. Figures from Statistics Indonesia and the Ministry of National Education are at best, inconsistent. The question of political will comes to mind, i.e., whether government is truly serious in combating illiteracy among women and the unjust conditions that often relate to a state of illiteracy.

Additionally, lack of political will has marginalised women, pushing them farther from the centre of policy and literacy programmes. This appears systemically rooted, manifesting in the consistently low budget

allocations for women's literacy programmes at both the national and local levels.

A more fundamental problem lies in the government's paradigm of women's literacy, or the lack thereof. With concepts unclear and poorly defined, interventions have tended to reinforce the non-pluralistic perspectives among government ministries and officials in the limited literacy interventions that are being implemented. Though Indonesia is a country with diverse culture and numerous languages, government literacy programmes do not promote multiculturalism.

The research revealed further that while Indonesia managed to significantly bring down illiteracy in the country, the gender gap in literacy stubbornly persists. This reveals a lack of policy coherence in the implementation of programs especially at the local level and again, implicates the lack of political will on the part of government to provide the full 20 per cent budgetary allocation for education mandated in the Constitution. A review of government literacy policies also show the lack of gender-sensitive mechanisms/methodologies, indicators and targets that would have surfaced low representation of women and girls in education and literacy programmes.

Moreover, the lack of updated and consistent data on education and literacy prevents a more accurate monitoring of the literacy situation and the sound evaluation of the impact of relevant policies and programs. Inconsistent data released by the Statistics Indonesia and the Ministry of National Education aggravate the situation and add further to the confusion.

Implementation of multi-stakeholder programs at the local levels suffers from weak mechanisms that leave much to the discretion of local executives and staff. The Joint Decree for Accelerating Illiteracy Eradication in Women would have been opportunity for local government units and civil society organisations to collaborate on women's literacy provision; it also mandates local governments to fund and implement literacy programs for women. Unfortunately, it is usually superseded by local priorities since local governments have autonomy in implementing programs and exercise their own controls over significant amounts of the education budget. To some extent, local governments' low prioritisation and marginalisation of women's literacy is influenced by the view that literacy is not a major issue.

A major barrier to women's literacy is the prevalence of gender-biased roles in Indonesian society. The socialisation to male-privileging gender bias starts early; girls are reared by their families to assume domestic roles while boys are encouraged to pursue higher education and find jobs outside the home. Nonetheless, the research in Maros District revealed that

poor women also engage in productive work but in informal or contractual terms as farmers, domestic workers or vendors to augment the family income. Thus, they both bear what is known as the double burden of private and public spheres.

The 2010-2015 Medium Term Development Plan of Maros District integrated programmes for women empowerment in the areas of education, health and livelihood, although the effectiveness of these programs has yet to be analysed. In East Lombok District, the Functional Literacy Program implemented in 2008 had shown some positive outcome with the improvement of the district's literacy rate to 80 per cent in 2009 for individuals 10 years old and above. The literacy programme included topics on domestic violence, illegal labour recruitment and child care.

At the national level, some NGOs involved in reducing the women illiteracy rate are KAPAL Perempuan, PPSW (Center for Women's Resources Development) and JALA PRT. They organise women in urban and rural poor communities to participate in literacy programmes with integrated gender justice programmes and micro-credit facilities.

Early marriage is still a widespread practice in the country and remains a critical barrier to girls' education and literacy particularly among poor families with limited resources to send children to school. Because young girls are routinely pulled out of school when they are wed, marriage becomes an option for poor families who want to save on 'unnecessary' educational expenses. Reinforcing this practice is another form of discrimination that stigmatises unmarried older women. This is validated by the 2007 Indonesia Demographic and Health Survey (IDHS) showing that half of females in Indonesia aged 25 to 49 years old were in union by age 19. The IDHS survey further highlighted that females with higher levels of education tended to stay out of early marriages. The Education Watch study undertaken by ASPBAE in Indonesia also revealed that girls, married or not, are further penalised when they get pregnant through expulsion from school.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends a thorough review of literacy and education policies of the government, giving special attention to the condition and needs of women as an underserved group in literacy programs. There is need to revisit and ensure compliance with international agreements and commitments signed and ratified by the government, such as the CEDAW and Dakar Declaration. The

principles and targets embodied in these international agreements must be clearly articulated in national and local policies, and translated into effective programmes with adequate budgets to ensure coherence of policies and actions.

At the same time, the government should reconsider policies that undermine literacy opportunities for women. UNDP lists 26 of these policies (UNDP 2010, 50), which include wearing the traditional Muslim dress that discriminate against poor families. In particular, the government should amend the 1974 Marriage Law to raise the minimum marrying age for girls to 18 years from the current 16 years. Strict measures should also be set in place to prevent schools from punishing pregnant students by expulsion.

A more effective monitoring mechanism must be developed for better trending and analysis of the literacy situation particularly among women and disadvantaged groups. The participation of civil society groups, communities and other stakeholders can provide better credibility and improve the accuracy of data needed for policy and programme development.

Lastly, given budget constraints and local conditions, the government should recognise and support community and civil society organisations initiatives in literacy. These groups can provide data and information on the implementation of programs in their areas and are key partners in monitoring and assessing literacy programs. In Maros District, CSOs advocated for women's literacy programmes in the District's Medium Term Development Plan, which was subsequently replicated in the 2010-2015 Village Development Planning of Desa Samangki and Desa Jenetaesa and resulted in a special scholarship for poor children. As well, a CSO in the sub-district of Simbang, Desa Samangki developed a sex disaggregated literacy data-base with field work students of UIN Alaudin. The Empowerment Partner's Resource Organization (LPSDM ) in West Nusa Tenggara on the other hand continues to lobby for women literacy programmes in the local government.

Similar cases of CSO participation in literacy advocacy and delivery have been initiated at the national level. Examples include lobbying the National Team on Accelerating Poverty Reduction to adopt literacy indicators in its programmes and network building to advocate and monitor women's literacy. Nevertheless, CSOs still need support to be mobilised for government's gender mainstreaming programmes.

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# Workshop and training on monitoring research and advocacy for women literacy

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WE WATCH

# PHILIPPINES

## Women's Stories: Building the Case for Women's Literacy in the Philippines

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# INTRODUCTION

This study reveals realities of women's illiteracy in the Philippines against education indicators that show more girls participating and performing better in schools. Studying the literacy situation of three marginalised groups – indigenous, Moro and urban poor women — it analyses factors that contribute to women's illiteracy, scans policy opportunities/mandates for advocacy and puts forward an agenda for government actions.

The Civil Society Network for Education Reforms, also known as E-Net Philippines, conducted this study as a contribution to 'Innovating Approaches in Advocating for Female Literacy', a project led by ASPBAE from 2011 to 2012 in partnership with the European Union. E-Net Philippines is a national network of 156 organisations working together on policy advocacy, campaigns and engagements/partnerships for the attainment of Education for All in the Philippines. E-Net Philippines firmly believes that education is a human right and thus holds government, as duty bearer and state party of many human rights treaties, primarily responsible for ensuring quality basic education for every Filipino child, youth and adult.

A key EFA advocacy of E-Net Philippines is gender equality in education. In 2006, it produced 'Equality in Education: Going Beyond Gender Parity in the Philippines', a paper that analyses the dimensions of gender equality in education and how these can be pursued within the education system. The network has also been a consistent campaigner on gender issues in education. It mobilises and supports collective action for a gender-fair curriculum integrating lessons on gender relations, breaking gender stereotypes in learning materials and pedagogy and ensuring empowering education for both girls and boys. It consistently raises in various fora issues of gender discrimination in schools. This study on women's literacy forms part of the continuum of E-Net Philippines' advocacy on gender equality in education that aims to put women's marginalised voices in education at the forefront of advocacy.

# RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research aimed to achieve the following:

1. investigate the learning deficit among female adult learners in the country in general and among the indigenous, Muslim and young mothers in particular who are traditionally marginalised and disadvantaged by the formal education system;

2. provide a picture of the specific issues and hindrances to learning of indigenous, Muslim women and young mothers;

3. surface the perspectives of women on literacy and learning given their emerging needs;

4. create a framework for agenda building as part of the Regional Action on 'Innovating Approaches in Promoting Adult Female Literacy'; and,

5. identify and develop women learners and leaders as EFA advocates.

## RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

To gain a sense of the situation of women and literacy in the country, the paper used as a guide three areas of inquiry. First, it looked at the situation of women in some of the most vulnerable population groups and the factors affecting their access to literacy and basic education. Second, it examined the formal educational system in terms of how it caters to girls and women's needs and contributes to women's participation in other spheres of life such as labour and employment, governance and political participation (outcomes of education on women). Third, it mapped policies or mandates for women's literacy and empowerment that can be used by women to claim their right to an education.

This study uses the Functional Literacy Mass Media Survey (National Statistics Office, 2008) definition of functional literacy as the ability to read and understand a paragraph, write and exercise numeracy skills.

Further, in claiming the right to EFA, the study invokes commitments made by government in the Philippine EFA Plan 2015, which states that every Filipino, regardless of age, gender and ethnicity has the right to complete basic education from Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) to high school.

Literacy has long been considered a non-issue in the Philippines because of the country's high basic literacy rate. However, the results of applying the functional literacy rate (a better measure of people's ability to apply their 3Rs), underscores the need for literacy programmes to be scaled up to eradicate illiteracy. This paper foregrounds the urgent need for government to act on this concern.

For E-Net Philippines, its advocacy for female literacy — for women ages 15 years and above — falls within a functional literacy framework where female adult learning of reading, writing and numeracy is integral to health, livelihoods and women's rights and empowerment. Moreover, this advocacy is informed by a feminist perspective that seeks the transformation of unequal power relations underpinning the structural barriers to women's participation. Hence, it looks at education not only as

an end but as a means through which women can develop their potentials, gain economic well-being, participate in different political arenas, and over the long term, claim their rights and their place in decision-making. Within these frameworks, E-Net Philippines investigated both the functional literacy situations of marginalised women and the contribution of schooling to girls and women's lives.

E-Net Philippines conducted the study from May to September 2010 using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach in partnership with its member organisations working on women's empowerment. Areas were selected on the basis of 1) high EFA deficit among the community women; 2) existing partnership/relations between E-Net Philippines and the local government units (LGUs); and, 3) the presence of a core of EFA advocates who could lead local advocacy in improving women's literacy. On these terms, the following areas and organisations were identified:

• Tulunan, North Cotabato (Indigenous and Moro women) – PIECE-EFA advocates and PTCA
• Columbio, Sultan Kudarat (Indigenous and Moro women) – PIECE- EFA advocates and PTCA
• Tagum, Davao del Norte (Indigenous women) – Konkokyo Peace Activity Center (KPACIO)
• Botolan, Zambales (Ayta, indigenous women) – Paaralang Bayan ng Ayta sa Zambales (PBAZ)
• Bgy. Palatiw, Pasig City, Metro Manila (urban poor women) – Kapit Barangay Pasig Volunteers Association (PKBVA)
• Pinagbuhatan, Pasig City, Metro Manila (urban poor women) – Kilusan at Ugnayan ng Maralitang Pasigueno (KUMPAS)
• Payatas, Quezon City, Metro Manila ( urban poor teenage mothers) – PINASAMA
• Bgy. Munoz, Quezon City, Metro Manila (urban poor women) Piglas-Kababaihan

A total of 171 women, ranging in age from 15 to 67 years, participated in the focus group discussions and key informant interviews. Most of them had reached only elementary school. A few had been able to proceed to secondary level but were not able to complete it; some were found illiterate. Most participants are married and with children.

Following the PAR methodology, the women researchers actively took part in 1) research design workshop and instruments development, 2) training on feminist research and PAR, and 3) analysis workshops on the data gathered.

The research questions revolved around education issues and the women's conditions, namely:

• life experiences and approaches to educating girls and women during their generation and what were expected learning contents and outcomes;

• factors affecting access to learning and education of girls and women;

• indicators and the interplay of these indicators, of women's 'empowerment' and the overall quality of life among indigenous, Muslim and urban poor communities;

• deconstructing the expectations from an educated woman by the family and the community;

• other factors considered as potentially having a significant effect on educational/literacy outcomes among women and girls (e.g., the role of language, traditions and other socio-cultural factors)

In the workshops, women also examined and mapped education and community programmes of government and civil society that focused on capacity building for women.

In concluding the FGD sessions, the participants went through a personal visioning exercise. The women were asked what learning means for them, the things they want to learn, their knowledge and skills and what they would want to propose to the local governments as an agenda.

The results from PAR were presented in two workshops held in Mindanao and in Metro Manila. With the help of Action for Economic Reforms (AER), these were analysed further in a larger context using government surveys and census, to generate a gendered and pro-poor analysis of education.

## SITUATION OF WOMEN AND LITERACY IN THE PHILIPPINES

### Literacy Situation

The FLEMMS (2003-08) shows basic literacy among Filipinos 10-64 years old, going up from 94.1 per cent in 2003 to 95.6 per cent in 2008; this translates to 58 million Filipinos who self-reported that they can read and write. Functional literacy[1] likewise increased by 2.3 per cent, from 84.1 per cent in 2003 to 86.4 per cent in 2008. The survey further indicated a slight decrease after five years in the proportion of those who could not compute, from 16 to 14 per cent and those who could not understand what they read, from 34 to 30 per cent.

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[1] Functional literacy is measured through a questionnaire administered by the National Statistics Office. The questionnaire asked respondents to fill in the basic profile, read a paragraph and answer the following questions in written form and lastly solve basic mathematical operations in a word problem. In computing functional literacy, however, the FLEMMS did not include the comprehension abilities of respondents.

Figure 1. Functional Literacy Rate of Population 10 to 64 Years Old by Region, Philippines (2008)

| Region | Rate |
|---|---|
| Philippines | 86.4 |
| National Capital Region | 94.0 |
| Cordillera Administrative Region | 89.2 |
| I - Ilocos | 91.3 |
| II - Cagayan Valley | 86.1 |
| III - Central Luzon | 92.1 |
| IV A - CALABARZON | 93.5 |
| IVB - MIMAROPA | 83.9 |
| V - Bicol | 79.9 |
| VI - Western Visayas | 82.6 |
| VII - Central Visayas | 86.6 |
| VIII - Eastern Visayas | 72.9 |
| IX - Zamboanga Peninsula | 79.6 |
| X - Northern Mindanao | 85.9 |
| XI - Davao | 81.7 |
| XII - SOCCSKSARGEN | 78.3 |
| XIII - Caraga | 85.7 |
| Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao | 71.6 |

Source: National Statistics Office, FLEMMS, 2008

However, the number of individuals lacking in counting and comprehension skills increased with the expansion of the population base from 57.6 million in 2003 to 67 million in 2008. Translated into absolute figures, non-numerate Filipinos in 2008 stood at 9.1 million, almost the same figure in 2003. Those who lacked comprehension abilities increased from 19.6 million in 2003 to 20.1 million individuals in 2008.

Women still outweighed the men in terms of both functional and simple literacy. The proportion of functionally literate women stood at 88.7 per cent as against men at 84.2 per cent, a few points lower than the national average of 86.4 per cent. Simple literacy for women registered at 96.1 per cent while for men, it came up to 95.1 per cent (national average of 95.6 per cent).

The FLEMMS findings on those who could read, write, comprehend a short paragraph and compute proved quite surprising:

• Only 69.8 per cent of Filipinos 10-64 years old are able to read, write, compute and comprehend
• Females scored higher at 73.7 per cent as compared to 66.0 per cent for males
• Among the Poor, the rate registered a very low 49.6 per cent
• Regions with the lowest levels that fell below 60 per cent were Eastern Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, Davao and Caraga

Illiteracy persists in urban poor, indigenous and Muslim communities where women have been denied access to education due to poverty. This observation is supported by E-Net's analysis of the FLEMMS 2008 data, which surfaced a big disparity in terms of literacy between the Poor and Non-Poor at nearly 20 percentage points.

Table 1. Functional Literacy by Economic Classification, Poor, Non-Poor Indicator (30-70 Years Old)

| | Functional Literacy | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | Literate | Non-Literate |
| Poor | 72.9% | 27.1% |
| Non poor | 91.2% | 8.8% |
| Total | 86.4% | 13.6% |

The regions with the biggest disparities in Literacy between the Poor and Non-Poor are SOCCSKSARGEN (with a disparity gap of 27 percentage points), Davao and Eastern Visayas (See table below).

Table 2. Functional Literacy by Region and by Economic Classification

| VIII-Eastern Vis. | Poor | 57.9% | XII-SOCCSKSARGEN | Poor | 60.7% |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Non poor | 81.4% | | Non poor | 87.7% |
| XI-Davao | Poor | 65.3% | CAR | Poor | 74.6% |
| | Non poor | 89.4% | | Non poor | 95.5% |
| IX-Zamboanga Peninsula | Poor | 68.5% | IVB-MIMAROPA | Poor | 69.4% |
| | Non poor | 88.5% | | Non poor | 90.8% |

The above data served as E-Net Philippines' basis for selecting respondent-participants. Thus, the PAR was conducted in SOCCKSARGEN and Davao, along with another indigenous community in Luzon and urban communities in Metro Manila.

Figure 2. Magnitude of Poverty by Sector



| | Children | Women | Urban Poor | Youth | Migrant and Formal Sector Workers | Farmers | Senior Citizens | Fishermen |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 2000 | 14,093,102 | 12,227,315 | 6,784,016 | 5,476,061 | 2,622,324 | 2,431,995 | 1,277,139 | 450,020 |
| 2003 | 13,469,849 | 1,602,634 | 6,360,978 | 5,293,223 | 2,886,445 | 2,027,689 | 969,906 | 440,579 |
| 2006 | 14,405,899 | 12,806,177 | 6,852,965 | 5,925,823 | 3,229,424 | 2,095,646 | 1,297,159 | 482,477.289 |

Source: National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB)

The National Statistical Coordinating Board (NSCB) reported to the National Anti-Poverty Commission and UNICEF in the Philippines that in 2006, as in 2003, Filipino children accounted for the largest number of the country's poor, followed by women. This clearly indicates the need for affirmative action on women's literacy and livelihoods.

## Women's Stories on Barriers to Education and Literacy

The PAR generated substantive and thematic results on barriers to female literacy particularly among disadvantaged and marginalised communities where the incidence of illiteracy is highest. Reinforcing the findings of other studies and refining insights on women and literacy, the data gathered on barriers to female literacy pointed to five loci of control —the school, government policies, home/family of the girl/woman, the community and the girl/woman herself.

*School Environment*

While basic education in the Philippines is free and compulsory, economic and geographical constraints continue to make access to formal education very difficult and further pull parents and children away from the school environment. Many schools are too far to be reached by indigenous communities who live in remote rural areas. Stories persist of children in rural locales walking long distances and enduring hunger, perilously fording rivers and crossing mountains, or children in the urban areas who have to pass congested, gang-infested streets on their way to and from school.

'Free' education in the Philippines is in truth riddled with hidden costs passed on to parents and households by successive national administrations unable to meet the educational needs of a ballooning population. Households are forced to fill in the deficits by shouldering the costs of school projects, and through mandatory contributions, the expenses incurred in the purchase of additional facilities, equipment or materials in the classrooms. Teachers make do by instructing pupils to sell various items, which the children in turn are compelled to obey.

The erratic national lingual policy used in schools adds another layer of disincentives especially among tribal, indigenous communities. Already marginalised to begin with, indigenous families and the children experience further exclusion and discrimination in formal schooling where their languages are not recognised.

There are reports too of sex-based violence mostly targeting girls in school areas or in contiguous communities that they pass through on their way to and from school. This form of violence against girls is often accepted as part of culture and thus thrives in these permissive environments. Victims' complaints, if expressed at all, are often dismissed

as trivial or puny. Lack of awareness on seeking redress is common and victims are often shamed to silence while perpetrators go scot-free. In addition to bearing these burdens, girls are further penalised when they get pregnant. They are often advised, or at times even commanded to stop schooling, or absent themselves from graduation ceremonies so as not to set a bad example to other girls. Only the girl-mothers, and not the fathers who attend the same school, receive such treatment.

> *'I live in a remote barangay and the school is very far from our place so I have to walk kilometers every day. Our school does not have a regular teacher and is sometimes closed. I stopped school but tried to continue it in the city where I worked as domestic help. I finished Grade VI then I got married and I now have three children. My husband met an accident and though I want to continue schooling, I cannot afford to do so anymore.'* (Jocelyn, 38 years old)
>
> *'I had to walk two hours to school everyday but I nonetheless finished high school. I cannot proceed to college because my sister is in college now. I have 8 siblings and only 2 of them are in school. While we paid no tuition fees, we were asked PhP1,000 every year for miscellaneous fees. I had to find work to earn what I needed to pay. I want to go abroad and work.'* (Rowena, 16 years old)

Problems reproduce and eventually become viciously cyclical. Grossly inadequate budgets lead to poor quality education, which parents and households with scant resources subsequently perceive as an unprofitable and hence unworthy investment.

### Home and Family

Constraints and barriers to literacy in the Philippines, the most glaring of which is endemic poverty, exist regardless of sex. Despite basic education being free, parents especially in poor families cannot afford to send and keep their children in school because of the hidden costs of schooling that competes with expenses for food, health and other basic needs. School tuition fees have now been abolished in the Philippines, but schools still require parents to pay various fees, most of which even exceed those mandated by the Department of Education (DepEd).

In response to rising complaints, the DepEd instituted a rule for 'voluntary contributions' to provide parents a way to report these cases. However, the mechanism remains weak, rendering the constitutionally guaranteed provision on free basic education meaningless for impoverished families.

Both male and female children of poor families often become part of family labour but again, there are gender differentials. Boys are usually allowed to venture outside the home to look for paid work, while girls are

mobilised for unpaid, informal work in caring for younger siblings, helping out relatives or neighbours, or in payment of debts owed by the family.

Not surprisingly, the lack of parental support for female education was commonly expressed in the discussions and exchanges during the PAR. While entering school has become easier for Filipino girls, the same cannot be said of the possibility of staying in school, which remains as difficult as before. These impediments find rationalisation in traditional norms that stereotype women in a life of marriage, housekeeping, child-bearing, child-rearing and taking care of the old. Other gender biases, such as fear over daughters getting pregnant outside of marriage, can be enough reason to bar them from going to school. As a way of discouraging them, parents have been known to impose on their daughters the burden of meeting the requirements for staying in school.

Existing beliefs and mindsets discriminatory to women and girls generate various conditions that effectively prevent girls from benefitting from educational opportunities. Tragically, the biases are passed on from mothers to daughters as shown by the tendency among illiterate mothers, or those who did not complete schooling, to discourage daughters from sustaining their formal schooling. Traditional roles also strongly define children's filial obligations. It is common in times of illness, abandonment by fathers or other conflict situations within the family, for girls to be asked to make a sacrifice, i.e., stop schooling, help the mother or father earn money, or assist in taking care of the other members of the family (the very young or the very old) and do household chores.

Poverty and the lack of parental support for girls' education often drive women to migrate to Manila and work as domestic helpers. This was a recurring tale among the adolescent girls and women in the FGDs in Pasig and Quezon City who left the province to seek so-called greener pastures in Manila. They advanced their salaries to give to their parents and held on to employers' promises that their continued schooling would be supported. In little time, they found themselves trapped, as before, in poverty and in even more precarious conditions in the city, without social and familial networks that they could turn to. Eventually, they gave up dreams of an education after years of working, eloped with boyfriends and set up their own families, and ended up still poor and lacking education. This cycle of poverty, migration, domestic work and illiteracy/neo-literacy explains why even with numerous schools in urban areas, women's illiteracy persists.

*'Both my parents can neither read nor write. Because of this, they were afraid to send me to school. And though I insisted, they argued that like them, I can live without being educated. I only finished Grade III.'* (Edna, 49 years old)

*'I am now on my third year in high school but my parents do not support me. I have nine siblings and they want me to stop working to help them support them. But my parents do not work and we just rely on a sister's earnings from Kuwait. I want to finish school and go to college.'* (Ellen, 18 years old)

*'When I was studying, I was left on my own by my parents. I had to cook my own food which was why I was always late for school. I wanted to be a teacher but I was betrothed at 11. That was part of our culture and is a way to save me from the harassment of Christian men. My parents were afraid of the Christian teacher who has a notorious reputation of molesting and raping lumad girls. Lumads are discriminated in our school. My fiancé fetched me from school to prevent other boys from pursuing me. I got married at 14 and have not returned to school since.'* (Dolores, 67 years old)

*'My father died when I was one year old. I am the youngest of four children. My sister married at 15. I worked hard to support my schooling and my mother. But she died when I was 18 and because we were so poor I did not get any form of support from other family. I only reached Grade VI and I got married at 21. Since then I have not gone back to school.'* (Rosalinda, 53 years old)

*Internalised Cultural Barriers*

Early or forced/arranged marriages or unplanned pregnancies are often cited by girls as reasons for dropping out of school. They are introduced to sexual experiences at a very early age, without benefit of awareness about their bodies, much less their sexuality and reproductive health and rights. In indigenous communities, girls as young as 12 years old can be arranged in marriage. For other girls, especially in the urban areas, marrying at an early age can be an attempt, albeit futile, to escape poverty, deprivation, conflict and violence at home.

Girls learn to accept from parents themselves and other family members that it is their fate to have little education. Especially with growing pressure to contribute to household incomes, they grow to adulthood believing that education is not valuable and eventually slip into gender socialised roles of motherhood and family.

Peer influence outside the home appears to be a strong factor as well for girls, particularly when familial bonds and parental supervision are weak. Where such influence veers towards giving up school, the risk is higher for children lacking in strong family anchors. Girls have also been found more vulnerable to myriad forms of abuse and exploitation. This is especially true for those socialised to rely on other people for their safety and protection and lacking in the development of a sense of control over their bodies and their health.

Early pregnancy has been a rising trend among the teenagers in urban poor communities. The Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study (YAFSS) in 2002 reported that '26 per cent of young women aged 15 to 24 years have begun childbearing (Raymundo, 2002)'. It also learned that two-thirds of the country's poorest girls give birth before the age of 20, hence implying an area for future study on the links between poverty, early pregnancy and education.

*'My father died when my mother was pregnant with me. I have three other siblings. When I was five, my mother remarried. My sister who was in Grade III was told by my stepfather to stop schooling because they needed help in the farm. I was likewise asked not to return to school to take care of my sick mother and my stepbrother. When I insisted on going back, my stepfather beat me as my mother watched. I only finished Grade I while my two other sisters reached Grade III. I got married at 17.'* (Lulu, 66 years old)

*'I want to enter high school after finishing elementary, but in a family with 10 children, it was impossible for me to continue and finish my studies and pursue my plans to work abroad. When my father died and my mother remarried, just after I graduated from elementary school, I was arranged to be married. I lost all interest in studying after that. I was just made to believe by my mother that becoming a mother myself is destiny for all girls in our community.'* (Lina, 38 years old)

*Community and Society*

The marginalisation of indigenous peoples is evident in all aspects, whether in governance, economic opportunities, ownership and control of assets or education. A DepEd policy that mandates schools in predominantly indigenous communities to hire indigenous teachers is often violated with school principals usually pinning the blame on the lack of licensed indigenous teachers. This occurs in a general school atmosphere of cultural insensitivity, which on the whole discourages indigenous and Muslim children from availing of an education.

Another factor discouraging parents from sending their children to school is the common view that education is time taken away from availing of economic opportunities such as finding work or helping the family. In the FGDs, the women recalled their parents often chiding them: 'Why do you have to study when you will end up working in the farm and family, anyway?' School is not appreciated as an investment that could possibly unlock bigger opportunities. This obviously stems from low wages, the increasing difficulty of finding work and other employment conditions that prevent valuing schooling beyond the immediate economic returns of being educated.

In the larger socio-economic context, mining activities and armed conflict have emerged among the factors most disruptive of children's schooling. In recent years, with mining declared a flagship programme by the Arroyo administration, exploration and extraction activities by multinational mining corporations increased in areas where the indigenous communities also locate. Areas in Mindanao, for example, not only have to contend with mining activities but armed hostilities between government troops and armed rebels as well. These conditions often lead to militarisation and its attendant problems of displacement and forced evacuation or relocation of indigenous and Muslim communities.

At the national level, education in general suffers from the lack of a strategic plan and funding support to ensure gender equality in education. Allocations of public resources are inadequate, if not declining despite the existence of national legislation and issuances recognising the role of women in development and nation building and the promotion of their rights and welfare. What eventually goes to women's literacy programmes is minimal, if not totally unavailable.

These policy and budgetary gaps manifest in various ways at the local levels. LGUs, for instance, provide limited or no support to effectively address sex-based violence often targeting women and girls, which frequently figures as one of the major constraints to sustaining their schooling.

*'I only finished Grade II and I cannot read or write anymore. Being the eldest of nine children, my parents expected me to work to support them. I want to go abroad but I always had problems filling up forms.'* (Merna, 18 years old)

*'I grew up in a remote province in Mindanao. I was able to enter elementary but was not able to finish it. My father was just a farmer-tenant and my mother had to stay home to take care of all of us—11 children. I had to stop schooling to help my mother take care of my younger siblings. Life was too hard so at 15, I escaped and moved to the city with a friend who promised that I could find work and eventually study. This did not happen. Worse, I had to transfer from one employer to another to escape the abuse I suffered from each of them. I was slapped, beaten, deprived of food when I made mistakes. The last employer attempted to rape me. I ran away with my boyfriend but he turned out to be lazy and irresponsible. Now I have children and am too old to go back to school.'* (Zenia, 45 years old)

## Effects of Illiteracy to Adult Women

Most of the women who participated in the study realised late in life the adverse effects of being illiterate. Several of them have regressed into illiteracy despite having had some years of schooling early in their lives. They exhibit low levels of confidence or none at all, as indicated by their fear of communicating with strangers, their lack of sense of who they are and what they are capable of doing. They want to go to another town or city, or even abroad, to find work or do an errand, but they fear doing so because they do not know how to read vehicle and road signs. They want to earn money, but when they are finally able to set up a small business, they find themselves cheated or shortchanged. Even the act of individually casting their votes during elections makes them apprehensive. They cannot fill up simple forms at the village level to avail of government services and goods (such as de-worming campaigns, vaccination for very young children and lactating mothers, micro-finance opportunities, etc.).

It is clear that these women recognise the importance of literacy and knowledge. They know that being literate can help them develop skills and gain confidence, and open more opportunities for them and their children. They are aware that being fully literate could enhance their mobility and capacities for social interaction, without the fear and anxiety of being negatively judged. They also see its importance in using mobile phones, computers and the internet and other forms of information communication technologies which have become vital in the world today. They found motivation in participating in literacy classes because they saw these as important means for them to learn about their rights as women and as human beings, and make sense of the socio-cultural, political, economic and environmental conditions they live in.

## STATE OF THE FORMAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

By all indication, the Philippines will most likely fail in its commitment to ensure Education for All by 2015. The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), for one, reported that 'from 90.1 per cent in school year (SY) 2001-2002, participation rate or the net enrolment rate (NER)[2] in elementary education declined to 83.2 per cent in SY 2006-2007, the lowest in the last two decades (see Figure 1). Although the downward pattern started to reverse by SY 2007-2008 at 84.8 per cent, the rate of progress is very minimal and not enough to achieve the 100 per cent NER by 2015, unless a big turnaround happens in the next two to three years' (United Nations, 2010).

Further, the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Report (UN, 2010) confirmed that 'gross enrolment rate (GER), which measures enrolment including those beyond primary school age, generally followed the same downward trend. From a high of 119.2 percent in SY 1999-2000, the GER dropped to 99.9 percent in SY 2006-2007 before slowly improving by SY 2007-2008, thus corroborating the validity of the NER trend.'

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[2] NER is based on school-age population 7-12 years old from 1991 to 2000 and 6-11 years old from 2001 to 2008. Assessment was made on the most recent years where data is comparable (2001 to 2008).

Figure 3. Elementary Education NER and GER (%), SY 1991-1992 to SY 2008-2009 (public and private)
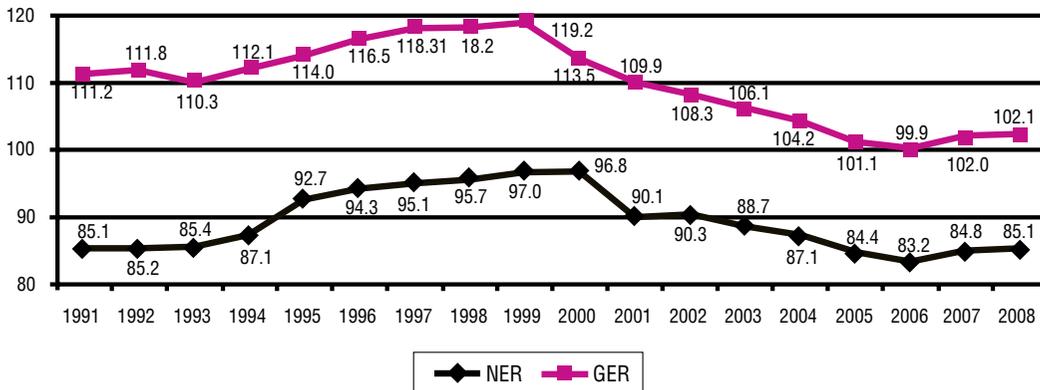


Source of basic data: Department of Education
Note: The years 1991-2008 in the horizontal axis represent the start of the school year (e.g., 1991 corresponds to school year 1991-92)

The Philippines is among the few countries in Asia-Pacific that has achieved gender parity in education. 'Generally, in terms of participation, the ratio of girls to boys in elementary education remained at 1.0 from 1996 to 2008,' according to the MDG Report 2010. 'On the other hand, it is observed that in secondary education, girls had consistently maintained a higher participation rate in high school than boys. Likewise, girls have consistently dominated enrolment in tertiary education over the boys for the past four school years, from 2005/2006 to 2008/2009.'

Figure 4. Ratio of Girls to Boys in Elementary Education Participation Rate (1996-2008)
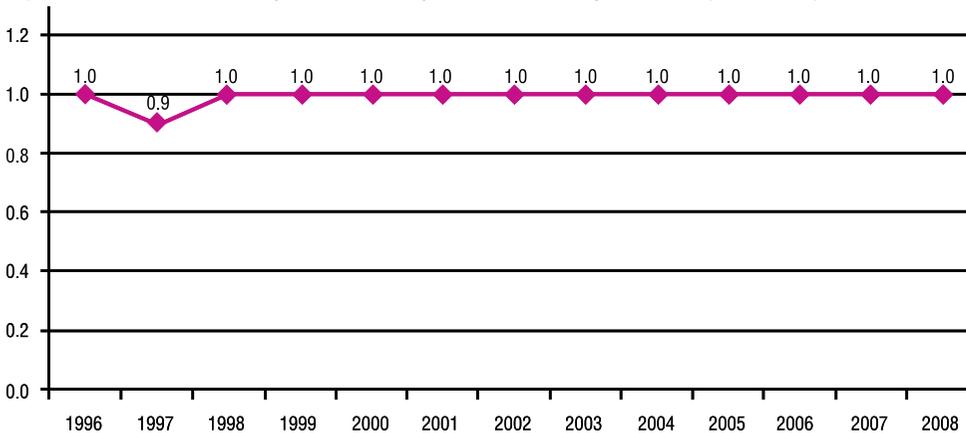


Source of basic data: Department of Education

Figure 5. Ratio of Girls to Boys in Secondary Education Participation Rate (1996-2008)
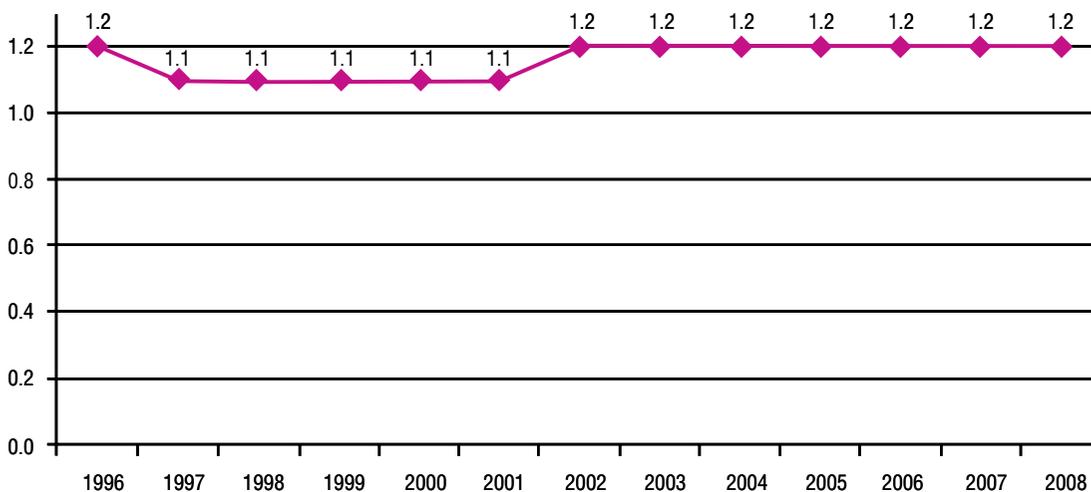


Source of basic data: Department of Education

Figure 6. Ratio of Girls to Boys in Tertiary Education Participation Rate (2005-2008)
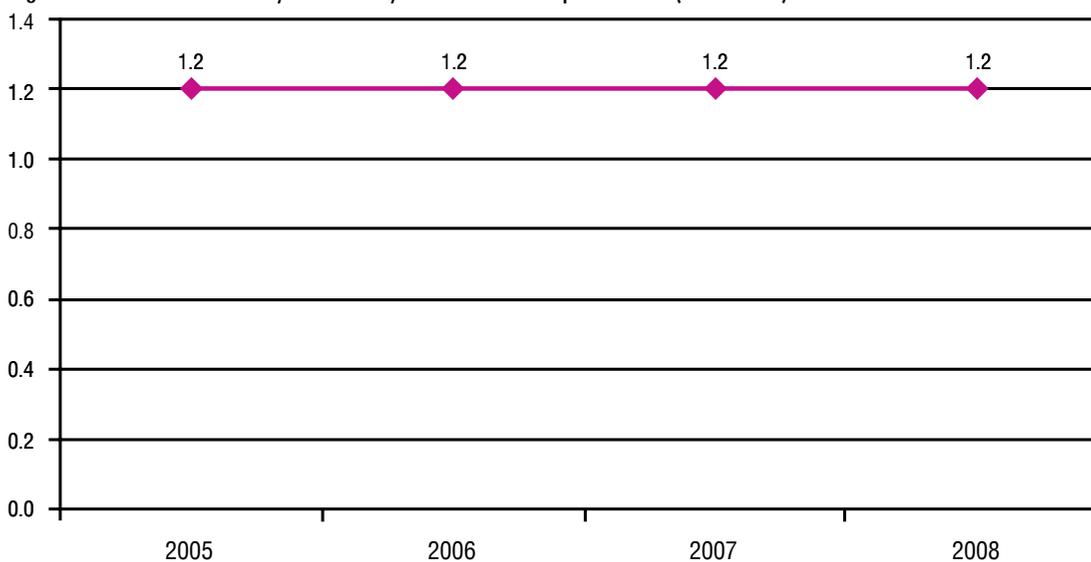


Source of basic data: Commission on Higher Education

The Report noted that the 'disparities in net enrolment rate (participation rate) are generally minimal across regions at the elementary level', and favour females. The Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) is an exception because of its average gender disparity index (GeDI) of 1.07 for the period 1997-2008). On the other hand, Region XII had an average GeDI of 0.98 (1997-2008), in favour of the male students. Region IX also

emerged with significant disparities in cohort survival and completion rates are likewise prominent based on the average GeDI from 1997-2008 of 1.27 and 1.29, respectively.

The disparities are minimal, but in concrete terms they bore significant impact on the lives of girl-mothers who were saddled with social reproduction work and thus found it impossible to access opportunities for mobility, participation and self-development. Indeed, the communities with low literacy rates also reported low participation of girls in school.

Again, this EFA deficit finds validation in the FLEMMS 2008 report on out-of-school children and youth. The areas identified with the highest out of school population are ARMM at 22.5 per cent, Region IX (Zamboanga Peninsula) at 16.5 per cent and Region XI (Davao) at 16.1 per cent.

Figure 7. Percentage of Population 6-24 Years Old Who are Out of School, By Region, Philippines (2008)
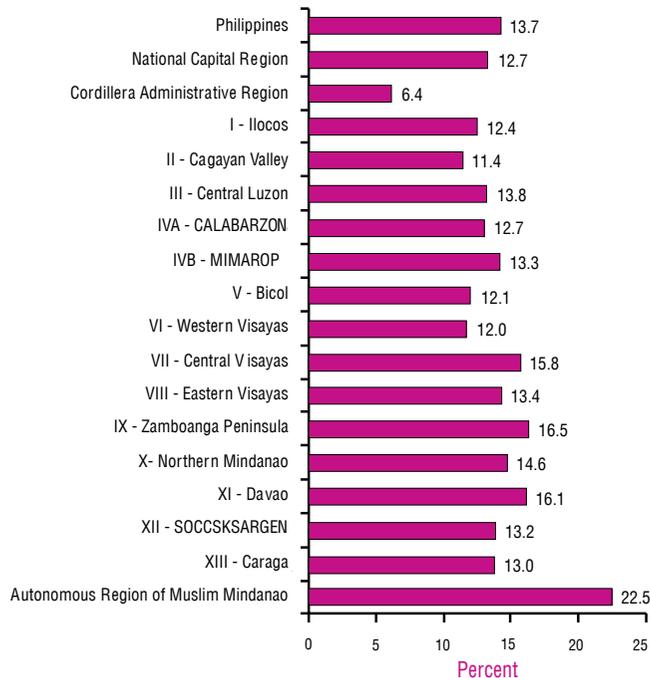


Source: National Statistics Office, FLEMMS, 2008

The top three reasons identified for not attending school are 1) the high cost of education (23.5 per cent; 2) looking for work; and 3) lack of personal interest. Other reasons cited were marriage, housekeeping, illness or disability, distance of schools, difficulty coping with school work, non-existence of schools within the *barangay* or village and absence of regular transportation.

The 2007 Education Watch by E-Net Philippines and ASPBAE showed disadvantaged groups in the household population covered by the survey as

composed of out-of-school youth and children (6-17 years old), youth (18-24 years old) who only reached elementary education and the illiterate and poorly educated adults (25-64 years old). About 11.54 per cent of children and youth and about 32.22 per cent of adults were found to be disadvantaged. A majority lived in rural communities, often without access to electricity, sanitation facilities and easy access to safe drinking water. Children who dropped out of school were unfailingly traced to the poor, the malnourished, and the disabled and to ethnic minority communities (ASPBAE, 2007). Similarly, the literacy disparities tended to be larger in poorer regions, as well as informal sector communities in highly urbanized or urbanising areas of the country.

Average dropout rate (ADR) at the elementary level was lower for females at 4.87 per cent compared to males at 7.07 per cent. Enrolment in government *Madrasah* schools accounted for only two per cent of the total enrolment in elementary. Even in Madrasah schools, female high school students comprised 52.57 per cent of the total enrolment and males even lower at 47.43 per cent for SY 2006-2007 alone; but the disparity is bigger for females at 57.24 per cent and males at 42.76 per cent. For the same school year, enrolment in indigenous communities accounted for only three per cent of the total enrolment in elementary, which showed a smaller share of females enrolled in elementary (49.65 per cent) but a bigger share in the secondary level (53.76 per cent).

Achievement scores for both mathematics and science in recent years, further support the idea that boys have been underachieving as compared with girls (Quimbo, 2003). Trends in many of the performance indicators collated by DepEd since SY 2002-2003 suggest disparities in education outcomes in favour of girls. School year 2008-2009 shows, for example, dropout rates, failure rates and repetitions as nearly twice higher for boys than for girls at the primary school level and even higher at the secondary level.

*Work and Economic Participation*

The failure of education gains favouring women to translate into economic gains later in life is highlighted by stubborn gaps in male and female participation in the labour force and in the gender tracking of women and girls into the kind of jobs that are extensions of their social reproduction work at home. While women far outweigh men in formal educational attainment and achievement, work and economic participation figures show that of the 35 million employed individuals in 2009, 61.3 per cent were males and 38.7 per cent were females. Half of the employed were engaged in services, about 35 per cent were in agriculture and the rest (14.5 per cent) worked in the industry sector.

The share of women in waged, non-agricultural employment remained unchanged for almost two decades from 1991 to 2009. More women found

employment as labourers and unskilled workers (36.6 per cent vs. 30 per cent for men) while a smaller number of female professionals outpaced men (8.09 per cent women vs. 2.3. per cent for men). As both labourers and unskilled workers, women were tracked in the services sector and men in the agriculture sector. The proportion of unpaid family workers remained higher for women than men (55. 8 per cent vs. 44.2 per cent). It would also appear from the lower proportion of female-headed poor households relative to men, that when women become breadwinners, households become less poor, even with men owning twice as much as women in terms of the lands redistributed by government for farming (NSO, 2009).

The 2010 MDG Progress Report points to the lack of gainful employment opportunities as one of the contributing factors to increased poverty incidence. This is most marked among the vulnerable groups, with the employment-to-population ratio for the age group 15 years and above slowly declining since 2008 particularly among the women and the youth. Nearly half of Filipino workers are still engaged in vulnerable employment (defined as self-employed) and contributing to family income without the benefits/security enjoyed from decent employment. This raises more prominently the challenge of achieving full, productive employment and decent work for all, especially for women and young people.

*Governance and Political Participation*

The rise to the presidency of two Filipino women since 1986 has had no significant bearing on opening more spaces for women's political participation. Only a quarter of women of voting age were elected to public offices (both at the national and local levels) in 2007 (Commission on Elections, 2008). The Philippine Senate has consistently been dominated by men, with only three women as incumbents during that year. While more women were elected to the House of Representatives in the 2007 as compared to the 1995 elections, they only amount to less than a fifth of the entire 23-member body. A steady increase in women's presence has been observed at the provincial, city and municipal governments, but the entire local executive and legislative bodies have remained dominated by men. Female relatives of male politicians who manage to assume elected posts do so as kin of male politicians and only extend the political directions and programmes of their predecessors.

*Gender and Migration*

Statistics clearly establish the continued rise in the number of Filipinos working abroad (Miriam College-WAGI, 2008). It is estimated that there are 8.7 million Filipinos mostly from the National Capital Region, CALABARAZON, Central Luzon and Ilocos Region now working in 239

countries. The United States and countries in the Middle East region count among the top five destinations (Miriam College-WAGI, 2008). Further, it reported more females migrating to other countries from 2005 to 2009, resulting in Filipino women making up nearly half of the global Filipino migrant population during that period (Commission on Filipinos Overseas).

Most of them are recruited into domestic work jobs in the Middle East countries, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia. A smaller number find work in professional health or care-giving, entertainment, clerical services, and in sales and production work. Usually married and with children, these women leave behind a generation of young people who grow up in the care of another female figure in the family. Stories are widespread of fathers/partners who prove unreliable in assuming care work in the family and spend hard-earned migrant women's remittances on vices. A number have also been implicated in incestuous rape and other forms of sexual molestation and abuse of their daughters.

This phenomenon of feminisation of migrant labour particularly for domestic work can be partly attributed to the increased demand in the global market for services traditionally assigned to and rendered by girls/women. Low levels of functional literacy among women make them even more vulnerable to this type of labour, which is considered unskilled and hence remunerated far less than professional work. Opportunities are severely constricted for applying for skilled work where employment contracts are more secure, pay is higher and employers are compliant with international labour standards to provide social protection.

The informality of domestic work and its location in the private/domestic sphere has proven problematic, even fatal for many Filipino

domestic workers abroad. Within the privacy of foreign employers' homes, human rights and labour standards can be suspended at will. The situation is further aggravated by the lack of access to social services, including psychosocial support, and the utter weakness of legal protection both here and abroad. This has resulted in all too many cases of domestic Filipina workers returning home maimed, sexually abused, mentally damaged or in body bags or coffins.

## GENDER PARITY BUT NOT YET GENDER EQUALITY

The above figures indicate that positive education outcomes do not necessarily translate into benefits or more advatages for women in the private and public sector. Many questions come to mind. Why do women

in the Philippines remain disadvantaged and marginalised in mainstream society despite having gained headway on education outcomes? Why do girls and women in indigenous and urban poor communities remain grossly disadvantaged, discriminated and marginalised, even in terms of attaining literacy and education? How can positive education outcomes for girls translate into enabling gains for substantively changing unequal gender relations disadvantageous to women? In social contexts where gender bias works strongly against women, how does government provide for affirmative and strategic policies and measures to address and overcome barriers to women literacy?

At the same time, other factors must be considered for it cannot be assumed that female achievement in all areas of educational performance (from entrance to completion to achievement) is necessarily a direct or even an indirect product of government reform policies and measures. Intimate knowledge of Filipino women's experiences would show that they are socialised and reared to be more responsible and dependable, including in schooling, and at times, this allows them to make certain achievements despite great odds.

Even with the removal of institutional barriers, other factors work to discourage parents from sending and keeping their daughters in school. Filipino women are also reared and socialised into roles traditionally considered as appropriate to their sex and gender, and they grow up equating fulfilment of these roles with measures of self-worth, dignity and honour. Foremost of these roles is that of wife and mother, i.e., caring for her family and complying with her domestic responsibilities, which are complied with at the expense of her individual sense of self, her dreams and aspirations in life, her needs and desires as a woman and as a person.

Nonetheless, this does not diminish the critical role that duty bearers and public policy plays in promoting female literacy. Glick (2008) asserts that patterns can be discerned with regard to effects of policies on girls' schooling and that public investment policies ensuring increased availability of schools are more likely to benefit girls' enrolment and educational attainment, even though such measures do not explicitly target girls at the outset.

Public policy and investment also respond to socio-cultural factors that make girls' schooling more sensitive than boys' to changes in fees and other direct costs, and therefore demand side interventions that subsidise households' schooling costs will have larger benefits for girls. Moreover, evidence shows that demand for girls' schooling is more responsive than boys' to improvements in school quality; this only shows that even a general enabling policy that does not specifically target girls can respond affirmatively to gender imbalances in the system. This area of variance needs further study vis-à-vis policy initiatives of the Philippine government in terms of making schools more accessible to its general population.

Aside from the household, the school environment must also be explored for potential contributors to the disparities. Studies of other countries'

experiences show that girls' retention in school can be discouraged by the quality of the school environment (Lloyd et al., 2000). Girls are less likely to stay in school under conditions where there is inequitable support for boys and girls, teachers' gender bias privileging boys' achievements in 'hard' subjects such as math and science, non-existent school policies on sexual harassment, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and where girls' experience of unequal treatment is unrecognised (Lloyd et al., 2000).

*Patriarchy in Philippine Society*

As a system, patriarchy is deeply rooted in Philippine culture and in society. Many believe that in education, it manifests as sex disparities stemming from either obvious or latent social expectations made on males and females (Fehr, 2003). Latent expectations are transmitted through cultural and social perceptions, attitudes and even through curriculum designs.

A common example is the expectation for females to be homemakers. This proceeds from the assumption that women should make their homes as comfortable as possible for their husbands who are naturally considered more superior to them in practically all respects. This difference in status also rationalises the way girls are the first to be made to quit school during periods of difficulty and direct their energies to household care-giving needs. The extent with which these norms are practiced affect women with relatively more education and economic resources, who are also expected in one degree or another to take the priority, traditional role of ' keeping the family together' and to treat individual desires and ambitions as secondary.

In the Philippines, women in poor households carry multiple burdens of taking care of the children as well as the entire household. With older children, the girls are often the ones obliged to take on household chores, with a view to training them for their future roles of serving husbands and families as wives and mothers and in that way, to increase their 'market value'.

These social reproduction roles are not only confined in the girls' families but may be extended and stretched at will, wherever and whenever needed. Thus, if family members fall ill, female kin are almost always mobilised to attend to their needs. Where fathers abandon families and mothers have to find work, older daughters are charged with the care of younger siblings. Girl children accumulate school absences in this manner, until such time that they would have to be dropped from the roll. The longer the time it takes for them to return, the more embarrassing the situation of having much younger classmates and the higher the possibility for quitting school altogether.

A supportive family and community, offering encouragement and believing in girl children's capacities and potentials could make a difference in otherwise difficult circumstances. However, without these elements, as is often the case, girl students may not be able to advance from the levels where they left off, and may even eventually regress.

# EXISTING POLICIES AND STRUCTURES IN ADDRESSING FEMALE ILLITERACY

Laws and policies codify government's international commitments to human rights and development. They do not automatically lead to changes for the better but they serve critical purposes in providing citizens handles for claim-making and accountability, as well as basis for resource flows and budgetary allocations. For the same reasons, laws and policy mechanisms are thus important advocacy targets which may be in the direction of protecting existing laws, promoting changes or scrapping measures for new ones; and realising what they guarantee and promise.

There are several international mandates for education signed and/or ratified by the Philippines. One of these is the Education for All international initiative launched in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 to bring the benefits of education to 'every citizen in every society'. In line with its commitments to the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, the EFA Grand Alliance under the Department of Education set out the following goals to be met by 2015:

1. *Universal Adult Functional Literacy*
   All persons beyond school-age should acquire the essential competence to be functionally literate in their native tongue, in Filipino or in English
2. *Universal Completion of the Full Cycle of Basic Education Schooling with Satisfactory Achievement Levels by All At Every Grade or Year*
   All children aged 6 to 11 should be on track to completing elementary schooling with satisfactory achievement levels at every grade, and all children aged 12 to 15 should be on track to completing secondary schooling with similarly satisfactory achievement levels at every year. At age six, all children should enter school, ready to learn and prepared to achieve the required competencies from Grade 1 to 3 instruction.
3. *Universal School Participation and Elimination of Drop-outs and Repetition in First Three Grades*
4. *Total Community Commitment to Attainment of Basic Education Competencies for All*
   Every community should mobilise all its social, political, cultural and economic resources and capabilities to support the universal attainment of basic education competencies in Filipino and English.

The Philippines also adopted the two EFA goals under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These are the completion by all boys and girls of a full course of primary schooling (MDG2) and the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education (MDG3). It further made commitments in the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) hosted by the Government of Brazil in December 2009.

CONFINTEA VI provided an important platform for policy dialogue and advocacy on adult education and non-formal education at the global level.

Domestically, there exists a range of policies that can be cited as mandates and used as leverage for advocacy on women's education. Most of these laws emphasise the integration of literacy into programmes that lead towards women's empowerment in different aspects — health, political participation, productivity and ownership of assets and decision-making in one's personal life. Education as a component of women's programmes is considered a key cross-cutting strategy.

Specific legal measures on education towards gender equality provide for ensuring girls' access to education and the development of a gender-fair education that aims, among others, for the removal of gender-based stereotypes and barriers to education. There are very few policies, however, that categorically argues for women and literacy. One of these is the provision in the Indigenous People's Rights Act (IPRA) highlighting the need for specific interventions on indigenous women's literacy.

This inadequacy of policy measures may be one of the effects of viewing basic literacy for women as a non-issue in the Philippines. As a consequence, there is no specific entity among the different mechanisms and structures that focuses on women and literacy. The national gender mechanism (Philippine Commission of Women) targets literacy and education, but as one of many concerns affecting women, while education-focused agencies look at all general education concerns, of men/boys and women/girls alike.

Nevertheless, the current legal and policy environment provides enough basis and cross-cutting mandates for claiming women's rights to gender-aware education and to literacy in particular. It is worth mentioning some of these legislative instruments that guarantee women's rights and envision women's empowerment in the political, social and economic spheres. Three landmark policies where women's literacy and adult education are integrated in the strategies for development are:

• Republic Act No. 9710, An Act Providing for the Magna Carta of Women approved on 14 August 2009
• Republic Act No. 7192, Women in Development and Nation Building Act signed into law on 12 February 1992
• Executive Order 273, Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development (PPGD) 1995-2025 signed by former President Fidel V. Ramos on 8 September 1995

Apart from women-focused policies, there are education policies that support Education for All commitments of the country that can be invoked to give particular stress to literacy and continuing education of women. These laws do not explicitly identify affirmative actions for women's literacy

and adult education but the principles on which they are based should be able to support such interventions. They include the following:

• Republic Act 7165, s. 1991 amended by R.A. 10122, An Act Creating the Literacy Coordinating Council
• Executive Order 358 Philippine EFA Plan 2015 signed by former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in 2006
• Executive Order 356 Renaming the Bureau of Non-Formal Education to Bureau of Alternative Learning System signed by former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo on September 13, 2004
• Philippine Education Highway

As previously mentioned, the IPRA asserts the rights particularly of indigenous women to literacy and education. E-Net Philippines' advocacy strongly supports this concern and sees in the clear handles provided by IPRA, opportunities with which to advocate for indigenous women to enjoy these rights.

With regards to mechanisms and structures, there are national and local structures where civil society advocates can argue for the agenda on women and literacy. Among these bodies are the following:

• Philippine Commission on Women (formerly the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women)
• Gender and Development Focal Points
• National EFA Committee
• Literacy Coordinating Council and the local LCCs established to work towards eradication of illiteracy in the country through policies and programmes in non-formal, informal and indigenous learning system as well as self-learning, independent and out-of-school study. The policies of LCC will ultimately benefit disadvantaged women who are unable to obtain a basic education or dropped out of school (PCW and LCC website).
• Local EFA Committees such as the Local School Board (LSB)
• LGU special bodies such as the Municipal Development Council

*Magna Carta of Women*

After many years of advocacy and campaigning by women's groups, the Magna Carta of Women (MCW) passed into law in August 2009 and entered into force the following month. The MCW, which is the Philippines' localization of its obligation as a CEDAW state party, provides yet another legal instrument for Filipino women's empowerment. The integration of education/training is a perspective carried in almost all sections of the document.The MCW devoted a section to education, with specific mention of school-based education and the need for gender-sensitive curricula and gender-fair policies.

*Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997 (IPRA)*

At the core of IPRA is the protection of indigenous people's right to their ancestral domain and self-determination. It upholds specifically for indigenous peoples, the 'free and prior informed consent [FPIC], as an instrument of empowerment'.

• Section 3. Free and Prior Informed Consent. The ICCs/IPs shall, within their communities, determine for themselves policies, development programmes, projects and plans to meet their identified priority needs and concerns. The ICCs/IPs shall have the right to accept or reject a certain development intervention in their particular communities.

With FPIC compliance sealed through written contracts among government, private firms (e.g., mining companies) and indigenous communities, literacy and education become indispensable tools for the protection of indigenous peoples' rights and ancestral domains.

Literacy is further implicated by IPRA's instruction that '…d) Consent or rejection by the ICC/IP community shall be signified by affixing signatures or thumb marks in a document written in their own language or dialect with corresponding English or Pilipino translation. Signatures or thumb marks shall be considered valid, only when it is affixed on each and every page of the document signifying consent or rejection. In case of rejection, the ICCs/IPs shall state in the document of rejection whether or not they shall entertain alternative proposals of similar nature;….'

*Opportunities and Challenges in the Policy Environment on Women and Literacy*

1. Many existing laws integrate women's education into different poverty alleviation, health and women's empowerment programmes. These offer good leverages for pushing policies and programmes that reiterate the pivotal importance of literacy to make these programmes successful for women.

2. The Gender Focal Points in national government line agencies and local government units can be the listening posts and champions in reminding agencies on their commitments to resources and programmes for women's empowerment, where literacy can be integrated.

3. The DepEd itself does not have a full-time Gender Focal Point and it is urgent to advocate with DepEd to act on this gap, especially since the work for women's literacy is located in the DepEd's Bureau of Alternative Learning System (BALS).

4. The cross-cutting nature of the programmes for women provides a whole range of possible entry points for advocacy. However, even with components on women's education, the broad nature of these programmes can also weaken or undermine the mechanism for claiming women's right to literacy. They can work to diffuse advocacy efforts and

may also be further watered down by the political dynamics between the different agencies. Mapping of possibilities, therefore, is necessary to prevent efforts from spreading too thinly and to achieve greater impact.

5. Given the nature of policies in place and integrative role of women's literacy in women's empowerment, it is imperative to work with various women's organisations, stress the importance of women's literacy/education, and reinvigorate partnerships at the national and local venues for policy/programme engagements.

## CONCLUSIONS AND WAYS FORWARD

Through the years, girls and women in the Philippines have progressively manifested advantage in all key result areas in education, despite prevalent gendered traditions and mindsets in society that discriminate against them. Unfortunately, this advantage has not been translated into greater equity in labour and employment, participation in broader public life and access to health and other services that could improve the overall quality of their lives. If anything, the increasing employment opportunities here and abroad have been shown to work against women in many ways; they have also become more vulnerable to various forms of abuse, and insecure in the face of a globalising economic order.

Filipino women today may arguably be better positioned to claim their rights because of the abundance of laws and issuances that promote the welfare of girls and women, broaden their access to education and protect them from any form of exploitation, abuse, discrimination and marginalisation. However, these policies generally remain without enabling mechanisms and structures for their proper and effective implementation to ensure the intended benefits and positive outcomes for women.

Major findings that can be drawn from the study are as follows:

*Formal schooling remains inaccessible and costly,* especially for communities living in poverty. High levels of poverty and high rates of illiteracy remain directly correlated. Although the Philippine Constitution provides for free and compulsory basic education, the hidden costs of formal schooling have proven formidable for poor households, causing children of school age to drop out and eventually leave school. It has been shown that many dropouts with less than four years of quality education find it difficult to return to school and eventually regress back to illiteracy, to join the ranks of illiterates who have never been to school.

The inability to cope with school expenses becomes even more glaring among households in both urban and rural communities where children are made to work and earn money to augment household income. Girls,

in particular, though deployed in both paid and unpaid work, are almost exclusively mobilised to take on household burdens especially when mothers have to work outside the home. Poverty requires the contribution of all household members who assume tasks and duties for economic survival that frequently compete with time needed in school. Addressing poverty-related causes for failure to complete basic education, improving health and nutrition especially for young children, and providing support and incentives for parents who send their children to school must be done on a sustained basis.

*The high participation rate in basic education hides the inequalities across genders, income groups and traditionally marginalised and disadvantaged communities in the country.* Government cannot afford to be complacent with the comparatively higher participation rate of school age children (though recent figures show a downward trend). Statistical aggregates mask differential impacts and do not reveal those segments or sectors of society with little or no access to basic education, or may need more support either to complete formal school or attain literacy in their adult life. Pockets of illiteracy can still be found among indigenous peoples' communities in the rural areas and informal settlers in urban poor communities where gender inequality lives on traditions and beliefs discriminatory to women.

*Beyond gender parity—working towards gender equality in the educational system.* Gender parity can be said to exist in the Philippine formal educational system where girls enjoy equal access to getting into the formal system as boys. However, broadening access to basic education does not automatically mean that gender-based inequalities in the education system are being addressed or that mechanisms for redress are provided to respond to cases of discrimination. When the formal system does not recognise gender-based differences, girls are still more likely to be disadvantaged due to both visible (e.g., women's reproductive health needs) and 'invisible' factors such as traditional perceptions and mindsets about the female gender and their role in society.

Admittedly, the DepEd has undertaken efforts and initiatives to make classroom teachers, textbook and curriculum writers and editors, publishers and illustrators more gender sensitive. However, these measures implemented in the school setting have neither been consistent nor sustained. Anecdotal evidences point to weak and minimal compliance with policies and issuances aimed at instilling greater gender sensitivity and gender equality in the school system among administrators, teachers and non-teaching staff. Biases against women and girls are still manifest among classroom teachers. The mere fact that adolescent sexuality and reproductive health and rights are still not effectively and adequately

integrated in the school curriculum is proof that schools still ignore gender-based differences between girls and boys.

Planning has not integrated adult learning programmes for women and there is no second-chance option for girls and women who missed out on formal education.

While institutional barriers have been removed to make education more accessible for girls and women, local governments and communities must be made to understand and appreciate more benefits from educating women and girls. Socio-cultural barriers in the form of traditional norms, mindsets and practices must be strategically and effectively addressed.

Notwithstanding the numerous laws, policies and issuances to promote broader access to education, and greater gender equality in the various social spheres of life, there are persistent gaps in sustaining the institutionalization of enabling mechanisms, processes and structures.

*Lack of more strategic and affirmative actions and mechanisms on the part of government, particularly at the local level, to integrate women literacy in other major streams of programmes and services made available for women.* Gender and Development funds or the special education fund from Real Property Taxes can be a source of budgetary resources for women and literacy work. Literacy lessons can also be integrated in women-targeted programmes in health and nutrition, entrepreneurship, water and sanitation. Through convergence of all programmes and services at the local level addressing gender-based issues and harmonizing national and local laws and policies upholding women's rights, stronger institutional bases for women and literacy work can be provided.

Addressing the problem of female illiteracy calls, first and foremost, for responding to the problem of attaining universal access to basic education—for males and females alike. The initiative of the Philippine Government in coming up with the *Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda* as the overarching policy framework to improve overall sector performance must be recognised as one of the landmark, defining policies of the current political administration. This Agenda needs to look at the following implications for action if it is to eradicate illiteracy among women in the poorest and most disadvantaged and marginalised communities.

What are our ways forward?

*First, the government still needs to abide by the international benchmark of allocating 20 per cent of the national budget for basic education and of devoting 3 per cent to adult learning programmes that are aimed at eradicating illiteracy.*

The Philippines ranks among the lowest education spenders in Asia and the rest of the world. The country's spending level is below the East

Asian regional average of 3.6 per cent of GDP and South Asia's average of 3.8 per cent. A middle-income country by the World Bank's standards, the Philippines' spending level on education is even lower than the 3.9 per cent of GDP, the median expenditure of countries belonging to the lowest income group.

National government still needs to reach the international benchmark of allocating at least six per cent of GDP to basic education. To its credit, basic education received a sharp increase in its 2011 budget, and was 18.5 per cent more than the 2010 appropriation. Relative to GDP, education budget slightly rose to 2.29 per cent as compared to the previous year of 2.10 per cent of GDP. This is the first time that the education budget as a share of GDP increased after consistently declining for the last 10 years (Social Watch Philippines, 2011). In the 2012 National Expenditure Programme, DepEd's budget was pegged at PhP214 billion, the second largest share of the national budget next to debt payments. However, critical programmes to serve urgent and unmet needs in the education sector are still poorly funded and virtually ignored. There are concerns raised that the budget focuses almost entirely on the formal school system and speaks little on the out-of-school children and other marginalised groups.

All forms of fees and expenses related to bringing one's child to school must be totally abolished, and workbooks and other school materials must be provided free of charge. Sanctions must be applied to teachers who peddle goods among students. There must be no graduation fees of any kind. No charges must be collected – whether mandatory or optional – from parents for the upkeep of classrooms and facilities.

*Second, the government has to strategically and proactively address the problem of school dropouts and illiteracy, especially among the marginalised and disadvantaged communities in the country.*

An initial step lies in *disaggregating the high participation rate by gender, income level, sectoral grouping and geographical location and/or sector groups and identifying those with the highest literacy deficits.* This must be followed by instituting measures addressing the glaring cultural barriers to girls and women's education.

The relatively high participation rate in the education sector in the country conceals inequalities in terms of access to adequate and quality education across gender and income groups. It is these areas, sectors and gender groups that must come under closer examination if governments—both at the local and national levels—are to design progressive and responsive reform policies in education. This study has shown that where poverty incidence is higher, so are education deficits greater; and where LGUs are poorer, the lower the expenditures and investments in education and literacy.

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) of the educational system allowed many of the women in this study to pursue the learning and the education that they have long aspired to complete. This programme has largely been carried out by non-governmental organisations in the communities where they are based and is aimed at pursuing a lifelong learning process for young people and adults alike who have been left out, for one reason or another, by formal schooling. Having greater flexibility, the ALS has proven more capacitating and responsive to the learning needs and concerns of its students, as well as more adaptive to the situation of the learners.

The DepEd's ALS programmes catering to adults, however, remain very minimal. The ALS operations budget (mainly for contracting NGOs and LGU services to illiterates and out-of-school youth), stands at less than one per cent of the total DepEd budget. Often, NGOs and people's organisations who are themselves struggling for resources, fund these ALS programmes in remote areas. E-Net Philippines strongly recommends that the DepEd prioritize programmes for women's literacy and continuing programmes to retain girls/women's/out-of-school literacy and education. Similarly, LGUs who already have programmes and services for the poor should have literacy embedded as a component for empowering women and other marginalised groups.

*Third, the framework and programmes for ALS to integrate literacy programmes to livelihoods, health, leadership and other themes that will empower women must be broadened.*

Expanding ALS to reach out to more young people and adults, especially women, who have been left out by the formal schooling system can be one of the strategies to address the problem of illiteracy. This can include government efforts especially at the local levels in developing comprehensive, integrated approaches that target individuals in poor and disadvantaged communities who have grown "too old" to return to school, whose literacy may have regressed or whose life conditions have become too constricted to pursue formal schooling (e.g., having small children to take care of). Another track can be the adoption of thematic approaches to improving literacy levels, such as combining microcredit/microfinance programmes or programmes on maternal and infant nutrition, reproductive health and adolescent sexuality with the corresponding functional literacy lessons.

Adequate funds to improve health and nutritional status of women and their children, especially in the most disadvantaged communities (e.g., informal settlers in the urban areas and indigenous communities in the rural areas) must be provided for, as these greatly affect education outcomes. LGUs can be enjoined to utilise existing policies and governance structures in mobilising more local resources for education (such as the Special Education Fund where a portion can be allocated for adult literacy work, or local development funds for development projects which can include an integral part on literacy).

Significant stress must be given to enforcing the use of the mother tongue in functional literacy programmes for women. Filipino, the officially recognised national language is the medium of instruction used in most literacy programmes. However, the large concentration of women illiterates locates in indigenous and Muslim communities, and they are not fluent in Filipino. Using the local language in instruction as well as in the learning materials, in addition to tapping local knowledge, has been shown to increase the effectiveness of literacy programmes. Moreover, educators from the community must go through adequate and appropriate training since they are the ones who can facilitate learning in the mother tongue. Effectiveness can further be enhanced through the partnership between literacy workers and community educators.

Women in the ARMM where the literacy rate is lowest and in informal settlers' communities in the highly urbanised cities of the country must be given special attention and assistance in attaining literacy and pursuing lifelong education and learning. The same applies for two other regions in Mindanao—CARAGA and Zamboanga Peninsula—where literacy rates are also very low.

With the comprehensive scope of the MCW, oversight functions of the PCW can be further enhanced and strengthened to ensure that entitlements of women for education and life skills learning, especially among the poor and the marginalised, are fully enjoyed.

*Fourth, schools need to ensure the protection and safety of girls inside the school and in the access roads to the school and importantly; putting in place a gender-fair education in schools is a strategic concern.*

We need to ensure girl-safe schools and communities by:

• educating all members of the school community — boys and girls, teaching and non-teaching personnel, security and maintenance personnel about laws and issuances protecting women and children, the nature and dynamics of all forms of child abuse, etc.;

• creating a mechanism within the school for receiving reported cases of violations and ensuring a strong referral system for necessary programmes and services for child-victims of abuse and a system of redress of grievances against perpetrators inside the school system;

• mobilising community support to safeguard safety and security of girls and boys (against bullying and sexual harassment, for instance);

• teaching adolescent reproductive health and sexuality in public schools and training a corps of sexual and reproductive health educators;

• intensifying and sustaining information campaigns on the benefits of education for all; and,

• consciousness-building among families and communities, especially those with high risk factors involving traditional mindsets and beliefs about girls and education.

It should be stressed that as long as the public school system refuses to teach reproductive health and sexuality education in the primary education level, they continue to promote gender-based differences between boys and girls, men and women that continue to disadvantage women in achieving gender equality through education in the community and in society.

Addressing part of the problem of drop-outs involves scrutinising more deeply the problem of male drop-outs and their lacklustre performance in school. Gender equality remains a pertinent goal, hence the need to get more boys to enter and complete formal schooling. As well, having more literate and schooled women than men can also lead to a situation where educated women are unduly pressured to take on the bulk of responsibilities, both paid and unpaid, to support household and family needs. This will redound to heavier burdens on women, given a continuing situation of employment opportunity gaps and male-privileging wage differentials in the labour market.

*Fifth, the government needs to strengthen mechanisms and structures mandated by various laws and issuances for tracking learner participation and performance in education and for broader participation in education governance.*

This means strengthening the LSBs at the LGU levels to improve citizens' participation, transparency and public accountability. We must ensure active and substantive participation of parents, communities and civil society organisations in planning programmes and measures to address education needs of a burgeoning population, in allocating the Special Education Fund (SEF) and in other decision/policy-making processes related to managing educational programmes and services at the local level. Integral to this recommendation is the implementation of an effective budget and expenditure tracking system in the education sector to monitor fund utilisation and assessing effectiveness of programmes and projects being implemented, including alternative modes of learning delivery to the various groups and communities, especially those who are grossly disadvantaged and marginalised.

*Sixth, the government must ensure compliance with the GAD policy and that GAD plans truly contribute to the empowerment of girls and women.*

The government plays a big and leading role in equalising opportunities for the poor, marginalised and excluded women. It is entrusted with the necessary mandates and has command over public revenues and resources to address structural barriers to women's literacy and empowerment such as 1) the lack of ownership of the means for productive life; 2) lack of credit/support facility for livelihoods; 3) low levels of women's participation; and, 4) lack of second-option education for girls and women. Local government programmes can be more beneficial when literacy is integrated into livelihood, health and other

social services and programmes for and with women. Integrating literacy into programme delivery has time and again been a proven strategy for ensuring learning and achieving the intents of programmes.

With the education sector progressing too slowly in coming out with programmes to address education of girls/women who need appropriate education interventions, LGUs must pave the way for ensuring second-option learning opportunities for women illiterates.

*Seventh, the government together with civil society should take the lead in awareness-raising and campaigning towards overcoming the cultural barriers to women's literacy.*

Mobilising volunteers and community campaigns hold much potential for changing mindsets of families and communities that for generations have underestimated the power of literacy/education for girls and women in indigenous, Muslim and urban poor communities. Education for girls/women has been viewed as an instrument for ensuring productivity of the women, particularly in terms of expanding the reach of their reproductive roles. The sad consequence of this notion is that, when education is inaccessible or fails to bring the desired results in terms of increasing incomes, girls/women are pulled out of education and compelled to take on their traditional care-giving roles in the family. Literacy helps women communicate, negotiate and plan ways of making their lives better in economic, social and political terms. These are important aspects of literacy that breaks down purely economistic expectations, and must be part and parcel of any community awareness-raising effort.

*Eighth, formal and informal support structures that encourage women's participation in literacy/adult learning programmes should be installed at the community level.*

The stories of women in this study attributed in a big way the strength to defend their participation in education programmes to the presence of support systems. For instance, day care centres relieved them of some of their child-rearing burdens and gave them more time for learning. Neighbourhood theatre groups provided temporary respite from unrelenting household chores.

The positive effects of creating women's circles or groups are well-founded. In the face of socio-cultural constraints that women face daily, from abusive and controlling spouses/partners to unsupportive families, these safe women's spaces can be vehicles for extending psycho-social support, for informal sharing of information and advice, or for simply exchanging experiences, finding common cause and building confidence in themselves and their abilities.

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# PAPUA NEW GUINEA

## Female Education in Papua New Guinea: Getting Better?

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# INTRODUCTION

This report provides an overview of the education situation for girls and women in Papua New Guinea (PNG), and through a detailed desk review, examines if equality exists for females in education. It analyses the PNG policy context and reviews national and international commitments of the government to female literacy and education. The report uses government assessments of learning and education access to determine whether gender equality has been achieved within the various education subsectors. The quality and coverage of non-formal education providers are also examined, specifically the extent to which they are able to meet the demands of learners. Finally, the report identifies key barriers to achieving female literacy and education equality and proposes recommendations for action.

# METHODOLOGY

The development of this report is part of Papua New Guinea Education Advocacy Network's (PEAN) two-year engagement under the 'Innovating Advocacy Approaches in Promoting Adult Female Literacy' project. The research was conducted at the beginning of the project to inform subsequent advocacy actions by the network and its members. The research report was informed by a desk review of government policies, plans and laws relevant to female literacy and education in PNG. To assess the extent of gender equity, the report also draws upon government and civil society organisation (CSO) reports on provision, access and quality of early childhood education, formal schooling, tertiary studies and non-formal education. The preliminary findings from the desk review were then presented at a workshop on female literacy attended by representatives of literacy providers, women's advocacy groups and other educators. During the workshop participants identified major barriers to female literacy and developed recommendations for action that were used to direct advocacy actions during the project.

# POLICY CONTEXT

This section of the research report examines in detail the policy context and includes a review of existing policies, plans, laws and institutions related to female education and literacy.

## Policies and Plans

The PNG Government's policy positions on women's education and literacy are articulated in numerous planning and policy documents. The following section provides an overview of these key documents and the extent to which female education and literacy is addressed and prioritised.

*Papua New Guinea Vision 2050*

In 2009, the Government of PNG launched the strategy document *Papua New Guinea Vision 2050* (henceforth 'Vision 2050'). Developed by the National Planning Committee (NPC), this policy document aims to guide socio-economic development over the next 40 years. The strategy highlights the important role education plays in achieving the strategy's overarching theme, 'Smart, Wise, Fair, Healthy and Happy Society by 2050'.

Seven strategic focus areas are discussed by the document, with the first of these on 'Human Development, Gender, Youth and People Empowerment' making numerous references to the important role of education and women. It emphasises the expansion of access to formal education committing to 'Free and Universal Basic Education for all school-age children from Elementary 1 to Grade 12' (GoPNG, 2009, p. 5). The strategy also stresses that 'literacy is the basis for basic skills and knowledge for all individuals' (GoPNG, 2009, p. 35) and envisions the use of community colleges to improve access to training over a 40-year period. Acknowledging PNG women's largely untapped potential in the country's development and their experience of education disadvantage, it notes that 'greater participation of women must be encouraged at all levels of society' (GoPNG, 2009, p. 35). The Department of Planning has strongly advocated harmonising all department plans, policies and budgets along lines that ensure deeper and wider integration of women's education and literacy in the coming years.

*Papua New Guinea Development Strategic Plan*

The PNG Development Strategic Plan, covering a 20-year period (2010-2030), sets out key strategies and actions towards achieving Vision 2050. It identifies both education and gender as sectors important in enabling a high quality of life for the PNG people. It goes further to state among its objectives that there must be equality of opportunity and broader participation of marginalised groups (GoPNG, 2010B). Gender is identified as a cross-cutting issue, implicated in the Plan's promise that 'all citizens, irrespective of gender, will have equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from the development of the country' (GoPNG, 2010B, p. 111). However, while the Plan provides clear targets for increased access and quality within both 'Primary and Secondary Education' and 'Higher

Education', these are not sex-disaggregated. Neither do its programmes suggest possible strategies to address existing inequality nor mainstream specific targets for females, though it identifies the need for innovative programmes to address significant gender disparities.

With regard Higher Education, the strategic plan highlights that intake capacity of the tertiary system is inadequate and the office prioritises the doubling the capacity of PNG's universities within the 20-year period (GoPNG, 2010B, p. 60). In addition, the Gender section of the Plan explicitly targets gender parity among all university graduates, namely that women comprise 50 per cent of all graduates by 2030 (GoPNG, 2010B, p. 112).

*PNG Medium Term Development Plan*

Aligned with Vision 2050 and the Papua New Guinea Development Strategic Plan, the PNG Medium Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2011-2015 published in 2010 is the first of four rolling plans that will cover the entire 20-year period of the strategic plan. 'Primary and Secondary Education' is identified as a key sector within the plan, under which specific targets are set for the gender parity ratio reach 97 per cent by 2015 for basic education.

The MTDP similarly identifies gender as a cross-cutting issue and commits to ensuring that 'all citizens irrespective of gender will have equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from development of the country' (GoPNG, 2010A, p. 125). Within the Gender sub-sector are explicit targets relating to education, health and governance, but these have not all been fully integrated into the plans for the key sectors. The Gender sector also contains no detail beyond an estimated annual allocation.

*National Education Plan*

The National Education Plan (NEP) (2004) outlines a plan for improving education access, quality and management over a 10-year period. The NEP makes clear reference to PNG's international education commitments to the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All (EFA) goals (PNG DoE, 2004A). It categorises education into 'Basic Education', 'Post-Primary Education' and 'Administration for Education', across which gender equity is underscored as a major social issue along with law, health and population. It is worth noting here that Higher Education is not overseen by the Department of Education and is thus not part of the NEP.

Despite noting the importance of gender issues with the NEP, there are only two activities in the sub-sector plans that explicitly address existing inequalities. One of these, under primary education's 'quality teacher education and training' targets an activity to review and update primary

teacher training curriculum for the purpose of providing gender equity materials. Another planned output seeks to 'provide leadership training opportunities for women teachers' (PNG DoE, 2004A, p. 57). The section on financing, however, does not reflect how these activities will be funded.

The plan also gives information on access, quality and management of literacy and non-formal education opportunities but lacks reference specifically to female literacy. Literacy courses will be provided as part of the 'Post-Primary Education' sector through 'Flexible, Open and Distance Education', and the 'Vocational Education' sub-sectors through Vocational Centres and Information Communication Technologies (PNG DoE, 2004A). From an 'Administration of Education'perspective, the plan notes literacy and numeracy as fundamental to all, and commits support to the delivery of literacy services through the National Literacy and Awareness Secretariat (NLAS) and 'in collaboration with other government departments and agencies' (PNG DoE, 2004A, p. 91). The extent of funding available to these activities and strategies is unclear.

*Universal Basic Education Plan*

The 2010-2019 Universal Basic Education Plan, an extension of NEP, focuses on children's education in the formal sector. The overarching goal of the plan is to ensure that 'all children of school age must enrol in school, complete nine years of basic education and should have learnt skills, knowledge and values covered in the basic education curriculum' (PNG DoE, 2009A, p. 24). The plan outlined five key results areas (KRAs), namely access, retention, quality, management and equity, with the latter two KRAs identified as cross-cutting results.

Giving a detailed situation analysis of the formal education system, the NEP affirms the presence of gender inequality (PNG DoE, 2009A) and makes note of the need to integrate gender as one of several cross-cutting concerns in the first three KRAs. However, the only action identified to address inequity is the establishment of Gender Focal Points in all provinces (PNG DoE, 2009A). The plan also provides detailed projections of budget allocation to support the achievement of the plan; however, no additional funding has been projected to address gender disparities in basic education.

*National Literacy Policy*

The National Literacy Policy launched and published by the Department of Education in 2000 reflects the commitment to universal literacy guaranteed by the PNG Constitution. Concretely, it targets children not enrolled in school, out-of-school youth and adults who fall outside its definition of literacy as the ability '...to read and write with understanding a

short simple letter or message in any language about a topic with which the reader/writer is familiar' (PNG DoE, 2000, p. vii).

'The policy clarifies that the Department of Education is the lead agency for non-formal education and other government departments support this role' (PNG DoE, 2000, p.vii). The policy also outlines the coordinating and governance role of the National Literacy and Awareness Council and Secretariat. The roles and responsibilities for literacy and non-formal education service provision are also outlined in the policy document. The national government maintains a 'decentralised approach'; provision of non-formal education services is considered the role of the communities, Local Level Government (LLG), churches and NGOs (PNG DoE, 2000). Like the other policy documents earlier mentioned, this document contains no reference to female literacy or to any other disadvantaged group that have the most need for intervention.

*Gender Equity in Education Policy*

The Department of Education's Gender Equity in Education Policy launched in 2002 and revised in 2009 aims to ensure that 'no students in the education system of Papua New Guinea are disadvantaged on the basis of gender' (PNG DoE, 2009B, p. 2). The principles of the policy recognise the importance of realising individual potential, short-term affirmative action; the need for change across elementary, primary, secondary and tertiary education sectors; and finally, not attributing gender stereotypes to learners (PNG DoE, 2009B).

The policy also outlines the roles and responsibilities in implementation of standards officers, guidance officers, school principals and other staff, as well as Department of Education personnel tasked with staff professional development and curriculum development. It is worth noting that the policy does not extend to adult education or non-formal education, and thus, fails to cover all aspects of the education system included in the National Education Plan.

*Gender Equity Strategic Plan*

The Department of Education's 2009 Gender Equity Strategic Plan is intended to be a sector-wide plan aimed at addressing widespread inequality. Informed by the Gender Equity in Education Policy, it identifies four strategies to realise gender equity, namely, participation and partnership, capacity-building, sustainability and gender mainstreaming (PNG DoE, 2009C). The plan focuses on the role of Department of Education divisions and staff in implementation and in ensuring adherence. Unfortunately, it provides little information on budgetary allocations and cautions that there is a need 'to be realistic about the resources available and the pace of change the Department can manage and sustain' (PNG DoE, 2009C, p. 10).

Also worth noting is the absence of reference to adult education and non-formal education. Women's literacy is mentioned but once, and only as part of the 'Partner Map' in the appendix to emphasise that 'national literacy training for women [be] via NLAS' (PNG DoE, 2009C, p. 73). Moreover, despite the plan claiming to be sector-wide, it is almost entirely focused on the formal education system, particularly the role of the Education Department and its divisions.

*National Women's Policy*

The National Women's Policy launched in 1991 seeks to ensure 'increased participation by women as both beneficiaries and agents in the development process and improvement in the quality of life for all' (GoPNG, 1990, p. 2). A key achievement proceeding from the policy was the establishment of the Office for the Development of Women. The policy and office are part of the work of the Department for Family and Community Development.

*National Higher Education Plan*

The National Higher Education Plan (NHEP), developed by the Office of Higher Education, is a 30-year (2010-2040) plan advancing the theme 'innovation through entrepreneurialism'. The plan is aligned with both Vision 2050 and the MTDP, and serves to expand out the process of increasing the number of tertiary graduates of local institutions. Several strategies to increase female participation, with corresponding detailed budgets are mainstreamed throughout NHEP. Strategies include the development of 'gender sensitive policies to promote enrolment…to allow capable and eligible females to enrol with lower entry scores than males' (PNG OHE, 2011, p. 39). Other proposals seek the establishment of an 'Equity Scholarship Scheme' to assist disadvantaged groups including women (PNG OHE, 2011). The need to provide specialised accommodation for women is further identified as a likely action.

## Legal Frameworks

This section provides a brief overview of laws and conventions that relate to female education and the literacy in PNG.

*Constitution of PNG*

The PNG Constitution explicitly recognises the equality of all PNG citizens as a key principle. It provides for 'an equal opportunity for every citizen to take part in the political, economic, social, religious and cultural life of the country' (GoPNG, 1975, p. 3) and further states that there be 'equal participation by women citizens in all political, economic, social and religious activities'(GoPNG, 1975, p. 3). The right to literacy for all

citizens also enjoys constitutional backing in the urging that 'all persons and governmental bodies to endeavour to achieve universal literacy in Pisin, HiriMotu or English, and in 'tokples' [vernacular].' (GoPNG, 1975, p. 3) The Constitution, however, contains no provision on universal education and mentions only that 'education is to be based on mutual respect and dialogue' (GoPNG, 1975, p. 2).

*Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*
The Government of PNG ratified the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1995; it has yet to ratify the Optional Protocol to the CEDAW. PNG is thus legally bound to realise Article 10 which provides that states parties 'take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education' (CEDAW, 1979). Further, section (d) under Article 10 commits states parties to providing women 'the same opportunities for access to programmes of continuing education, including adult and functional literacy programmes, particularly those aimed at reducing, at the earliest possible time, any gap in education existing between men and women' (CEDAW, 1979). Thus, the Government of PNG, by ratifying CEDAW, has made commitments to address education injustices experienced by illiterate women.

*International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*
The Government of PNG ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 2008 without reservations. Article 4 of the covenant states that, parties commit 'to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights' (ICESCR, 1966). The covenant also covers education specifically in Article 13, meaning that as a state party of the ICESCR, the Government of PNG has committed to 'recognize the right of everyone to education' and to ensure that 'education shall be encouraged or intensified as far as possible for those persons who have not received or completed the whole period of their primary education' (ICESCR, 1966).

## International Commitments

*Millennium Development Goals*
    The Government of PNG has pledged its commitment to meet the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. In reviewing female literacy, the goals on universal primary education and gender equality are particularly relevant. The second goal focuses on ensuring that all girls and boys complete primary school while the third goal

broadly focuses on empowering women and particularly targets removing gender disparities in education.

*Education For All*

In addition to the MDGs, the Government of PNG has also made pledges to realise the Education For All (EFA) goals by 2015. The EFA goals take a holistic perspective on education, going beyond formal education to include adult literacy and non-formal education. The fourth EFA goal aims at 'achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults' (UNESCO, 2011, p. 65). This is further strengthened by the fifth goal focused on 'eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality' (UNESCO, 2011, p.73). This pledge to the EFA goals signifies a strong commitment on the part of the PNG government to improving the education and literacy situation of PNG women.

In 2004, the PNG Department of Education, in collaboration with UNESCO, published its EFA National Action Plan, which identifies barriers to the realisation of the goals and indicates actions for overcoming them by 2015. For the literacy goal, the plan cites the lack of funded adult education institutions as a major problem, to which the Education Department will respond by allocating PGK 300,000 per annum (approximately USD 100,000) for the refurbishment of centres for adult learning and to 'sustain the effort of institutions delivering adult education' (PNG DoE, 2004B, p. 39).

However, with regard to the goal of eliminating gender disparities, the action plan claims 'there are no institutional impediments established to hinder the progress of girls through the education system' (PNG DoE, 2004B, p. 42), despite other departmental policies and plans having explicitly noted significant gender gaps. Moreover, it stated that no action is required in relation to goal five, suggesting that the Department of Education felt that it had been already achieved in 2004.

## Institutional Structures

*National Literacy and Awareness Council*

The National Literacy and Awareness Council (NLAC), as outlined previously in the policy section, is an important institution for non-formal education and literacy in PNG. The council is made up of government representatives, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), churches and provincial governments (see Figure 1). A critical institution for non-formal

education and literacy in PNG, the council's role includes monitoring the implementation of the Literacy Policy, working to 'coordinate, encourage and facilitate literacy and awareness activities' (PNG DoE, 2000, p. 30). It is also responsible for forwarding recommendations to the Secretary for Education on literacy activities during meetings twice yearly (PNG DoE, 2000). NLAC, however, was dissolved in 2004 and has been inactive since (PNG DoE, 2008). Although the National Literacy Policy Review Working Group unanimously endorsed the recommendation for improving and re-establishing NLAC, it remains inactive due to lack of senior support, funding constraints and confusion about its role (PNG DoE, 2008). Recent efforts to reinstate NLAC, as part of the UNESCO Capacity Building for EFA (UNESCO CapEFA) Project have also been unsuccessful.

**Figure 1. Literacy Implementing Agencies**
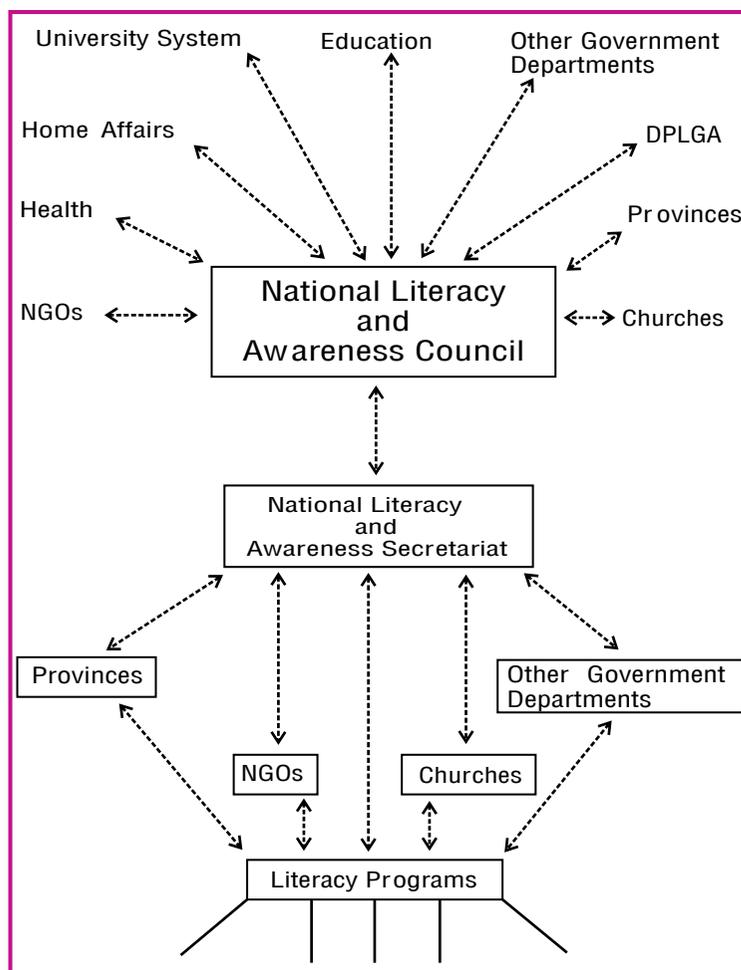


Source: PNG DoE, 2000, p. 35

*National Literacy and Awareness Secretariat*

The National Literacy and Awareness Secretariat (NLAS) is another entity envisioned to play an important role in implementing the government's National Literacy Policy. Within the policy, NLAS' roles and responsibilities include acting as the national and international communication focal point for literacy, facilitating training for literacy teachers and developing local learning and literacy materials (PNG DoE, 2000). However since the policy's inception and with NLAC's dissolution, NLAS has been struggling to fulfil its role and continues to have little status (PNG DoE, 2008). The Secretariat is part of the Department of Education, but is located with the Office of Libraries and Archives.

# EDUCATION AND LITERACY SITUATION

A number of key government reports acknowledge gender disparity as an issue. This section examines publicly available Department of Education statistics on female access, transition and completion of formal education. It follows as a guide the sub-sector breakdown used by Department of Education's National Plan for Education. Information has been primarily sourced from the PNG Department of Education 'State of Education' report, (available on the department's website), which provides a detailed analysis of the education situation based on the 2007 School Census. Supplementary and complementary information from other Department of Education reports are also used, along with independent local research and international reports from organisations such as UNESCO.

As noted previously, non-formal education is integrated into the other sub-sectors. However, to facilitate analysis, the research deemed it fit to consider the youth and adult literacy situation separate from the sub-sectors of Elementary Education, Primary Education, Secondary Education, Flexible Open and Distance Education, Vocational Education and Technical Education and Training. It also analysed higher education in terms of access and quality, though this sector falls outside the jurisdiction of the Department of Education.

## Elementary Education

The 'State of Education' monitoring report observed rapid growth in elementary education over the last 15 years,and it is considered 'now, with certain reservations, broadly accepted as a part of the formal education system' (PNG DoE, 2011, p. 11).

The information gathered presents strong evidence of gender equity within elementary education (see Table 1). Admission rates, which show the level of access to elementary education, are almost identical for boys and girls. The Department of Education acknowledges the practise of under-age enrolment and repetition as common, but it is not as yet known whether gender biases are implicated (PNG DoE, 2011). The same holds true for significant over-age enrolment; this is also often reported but due to limited data, no conclusion can be drawn in relation to the existence of gender disparities.

Table 1. Elementary School Admission Rates by Gender (2007)

| | Male | Female | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gross admission rate | 77.3% | 77.0% | 77.2% |
| Net admission rate | 11.2% | 11.9% | 11.5% |

Source: PNG DoE, 2011, p.11

Nevertheless, the elementary education sub-sector still faces a number of significant challenges in terms of providing quality education to all young children. The 'State of Education' report notes that because of funding shortfalls, widespread repetition, provincial disparities, teacher dissatisfaction, inadequate facilities and controversies over curricula, there is no assurance that the gains in girls' participation and the achievement of gender equity in elementary education will be sustained (PNG DoE, 2011).

## Primary Education

The 'State of Education' report provides detailed information about access, quality and management of primary education in PNG. As can be seen from Table 2, females are less like than males to be enrolled in primary school, with the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) for females for grades one to six at 70 per cent as compared to 78 per cent for males. When analysing the Net Enrolment Rate (NER) a smaller disparity can be observed between females and males, with an NER of 43 per cent for grades one to six for females compared to 46 per cent for males. The large discrepancy between the GER and NER is likely due to high incidence of over-age enrolment in primary school, indicating internal inefficiencies are present for both male and female students (UIS, 2009).

Table 2. Primary School Enrolment Rate by Grade and Gender (2007)

|  | Gross Enrolment Rate | | Gross Enrolment Rate | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Grades 1 to 6 | 78% | 70% | 46% | 43% |
| Grades 3 to 8 | 65% | 57% | 39% | 37% |

Source: PNG DoE, 2011, p.22

The 2011 UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR) depicts a similar pattern in enrolment rates. UNESCO found PNG's GER for primary education in 2009 to be at 59 per cent for males and 50 per cent for females, with a Gender Parity Index score of 0.84 (UNESCO, 2011, p. 305). Moreover, despite the PNG Department of Education's EFA Action Plan suggesting there is little gender disparity in primary education, female students are still less likely than male students to be enrolled in primary school.

The government has not published intake rates, which are used to indicate the level of access to primary education. Using the 2011 EFA GMR, the Gross Intake Rate (GIR) in primary education emerges several points lower for girls as compared to boys, at 29 per cent and 33 per cent, respectively (UNESCO, 2011, p. 296). Independent research conducted by ASPBAE and the PNG Education Advocacy Network (PEAN) validates this data on girls' access and exclusion from school. Conducted in the three provinces of Chimbu, Sandaun and Gulf, the research gathered historical information on the highest level of education attended for survey respondents aged 15 to 60. Table 3 shows that across all three provinces, females are more likely than males to have missed attending school.

Table 3. Highest Level of Education Attended, by Gender

|  | Chimbu | | Sandaun | | Gulf | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Never attended | 11.2% | 23.6% | 24.2% | 47.9% | 7.7% | 11.3% |
| Primary | 49.9% | 49.6% | 52.5% | 40.1% | 69.7% | 72.6% |
| Secondary | 24.3% | 18.1% | 10.0% | 8.3% | 19.1% | 14.9% |
| Tertiary | 14.7% | 8.8% | 13.4% | 3.7% | 3.5% | 1.1% |

Source: ASPBAE, 2011, pp. 15, 36 and 56

The ASPBAE research also highlighted gains made in terms of increasing participation in school (see Figure 2). Sandaun province registered the most dramatic gains, with the rate of exclusion falling from 61 per cent for older females to 32 per cent for females aged 15 to 29 years. Despite

these advances, however, the likelihood of females never attending formal education is still double compared to males.

Figure 2. Never Attended Formal Education, by Gender, Age Cohort and Province
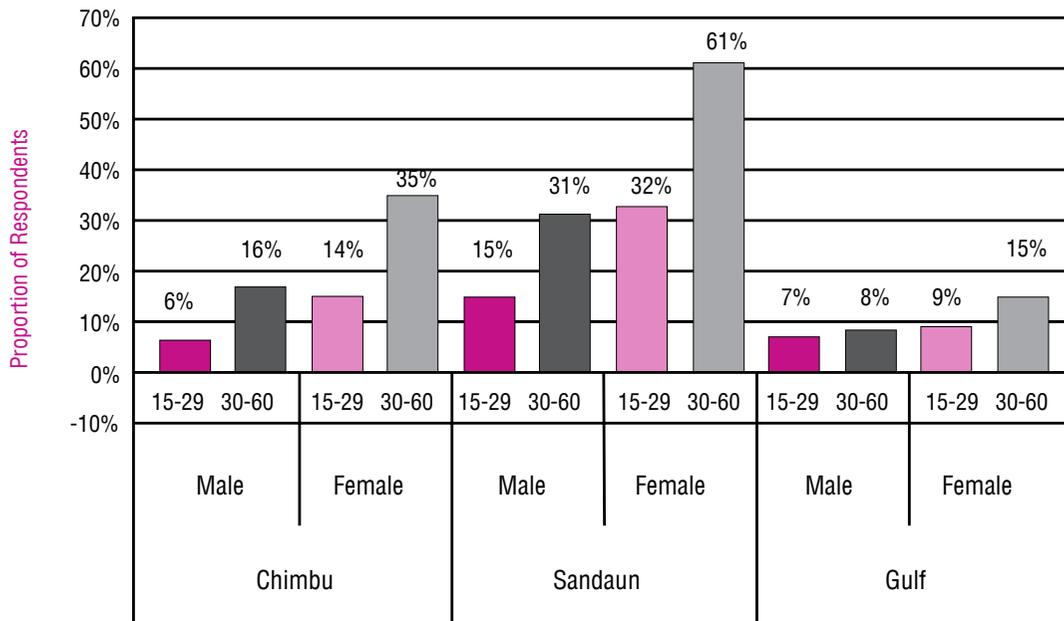


Source: ASPBAE, 2007 2011, pp. 9, 15, 36 and 56, with further analysis of original data

The 'State of Education' report also provides information about completion rates, as shown in Table 4. For both grades one to six and for grades three to eight, the completion rate is higher for males as compared to females. For the first six years of primary school the completion rate for males is over six per cent higher than females.

Table 4. Completion Rates by Grade and Gender for Cohort Completing in 2007

| | Male | Female | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Grades 1 to 6 | 64.3% | 58.9% | 61.8% |
| Grades 3 to 8 | 56.3% | 55.6% | 56.0% |

Source: PNG DoE, 2011, p.26

The Education Department's transition rates over a seven-year period also point to gaps in favour of males. As shown in Table 5, the transition rate for females is lower than for males in the seven years prior to 2007. The department's report called attention to what it considered 'more alarming' – 'the difference between male and female transition rates seems

to becoming wider rather than narrower as called for in the National Education Plan' (PNG DoE, 2011, p. 36). Further, the rate of transition has actually fallen for both males and females, indicating that despite investments to expand secondary education many girls are not moving to the higher school level.

Table 5. Transition Rates from Grade 8 to 9 by year and gender

|  | Male | Female | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2000 to 2001 | 69.3% | 66.5% | 68.1% |
| 2001 to 2002 | 76.3% | 70.7% | 73.9% |
| 2002 to 2003 | 77.4% | 69.3% | 74.0% |
| 2003 to 2004 | 65.2% | 57.5% | 61.9% |
| 2004 to 2005 | 61.3% | 53.7% | 58.0% |
| 2005 to 2006 | 57.2% | 53.1% | 55.4% |
| 2006 to 2007 | 56.9% | 53.1% | 55.3% |

Source: PNG DoE, 2011, p.36

Although information is available for school achievement in literacy and numeracy by province, sex-disaggregated data is not publically available. Moreover, recently released Department of Education information dismisses the possibility of assessing whether females and males' learning achievement at primary school are equitable.

## Secondary Education

The 'State of Education' report also provides enrolment rates for secondary school at a national level, as shown in Table 6. Female enrolment rates lag behind the males in both lower and upper secondary school, at 19.9 per cent for females in lower secondary compared to 25.7 per cent for males. The NER is not publicly available, hence the difficulty of commenting on the efficiency of the system and the extent of over-age enrolment.

Table 6. Enrolment Rates by Level and Gender in 2007

|  | Male | Female | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Lower Secondary | 25.7% | 19.9% | 23.0% |
| Upper Secondary | 8.9% | 6.1% | 7.6% |

Source: PNG DoE, 2011, p.36

Figure 3. Secondary School Participation, by Gender, Age Cohort and Province
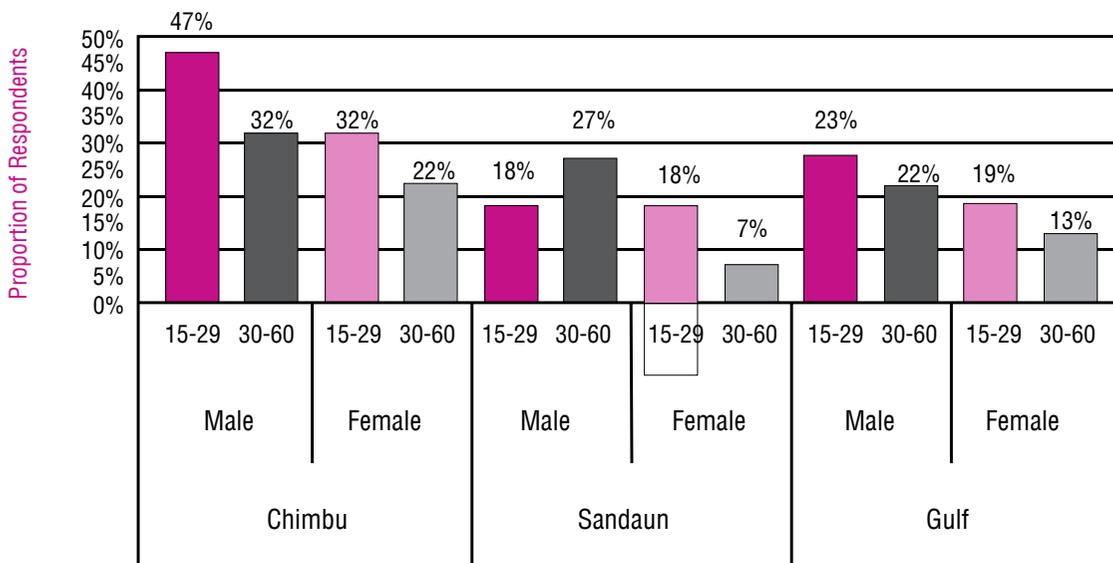
The gender disparity observed above in secondary education enrolments is further supported by the research conducted by ASPBAE and PEAN (See Figure 3). Findings show that in the three surveyed provinces, there has been an expansion in participation in secondary school across the generations for both males and females, but young males in Chimbu and Gulf have higher rates of participation compared to young females.

In summary, there is clear evidence that disparities still remain for females in terms of access, transition and completion of formal schooling. For some indicators, such as NER, the gender gap is small but if gender equality is to be achieved, then the gap must be closed.

## Flexible, Open and Distance Education

In comparison to primary and secondary education, only a small amount of information on the Department's Flexible, Open and Distance Education sub-sector can be accessed. The 'State of Education' monitoring report provides limited information on the distance education program, admitting that this was a 'relatively low priority for 2007' (PNG DoE, 2011, p. 39). In terms of access though, it is clear that more males are enrolling in distance education (see Table 7 below), and that fewer females enrolled in new subjects in 2007.

Table 7. New Distance Education Student and Subject Enrolments by Gender in 2007

| | Male | Female | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| New Student Enrolment | 1,688 | 1,430 | 3,118 |
| New Subject Enrolment | 3,236 | 2,754 | 5,990 |

The 'National Education Plan' envisioned distance education institutions using information communication technologies to further develop adult education (PNG DoE, 2004A). However, the monitoring report gives no information in this regard. In addition, because of the lack of a common assessment system, there is currently no way to measure or compare the learning of males and females enrolled in distance education (PNG DoE, 2004A).

## Technical Vocational Education and Training

Given the emphasis placed on vocational training by the Department's strategy and many development partners, it is worth briefly analysing female participation in the sub-sector. Data from the 'State of Education' report (see Table 8) depicts big gaps, with male enrolment in PNG's technical colleges dramatically higher than females' enrolment.

Table 8. Technical College Enrolments by Type of Course and Gender (2007)

| | Male | Female | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pre-employment Technical Training | 15 | 1 | 16 |
| Technical Training Certificate | 848 | 210 | 1058 |
| Ext / apprenticeship | 393 | 63 | 456 |
| National Certificate | 94 | 0 | 94 |
| Diploma | 1021 | 499 | 1520 |
| Part Time | 293 | 18 | 311 |
| Full Time | 2105 | 727 | 2833 |

Source: PNG DoE, 2011, p. 41

## Tertiary Education

A number of sources indicate that female participation is less than that for males. The Asian Development Bank's review of the Higher Education Project, for example, highlights that in 2004, females comprise only 39 per cent of nationwide tertiary student enrolment and that only 23 per cent of tertiary lecturers was female in 2006.

Table 9. Tertiary Enrolments by Gender (1999)

| | Male | Female | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gross Enrolment Rate | 2.6% | 1.4% | 2.0% |

Source: AusAID, 2011, p. 1

Another indicator of the existing gender inequity is the gross enrolment rate shown in Table 9. This is supported by ASPBAE's research in the three provinces (Table 3) portraying the greater proportion of males attending

university. Moreover, it is clear that females experience disadvantage at tertiary level and are less likely to enrol at university.

## Non-formal Education and Literacy

The level of female participation in non-formal education and level of literacy will be analysed in the following section. Despite, non-formal education and literacy being declared the responsibility of the Department of Education, there is no information in the 'State of Education' monitoring report on education outside the formal system. Literacy rates are, however, made available by the Government of PNG through other sources including the National Statistics Office. The National Statistics Office's literacy rates, shown in Table 10, highlight that female literacy is substantially lower than male literacy at national, urban and rural levels.

### Table 10. Literacy Rate for those Age 15+ by Gender and Location

|  | Male | Female | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| National | 61.2% | 50.9% | 56.2% |
| Urban | 88.6% | 83.3% | 86.2% |
| Rural | 56.8% | 46.3% | 51.7% |

Source: PNG NSO, 2004

The literacy rates are also available disaggregated by province, as shown in Table 11. The disparities between females and males are stark, with the literacy rate of females lower than males in every province for both the 1990 and 2000 census. Almost half of the provinces (8 of 20) in the 2000 Census had female literacy levels below 50 per cent compared to only a fifth or four provinces for males. Comparing literacy rates in 1990 to 2000, every province registered increased literacy levels for both males and females; however, in 10 provinces the gap between male and female literacy rates widened. Nationally, the gap between female and male literacy grew from 9.2 to 10.3 per cent. Wider disparities were observed in 2000 as compared to a decade past in the highly populated highlands provinces of Simbu, Enga, Eastern, Southern and Western Highlands where literacy has persistently stayed lowest over the years. The provincial inequity is also noted by the PNG Department of Education; 'literacy level of people on the coast andislands is better than those of the highlands and most parts of the northern end of the mainland' (PNG DoE, 2008, p. 39).

Table 11: Literacy Rate for those Age 15+ by Province and Gender

| | 1990 Census | | | 2000 Census | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female | Total |
| Western | 72.4% | 60.2% | 66.5% | 76.4% | 66.1% | 71.3% |
| Gulf | 62.5% | 50.9% | 56.9% | 66.0% | 56.0% | 61.1% |
| Central | 70.7% | 61.8% | 66.4% | 75.4% | 68.6% | 72.1% |
| National Capital | 83.8% | 78.1% | 81.3% | 92.3% | 88.7% | 90.7% |
| Milne Bay | 79.2% | 74.7% | 77.0% | 79.8% | 76.2% | 78.1% |
| Oro | 67.0% | 57.8% | 62.7% | 72.9% | 66.2% | 69.7% |
| Southern Highlands | 26.6% | 20.4% | 23.5% | 40.6% | 32.2% | 36.5% |
| Eastern Highlands | 30.5% | 19.5% | 25.2% | 51.0% | 36.5% | 43.9% |
| Simbu | 31.1% | 20.9% | 26.2% | 48.7% | 34.5% | 41.8% |
| Western Highlands | 26.8% | 19.4% | 23.3% | 44.1% | 32.6% | 38.4% |
| Enga | 34.9% | 24.9% | 30.2% | 40.2% | 29.5% | 35.0% |
| Morobe | 57.2% | 46.8% | 52.2% | 69.5% | 57.3% | 63.6% |
| Madang | 50.7% | 40.5% | 45.9% | 61.2% | 48.8% | 55.2% |
| Sandaun | 36.4% | 23.7% | 30.4% | 52.0% | 36.4% | 44.4% |
| East Sepik | 41.9% | 30.5% | 36.1% | 59.7% | 46.0% | 52.7% |
| Manus | 65.4% | 59.5% | 62.5% | 87.8% | 83.7% | 85.8% |
| New Ireland[1] | 63.7% | 58.7% | 61.4% | 78.9% | 75.8% | 77.4% |
| North Solomons | - | - | - | 78.4% | 75.0% | 76.7% |
| East New Britain | 74.2% | 72.6% | 73.4% | 82.4% | 80.7% | 81.6% |
| West New Britain | 64.4% | 56.8% | 61.0% | 73.9% | 66.9% | 70.7% |
| National | 49.5% | 40.3% | 45.1% | 61.2% | 50.9% | 56.2% |

Source: PNG DoE, 2008, p.38 and PNG NSO, 2004

A self-declaration question in the census and not demonstrated literacy competence generated the above nationally declared figures. Studies have consistently shown that the self-declaration methodology, as used in PNG, is inaccurate and typically produces inflated literacy rates (UIS, 2009, UNSD, 2011 and ASPBAE, 2011). Unfortunately, despite the observation by competent bodies and organisations that the census literacy figures are inflated, little research has been undertaken to determine the actual level of literacy of males and females in PNG.

ASPBAE's language experience survey and literacy assessments in five provinces provide invaluable data that can supplement the Government of PNG's declared literacy rates. To measure individual reading confidence, the

[1] No data available for 1990 due to conflict within the province

ASPBAE research conducted with PEAN included a question that replicated the census self-declaration question. Consistent with the figures in Table 11, ASPBAE's findings highlighted that in all five provinces, males were more confident in their reading ability than females (see Table 12). Hence, both Government data and independent research using the self-declaration method unquestionably show females as less literate than males.

Table 12: Reading Confidence in Tokpisin, Motu or English, by Gender

| | NCD/New Ireland | | Chimbu | | Sandaun | | Gulf | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Read easily | 78.5% | 71.4% | 79.4% | 70.0% | 73.5% | 52.7% | 67.4% | 59.7% |
| Read some/mostly | 11.9% | 14.5% | 13.5% | 13.6% | 11.1% | 15.1% | 17.6% | 20.7% |
| Cannot read | 9.6% | 14.1% | 7.0% | 16.4% | 15.5% | 32.2% | 14.9% | 19.7% |

Source: ASPBAE, 2007 and ASPBAE, 2011, pp. 23, 44 and 64

In addition to self-declaration, the ASPBAE/PEAN research also used a detailed literacy assessment as one of its methodologies. This instrument included 11 questions and 'focussed on each component skill of functional literacy: reading, writing and numeracy, as well as comprehension evidenced by the ability to apply these skills in familiar contexts in everyday life' (ASPBAE, 2011, p. 2). Findings revealed that the majority of individuals surveyed across the five provinces were either semi-literate or non-literate (see Figure 4). Gender disparities also surfaced in the smaller proportion of females assessed as literate compared to males. Further, a higher proportion of females were assessed to be non-literate compared to males. For example, in 'Chimbu Province, the non-literate rate for females at 40.9 per cent is almost double the male non-literate rate of 21.3 per cent' (ASPBAE, 2011, p. 6).

Figure 4: Literacy Classification by Gender and Province
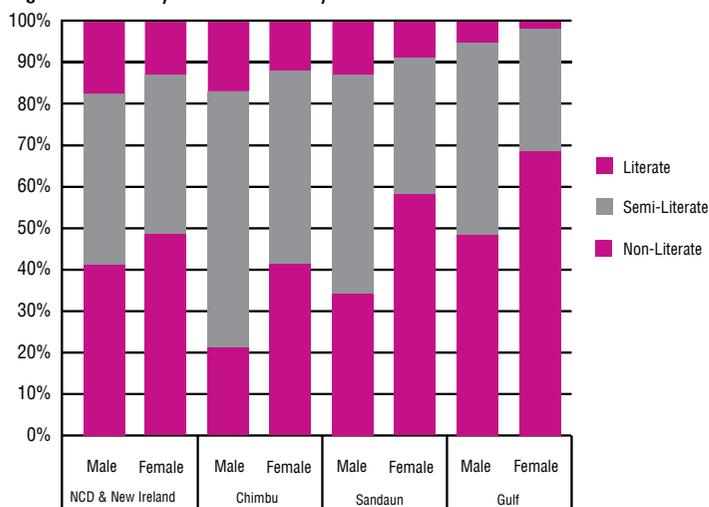


Source: ASPBAE, 2007, p. 9 and ASPBAE, 2011, pp. 25, 45 and 65

Both government and non-government sources thus clearly portray lower literacy levels among females than males. They also reveal that females are comparatively less confident in their literacy skills and that females in five PNG provinces are less literate than males, as found specifically from the ASPBAE literacy assessments.

## LITERACY PROGRAMMES

As noted within the National Literacy Policy, service provision of literacy programmes is decentralised and provided primarily by communities, Local Level Government (LLG), churches and NGOs. The Department of Education maintains its role as the lead department, with NLAS attending to functions of coordination and monitoring.

The 'Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) Situational Analysis' provides a detailed overview of literacy programmes in PNG based on information collected by NLAS from Literacy Programme Coordinators from 2001 to 2005. It depicts for this period the expansion in the number of learners engaged in literacy programmes (see Table 13). This can be attributed to higher female participation programmes over the five-year period, reaching as high as 69 per cent in 2004. However, it cannot be determined if this growth in participation was sustained as NLAS has not released participation rates in the last five years.

Table 13: Participation in a Literacy Programme by Year

|  | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of learners | 25,030 | 21,660 | 38,539 | 78,095 | 91,867 |
| Number of female learners | 14,493 | 12,572 | 26,231 | 54,264 | 50,933 |
| % of female learners | 58% | 57% | 68% | 69% | 55% |

Source: PNG DoE, 2008, p. 41

The Department of Education also published provincial information on the coverage of literacy programmes (see Table 14). During 2002-2003, there were 60,199 students registered in literacy programmes, supported by 2,540 literacy teachers. NLAS collected sex-disaggregated data of literacy teachers and students, but this information was not published. Almost a third of the students are concentrated in only two provinces, Southern Highlands and Enga Provinces with 9,831 and 8,340 students respectively.

Table 14: Literacy Programmes, Teachers and Students by Province (2002-2003)

| | Programmes | Teachers | Students |
|---|---|---|---|
| Western | 27 | 35 | 298 |
| Gulf | 40 | 40 | 257 |
| Central | 8 | 14 | 152 |
| National Capital | 22 | 55 | 776 |
| Milne Bay | 101 | 126 | 1,004 |
| Oro | 17 | 43 | 624 |
| Southern Highlands | 76 | 432 | 9,831 |
| Eastern Highlands | 26 | 55 | 2,064 |
| Simbu | 42 | 104 | 2,381 |
| Western Highlands | 31 | 56 | 1,008 |
| Enga | 311 | 316 | 8,340 |
| Morobe | 98 | 128 | 2,501 |
| Madang | 7 | 17 | 103 |
| Sandaun | 3 | 55 | 1,849 |
| East Sepik | 54 | 115 | 2,196 |
| Manus | 19 | 43 | 91 |
| New Ireland | 3 | 7 | 55 |
| Bougainville | 14 | 31 | 463 |
| East New Britain | 83 | 230 | 1,335 |
| West New Britain | 131 | 330 | 2,142 |
| NGOs (multiple provinces) | 47 | 254 | 1,997 |
| Church (multiple provinces) | 31 | 54 | 1,734 |
| No provincial detail | - | - | 18,998 |
| National | 1,191 | 2,540 | 60,199 |

Source: PNG DoE, 2008, p. 41

The NLAS data highlights the huge number of programmes that ran over the two-year period. In addition to 1,191 programmes running, many unmonitored ad hoc programmes are known to exist. NLAS commented that 'many more programmes are in the remote areas in the provinces that this office is unable to get them [sic]' (PNG DoE, 2008, p. 44). These programmes are carried out independently of each other, often by volunteer teachers who are without benefit of a common curriculum, materials or standards. Although a key function of NLAS is to assist with

the production of teaching materials, it only provides materials in the national language as 'programmes are expected to write their own learning materials according to the needs and interests of their learners' (PNG DoE, 2008, p. 28).

The following tables provide an overview of three high profile organisations providing literacy training to women in PNG. All three service providers have a strong focus on women and have all faced challenges in delivering assistance.

| Organisation | Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) |
|---|---|
| Brief background | YWCA PNG has been providing support to improve female literacy for over 10 years using a learner-centred approach combined with intensive training of local literacy teachers. YWCA has six provincial literacy coordinators and established over 250 literacy schools. |
| Learners | Over 15,000 since 2000 |
| Strengths | Literacy programmes make links to real life situations thus ensuring that skills gained are relevant. These include such skills as: Bookkeeping for small businesses Understanding PNG's preferential voting system Reading medicine labels and following dosage instructions Dealing with money at the market |
| Challenges | 'Many more communities have expressed their interest for literacy programmes; however, limited availability of fund is the main issue deterring us from assisting these communities' (YWCA, 2011). |
| Photo Source : http://www.ywcapng.org/ Working on 2011 Literacy Project |  |

| Organisation | World Vision PNG |
| --- | --- |
| Brief background | World Vision PNG is involved in delivering literacy programmes in Port Moresby, Bougainville and Madang. |
| Learners | Disadvantaged youth and adults, and literacy teacher through 'train-the-trainer' approach |
| Strengths | The programmes aim to encourage people or communities to start with what they already have and not depend on handouts. They are usually run using existing facilities and often in partnership with local churches. |
| Challenges | The work in Port Moresby targets settlement sites, similar to slums. The congested surroundings, makeshift houses and the lack of electricity, water and sanitations makes learning particularly difficult. |

| Organisation | Vision Sustainable Melanesia |
| --- | --- |
| Brief background | Established since 2004, Vision Sustainable Melanesia works with women, youth and children and focuses on providing basic life skills training, financial literacy and basic literacy programmes. |
| Learners | Around 1,500 per year in Port Moresby and 250 in Manus Province in 2011 |
| Strengths | 'Our organisation provides grassroots training in a simple and manner that is relevant to the cultural context. Using practical and sharing experiences, is an important tool when delivering programmes and using language that people are able to understand. Our aim is to reach out to the poor, vulnerable and unfortunate and providing an opportunity that brings out the best in their potential and bring them up to the same level as everyone, as we believe that everyone is equal and nobody is or should be a slave to another.' (Mary Pohei – Founder of Vision Sustainable Melanesia) |
| Challenges | 'There is a huge interest in literacy and functional literacy but there is no financial assistance to support our work. I was doing all this work on a volunteer basis and I have already exhausted every means of resources that I have. I believe that if all Papua New Guineans were able to read and write and that they were able to read and understand the issues affecting our country, they would be better off to make informed decisions for themselves and their communities' (Mary Pohei in Miva, 2010). |

# BARRIERS TO FEMALE LITERACY

Several key barriers hinder education and literacy among females. These range from the lack of interest and political will to implement gender-equality policy provisions and provide adequate resources, to the persistence of socio-cultural attitudes on roles and expectations that constrain women's access to literacy and education opportunities.

## Inability to implement gender policy statements

The PNG Constitution clearly stressing the importance of ensuring equality for all Papua New Guineans is carried by the Department of Education's policies. However, by the Education Department's own admission under its gender strategy, despite the existence of progressive national laws and policies, 'coordination and application of these policies, and the capacity for implementation and monitoring, are currently major limitations' (PNG DoE, 2009C, p. 11). As noted previously, gender issues are typically treated as separate issues and are not mainstreamed across sub-sector plans and strategies. Having a gender policy statement alone is insufficient to drive action; actions to effectively address inequities must be integrated into the department's education plans if the disparities are to be eliminated.

## Education Financing

Constitutional commitments to literacy find little support in annual government funding. The Department of Education's annual literacy budget was less than 0.4 per cent from 2006 to 2008 as shown in Table 15. According to NLAS, 'funding is inadequate as literacy is regarded as a low key issue therefore no follow-up workshops or in-service workshops are conducted' (PNG DoE, 2008, p. 29). The department's decentralised approach to literacy service provision also means that NGOs, Faith Based Organisations (FBO) and the community continue to bear the cost of providing literacy services with little or no assistance from the government and donors.

Table 15: Education Budget Breakdown by Program

| | 2006 | | 2007 | | 2008 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (PGK,000) | % | (PGK,000) | % | (PGK,000) | % |
| Management and General Administration | 56,440.3 | 44.4% | 54,312.4 | 43.0% | 57,488.40 | 44.5% |
| Education Standards | 10,256.40 | 8.1% | 11,149.9 | 8.8% | 10,734.00 | 8.5% |
| Teacher Education | 8,822.5 | 6.9% | 12,393.6 | 9.8% | 13,999.30 | 11.0% |
| Literacy and Awareness | 444.1 | 0.3% | 428.0 | 0.3% | 548.8 | 0.4% |
| Secondary Education | 11,996.2 | 9.4% | 12,460.2 | 9.8% | 12,042.60 | 9.5% |
| Vocational Education | 3,992.5 | 3.1% | 3,881.4 | 3.1% | 2,476.2 | 1.9% |
| Technical Education | 12,053.1 | 9.5% | 11,752.7 | 9.3% | 12,200.4 | 9.6% |
| Libraries | 1,033.9 | 0.8% | 1,191.2 | 0.9% | 1,175.4 | 0.9% |
| Archives | 495.9 | 0.4% | 648.0 | 0.5% | 636.8 | 0.5% |
| Primary Education | 21,484.7 | 16.9% | 18,133.9 | 14.3% | 17,905.6 | 14.1% |
| Totals | 127,019.6 | | 126,351.3 | | 129,207.5 | |

(Source: PNG DoE, 2011, p.52, note 2007 and 2008 are approximations)

As noted in the policy section of the report, the Department of Education's policy documents and plans make reference to the importance of ensuring gender equity. However, the activities and strategies that have been identified to improve the education situation for women are not factored into budgets. In contrast, the Office of Higher Education's gender actions have clear funding sources and targets. Until the Department of Education commits funds to address gender inequity, existing disparities are almost certain to continue.

## Gender inequality is reinforced across sub-sectors

The analysis of female access and participation in education highlighted inequity across all but the 'Elementary Education' sub-sector. Within both primary and secondary school, females are less likely to be enrolled and tend to have lower transition rates between the different school levels. Females are not benefiting from 'Flexible, Open and Distance Education' with male enrolments being higher. Further, male enrolments in all 'Technical Vocational Education and Training' courses are substantially higher. Finally, less than 40 per cent of those enrolled at university are females. Given that only the tertiary sub-sector has funded activities to address the disparity, it is reasonable to suggest that disparities are being reinforced by the current education system and gender equality is unlikely to be achieved unless decisive action is taken.

## Leadership disinterest in literacy and poor coordination

The Department of Education has been clearly identified as the department in charge of literacy in PNG; however, literacy remains poorly coordinated and receives little government support. With the NLAC's dissolution in 2004, the NLAS' governance structure has been dysfunctional for the last seven years. Despite efforts to re-establish the council, it seems unlikely that the council will be revived anytime soon. NLAS has struggled to play its coordinating role and has admitted (as noted earlier) that it is unaware of many of the literacy programmes and providers in isolated regions. Further, NLAS acknowledges that the impact of its work with literacy trainers is unclear and that 'we do not know whether they apply the skills and knowledge gained during the workshop' (PNG DoE, 2008, p. 29). Literacy is considered 'low status' by the government and the current education debate is almost entirely focused on removal of fees and curriculum reform in the formal sector.

## Gender role expectations

The final barrier to females achieving education and literacy equality is the gender bias in roles and expectations that prevent them from accessing the same education opportunities as males. PNG is a traditional society where men overwhelmingly dominate positions of power while women are expected to be the primary caregivers in their extended families. Johnson (1993) notes that schooling is prioritised for boys upon the assumption they are more likely to earn income in the future. He observes further, affirming findings of independent researches, that girls are principally expected to provide labour at home. The research conducted by ASPBAE and PEAN gathered information about reasons for not completing school confirmed this, as shown in Table 16. The influence of parental expectations to assist at home commonly figured in around half of the respondents' reasons for not completing school. This pressure on girls' roles and responsibilities clearly affected their attendance and completion of schooling. Women who want to further their education and become literate face hostile reactions from the family and community.

Table 16: Reasons for School Non-Completion by Province and Gender

| | NCD/New Ireland | | Chimbu | | Sandaun | | Gulf | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| No school in village | 41.9% | 37.2% | 39.2% | 36.4% | 47.7% | 47.8% | 23.3% | 21.8% |
| School fees | 55.6% | 55.5% | 65.9% | 59.2% | 57.6% | 54.6% | 72.5% | 68.5% |
| Other costs | 40.3% | 38.9% | 39.2% | 32.5% | 34.3% | 33.5% | 27.0% | 27.3% |
| Not safe | 33.5% | 26.7% | 29.2% | 28.8% | 29.9% | 26.9% | 11.6% | 11.8% |
| Not enough desks, books | 23.8% | 17.8% | 27.2% | 25.7% | 24.4% | 21.5% | 6.3% | 11.3% |
| No toilet | 21.4% | 17.0% | 24.1% | 26.3% | 21.8% | 19.6% | 6.1% | 11.3% |
| Not interested | 36.7% | 27.7% | 27.9% | 28.7% | 25.7% | 30.6% | 15.9% | 18.5% |
| Parent want help at home | 45.2% | 51.4% | 39.2% | 55.3% | 45.5% | 53.9% | 23.5% | 45.0% |
| Parent want me to work | 41.9% | 43.0% | 43.4% | 37.7% | 46.1% | 40.0% | 22.0% | 23.1% |
| Other reasons / Not selected | 0.0% | 0.0% | 1.2% | 0.7% | 38.0% | 28.3% | 3.2% | 0.4% |

(Sources: ASPBAE, 2007, p.6 and ASPBAE, 2011, pp. 17, 38 and 57)

# RECOMMENDATIONS

From the review of the policy context, existing providers, education situation and the barriers to female literacy, there is unquestionably much ground to cover before gender equality is achieved in PNG education. In response to the literacy challenge, this report makes four recommendations that have been endorsed by PEAN and its members involved in women's education advocacy.

Bold and decisive action is required to address the literacy crisis in the country. This means developing a more comprehensive national literacy policy, allocating substantial new resources and innovating new strategies in cooperation with civil society organisations and communities aimed at improving education access and quality, and in ensuring literacy for all women, youth and adults.

There is a need to dramatically improve access and quality of education at primary and secondary school, and ensure that all students at minimum become functionally literate. The Department of Education needs to dedicate separate resources to address the inequity for girls in terms access, transition and learning achievement.

Substantial second chance and post-school education programmes need

to be developed by the state to provide learning opportunities for the out-of-school, particularly women and girls, to achieve functional literacy and acquire basic life skills. Widespread women's literacy programmes should be developed by the government and not left to NGOs and the churches. The Department of Education should lead the development of a Non-Formal Education Policy that clearly articulates the role of government and its partners in service delivery, coordination and funding.

Gender issues should not be considered as mere appendages to policy and planning documents, but as central concerns in the whole process of achieving universal literacy in PNG. The Department of Education needs to review its existing policies and plans, and ensure within future documents gender issues are mainstreamed, with specific gender targets included within the subsectors and financial resources explicitly identified for programmes to address inequality.

## CONCLUSION

This review of female education and literacy in PNG has highlighted widespread inequality across the education sub-sectors. Despite laudable commitments within the national constitution and many planning documents, the reality is that severely inadequate resources are channelled into improving the female education and literacy situation. In PNG, girls and women are less literate, and within most sub-sectors, females have lower participation and transition rates than males. The non-formal education sector currently fills the gaps created by the inefficient and ineffective formal education system, with almost no coordination or support from the Department of Education. There is an urgent need for the Government of PNG to take responsibility for past and ongoing failures and to clearly articulate and fund strategies to address the disparities.

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