of priority target illiterate populations. Depending on conditions in the particular country, such targets might be a particular age-group, a disadvantaged group such as women, the disabled, rural or semi-urban poor, ethnic minorities or indigenous populations. Hence, the educational or literacy approaches need to be tailored to specific economic and cultural contexts so as to be relevant and attractive for the potential learners. The magnitude of the task of achieving adult literacy can be assessed using population and literacy pyramids showing the literacy trends and distribution by sex and by age group within changing demographic contexts, as shown in Figure 4.

Data on the breakdown of literacy rates by age and sex are for the most part based on rough estimates and should be interpreted with caution. Nevertheless, as shown in Figure 4, the data indicate, among other things, that the older the population, the higher the incidence of illiteracy, especially among females.

The magnitude of the EFA challenge implies that, in addition to seeking to assure that all primary-school-age children have access to schooling, more efforts are needed to develop adult and non-formal education so as to reach those children, youths and adults whose learning needs may not be adequately addressed by conventional or formal education.

In view of the current EFA trends, most experts, as well as EFA partners agencies, are convinced that it is impossible to achieve the EFA goals and targets without reinforcing the non-formal education system (NFE), especially in poor countries. Though universal primary enrolment remains the principal means of ensuring basic education for all, it is limited to those in appropriate age groups, those for whom schools are accessible and, in many cases, those who can afford the costs of schooling.

In many countries, literacy training and NFE have been found to be effective tools in reaching children who cannot or do not enrol in primary school, those who drop out from school, and youth and adults who relapse into illiteracy and those who have never benefited from any schooling. Such countries include members of the E-9 group of most populous nations (Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan).

Table 4 gives an overview of the status of literacy and non-formal education in the E-9 countries. According to the Indian EFA report, for example, in 1997 some 7 million children in remote and inaccessible rural areas and urban slums, especially girls and the children from disadvantaged groups, had gained access to primary education through NFE channels. Such efforts account for about 3.5% of the total enrolment at the primary stage and a reduction of over 1% in overall drop-out rate. While small in numerical terms, these gains are significant because they show the potential impact of working through news institutions to reach unschooled persons.