

THE ROAD TO LITERACY: AN ASSESSMENT OF SOME ASPECTS OF THE ETHIOPIAN NATIONAL LITERACY CAMPAIGN

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ABSTRACT. In spite of the official report that the national illiteracy rate has been reduced to less than 25%, it is argued here that illiteracy of quite a considerable size will last longer because of (a) the way the National Literacy Campaign (NLC) has been conceptualized and operationalized, (b) the non-literate environment, (c) deficiencies of the schools, and (d) the prevailing national conditions, rendering illiteracy a less urgent and less visible problem. A change in policy to a preventive approach is recommended.

I. INTRODUCTION

Complete eradication of illiteracy is a preoccupation of Third World Countries and their new governments. July 1989 marked the tenth anniversary of the launching of the Ethiopian National Literacy Campaign (NLC) under the National Literacy Campaign Coordinating Committee (NLCCC) which is duplicated down to the lowest unit - the literacy center. The original plan was to wipe out illiteracy from Ethiopia by 1986. Six years later, the NLC was integrated into the Ten Year Perspective Plan, 1984/85 - 1993/94. The official statistics as at July 1989, show that as a result of the combined effort of the NLC and the formal school system, the national literacy rate has climbed to 75 percent. If the efforts of the NLC continue with the same momentum, one would expect complete eradication of illiteracy by 1993. On the basis of available and accessible documentary evidence, mostly in Amharic, of the NLCCC, this article argues otherwise.

One ought to recognize, at the outset, that this quantitative achievement was accomplished under very difficult conditions when the government's financial allocations to the NLC have not been as high as

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desired. Some of the major qualitative contributions of the NLC to national development have also to be recognized. Educationally, and without debating the necessity and the timing of the NLC, it was the first ever drive, with a central direction, to universalize literacy instruction in the shortest possible time. Despite the lack of precise and well established figures, thousands of persons, who otherwise would never have had the opportunity, are now pursuing their formal education through full-time and part-time studies, with some already in colleges. Perhaps millions of neo-literates are using their new skills in very simple reading and writing, for example, their names and house numbers. From the perspective of adult education, the traditional view that learning is for the young has been disproved.

In the socio-political sphere, some ten different nationality languages have been reduced, for the first time, into writing using the Amharic script. Over and above the technical accomplishment, there is perhaps the psychological and social satisfaction of learning in one's language. Women are given the opportunity to learn equally with men. The NLC provided a forum for a large scale politicization of the masses as well as the elite, e.g. literacy teachers, although most of this politicization could have been achieved at very much less expense via other means. The NLC afforded a forum for the mobilization of national resources, cooperative work in communities among Government, Party and other organizations, and for the accumulation of a lot of experience which could be tapped in future undertakings.

Complete eradication of illiteracy in Ethiopia, as elsewhere, is a function of the circumstances that advance or impede the effort. Part I of this assessment analyses those that inhere in the conceptualization and operationalization of the literacy and post-literacy efforts, the latter chiefly focussing on community reading rooms. Part II takes up the external (to the NLC and NLCCC) forces and factors. These could have been included in Part I except that they are of a higher order, relating to national life and therefore deserving a separate treatment. In Part III, the recommendations are stated.

PART I

The analysis here incorporates the NLC's definition of literacy, its objectives, the quality of instruction, level of literacy acquired, rate of progress and evenness of the effort, the statistics, and the post-literacy activities especially the community reading rooms.

As a relative concept, functional literacy is variously defined and measured. The most recent definition of functional literacy by Graff [8] is almost the same as the 1962 UNESCO's definition of literacy. "Functional literacy is the essential knowledge and skills which enable [one] to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in [one's] group or community, and whose attainment make it possible for [one] to continue to use these skills towards [one's] own and the community's development" (p.3).

While the NLCCC has not coined a definition of literacy or functional literacy for its purposes, it has set out to achieve the following "specific objectives" which are much more than the 3Rs.

Reading:

To be able to read and understand newspapers, magazines and periodicals and wall sheets produced for the general reader..... which relate to national political affairs, simple economic issues, agriculture, health, nutrition, child care, maternity.....

Writing:

To be able to write letters to friends and family members, and to *Kebele* or Peasant Associations, or to government agencies or cooperatives asking for information, seeking advice or stating a case.

Computation:

To be able to calculate or estimate such things as areas of land, quantities of materials, crop yields, seed and fertilizer requirements, to calculate prices and quantities, measure weights, prepare budgets, work out taxes, and to set out these calculations simply [13:26-27].

Educational objectives are usually stated in specific behavioral terms if they are to serve as a basis for selecting courses, writing course syllabi, selecting and training teachers, selecting instructional materials, choosing teaching methods and aids, and determining evaluation techniques. The NLC objectives are too broad to be of any help in this regard. Moreover, the objectives are very unrealistic. Under present educational conditions, it is very doubtful whether grade six students can do the writing, reading and computation required of the neo-literate. Writing a letter requires more than stringing words; there are technical matters such as forms, greetings and salutations. Reading is also more than identifying words. How many of the neo-literates, in one has observed in Addis Ababa, for example, can complete a bank form? Perhaps many may not even identify their own literacy certificates.

Literacy teaching and learning leave much to be desired. A total of 282 hours of instruction, not always given, is the minimum set before learners sit for the certifying examination set by each literacy center of which there can be as many as 20,000 in any given round. The prescribed time, spread over four months, is inadequate, even by Ethiopian standards, to cover the prescribed material. According to Assefa Aberra, "It has been repeatedly pointed out that since the instructional time allotted to cover the literacy syllabus is too little, learners do not complete it" [18:39].* Poor teaching has been identified as one of the problems early in the Campaign. A summary report at the end of the first round of 1971 E.C. stated "Literacy teachers are hasty,

*Most of the quotations from Ethiopian sources have been translated from Amharic into English by the writer.

they try to teach over learners' heads and, for lack of time and insufficient experience, they do not apply the new methods". A Report at the end of the third round also referred to similar problems related to poor teaching in a number of literacy centers [19]. Another NLCCC report stated "The calligraphy of most of the campaigners (teachers) is often difficult to decipher even for the evaluation team members and ways must be sought to improve it" [20:40]. A more recent one indicated prevailing poor conditions thus. "The teaching-learning activity is enfeebled by lack of control and monitoring and the non-conductive environment" [28:6].

Lack of motivation is an international factor contributing to relapse. This is particularly so when it becomes clear that no immediate material gains are seen forthcoming [11]. Contrary to general adult education principles, the NLC uses punitive measures, which discourage learning, to secure attendance. Success in literacy could be measured by passing a test, or degree of retention, or degree of use of the skills in the intended way [11]. The literacy rates reported are based on passing the variously set examinations, the only criterion the NLC uses. Looking at most recent national literacy rate, one is bound to ask: Is the level of literacy achieved permanent or not? What opportunities exist to enhance retention, improvement, and use of the newly acquired skills?

Literacy criteria vary with place and time. Developed societies require higher levels of reading and writing than developing ones. Forty years ago, elementary education of less than five years marked a US citizen functionally illiterate [10]. Currently, however, there is a debate whether or not completion of high school education marks the same citizen functionally literate [9]. Grade equivalency is one general criterion used to indicate the level of literacy. Permanent literacy, a term relative to its environment, tends to be associated with four years of schooling in developed societies and six years in developing ones. A higher grade equivalence is required in the latter because there is very little reading material [5].

In the Ethiopian context, the bench mark is neither fixed nor clear. Different documents directly or indirectly equate the NLC certificate to grade two, four or even six [19, 29]. An entrance examination, a questionable idea, is required of the young neo-literate wishing to join the regular program [25, 29]. Even if the NLC instruction is equivalent to grade two, which it is not, this does not guarantee permanent literacy. The NLC certificate can not be equated to grade four or six either. Otherwise, the elementary school system is under very serious question in more ways than one.

A study of the NLC figures, leaving the question of accuracy aside for now, reveals that (a) the NLC has not progressed as anticipated; (b) there is unevenness in the effort; and (c) there is a considerable wastage (see Tables I to III). Because the NLC has not moved as expected, there is a huge backlog. Since 1984-85, the NLC's plan was to literate 1.6 million persons in each rounds. A reading of the programs of the sixteenth through the nineteenth rounds shows that in actual operational terms, the expected registration was respectively, 975,163; 1,302,299; 1,076,722 and 1,302,290. Statistics also indicated that the actual enrollment has been less than one million, leaving, at least 600,000 behind. This means that for every three rounds, discounting the dropouts and relapses for the time being at least, more than one additional round is needed. In addition, a 1987 study [12] indicated that learners tend to take between eight and ten months or two to three rounds, at least, to be certified.

Table I
National Percentage of Successful
Participants (rounds 1-9)
(in millions)

Round	Registered (in millions)	Examined	Certified	Successful Participants %
1	6.2	3.7	1.5	24
2	0.5	0.3	0.7	?
3	2.5	1.6	1.0	40
4	0.8	0.5	0.6	?
5	1.5	2.2	1.4	64
6	0.7	1.3	0.8	?
7	1.3	1.8	1.2	67
8	0.7	1.4	0.9	?
9	1.2	1.8	1.2	67
Totals	15.4	14.6	9.5	65

Source: [14:42].

That the success rate is improving is heartening. But the decline in Tables I and II does not appear to lessen the concern of the Ministry of Education (MOE) which seems to detect a rise in the wastage. Its Department of Adult Education stated that:

Table II

National Wastage (in millions)

Rounds (inclusive)	Learners Registered	Learners Passing Exam.	Wastage
1 - 3	9.2	3.1	6.1
1 - 14	18.2	13.7	4.5
1 - 15	19.1	15.0	4.1
1 - 16	18.9	14.2	4.7
1 - 16	19.4	15.4	4.0
1 - 17	20.1	17.0	3.0

Source: Compiled from [15, 21, 25, 31].

"Educational wastage is in evidence; those who do not register at all, those who discontinue, and those who fail constitute a large group" [28:6]. An annual conference of educational administrators also concluded that wastage was on the rise. "When one compares the number of adults who discontinue after registering and those who fail the examinations in each round of the beginner and remedial classes, the increase in the wastage is conspicuous" [31:53]. Nine of the administrative regions, (see Table III) have a wastage rate of close to or more than 25 percent, with one as high as 45.6 percent. Five of these are the southern regions, of which Gamu Goffa is the worst, with a 45.6 percent. Asseb's high wastage may be attributed to the transit nature of the population, especially around the port city. The conditions prevailing in the northern regions of Eritrea, Tigray and Wello must also be taken into account with respect to the figures for this area, though Eritrea is doing better than the other two. Shoa, Harerghe, Gonder, Illubabor, Addis Ababa and Arsi, in that order, are leading in their performance. The NLC wastage may not be tolerable in this age of economic hardships and a very low participation and internal efficiency.

rates at the elementary school level. Using the NLCCC figure of 16.25 Birr as the per capita cost of literating an adult, the financial wastage based on the figures in Table I ranges from 97,500 to 76,375,000 Birr between the first and the ninth rounds. The critical choice is whether to register very large numbers and have low "passes" or to have a larger proportion of passes out of a small enrollment.

The NLC performance also shows gross disparities between administrative regions as well as between their principal towns. The Second Congress of the Commission for the Organization of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (COWPE) instructed all administrative regions to free their respective principal towns from illiteracy before the tenth anniversary of the revolution and the founding of the Party in 1984. According to the reports submitted for the purpose, Nazareth (Shoa), Asseb, Arba Minch, Debre Marcos and Addis Ababa, in that order, had only less than five percent illiteracy; Nekemte, Mekelle and Goba had between 14 and 16 percent; the remaining eight had between six and ten percent [23]. Although there is no indication when and how this census was taken, 81 percent of the principal towns, by international standards, have eradicated illiteracy.

Another important dimension of the performance of the NLC is the degree to which women have benefitted or not. An examination of the literacy statistics up to the end of the fifteenth round shows that in general women lead men in enrollment; in pass rates however, they lead only in nine administrative regions and follow in seven others. But a comparison of the ratio of male to female passes for each administrative region shows that men have benefitted more than women [30:146]. At the post-literacy stage, the enrollment pattern is exactly reversed but in completing this stage women are again behind men by 803,557 [30:148]. An earlier study elsewhere also showed that the male pass rate is higher. "...Several evaluations elsewhere show that it takes longer for women to become literate, in other words the pass rate is lower for women than for men" [11:46-47]. According to Lind and Johnston [11] traditional roles of women interfere with their attendance and efficient learning. The less women participate and perform in the post-literacy stage also means the greater their chances of relapsing into illiteracy. The problem

of female illiteracy in Ethiopia is compounded by their low participation rate, 38 percent, at the elementary level [31:13]. It is, therefore, obvious that both the unevenness and the wastage swell the backlog.

Table III

Wastage by Administrative Region for
Rounds 1-16, (July 1979-Jan. 1987)

Admin. Region	Registered	Passed/ Certified	Wastage	Wastage %
Arsi	777,934	700,509	77,425	9.95
Bale	541,544	401,965	139,580	25.77
Eritrea	396,367	313,318	83,580	20.95
Gamu Goffa	537,758	292,502	245,256	45.61
Gojjam	2,033,992	1,494,008	539,984	26.15
Gonder	1,432,455	1,380,823	51,632	3.60
Harerghe	2,024,677	1,961,355	63,322	3.13
Illubabor	440,098	407,007	33,091	7.52
Keffa	1,181,601	880,360	301,241	25.49
Shoa	3,399,234	3,336,159	63,075	1.86
Sidamo	1,826,004	1,315,151	510,853	27.98
Tigray	355,391	240,215	115,186	32.41
Wellega	1,456,020	1,012,173	443,819	30.48
Wello	1,723,178	1,237,451	485,727	28.19
Asseb	28,027	21,249	6,778	24.18
Addis Ababa	603,457	552,561	50,896	8.43

Source: Registration and pass figures [25:19].

Post-literacy is a follow up activity pursued to counteract relapsing. Theoretically, pursuance of post-literacy activities is an admission that the literacy instruction provided is inadequate. As Lind and Johnston said, "the main concern of a post-literacy programme should be a better literacy programme" [11:78]. Studies of relapse into illiteracy in Nepal, Thailand, Poland, and India showed sizeable relapses, 30-60 percent, between three to ten years of both school leavers and neo-literates [7, 2, 16].

The purpose of the Ethiopian post-literacy provision seems to be to reinforce the skills through additional teaching and create a literate environment. Consequently the provision is of two stages, neither of which is as compulsory as the beginners' class. The first stage is class instruction for a total of 96 hours over 16 weeks. The second is reading in Community Reading Rooms (CRR) and listening to radio programs. For example, of the total number of people literated (14.7 million) up to the end of the fifteenth round, 75.78 percent registered for the first stage and 59.71 percent passed the post-literacy examination; the other 40 percent received the minimum training and acquired perishable skills. Among the major problems of the radio program, broadcasting only in four different languages between 7:20-7:55 a.m. and 5:00-5:35 p.m., Monday to Friday, are its inappropriate schedule and lack of synchronization between instruction and listening and discussion times.

CRRs are believed to be a crucial force in solidifying or eroding the NLC achievement. The first serious study to organize CRRs was drafted in Hamle 1980. CRRs are primarily intended to maintain, or reinforce the new skills or even improve their mastery. CRRs are completely a community responsibility. Because communities differ in their resources and interests to organize on CRRs, there is bound to be qualitative and quantitative differences among them. CRRs are wanting in many respects. They are available at less than twenty percent of the literacy centers [28:28]. The radius or population size each CRR should serve is unknown. Besides, of the 7409 reported at one time, nearly 1300 were classified as temporary; 6000 as permanent and the rest of unknown status. Few are built for this purpose; many are make-shift arrangements without sufficient light, ventilation and seats and therefore

are unfit for reading [27:14]. Inequality in distribution and quality of CRRs means inequality of reading opportunity.

Moreover the number of CRRs fluctuates. At the end of the eleventh round, 7100 reading rooms were reported. Four rounds later, they stood at 6318. At the end of the nineteenth round they were reported to be 7715. Sometimes these reading rooms seem to exist only as numbers. Gojjam, for example, reported at one time to have many reading rooms in one area but was very hesitant to have these visited by a team of literacy supervisors from Addis Ababa during the eighth round. Even the permanent ones have no reading assistants for the weekly prescribed four-hour reading. For these and other reasons, there is fear that many CRRs do not either exist or function on a regular basis.

Equally serious, is that the CRRs have a very poor, unreliable and inappropriate material base. Different agencies are supposed to supply them with reading materials. The directive on the supply of reading materials reads "LCCs should approach various mass organizations, development agencies and ministries and see to it that their directives, newspapers, newsletters, flyers, magazines, periodicals are available in CRRs" [32:11]. Several concerns emerge from such a directive. Through what specific financial and logistical arrangements are the local LCCs going to obtain copies of these reading materials? The materials under discussion are produced by and distributed through an organization mostly based in Addis Ababa and this organization has no knowledge of the CRRs in a given "*woreda*" or peasant association. Nor does the organization have the money to produce sufficient copies for the CRRs, as well as for its own audience. A survey involving 16 different development oriented organizations was conducted to find out how many send their newsletters, journals, pamphlets, etc. Only 25 percent reported sending copies of their literature to CRRs.

CRRs are starved of appropriate reading materials. Materials donated by different agencies with different missions and concerns do not necessarily deal with the immediate problems of the neo-literate. One cannot assume that these materials are written to the standard and

the general psychological and physiological status of the neo-literate. This in fact has been identified by the MOE as one of the problems related to reading materials [30]. Some of the better CRRs have discarded English books, school texts or materials used in the beginners class of the NLC, sitting dusty and cobwebby [25]. A survey also indicated that 87 percent of the agencies use Amharic as their medium, followed by Oromo and Tigrigna [28:45-46].

National newspapers intended for the general audience are the responsibility of the Ministry of Information which, operating on a government budget, is unable to provide free copies of its papers to the CRRs. A survey conducted to explore the distribution of some of these newspapers to Addis Ababa CRRs showed that 30 percent received *Addis Zemen*; 20 *Yezaryetu Ityopya*; and none, *Beressa* [26:477]. Another survey on the same subject involving a national sample of 227 CRRs showed that of the major Government and Party newspapers, *Addis Zemen*, *Serto Ader* and *Yezaryetu Ityopya* were available in about 15, 14 and 11 percent respectively, of the CRRs. *Hibret* and *Beressa* were available in less than three percent each of the CRRs [26:47].

At the lower levels, some 60 to 100 different titles of local newspapers are irregularly produced by local committees, not necessarily with the requisite expertise, in Amharic, Oromo, Tigrigna, Wolayetigna and Sidama and some combinations of these [27]. Amharic is leading both in number of titles and copies produced [28:15]. Their frequency ranges from 6 to 12 times a year; and their circulation from 6 to 4000. Copies produced are not based on any rational basis, as for example, on number of CRRs or potential readers in the community. Lack of money for distribution, delay at intermediary points [32, 33] and especially the number of languages used are the major problems, which restrict the availability of reading materials and hence make post-literacy opportunities rather limited.

Although CRRs and local newspapers have problems, their contribution and potential must be recognized in general terms. A renewed attempt is made to create a literate environment through CRRs and local newspapers as a new and important force in Ethiopian

education in general and adult education in particular. When better organized, the idea and habit of going to a place called CRR and sitting down to read either for pleasure or profit or both could be firmly established. The habit of reading in a CRR could be transferred to home reading. Because of CRR and other more recent activities, communities are sharing some of the financial burden with the Government, an important consideration in times of acute shortage of financial resources. CRRs and local newspapers could become important communication channels. CRRs and newspapers are the cornerstones of future libraries and national and regional newspapers. Some informal education is also being given to the general public through CRRs about the library as a useful institution. Lastly, these can provide employment for many persons who need training in formation science.

The last of the factors considered in this section pertains to statistics. Literacy statistics are internationally looked upon with suspicion for many good reasons [11]. The problem is more so when the provider of the literacy education is also the source of the figures as in the case of the NLC. Because of overzealousness, sheer competition and perhaps pressure from higher organs, there is a number mania in the NLC [6]. A number of NLCCC meetings have pointed out problems of statistical reporting. A 1987 study [12] also stated that figures at different layers of the NLCCC structure do not always tally. Figure padding was pointed out in an LCCC document written in preparation for the Party's establishment in 1984. The report read: "When some *Kebeles* (in Mekelle for example) realized their high percentage of illiteracy compared to other communities, they quickly adjusted their percentages from 33 to 11 percent in Higher 2, *Kebele* 15, and from 52 to 7 percent in Higher 2, *Kebele* 18" [20:41].

The documents reporting on the number of persons literated during the Development Through Cooperation, Enlightenment and Work Campaign, gave the following three different figures: 152, 065 [31] 158,065 and 160,000 [27, 28]. The number of literacy teachers during the third and sixth rounds were reported respectively as 37,993 and 194,347 in one document [23] and 57,993 and 104,347 respectively in

another document of the same office [20]. CRRs were reported as 6,606 at the end of the ninth round [22] and 6,144 at the end of the fifteenth cycle in Hamle 1978 [24]. Other examples can be supplied easily to show that the NLC statistics are dubious.

PART II

Among a group of external (to the NLC and the NLCCC) factors influencing NLC efforts are the non-literate environment, the elementary schools, and the general conditions (poverty, drought, war) in the country. Literacy and numeracy are not ends in themselves. There must be possibilities and opportunities for subsequent use. Rural Ethiopia provides the starkest reading environment. "The conditions are not yet favorable to promote or even maintain literacy skills. In some places, it is difficult to obtain a piece of paper and a pencil, let alone readable materials" [15:18]. In a few places temporary bottle labels, posters and National Lottery tickets may offer practically the only one-time reading opportunity. *Kebele* meetings are announced, even in Addis Ababa, up until recently, orally. Generally, the oral culture prevails. Such an environment is very discouraging and renders the newly acquired skills useless.

It is generally acknowledged that discontinuity between the literacy language and the state (national) language contributes to relapse [4, 1, 11]. While the NLC purports to teach "functional literacy", the teaching is not functional from the point of view of language. Of the fifteen instructional languages less than one half are used in the radio program and in producing local newspapers for CRRs. Also, there is no organized program to facilitate the linguistic transition adults have to make to the state language - Amharic.

The current capacity and performance of the elementary school system, instead of reducing national illiteracy, appear to contribute to it. Fourteen years after the revolution and half way through the Ten Year Perspective Plan, the elementary school participation rate has improved from 17 to 34 percent, according to Government statistics. A MOE plan to raise this participation rate from 34 to 39.9 percent in 1987-88,

achieved a dismal one percent increase [31:12]. The Ten Year Plan itself projects a 65 percent participation rate by the end of the Plan period. This requires an increase to the order of 30 percent during the remaining five years. This achievement is very unlikely if the 1987-88 experience is any indication. Therefore, the 65 percent target will not be accomplished by 1993. On the performance side, as many as 40 percent of the pupils in the lower grades of the elementary schools are dropping out before achieving permanent literacy, to grow up as illiterate adults [30:111].

The country's exiguous resources and the national attention are constantly being diverted to more immediate and life saving tasks and the creation of socio-political institutions. Just a little before and subsequent to the launching of the NLC in July 1979, the country has been engaged in: (a) reconstruction after the war with Somalia (1977), (b) organizing the peasantry on a national basis (1978), (c) establishing COWPE (Sept. 1979), (d) inaugurating Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association (REWA) and Revolutionary Ethiopian Youth Association (REYA) (1980), (e) villagization (1981), (f) founding of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (1983), (g) resettling of famine and drought victims (1984), (h) drafting and ratifying the Constitution and establishing the Peoples' Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (1986-87), and (i) the war in northern Ethiopia.

All these have had two consequences on the NLC. The new social, economic and political organizations were relatively young to effectively conduct the NLC. *Kebeles* for example were not strong enough when they were given this responsibility. At the end of the first round in 1971 E.C. a report pointed to this problem by stating that "members of *Kebele* LCCCs have failed to discharge their literacy duties and responsibilities". A report at the end of the second round in 1972 E.C. also stated that in addition to this kind of failure, there were problems like "the absence of a centralized operation and LCCCs at the level of some *awrajas*" not being established". The new organizations were also over strained. For example, "in Dessie, members of the LCCC were only able to partially discharge their duties because of overlapping responsibilities" [20:65]. Further on the same document points to the

fact that some of these organizations had overlapping and different assignments to be accomplished simultaneously. "Sometimes these overlapping activities meant almost no campaigners (teachers), for example during the 12th round, when these were deployed for the national census and when there was national military service recruitment" [20:83] occurring simultaneously.

Moreover, because the country was engaged in many and overlapping development efforts, some of which needed immediate attention, NLC problems identified and reported early in the campaign were left to develop into a state of malignancy. According to Lind and Johnston "external factors (drought, war, or just other important programmes) remove literacy's priority in practice along the way" [11:71].

An important aspect of the general condition is the economy. It is now a globally recognized fact that Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world [17:2]. "Successes in literacy were achieved when literacy was linked to man's fundamental requirements, ranging from his immediate vital needs to effective participation in social change" [11:83]. The vital need in Ethiopia now is survival. Food, shelter, and clothing are the most basic concerns. This is a national preoccupation. Under this condition, literacy may not be seen offering any immediate benefit or any clear prospect for the future. Literacy participants, compelled to attend classes, may not learn with interest. There are stories of persons in literacy classes year after year and failing examinations because their minds, while in class, are preoccupied with more immediate problems. Even if these external factors were non-operative, in Ethiopia as elsewhere, there are bound to be some illiterates who for various reasons are not reached by the NLC. Among these are persons not covered by the fifteen NLC languages, seven to ten percent [13], those with learning handicaps, nomads, and persons who are constantly moving between places in search of work.

To summarize, in arithmetical terms, eradication of illiteracy means reducing it to tolerable international level of less than 10 percent [3]. This, Ethiopia may not achieve in the foreseeable future because of the

perishable skills acquired, the backlog resulting from the school system and the NLC efforts, and the prevailing conditions in the country.

PART III

There is a need for a change in philosophy and approach from the eradication of illiteracy to the control of illiteracy. Illiteracy among the young must be checked. Formal schools provide the chief mechanism and the long term solution in a non-literate environment. Ethiopia needs a realistic policy defining and redefining a national minimum level of functional education and the period to universalize this minimum. Accordingly, schools need to be expanded to accommodate most school age children and improved for better instruction. Such an approach will ensure that school age children are covered and provide a yardstick against which all educational efforts are evaluated.

In the meantime, we can build on the reservoir of the NLC experience, which so far can be regarded as the first and fundamental stage, though long and expensive, in creating a national (1) awareness of the scope, significance and magnitude of illiteracy in Ethiopia and measures taken to fight it; and (2) interest to promote the literacy cause by learning or contributing to the effort. With this experience, we need to gradually phase in a selective approach whereby administrative regions, and within them, groups in working and living places with positive attitude and motivation can participate in a more effective functional literacy program with objectives and quick results such as more crop yields. These selected communities will be key centers of functional literacy (KCFL) which can attract neighboring communities and cause them to imitate them with necessary adjustments.

These KCFL will have the best elements of the NLC - motivated learners and teachers, suitable content and materials, accessible location, etc. Various organizations and associations can be required to organize and sponsor in a coordinated manner such KCFL for their membership or others. A system of incentives in the form of prizes, or even a rebate of part of the cost of KCFL by the Government need to be established

for organizations and associations participating in this effort. Such a scheme can eventually become a mass movement.

In a country where the great majority of the schools lack libraries and reading materials, it may be unrealistic and too early to expect much from CRRs. Care must be exercised in the establishment and management of CRRs because these are going to be the cornerstones of the future community libraries. Otherwise, a negative attitude may develop about CRRs, community libraries, and more fundamentally, reading. CRRs may start in small and humble ways in selected towns preferably attached to or as part of a school, where they can be serviced relatively easily and where they can serve both students and neo-literates. With time, CRR could branch off into two to serve the two different populations. Such a beginning can be made by selecting the better ones from among the existing CRRs.

Since the country's working language is Amharic, the post-literacy activity, including the radio programs, uses fewer languages, and since entrance examinations are required of those desiring to enroll in the formal program, a special transition Amharic program is needed either as part of the post-literacy activity or as a separate stage by itself. To offer Amharic as a subject in the beginners' class is to crowd the existing schedule.

In the absence of any published research, the NLC should urgently embark on empirical studies into the level of literacy acquired, relapse and its potential, impact of the NLCC on the individual life, issues related to languages used, the strong and weak aspects of the Campaign, etc. Such studies can provide a sound basis for future planning and policymaking.

Literacy and national development are mutually reinforcing and demanding. A development program must take the lead, with even the narrowest margin. This will create the demand for literacy. Sheer acquisition of literacy skills can become frustrating in a stagnant or even deteriorating environment. Although literacy and development are mutually related, not all development work requires literacy. Experience here and elsewhere has shown that there is plenty of fundamental

scientific knowledge and skills that can be taught and carried out without literacy and numeracy. These are an absolute minimum beyond a certain stage of development. There is therefore, a need to redirect resources to the transmission of scientific values and attitudes and the teaching of knowledge and skills that are rewarding and life saving. Illiteracy may be shameful, but hunger, disease and poverty are killing, more dehumanizing and more shameful.

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