



# **Signposts to Literacy for Sustainable Development**

**Complementary Studies  
by Harbans S. Bholá and  
Sofía Valdivielso Gómez**



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



**SIGNPOSTS TO LITERACY  
FOR  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Complementary studies by  
Harbans S. Bhola  
and  
Sofía Valdivielso Gómez

Joint winners of the 2004-2005 International Award for  
Literacy Research  
UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL),  
Hamburg, Germany



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## FOREWORD

The two studies included in this volume, both dealing with the subject of literacy and sustainable development, are joint winners of the 2004-2005 International Award for Literacy Research, sponsored jointly by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Hamburg, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the Canadian National Literacy Secretariat with the support of its parent ministry, Human Resources Development.

Since the launching of the award in the early 1990s five previous winning studies have been published, dealing with various aspects of literacy and its complex socio-economic and cultural contexts. While the first five cycles of the competition did not delimit the thematic range of the studies, the sixth cycle was thematically linked with two current international education agendas: the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012) and United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014). Researchers were invited to undertake and submit studies on the topic of “Adult Literacy for Sustainable Development”.

This is also the first time that two joint winners have been chosen. In judging the entries for 2004-2005, the Governing Board of the Institute, acting as the Selection Committee, found that both studies displayed a focused and reflective approach and developed original insights which could help in the designing of new strategies for sustainable development. The Committee decided that the two studies were of equal merit and should share the award, and that they should be published in shortened versions in one volume.

The first of the two studies is by Harbans S. Bhola, an outstanding scholar who is already widely known for his work in the areas of literacy and adult education and for his many books on these subjects. In the present work he addresses the task of developing a “Knowledge-based Discourse for Action” within the domain of adult literacy for sustainable development. After a broad historical and theoretical survey of both fields, he explores how the adult literacy drive and the promotion of sustainable development can be brought together. In the latter part of his text he makes some eminently practical suggestions, such as: that adult literacy programmes should act in partnership with organizations working in such areas as agriculture, animal husbandry, water development, forestry management and public health; that field workers in literacy and adult education should be trained in ecological awareness; and that systems

of monitoring and evaluation in the areas of literacy and sustainable development should be integrated.

Prof. Bhola's text is therefore a strong combination of theoretical perspectives and practical approaches, which will make his study of great value to researchers, policy-makers and practitioners alike.

The second study in this volume, by Sofía Valdivielso Gómez, a scholar coming from the grassroots movement, complements that of Prof. Bhola. Like Bhola, Dr. Valdivielso takes a holistic approach to the subject of literacy and sustainable development. Her key concept is "integral literacy", which goes beyond the merely functional approach to embrace the more subjective and cultural dimensions. "Integral literacy," she writes in her introduction "can help us to understand that we human beings all share the same fate and that this tiny planet, located in one of the suburbs of the known universe, will be able to survive only if it makes room for each and every one of us and, moreover, manages to do so sustainably".

Dr. Valdivielso is much inspired by the American thinker Ken Wilber and his philosophy of "universal integralism", which rests on the view that every phenomenon has four dimensions of reality, which he sets out in the form of a square divided into four quadrants. At the human level, these are: 1. interior-individual (subjective thoughts, ideas, feelings); 2. exterior-individual (measurable neurological and brain processes); 3. interior-collective (cultural factors); 4. exterior-collective (social, economic and political systems, group infrastructures). Dr. Valdivielso sets out this scheme very clearly in chapter 3, then finally in chapter 4 she discusses how Wilber's scheme can be applied to literacy for sustainable development. "If integral literacy," she writes "is to break away from fragmentary thought, to advance in the cultural development of groups, societies, nations and the globe itself, then it must operate within an all-level, all-quadrant system."

These two studies complement each other and thus admirably embody the integral approach that both authors argue for. The word "signposts" in the overall title of the book is well chosen, as both authors point the way to a more holistic form of literacy and a more sustainable form of development.

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**ADULT LITERACY FOR  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:  
Creating a Knowledge-based Discourse  
for Action**

Harbans S. Bhola

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## INTRODUCTION

The discourse of “adult literacy for sustainable development” is not new, and yet it is not as widely shared today as it should be. Even professionals and practitioners who are doing substantial work in the general areas of literacy and socio-economic development around the world are not always very familiar with the language of this discourse.

These professionals and practitioners could indeed benefit from: (1) clarification of the language of the current discourse of adult literacy for sustainable development; (2) analyses of conceptualizations of adult literacy (and other literacies), and of scenarios of sustainable development that might be appropriate in different national, regional, or communal settings, in both developing and developed areas of the world; (3) delineation of processes and consequences generated in the dialectic between literacy and development in general, and between adult literacy and sustainable development in particular, in the lives of both individuals and societies; and (4) drawing on knowledge-based and well tested experiences of the past in the areas of policy-making, institution-building, programme development and measurement of results, onto our future endeavours of adult literacy for sustainable development.

Literacy work with the illiterate and the excluded in today's world of print needs no elaborate justifications. This, however, is not to say that literacy work could not be better programmed, better integrated with other projects of education and extension, better joined with ongoing or imminent structural changes congenial to the interests and needs of the poor and powerless, and more systematically delivered.

Sustainable development itself is not a static concept. It is indeed an expanded and qualified version of development, as we have known it, during the last half century or more. It is based on a recognition of the “limits to growth” – growth in the Western-mode – and a realistic and moral acceptance of lowered expectations relative to today's artificially inflated needs and recklessly extravagant standards of living. It is a plea for “ethics

of frugality” and search for a sane and sensible alternative – a different quality of life rather than a reduction of the quality of life of peoples. This will, of course, pose the challenge of minting a definition of sustainable development which is based on a universal consensus, taking into account principles of democracy and justice as well as considerations of production and consumption; and which is at the same time amenable to adaptation to the specificities of locations of human communities.

People do not just read, they always read something. Hence adult literacy (and adult education) must face the question of the content of literacy programmes covering macro issues of global environment and world peace on the one hand, and concrete problems of health and livelihood on the other hand. In the pages that follow, we will elaborate how the texts we may have developed should be taught and how the consequences of new learning, in life and work, should be assessed. Finally, we will discuss the need for mobilization and action as already identified as part of the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012), and the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), and the need for system building, both real and virtual, for the delivery of adult literacy for sustainable development during the rest of this decade and the next.

## Chapter 1

### UNDERSTANDING ADULT LITERACY

Literacy has many roles. It is the mother of history, midwife of civilizations, “technology of the intellect”, instrument of participation in politics and economy. Without it we cannot pass through the portal of the modern world of print.

#### **The nature of literacy**

Taking a traditional definition, one could say that literacy is the ability of a person to read and write a simple statement on everyday life in the mother tongue. “...A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in 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” (UNESCO, 1979). But in today's world, where we read not only words in a written text, but also a wide variety of other symbolic codes for transforming reality, literacy can be defined as “the ability of a person to code and decode, smoothly and effortlessly, and with understanding, a living and growing system of symbolic transformations of reality, including words, numbers, notations, schemata, diagrammatic representations and other marks, inscribed on paper or other two-dimensional surfaces (cloth, celluloid or the screen of a computer terminal), all of which have become part of the visual language of a people and have thus come to be collectively and democratically shared by both the specialist and the non-specialist (such ability having become part of the current social, economic, political and cultural demand system of a society” (Bhola 1984a, p. 260). Reading “the word” is now connected with reading “the world” in all its multiple dimensions.

The above definition of literacy, as the ability to read not just words but all markers representing symbolic transformations

of reality, has become possible because of the expanded understanding of literacy provided by cultural anthropologists, historians of civilization, psychologists and students of cognition, linguists and scholars of semiotics, economists, political scientists, and sociologists, who have looked at literacy as an organizer and re-arranger of both our cognitive processes and our cultures.

The ability to make symbolic representations of experienced reality emerged as part of the evolution of the species. It was this ability that made reason, rite and art possible for the human species (Langer, 1942). The human gene, mind and culture continued to develop in a co-evolutionary process. Symbolic transformation of reality into speech could be called the first grand marker on our path to being human. The ability to make symbolic representations of reality in writing – of reality already symbolically expressed as speech – was the second grand marker of our being and becoming – a great fulfillment for our species (Bhola, 1997b).<sup>1</sup>

Literacy (as writing) changed the literate's "technology of the intellect". It gave the individual capacities and potentials that were not possible without literacy, such as abstract context-free thinking, and differing ways of describing, classifying, reasoning and inferring (Goody, 1968). Writing reduced the need to remember and gave us the capacity to record our own history, also the ability to accumulate knowledge capital and pass it on to the next generation, contributing to class formation in societies.

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<sup>1</sup> See also an earlier work of Lumsden, C.J. and Wilson, E.O. 1981. *Genes, Mind and Culture: The Coevolutionary Process*. Cambridge: MA: Harvard University Press. More recent work on the essential nature of literacy is in: Todd, Emmanuel (Translated from French by Richard Boulind), *The Causes of Progress: Culture, Authority and Change*, Oxford (England): Basil Blackwell, 1987. [Original French version: *L'Enfance du monde : Structures familiales et développement*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1984]. Emmanuel Todd described literacy as "a modernization of the mind" and as the fundamental instrument of social development which is intellectual rather than a material, first cultural, then economic. Recent work of the Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen and its implications for literacy as freedom is in his book: *Development as Freedom*, New York: Knopf, 1999 and in his article "Reflections on Literacy" in UNESCO. 2003. *Literacy as Freedom. A UNESCO Round-Table*, Paris: UNESCO, pp. 20-30.

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Within these organized settings it was possible to develop bureaucracies and then to establish empires. Writing also enabled individuals to participate in remaking their own cultures (Innis, 1951). In more recent history, the printing press (Eisenstein, 1979) and consequently print capitalism led to the emergence of imagined communities, ethnic pride and nationalism (Anderson, 1991).

The pragmatic consequences of literacy have been most discussed during the post-colonial (or as some would say the neo-colonial) period. It is widely recognised that literacy is necessary to enable people to experience conscientization and to engage in political praxis (Freire, 1970; Freire and Machedo, 1987). The role of literacy in increasing life chances in general, and in improving chances for better livelihoods is now unquestioned. The acquisition of enhanced status for the newly literate is another benefit of literacy. Indeed, literacy has become essential for more than mere survival in today's world (Bhola, 1990a).

The discourses that put literacy against audio-visual media to imply that we could go directly to the people through media, without having to first make them all literate, are now defunct if not dead (Bhola, 1990b). We know that in today's world we need literacy more than ever, not only to understand media messages better but also to enable us to cope with the technical aspects of the new information and communication technologies which require a minimum level of literacy (UNDP, 2001).

At the same time we must be aware that literacy can be neglected and can be withheld from the powerless. Again, literacy is necessary but not a sufficient condition for advancement of individuals and societies. Concomitant changes in political and economic structures are necessary for the promises of literacy to be fulfilled. Yet undoubtedly those struggling to overcome hunger and need can engage more effectively in the economic, political and social spheres if they have the advantage of literacy. Without literate populations, sustainable development would be limping on one leg!

**Literacy versus literacies**

In line with the post-modernist tendency to see reality as socially constructed, there is an increasingly widespread use of the plural term “literacies” (Cook-Gumpertz, 1986). Literacy outside the culture of adult education had always been used as a metaphor for knowledge and understanding. Educated and cultured men and women were referred to as “literate”. Special knowledge or lack of it was labelled in terms such as “scientific literacy”, “environmental literacy”, “media illiteracy”, or “musical illiteracy”.

Literacy, within the culture of adult education, has tended to be linked with a particular context or purpose, such as school literacy, family literacy, women's literacy, farmers' literacy, workers' literacy, and literacy for prisoners. But the idea of literacies, was more radical, suggesting that literacy is not “autonomous” but is subservient to particular ideologies that colour the definition of literacy in particular settings (Street, 1984). The concept of social construction of literacy was later used to caution literacy workers about the utility (or rather the futility) of literacy campaigns and large-scale literacy programmes as being too catch-all and therefore of little relevance to the lives of learners in particular contexts.

Lurking behind this discussion of literacy versus literacies is not only the positivist versus the constructivist epistemology debate but also the dialectic between the etic and the emic approach. The former involves approaching the subject from a standpoint of distanced objectivity, with criteria external to the system. The emic standpoint and criteria are internal, based on the insider's familiarity with the system (Wise, Headland and Brend, 2003). But the two approaches are a dyad rather than a contradiction. The teaching of literacy comes from the outside and therefore is etic. However, in the very process of acquisition and utilization of literacy by the learner, or group of learners, literacy becomes emic. The so-called autonomous literacy becomes personalized and ideologized by learners as multiple literacies.

The process of the etic becoming emic need not be left to chance or time but can be consciously furthered (Bhola, 1989*b*).

### **Throwing light on adult literacy**

The use of the phrase “adult literacy” (as distinguished from “literacy” in general) is meaningful. Adult literacy, of course, covers both males and females, but the cut-off point for adult literacy statistics differs across countries. UNESCO in its statistical data on adult literacy, uses the cut-off point of 15 years of age – an age by which those who were able to benefit from schooling would have completed about 9 years of schooling, and those not proceeding with their education would be old enough to join the economy (UNESCO, 2003). Some adult educators let children as young as 8 or 9 join their programmes arguing that some children of that age are forced to assume adult roles for reasons of poverty or untimely death of parents or wards, or simply because there were no schools for them within reach..

While all sectors of education are important for “sustainable development” and the reduction of poverty, the adult literacy sub-sector clearly has a key place.

Gone are the days when alphabetic methods of literacy teaching were used, and sometimes children’s reading materials used in schools were borrowed for use with adults, driving them to boredom and despair. Today almost all adult literacy projects and programmes use primers specially written for adults. These primers use word or sentence methods of teaching literacy so that adult learners learn to read meaningful groups of words, with relevance to their lives, on the very first day as adult learners.

We are realizing that literacy acquired in school is not necessarily the same kind of literacy as that provided to adult learners by-passed by the school. All literacy is inherently functional, but adult literacy today is almost always explicitly connected with functional knowledge. We are discovering that more and more adults who had already learned to read and write at school are nevertheless joining adult literacy groups. When they

are asked why, the answer is: because they are learning things in adult learning programmes that they did not learn at school and are not likely to learn anywhere else. By coming to literacy groups they also become connected to special development projects for local governance or income generation, and in addition they acquire new skills and associated benefits such as leadership training and micro-credit management (Carr-Hill, 2001).

Adult learners in literacy classes do not just read, they read something – which is always “educational”. In other words, adult literacy and adult education are intertwined. The job begun by adult literacy and continued by adult education will never end. New generations of adults wishing to fulfill their knowledge needs will be making more and more use of adult education provision. In other words, adult education today will always be joined with lifelong education.

Ideally, adults should become self-directed, independent learners, who should be able to determine what educational needs they have, and then should be able to pursue materials, and mechanisms for obtaining that education. This ideal of “adult learning”, however, is not possible to realize in today's world, and certainly not in the Third World. In the Third World and in many other transitional societies, “adult learning” will have to be contingent on “adult education” for decades to come. What Slovenian adult educators have called “organized self-directed learning” (Perme and Oresnik, 2004) will have to be the model for most “adult learning”.

### **Adult literacy and sustainable development: a necessary link**

A commitment to literacy for all in general and to literacy for adults in particular has existed for a long time. All the world summits of the 1990s and all of the major policy frameworks on education during the last decade have affirmed the role of literacy in sustainable development. The Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V) and the World Education Forum in Dakar (a review of progress since the Jomtien Education

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for All meeting) (UNESCO, 1997a; 2000)<sup>2</sup> invited renewed attention and effort for literacy promotion as central to sustainable development and all that it seeks to achieve. The United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012) and United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) have now reaffirmed that commitment to adult literacy is essential if the dreams of sustainable development and poverty eradication are ever to be realized.

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<sup>2</sup> The Dakar Forum was held to review progress since the 1990 World Conference on Education for All

## **Chapter 2**

### **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: EMERGENCE OF THE CONCEPT**

There have been several quite significant developments in the theory and practice of development during the last half century.

#### **From economic development to sustainable development**

In the early part of the period following the Second World War, when the erstwhile colonizers offered to help their old subjects to develop their poverty-ridden nations, development came to be defined as economic development, and the model of development used was rooted in the historical experiences of the Western world. Development was seen as economic growth, to be measured in terms of increases in the Gross National Product (GNP). Later, the GNP as a measure of development came to be generally substituted by GDP (the Gross Domestic Product) (Rostow, 1960; Harbison and Myers, 1964; Wilber, 1979).

According to the Western model of development, growth of GNP/GDP was to be obtained by accumulating capital – by increasing domestic savings and obtaining loans and grants. Capital formation was to be joined with modern technology to promote manufacturing and industrialization, for import substitution and to produce goods for the emerging new markets abroad. To begin with, most of the money would come as loans from development banks, and expatriates would return to establish factories and manage mining and industries. It was hoped that the production of national wealth through economic growth would inevitably filter down to the poor. This model, it should be noted, did not seek to build a welfare state but sought to create communities of people competing with each other and with the outsiders for higher and higher productivity and personal consumption. Another unstated implication of the model was its preference for the modern urban sector over

agriculture. The model also had serious implications for national education systems. Modernization, as sought in this model, required formal education for the professionalization of labour for the formal economy. This meant neglect of the education of the masses outside the formal economy, placing adult men and women in the rural areas at a grave disadvantage<sup>3</sup>

Over the years, the problems with the Western model of economic development had become transparent, but it was too late. As the forces of globalization accelerated, the model of economic development came to be entrenched in the political economy of globalization itself. It was not to be discarded any time soon. However, some changes in the rhetoric of development were introduced. Economic development was joined with social development – even with cultural development. Modernization and democratization came to be mentioned in the same breath. Lifelong learning was the new mantra that was used by Third World nations to withdraw from their commitments to education of adult men and women in the rural areas where most of the poor and illiterate were living<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The discourse of development theory is by no means monolithic. Some important contributions are: Frank, Andre Gunder, *Lumpen-Bourgeoisie and Lumpen Development: Dependency, Class, and Politics in Latin America*, New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1972; Schultz, Theodore W. *Investing in People: The Economics of Population Quality*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1981; UNESCO, *Different Theories and Practices of Development*, Paris: UNESCO, 1982; Apter, David E., *Rethinking Development: Modernization, Dependency, and Postmodern Politics*, Newbury Park: Sage, 1987; UNDP, *Human Development Report 1999: Globalization with a Human Face*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. The discourse of “education for development” is best captured in Harbison, Frederick H., *Human Resources as the Wealth of Nations*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1973; Coombs, Philip H., *The World Educational Crisis: A Systems Analysis*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1968; and Coombs, Philip H., *The World Crisis in Education: The View from the Eighties*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

<sup>4</sup> For implications of the all-encompassing phenomenon of globalization, see: O'Meara, Patrick, Howard D. Mehlinger, and Matthew Krain (eds.), *Globalization and the Challenges of a New Century: A Reader* (Bloomington and

### **Evolution of the concept of sustainable development**

A serious and significant questioning of the Western development model came about through the awareness of “the limits to growth”. This over the years led to the elaboration of the concept of sustainable development which, in turn, became linked with paradigms of poverty reduction. A recent issue of *UNESCO Newsletter* (UNESCO, 2006) presents the seven milestones in the development of the concept and the project of Sustainable Development thus:

1972: UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm leads to creation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

1987: *Our Common Future*, the report of the Brundtland Commission, popularizes the term sustainable development.

1992: Agenda 21 adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro as the basis for measuring progress in sustainable development.

1999: Launch of the Global Sustainability Index, tracking corporate practices.

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Indianapolis, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000. For educational implications particularly, see: Burbules, Nicholas C., and Carlos Alberto Torres (eds.), *Globalization and Education: Critical Perspectives* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000). A strong case has been made for learning throughout life, in Delors, Jacques, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century, Paris: UNESCO, 1996. The pitfalls, if not the impossibility, of “lifelong learning” without “lifelong education” are discussed in: Bholá, H.S., “Adult Literacy for Sustainable Development in India: Policy Brief with Details for Practice”, *International Journal of Adult and Lifelong Education*, Vol. 4, No. 1-4, April-September 2006, pp. 77- 100.

2000: The Millennium Declaration, adopted by UN General Assembly, defines “respect for nature” as a fundamental value and commits “to integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies”.

2002: The World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg promotes environmental protection, economic and social development as interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

2005: The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) is launched to advance lifelong learning of knowledge, skills and values required for durable social transformation.

Let us look more closely at these milestones.

***Environment in focus: the Stockholm Conference and its aftermath***

The birth of the idea of sustainable development is often linked with the 1972 meeting of a group of world’s scientists and political leader in Stockholm, Sweden. They were deeply concerned about the changes taking place in the global environment, caused by exploding human populations, exponentially increasing levels of consumption in the West, and the damage done to the ecology of the planet by industrial production to produce the goods and services needed by human communities, particularly in the West. These ideas attracted considerable attention. Claims were made that there were indeed real “limits to growth”, Western-style, and that the existing monolithic world economic system could not be sustained and would indeed collapse by around 2050 unless economic growth as we know it now could be stopped. Others asserted that humankind was at a turning point and could usher in an integrated world system that would be able to launch a coordinated global plan that would

enable controlled and organic growth instead of stumbling from crisis to crisis<sup>5</sup>.

In order to give continued attention to these issues the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was created at the Stockholm Conference. In 1987 the report of the Brundtland Commission, entitled, *Our Common Future*, popularized the term sustainable development. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also called the “Earth Summit”, held in Rio de Janeiro 3-4 June 1992, would make issues of sustainable development part of the global discourse for ever. Recognizing the integral and interdependent nature of the Earth, our home, the nations meeting at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro adopted a set of principles to guide future developments and a concrete plan of action that has come to be called Agenda 21<sup>6</sup>.

### ***Agenda 21***

An official summary of the Agenda 21 document provided below should be read by all adult literacy and adult educators interested in promoting sustainable development:

Agenda 21 explains that population, consumption and industrial technology are the primary driving forces of environmental change. It lays out what needs to be done to reduce wasteful and

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<sup>5</sup> Limits to this Western-style development were soon discovered, as in Meadows, Donella H. *et al.*, *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind*, New York: Universe Books, 1972. For the persisting contradictory and optimistic view, see: Mesarovic, Mihajlo, and Eduard Pestel. *Mankind at the Turning Point: The Second Report to The Club of Rome*, New York: E.P. Dutton / Reader's Digest Press, 1974.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations. *Agenda for Change – the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*. Cf.: <http://www.iisd.org/rio+5/agenda/declaration.htm> Accessed 11 Oct. 2004. The initial Conference Report can be found in: United Nations, *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992*, Vol. 1, *Resolutions Adopted by the Conference*, New York, United Nations, 1993. See also Johannesburg Conference (2002).

inefficient consumption patterns in some parts of the world while encouraging increased but sustainable development in others. It offers policies and programmes to achieve a sustainable balance between consumption, population and the Earth's life-supporting capacity. It describes some of technologies and techniques that need to be developed to provide for human needs while carefully managing natural resources.

Agenda 21 provides options for combating degradation of the land, air and water, conserving forests and the diversity of living species. It deals with poverty and excessive consumption, health and education, cities and farmers. There are roles for everyone: governments, business people, trade unions, scientists, teachers, indigenous peoples, women, youth and children. Agenda 21 does not shun business. It says that sustainable development is the way to reverse both poverty and environmental destruction.

We currently gauge the success of economic development mainly by the amount of money it produces. Accounting systems that measure the wealth of nations also need to count the full value of natural resources and the full cost of environmental degradation. The polluter should, in principle, bear the costs of pollution. To reduce the risk of causing damage, environmental assessment should be carried out before starting projects that carry the risk of adverse impacts. Governments should reduce or eliminate subsidies that are not consistent with sustainable development.

A major theme of Agenda 21 is the need to eradicate poverty by giving poor people more access to the resources they need to live sustainably. By adopting Agenda 21, industrialized countries recognized that they have a greater role in cleaning up the environment than poor nations, who produce relatively less pollution. The richer nations also promised more funding to help other nations develop sound environmental practices. Beyond funding, nations need help in building the expertise and the capacity to plan and carry out sustainable development decisions. This will require the transfer of information and skills.

Agenda 21 calls on governments to adopt national strategies for sustainable development. These should be developed with

wide participation, including non-governmental organizations and the public. Agenda 21 puts most of the responsibility for leading change on national governments, but says they need to work in broad partnerships with international organizations, business, regional, state, provincial and local governments, non-governmental organizations and citizens' groups.

Finally, Agenda 21 asserts that only a global partnership will ensure that all nations will have a safer and more prosperous future.

### ***Paradigms of poverty reduction***

A paradigm of poverty reduction has come to be an essential component of any agenda for sustainable development, anywhere in the world. If sustainable development has to serve the interests of all of the people of all nations, special attention has to be paid to the poor. Poverty paradigms being proposed today do not seek to rob the rich to pay the poor; nor to retreat from economic growth or bury the free market. They seek instead a mixed model of development that combines development of the modern sector with that of the rural sector, formal economy with informal economy, in each case joining growth with equity. The state is not absolved from its obligations to the poor and powerless. The Millennium Declaration adopted by UN General Assembly in 2000 defines “respect for nature” as a fundamental value and commits “to integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies” and it declares its goals in terms of reducing poverty from developing nations (United Nations, 2000)

### ***Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development: ten years after Rio***

The World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, South Africa, for ten days from 26 August to 4 September 2002, came ten years after the Earth Summit of Rio de Janeiro. It reiterated that Planet Earth was indeed in terrible

disrepair. But along with the important ecological message, they joined a powerful and potent political message that the widening gap between the rich and poor within nations, both developed and underdeveloped, had become untenable. It pleaded with the rich and powerful to help the poor and powerless for their sake and for their own sake as well. The World Summit on Sustainable Development of Johannesburg of course promoted environmental protection, but it emphasized economic and social development as well as being interdependent and mutually reinforcing. The essence of the Summit was to seek ways of protecting nature while boosting living standards for the world's poorest people. Poverty reduction became central to sustainable development<sup>7</sup>.

In the opening speech at the Summit, South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki stated: "A global human society based on poverty for many and prosperity for a few, characterized by islands of wealth surrounded by a sea of poverty, is unsustainable." He went on to say: "For the first time in human history, human society possesses the capacity, the knowledge and the resources to eradicate poverty and underdevelopment" – implying that not to act would be historically inexcusable (Associated Press, 2002a). The words of the French President Jacques Chirac were marked by both outrage and eloquence when he said: "Humanity has a rendezvous with destiny. Alarms are sounding across all the continents. We cannot say that we did not know! The persistence of mass poverty is outrageous and an aberration. The world is suffering from poor development, in both the North and South, and we stand indifferent (Associated Press, 2002b). Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General, speaking from the

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<sup>7</sup> For the Johannesburg Declaration on sustainable development, see: United Nations, *The Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development*, issued by the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2-4 September 2002. <[www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/documents/summit\\_docs/1009wssd\\_pol\\_declaration.doc](http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/documents/summit_docs/1009wssd_pol_declaration.doc)>.

See also the twin document, *Plan of Implementation*, also issued by the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development. <[www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/documents/summit\\_docs/plan@final1009.doc](http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/documents/summit_docs/plan@final1009.doc)>.

same platform that day in measured tones, added his voice of exhortation: “The model of development we are accustomed to, has been fruitful for the few, but flawed for the many. A path to prosperity that ravages the environment and leaves a majority of humankind behind in squalor will soon prove to be a dead-end road for everyone.” (Associated Press, 2002*b*).

A couple of weeks after the Johannesburg Summit, during the 2002 annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, held in Washington DC, the IMF Managing Director, Horst Koehler himself admitted to the increasing recognition of the fact that at the present time there is a gap in the international financial architecture. The World Bank President, James Wolfensohn was even more direct and concrete as he acknowledged that much more needed to be done to narrow the gap between the rich and poor nations when 15 per cent of the world's population controls 80 per cent of the income. He asserted that “The quest for a more equal world is the quest for long-term peace – something that military power alone can never achieve”. (Associated Press, 2002*c*).

The *Declaration* and the *Plan of Implementation* that emerged from the Summit marked a historic shift in the definition of development itself. Development at the Summit was not seen solely as growth in GNP but included also the quality of life and well-being of common people as individuals – particularly those by-passed by the current development objectives, processes and structures. Thus, development came to be seen as bi-focal, embracing not only economic modernization but also community development – i.e. development at community level in the lives of families and family members as real individuals. The objective of wealth production has not been rejected but has been joined to the just distribution of wealth among the poor and dispossessed.

The overall goal now is poverty eradication, with affirmative action on behalf of women, using all the four paths of cultural development, social development, economic development and ecological development. The more concrete objectives are provision of clean drinking water, sanitation, adequate shelter, affordable energy, health care, food security, and protection of bio

diversity – resonating with the classical objectives of community development projects around the world<sup>8</sup>.

It could be asserted that the World Summit on Sustainable Development was, by implication, also a Summit on Adult Education – but this implication was not adequately addressed by the participants. The Summit's educational demands were not fully elaborated and its educational promise was not appreciated. It is disappointing to note that the educational prescriptions coming from the Summit were lacking in inspiration and were less than adequate to meet the future educational needs as embedded in the Summit's agenda – and easily visible to the perceptive viewer. It was thought perhaps that the role of education was so basic and so obvious that it was not necessary to waste words discussing the specifics of education for sustainable development. They were satisfied with borrowing a page of text from UNESCO meeting in Dakar in 2000 (UNESCO, 2000*a*; 2000*b*)<sup>9</sup>, and be done with the issue!

The Dakar Framework for Action, borrowed by the Summit at Johannesburg, recommended:

1. Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
2. Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality.

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<sup>8</sup> See footnotes 6 and 7

<sup>9</sup> Clear links between adult literacy (adult education) and poverty reduction in the context of sustainable development have been elaborated in the following two papers: Bhola, H.S., Potential of Adult and Lifelong Education for Poverty Reduction: Systems Thinking for Systemic Change. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, Vol. 24, No. 5, September-October, 2005, pp. 405-417; and Bhola, H.S., "Adult and Lifelong Education for Poverty Reduction: A Critical Analysis of Contexts and Conditions", *International Review of Education*, Vol. 52 (3-4) 2006, pp. 231-246.

3. Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills (UNESCO, 2000*b*, p. 8).

A critical reading of the six recommendations shows that primary education of good quality for all children was the main focus of the Dakar meeting but that commitments to adult literacy and adult education remained relatively weak.

### ***Two United Nations decades***

The vision of Johannesburg Conference of 2002 has since been expanded by The United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD)(2003-2012) and the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) – particularly with regard to the educational needs of our modern-day agenda for sustainable development. The UNLD reminded the nations of the world that literacy was a human right and the key to learning. The nations of the world were asked to recognize that the promotion of literacy is in the interest of all, and should go hand in hand with efforts towards peace and mutual respect in a world of globalization (United Nations, 2000*b*; 2001; 2002).

The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), launched in 2005, sought to advance the

lifelong acquisition of knowledge, skills, and values required for durable social transformation. In its proclamation, sustainable development was elaborated to include three sectors: Environment, Economy and Society (United Nations, 2002*b*). A Japanese NGO has since added a fourth component: Individual Well-Being (Japan for Sustainability Project, 2005). Any nation seeking to put education to work for sustainable development will have to invent a many-stranded staircase curriculum that includes all of these four sectors, at all educational levels, – from the universities and community colleges, through secondary schools, down to basic education – covering all children, youth and adults, both male and female. A monumental effort of capacity building will have to be mounted both within the bureaucratic structures of the state and within the non-governmental sector, to enable the design and delivery of this many-stranded curriculum. At the other end, the four strands of the curriculum will have to be analysed to deliver hierarchies of knowledge and associated indicators for use in effective monitoring and evaluation systems to assess processes and results (Bhola, 1994*b*).

### **Coordinating activities for sustainable development**

To sum up the challenges of change – both structural and instructional – required for actualizing Sustainable Development, the following will be required (United Nations, 2001; 2002*b*):

- Environmental education, which must include a basic level of scientific literacy and should be integrated with an appropriate scheme of incentives and disincentives, codified into laws to ensure that development agendas and strategies do not destroy surrounding ecology.
- Population education, which is linked with the health of environment – exploding populations being the main cause of ruination of the environment – and which is also linked

with family life education, including family planning through contraception, and thus requires some biological, physiological and psychological knowledge.

- Education for prevention and the treatment of HIV/AIDS which could decimate populations, particularly the young, who are at the reproductive age but are also in productive roles as farmers and workers. Such education should enlist the help of teachers, extension workers, health workers at community clinics, and policemen on their beats in communities.
- Personal income generation and improving the productive capacity of farmers and workers for a better livelihood at individual level and higher productivity at the community and national levels.
- Maintenance of institutional structures, offering education, health, and security, which, if the population of the working adults is decimated by HIV/AIDS, would not be able to continue providing services for education, health and security.
- Establishing and maintaining structures for democratic participation and maintenance of social justice.
- Pursuit of civilizing activities that make human life worth living, among them education for all.

## Chapter 3

### THE CONSEQUENCES OF ADULT LITERACY: THE EVIDENCE

#### Cases from UNESCO/UNDP, China, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Namibia, South Africa, and a World Bank Study covering Africa

As indicated above, the discourse of education for development goes back to the 1950s. By the early 1970s the concept of sustainable development had been formed and soon became connected with the paradigm of poverty reduction. The majority of the world's poor were illiterate and needed literacy skills for both democratization and modernization. Today, the new language of discourse is "adult literacy for sustainable development." While this new language of discourse is coming into wider use among the policy elite at the global level, it is by no means universally adopted by literacy workers and development workers on the ground, although often they have been *de facto* promoting adult literacy for sustainable development without being consciously aware of it. In the review of cases of adult literacy work presented below, the language of policy justifications may be different, but the aims, objectives, and processes have been the same, anticipating the same results in the lives of individuals and communities.

In the following pages we will develop a critical evaluative account based on studies of adult literacy with which the author has been most familiar. It is a fairly extensive sample, covering several countries of Africa, and some from Asia. Reviews of evaluations done by UNESCO and the World Bank are also included in our sample. In terms of the historical time frame, these studies cover more than four decades from the 1960s to the first decade of the new century.

**Looking for effects**

Understandably, the consequences of adult literacy first appear in the individual learner by way of new cognitive behaviours and ways of understanding reality, which engender in the individual a new self-concept that is accompanied by greater self-confidence and self-esteem. The ability to read will enable an individual to start swimming in the fast evolving culture of print. Some new literates may be satisfied with reading the scriptures, while other may want to read folk tales and the ancient epics of their culture. Some may want to read the newspaper to find out what is going on in their immediate or wider surroundings. Utilitarian uses of literacy by individuals may include generating income for better livelihood or making one's voice heard in situations where social and political decisions are made.

Neo-literate adults who head families and feel responsible for them may want to change the culture and the cultural capital of the family, which they feel is now within their locus and context of control. They would perhaps want to send their children, especially daughters, to school. They might develop a new attitude to their wives and children and wish to treat them as persons rather than possessions. They may also want to access and use developmental knowledge about health and nutrition. Most importantly, they may want to understand and protect their immediate environment, which is the central core of sustainable development.

At the same time we should not expect the newly literate individual to change economic, social, political and cultural life in the community and beyond, if the existing structures and systems established by the state and civil society are not congenial to change and if the governing classes want to maintain the status quo. This is an important point. We should not expect literacy to have a deterministic role in societal change. Literacy is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for such changes. Political-economic and cultural systems and structures must be congenial to creating a just society for literacy and literate individuals to make their contributions. It is important to remember that if the adult learner

has not learned or acted on his or her learning, it is the system's failure, not that of the learner. Failures of providers and policy makers should not be blamed on adult learners.

The thumbnail sketches of evaluation studies included below have dealt, first, with “impact by design” to examine whether pre-determined literacy objectives were being achieved. These studies determined programme coverage, identified participants' responses and measured their achievements. These evaluations have then gone on to look at “impact by interaction” by studying correlations between literacy and health, literacy and poverty, literacy and schooling, particularly of the girl child. Some of these studies also asked the question whether the diffusion of literacy was having a generative role in starting to change lives of peoples and their communities, bringing significant levels of “impact by emergence” (Bhola, 2000*a*). Data, of course, have come from individuals and their families and leaders within communities.

### **UNESCO/UNDP Experimental World Literacy Programme**

It is appropriate to begin with the first ever evaluation study of adult literacy covering a number of countries around the world conducted in 1976 (UNESCO/UNDP, 1976). The UNESCO/UNDP Experimental World Literacy Programme was approved in 1966: Algeria, Ecuador, Iran, and Mali joined in 1967, followed by Ethiopia, Guinea, Madagascar and Tanzania in 1968, and Sudan in 1969. Other countries that came to be linked with the main initiative were: Venezuela (1968), India and Syria (1970), and Afghanistan, Kenya, Niger, and Zambia (1971).

Monitoring and evaluation were an important part of the UNESCO/UNDP project. Unfortunately, because of a general bias in favour of the positivist methodologies of sampling and instrumentation using “before and after” control groups, everything else was dismissed as impressionistic; and all qualitative data and individual narratives were excluded. Using findings from a few systematic studies during 1971-72, a

UNESCO/UNDP (1976) assessment found that “functional literacy classes had a direct influence on participants' behaviour vis-à-vis their participation in formal organizations, their knowledge of modern technology, their adoption of modern methods, their knowledge and adoption of improved health and nutritional practices, and their level of socio-economic aspirations (p. 110)”.

### **Adult Literacy in China: a partner in the revolution**

Marxists, historically, have considered adult literacy as a paramount instrument for involving citizens in both politics and economy. When the People's Republic of China was established in 1949 illiteracy rates were 85 per cent for the general population and 95 per cent in the rural areas. Within two years of coming to power, the new regime had declared their intention to make 200 million adults between the ages of 18 to 40 literate within five to seven years. There have been several bumps on the road, but the overall achievement in literacy promotion in China has been most impressive. Already by 1966 over one hundred million adults had been made literate; and another 37.7 million were added to the impressive total in the next decade, despite the disruptions of the Cultural Revolution from May 1966 to October 1976. By early 1980s, rural illiteracy was down to 30 per cent and in urban areas it was as low as 8 per cent, (Bhola, 1984b, p. 74). The most recent national census counted 182 million illiterates and semi-literates aged 15 and over, marking the illiteracy rate of 22.23 per cent (Tang, 2006).

The Chinese experience shows that literacy can indeed serve transcendental ideological goals on the one hand, and more concrete goals of economic production on the other. In fact, political analysts today marvel at the happy irony of the history of literacy in China. Literacy promotion, which was first used for indoctrination of the masses in the Marxist ideology and in the preparation of workers for the socialist economy, has now been put to a completely unexpected national agenda: to transform the

socialist economy into capitalist economy and to compete successfully in the competitive global market economy today.

### **The literacy campaign of Tanzania: The mother of all literacy initiatives in Africa**

President Julius K. Nyerere's vision for Tanzania, codified in the Constitution and further elaborated in the Arusha Declaration (1967), was of a true people's republic which would allow all citizens to participate in the development of a self-reliant society built on socialist principles. Education was to be at the core of this project, and adult education at the inner centre of the core. In his speech while introducing the first Development Plan for the country, he said: "First, we must educate our adults. Our children will not have an impact on our economic development for five, ten, or even twenty years. The attitudes of the adults...on the other hand, have an impact now" (Bhola, 1984c, p. 138).

In 1968, President Nyerere enthusiastically accepted for Tanzania to be one of the nations to join the experimental work-oriented adult literacy pilot project of UNESCO/UNDP. The national mass literacy campaign was officially declared in 1971. The government, in cooperation with the Party (TANU), created a vibrant system for delivery that included establishing learner groups; writing and publishing special functional primers to be integrated with practical training; and starting rural newspapers, rural libraries, and radio forums to enrich the mass campaign. National examinations were used both as a way of mobilizing the people as well as providing them with feedback for their learning. No one was expected to experience "failure", though some would have learned less than others, and stayed longer in learner groups. Those who completed all the stages of literacy would continue in post-literacy classes. Or they would join the Folk Development colleges. The Folk Development Colleges project had begun in 1975 and there were 52 of them on the ground by 1984. Their purpose was to raise the skills capital of the predominantly rural

Tanzania, working both for new literate adults and school leavers after primary education.

An evaluative profile of literacy work in Tanzania during 1971-1981 had this to say: "Illiteracy in the United Republic of Tanzania dropped to 27 per cent in 1977 to 21 per cent in August 1981. The more significant effects...should be measured in individual and social terms. Individuals, it has been asserted, have changed their ways of thinking, feeling and envisioning. They have lost their sense of marginality, alienation and fear. They have become self-confident and assertive. In broader social terms, the most important effect of the mass campaign (and of adult education in general) may have been the politicization of the masses, a real change in the political culture of the United Republic of Tanzania" (Bhola, 1984c, p. 155).

An evaluation made available in 1985 covered monitoring and evaluation of adult learners, post-literacy learners, and study of impact (Ministry of Education, Tanzania, 1985). This 118-page mimeographed evaluation report claims to be the first systematic evaluation of the impact of "adult education"—a term interchangeably used with the mass literacy campaign launched in 1971.

Learners stated their approval of the ideology of self-reliance and the emerging socialist order in Tanzania. On the basis of their immersion in the field and later in the evaluation data, the evaluators asserted that a Tanzania as a fully literate nation had become a normal expectation among the people; that Kiswahili which was the language of literacy had come to be accepted as a national language, and a Tanzanian culture above ethnicities seemed to be emerging. Tanzania at Independence was considered to have more than 400 ethnic groups all speaking their own languages. It was also asserted that there were already the beginnings of a re-definition of the female in Tanzanian society, though not much was ever said by respondents about family planning. There was a clear literacy and voting connection. Newly-literate and even barely literates were able to vote their choice "without anybody's assistance" and felt not just self-confident but empowered. Thus literacy was able to contribute not

only to voting but also to state formation. There was the emerging understanding that the knowledge capital now within the communities needs to be complemented with new modern knowledge; and there was an awareness this could be done systematically through the use of institutions of politics and education in the Tanzanian society, particularly the radio, and newspapers.

The mid-1980s marked the beginning of the slippery slope downwards for adult literacy in Tanzania (Carr-Hill *et al.*, 1991). Both context and conditions were now against its promotion and maintenance. The country had meagre national endowments by way of forests or minerals. It was an agrarian nation, with little to sell by way of cash crops. It was of no strategic or economic interest to the West and was therefore unable to attract much foreign aid. With the emerging realities of the global macro-economic system, and galloping globalization, Tanzania had to make a deal with the IMF and the World Bank just to survive. After the signing of the 1986 IMF agreement, literacy in Tanzania started to lose ground. From 10 per cent in 1984, illiteracy increased to hover between 20-30 per cent in 1992; and to 32.2 per cent (20.6 per cent for men and 43.2 per cent for women) in 1995 (UNESCO, 1997*b*).

### **Literacy next door in Kenya**

Kenya was an important partner of the East African Community of three countries (Kenya, Tanganyika/Tanzania, and Uganda), established by the British, but in adult literacy work it did not keep pace with Tanzania. Under Jomo Kenyatta (1962-1978), Kenya came to be a political culture completely different from Tanzania. A future Kenya was imagined as a modern democratic state, but it turned into a popular despotism, with shallow modernity. The power elite in the government and the party spent more time in acquiring personal wealth than on implementing policies of the state to serve the people.

President Kenyatta did not pay any serious attention to adult literacy. It was only towards the end of his regime that he tolerated

some work in adult literacy. Kenya had to wait until 1978 to launch its national literacy programme to meet the needs of 5 million illiterates, increasing by 3 per cent annually. An evaluation conducted some ten years later determined that, in spite of the generally low internal efficiency of the programme, some 70 to 80 per cent of the learners who had received a literacy certificate had indeed achieved at least an average level of performance in reading. The programme had had “a positive effect on the functional knowledge, attitudes and practices of the learners either directly or indirectly. Adults who had completed the programme tended to know more about health, nutrition, agriculture, etc. than the illiterates; they had less traditional attitudes and put new ideas into practice more easily” (Carron *et al.*, 1989, p. 220).

### **Literacy in Uganda – after a long wait**

Uganda's President Obote, after independence, first sought to follow Nyerere's lead in adult literacy, but soon lost interest. Idi Amin, who came to power in 1971, was Uganda's downfall in more ways than one. Uganda would have to wait for serious work in literacy until the 1990s.

In 1999, an evaluation of a four-year-old functional adult literacy programme in Uganda, revealed that nearly everyone in the sample was able to read, although numeracy and reading comprehension scores of learners were lower than their reading scores. An intriguing finding was that many of the learners (overwhelmingly women) who were then participating in literacy programmes had also attended the formal school as children. They were of the opinion that they had learned nothing much at school that was useful to them in life and at work. On the other hand, the adult literacy programmes in which they were participating gave them useful development knowledge and promised them important “other inputs” such as new seeds, fertilizers, credit for micro businesses, etc.

The overall performance on items of functional knowledge, attitudes and practices were better than those in the control group.

They ranked the relative importance of learning categories in the following order: modern attitudes (72.77), knowledge items (56.15), and modern practices (44.70). In concrete terms, the benefits derived from literacy included, "family health, food security, increase in family income, ability to pay children's school fees...ability to participate in civic activities in their communities, e.g., attending local council meetings, taking part in voting activities, decision making not only at family level but community level as well. Other benefits cited were self-confidence, self-esteem and the ability to avoid being cheated and manipulated." (p.vii). Another interesting finding was that learners came to understand the role of English for success in life and work (Carr-Hill, 2001). Sadly, the evaluation study reported that the state's commitment of literacy in 1999 was already decreasing.

### **Adult Literacy for development in Ethiopia**

In 1974, the regime of Emperor Haile Selassie was overtaken by the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) led by Comrade Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam. The new revolution sought to destroy the structures and the very soul of the old feudal-bourgeois society by eradicating ignorance, ill-health and exploitation, and enabling all the people of the country to participate in creating a new Ethiopia.

The new Ethiopia would mobilize people for their own benefit, combining the strategy of "development by campaign" with "literacy by campaign" (Bhola, 1994a). Literacy was central to the revolutionary development process and the main instrument of mobilization of the peoples. Chairman Mengistu Haile Mariam would himself teach literacy classes and give away large colourful banners to reward villages that had become fully literate.

On 8 July, 1979 a National Literacy Campaign (NLC) was launched that promised to eradicate illiteracy from urban areas by 1982 (target year revised to 1984); and from the rural areas by 1987 (target year revised to 1992). Between July 1979 and April 1985, some 18.3 million people had participated in the basic

literacy campaigns that offered literacy in all of the 15 languages of the nationalities; and some 8.1 million had joined the post-literacy classes in a nation of 42 million people. From about 93 per cent in 1974, illiteracy was down to about 50 per cent by the end of 1985.

While quantitative data made available by the campaign is impressive, data about qualitative changes in the lives of people is not available. The Report of a one-man evaluation mission on behalf of UNESCO (Okech *et al.*, 2001) did assert that individual identities of Ethiopians were claimed to have changed, particularly of Ethiopian women, and social and economic relationships had been transformed.

In 1990 the literacy rate in Ethiopia was estimated to be around 77 per cent. In May 1991 there was a regime change and a quick decline in the fortunes of literacy began. The Transitional Government of Ethiopia, in their twin *Education Sector Strategy* and *Education and Training* documents, issued in 1994, had nothing much to say about adult education and adult literacy. The most recent UNDP *Human Development Report* indicates that adult literacy rates for Ethiopia had increased from 28.6 per cent in 1990 to 40.3 per cent in 2001; and the Human Development Index for Ethiopia had improved from 0.305 to 0.359 during the same time span.

It should be noted that the modest increase in literacy percentages over a decade may have been affected more by the diffusion of primary education of children than by literacy programmes for adults. The 81.9 per cent of the population living on less than \$1 a day may indeed have been left without adult literacy and development knowledge that adult literacy could have brought to them (See: [www.globalis.gvu.unu.edu](http://www.globalis.gvu.unu.edu).)

### **Botswana's literacy programme**

Botswana (previously Bechuanaland), which became independent in 1966, is a desert state with its small population spread wide and thin. With the discovery of diamond mines under the sands of the

Kalahari Desert, things looked promising. It seemed Botswana could undertake its own development without dependence on donors or getting indebted to the World Bank. By the mid-1970s, Botswana had proclaimed a development ideology of economic equality, democracy and social justice. Education for *Kagisano* (social harmony) was placed at the core of the development project of the nation. Universal literacy in Setswana among adults was part of the plan.

The Botswana National Literacy Programme (BNLP)<sup>10</sup> was indeed formally launched in 1981 with the objective of eradicating illiteracy from among adults and youth aged 10 and over by 1986. Considerable time and resources were invested in building structures and appointing and training professionals to deliver literacy to the illiterate all over the country. District Adult Education Officers (DAEO's) were appointed, one for each district and a large number of Literacy Assistants were recruited to deliver literacy in communities where several literacy centres would be established and staffed by trained literacy teachers. All the staff received appropriate training in workshops organized by donors from Germany: GTZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit/International Cooperation Enterprise) and DSE, (former Deutsche Stiftung für Internationale Entwicklung/German Foundation for International Development, now *InWent*) in particular. By 1985, some 65,000 persons had been recruited as

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<sup>10</sup> The description and discussion of the National Literacy Programme in Botswana is built upon the following: Bhola, H.S., *Building a Built-in Evaluation System: A Case in Point*, Bloomington: School of Education, Indiana University, 1984. [ERIC Clearinghouse Document No. ED 256 779]; Bhola, H.S., "Report Card on the National Literacy Programme: The Case of Botswana". Paper presented to the Joint SIDEC/CIES Conference on Comparative Education and International Development, Stanford, CA., 15-20 April, 1985 [ERIC Clearinghouse Document No. ED 255 705]; Bhola, H.S. 1988. *The Botswana National Literacy Programme: Case Materials on Policy and Performance*, Bloomington: School of Education, Indiana University, 1988. [ERIC Clearinghouse Document No. ED 332 144]; and Bhola, H.S. 1988. "Evaluation of Botswana National Literacy Programme: The Politics of Renovation and Control". Paper presented at the 32nd Annual Conference of the Comparative and International Education Society, Atlanta, Georgia, March 17-20, 1988. [ERIC Clearinghouse Document No. ED . 294 887].

learners, of whom 20,000 had been declared literate. Estimates of total illiterates at that time were in the neighbourhood of 223,000. By the end of 1988, a cumulative enrolment of 170,000 was claimed when the estimates for illiterates were between 250,000 and 300,000.

### ***Impact on individuals and communities***

The BNLP is well-known for its built-in monitoring system that was to undertake both formative and summative evaluations. External evaluations were also conducted when needed. In evaluations of impact, the evaluators heard from individual learners the same metaphors of “freedom and light” which have been used by learners around the world to describe the consequences of becoming literate. They achieved greater self-confidence and self-esteem. They learned to speak their minds. Women seemed to have benefited relatively more from their learning. It was learning with feeling.

The BNLP, it seems, did create new demands from learners, both individual and social. There was an increased demand for schooling for the children out of school. Without waiting for new schools to open, many young children came to learn in “adult” literacy classes. Adults in learning groups had succeeded in learning to read, write and count, but participants “had not learned anything else”, because they had not been taught anything other than some needle work, cooking and baking and some vegetable gardening. Teaching of agricultural skills was conspicuous by its absence. Neither agricultural extension workers nor literacy teachers had provided any help. Learning of income generating activities in general was sorely missed.

Contact with the programme had resulted in a great rise in learning aspirations of participants, all converging on improvement of their lives. They wished they had been able to learn about the ways to preserve the traditional cultures, animal health, nutrition, livestock management, health education, farming, brick making, running a business, animal breeding, and even history, singing and English – in that order. As in the case of Swahili in

Tanzania, the language of literacy in Botswana, which is Setswana, became the official language for community meetings, pamphlets and newsletters issued by government's extension services, and indeed the national medium of communication. All this played a significant role in working toward a stronger collective national identity of the diverse people of Botswana.

### **Literacy in Zimbabwe**

During the late 1980s there were two literacy initiatives in process in Zimbabwe: one was initiated by the new revolutionary government; another had been run by ALOZ (Adult Literacy Organization of Zimbabwe), a civil society organization (Bhola, 1989*a*; 1990*c*).

The Government's National Literacy Campaign of Zimbabwe was launched by the then Prime Minister, now President Mugabe on 16 July 1983, as part of the Mudzi Declaration on Literacy for All in Five Years. Illiteracy it was said did not allow the mental emancipation of the people, and literacy was needed to set the mind free.

The main agents for the implementation of the government campaign were going to be DLC's (District Level Coordinators) chosen from the ex-combatants with at least five O-level passes, thus combining revolutionary commitments with academic competence. Teaching would be done by VLC's (Voluntary Literacy Teachers) to eventually cover 2.5 million illiterates and semi-literates in the urban and rural areas. But the state's ideological fervour cooled. The Party lost interest. The promised structures of delivery did not come into being. Revolutionaries turned politicians turned their attention on to building personal careers. DLC's wanted regular jobs in the state bureaucracy. Volunteer teachers earned no gratitude and were seen by their learners as failures in life. By 1986, the fate of the programme had been sealed. The leadership failed to deliver literacy. It was not literacy that failed!

A literacy initiative started in the pre-Independence period by a civil society organization (Adult Literacy Organization of Rhodesia) had survived the revolution. Giving itself a new name, Adult Literacy Organization of Zimbabwe (ALOZ), it proclaimed its renewed commitment to adult literacy in independent Zimbabwe, assuming the bold aim of achieving universal literacy for the nation. The programme was run parallel to the government's programme with somewhat different ideologies and different plans for recruitment of literacy teachers, methods of teacher training and instructional materials.

### ***Impact of literacy***

A systematic evaluation of programme implemented by ALOZ (Bhola) showed that literacy had come to be part of the definition of adulthood for those who had become literate. If you were an adult you had to be literate as well. Without exception, learners claimed that literacy had improved their lives, irrespective of the level of literacy learned. Once again, without exception, learners made statements of acquired self-confidence: "I can do things on my own. I can travel on my own. I can participate in most activities. I can do anything without fear. I can stand in front of others. Everything I do now is up-to-date."

The most important consequences of literacy were felt inside the home and affected the relationships between family members, with women and children benefiting particularly from the change. Literate spouses were able to talk respectfully to each other. They talked of being able to instruct their children in good manners as well as help them with school work. Wives were able to express themselves freely, and husbands began consulting with their wives. An old patriarch who had not yet shed all of his old skin said: "Now that my wife had become literate, I realize that a wife can be a useful thing!"

Learners wrote letters and read pamphlets on agriculture, cooperatives, health and politics. Learners stated that they now understood government policies better. At work there was better communication and greater team spirit. They had acquired better

economic skills and could improve income to a certain extent. They could read their bills and calculate income. They had acquired useful health knowledge and could use it to take better care of pregnant mothers and their children. At the same time they were not too sure about having learned any new social skills.

During the last two decades, Zimbabwe has undergone climactic changes. In a highly divided polity, always on the brink of violence, any talk of adult literacy promotion is well-nigh impossible. The energies of the state are dedicated more to self-preservation than the progressive tasks such as adult literacy promotion for the truly poor and powerless. Inexplicably, in spite of the political violence and corruption, economic mismanagement, and famine, Zimbabwe claims to have “a literacy rate of around 90%, one of the highest in the continent” (See [www.guardianunlimited.co.uk](http://www.guardianunlimited.co.uk); July 12, 2000). This does not jell with the reality that in a population of 12.5 million in today's Zimbabwe, 70 per cent live below the poverty line, and the HIV/AIDS prevalence among the population is a high 33.7 per cent.

### **Literacy in Ghana**

Education was always accepted as the instrument of social transformation in newly independent Ghana (Bhola, 2000*a*). Adult literacy activities by NGOs and the churches began already in 1948. The pace quickened in the 1950s. Between 1952 and 1966, a total of 225,000 literates were produced by government and NGOs. But then the political will to eradicate illiteracy collapsed. The annual output of literates fell from 22,000 annually in the 1950s to 2,000 annually in the 1970s. According to the 1984 Census, 65% of adults in Ghana had never been to school. Among those who earned their living through agriculture, 72% had never been enrolled in school. The distribution of education was further polarized: between females and males, and also between the neglected northern and the somewhat better off southern region.

In 1986, as part of the overall Education Reform Programme (ERP), the Government of Ghana reactivated adult and non-formal education programmes and promised to reach all the 6 million illiterates then living and working in the country and to provide all of them with functional basic education by the year 2000. The Government committed itself to reduce numbers of illiterates in Ghana by 10% annually. Indeed, in 1990, the NFED and NGOs enrolled 290,000 learners offering them literacy in all of the 15 mother tongue languages of Ghana.

The Ghana Literacy and Functional Skills Programme (LFSP) was launched in July 1992. An evaluation of the first phase, which ended in December 1997, took stock of the LFSP as a system of delivery, the quality of services delivered, and their effects on learners and communities. As anticipated, the first effects of literacy were on the individual selves of participants. First and foremost, learners' identities changed in subtle but significant ways. There was an emerging sense of self-worth and self-esteem, especially among female learners. There was a feeling of personal freedom and self-sufficiency. For the first time, mothers dreamed new dreams for their daughters. Within the locus and context of their control, learners had used, in their lives and work, what they had learned in their classes. They were using their literacy skills as they made transactions with the shop keeper at the post office or the bank. They were practising better environmental hygiene. They had learned new income generating skills and discovered the economic possibilities of skills they already had. Productive processes and productivity had both undergone visible improvement.

Learners had released children from domestic "child labour" so that the children, both boys and girls, could go to school and have time to do their homework. They were beginning to use the clinic for own health care and had encouraged family members and friends to do the same. They were now better able to make use of other services of education and extension (in agriculture, health, water development, etc.) that were not accessed even when they had been available within the communities. And those who wished to read the Bible could, of course, do that. More systematic

interactions between literacy and social, economic and political realities have not been pursued because structures were not congenial to such interactions in favour of the new literate, and because providers and policy makers have not combined educational interventions with appropriate structural interventions. Yet, some amazing things happened in the communities where learners lived. The very fact of the introduction of a literacy class where women could go without the permission of their husbands, changed the social world of each and everyone in the community of women more dramatically than of men.

#### **Namibia: The National Literacy Programme in Namibia (NLPN)**

During the colonial period, literacy work in Namibia (then South West Africa) was left to church-related NGOs (Bhola, 1995a). The Namibian Literacy Programme (NLP), and some commercial undertakings, had taught literacy in the mother tongue, notably, excluding English. Later, the territorial Department of National Education did some literacy work on commercial farms and in urban adult education centres. In 1990, the one officer responsible for this programme, had 2,273 students (out of some 400,000 adults still illiterates), enrolled in 109 farm centres and 16 other locations.

In 1975, the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) in exile, was able to establish bases in Angola after Angola's independence, and began educational work among freedom fighters and refugees. In 1976 SWAPO formally adopted a political programme that was based on health and education of children and adults. In 1980, the SWAPO Women's Council decided to make literacy a priority. The London-based Namibia Refugee Project helped produce materials and handbooks using the psycho-social method of Paulo Freire, and in 1986 a start was made in teaching literacy in the SWAPO camps in Zambia and Angola where some 3,400 (out of an estimated 10,000) eligible learners were covered (Ellis, 1996; Bhola, 1998c).

In 1988, after 23 years of a gruelling bush war, the apartheid regime of South Africa had agreed to withdraw from the then South West Africa, later renamed Namibia. On 21 March 1990 Namibia celebrated its first day of Independence with Sam Nujoma as its first President. With the end of the revolutionary phase, the development rhetoric changed. Neo-liberal discourse of democracy, property, free market economy, productivity and competition quickly came to be part of the new discourse in Namibia.

Article 20 of the Constitution of 1993 had stated that: “All persons shall have the right to education.” The reference to “all persons” in Article 20 above was indeed interpreted to include all adults, both men and women. In 1992, the government devised a National Literacy Programme in Namibia (NLPN), and invited collaborations from voluntary associations within the country and from donors abroad. It should be noted that the NLPN has been predominantly a programme supported by donors, particularly Sweden and the Netherlands. It is odd but true that in most of sub-Saharan Africa, with the exception of Tanzania under Nyerere, adult literacy work was not initiated unless donor assistance was available.

In 1992 it was time to bring literacy to the whole nation, and give it a central position in the total strategy for national development. Literacy was declared by the nation to be the key to personal and thereby to national development. At that time the country had an estimated 400,000 illiterates. The NLPN was launched on 5 September 1992 after a full year of preparation, establishing a target of 80 per cent literacy by the year 2000.

The NLPN reflected the general overall ideology of democracy, modernity, and capitalism. Conscientization and liberation were no more part of the discourse. Literacy was to be a key to the future. Interfaces between literacy policies, formal education policies and development policy were recognized, and detailed plans for the implementation for the NLPN were included in the *Guide* of 1992 distributed to all literacy centres.

In spite of all the shortcomings in programme design, teacher training, materials production and achievement testing, the

impact of the programme on the lives of learners was gratifying. Newly literate adults in the evaluation sample described the impact of literacy on themselves in metaphors of freedom and light. They felt they had come “out of darkness!” and felt “free to speak up!”. A greater general awareness of things emerged. Their web of information and knowledge became wider and richer and they sought information about things farther away from everyday existence. Newspaper and radio both became salient in their lives.

They became self-confident and self-reliant and felt that they had won the respect of others. They wrote their own letters, filled their own forms at the bank and post office, found their own way around the hospital and the regional administration offices, and could see what was working in their daily lives and what was not.

Mutual support and respect within the family was the most often stated result of literacy. Spouses and boyfriends were helpful and respectful. But the results were much more significant in regard to children. Children felt encouraged to study. They were given time off from domestic chores during examinations. As a result they did better at school. There was mutual sharing of knowledge between parents and children. Parents' educational aspirations for their children rose higher, as they imagined them going on to further education.

There were subtle but significant changes in regard to participation by new literates in the community. More learners now had party affiliations. One was elected school board member. Women organizations in the localities became more vibrant. There was not much income generation activity because the local economy did not provide much by way of economic opportunities. Regarding political participation, learners who were literate felt in a better position to register for elections and decide whom to vote for.

The NLPN Promoters (teachers) typically lived in the villages where they taught. Their lives were also significantly affected. They learned to communicate and work with people. They found that learning to teach adults was a valuable experience. They acquired new knowledge and a more positive

attitude to life. They felt more independent and enjoyed the respect offered to them by learners and community members. Last but not least, these 2,000 teachers most of them women had gotten jobs that paid reasonably well. That had changed the standard of living of families to which they belonged – large families with an average of nine members in the family. This made the NLPN the largest extension programme in the country and also the one with the most strategic impact.

Most importantly, adults wanted literacy for its own sake. For them being literate became a norm to adopt, a social good to achieve. One important impact of NLPN was demand from learners for further education. At the time of the evaluations being now reported, plans were afoot to expand the NLPN upwards by initiating an Adult Upper Primary Education (AUPE) programme for those who want to continue their education.

### **Adult literacy in South Africa, embedded in Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET)**

With the assumption of power by the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa in 1994, pragmatism won over ideology. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) got quickly abandoned in favour of Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR), actually a neo-classical approach to economic development. To further the aims of GEAR, the government sought to integrate national educational policies and objectives into the structures of the global economic market (Bhola, 1998a).

The new black leadership on coming to power had claimed that as many as 15 million people in South Africa were illiterate (or without formal basic education) in 1990. At least 46% of the Africans, 34% of the Coloured, 16% of the Indians and 1% of the White population were not literate, implying racial bias and neglect on the part of the old Apartheid regime. According to a 1986 report of the National Manpower Commission, 30% of South African workers had no formal education; 36% only had

primary education or below; 31% had secondary education; and only 3% of South Africa's labour force had diplomas and degrees. Thus 66% of the workforce would have profited from the provision of adult basic education.

The new government responded to the above situation by proposing a programme of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET). The policy guidelines issued by the government in September 1995 were to assist adults in the economy to acquire competencies and qualifications to contribute to the nation's productivity while personally advancing along career paths. Nothing was said directly about adult literacy programmes for those without literacy skills in rural areas or those without employment in urban areas. Modernization was preferred over democratization.

The Government-run ABET campaign *Ithuteng* ("Ready to Learn") only flirted with adult literacy and achieved no significant results. The Thousand Learner Unit (TLU) project of the National Literacy Co-operation (NLC), a non-governmental organization (NGO), did deal with literacy directly. NLC's work had considerable promise, but suffered a premature death as the European Union withdrew its funding support.

### ***Impact on the lives of people***

An evaluation of TLU's work in the field during some eighteen months showed important results (Bhola, 1998*b*). The literacy group at the Lungisane Learning Center, Gauteng, claimed that literacy learning at ABET-sites had promoted peace among the warring factions – referring to the civil strife between the Zulu and non-Zulu at that time in the Kwa-Zulu Natal region. At Soyabona Center, the best learning programme had been Ubuntu (Building Humanity), which meant creating caring communities. Other community groups talked about lives being moulded; adult learners being ready to read, and community leaders being ready to lead; and some asserted that the coming of the literacy programme to their communities in itself had had a transformational effect on their lives.

As expected, adult men and women had both made use of literacy within the contexts and loci of their control and thereby changed their lives in small but significant ways. Effects included all types of changes – social, political, cultural and economic. The defining factor was context and locus of control of the individual on his or her existing social surroundings.

“Adults did not always get certificates, but most got personal satisfaction. Few if any got jobs but most improved the quality of their lives in small but significant ways. They were ‘learning and discerning’. They acquired self-esteem and a measure of hope. They learned how to navigate in the culture of print and were beginning to understand how the world works. Some immediate economic returns by way of new opportunities or improved productivity had materialized within work in the informal economy rather than through jobs in the formal economy. Non-economic returns in the social, political and cultural situations and sectors were much more liberal and in the long run may be more fruitful...The latent potential of local leadership was being discovered, ready to be harnessed for completing the ‘incomplete revolution’” (Bhola, 1998*b*, p. 174).

### **Promoting adult literacy for development in India: a mission half accomplished**

On the eve of its Independence in 1947, India was a low-literacy country. During the decade immediately preceding, leaders of the Independence movement had sought to connect the teaching of literacy with mobilization of the masses for the struggle for freedom. However, after Independence the idea of bringing literacy to the masses was forgotten in favour of modernization with a bias towards industrialization. The five economic development plans during 1951-79, allocated completely insufficient budgets to adult literacy, which could have been the arrowhead for all adult education for development for all.

A new Prime Minister at the helm brought a big change in the fortunes of adult literacy. The National Adult Education

Programme (NAEP), the very first serious national project of adult education, was launched in October 1978 – with literacy as an indispensable component, for approximately 100 million illiterate persons in the age-group 15-35 with a view to providing them with skills for self-directed learning leading to self-reliance and active role in their own development and in the development of their environment. Early returns (in 1979) showed rather modest results, yet the people wanted the programme to continue.

### ***The National Literacy Mission***

In 1989, the programme was re-launched as the National Literacy Mission (NLM) (Bhola, 2002a). The NLM was a significant organizational innovation, using the strategy of a nationally planned and funded programme, incorporating a series of participatory and time-bound initiatives at district level known as the Total Literacy Campaigns (TLCs). At its peak, the NLM had covered 574 out of the total of 598 districts of India, using the TLC approach. Three hundred and two districts had already entered in the post-literacy phase; and 112 districts had received sanctions for initiating Continuing Education Programmes. Weaker sections of Indian society, such as women and scheduled castes and tribes, had received special attention.

An assessment of the individual and social effects of the NLM, based on some 97 evaluation studies, showed that the impact attributable primarily to the NLM, had been substantial. The year 1991 saw the literate population rise to 52.11 per cent (63.86 per cent for males, and 39.42 per cent for females); in 2001 the total estimated figure was 65.38 per cent. While the big surge in literacy statistics from 1981 to 1991 cannot be attributed entirely to the NLM (an important contribution to literacy was made by the sector of primary education), the achievements of the NLM were undeniably impressive.

In qualitative terms, the effects of literacy can be summarized as follows: “Uses of literacy were both multiple and frequent. First and foremost, literacy became a matter of self-affirmation and self-esteem as learners acquired the power to be

fluent, and negotiate with others, in the culture of print. Others, literate and illiterate, took note of the new learners' literacy skills and attributed them greater value and status. This was particularly significant in relation to women who, with their newly acquired self-confidence sometimes came back to participate in the campaign as literacy instructors or, if the instructor was absent for some reason, came to fill in and to keep the literacy class going. In their immediate surroundings, learners used literacy skills to read road signs and wall posters, to send letters to others, check calculations in the market and handle their simple financial transactions. The new learners read newspapers, and handwritten letters, helped children's home work, had better family relationships, lowered their consumption of alcohol and tobacco. Other social dividends noticed were: lowered petty crime, improvement in correct and valid voting, and lessening of diarrhoeal diseases. And no more cheating at ration shops. Property rights of women, about which there has been a conspiracy of silence, came to be openly discussed. There was tree growing and preservation of forests; improvement in personal cleanliness, in cleaning of surroundings; and greater use of the available telegraph and postal facilities. Both males and females learned to discern and dare!" (Bhola, 2002a, p. 290).

The NLM, in addition to teaching literacy had also hoped to create among the participants an "awareness" of political realities, and to teach "functionality" to contribute to improving their livelihoods. Unfortunately, in these areas the programme fell short of expectations.

### **The case for adult basic education in Sub-Saharan Africa**

A study conducted by Lauglo (2001) under the aegis of the World Bank, covering several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, reconfirmed that illiteracy was indeed a major barrier to poverty alleviation, and it was pointed out that expanded provision of primary education alone will not solve the problem. Illiterate adults, both male and female, must be approached directly and

urgently. This approach would have additional dividends in that newly literate adults will give more support to their children's education and will contribute to local schools becoming more community-based. The point was also made that literacy does indeed empower learners, since it gives participants a sense of self-efficacy. Participatory pedagogy reinforces a sense of self-empowerment. New literates, particularly literate mothers have been shown to be better able to protect their children's health; and some evaluation results confirmed improvement of livelihoods as direct result of engagement of adults in programmes. Another significant point made by Lauglo is that "allegations about generally poor internal efficiency" of literacy and adult education programmes is overstated.

### **The Global Monitoring Report: Literacy 2006**

We end this section with the succinct conclusion of the EFA Global Monitoring Report: *Education for All: Literacy for Life*: "...Literacy is a right and confers distinct benefits, whether acquired through schooling or through participation in adult literacy programmes. Adult programmes appear to yield some benefits, particularly in terms of self-esteem and empowerment, that go beyond those that result just from schooling; the very scant evidence also indicates that adult programmes are as cost-effective as primary schooling, raising important questions as to why investment in adult programmes has been relatively neglected until recently" (UNESCO, 2005, p. 145).

To conclude, both the objectives and effects of adult literacy programmes during the last half century can be seen to be highly relevant to poverty reduction and sustainable development. The evaluative account of adult literacy work presented above underlines the need to dedicate all necessary resources for putting adult literacy to the service of combating poverty and promoting sustainable development in the expanded sense of the term.

## **Chapter 4**

### **IMPLEMENTING THE GRAND PROJECT OF ADULT LITERACY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: ESSENTIAL AGENDAS AND ENABLING SYSTEMS**

Various developing countries have been characterized as “weak states” or “fragile states”, implying that they have neither the policy effectiveness nor the material and non-material resources to implement viable national-level initiatives to promote “adult literacy for sustainable development”. In the developing world a weak state is often accompanied by a weak civil society. Some of the non-government institutions that do exist actually constitute a pseudo civil society, being local branches of NGOs chartered and funded from abroad (Bhola, 1997a). At the same time, considerable resources, knowledge capital and appropriate technology (which the developing countries cannot always create on their own) will have to flow from the North to the South if the grand and global project of adult literacy for sustainable development is to have a chance. (Midgal, 1988; Sassen, 1996). It must also be recognized that, at the global level, the United Nations (with its network of member institutions such as UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF, WHO, ILO and many others) have set important standards and norms and have provided excellent leadership in areas of human rights, social development, promoting a culture of peace, promoting basic education, and bringing adult education and adult literacy to the nations of the developing world.

#### **The northern agenda for adult literacy for sustainable development**

It is frequently and too easily forgotten that, in the grand project of implementing adult literacy for sustainable development, the North not only has to assist the South but also has to develop its own northern agenda in this domain. The North does not, of course, need lessons in policy development or help in institution

building, planning and evaluation. The countries of the North also have the necessary resources in terms of both hard and soft technologies. What they do need is a new ideology that enables them to include all humanity in the same grand vision. Such a vision might include for the developed countries a new definition of “quality of life” and a new “ethics of frugality”. These countries need to understand that taking the path of sustainable development is necessary, both for reasons of enlightened self-interest and for contributing to a just and moral world order. Furthermore, the purely social scientific approach needs to be joined with the spiritual dimension to enable the people of the North to become less firmly attached to life styles and patterns of consumption that have become unsustainable (Bhola, 2000*b*).

### **Responsibilities of the nations of the South**

All this is not to say that the nations of the developing world can leave their destinies to the whims and charitable impulses of the developed nations. Indeed many of the proclamations and promises made by the rich nations at world forums have remained unfulfilled. Rhetoric has been plentiful, but actual work on the ground has not been commensurate. This could have been expected. Nations seeking sustainable development of their societies have to help themselves to receive help from others. They have to forge and sustain the national will to work for the development of their peoples. The roles of the state and the civil society will have to be integrated and enhanced. Appropriate political, economic and educational changes in structures will have to be legislated and carried out in a spirit of commitment and sacrifice. This will involve participative, policy-oriented decision-making at the upper levels of the system; and a division of labour at the ground level where adult learners must be served in their own communities. Implementation of these changes and the education of the masses to participate in the new order will have to be rooted in the best of knowledge available to planners and practitioners.

It needs repeating that both in the North and in the South we need a new agenda for education. We cannot be promising sustainable development, but at the same time continue providing only formal education that serves the needs of the formal economy using modern technologies. Educational agendas must include non-formal and informal education to meet the needs of adult learners and of the rural and the urban poor earning their living in non-formal and informal economies.

### **Systematic and systemic approaches to implementation**

In order to make these changes durable and effective it is necessary to have tested models for the implementation of systemic change (Bhola, 2003*b*; 2004).

Implementation involves two major tasks: (a) defining the goal to be reached and (b) delineating the pathway to get there. In putting adult literacy to the service of sustainable development, the first major task would require two sub-tasks: (i) imagining a future system of adult literacy provision to support sustainable development; and (ii) assessing the existing system of adult literacy on which a future system must be built. The second major task will be to develop a set of concrete actions to set up a system.

### **Imagining and describing an adult literacy system for sustainable development**

The imagined system will, by definition, be an “ideal” system. But to make sure that we are not building castles in the sky, the idealized has to be contextualized – that is, it has to be realizable within the chosen context and conditions. This idealized-contextualized system will then be used as the norm to assess the existing system, that is what exists on the ground regarding the provision of adult literacy for sustainable development. An analysis of discrepancies between the idealized-contextualized system and the existing system should follow.

An ideal system of adult literacy provision can be seen to have the following 11 components (or aspects):

### ***Ideology***

The ideology of adult literacy for sustainable development has to be linked to the real needs of people and must include a commitment to poverty eradication. An ideological re-orientation will have to take place at all levels of society and the body politic. Appropriate messages and systems of incentives and disincentives will have to be created for different levels from the international down to the national, provincial, district, community, family and individual levels.

### ***Policy, planning, and programming aspect or component***

While working on policy development, planning and programming, the nations in the developing world should be aware of the work done by UNESCO in this area and seek and use all the help available from and through UNESCO from the international community of professionals in adult literacy and sustainable development. The concrete objective at the national level will include: (1) realizing the role of literacy; (2) actualizing the project of sustainable development; (3) constructing and renovating structures and infrastructures congenial to the new policy objectives. At the national level governments must be lobbied to reclaim the policy space that has been surrendered to the forces of globalization and take back national leadership in the promotion of adult literacy and adult education.

### ***Mobilization as an aspect or component***

Each and every Member State of UNESCO should formally and publicly accept the concept of adult literacy for sustainable development. The contexts and contents of the Declaration of the Literacy Decade, and of the Johannesburg Conference on Sustainable Development should become part of the common

knowledge of policy makers, planners and practitioners in each and every nation of the Third World. Adult educators should write about these events in newspapers, professional journal and newsletters dealing with adult literacy and adult education. Appropriate use should be made of old and new technologies of radio, television and the Internet. Wherever these channels do not exist or are not accessible, adult educators should organize lecture tours and seminars for their colleagues in small towns and communities, townships and places of work.

### ***Institution-building and organization development***

Attention to organizational and institutional issues is important for the effective implementation of a multi-sectoral, multi-level project of adult literacy for sustainable development. National governments may want to begin with the establishment of National Boards of Adult Literacy/Adult Education, which can act in partnership with all institutions that can contribute to furthering adult literacy for sustainable development. Such institutions will represent many fields, including: adult education; nonformal education; formal education, particularly at the basic education level; community development; women's programmes; agriculture and animal husbandry; water development and geological surveys; forestry management; fishing; public health and HIV/AIDS awareness; and many others areas appropriate to the context of implementation. In all instances of such synergy, the integrity of individual institutions should not be compromised.

Especially challenging tasks will face the institutions dealing with adult literacy and adult basic education. These areas have a long enough history of operating outside established institutional settings in the developing world. Work tends to be project-bound and short lived with little or no institutional continuity.

In the present set of circumstances, establishing well functioning local institutions will be the supreme challenge. Communities will have to establish: (1) teaching and learning centers to undertake motivational and instructional work in communities; and (2) management groups that can manage

"common-pool resource systems" such as water, forests, fishing areas, etc. (Ostrom, 2005).

In developing institutional arrangements for adult literacy for sustainable development we need to keep a balance between the role of the state versus the non-governmental organizations, between centralization (top-down) versus decentralization (bottom-up) and between leadership and people's will. Evidence from the field tells us that, while participation is necessary, no single group of participants can have or produce all the necessary information. Inputs of information and leadership from above and outside will often be necessary. It should be remembered that much too often "efforts for decentralization, efficiency and accountability are not working. Bottom-up strategies for planning and participation are symbolic rather than real".<sup>11</sup>.

### ***Curriculum development***

Curriculum is not a concept to be confined to a classroom full of students within the compound of a schools or college. Curriculum is indeed a body of content of knowledge, values and skills, with associated real-life activities to be transferred to group of learners in various settings and stages of life. Thus defined, curriculum needs serious consideration and careful development as part of all new policy initiatives.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg 2002) addressing stakeholders in both North and South, asked that "we assume a collective responsibility to advance and strengthen the interdependence and mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable development – economic development, social development and environmental protection – at local, national, regional and global levels (*Declaration*, p.1)".<sup>12</sup>

The environmental component relative to economic and social development, seems to be grossly neglected. As Elinor Ostrom points out for sustainable development to take place at the

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<sup>11</sup> IDS News, n.º 136, October 2004. Cf.: <http://www.ids.ac.uk/>

<sup>12</sup> See footnotes 6 and 7

local level, individuals must “have developed relatively accurate mental models of how the biophysical system itself operates (Ostrom 2005, chapter 9, p. 37).” Some attempts have been made to develop materials for use by adult literacy workers for developing basic scientific understandings, but these materials have not been put to any use. Thomas and Kondo have offered simple ideas about environment, health, agriculture, and energy for use of adult educators and literacy workers (Thomas and Kondo, 1978; Singh, 2002). Bhola has detailed a possible curriculum including four content areas for trainers of field workers: (1) Know Your Land and People; (2) Your Self, Body, Mind and Soul; (3) Livelihood for All; and (4) Science in Our Daily Lives (Bhola, 1999). These ideas, of course, will have to be adapted to the ethnic norms of communities and reconciled with traditional knowledge (Bhola, 2002*b*).

### ***Media and materials***

In the cities and townships of the Third World, TV and radio broadcasts are freely entering the homes of those who can afford them, while compact discs and tapes are ubiquitous. But these media are inaccessible to the very poor. The messages carried in and over these media promote fantasy rather than awareness; advertisements that sell rather than information that educates. The traditional media of communities have either been co-opted by the new media or pushed aside. The situation is equally bad when it comes to instructional materials for adult literacy and sustainable development. Educational TV and radio are nearly non-existent. Hours set aside for educational purposes on state broadcasting facilities have all disappeared.

Book publication to serve the needs of adult learners in the developing world is at a dismal level. There is very little available for adults to read, especially when it comes to scientific topics such as ecology, environment, health and HIV/AIDS. Most learners have to be satisfied with whatever little has been produced within the education projects themselves. Too often it is a literacy primer and a couple of graded readers to follow up on the primer.

***Teaching-learning encounters***

Teaching-learning encounters at the field level will remain the most important components in promoting adult literacy for sustainable development. These encounters could involve a literacy teacher and/or an extension worker interacting with an individual learner or talking to a family or a group, in either an informal or a more or less formal setting. In some rare settings a virtual encounter may be involved, that is, teaching-learning may take place through radio, TV or the internet.

As a general principle, teaching-learning in all these settings should be participatory. And in group settings, the Reflect Methodology (Archer and Cottingham, 1996) may be useful to pursue. Where an adult literacy worker (or an adult educator) is working together with a specialist (such as a health worker or a water development engineer), some time and effort should have been spent in advance on team building between facilitators.

Participatory approaches do not take place in a vacuum but around the core of some knowledge, attitudes and skills that need to be communicated. Before getting into the participatory process, the educators' team must have completed the "didactic process" of clarifying amongst themselves the general objectives of the exercise and the specific information and skills that they would want to communicate. It may seem contradictory to use the "didactic process" as a springboard for the "participative process". But in fact it is not. Participation is not another name for sharing each other's ignorance. New knowledge, attitudes, and skills from the outside will, of course, have to be connected with people's lives, critiqued, made relevant, adapted and re-invented in local settings and made congenial to multiple identities.

***Training and orientation for capacity building.***

Building understandings and capacities among teachers, extension workers, trainers and other stakeholders at the various levels of the system of adult literacy for sustainable development is an obvious necessity. Over the years, perhaps, special institutional arrange-

ments may come to be established for the training of community development specialists, micro-economic analysts, adult literacy workers, adult educators, water development specialists, women's empowerment specialists, and so on. However, in the meantime, training and orientation of functionaries at the district, and community levels and of facilitators at the field level will have to be designed, and conducted *within* the systems of adult literacy for sustainable development.

Multiplier models of training will have to be used. People at the highest levels of the system (for example, UNESCO personnel and officials in national ministries and directorates of adult education and adult literacy should get proper orientation. Each and every training programme at the national, provincial, district, and community levels) should be based on a well written and usable mother manual, including detailed instructions on how to adapt the mother manual to each different context of communities.

### ***Word-to-work transition or post-literacy***

President Nyerere of Tanzania had remarked that "Education is Development". While sustainable development is going to involve strategies that are both structural and instructional, the instructional is most important since the ability to understand and deal with structures is in itself a process of education. Again, while designing strategies for joining adult literacy with sustainable development, planners and practitioners should think about word-to-work transition and carefully plan for post-literacy activities both instructional and developmental.

### ***Monitoring and evaluation***

A Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) component is absolutely essential for a fully functional implementation system. The main functions of M&E are: to make continuous checks on policy and planning; to register changes in programming, curriculum development and training protocols; and most importantly to conduct both formative evaluation of continuous performance of

the system, and summative evaluation at the end of projects and programme cycles.

Both of the two mutually integrated systems – the adult literacy system and the sustainable development system – should be reflected in the M&E system. This would mean that indicators chosen for inclusion in the M&E would cover: (1) indicators of literacy enrollments, distributions and achievement, (2) indicators of subject-matter knowledge, attitudes and skills for actualizing sustainable development (e.g., water cycle, habits of material consumption, knowledge about HIV/AIDS, etc.); and (3) indicators of effects to the utilization of learning in the world surrounding the individual learners. Indicators may relate to individuals, their families, groups, communities and sub-cultures, and institutions.

Some of the indicators will be included to suit the needs of international data-sets kept by UNESCO and other United Nations agencies. Most of the indicators will be selected at the national level and then adapted at the sub-regional or provincial levels – seeking equivalence without compromising initial intent. The creation of suitable instruments for observation, interviewing and achievement testing will have to be assigned to provincial or district levels depending upon contexts and conditions in each country. Standardization of data for comparisons across genders, social classes, districts, and nations will be complex, but not impossible. To help in interpretation of results, it is necessary to complement an M&E system with an SIM – a set of instructional materials and tests used in generating the numerical data. Stakeholders at various level of the system should be encouraged to learn from the data collected by them and make use of that data for making informed decisions at their levels. This is necessary for creating a “culture of information” within the overall project of adult literacy for sustainable development (Bhola 1995*b*; 2003*a*; 2005).

### ***Professional support system***

A system for implementation of a policy can never be completely self-sufficient. It will have to depend on an extensive “professional support system” spread within a particular nation and perhaps across the world. It will require help from basic and applied researchers, R&D (research and development) institutions, training and orientation institutions for the preparation of extension workers, and media institutions to disseminate knowledge and mobilize peoples' interest. The context will determine what support should be needed and how the various agents and agencies should be networked.

In putting adult literacy in the service of sustainable development, we had talked of two major tasks: (1) imagining a future system of adult literacy provision to support sustainable development; and describing the existing system of adult literacy on which a future system must be built; and (2) developing a set of concrete actions to install the imagined system in the real context of our world of action. Having dealt with the first task, we now move to the second task of implementing change on the ground.

### **Approximating to the imagined system in particular contexts**

Common sense joined with experience can work quite well in planning for implementation. But when common sense is informed by theory, planning for implementation can become more effective and efficient. A field-tested model for implementation based on systems theory is the CLER (Configurations-Linkages-Environment-Resources) model, elaborated below (Bhola, 1988).

The first step in the use of the CLER model is that the planning agent or the agency seeking change, together with the objective of change and the adopter(s) of change, should be seen as an ensemble of three entities engaged in a multiple dialectical relationship. The three entities can be summarized as follows:

(P)	(O)	(A)
<p>The cluster of configurations acting as the <b>PLANNER SYSTEM</b></p>	<p><b>OBJECTIVES</b> as stated in context of the overall project of Adult Literacy for Sustainable Development</p>	<p>The cluster of configurations acting as the <b>ADOPTER SYSTEM</b> (or the beneficiaries)</p>

### **Starting with objectives**

For the overall system of adult literacy for sustainable development, adult literacy objectives will be intermediate and instrumental, while the objectives for sustainable development will be summative and substantive. Both sets of objectives may have to be set, but the two must not be confused. Objectives for adult literacy in this setting are generic: to teach literacy to future beneficiaries so that they can join the print culture and in the process improve their cognitive processing of information about the world around them. Those who acquire literacy do not just read, they “read something”. In this case, they will read about basic ideas concerning environment, ecological balance, air pollution, the role of forests, the consequences of desertification., and other such matters. They will learn about the relationship between material consumption and the health of their small patch of land on the Planet Earth. This means that in this context, adult literacy will include a “scientific literacy” component at its core.

### ***Selecting and sequencing objectives***

In policy proclamations, all policy objectives may be listed as if all are of equal value. However, while considering implementation (planning and actualization of objectives) in context, some objectives may have a high priority, and others may be important because they can act as the thin end of the wedge and play a generative role in the tranformational processes. The availability

of resources may decide how many objectives could be handled within a particular region during a particular time period. The sequencing of content will of course have to be integrated with the sequence of teaching the language of literacy.

***Elaborating the planner system as an ensemble of configurations***

The planner system in the ensemble presented above will include members of the power elite and prominent decision makers, organized interest groups, informal social organizations, formal institutions, communities and sub-cultures. It should be noted that this ensemble of configurations will not emerge independently of the objectives, but will be determined by the objectives. If the objectives include work related to HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, relevant configurations from the health sector and others associated with this work will necessarily be part of the collective. If objectives also include improvement of livelihoods, the collective of social configurations would reflect that interest.

Having listed these social configurations, we should go on to develop a “socio-gram”, i.e. a visual representation of relationships between and among the various configurations. Linkages both formal and informal should be identified and indicated, as should the availability of resources within the various configurations or accessible by them. These resources may consist of concrete things such as money, material or personnel, or less tangible elements such as concepts, influence, institutional capacities and time. Finally, attention should be paid to the environment, the ultimate configuration, which will include contexts and conditions.

***The adopter (beneficiary) system elaborated***

The adopter system could be defined by a geographical region, or by a social category such as farmers, workers, women, the poor, or disadvantaged groups targeted for affirmative action (such as the scheduled castes and tribes in India, and various ethnic minorities

in the United States). As potential beneficiaries they could also be addressed as individuals, groups, institutions or sub-cultures. As in the case of the planner system, a socio-gram of the adopter system should be developed. An analysis of linkages, of resource availabilities, and environment should also be undertaken.

### **Inventing implementation scenarios and strategies: thinking with CLER**

With the elaborations of P, O, and A in hand, we should look at these three parts in conjunction, and look for openings and opportunities for possible interventions to move toward the objectives. Planned change does not lend itself to formulas. Strategic imagination and collaborative thinking are what is needed in writing scenarios of implementing change based on reflection of the multiple dialectics among and between P, O, and A.

The CLER Model is, of course, applicable at all the various levels of the system of adult literacy for poverty reduction and sustainable development. System boundaries, perspectives and indeed the scope of interventions to be made will change as we move from the national level down to the provincial, district, community and group levels. At the national level, all of the eleven components of a fully-functional system (of adult literacy for poverty reduction and sustainable development) may be involved: articulation of ideology, choice of a paradigm of poverty reduction, definition of sustainable development in the context of a nation, policies and processes of mobilization, building or rebuilding of social institutions, and invention of new roles for a new national project. Decisions may also be made about a core curriculum, and the language or languages of adult literacy as also the basic list of indicators that must be used. Decisions will also have to be made about building training and M&E systems. Last but not the least, obligations of the provincial, district, and community level agents will be clearly defined.

At the provincial or district levels, the systems perspective, as embedded in the CLER Model, could be most useful in

examining regional realities of subcultures and languages, studying variations of socio-economic conditions and identifying pockets of poverty and disadvantage across the regions. Curriculum development and assessment of needs of typical populations also seem to belong to this level of the system. Actual production of materials on topics such as the environment, HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis may be needed. TV and radio programmes and internet and computer centres may also be handled at this level. This is also the level where provincial M&E systems should be designed and established. Finally, provincial and district levels will have to undertake responsibility for capacity building for all professionals – particularly training and M&E specialists. To reach down into the communities and learner centers multiplier training models will have to be developed.

At the community level, thinking with the CLER model could enable community development workers and members of the community to understand the opposites of cooperation and conflict existing in the community and to help identify leaders who could bring the community together to share common goals. Communities could understand the need for developing resources from within as well as ways of organizing resources from outside. They could ensure that the educators and extension workers coming from outside are harmonizing their work at the community level.

Finally, at the learner group level, thinking with CLER could enable the facilitator to understand the problems that learners will bring to class with them, arising from status, age, gender, competing obligations, ill-health, fatigue, personal hurts and grief that will inhibit individual and group learning. These understanding could then be helpful in developing motivational strategies for learners. A quick common-sense use of CLER could also give insights about what is possible and what is not, regarding poverty reduction and sustainable development in the community. This should then enable the facilitators to gear the curriculum and instructional materials developed in the district or at the provincial level to the realities of individual learners and their families.

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# **LUGGAGE FOR A JOURNEY**

## **From Functional Literacy and Development to Integral Literacy and Sustainable Development**

Sofía Valdivielso Gómez

Translated from the Spanish by Peter Whiting with research  
assistance from Peter Unkart

## INTRODUCTION

*There is no greater mistake than the supposition that true originality is a mere matter of impulse or inspiration. To originate is carefully, patiently and understandingly to combine.*

Edgar A. Poe

I took the title of this work<sup>1</sup> from the old saying “*para este viaje no se necesitan alforjas*” [for this journey you do not need any luggage]. I have always heard this echoed by people who reject theory and extol the obvious merits of “common sense”. This rejection of theory is frequently apparent in technical thinking, permeated by a flat vision of the world, where only what can be measured, touched or weighed is considered real and which fundamentally discards whatever cannot be apprehended by instruments of measurement.

My title plays on the traditional meaning of the phrase while at the same time suggesting the opposite, namely, that in order to undertake this particular journey I have indeed needed “luggage”, which has been of different kinds. The luggage I have taken on my journey has consisted in the writings and theories that have appeared in the areas of literacy and development, amongst others. These writings and theories have not appeared out of nowhere, but within contexts, which in turn are contained within broader contexts.

Over the last thirty years tons of documents have been issued on the subjects of literacy and development in their different acceptations, such as instrumental, functional, cultural or economic. This output has been produced in two different contexts. One is that of the major intergovernmental conferences organized by the United Nations – and more specifically by UNESCO – which have tried to make governments and societies aware of the vast numbers of individuals who experience difficulties adapting to present-day societies. The other context

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<sup>1</sup> “*Alforjas para un viaje*” in the original Spanish

is that of the academic world, where an effort is made to attach significance to this phenomenon and to understand its nature.

If we look at both these contexts and the chorus of opinions represented in each of them, it soon becomes clear that the traditional definitions of the concepts of “literacy” and “development” are very restrictive. With regard to the concept of “literacy”, for example, the only skills taken into account have been those required to “function” in present-day societies. The lack or otherwise of these skills is the main indicator according to which the social importance of this phenomenon has been gauged. Any individual showing any difficulty in the handling of these skills has been labelled as a “functional illiterate”. If instead of considering only instrumental capacities, however, we extend the concept further to subjective and inter-subjective skills, the picture that emerges is very different. If these other skills related to subjective and cultural backgrounds, however, are ignored, then all those defined as “illiterates” will be looked upon as incapable. The same goes for the concept of “development”, which is traditionally restricted to its economic dimension.

If we adopt an integral approach to literacy instead, human beings are shown as complex and multidimensional, while the functional approach is criticized as being linear, simplistic and reductionist. Functionalist theories have tended to favour the construction of a form of reality that is unidimensional. According to the conceptualization of integral literacy, on the other hand, the aim is to go further and, without denying that functional capacities or economic development are necessary, it is considered that there are other domains and other skills which are just as important as the functional for living in present-day societies. According to this view, reality is multidimensional and complex, and any attempt to deal with the problem must take account of this complexity, so as to reach beyond the mere mastery or lack of specific abilities.

This study tries to construct the meaning of integral literacy by starting from the assumption that literacy and development are complex phenomena and that understanding

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them in their totality implies adopting an approach that takes account of this complexity. Integral literacy can help us understand that we human beings all share the same fate and that this tiny planet, located in one of the suburbs of the known universe, will be able to survive only if it makes room for each and every one of us and, moreover, manages to do so sustainably.

Chapter one offers an overview of past theories and research concerning literacy and development, and concludes by looking at some of the limitations inherent in that type of conceptual approach and research.

In chapter two, we consider what, in my judgment, are two very important dimensions that we need to take account of when dealing with the processes of literacy and development, which were absent in the views described in chapter one, namely individual consciousness and gender. These two new dimensions – added to those which are traditionally considered – are essential if we are to apprehend the meaning of integral literacy. This is the theme of chapter three. Here I look at what is known as an “all-quadrant, all-level” model, which was devised by the author Ken Wilber. This starts from the premise that reality – any reality – is made up not of parts on the one hand and wholes on the other, but that everything that exists – whether an object, a subject or a thought – is at the same time a whole in itself and part of a greater whole. In other words, reality is made up of wholes which are at the same time parts. These wholes/parts, in turn, are characterized by four dimensions: intentional, behavioural, cultural and social.

Chapter four concludes the study and applies the Wilber model to build up the concept of “integral literacy”, while offering some methodological guidelines on how to go about this task.

## **Chapter 1**

### **VIEWS ON LITERACY AND DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter begins with an analysis of the concepts of “literacy” and “development” looked at from two different points of view. Firstly we track the way they have evolved through what we might call the “institutional” or “governmental” approach, whose leading proponent is UNESCO. This approach has played an important role in drawing the attention of governments to the theme. Then I take a look at the academic approach, which is more that of universities and research institutes. While the institutional approach is fairly uniform, though evolving gradually over time, the same cannot be said of the academic approach, which has been made up of a variety of opinions right from the start. According to this scenario, the definition we arrive at will depend on the theoretical perspective in which we place ourselves and on the notion of culture we assume. In other words, there is no consensus where the definition of these concepts is concerned, and hence none regarding their delimitation or measurement, as we shall see below.

#### **The evolving concepts of “literacy” and “development”**

As I explained earlier, when we analyse these concepts we come across two types of approach: one governmental, generally propounded by the United Nations through international conferences, and the other more academic, based on the input of theoretical research. The former has traditionally been dominated by the developmentalist view, according to which literacy has been understood as a tool needed for development,

rather like a technique that we decide what to do with once we have acquired it. In the latter approach, we find a variety of views and definitions which depend on the theoretical context on the basis of which the phenomenon is analysed.

These approaches interpermeate and influence each other. Thus, if we examine the series of definitions put forward at international conferences, we can see that they are influenced by theoretical constructs emanating from more academic circles. For instance, if we compare the documents produced by these conferences, we can see quite clearly how the definition and understanding of the phenomenon of literacy has evolved over time. We may observe how literacy is perceived in the early conferences: on the one hand, as something which people either have or do not have, independently of the cultural context in which they live; on the other hand, as a tool required for the improvement of employment and productivity. The later conferences, however, end up assuming that literacy can be neither understood nor measured outside such contexts and cannot be reduced to its instrumental aspects. At the same time, the academic approach tends to be permeated by the concepts and definitions that emerge from the international conferences.

It may be said that the same applies to the concept of “development”. This has been evolving from a monolithic vision, related solely to economic variables, towards a more complex understanding which, without denying the economic dimension, takes account of other factors, more closely related to local contexts and to the huge diversity we find in each of these.

Both concepts, “literacy” and “development”, have been evolving in parallel from unilinear towards more multilinear and complex perceptions. Some three or four decades ago, we used to talk about “literacy” and “development” in the singular. There was only one sort of literacy based on technical factors and one sort of development based on economic factors. We now tend to refer to both concepts in the plural; so that we have, for instance, “cultural literacy”, “digital literacy”, “emotional literacy” or “functional literacy”. Similarly we talk about different types of

development, such as “exogenous development”, “endogenous development”, “sustainable development”, “cultural development”, “industrial development”, “capital development” or “market development”. We even talk of cognitive, intellectual or emotional development. We have discovered diversity and we have incorporated it in our theory and in our practice. Differentiation has enabled us to achieve major advances in each and every discipline. Rather the danger at present is becoming lost in a welter of fragments.

What we must do now is look for a cement to glue these fragments together into a more holistic view of reality which, insofar as it incorporates all the fragments, endeavours to go beyond and encourages us to devote more thought to what makes us more united, more equal, more human and in the end more fraternal.

### ***Governmental and institutional views***

From its beginnings, the United Nations organization expressed the conviction that education is one of the basic pillars on which modern societies rest. UNESCO, as a specialized agency of the United Nations, was created for the purpose of rendering the right to education universal.

At this juncture, with the hindsight of more than half a century of history, it is safe to say that, while we have covered a fair amount of ground, we are still far from being able to state that this right has been made universal. There are still striking differences between rich and poor countries, as well as within countries, since there is a clear gap between those who are able to exercise their right to education and those who are not.

Over the last five decades, UNESCO has organized five international conferences expressly dedicated to Adult Education (for which we may use the abbreviation AE), in addition to promoting and participating in other activities connected with the same subject. I shall proceed to review each of these events individually, concentrating chiefly on the

concept of “adult education” in general and on that of “literacy” more specifically.

Our journey through these conferences begins in Ellsinore, where the First International Conference on Adult Education took place in 1949, and ends in Germany, in the Hanseatic City of Hamburg, which hosted the Fifth International Conference in July 1997. Between these two end points we shall add in a few stopovers: Montreal, 1960; Tehran, 1965; Tokyo, 1972; Persepolis, 1975; Nairobi, 1976 and Paris, 1985. Each of these cities was the scene of international activities of great significance for the advancement and understanding of adult education and literacy.

*Elsinore, 1949*

Elsinore, a small town in Denmark, is where the First International Conference on Adult Education was held. As was to be expected, discussions at the conference revolved around the role AE should play in the full development of peoples and the strengthening of positive relations between them. It was recognized that literacy was part of adult education but, given its extension and complexity, it was decided to exclude it from consideration. Thus in the introduction to the conference document it was stated that:

“The campaign against illiteracy is theoretically a part of adult education in the same way as introduction to the arts or economic and social training are. But the teaching of literacy has so wide a scope and raises such specialized problems that UNESCO prefers to treat it as part of the fundamental education field, closely related to but distinguishable from adult education. This problem, then, will not be studied; similarly, traditional school teaching and formal training in technical skills are omitted” (UNESCO, 1949)

Few of the countries referred to at the time as “underdeveloped” in fact attended the conference. Their absence was openly reflected in the actual text of the declaration, which

is quite ethnocentric regarding matters such as the concept of “development”. The final conclusions referred explicitly to the chaos prevailing in Europe, to the wounds opened up by world confrontation and to how AE could be a tool for rebuilding trust among peoples.

*Montreal, 1960*

The Second International Conference on Adult Education was held in Montreal in August 1960. The theme of the conference was: “*Adult education in a changing world*”, and it gave the specialists meeting there an opportunity to review the development of AE over the previous decade and to make plans for meeting future requirements.

Being aware of the many changes undergone by human kind (including technological development, the growth of the world’s population, the emergence of new States, the exacerbation of nationalisms, the development of towns as major urban nuclei, the development of large-scale mass communication media, confrontation between countries, or the dangers to survival arising from the potential for destruction accumulated over the previous decade), the conference focused on the need for all countries in the world to *learn* to coexist peacefully. Thus “learning” became the keyword of the meeting.

Literacy was still left out of the debate on adult education, although two references were made to it in the conference document. In the section concerning the organization and structure of adult education, the conference proposed organizing regional seminars on adult education and literacy:

“The Conference proposes that within the next two years UNESCO hold, in Latin America, Asia and Africa, regional seminars of countries having common problems in regard to Adult Education in general, and literacy in particular, so that in these meetings practical solutions for raising the cultural level of the said regions may be studied and agreed upon” (UNESCO, 1960).

It was also proposed that a special fund should be created to combat illiteracy and it was recommended that the fund should be set up in UNESCO:

“Action should be taken to create within the competent organizations of the United Nations, including UNESCO, a special fund, derived from increased contributions from Member States, for the specific purpose of eliminating illiteracy in the developing and new independent countries” (UNESCO, 1960).

At that time it was thought that literacy presented a problem only for “underdeveloped countries”. In Western countries the belief prevailed that with access to basic education for the whole population, the problem of literacy, if it existed at all, was only residual, that is to say, restricted to elderly sectors of the population which had not had the opportunity to attend school when they were children. It was thought therefore that the problem would resolve itself when the members of that group of the population died. The conclusion was that if countries wished to emerge from underdevelopment, they needed to make their populations literate. It was assumed, too, that a suitable model for development was the Western model and that therefore literacy should be conducted in the languages of the former colonial powers (even though these were not physically present) and not in local languages.

*Teheran, 1965*

Once it was assumed that development was not possible unless supported by a literate population, at the 13th meeting of its General Conference, held in Paris in 1964, UNESCO convened a World Congress of Ministers of Education on the “*Eradication of Illiteracy*”.

This Congress was held in Teheran in September 1965. It concluded that, far from being an end in itself, functional literacy should be designed to prepare man to perform a social, civic and economic function that goes well beyond the limits of rudimentary literacy, reduced to the teaching of reading and

writing. Learning to read and write should be an opportunity to acquire knowledge that can be used for an immediate improvement in the standard of living: reading and writing must lead not only to general and basic knowledge but also to preparation for work, an increase in productivity and a broader participation in civic life, a better understanding of the surrounding world and finally must facilitate access to the store of human culture.

This definition places literacy in a development context that is not restricted to economic aspects. For the first time it opens up to civic considerations, the exercise of citizenship, culture and international understanding. In the general conclusions of the conference, however, more specifically under section 1.2, this view is contradicted by the statement to the effect that adult education, as an essential element of general development, must be closely linked to economic and social priorities, as well as to current and future labour requirements.

In 1967, UNESCO launched the Experimental World Literacy Programme, better known by its abbreviation EWLP, organizing it around the definition arrived at two years earlier in Teheran.

In the 1970s, the concept was disseminated worldwide by various international agencies, chiefly UNESCO. By the end of that decade, it was clear in view of the expansion of adult education that the subject of education could no longer be restricted to the area of schooling alone. It should be remembered that in the 1960s the approach to education was decisively influenced by the theory of human capital, which considered an investment in education to be profitable in the longer term. That theory was used to justify the expansion which took place in education in that period.

A hint of this approach was already apparent at the Montreal conference, but it was voiced explicitly at the Teheran Congress. It was considered that literacy was the key that would enable developing countries to access a standard equivalent to that of the more advanced countries.

*Tokyo, 1972*

The Third International Conference on Adult Education was held in Tokyo in August 1972 for the following purpose: to examine the trends in adult education during the last decade; to consider the functions of adult education in the context of life-long education; and to review the strategies of educational development in respect of adult education. For the first time, consideration was given to problems arising from a deteriorating environment due to the uncontrolled development over the foregoing decade. At the same time, the presence of new States, which had already attended the previous conference, began to make an impact, which gave rise to a need to address the problems of minority cultures.

Literacy was recognized as a basic component of adult education. Thus, recommendation 1 concerning national policies for adult education insisted that Member States should take into account the following factors, amongst others:

“[...] public access to adult education including literacy should be expanded so as to provide learning opportunities for all citizens without regard to race, colour, creed, sex, age, social position or educational level” (UNESCO, 1972).

The concept of “functional literacy” which had emerged in Tehran was adopted by the conference, which recommended to Member States that:

“[...] in addition to its emphasis on socio-economic development, functional literacy should also aim at the awakening of social awareness among illiterate adults so that they may become active agents in the building of a new and better society” (UNESCO, 1972).

Since the processes of decolonization were in full swing at the time of the conference and since the level of illiteracy in the former colonies was very high, the conference in recommendation No.7 emphasized:

“[...] that decolonization will never fully attain its aim if a third of mankind, being illiterate, not only remains a frustrated onlooker of the development of the other two-thirds, but plays no part in the pursuit of progress and in the enjoyment of the benefits of universal progress” (UNESCO, 1972).

It was in Tokyo that for the first time a recommendation (No. 16) was entirely devoted to international action against illiteracy. Developmentalist views continued to hold sway at the time and all recommendations concerning literacy took that bias into account.

#### *Persepolis, 1975*

In September 1975, an International Symposium for Literacy was held in Persepolis with the aim of assessing the results of literacy policies initiated in the previous decade.

Functionalist ideas – very much in vogue in the 1970s – began to be criticized by various circles, who suggested that after a decade of dominating literacy programmes they had not produced the expected results. Thus, the *Declaration of Persepolis* began by stating that:

“The number of illiterates is constantly growing. This reflects the failure of development promises that are indifferent to man and to the satisfaction of his basic needs” (UNESCO, 1975).

This failure opened the way to other views on literacy, which were more critical, seeing it not so much as a process of adaptation but as the acquisition of consciousness, the finality of which was to free participants and to transform the reality in which they live. We may read in the *Declaration of Persepolis*:

“Literacy work, like education in general, is a political act. It is not neutral, for the act of revealing social reality in order to transform it, or of concealing it in order to preserve it, is political” (UNESCO, 1975).

These new ideas, derived from the movements in favour of mass education, did not, however, abandon the field of literacy. Ever since Persepolis they have been part of the debate, in terms of action as well as conceptualization and research. At the Persepolis symposium, literacy began to be seen not so much as an instrument of development but rather as a fundamental human right. The Declaration is entirely imbued with this critical approach. The symposium is given an important place in this account mainly for two reasons: firstly, because it opened the way to more critical views and therefore marked a turning point in the theoretical outlook; secondly, because it was the first to institute 8 September as International Literacy Day.

The meeting recognized that literacy is not an end in itself, but a human right which should aim to develop a critical consciousness allowing individuals to be active protagonists in the processes of social change. In this sense literacy is considered to be:

“Not just the process of learning the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, but a contribution to the liberation of man and to his full development. Thus conceived, literacy creates the conditions for the acquisition of a critical consciousness of the contradictions of society in which man lives and of its aims; it also stimulates initiative and his participation in the creation of projects capable of acting upon the world, of transforming it, and of defining the aims of an authentic human development. It should open the way to a mastery of techniques and human relations. Literacy is not an end in itself. It is a fundamental human right” (UNESCO, 1975).

The *Declaration of Persepolis* goes beyond the merely functional concept and includes cultural and personal dimensions. Literacy ceases to be understood just as a means of learning how to do and begins to be seen also as a tool in the process of learning to be. The instrumental dimension is not rejected, but it is recognized that experience has shown that

working only in that dimension can lead to alienation instead of social and cultural integration.

*Nairobi, 1976*

In Nairobi, where the 19th meeting of the UNESCO General Conference was held in November 1976, adult education was singled out for attention when a recommendation was approved regarding the development of this area of education. The recommendation sets forth a number of principles dealing with definition, objectives and strategy, content, methods and means, structures, training of persons, relations between adult education and youth and between adult education and work, management, administration and international cooperation. The meeting produced the definition of adult education which achieved the greatest international consensus:

“The term ‘adult education’ denotes the entire body of organized educational processes, whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adult by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications, or turn them in a new direction and bring about changes in their attitudes or behavior in the twofold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development; adult education, however, must not be considered as an entity in itself, it is a subdivision, and a integral part of, a global scheme for life-long education and learning” (UNESCO, 1976).

Following the guidelines approved in Persepolis, this definition places AE within a broader framework and recognizes that its function should be the full development of human beings and not just the economic development of peoples. Thus, the analytical part of the recommendation introduces the recognition

of different forms of culture, different systems of social organization and separate values in different communities. This denotes progress in terms of the breadth and complexity of the concept. In practice, however, the types of adult education and functional literacy which were adopted in practically all countries were much more restrictive, because they continued to be seen as synonymous with productivity and reduced to their instrumental dimension.

In any case, it is safe to say that at that time the seeds of multiple thinking, of a diversity of contexts and uses of literacy and of different types of development had been sown. It would take a few more years, however, for the concept to explode and for the concept of “literacies” in the plural to be recognized.

The next conference was held in Paris in 1985. One year earlier, something extremely important happened: for the first time, the notion of “sustainable development” began to emerge.

*World Commission on Environment and Development, 1984*

At this stage, it is worth catching a few glimpses of the debate about the concept of “sustainable development”. The World Commission on Environment and Development met for the first time in October 1984 in order to seek replies to an urgent call by the United Nations General Assembly to establish a global agenda for change. The participants started from the assumption that with the resources available mankind could build a more prosperous, more just and more secure future.

The Commission’s activities led in April 1987 to the publication of the report *Our Common Future*, which raises the possibility of achieving economic growth on the basis of policies of sustainability. It expresses the hope of a better future, but without conditions, since it recognizes explicitly that this hope depends on firm political actions allowing the proper management of environmental resources in order to guarantee sustainable human progress and the survival of mankind on earth. According to those who drafted the report, the latter does not claim to predict the future, but rather puts forward an urgent call, in the sense that the time has come to adopt decisions

which can ensure the availability of resources to sustain this generation and following generations. When the Commission was set up in 1983 as a body independent of governments and of the United Nations system itself, the unanimous conviction had already been reached that it was impossible to separate the themes of development and the environment.

The Commission pointed out that many “development” models led to an aggravation of poverty, vulnerability and even to environmental degradation. This new awareness led to a new concept of “development”, namely “sustainable development”, that is to say a form of development which protects human progress in the future.

**Sustainable development**, therefore, refers to the rational use of the natural resources of a place, ensuring that they are not exhausted and that future generations can make use of them in the same way that we do ourselves, that is to say, ensuring that our own basically economic practices do not jeopardize the future of the planet.

The first internationally recognized definition of sustainable development is to be found in the well known *Brundtland Report* (1987), the outcome of the work of the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development created by the United Nations Assembly in 1983. This definition was echoed in Principle 3 of the Rio Declaration (1992): “[...] The right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations”. In other words, the concept of “sustainable development”, while based on a concern for the environment, is not a truly environmental concept but tries to go beyond the view of the environment as a separate aspect of human activity which needs to be preserved. As human beings we are not aloof from the environment; quite on the contrary, we are totally immersed within it, for without it our life would be impossible. The best way of protecting it, therefore, is to take it into account in all the decisions we take.

The concept of “sustainable development” arose as a necessary response to the tremendous problems humanity was

facing at the end of the last century, the effects of which are still felt today. Some of these problems are well known for their direct effects on human health, such as air, water and soil pollution. But there are others that are more subtle and more difficult to detect, such as the loss of biodiversity or the imbalance in the carbon cycle. We have understood that there are limits to the extent to which our earth can assimilate our rubbish and put up with our abuses. In the end we have understood that if we want to continue enjoying life, we must be careful of the way we use the resources that sustain it.

The report urges governments to ensure that their agencies act responsibly, that is to say, that they support development that is economically and ecologically sustainable. They should also reinforce the standing of their bodies in charge of environmental monitoring. Lastly, the report expresses a call to action. It recalls that at the beginning of the twentieth century neither humankind nor human technology had the capacity to upset planetary systems. By the end of the century, they had acquired this power. Furthermore, many undesired changes have occurred in the atmosphere, the soil, water, plants, animals and in relations between them. It is emphasized that the time has come to break with past patterns. Any efforts to maintain social and ecological stability through antiquated development and environmental protection schemes will only increase instability. Security is to be sought in change. Above all, the Commission addresses persons of all countries and all conditions. The changes in human attitudes it calls for require vast campaigns of education, debate and public participation. Hence the insistence on the importance of education to achieve the objectives of sustainable development.

We have spent more than three decades debating the subject, yet we cannot state confidently that we have achieved the objectives, since there are still countries where it is not recognized that industrialization without limits has produced more problems than it has solved; there are still governments which are not prepared to reduce their emissions of polluting gases and which are unable to understand that the environment

is not confined by frontiers. Nevertheless, it is possible to say that, thanks to the awareness of the problems and social pressure, attitudes are starting to change in much of public opinion, which in recent years has begun to be more active in terms of disseminating new approaches to these subjects. An increasing number of people are beginning to understand more and more clearly that the disregard for our biological nature has produced too many imbalances in the ecosystem which sustains us and, even though very slowly, this new attitude has been causing us to change some of our consumption habits.

*Paris, 1985*

As was the case for previous conferences, the Paris mandate was to examine, inter alia, the development of adult education since 1972, its contribution to the solution of some of the major problems of the contemporary world, the priorities of educational activities aimed at enhancing the active participation of adults in economic, social and cultural life, and the means for international and regional cooperation to achieve an improvement in adult education.

In the documents produced by the conference, it is possible to detect two ways of understanding adult education and, by extension, literacy. The functionalist approach, which considers literacy as an instrument of adaptation, is clearly present in some paragraphs, though alongside the critical approach, which understands adult education as an agent of transformation and change.

In its references to functional illiteracy in absolute terms, the conference, in its final report, recommends that Member States adopt a civilizational concept of literacy:

“[...] the aim of which is to raise the individual to an educational and cultural level that enables him to acquire the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic and to participate in the development of his society and the renewal of its structures, so that he will have the social and cultural incentives to go

on learning and to improve the quality of life” (UNESCO, 1985).

It was in Paris that the concept of “literacy” was extended beyond its functional aspect and came to add on a cultural dimension. In this sense, it is recommended to Member States:

“[...] to adapt the concept of literacy to the purpose of particular actions, and accordingly to distinguish between:

- a) functional literacy, which, in addition to inculcating learning skills, should help workers to achieve greater mastery of their occupations, increase their theoretical and practical knowledge, advance in their careers and continue with their education;
- b) social literacy, which should be a means to the acquisition of the tools of further mastery of the written word and pave the way for the integration of the newly literate into their cultural, social and political environments” (UNESCO, 1985).

In this way, literacy is placed in a more comprehensive context and is not restricted solely to its instrumental aspects, or to its economic and productive aspects. This reflects a very substantial advance in the broad understanding of the concept, since the perception was emerging that literacy understood as a technique isolated from any cultural context was not useful, given that there was already sufficient experience to understand that the success or failure of literacy was directed related to the cultural background to which the newly literate belonged. If the backgrounds turned out to be too little motivating for the newly literate, this would lead to a reversal of the literacy process.

That new understanding opened the way for literacy projects and programmes to take account of the important need to work simultaneously with illiterate persons, and within the backgrounds in which such persons live, since it is no use making people literate unless new environments are opened up

that can facilitate the maintenance and subsequent development of the knowledge acquired.

The conference approved a *Declaration on the Right to Learn*. This begins by recognizing that the right to learn is a major challenge for humanity, which may be defined as:

“[...] the right to read and write, the right to question and analyse, the right to imagine and create, the right to read one’s own world and to write history, the right to have access to educational resources, the right to develop individual and collective skills [...]. The right to learn is an indispensable tool for the survival of humanity” (UNESCO, 1985).

The Declaration emphasizes that this right to learn must not be understood only in its functional aspect – as an instrument of economic development – but above all as a universal human right through which, if exercised, human beings may become subjects who create their own history.

In practice, however, the type of functional literacy, which was adopted in practically all countries, was much more restrictive and was limited to the development of skills that were considered necessary for adjusting to the changes of present-day societies. This restrictive outlook was also introduced in the research conducted into this phenomenon. The focus was placed on the need to quantify the number of persons who at the end of the twentieth century were still unable to adapt to changes and to arrive at a definition of what adult persons should know in order to function correctly in these societies.

#### *Hamburg, 1997*

Given the increasing awareness of the impact and interconnectedness of accelerating changes in present-day societies, the topics addressed at the conference were related to all the aspects that make up the modern world and that education could help improve. Ideas regarding the importance of backgrounds, the multiple uses of literacy, the recognition of cultural differences, interculturality and the limitations of developmental

theories were all fully reflected in this conference. In addition, for the first time consideration was given to the responsibility of individuals for their own training.

In the course of discussions, a new type of approach began to emerge, which in the view of some was a new paradigm, based on the search for new ways of integrating perspectives which in Paris appeared to be opposed. There was an attempt to transcend the functionalist and critical approaches and, without denying them, to merge them into a new and broader outlook.

Hamburg was situated at the emergence of a more inclusive view of adult education, understanding it as part of a process that covers the whole of life, whose objectives are directed at promoting the learning of persons and communities, fostering dialogue between different cultures, respecting diversity and cultural difference, and thereby contributing to a real culture of peace.

The Declaration emphasizes that development is meant to serve human beings and not the other way round. In paragraph 1, it states that:

“[...] only human-centred development and a participatory society based on the full respect of human rights will lead to sustainable and equitable development” (UNESCO, 1997).

The theme of the conference was: “*Lifelong learning: A right, a tool, an enjoyment and a shared responsibility*”. The concept of “lifelong learning” comes from the report by Jacques Delors entitled *Learning: The Treasure Within*, published by UNESCO in 1996. This report bases its proposals for reform on two principles: on the four pillars of education – namely learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be – and on lifelong learning. These principles place education within an integral perspective, open to the succeeding stages of the life cycle that runs from childhood to life’s end, and promoting an interaction between different fields of knowledge. It focuses more on the processes of learning than on those of

teaching, on the need to build knowledge starting from the previous knowledge acquired by individuals, regardless of age or the space of learning, and on the need to create links between all social sectors and players that can allow the emergence of real societies of learning. This is the spirit both of the *Declaration* and of the *Agenda* issued by the Hamburg Conference. Thus, paragraph 11 of the *Declaration*, on the subject of adult literacy, states that:

“Literacy, broadly conceived as the basic knowledge and skills needed by all in a rapidly changing world, is a fundamental human right. In every society literacy is a necessary skill in itself and one of the foundations of other life skills. There are millions, the majority of whom are women, who lack opportunities to learn or who have insufficient skills to be able to assert this right. The challenge is to enable them to do so. This will often imply the creation of preconditions for learning, through awareness-raising and empowerment. Literacy is also a catalyst for participation in social, cultural, political and economic activities, and for learning throughout life” (UNESCO, 1997).

The view of literacy as a complex phenomenon is clearly expressed in this paragraph: it is no longer seen as an instrument of development, but above all as a universal human right which is needed to exercise all other rights. It extends beyond the technical aspect and becomes a precondition for the enjoyment of citizenship, since the latter can only be exercised on the basis of awareness and empowerment. This implies that literacy has to take account not only of the external dimensions of subjects (the economy and society), but also of their internal dimensions (consciousness and culture).

In Hamburg, an understanding begins to emerge of literacy as a complex phenomenon which goes well beyond mere technique and which sets out with the objective of achieving the full development of human beings, which is why the *Agenda for the Future* drafted by the conference recognizes that:

“Today, there are nearly 1,000 million people who have not acquired literacy skills and there are millions who have been unable to sustain them, even within the most prosperous countries. Everywhere in the world, literacy should be a gateway to fuller participation in social, cultural, political and economic life. Literacy must be relevant to pupil’s socio-economic and cultural contexts. Literacy enables individuals to function effectively in their societies and to fashion and shape them. It is a process in which communities effect their own cultural and social transformations. It must address the needs of both women and men, to enable them to understand the inter-connections between personal, local and global realities” (UNESCO, 1997).

Here we begin to realize the importance of understanding the interconnections between personal, local and global aspects. We begin to understand that for development to be sustainable it must have a human face.

### ***The academic approach***

As we pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, the changes that are occurring in the definition of concepts in governmental conference circles are interrelated with the changes occurring in academic circles and vice versa. We may now undertake an analysis of this theme within this scenario, which should allow us to see how the trends we found in the governmental approach reappear in what we might term the “academic approach”.

If we look at the research conducted in this area, we may distinguish two types of outlook. In the first case, the analytical emphasis is placed on the personal/individual dimension, so that literacy is understood to be something which one either has or does not have. In the other approach, the emphasis is placed on the social dimension and, according to this view, being literate or not depends on the social context and the use that individuals make of literacy. In other words, two approaches and two research models.

The problem just now is that there are people who are convinced that their own line of research is right and that hence all the others are wrong. Fortunately some attempts are also being made to pick out what is best in the different theories and to structure a more holistic view of the subject.

We may now look in more detail at these two ways of conceptualizing and investigating literacy within the general framework of the academic approach.

*Literacy as a personal and individual dimension*

One of the basic assumptions here is that there is something very simple called “literacy”, which is understood as an independent variable which produces effects, which may in turn be investigated from either a personal or a social point of view. This model predominated in the 1960s and 1970s, and is strongly imbued with the functionalist ideas that were current at the time. Most of the articles that follow this approach (Kirsch and Guthrie, 1984; Kirsch and Jungeblut, 1986; Hirsch, 1987; Kirsch, 1990; Venezky, 1990; Campbell, Kirsch and Kolstad, 1992; OECD, 1995, 1997, 2000) portray literacy as a tool which makes it possible – independently of the individuals or the social contexts in which they will interact – to increase cognitive levels and to develop a critical and reflexive way of thinking. From this point of view – biased by an instrumental interpretation – it is assumed that once the technique or skill has been acquired, the use made of it will depend on the physical individuals involved.

Based on this outlook, which emphasizes – not without reason – the need to quantify the problem, to obtain an objective picture of it and to become familiar with its dimensions, various lines of research have evolved over the last decades. Among these lines of research it is worth mentioning that based on test profiles (Kirsch and Jungeblut, 1986; Campbell, Kirsch and Kolstad, 1992), since this was the one adopted by OECD and implemented in more than 20 countries between 1994 and 1998 (OECD, 1995, 1997, 2000).

The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) (1995, 1997, 2000) gives expression to the new ways of interpreting literacy:

“not as a single dimension along which a single cut point or standard can be selected to separate the “literate” from the “illiterate”, but rather as a set of complex information-processing skills that go beyond decoding and comprehending school-like prose materials. (Campbell, Kirsch, Kolstad, 1992)

Apart from the criticisms made of this research based on the hermeneutic paradigm which we shall peruse in the following section, among researchers who share the postulates of the hermeneutic paradigm many of us are willing to recognize at the same time that this research has made some progress with regard to the concept and its measurement. We agree that literacy cannot be understood as something which one either has or does not have. The definition and hence the assessment of literacy has also been adapting to the times. While at first it was considered that a person was literate merely on the basis of his ability to decipher a simple text, nowadays such a person would be relegated to the group which the IALS defines as level one of literacy. The consensus view nowadays is that literacy is a complex process which requires many skills. Its definition and evaluation, therefore, must take account of this complexity.

The fact that different areas are now taken into consideration, as well as different levels within each of those areas, that indirect measures have been abandoned, such as the number of years of schooling, that we have gone beyond a dichotomous approach and that different skills in the handling of information are now differentiated must surely signify progress in relation to earlier research.

If we could retain just the skeleton of this research and build up the various tasks taking account of the cultural contexts in which they are to be implemented, the information we would obtain would be richer and more useful. But we have to bear in mind that we are increasingly living in a “global village” and this

means that all the inhabitants of this village must be able to handle global codes. We must not restrict ourselves to micro-contexts, but we must incorporate these as part of broader outlooks. Quantitative methods are useful in some cases, but qualitative methods are preferable in others. The former place us in general contexts. The data they generate and the information they produce are necessary for political decision-making, which will significantly affect ordinary citizens. This line of research has established clearly that the countries that have achieved the greatest social cohesion are those where the citizens have achieved higher literacy standards. The fact that this is so is the outcome of political decisions taken at State level, which have been decisive in terms of improving the literacy standards of the population as a whole.

Notwithstanding the critical views we shall outline below, it cannot be denied that this quantitative research tool does contribute a wealth of data, which is much more complete and complex than, for instance, other types of research based on simple measurements. The problem resides not so much in the type of image conveyed, but in the belief that this image is the only one there is.

#### *Literacy as a social dimension*

For those who defend this model (Barton, 1990; Fingeret, 1992; Kozol, 1990; Freire and Macedo, 1989; Ayuste, 1990; Street, 1992, Hamilton, 1990, Barton and Hamilton, 1990; Graff, 1997; Druine, 2000; Bernardo, 2000; Valdivielso, 2000), literacy is neither a state, nor a technique, nor a skill, because no one learns to read and write in a vacuum. It is not a question of first acquiring the basics and then, once these are mastered, doing something with them, since the act of learning is a social act, immersed in a social context and imbued with ideological connotations.

The proponents of this model prefer to talk of “literacy practices” and “literacy events” as terms which may be helpful in focusing the subject on the real activities entailed by reading and writing, thereby moving away from some of the stereotypes that appear in current discussions about literacy. Brian Street (1992) over a decade ago proposed referring to “literacies” in a multidimensional and plural sense, rather than “literacy” in a monolithic and singular sense, also as a means of departing from stereotypes.

What is really interesting in this approach is to study how ideas, theories and models are internalized with respect to political processes, identity and literacy. Power conflicts inevitably emerge around literacy practices. And one of these conflicts concerns its definition.

Some also express the view that the quantitative model does not take account of the huge amount of research that invalidates its own assumptions and that in the area of research this model based on direct surveys is overdimensioned:

“More than two decades of critical, empirical, and theoretical work – a significant amount of which focuses on or includes literacy – is neither acknowledged nor allowed to influence the study's design, conduct or reported conclusions.” Graff, H.J. (1997), *The Persisting Power and Costs of the Literacy Myth*, Working Papers on Literacy, The Centre for Literacy, Montreal, p. 3-5

The work lasting over two decades to which Graff refers is the one based on qualitative methods, on anthropological, historical and ethnographic studies concerning literacy, its uses and practices. According to Brian Street (1997), research models based on the contexts in which people live and interact have demonstrated that literacy has many uses and meanings, and that these uses and meanings invariably involve power relations.

We find that the debate about lines of research reveals two different positions which we have already outlined. What is new in the current discussion, according to some authors, is the semantic contamination which has occurred between the

positions. The proponents of quantification have taken from the cultural approach a significant quantity of concepts which, far from helping to clarify the debate, have merely complicated it even further. For example, the definition of the concept of “literacy” used in the research known as the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) and applied between 1994 and 1998 in more than 20 countries of the OECD has many points in common with that advocated from the more social and cultural standpoint:

“[...] this conceptual approach points to the multiplicity of skills that constitute literacy [...] and that no single standard of literacy can be set.” (OECD, 1995: p. 3)

The authors insist on defending the multiplicity and complexity of the concept, so that they establish different fields and scales. They do not refer to literacy any more as if it were something which you either have or do not have, but they portray it as a continuum, so that, from this point of view, nobody can be considered totally literate. What happens in such cases where concepts are appropriated by one of the parties is that it generally leaves the other party without any arguments, obliging them to be very precise in the use of the different terms and to clarify repeatedly that they are not talking about the same thing, even though they may refer to it by the same name. In this respect, John K. Smith refers to a process of “co-option”:

“[...] the crucial terms of ‘new’ vocabularies are skimmed off and parts are woven back into the ‘old’ story, thereby removing much of their threat to the existing vocabulary and leaving the ‘old’ story essentially intact. (Smith, 1993: p. 8).

All this discussion about quantitative and qualitative methods shows how polemical the subject is and how apparently irreconcilable the positivist and critical-interpretative paradigms really are. The former start from the assumption that reality is one and may be observed objectively and adequately represented by means of quantitative methods. The latter start from the premise

that there are many socially constructed realities that have to be studied using qualitative methods, always taking account of the inevitable interaction between observer and observed. If we analyse the arguments and epistemological assumptions of each side, we will find that they are apparently irreconcilable, since it appears that the differences between the two positions are greater than their areas of convergence. One position understands reality as something given and the other as something constructed.

The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) does not take account of the world of intersubjective interactions, which is where our actions acquire significance. Setting in train a statistical machinery of indicators does not offer us any information on the wealth of intersubjective relations and deprives us of the enormous cultural wealth sustained by such practices. By reducing us to a statistical indicator, these methods dehumanize us.

According to this last point of view, a population with a high standard of literacy is the solution to the problems we are currently facing. But this is mistaking the part for the whole. While it is true that a population with a high standard of literacy is positively correlated with employment and, by extension, with levels of well-being, this does not mean that it will always be so.

In recent years and for reasons independent of standards of literacy, hundreds of thousands of people have lost their jobs. Many of these new unemployed are situated on the highest rungs of the literacy ladder and have lost their jobs not because they are unable to adapt to change, but because in fact change is in most cases unpredictable. This unpredictability makes us aware of the level of risk we live with. In this risk society (Beck, 1998), life becomes insecure, amongst other reasons because of the crisis affecting tradition, the resurgence of fundamentalisms and the limited ability of the political authorities to control social and economic transformations, and because of the ecological challenges we have to face. If so, it does not appear very reasonable to restrict learning to a catalogue of instrumental skills defined on the basis of decontextualized situations.

Because problems cannot be tackled in isolation, we have to use multiple perspectives, incorporating cultural traditions and trying to institute an interprofessional dialogue which can help us understand reality and arrive at decisions that take account of the complexity of situations. If the problem we are dealing with is literacy and development, it appears reasonable and necessary to tackle it by starting from what people do in their lives and from there to go on to build new knowledge that will help us not only to understand it better, but more importantly to find new ways of resolving it. These new methods will have to take account inevitably of all objective features as well as subjective and intersubjective aspects.

The Fifth International Conference on Adult Education established clearly that while productivity and economic development are important, they are not exclusively so. Literacy and adult education must also develop a sense of responsibility among individuals and communities; they must promote coexistence, tolerance and the creative and informed participation of the population in the community, whether at local or at global level. In Hamburg, the notion of “adult education” was linked not only to competitiveness, but also – and above all – to such notions as social justice, community development, new technologies, social integration and mutual respect, peace, democracy, risk management, and equality of rights – regardless of the religion, class, gender or ethnic group to which an individual belongs.

The IALS research model has become the dominant model used by the major international agencies – such as OECD and the World Bank – to the exclusion of qualitative research, which the proponents of the model consider subjective and not appropriate for generalization.

### ***The limitations of the two models***

The positivist paradigm considers people as isolated subjects: they only need to be able to cope with any given type of situation. This assumption is derived from a cultural attitude whereby doing things alone is better than doing them collectively. The

researchers who defend this paradigm are not interested in comprehending the world of social interaction or the dynamism that emanates from intersubjective relations. For this reason the measures they propose to overcome the problem of illiteracy invariably concentrate on the individual and on the need to improve his functional competencies, which are related almost exclusively to productivity at work and to consumption.

Those who opt for the critical paradigm consider that functional illiteracy is a problem related not so much to individuals but rather to societies, so that the solution to the problem must also depend on the transformation of societies. This paradigm assumes that reality is much more complex than in the former approach. Certainly it is more wide ranging, since it assumes that the basic abilities which adults need for their own development in present-day societies depend on the context in which they live and interact. Demands do not arise in a vacuum; they respond to a social dynamic. It is the need to understand and transform this social dynamic which leads us to understand that reality is anything but simple, since it is configured on the basis of multiple and complex interrelations.

The debate we are witnessing raises issues such as ethics, emotionality and the construction of personal identity, gender, interculturality, multiculturalism, democracy and sustainable development. How can these dimensions be incorporated in the definition of literacy?

In my opinion, both lines of research suffer from a significant limitation in relation to the subject of individual consciousness, which in turn is intimately connected to the construction of a gender identity; in other words, the manner in which men and women learn and construct meanings does not appear in either of them. Both of them treat gender as a neutral factor.

In the last ten years things have been changing, even though the changes are still superficial. They are more visible because the mindsets of individuals have been evolving and more and more people understand that reality is holistic, and that the different ways of analysing it are relevant but partial, in other words, that the era of fragmentation has yielded a huge store of knowledge and that the problem we need to deal with now is not so much dismantling one or other of the paradigms, but finding a way of integrating the different forms of knowledge within an integral approach which, far from excluding them, will incorporate them within a broader and more ordered vision. Explaining this vision is what I will try to do in the next two chapters.

## **Chapter 2**

### **INCORPORATING THE CONCEPTS OF “GENDER” AND “CONSCIOUSNESS” AS PART OF THE PROCESS OF LITERACY AND FULL DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Introduction**

In order to take on board the critical points of view, we must use criticism as a conceptual tool to enable us to appropriate and to judge the assumptions on which the different lines of research are based and we must then try to reformulate them on a different conceptual plane. To do this we must assume that no social research is neutral, because when it comes to interpreting we are necessarily obliged to select. Knowledge is produced socially and in this process of production various assumptions are selected that respond to the interests and views of the researching circles.

This selection is not always explicit. Many of the contents are present implicitly in the different lines of research. The views and research on literacy and development have tended to leave out the analysis of two dimensions which in recent decades have begun to be indispensable in any research into social reality. The first of these is gender. While the main doubts expressed by the critical paradigm in relation to the positivist approach to functional literacy are based on the fact that the latter takes reality as a neutral factor, the criticism we would make from the point of the view of gender analysis, and which we may direct at both those paradigms, is that they consider gender relations also as a neutral factor. In doing so, they leave out of their analysis at least half the population they are researching.

According to both points of view, women collectively are invariably portrayed as having greater difficulty adapting to the changes that are generated in present-day societies. According to the positivist paradigm, women apparently possess fewer literacy abilities. It does not seem to occur to them that perhaps

this difference in literacy standards is due to the fact that the texts and tests used rest on a deep-seated gender bias and that the reason why women achieve lower marks than men is not due to the fact that they have fewer competencies, but that the competencies measured are essentially male.

Although in the reasoning of cultural literacy the emphasis is placed on the need to start from what people know and how they resolve the problems they face in their daily lives, it still does not take account of the fact that social reality has been constructed mostly by men, and that the codes and strategies which are considered positive and adaptive are also male. They analyse the difficulties women encounter when acquiring particular skills from their dominant position in patriarchal societies, but because they fail to take account of the fact that women do not construct reality on the basis of the same premises as those of men, they fall into the very errors they criticize. At present, we are beginning to witness a more complex approach to gender which, without denying equality between men and women, at the same time incorporates the difference between them.

Incorporating the difference implies being careful to give due attention to the individual dimension, which can only be done through consciousness. We need to go back and reconsider the question of intersubjective relations, including the dimension of individual consciousness, which covers not only the development of intelligence and thought, but also emotional and moral development, amongst others.

These two variables, gender and individual consciousness, let us access reality from a more integral perspective and make it easier for us to understand that the literacy paradigms we have considered so far do not include either. Both paradigms have left out the conscious individual subject and in constructing a generic social subject they have excluded women.

In the previous chapter I introduced the functionalist and cultural approaches to functional literacy. In this chapter I would like to study these two new dimensions, which I consider

essential for apprehending the concept of “integral literacy”, and for achieving sustainable development.

### **Individual consciousness**

Individual consciousness has much to do with our sense of being and existing in the world, which in turn is rooted in our personal identity, which in turn is very closely related to our biographies.

The evolutionary outlook in relation to development is present in many fields of research. We only have to look at studies on the development of intelligence (Piaget), moral thought (Kohlberg, Gilligan), or personality (analytical theories), etc. All these approaches have in common the idea of directionality, that is, of a sequence of states or stages, moving towards an objective, where each of the stages possesses its own characteristics.

Those theories also agree that the transition from one stage to another occurs as a result of a crisis occurring in existing structures, which at some given moment cease to be functional in terms of offering an understanding of the question of being and existing in the world. This dysfunction is what leads to the crises and it is the need to resolve them that facilitates the emergence of new structures which appear as more functional than the previous ones. The protagonist in the process is always the individual subject; in other words, realization is always a personal process, deeply embedded in the social and cultural contexts in which the subject lives. It is obvious that the process does not occur in a vacuum; quite on the contrary, it can only take place through interaction with others. The cultural space, defined as a space of shared meanings, is what gives significance to the processes of personal, cultural and social development and vice versa.

Nowadays, there are a number of scientific circles that suggest that we human beings are not only individual or social but also biological subjects and some opinions are even starting to add that we may also be spiritual. These new interconnections

have changed the approach to an understanding of what it means to *be human*. It is not just reason, or passion, or culture, or history, but all these at once.

Anthropology shows us that hominization is a process which began thousands of years ago, and which has accompanied us since the earliest tribes of the earth's society; biology shows us evidence of the importance of hormones and how the emergence of the complex neocortex permitted the development of thought and culture; psychology offers us information on the stages we are passing through from non-consciousness to consciousness of being; sociology enlightens us regarding the technological base, modes of production and social organization which have underlain different societies throughout history. All these sciences are converging to build a new awareness, which helps us understand that the era of fragmentation must now give way to a new approach that tries to include in a more holistic definition what a “human being” is. This understanding of the multidimensionality of the human being must be incorporated in the concepts of “literacy” and “development”, since this understanding is necessary if we are to grasp that life is a complex process of interrelations, that we are all part of a giant network which, far from separating us into isolated units, keeps us united. An understanding of this unity is necessary for the survival of our planet.

“L'être humain est à la fois physique, biologique, psychique, culturel, social, historique. C'est cette unité complexe de la nature humaine qui est complètement désintégrée dans l'enseignement, à travers les disciplines, et il est devenu impossible d'apprendre ce que signifie être humain. Il faut la restaurer, de façon à ce que chacun, où qu'il soit, prenne connaissance et conscience à la fois de son identité complexe et de son identité commune avec tous les autres humains.” (Morin, 2001)\*

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\*“A human being is at the same time physical, biological, psychic, cultural, social and historical. It is this complex unity of human nature which is completely dispersed in education, through different disciplines, so that it has become impossible to learn what it means to be human. It must be restored,

We are absorbed in completely new changes which are causing situations to emerge which we have never had to face before. We are becoming aware that the truths and certainties with which we grew up are no longer so; that knowledge is exposed to error and illusion, and that the paradigms which gave shape to our understanding of the world are beginning to break down. It is by assuming uncertainty as an opportunity and not as a fatality that we may respond to the demands of the new times.

There are many approaches to the development of human consciousness. Generally, they all agree that consciousness unfolds sequentially and that each of its stages reveals a new understanding of the world which is more inclusive and deeper than the one before.

In the field of the psychology of development there are different schools and interpretations of each of the stages through which individuals pass along their life cycle. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that there is a consensus regarding the view that personal development passes through three major stages. We build our identities by starting with a pre-personal or "pre-egoic" stage, characterized by indefiniteness and a merging with our surroundings; this is followed by another personal or "egoic" stage, characterized by the build-up of individuality; and then by a third stage, which is beginning to emerge from transpersonal theories, which is "trans-egoic" or transpersonal, characterized by the discovery of unity and diversity not as two opposed concepts but inseparable from each other, as if they were the head and tail of the same coin.

We find the same when we analyse the views expressed on moral development. There is general agreement that human moral development goes through three major basic stages: (1) a pre-conventional stage (at birth human beings are not socialized and not integrated into any system of moral development); (2) a conventional stage (through socialization human beings learn from others and from themselves a general moral model that

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*so that every individual, wherever he may be, may become aware and conscious both of his own complex identity and of the identity he shares with all other humans."*

represents the basic values of the society in which they grow up), and (3) a post-conventional stage (where individuals are able to distance themselves from the group to which they belong and to acquire the ability to criticize and transform it). These three stages are also known by other names, such as: egocentric, sociocentric and worldcentric. All agree that moral development progresses from consciousness based on the self to a broader consciousness that includes everyone.

### **The construction of subjectivities in patriarchal societies**

In the 1970s, the gender issue began to be broached both at international conferences and in academic circles. Among the views expressed concerning the construction and significance of our condition as men and women, we again find a chorus of opinions which, for the purposes of our analysis, we may again reduce to two approaches (Amorós, 1995, 1997; Beauvoir, 1981; Benhabib, 1992; Guerra, 2001; Molina, 1994; Valcárcel, 1980, 1983).

The first of the two, which has its roots in antiquity and has persisted through history until the present day, starts from the assumption that we women are **nature**, and that as a result we are denied any deliberative capacity and we are restricted to the sphere of reproduction and beauty. According to this outlook, **reason** is a quality pertaining exclusively to men.

The second approach emerged in the Age of Enlightenment, starting from the premise that reason is not a sexual attribute and that therefore men and women are ontologically equal. These views have been basically put forward by women, although they have also been defended and argued by some men.

Both these attitudes have existed side by side to the present day. They pervade our lives. We find them everywhere: in novels, songs, films, discussions and even now the dominant view is still the one that assigns us to the domestic sphere and defines us in terms of nature and passion. We also come across

this attitude in the declarations of international conferences organized by the United Nations. On some occasions, women are treated as objects; on other occasions as subjects. Sometimes it is said that education is a tool and that women must be educated in order to facilitate development, while at other times education becomes a right and women must therefore be educated in order to become autonomous subjects. We shall take a look below at the governmental approach to literacy and adult education taking account this time of how women are treated in this scenario. By rereading all the texts from this angle, we shall be able to verify to what extent the symbolic universal that women are beings-for-others continues to apply.

### **Reinterpreting the governmental approach in the light of gender: conferences on adult education**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights took a significant qualitative step forward by accepting that all human beings are equal and recognizing them as entitled to rights, without distinction as regards gender, race, ethnic group or social background. We have made significant progress since then, although it cannot be said that the progress has been either linear, balanced, or homogenous.

If we analyse any of the rights recognized in the charter, from a national point of view we find countries which have universalized certain rights and set up systems to guarantee them. There are countries that can assert that their whole population has access to certain rights. At the other extreme, we find countries which, although recognizing the rights as fundamental, have not been capable of setting up the structures needed to make them effective.

All the other countries fit in somewhere between the two extremes. This gap between the recognition of a right and the real possibility of exercising it is a very important factor when we talk about rights, because we tend to do so as if we all assumed the same meaning. A text, however, only takes on

meaning in relation to a context (Freire, 1969; Freire and Macedo, 1989). For example, if we take education as the text and the concrete territories where it is implemented as the contexts, we must admit that we are not talking about the same thing if we refer to a country with adequate infrastructures to cater for the whole population or a country where access is still not guaranteed for the majority. Any discussion about rights must therefore necessarily start by recognizing the gap between the recognition of a right and the real possibility of exercising it. And doing this implies reflecting on the language and concepts which define the different realities.

Traditionally, we have endeavoured to reduce the material gaps between the right and its effective enjoyment by making more material and technical resources available. But in doing so we have left aside another type of more subtle gaps, which are no less important. These gaps are present within the cultures themselves, in the set of shared meanings and in all of our minds. They are more related to the subjective (I) and the inter-subjective (we).

If we look at the figures showing the number of human beings who are still unable to make use of their rights, we can obtain a clearer picture of what I am saying. For example, at the World Education Forum that was held in Dakar in 2002 and in the *Dakar Framework for Action*, it was stated that more than 113 million children, two-thirds of whom are girls, still do not have access to education. In the opening address of this conference, Kofi Annan, the United Nations Secretary-General, referred to the latter especially in the following terms:

“For them, the denial of human rights has struck twice over. For they are also denied something proclaimed on the first page of the United Nations Charter: the equal rights of men and women.” (UNESCO, 2000).

These figures are explicit enough to show that this is not due only to a lack of resources, but that there are still cultural

values, gender stereotypes, that prevent girls and women from exercising their rights on an equal footing.

At the other extreme, we may observe that in countries with well structured education systems, where equal access is guaranteed, the education that is imparted is not serving to eliminate gender, class and ethnic inequalities. The values transmitted by the school system are not neutral either, since they respond to a view of the world which is masculine, heterosexual, white and middle class, as a result of which many men and women are excluded.

In the first international conferences on the right to education, most of the participants were men. A careful look at the various declarations and the texts of the different commissions shows a dual attitude to women. On the one hand, they are recognized as being equal with men, but on the other, they are confined to the straightjacket of reproductive tasks. Some recognize the importance of their education as an instrument of development, while others admit women as subjects of rights. In other words, some define us a objects and others as subjects.

This way of thinking still applies, though with less intensity. This has been thanks mainly to the role played by women’s networks, especially in the decade of the 1990s, by participating actively and massively in such forums. Women’s groups have argued all along that these double standards must be done away with and that measures must be taken to ensure that we are able fully to exercise our citizenship.

So, the production of knowledge by the women themselves and the work of non-governmental organizations in support of the equal right of women to citizenship is one of the most important innovations that reflect a change in mentalities and attitudes. Many national, regional and international non-governmental organizations are promoting new proposals for change which, little by little, have been permeating the different social contexts. It is a fact that, despite the difficulties, we women have been squeezing through the loopholes in the system and conquering new spaces. Thanks to the presence of many women’s networks at international conferences, the theme of

equal rights has pervaded all society to the extent that nowadays nobody would dare assert that we women are not entitled to rights.

The growing presence of women, representing both the executive branch and international non-governmental organizations and networks, at the various conferences organized by the United Nations in the last decade has been essential as a way of inserting the gender perspective in every one of the documents issued by these meetings, which are increasingly producing a social impact and leading to change.

The growing participation of civil society organizations at international and intergovernmental conferences has led to changes in procedures and has facilitated the conquest of areas of dialogue both with governments and with the United Nations organization, which have increasingly asked them to produce reports alongside the official ones. Many of the international women's networks have consultative status with the United Nations.

Earlier in this paper, I reviewed the concepts of "adult education" and "literacy" used in conferences organized by UNESCO, from Elsinore (1949) to Hamburg (1997). In the next section I shall follow the same path, but from a different angle. This time I shall be analysing the role that organizations such as UNESCO have played in promoting the universalization of education, while concentrating specifically on the way women have been dealt with over the period. My support material will be the same as I used previously, namely the declarations agreed and approved at the various conferences which UNESCO has organized on adult education and literacy over the last 50 years.

### ***Elsinore, 1949***

Elsinore is the town where the First International Conference on Adult Education was held. On that occasion, women were included within the generic masculine and thereby rendered invisible. Logically, the debate at that conference focused on the role that adult education should play in the integral development

of peoples and the strengthening of positive relations between them.

Adult education was understood more as an end in itself than as a human right. The conference recognized the importance of men and women for the development of peoples. It also recognized equality between men and women, so that it did not appear necessary to treat them separately. This outcome may have been due to the fact that we had only just emerged from a war situation in which women played a very important role and that men, mostly from western countries, developed a special sensitivity which brought them to consider women as their equals. Throughout the text of the *Elsinore Declaration* there are many occasions on which men and women are designated on an equal footing. The following sentences are taken from the section concerning the contents of adult education:

“All men and women feel a need to be qualified for their daily work. Many people grow up without having been completely trained for the pursuit of their chosen occupation [...]” (UNESCO, 1949, Summary Report).

### ***Montreal, 1960***

The theme of this second conference, which was held in Montreal from 22 to 31 August 1960, was: “*Adult education in a changing world*”. The conference provided an opportunity for all the specialists meeting there to examine the development of AE over the previous decade and to make plans to meet future needs. Eleven years on from the Elsinore conference, the cause of women had clearly regressed; the old symbolic universals concerning them began to gain ground again and women ceased to be subjects: once again we were seen as mere objects. We went back to being a means and not an end in itself.

The theme of women appeared at the conference explicitly and one topic of discussion was dedicated to them, as follows: “*The changing position of women in society, and of the family as an institution*”.

If we read the declaration carefully, and the texts produced by the different commissions, we find a dual attitude to women. On the one hand, they are recognized as being equal to men, while on the other they are strapped in the straightjacket of reproductive tasks. There are two paragraphs in particular where this is quite apparent. Where objectives 2, 3 and 7 of AE are mentioned, it is stated literally that:

“(ii) People must be encouraged to understand and promote change, to welcome and cooperate with it [...]

(iii) Every man and woman should have opportunity for individual personal development to the utmost of which he or she is capable. This requires, for everyone, the right to share in all forms of the culture of the society to which he belongs.

[...]

(vii) [...] The changes which we have noted above increase the situations in which men and women must act with adult responsibility, and increase the need for adequate preparation to enable them to undertake that responsibility.”

(UNESCO 1960, Declaration of the Montreal World Conference on Adult Education)

But it is when they come to analyse “responsibilities” that the notion clearly emerges of how women and their social function were looked upon at that time. Thus, in the section on “Civic and Social Education”, we read as follows:

“The smallest, and the most natural, social unit is the family. Education begins at home. In the family, the part played by the mother is of inestimable influence; she is, indeed, an educator, and her particular needs, in this role, must be a matter of concern for adult education. This is not, for a moment, to suggest that this is necessarily her only role, and these her only calls upon adult education. The point is that this is a special role which she must play, and which, if it is to be performed effectively in our

complex modern world, requires something more than maternal instinct and mother wit.” (Declaration)

In this conceptualization of the role of mothers in the education of their children, we note one of the echoes of the Age of Enlightenment, which, as we saw earlier, restricts women to reproductive tasks. Men continue to determine what we are and what we must do. For example, in the composition of the various groups and commissions, only one woman was included, not to mention the offices of president, vice-presidents and rapporteurs, which were all filled by men.

### ***Teheran, 1965***

As a result of the growing awareness that development would not be possible without a literate population, at the 13th meeting of its General Conference, held in Paris in 1964, UNESCO convened a World Congress of Ministers of Education on the Eradication of Illiteracy. This congress took place in Teheran from 8 to 19 September 1965.

We may recall that in those years discussions were mostly dominated by functionalist views and the theory of human capital. Attitudes to women were also permeated by these ideas. Thus, throughout the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, and even up to the mid-1980s, the education of women was looked upon as an instrument of development. Women were considered as objects which had to be acted upon in order to improve the development indices of particular countries. “Educate a woman and you educate a people” was a popular slogan at that time. Women’s education was not conceived as an inalienable right, independent of their social status. On the contrary, they were considered as a means by which an end would be achieved, which was none other than raising the levels of development of countries considered to be third class.

These sorts of attitudes condemned women to permanent tutelage, to being objects of legal rights, as opposed to men who were always considered subjects of legal rights. The situation we

have just described is apparent in the following extracts taken from the general conclusions of the Teheran Congress and the recommendations drafted by Commission I, responsible for analysing "Literacy and technical, economic and social development". Section 1.2.n, when dealing with the subject of women's literacy, called for particular attention to be paid to the problem of women's illiteracy, in view of the high rate of female illiteracy and women's commitments to the education of the family and to society. Section 1.2.o in turn called for the international organizations, especially UNESCO and the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, to take appropriate steps to eradicate all discriminations currently affecting women in this respect.

Commission II, which dealt with the topic of the organization, methods and techniques of literacy, recommended that, considering the importance of women's literacy, due account should be taken in the preparation of reading material for the use of newly literate women of women's particular requirements, such as a knowledge of hygiene, nutrition and childcare, and that literacy methods for women should be adapted to their specific motivations and needs. Commission II further recommended that special attention should be paid in the education of women to civic and social education in order to enable them to take a more active part both in the life of the community and in family life.

### ***Tokyo, 1972***

Women continued to lose ground. At the Tokyo Conference, one president, 14 vice-presidents, a general rapporteur and two commission presidents were appointed, all men. These appointments are very important in the dynamic of conferences organized by the United Nations, because it is in their midst that the documents are prepared which later will be approved in plenary. While at the previous conference there was one woman among the officers, in Tokyo we went from one to none. Once again, we were rendered invisible.

Women were treated as one of the groups requiring priority attention, on a par with migrant workers, people suffering from physical and mental disabilities, the elderly, etc. We were once again relegated among the dependent groups, incapable of looking after ourselves. We can see this in paragraph 22 of the Final Report:

“The educationally underprivileged and weakly motivated adults were usually those with little or no basic education. They included such less favoured groups as isolated rural communities, migrant workers, the aged and the physically and mentally handicapped. In all such groups the often underprivileged position of women should be taken into account.” (UNESCO, 1972)

In recommendation 3, the conference did recognize that women should have equal access to education:

“The Conference,  
Mindful of the social and other handicaps which in many countries inhibit women from playing their full role in society,  
Recognizing that equal access to education for women is essential for the democratisation of education,  
Recommends that Member States give high priority in their development plans to provide wider access of women to educational opportunities, and in particular to out-of-school education.” (UNESCO, 1972)

In recommendation 6, dealing with the introduction of measures to promote the education of workers, it is recommended in paragraph 3 that Member States urgently take measures in order:

“(3) that the most under-privileged groups, including immigrant workers, unskilled farm workers, handicapped workers, working women and young people, the unemployed, etc., may take part in educational activities in accordance with their needs” (UNESCO, 1972)

In that recommendation, we ceased to be a group requiring preferential attention and became a category.

***Persepolis, 1975***

The whole declaration that emerged from the International Symposium on Literacy is imbued with the critical approach already present in the views expressed on education. In the final documents, women are explicitly referred to only once, when it is recognized that they are the social group with the highest levels of illiteracy. So from being a category we became a social group:

“Literacy is effective to the extent that the people to whom it is addressed, in particular women and the least privileged groups (such as migrant workers), feel the need for it in order to meet their most essential requirements, in particular the need to take part in the decisions of the community to which they belong.”  
(UNESCO, 1975)

Although the subject of women is approached from a tangent, we feel it is important to mention this Symposium because that was the first meeting really where the door was opened to counter-dominant views and which therefore marked a turning point in the theoretical-ideological outlook. As we have seen, nevertheless, these views also treated us as if we were under-age. What was really deemed important was the emancipation of the more underprivileged classes, and not the emancipation of women.

***Nairobi, 1976***

The 19th meeting of UNESCO's General Conference, which was held in Nairobi, recognized the historical injustice done to half of humanity, namely women, and recommended that Member States should:

[...] in eliminating the isolation of women from adult education, work towards ensuring equality of access and full participation in the entire range of adult education activities, including those which provide training for qualifications leading to activities or responsibilities which have hitherto been reserved for men” (UNESCO, 1976)

In the recommendations produced by the meeting, women were no longer considered members of minority groups, but were allowed the status of citizens, with rights on a par with men. To this extent we may observe some progress in terms of the institutional recognition of the equality of women in relation to men. That recognition was the outcome of the social pressure which the international feminist movement was bringing to bear throughout the period. Paragraph 14 of the Final Report is entirely dedicated to women and says in particular:

“With regard to women, adult education activities should be integrated as far as possible with the whole contemporary social movement directed towards achieving self-determination for women and enabling them to contribute to the life of society as a collective force, and should thus focus specifically on certain aspects, in particular:

- (a) the establishment in each society of conditions of equality between men and women;
- (b) the emancipation of men and women from the preconceived models imposed on them by society in every field in which they carry responsibility;
- (c) civic, occupational, psychological, cultural and economic autonomy for women as a necessary condition for their existence as complete individuals;
- (d) knowledge about the status of women, and about women’s movements, in various societies, with a view to increased solidarity across frontiers.” (UNESCO, 1976)

***Paris, 1985***

The Conference on that occasion was headed by: one president, 14 vice-presidents (including three women), one general rapporteur, one president of Commission I, one president of Commission II and a female president of the editorial group. Out of a total of 19 appointments, this time four went to women. From 0% representation at the previous conference, we jumped to 21%.

If we look at the texts produced by the meeting, we find there are two ways of understanding AE. There is the functionalist view, which considers it as an instrument of adaptation and which is clearly present in some of the paragraphs, and there is also the critical view, which considers adult education as a factor favourable to the creation of awareness and transformation.

This twin attitude is also evident with respect to women and reappears at practically all the international conferences. Some paragraphs emphasize the importance of educating women so that they are better able to perform their social reproductive functions, while others recognize them as subjects in their own full right, on an equal footing with men. This reflects the enormous complexity of the way consensus is arrived at in international contexts, where the views expressed convey the attitudes of all the different cultures inhabiting our planet (different value systems). At the Paris Conference, nevertheless, the views expressed on women regressed compared with the Nairobi Declaration, where, as explained above, the historical injustice committed towards all of us was explicitly recognized. While on the one hand the right to education and the right to learn were recognized as fundamental rights, both for men and for women, whenever thoughts turned to education for women there was always a mention of the social benefits which their education could bring. In other words, the Conference went back to emphasizing the education of women as an instrument, in the same sense as being for others and not being for oneself. This is reflected in paragraphs 96 and 97:

“96. To prevent a widening of the gap between the favoured and less favoured from the educational and from the social and economic points of view, adult education is increasingly tending to give priority, where resources are limited, to certain groups of people who are at a disadvantage regarding access to education or who are unable to benefit with the same chances of success from the opportunities open to them. These groups have specific educational needs which cannot be satisfied unless certain conditions are met. A great number and variety of measures have been taken to help them and they have sometimes been the subject of “positive discrimination” or “affirmative action”.

97. Thus, as an example, a special effort has been made over the last ten years in many literacy campaigns to take account of the particularly high rate of illiteracy among women, education for whom has a multiplier effect because of their family and social role and their potential contribution to development.” (UNESCO, 1985)

In the report of Commission I, women’s education is seen from the point of view of human rights and not as an instrument for improving their reproductive functions. Thus paragraph 155 is explicit in this respect:

“155. Most participants stressed the importance of women's education in promoting the full equality of women with men. [...] one speaker said that education programmes should make women aware of their own needs and enable them to acquire the requisite knowledge directly [...] Adult education should enable women to share to the full in local, national and international life.” (UNESCO, 1985)

Commission II takes a more limited view in its report regarding the education of women. When referring to the groups for which adult education is intended, paragraph 272 of the final report reads as follows:

“272. [...] Many speakers referred to the higher illiteracy rates among women and the crucial role which women play as transmitters of cultural values, transmitting knowledge and attitudes from one generation to another. Several among them described programmes being designed for women in order to enable them better to fulfil their traditional roles or to prepare them to fill new roles in society.” (UNESCO, 1985)

Section II(i) of the recommendations chapter is devoted entirely to women and especially to their education:

“The Conference,  
Mindful of the fact that illiteracy is a particularly serious problem afflicting women who, in several societies, do not have access to training and consequently evince an illiteracy rate considerably higher than that of men,  
Recommends the Director-General, in his work on concentrating the activities of UNESCO, pay special attention to adult education and, in particular, to the following areas:  
Programmes, especially for women, aimed at the eradication of illiteracy as the first necessary step towards the development and implementation of lifelong education;  
Programmes which ensure the active participation of women in shaping the curricula of their own education;  
Programmes especially aimed at giving women the same opportunity of education as men, and thereby providing them with a prerequisite for their active participation in community affairs and in their own social and economic development.” (UNESCO, 1985)

The Conference ended with the approval of the Declaration of the Conference, which specially mentions the role of women in the following terms:

“This conference recognizes and acclaims the energy and the trends in human relations that women and their organizations have contributed. Their specific

experiences and methods are central to the fundamental issues on which the future of humanity depends, such as peace and equality between women and men. This being the case, women’s participation is essential in the development of adult education and in plans to bring about a more humane society.” (UNESCO, 1985)

### ***Hamburg, 1997***

Thanks to the fact that women’s groups specializing in the subject of adult education had attended the conferences preceding Hamburg, especially those that took place in the first half of the 1990s (including the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 1994; the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 1995; and the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995), they came to Hamburg well equipped in ways of organizing themselves and achieving amendments to official texts. At Paris it was already no longer possible to treat women’s organizations as if they were invisible and, thanks to their presence at the Conference, it was explicitly recognized that they were playing an extremely important role in achieving the recognition of women as citizens in full right. In Hamburg, they were not only visible but they also played an active role throughout the process.

The international conferences that took place in the first half of the 1990s, especially the Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), sparked a debate that led to a more in-depth consideration of the interconnections between the education of women and their empowerment. This approach was prevalent in Hamburg among the various groups of women, who set about developing a joint strategy in each of the working groups and workshops. Women spoke with a single voice in defence of gender justice. Every day, before the working groups began their work, we met amongst ourselves and decided what type of strategies should be deployed on that particular day. Thanks to these efforts, we may consider the Hamburg Conference, which was attended by 1,500 participants from all regions of the globe, 40 per cent of whom were women, as a watershed in the history

of adult education in terms of defending women’s right to education worldwide. This is because for the first time it was we women who took the floor and brought pressure to bear to ensure that our subjects were included on agendas on equal terms with others.

At that Conference, it became clear that the theme of women had to be dealt with from two points of view. On the one hand, it was important to discuss the continuing exclusion of women by tackling the following issues in particular: equal representation in and access to education, a participative pedagogy sensitive to gender issues, the perverse effects of violence against women, globalization and structural adjustment, and the promotion of women’s organizations. On the other hand, it had to be ensured that the question of gender should be treated as a cross-cutting issue in all other areas.

Both the *Agenda for the Future* and the *Hamburg Declaration* emphasized that equal opportunities in all aspects of education were essential to enable women of all ages to contribute to society to their full potential. This is the message conveyed by article 13 of the *Hamburg Declaration*, which reads as follows:

“Women have a right to equal opportunities; society, in turn, depends on their full contribution in all fields of work and aspects of life. Youth and adult learning policies should be responsive to local cultures and give priority to expanding educational opportunities for all women, while respecting their diversity and eliminating prejudices and stereotypes that both limit their access to youth and adult education and restrict the benefits they derive from them. Any attempts to restrict women’s right to literacy, education and training must be considered unacceptable. Practices and measures should be taken to counter them.” (UNESCO, 1997)

([http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/documentation/con\\_fintea5.shtml](http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/documentation/con_fintea5.shtml)).

In some workshops, set up by women's organizations, while it was suggested that opportunities for formal and non-formal education had contributed to the emancipation of women, it was also observed that some of these initiatives had the effect of actually strengthening gender inequalities. It was therefore concluded that it was not just a question of access, but also of the content of what men and women learn.

The participants at the *Hamburg Conference* committed themselves in the *Declaration* to encourage and develop organization and leadership capabilities among the adult population and especially among women. At the same time, they recommended setting up mechanisms allowing women to gain access to formal power structures and decision-making processes in both private and public spheres. A recommended means of achieving this was:

"By investing an equitable share of resources in women's education to ensure their full participation in all fields of learning and knowledge" (UNESCO, 1997)  
(<http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/documentation/confintea5.shtml>).

This significant participation by women is what in fact occurred at the Conference itself, which led the General Rapporteur to acknowledge the fact in the *Final Report* in the following terms:

"[...] There has been effective participation of women in panels and in delegations, and all of this has provided the opportunity for a critical mass of women to affect the proceedings of the Conference" (UNESCO, 1997)  
(<http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/documentation/confintea5.shtml>).

Theme 4 of the Agenda is entirely devoted to women's education. One of the objectives of adult education mentioned in the Agenda (paragraph 12) was to create greater community participation, in particular:

“[...] By encouraging and developing leadership capabilities among the adult population and especially among women, enabling them to participate in institutions of the state, the market and civil society” (UNESCO, 1997)  
(<http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/documentation/confintea5.shtml>).

Paragraph 13, which concerns raising awareness about prejudice and discrimination in society, proposes to do so:

“[...] By developing education programmes that enable men and women to understand gender relations and human sexuality in all their dimensions” (UNESCO, 1997)  
(<http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/documentation/confintea5.shtml>).

Lastly, paragraph 29 establishes the objective of promoting the empowerment of women and gender equity through adult learning. This objective can be achieved:

“[...] By recognizing and correcting the continued marginalization and denial of access and of equal opportunities for quality education that girls and women are still facing at all levels” (UNESCO, 1997)  
(<http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/documentation/confintea5.shtml>).

The fact that women’s organizations and networks specializing in adult education and literacy have been taking an active part in all the conferences organized by the United Nations has been facilitating the emergence of more holistic approaches to understanding the meaning of literacy and development, and how this can be useful in the search for solutions to the problems we have to face in present-day societies. Little by little, the idea has been emerging that, in view of the complexity of the problems, we must all adopt

complex approaches, with the conviction that linear methods of dealing with current issues are no longer effective.

At the same time, the fact that different groups, especially women’s groups, have attended practically all the conferences has been conducive to the emergence of a more inclusive, more integral way of thinking. We are now aware that issues cannot be tackled in isolation, that all problems, whether related to the environment, development or racism, affect everyone of us, so that in recent years there has been a change of attitudes towards the way problems should be tackled, which consists in placing human beings at the heart of the debate and not on the periphery, as used to occur in the 1960s and 70s. In Durban, where the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance was held, the women’s movement highlighted the need to merge the different agendas in order to deal with these problems more comprehensively, since all issues raised at present are crossed by gender problems.

Having considered the dimensions of consciousness and gender, and the need to include them in our analysis, we may now go on to outline a model of what integral literacy means. This is what we shall do in the following chapter.

## Chapter 3

### KEN WILBER, THE FOUR QUADRANTS AND INTEGRAL LITERACY

“*Integral*: the word means to integrate, to bring together, to join, to link, to embrace. Not in the sense of uniformity, and not in the sense of ironing out all the wonderful differences, colours, zigs and zags of a rainbow-hued humanity, but in the sense of unity-in-diversity, shared commonalities along with our wonderful differences.”  
(Wilber: 2000, p. 2)

#### Introduction

After undertaking a detailed review of the sciences over the last few centuries, recognizing the progress made and setting out the mistakes of traditional science, Wilber (1995) proposes a more complex approach to the analysis of reality. He considers that we human beings are all at once bio-psycho-anthropo-social and spiritual beings and he sees reality as unfolding before us in levels of complexity.

For Ken Wilber, reality is not made up of wholes on the one hand and parts on the other, but of wholes which are at the same time parts of greater wholes. That is to say, each whole is part of a greater whole which includes and transcends it. From this point of view, the smaller wholes are included in greater wholes because in reality there are not parts on the one hand and wholes on the other, but only wholes which are simultaneously parts. In order to name these wholes-parts, he uses the term *holon* used by Arthur Koestler, who coined it to refer to what is a whole in one context but simultaneously a part in a different context.

For Wilber (1995), each *holon* has four dimensions which operate simultaneously and are at the same time cause and effect of all others. In order to explain his model, he resorts to the

image of four quadrants, each of which is made up of different levels and lines of development. Wilber presents two of these quadrants as exterior, related to knowledge of the objective and representing the object of study of the traditional sciences, since they respond to the latter's principles. His other two quadrants are interior and are related to subjective and intersubjective knowledge.

According to Wilber, the mistake made by the traditional sciences was to reduce these four quadrants to only one, thus generating a vision of the world which he calls "flat", "linear" and "reductionist", since it operates only on the surface and disregards depth. Wilber asserts that every whole possesses these four dimensions and that each one of them has its own type of truth and its own test of validity. Thus asserting that none of the quadrants may be reduced to the others implies accepting that none of its respective truths may be denied from an environment outside its own and that the criteria of truth for each of them must be different.

He also explains that the fact that none of them is reducible to the others does not mean to say that they are not scientific. In order to explain this he distinguishes between bad and good science. For him, good science, regardless of the field in which it operates, must proceed according to a method which in some way follows the following three steps: first, *instrumental injunction*, which consists in using procedures suited to each objective; second, *intuitive apprehension*, which consists in the direct apprehension of data and experience; and third, *communal confirmation or rejection*, which consists in checking the data, the results, the evidence with those obtained by other researchers. (Wilber, 1997)

According to this approach, any affirmation related to data, originating in any quadrant, may be subjected to its own tests of validity, which allows us to accept them or reject them, validate them or refute them, justify them or deny them.

The upper right quadrant includes the external and objective dimensions of individuals and objects. Here we start from the premise that statements are valid propositions only if

they refer to objective facts. In this sense, any statement is true only if it agrees with the facts that are observed. Therefore the criterion of validity in this quadrant is that of propositional *truth*.

The upper left quadrant, on the other hand, contains the internal states of the subject. Here it is not a question of knowing whether the map fits the territory, but of checking whether the map-maker is truthful. In other words, the proof of validity in this area is not a question of determining if any type of statement agrees with external facts, but in knowing if we can trust the truthfulness of the statements about our own internal states. For this reason, the validity check in this quadrant is not so much objective truth as subjective *truthfulness*.

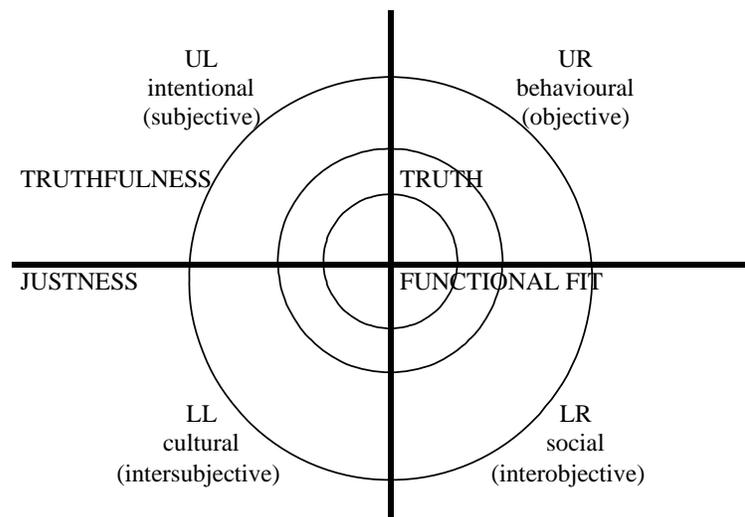
The lower right quadrant approaches the collective from an exterior and objective point of view and tries to explain the status of individual components from the point of view of their functional fit. The idea is to check the objective behaviour of the whole system of social action from an empirical point of view. The validity criterion in this quadrant is functional fit, understood as the way in which each proposition is related to the network or overall system.

The lower left quadrant tries to apprehend the way in which mutual understanding leads to a relationship between subjects. That is to say, in order to coexist we must not only fit our bodies into the same physical space, but we must also adapt our minds to the same ethical, moral and cultural space; in other words, to the same intersubjective space. This is achieved by means of mutual recognition. The proofs of validity in this quadrant revolve around rightness, justness, goodness and impartiality. The intersubjective space created by the contexts and visions of the world which we share with others constitute an essential component of human beings, without which there could be no individual subjective identity, nor could we perceive objective reality.

*Figure 1* shows the four quadrants and their respective validity claims. The upper left (UL) quadrant shows the interior of the individual; the upper right (UR) quadrant is the exterior of the individual; the lower left (LL) quadrant is the collective

interior and the lower right (LR) quadrant the collective exterior. Each quadrant has its own validity claim.

**Figure 1: Wilber's four quadrants and their validity claims**



(Wilber, 1997)

In building these four quadrants, Wilber uses theories developed by other authors, since, as we have seen, he recognizes that each of the quadrants has produced truths which are useful for an understanding of reality. Thus for the quadrants on the left-hand side, which represent the individual (subjective) and the collective (intersubjective) part of the interior of the human *holon*, he uses interpretative, hermeneutic and analytical approaches. These apply to the study of individual and collective consciousness.

The right-hand quadrants represent the exterior individual and collective part of the human *holon*. According to Wilber, these dimensions are monological, empirical, positivist and focused on the study of form.

We shall now seek to give a more detailed explanation of the four quadrants. For this we shall separate them into two main categories: individual and collective, each in their external and internal dimensions.

### **Integral literacy and intentional and behavioural aspects**

Intentional and behavioural aspects refer to the interior and exterior of the *holons* in their individual dimension. Each level transcends but also includes all former levels and adds its own distinctive characteristics.

The quadrant that studies the interior individual starts from the apprehension of concepts, and passes through a series of stages or waves of development, which become increasingly complex as the development process progresses. Its exterior ranges from atoms to the complex neo-cortex of human beings.

In the upper right quadrant, we find external, empirical and objective descriptions. In any scientific text we can find a detailed description of the limbic system or the complex neo-cortex. We are provided with detailed analyses of their components, how they evolved, their relations with other parts of the organism or whereabouts in the limbic system certain basic emotions are situated, such as sex, aggression, fear and desire.

Wilber warns us that in none of those texts will we find the least description of emotions, because emotions belong to the interior experience of the limbic system. Emotions and the accompanying consciousness are what any *holon* with a limbic system experiences from the interior and objective scientific descriptions are not interested in the interior experience, because there is no objective means of accessing internal space.

The upper left quadrant contains some of the basic types of interior subjective consciousness that correspond to the various exterior objective forms (upper right quadrant). The capacity to respond actively to surrounding stimuli appears in the cells; sensations emerge with neuronal organisms,

perceptions with the neural cord, impulses with the cerebral trunk, emotions with the limbic system, symbols with the neo-cortex, concepts with the complex neo-cortex, etc.

In the psychology of development, there are different schools and interpretations of each of the stages through which individuals pass throughout their lifecycle. We can say, however, that there is a consensus regarding the fact that personal development passes through three main stages. Disagreement arises more in relation to the sub-stages which may be identified and the way in which every crisis may be resolved in each of these three main stages. There is agreement regarding the fact that we human beings, both men and women, build our identities starting with a prepersonal or “pre-egoic” phase, which is characterized by indefiniteness and fusion with the environment; a personal or “egoic” stage, characterized by the construction of individuality, and a third stage emerging from transpersonal theories, which is “trans-egoic” or transpersonal and is characterized by the revelation of unity and diversity, not as two opposing concepts, but inseparable from each other, like the head and tail of the same coin.

The left quadrant is also based on evidence, but unlike the right one, uses other instruments. It reflects how *holons* appear from inside, while the right-hand quadrant reflects how they appear from outside. Subjective and objective, consciousness and form.

An example might help us understand this idea better. Let us consider the concept of “literacy”. If we analyse it from the interior-individual quadrant, when we think of literacy what we experience is the thought in itself, that is to say, the symbols, meanings and mental images related to that thought. This is part of the upper left quadrant which is related to the interior of the individual.

While we are experiencing this thought, a series of changes are occurring in our brain, such as the secretion of dopamine, the appearance of acetylcholine, which allows the transmission of the nervous impulse between synapses, etc. All these changes in the physiology of the brain may be observed

from the outside using suitable equipment, which is why they belong to the individual-exterior (UR).

Although the brain is internal to the organism, it has nothing to do with real internal consciousness. The brain is an objective, physical and biological organ and can therefore only be examined objectively and empirically (UR). But consciousness we are aware of immediately, internally and directly (UL), and when we think of literacy and development we do not say “Wow! I am accumulating dopamine!”, but we experience the thought in its own terms of images, representations, symbols and concepts.

The brain is observed objectively, but mind or consciousness may only be experienced subjectively. Neither one of these is therefore reducible to the other, because the phenomenology of each is completely different. The brain is physically locatable; it has a weight and a size; in fact it has what Wilber refers to as *simple location*. According to him, the brain, a stone or a town are observable, while envy, pride, conscience, bravery, intention or desire are not. What is desire? If you try to observe it, you will find that you cannot do so in the same way as you might examine a stone, because desire is an internal dimension and therefore does not have simple location. Of course, Wilber points out, this does not mean that it is not real. It only means that it lacks simple location.

No idea, feeling or emotion can be seen; it is not perceptible, not even using a technical apparatus. It cannot be seen, but it can be interpreted. This is why Wilber asserts that surfaces can be seen, but depths have to be interpreted.

None of the approaches to functional and cultural literacy presented in this work takes account of this individual dimension of the human *holon*. This quadrant contains the various lines and levels through which individual consciousness will emerge. The different lines represent the different aspects of individual consciousness (cognitive, moral, emotional, psychosexual, etc.). Each one of these lines unfolds in different stages. This implies that in different kinds of literacy we may come across persons who have reached high levels of development in

one of the lines and medium or low development in others. It is in this quadrant that we shall have to work if we are to produce changes in the consciousness of individuals, without which any cultural or social changes are bound to remain superficial.

### **Integral literacy and cultural and social aspects**

Individual *holons* exist only within a community of *holons* of similar depth, which in turn have an interior facet and an exterior facet, corresponding to the lower left (cultural) quadrant and the lower right (social) quadrant.

The cultural aspect refers to the set of interior meanings, values and identities which we share with those who belong to a community similar to our own. The social aspect refers to material and institutional forms that are external to the community, in other words, its technical-economic foundation, its architectural styles, its writing codes, the size of its population, etc.

In very general terms, the cultural aspect is related to a worldview which we share collectively and the social aspect to the material basis of that worldview. “Social”, therefore, refers to any objective, concrete and material component, and especially the technical-economic component (foraging, horticultural, agrarian, industrial or informational) and geo-political structures (villages, states, world federations, etc.). All these are examples of external forms of the collective.

By “culture” Wilber understands the common space to which *holons* may respond independently of the level they occupy in the *holarchy*. Mammals do not respond to all the stimuli that are present in the environment; they register only what is significant for them, or what affects them. Mammals, like any other *holon*, only respond to what fits into their world space; all the rest constitutes alien space. The study of what the *holons* can respond to is the study of the world spaces they share, the common world to which all *holons* of similar depth can respond. It is in the end their shared culture.

Wolves, for example, share a common emotional space. They all possess a limbic system whose interior correlate consists of certain basic emotions. A wolf guides itself and its fellow wolves by using basic emotional cognitions which are on an affective and not a reptilian or sensory-motor level. They can hunt or gather as a pack because they are able to use a very sophisticated system of signals. It may be said that they share an emotional space. But whatever falls outside that space they fail to register. We may read them the story of Don Quixote, but that does not mean to say that we can make them understand it.

This applies to all *holons*, regardless of their depth. A *holon* can only respond to stimuli that fall within its space, which fit within its vision of the world. Any stimulus that lies outside that space does not exist for them. At the time when evolution reached the neo-cortex stage, its basic space became organized into sophisticated cognitive structures. These worldviews incorporate the basic components of previous spaces, such as cellular irritability, reptilian instincts or the emotions of paleomammals, but they add new components which organize and develop new worldviews. In each one of these new stages, the world appears different and is in fact different, because now it is possible to respond to stimuli which, at the former levels, were not even perceptive.

Continuing with the example of literacy and development, this thought only makes sense within a particular cultural substratum. If we lived in a tribal society, we would not even have the notion of literacy, but we would be thinking instead that we ought to protect ourselves from bears or that we should take shelter from the rain. Any type of individual thought therefore emerges within a particular cultural substratum which gives it meaning. Indeed without that substratum we would be unable to form even the tiniest individual thought. This means that the cultural community imposes a particular intrinsic substratum, a context, for any individual thought we might give shape to. Thoughts do not appear in our heads out of nowhere, but they do so within a determined cultural substratum and even if we try to transcend that substratum, we cannot escape from it

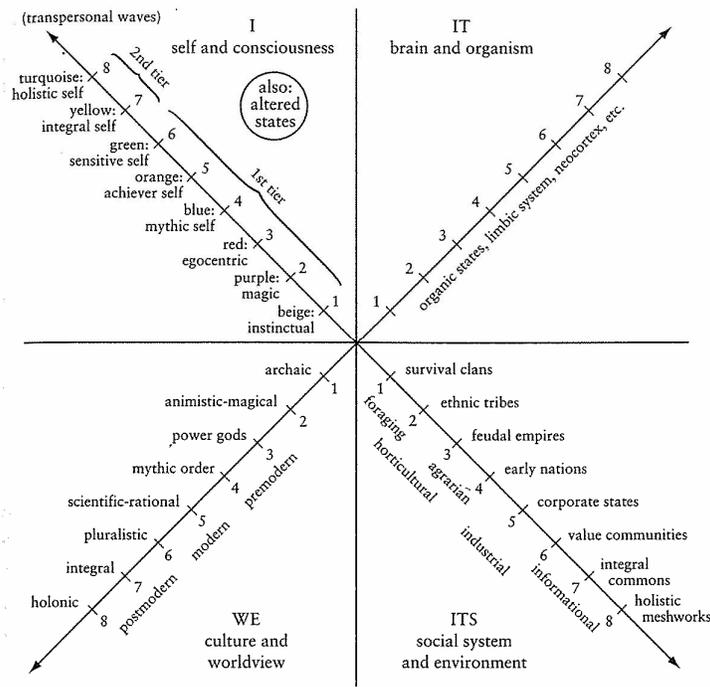
completely. Therefore this quadrant (LL) refers to the intersubjective space of the cultural contexts we share with others.

But culture is not something either that hangs in a void; it has its material components (in the same way as ideas have their cerebral correlate). Every cultural event has its concrete social correlate, which is related to techniques, modes of production, institutions, codes and writing patterns, etc. The use we make of literacy, therefore, would be determined by the technological environment of the society in which we live. This is the lower right quadrant, the system of real social action, which is absolutely crucial for determining the cultural worldviews out of which thoughts emerge.

“So my supposedly ‘individual thought’ is actually a phenomenon that intrinsically has (at least) these four aspects to it – intentional, behavioural, cultural, and social. And around the holistic circle we go: the social system will have a strong influence on the cultural worldview, which will set limits to the individual thoughts that I can have, which will register in the brain physiology. And we can go around that circle in any direction. They are all interwoven. They are all mutually determining. They all cause, and are caused by, the others, in concentric spheres of contexts within contexts indefinitely” (Wilber, 1997).

The following figure shows how each of the quadrants evolves:

**Figure 2: Wilber’s version of how the four quadrants evolve**



(Wilber, 2000)

Wilber warns us that none of these four dimensions may be reduced to the others. Each one gives us information on different aspects of the known world and, therefore, if we reduce some to others we bring about distortions, fractures and splits. We arrive at a knowledge of the interior quadrants through interpretation and of the exterior quadrants using an empirical approach. The former are related to consciousness; the latter to forms; the former are subjective or intersubjective; the latter objective. The former can only be interpreted and respond to the

question, what does it mean?; the latter describe and respond to the question: what does it do?

Taking this view and relating it to the question of literacy, which is our concern, the differentiation between individual and social is very useful to help us situate the previously explained approaches in the debate. On the one hand, we find that the functionalist approaches operate according to this system in the lower right quadrant, in other words what they try to measure is what every person (*holon*) knows what to do in this dimension, what tools the person knows or does not know how to use, etc.

Those who focus on the cultural dimension of literacy, on the other hand, are more concerned with the meaning of whatever use the person makes of the tool. That is to say, they operate within the lower left quadrant. If we make this first differentiation we can then say that both are right and both are wrong. They are right when they are operating within their own quadrant; they are wrong when they try to reduce the rest of the quadrants to their own, considering it as the only valid one.

To sum up, each of the four quadrants has its own validity claims and its own language. The two left-hand quadrants refer to the interior, individual and collective, and the two right-hand quadrants to the exterior. Wilber simplifies these four dimensions into three: individual-subjective, which refers to the development of individual consciousness and therefore is expressed in terms of the “I”; the interior-collective, which refers to shared meanings, the cultural background, and which is expressed in terms of the “we”; and the other right-hand dimensions which, since they are both objective and empirical, may be expressed in terms of the “it”. I, we and it are therefore the three main dimensions which we need to take into account:

“[...] the great task of modernity and postmodernity, as theorists from Schelling to Hegel, to Habermas to Taylor have pointed out, is not to replace gross reductionism with subtle reductionism (or atomism with flatland holism), but to *integrate the Big Three* (integrate I, we, and it; or art, morals, and science; or self, culture, and nature), not by reducing one to the others, but by finding

a richly encompassing conception of the Kosmos that allows each to flourish in its own right” (Wilber, 1995).

Wilber admits this task is difficult and increasingly urgent on account of the currently fragmented worldviews, whether inspired by atomism or by holism. In the next chapter I shall try to set out a few conclusions regarding the way in which Wilber’s four quadrants allow us to move on from a form of literacy and development that has so far taken into account only a partial worldview, to integral literacy and development, which take account of all four dimensions of reality.

## **Chapter 4**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **Integral literacy**

Any educational practice which is to facilitate integral literacy and allow sustainable development must take account of the four quadrants explained in the previous chapter. It must take account of the fact that we human beings are biological, psychological, cultural and social, and that we are all these things at once, not as separate natures joined together but as a single multi-dimensional, complex nature. If we are to assume our multi-dimensional nature, this implies departing from the previously dominant assumption that we are purely reason, that we human beings are above all rational beings, because according to the new ways of thinking that attitude brought about many fractures in the last century, causing us to fragment and become dissociated from our true nature, which is all at once emotional, cultural and social.

In order to understand the meaning of this new way of thinking, it is crucial to grasp the relation between literacy, sustainable development and the development of consciousness. Literacy must be seen within the context of the development of consciousness; a more evolved consciousness must be more inclusive, more profound, more panoramic, more comprehensive, more dialogistic, more spiritual, more loving, more universal, in other words, more integrated.

#### **The four quadrants of integral literacy**

Wilber's model of the four quadrants, multiple levels and different lines can help us achieve a more holistic grasp of the reality of literacy and development.

An integral approach to literacy must start from the premise that we are multidimensional beings and that our nature is complex; it must demonstrate in other words that the human condition, as a *holon*, has four dimensions: intentional and behavioural, cultural and social. Two of these dimensions are internal (intentional and cultural) and two are external (behavioural and social). The internal dimensions are subjective and intersubjective, while the external ones are objective. If we are to understand literacy from this point of view, we must work in all these dimensions. We have seen that each of them is based on different premises and different criteria of truth.

Undoubtedly, if we work on external dimensions with the help of literacy, we must do so with methodologies that allow us to transmit appropriate techniques for reading and writing, as well as for functional adjustment. The objective of these quadrants is objective knowledge and learning is instrumental. From this point of view, the positivist paradigm, which is only interested in knowing how things work and how functional adjustment is arrived at, may prove adequate. In this framework, methods are based on the transmission of knowledge, which is passed on by the teacher and assimilated by the pupils. What is transmitted includes techniques, the shape of letters, their sounds, the construction of syllables, words, phrases, concordance, punctuation, nouns, verbs and adjectives, how machines work and how society operates. All these belong to objective knowledge.

But while these techniques are perfectly valid for working on the objective dimension, they are totally useless for working on subjective and intersubjective dimensions. In order to work in these quadrants, we must do so with other methodologies that start from dialogical logic and are based on communication and interpretation. The objective of the upper left quadrant is self-knowledge. We have already seen that the criterion of truth for this quadrant is the truthfulness reflected in the sincerity, integrity and trustworthiness of the speaker. In other words, what is important is not so much verifying whether any statement made corresponds to objective truth, but knowing

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whether the person who makes the statement is telling the truth or is lying, either to himself or to others. In this case, we are dealing not with external, observable and measurable forms of behaviour, but with internal states, thoughts, feelings and emotions, and the only way of accessing this is through dialogue and interpretation. Working on the subjective individual dimension therefore requires methodologies based on these aspects, which can help the persons attending literacy classes to realize whether they are being sincere with themselves or whether they are lying. Learning in this case is communicative.

In the lower left quadrant as well we will have to work with qualitative methodologies, based on dialogue, because in this case, too, learning is communicative. This quadrant can explain shared worldviews and its objective is to facilitate mutual understanding among speakers. From this quadrant we can appreciate values that enable us to recognize and to respect the rights of others and of the community, without forgetting that the goal is to continue expanding the circle from a local to a global dimension. These rights are collective and in order to understand we must enter the same intersubjective space, because only on this basis will we be able to respect and recognize each other, which does not imply that we shall necessarily agree, but merely that we shall be able to recognize each other. Learning to recognize and respect the “other” is the objective of this quadrant and this “other” range from the nearest to the furthest, from local to global. Here we are not interested in objective truth, but in intersubjective fit. In order to work this quadrant starting from literacy, we must place ourselves in the same intersubjective space as our pupils and seek to build the values that will enable us to understand each other. We must therefore start from the recognition of all members of the group as active members who are participating collectively in the construction of this intersubjective space.

The challenge consists not just in recognizing the underlying connection within *each* quadrant, as if the quadrants were independent of each other. If we were to do so, we would once again be falling into a summative approach. This must be

avoided. What we need to do is to integrate parts, not place them alongside each other and go on thinking fragmentally. Therefore, any attempt that selects only one quadrant and does not take account of the corresponding levels and lines will just be more of the same, even though we may give it other names. If integral literacy is to break away from fragmentary thought, to advance in the cultural development of groups, societies, nations and the globe itself, then it must operate within an all-level, all-quadrant system or, in Wilber's words, it will have to be all at once an all-quadrant, all-level system.

Integral literacy must therefore take account of and work simultaneously with the four quadrants that we explained in the previous chapter. This in turn implies doing so from a multi-quadrant, multi-level perspective, since this will allow us to access a more integral form of practice, which can distinguish and apprehend the different levels and dimensions of educational experience. The objective is to obtain a coherent, comprehensive image that allows us to grasp the depth and location of the parts, and to recognize the centrality of the integrality of literacy and development of the 21st century.

### **Integral literacy and levels of wholeness**

Integral literacy may be looked at in terms of different levels of wholeness. These may be understood as *holons*, that is to say, wholes-parts within wholes-parts which make up an educational *holarchy*, the distinctive and essential nature of which is the development and growth of consciousness, which evolves from the particular to the universal. It is important to emphasize that the different levels of educational wholeness link literacy with the development of consciousness, a global consciousness being more complete than an exclusively communal or ethnocentric consciousness. Each level is oriented towards the development of a corresponding level of consciousness, and every higher level of consciousness comprehends the lower levels.

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The first level of wholeness which integral literacy has to take account of is individual consciousness, the needs, interests and goals of the individual subject, his/her personality and the individual differences that make him/her unique. Here it is important to pay attention to the different styles of learning, since every individual has his/her own style of learning, which must be respected and stimulated. We must also work here on gender consciousness, taking account of the fact that men and women build up their identities differently, and that our value systems are based on different values (Gilligan, 1982). Integral literacy must therefore help both men and women first to build themselves as different beings and then to recognize each other as equals. This is how, in my opinion, integral literacy can be a useful way of transcending differences, but these cannot be transcended if they are not first integrated. This is an important crux, since if we place ourselves from the point of view of evolutionary development, we must understand that merging is not at all the same as integrating. Therefore, working on the individual dimension implies favouring the emergence of new levels of consciousness, taking account of both deep-seated and superficial structures.

The challenge at present consists in recognizing differences but taking care not to use them, once again, as a means of restricting women's rights, because what usually happens is that as soon as any type of difference is declared to exist between persons, the most privileged will use that fact as a means of perpetuating their privileges. The challenge before us consists in the first place in establishing what differences exist between the masculine and the feminine spheres of value; in the second place, in learning to value these differences not in terms of better or worse, nor placing them on a equal footing as if they were complementary. No, the challenge consists rather in valuing the two spheres equally. Both are necessary and equally valuable; hence it is not a question of trying to eliminate differences, but of finding a balance between them.

For all these reasons, there is a clear need for literacy to help construct gender identities. We might even go so far as to

refer to gender literacy as a tool which could help us build our identities, whether as men or as women, starting from a recognition of our differences. This would need to be worked on as part of the process of building identity.

Literacy must facilitate the construction of these new identities that will provide us with a new way of relating to each other, recognizing each other and respecting each other. To achieve this we will need to face enormous cultural resistances, because the male worldview has been so dominant for so long that we have come to believe that it is the only true one. Fortunately, we have come to the stage where these truths are being questioned, which helps us to understand that, without denying equality, it is still possible to recognize difference as well.

The second level of wholeness is the communal consciousness of the human being. It is a more complete level of consciousness, because it includes others in its perception of reality. At this level, integral literacy must place the emphasis on the quality of human relations, on the awareness of belonging to the community. This community may be made up of the family, the adult education centre, the village or the town in which we live. When we are working at this level we must allow the emergence of the *we* dimension, which may be achieved by using dialogue and shared worldviews. This will allow us to transform a set of isolated individualities into a real community of learning, whose aim is to generate common meanings, shared through dialogue.

The third level of wholeness that integral literacy must take account of is social consciousness, which refers chiefly to a human being's national or cultural consciousness, where the ideological foundations and economic goals of countries or cultures take on considerable significance. From this level we can seek to favour the emergence of an awareness of social justice, democracy and peace, which will allow us to transcend the social disintegration caused by the dominant values of exploitation, control and dominance. Our effort must be directed at overcoming the old traditional view that considers societies

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purely in terms of class struggle, problems and conflicts of interest. A more profound vision would help us perceive conflict within a context of cooperation and development.

The fourth level of wholeness refers to global consciousness, to the processes of globalization that demand worldwide interest, a worldcentric ethic that is not focused solely on the well-being of the group to which we belong – as on the previous social level – but on the well-being of humankind as a whole (Morin, 2000). At this level of wholeness, the objective of integral literacy will be to build the feeling of belonging to a global citizenship, of belonging to and loving the human family, and of profound respect for the planet earth. This global consciousness transcends and therefore incorporates personal, local and national interests, and apprehends the wonder that humanity can share a single consciousness. At this level national differences are overcome and all human beings are subjects of interest, without distinction of cultures or beliefs.

The 20th century made great strides forward but also great steps backwards; it solved some problems and created others. We have now accumulated a sufficient quantity of knowledge to allow the emergence of a complex consciousness with worldcentric visions. People, communities and societies nowadays are increasingly faced with completely new situations, which require the deployment of new approaches and techniques, but which are not devoid of risk for us all (Beck, 1986).

In order to progress towards integral models of literacy, we need a body of professionals who are able to assume these new approaches. Unless the mentalities of those who must facilitate the processes of integral learning do not change, then practices will not change either. We all know that changes are not brought about by decree. Introducing these new approaches will require training professionals who are able to further the process, which in turn will mean changing the paradigms on which the knowledge and training of teachers is based.

Integral literacy must play its role in this change of paradigm and will therefore need within its field to help people

understand it, since, as we have seen throughout this work, there is at present a wide gap between on the one hand our disconnected and fragmented knowledge, compartmentalized into disciplines, and on the other hand the realities and problems which are increasingly interrelated, multidimensional, transnational, planetary and global.

Those of us who are dedicated to this field of study and work must contribute our grain of sand in order to facilitate this change, without forgetting, as Edgar Allen Poe said in the quotation heading this study, to originate is carefully, patiently and understandingly to combine.

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This book comprises complementary studies by H.S. Bhola and Sofia Valdivielso Gómez, joint winners of the sixth International Award for Literacy Research, given by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Hamburg. Prof. Bhola's text systematically explores how the adult literacy drive and the promotion of sustainable development can be brought together, while Dr. Valdivielso Gómez argues for an integral approach to literacy and sustainable development, informed by the ideas of the philosopher Ken Wilber. Both provide valuable signposts for researchers, policy-makers and practitioners in the field.