

**EDUCATION FOR ALL GLOBAL MONITORING REPORT 2006
SPECIAL THEME: LITERACY**

**External Consultation Outline
28 February 2005**

(Draft, not for quotation)

This is a preliminary outline of the Report, written in narrative form, designed to invite comment from our many – and different – stakeholders. As with past Reports, there will be discussion both of general progress toward Education for All goals and of a special theme, literacy, which corresponds to the Dakar goals. Comments are invited on any aspect of the Report outline, although the moderated online consultation will be limited to the literacy theme (Chapters 1 and 4-7). The Report Team undertakes to consider all comments carefully; appropriate to the Report's independence; however, the final Report will not necessarily reflect all comments nor will it necessarily be organized in the same order as this consultation outline. Meanwhile, the Team has commissioned background papers on many of the issues raised in this outline and also a series of country case studies.

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Chapter 1: Literacy for All

- 1.1 Literacy is at the core of learning as it constitutes learning how to learn. In one sense, everyone is literate – everyone can communicate verbally in her or his mother tongue. But in another fundamental sense, many women and men are not literate: they lack the expression and comprehension skills enabling them to learn and access written information and communication, and thereby to improve their daily lives.
- 1.2 Some lack basic literacy skills because they have not attended school; others because their schooling was cut short or of poor quality. These people are almost all poor, two-thirds are women, almost all live in rural areas of low-income developing countries, and many belong to linguistic minorities. Some, however, are found in middle- and even high-income countries. Wherever located, the persistence of illiteracy represents a violation of human rights, a loss of human capability, and a brake on economic and social development.
- 1.3 Not only is it at the core of learning, literacy is also at the core of Education For All (EFA) and is central to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is at the core of EFA because it constitutes one goal in itself (see box), because it is an outcome of the goals as a whole, and because its achievement facilitates the achievement of the other goals. The children of literate parents are more likely to be enrolled and to learn in school. The higher the quality of teaching and learning in school, the more chances students have to achieve literacy. Other life skills are easier to acquire, and continuing education easier to access, for the literate. Literacy is central to the achievement of the MDGs because of their core objective of halving global poverty. The map of global poverty correlates closely with the map of insufficient literacy.

Box 1.1. The Dakar Framework for Action and Millennium Development Goals

EFA Dakar goals

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 complete **free and compulsory primary education of good quality**.

3. Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable

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.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Goal 2. Achieve universal primary education

Target 3. Ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be

access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes.	able to complete a full course of primary schooling.
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.	Goal 3. Promote gender equality and empower women
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.	<i>Target 4.</i> Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels of education no later than 2015.

1.4 The year 2005 is shaping up to be a critical one for EFA, the MDGs and international cooperation more generally. It is the first year in which a specific goal is scheduled to be met – that of gender parity in primary and secondary education – although it is likely to be missed in some 75 countries. Already, the UN Millennium Project Report (January 2005) has labelled progress toward the education MDGs as “partial”. 2005 is a year when the rhetoric of commitment may be translated into international action on a scale that is more commensurate with the challenges set by the global goals. For example, proposals for doubling aid, eliminating debt and reforming world trade are to be discussed by G8 countries in July, the UN Special Session on the MDGs in September and the Doha trade round in December. The OECD Development Assistance Committee will consider moves toward greater harmonization in aid in March and the Fast Track Initiative will strengthen its efforts to improve cooperation in the education sector.

1.5 The 2006 EFA Global Monitoring Report will appear at the end of this year of major international reporting and renewed calls for action and ahead of EFA High-Level Group and FTI meetings in China in November 2005 when it should be possible to gauge whether the international community has moved much more radically than hitherto in its support for national efforts to achieve EFA. While the timing of the 2006 Report limits further opportunities to influence policy in 2005, it does permit the Report to comment on emerging discussions and outcomes. The choice of literacy as a special theme is particularly relevant in the context of these wider debates about poverty and development.

1.6 The global literacy problem remains staggering. By the standard measure in which people report on their own literacy, there are over 800 million illiterates¹, corresponding to one in five adult women and men. Absolute numbers are highest in South and West Asia, Sub-

¹ The measurement of literacy has yet to catch up with knowledge about its complexity. The Report thus has little choice but to use conventional measures of literacy and illiteracy, flawed though these are, at least for global comparative purposes. Chapter 5 will contain a discussion of measurement difficulties and possibilities.

Saharan Africa and East Asia and the Pacific but the lowest literacy rates are found in Africa, South and West Asia and the Arab States. It is the large populations of East Asia that result in high absolute numbers of insufficiently literate despite much higher overall literacy rates than in the other regions. Over 70 percent of all illiterate women and men live in nine countries, one third in India alone (see table 3.7 of the 2005 report, p. 129, or online www.efareport.unesco.org)

- 1.7 Unfortunately the global literacy challenge is likely even more severe than shown by official statistics. Conventional measures of literacy have been uni-dimensional and somewhat simplistic. When other perspectives are brought to bear, the situation becomes more complex but also worsens. One new perspective involves using simple “objective” tests rather than relying on the subjective reporting that goes into the conventional measure. This reveals that objective literacy is considerably lower than subjective assessments. In Lao PDR, for instance, a 2001 survey compared the tested literacy rate with the reported literacy rate for 15-59 year olds with dramatic differences. The reported literacy rate was almost 75% whereas tested literacy was below 50 percent. Similar results are obtained throughout the world. Other perspectives are gained by the more dynamic assessment of literacy over time and in different contexts rather than once-off assessments. Yet another very crucial perspective comes from comparing literacy in different languages (mother tongue, other local languages, official or national languages, and international languages). These new perspectives provide important ways of assessing literacy, although there are not as yet any sets of comparative international data based upon them.

Lao PDR, Tested and Reported Literacy Rates (15-59)

	Total	Male	Female
Tested basic literacy rate	45	54	37
Reported literacy rate	72	80	66
Difference (Reported - Tested)	27	26	29

Source: Lao National Literacy Survey 2001: Final Report

- 1.8 Just using the perspective of “objective” tests, likely well over one billion women and men lack literacy, or one in four adults. If the definition of literacy is expanded to include also the practical application of literacy skills, the numbers will be even higher. A quarter of the world’s adults have been denied their right to education, with consequences for their human capability and their countries’ development. The Report will explore further, in rough quantitative terms, the lost capabilities and the global cost of this continuing lack of basic literacy skills, both for individuals and for societies and economies.
- 1.9 Relatively little is being done or even proposed, however, to tackle the adult literacy problem, either nationally (with some notable exceptions) or internationally. The key recommendations of the UN Millennium Project do not mention it. The MDGs themselves do not include literacy, though youth literacy is one MDG indicator. The principal focus of the two education MDGs, and even within the EFA movement, has

been largely on universal primary education and on gender parity in schooling. The Fast Track Initiative, for example, concentrates on these two objectives. Yet this was not the world's intent, as global commitments indicate. The Dakar Framework in 2000 was quite explicit in containing a goal, and hence a commitment, for adult literacy. The UN Literacy Decade was then launched in 2003 to renew the commitment and efforts to improve literacy around the world.

- 1.10 The Report will explore the reasons for the relative neglect of adult literacy despite global commitments such as Dakar and the Literacy Decade. Is it that attention to schooling has simply got in the way? Is it that poor, rural women have the least voice in their countries' affairs? Is it that governments think it is the province of NGOs rather than of public policy? Is it that there is insufficient knowledge of how to tackle the problem on a sufficient scale to make a difference? Is it that insufficient resources have been devoted to adult programs? Is it a lack of political will?
- 1.11 The Report will argue not just that literacy is a forgotten EFA goal but also that formal schooling alone will not be enough to make a major dent in the global problem of illiteracy and thereby reach the Dakar goal. Formal schooling remains essential and improving enrolments, retention and quality are critical, as the 2005 GMR showed. But more is needed than schooling. EFA thus requires simultaneous attention to (a) universal primary education; (b) out-of-school children; and (c) literacy programs for adults and youth, whether or not they have attended some school.
- 1.12 The Report will start by reviewing progress toward all six EFA goals, drawing out their interconnectedness (Chapter 2). It will hold countries and the international community to account by assessing the commitments of national governments and aid agencies (Chapter 3). Special attention will be paid in both chapters to the gender parity goal, given the significance of 2005. Having established the current global EFA situation, the next four chapters will focus on literacy. Chapter 4 will further define literacy, present a framework for its consideration and explain why literacy is central to EFA and development more generally, drawing on the rights, capabilities and development approach. Chapter 5 will summarize the state of global literacy, introducing the equally thorny - and different - problems of measuring and monitoring. Chapter 6 will discuss the determinants of literacy, drawing on historical analysis, research evidence and country cases. It will identify which of these determinants are amenable to policy interventions, thereby paving the way for Chapter 7, which will consider what policies can make a difference in reducing illiteracy. Finally, Chapter 8 will point the way forward, on EFA as a whole and on literacy, drawing on the preceding chapters.

Chapter 2: Education for All - Five Years On From Dakar

- 2.1 This Chapter, together with the following one on national and international commitments will, as in the past, constitute a core purpose of the Report. Data will be presented on the

six EFA goals, with particular attention to those regions that are most critical for their achievement:

- Early Childhood Care and Education (Goal 1) will be the special theme of next year's 2007 Report. Treatment in this edition will be limited to the presentation of standard statistical information, to the extent possible.
- Primary schooling (Goal 2) will continue to be extensively monitored.
- Because of its relevance to literacy, the youth and adult learning Goal 3 will be discussed at some length and interpretations will be offered, given widespread confusion about the links between it and literacy (Goal 4). It will likely be argued that Goal 3 can be interpreted as recognizing that youth and adults have unmet learning demands and needs that must be met through equitable access to a range of programs of different natures. These include literacy and life skills programs, other forms of basic education and continuing education opportunities.
- Special attention will be paid this year to updating progress towards gender parity (Goal 5), because of the significance of 2005 as the first specific EFA target date.
- Quality (Goal 6). The upcoming Report will take account of developments since the publication of the 2005 report focused on quality while also discussing the issue of the literacy process and its impact on literacy acquisition (as measured by test scores), based on the new PISA² and TIMSS results³.

2.2 Based on quantitative data, this chapter will identify precisely where progress is and is not being made. Simple projections will show how the world might look in 2015 on present trends, including specific regional and country analyses. The Education for All Development Index will be further developed. It has generated international interest and is proving to have an important comparative challenge effect.

2.3 Overall, the news in this chapter will be that there is only partial progress toward the EFA goals. Their achievement remains possible but becomes harder with each year of insufficient progress. This conclusion will lead directly into Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Meeting Our Commitments

In light of the partial progress reported in Chapter 2, this Chapter 3 will review national and international commitments to achieve the Dakar goals.

3.1 **National.** The Report Team is embarking upon a program of extended monitoring of national commitments and policies toward EFA. This will include an examination of the key factors still impeding progress, which obviously vary among different regions and countries. This is a medium-term work program, particularly focused on the 2008 Report that will take a mid-decade look at overall EFA progress. In the 2006 edition, however, we hope to start reporting on the results of this work, especially for regions that are

² Programme for International Student Achievement

³ Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

critical to global EFA achievement, notably Sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia, the Arab States and Central Asia. We also intend to highlight some success stories and to examine some of the challenges ushered in by these: e.g. when countries come close or achieve universal primary education, how are they to finance the emerging demand for secondary education? This is a critical question: it affects the financing of the whole education sector (including primary education and quality inputs for it), not to mention adult literacy.

3.2 Impediments to EFA achievement will likely be considered under five headings, building on the 12 strategies of the Dakar Framework:

- Political will and capacity: an important but very difficult topic. Political will at which level of government, for example? Are organizational and institutional arrangements important?
- Resource levels and allocations: covering financial resources and the efficiency of their use, including educational policies that produce high rates of repetition, and human resources, notably teachers, as discussed at some length in the 2005 Report;
- The impact of HIV/AIDS: both on children, as orphans or family heads for example, and on education systems, especially teachers;
- Emergency response: the discussion will include countries affected by conflict (many of the out-of-school children in the world are in countries in or recently emerging from conflict) and by natural disasters, such as the recent Indian Ocean tsunami;
- Social Inclusion policies: including such issues as gender, ethnicity, disability, and obstacles to enrolment and continued attendance – including fees and other household costs – by the poor.

3.3 **International.** Coming at the end of an important year, with potentially significant developments for aid, the Report will provide an opportunity to consider the adequacy of the current international mechanisms for achieving EFA, including through external financing.

3.4 The Report will analyze the latest available data on international commitments to EFA expressed in the level and distribution of aid, the relative importance of the different channels and modalities (including, for example, debt relief, the Fast Track Initiative, and silent partnerships in which one donor administers another's fund) through which aid flows, and the effectiveness of global mechanisms designed to strengthen coordination and harmonization. This last will include the appropriateness of and relationships between the existing statistical monitoring mechanisms.

3.5 **Aid for Literacy.** Since Dakar, there is no readily available international evidence to show whether aid agencies have reassessed their development strategies to give greater weight to literacy and hence to increase resource flows for literacy programs. On the basis of surveys of bilateral and multilateral agencies and of international NGOs, the Report will assess the place of literacy in aid policy and practice. Is the Dakar literacy goal meaningful to agencies? Do agencies have an operational definition of literacy? How do they treat literacy in their education sector strategies and in other sector strategies? Do they see a role for targeted youth and adult literacy programs as well as formal schooling?

How does this fit with the increased focus on sector-wide approaches? What level of aid do they provide for literacy, recognizing the difficulties of measurement? How do they support the involvement of NGOs? Are literacy programs in developing countries, especially aid-dependent ones in Africa, strongly reliant on external financing? To what extent can mechanisms to tap national resources be strengthened and complemented by international assistance?

- 3.6 The Report will also attempt to offer some initial indications of the resource challenge behind the Dakar literacy goal and will provide an early appraisal of the extent to which the UN Literacy Decade is likely to galvanize international interest and action. Does it need supplementing with other kinds of international support? At best, this section will set some benchmarks against which support for youth and adult literacy can be assessed in the next ten years, while recognizing that for some agencies achieving universal basic education, through primary completion and gender parity, is seen as the key contribution to achieving adult literacy.

Chapter 4: Literacy Matters

- 4.1 What is Literacy? People tend to think of literacy as the ability to read and write, and do arithmetic (numeracy). They then tend to classify others as having, or not having, these skills. Indeed, this is the assumption on which most of the official global literacy figures are based.
- 4.2 There is considerable practical value in this simple definition and simple understanding -- and indeed it is the only one available for extensive international comparative purposes. The definition is incomplete, however. It does not take account of the language in which the skills are acquired and applied, of the diverse circumstances of learners, or of our increasingly sophisticated understanding of literacy.
- 4.3 In order to explore the meaning of literacy, the Report will first consider understandings of literacy through the voices of learners, their families and other literacy stakeholders; through the positions of governments, aid agencies and international organizations; and through academic research. Once a working definition has been established, the case for literacy will be made through a discussion of its benefits. Based on these, a framework is presented for organizing and understanding literacy that will then be used in the rest of this Report.
- 4.4 It is important to begin by listening to learners as most of our “knowledge” of literacy is defined by academics and international organizations. How do “illiterate” people, learners and the newly “literate” make sense of their literacy or illiteracy? How do they express their demand for literacy? Why do people want, or not want, to become literate? How do language, gender, family membership and work opportunities affect this? Do women and men have different motives to become literate? What about other stakeholders – what do employers and social organizations demand? What do NGOs, faith-based and

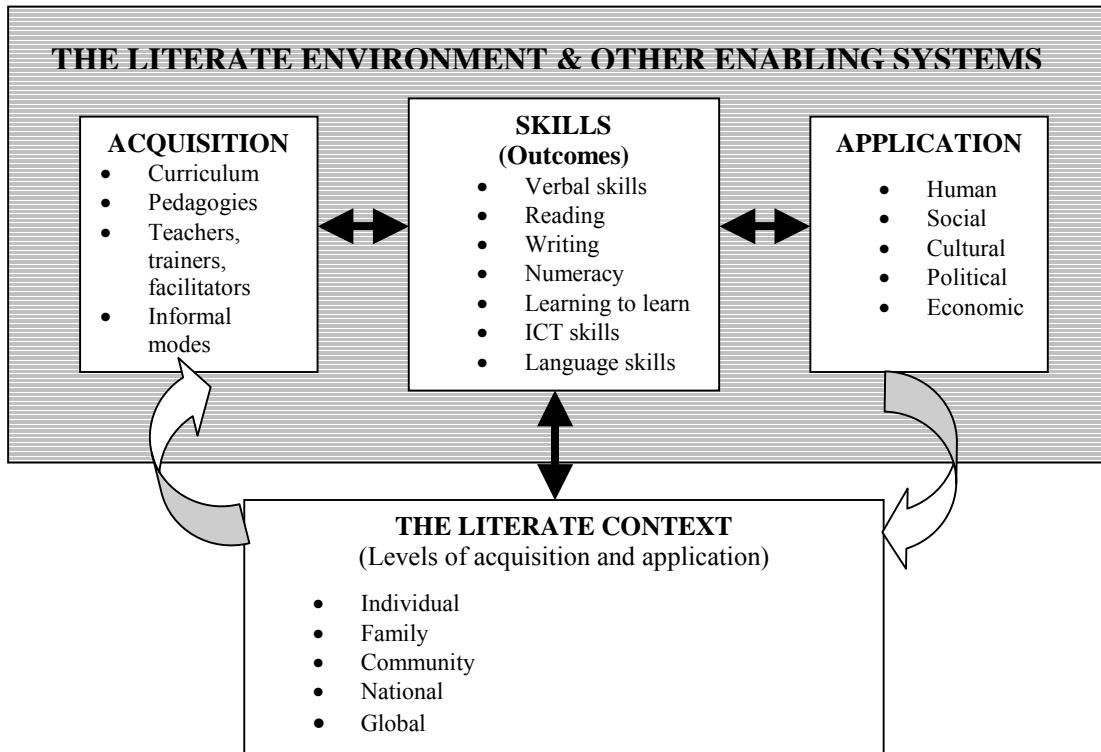
community organizations, and service providers understand by literacy? What are the rationales used by governments to invest in literacy, through schooling and for adults? Not to invest? How about aid agencies?

- 4.5 Various approaches to understanding literacy will be briefly reviewed:
- Literacy as the cognitive attainment of basic reading and writing skills;
 - Literacy as inclusive of numeracy (with its different interpretations);
 - Different meanings of “functional” literacy, ranging from that of linking literacy to work-oriented skills training to the more simple practical and useful application of acquired literacy skills;
 - Literacy seen as a tool for awareness-raising and social change (often inspired by Paolo Freire);
 - Literacy as integrated with income-generation or training in livelihood or other skills;
 - Literacy as “multiple literacies” are identified and developed (e.g. literacy in different language and contextually situated “literacy practices”, as identified and defined by ethnographic research; and
 - Post-modern arguments against any standardization of literacy. These argue that traditional literacy acquisition eradicates vernacular languages and call instead for a renewed focus on quality of oral communication, the oral mastery of language, etc.
- 4.6 These different approaches help us to identify literacy competencies or skills and to examine different processes for acquiring them: through the content of formal and non-formal curriculums, through formal and non-formal teaching and learning methods, through the professional development of teachers, trainers, facilitators and supervisors, and through informal processes in the workplace, community or household. In addition, much of the discussion of literacy focuses on individuals. There is, however, an emerging and important body of knowledge that considers also family and community literacy, these not being the same as the simple aggregation of the literacy of individuals.
- 4.7 Some of these views have been incorporated in the working discourse of international organizations such as UNESCO. They have two drawbacks, however. First, they are complex and their full incorporation would make the monitoring of literacy, and hence policy development and policy analysis, very difficult. Second, they divert attention from the global literacy problem – the large number of poor, rural women and men, speaking minority languages, who are insufficiently literate. A pragmatic first step is to recognize their existence but to move to define a framework for analyzing and monitoring literacy, and literacy policy, in the context of the benefits of literacy and the losses that result when there is insufficient literacy.
- 4.8 The Benefits of Literacy. The potential benefits of literacy, in terms of rights, capabilities and development, are numerous and emerge at multiple levels. For the purpose of human development, literacy is frequently linked to enhanced self-confidence, greater autonomy, and improved health and lower fertility. Studies have also consistently found that adults with better literacy skills are more likely to be employed, and to earn more, than those with poorer literacy skills, even when taking account of other factors that affect work performance. This does depend, however, on the nature of the labor market in specific

contexts. Literate people and households are generally better able to handle unexpected shocks and problems, as the social risk insurance literature demonstrates. Literate communities are often better mobilized and can better coordinate developmental initiatives and activities. More literate people have better access to their rights as citizens and political processes.

- 4.9 Increasingly, evidence has brought out very clearly how education, including literacy, is a factor potentially contributing positively to women's empowerment – economic independence, social emancipation and political participation. Many women who have benefited from adult basic and literacy education have testified to their feeling of personal empowerment as a result. Improved health and nutrition, reduced fertility rates, and increased demand for access to school by their children, together with better learning achievements by these school children, are outcomes often mentioned as rationales for learning programs for women. More broadly, there is now evidence indicating the importance of women's literacy not only for women's empowerment but also more broadly for economic growth, poverty reduction and improvements in equity. These arguments are not new – they underpin, for example, the importance of the gender parity goal and indeed are so central to development and poverty reduction that this is one reason that 2005 was originally set as the target date for achieving parity in schooling – without more literacy for women, the other MDGs are not likely to be achieved.
- 4.10 Literacy can be instrumental in the pursuit of capabilities and development and access to rights, at personal, family, and community levels, as well as at macro-levels of nations, regions and even the world. As noted in Chapter 1, it has a significant contribution to each of the MDGs, especially the overriding goal of reducing poverty, as well as to the more specific EFA goals. As the basis of most education processes, literacy can contribute to social cohesion through the transmission of local, national and global values, religious practices and cultures.
- 4.11 A Framework for Analyzing and Monitoring Literacy and Literacy Policy. Drawing on the different understandings of literacy explored in this chapter, the Report will adopt a pragmatic definition that sees literacy as a means of *written communication* consisting of two components: *expression and comprehension*. Literacy is both the right to the skills of expression and comprehension (as appropriate to a particular context and within a suitable language) and also the sustained application of this right in people's lives such that they benefit from them. This is why literacy is at the core of learning, as it constitutes a necessary – but not a sufficient – condition for learning how to learn. Those without the literacy to participate in important socio-cultural, political and economic activities are without a basic human right. This notion of literacy can vary from context to context (e.g., especially, ICT skills or language skills), but at a minimum amounts to the meaningful acquisition, development and application of written language, including numeracy. All are interrelated and all are affected by the broader policy and literacy environment. Taking as a starting point these desirable literacy skills, especially the critical minimum set that might contribute to enhanced inclusion, the following preliminary framework is tentatively presented to understand and monitor literacy and literacy policies.

A Tentative Framework for organizing, understanding and monitoring literacy and literacy policy



Chapter 5: The State of Literacy

- 5.1 **Introduction and Overview.** Chapter 5 will examine global, regional, national and sub-national patterns of literacy in order to understand who are the more and who are the less literate, which communities benefit from high or suffer from low literacy, and the channels through which literacy is spread. Consistent with the Report's key focus, the chapter will emphasize the relatively low levels of literacy among disadvantaged groups, especially women, the rural poor and linguistic minorities. Language will thus be an important theme of the chapter – which languages are used as a medium of written communication and taught in formal schools and literacy programs compared to the much larger number of oral languages.
- 5.2 The chapter will be based on data and driven by ongoing methodological debates on the definition, monitoring and measurement of literacy. Attempts will be made to consider broader definitions of literacy than in the past, but the measurement of some of these will be limited by the availability of both quantitative and qualitative data. The chapter will therefore also comment on data needs for monitoring literacy for national and comparative purposes as well as for national and local planning. It will look at the various exercises carried out to improve the measurement of literacy, including programs like IALS⁴ and ALL⁵ in industrial countries and the current planned LAMP⁶ exercise for developing countries at the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. It will also be closely linked to the broader EFA analysis in Chapter 2.
- 5.3 The principal conclusions of the chapter are expected to be that:
- Literacy, even envisaged only as a set of individual skills, is extremely heterogeneous, which makes it difficult to measure in a way that is clearly comparable across countries; insight can be gained from a comparison with the measurement of poverty;
 - There has been a long-run transition from low to high literacy, with the timing and the speed varying across countries. Generally literacy rates have first risen among privileged social groups and then spread to disadvantaged ones;
 - This results in striking geographical and socio-economic disparities in literacy levels and rates (e.g. the least literate are poor elderly women living in rural areas of developing countries), the central issue that needs to be addressed in meeting the EFA literacy goal.
- 5.4 **Monitoring and Measuring Literacy.** The data required to monitor and measure the various concepts of literacy presented in Chapter 4 will be reviewed, including their availability. Four key aspects will be discussed:
- The heterogeneity of literacy skills;

⁴ International Adult Literacy Survey

⁵ Adult Literacy and Lifeskills

⁶ Literacy Assessment Monitoring Project

- The fact that literacy does not correspond to the same skills in different languages e.g. functional literacy takes longer to achieve in languages that use ideograms, such as Chinese, than the same skill in languages that use alphabets;
- Literacy acquired in different languages (mother tongue, local, national/official, and international);
- The importance of utilizing and sustaining literacy skills.

5.5 **Historical Perspective.** The spread of mass literacy is a relatively recent phenomenon by historical standards, dating from the late nineteenth century, and is one of the major transitions underpinning development, along with industrialization and the demographic transition. As available, historical data, supplemented with case studies, will be presented on the transition from elite to mass literacy. The Dakar goal implies the need for rapid change. What does history tell us in this regard?

5.6 **Contemporary Patterns and Trends of Literacy.** Three types of analysis will be carried out. *First*, the latest global literacy estimates –for women and for men – will be presented, including a discussion of the methodological debates that accompany them. The estimate in the 2005 Report of about 800 million adult illiterates will be updated, as will its regional and country distribution. Particular focus will be paid to countries with large absolute numbers of illiterates (e.g. India, China, Pakistan and Bangladesh) and to those with low overall literacy rates, regardless of size (e.g. many countries in Africa). The distribution of literacy within countries will also be illustrated, especially for India and China.

5.7 *Second*, the socio-economic characteristics of literate and illiterate people will be presented. These will emphasize gender, age, residence (rural, urban, peri-urban), and household income. The prevalence of literacy among high-income urban men and of illiteracy among poor rural women will be illustrated across countries. Internal and international migration will also be considered, with different patterns emerging from migration driven by labor markets or by conflict and displacement, though data considerations will limit the discussion.

5.8 *Third*, trends in recent decades will be analyzed, at global, regional, national and sub-national levels, using age-cohort data and socio-economic characteristics. Generally, literacy rates are much higher – and the literacy gender gap much smaller – among younger population cohorts than among older ones, reflecting the expansion of mass schooling. This is not universal, however, and analysis will be provided, linked to the broader EFA analysis in Chapter 3, on those countries where literacy rates may be stagnating or declining, due to the collapse of education systems (e.g. in the former socialist countries of Central Asia), the impact of conflict (e.g. Sub-Saharan Africa), the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and other factors including immigration (e.g. in the United States but also in Western Europe). The fact that literacy rates can decrease will be emphasized. This is as true of low literacy countries, where the disruption of the literacy environment can push the literacy rate even lower, as it is of high literacy countries.

- 5.9 **Alternative Measures of Literacy, the Uses of Literacy and the Literacy Environment.** The above analysis is based on conventional measures of literacy. This is driven by the availability of data but it is inherently unsatisfactory, given changing knowledge about literacy. This section will discuss the extent to which another picture emerges as alternative measures of literacy are used. Unlike the earlier analysis using conventional data, this section will rely on specific cases for which alternative data are available.
- 5.10 • *Alternative measures of individual skills.* As the Lao PDR example in Chapter 1 illustrated, recent surveys indicate that actual literacy levels are lower than conventional data suggest. There are two reasons: the bias of subjective estimates and the difficulty of equating the attainment of a particular grade with the acquisition of specific skills, given the wide variability in the quality of formal schooling. How large are such biases? Do they affect all individuals or social groups in the same way? More generally, the heterogeneity of literacy skills will, to the extent that it is measurable, be addressed, as has been the depth of poverty using more indicators than the headcount index for example, and taking qualitative as well as quantitative factors into account. For example, the literacy skills of different cohorts may not be comparable. A discussion of the measurement of numeracy and the extent to which its patterns are correlated with those of literacy per se will also be included if possible.
- 5.11 • *Literacy and language.* The definition of literacy is intrinsically linked to a specific language. Yet relatively few of the world's languages are written ones or used as a medium of instruction in formal schooling and literacy programs. The Report will present data on this, as well as on the proportion of literate and illiterate persons whose mother tongue is not a written language, and for whom literacy acquisition also implies learning another language. The distribution of languages is closely associated to the distribution of literacy, including at the household level; in societies where women's mobility is limited, it is common that mainly men speak the official language. The trade-off between learning literacy in one's mother tongue and learning a more common, and often dominant, language will be discussed, keeping in mind that the oral or written status of a language is to some extent a policy decision.
- 5.12 • *The uses of literacy.* The Report will include data on access to media, book publication, the information society, the Internet, etc., and will also use publications in fields such as history, anthropology and the sociology of culture. The definition of "the uses of literacy" and its relationship with other "life skills" will be explored, along with an assessment of the existing literature.
- 5.13 • *The literacy environment.* The Report will reflect on the idea of literacy at the "community" level, attempting to define what a 'literate community' is and to what extent it is more than a collection of literate individuals. There will also be a discussion of intra-household inequalities in literacy. Being illiterate but having literate relatives ('proximate illiteracy') is not the same as being illiterate without such literate relatives ('isolated illiteracy'). Available data will be presented, together with a reflection on the way this externality-based argument could be extended to social units other than the household.

The data presented in the preceding paragraph on the uses of literacy will also be relevant to the discussion of the literacy environment.

- 5.14 This section will conclude with a discussion of its implications both for monitoring literacy internationally and on the ground in specific policy and program contexts (linked to the discussion in Chapter 7).
- 5.15 **Literacy in 2015 – Projections and Implications for the 2015 EFA Goal.** Projections will be used to provide a general assessment of progress toward the Dakar literacy goal, based on the data presented above. Countries will first be classified according to their progress and this will further identify those that have made remarkable progress in recent years – is this progress real or nominal? Can these countries’ success show the way for others? For countries that seem unlikely to meet the 2015 goal, when instead may it be achieved? One difficulty will be the precise quantitative meaning of the Dakar goal, which the Report will have to interpret. As formally stated, it is not meaningful for the large numbers of countries with literacy rates above 67 percent; in simple numerical terms these countries cannot achieve 50 percent increases as these would bring their literacy rates above 100 percent. Two possible interpretations are (a) to increase the literacy rate by 50 percent or to 100 percent, whichever is the lower ultimate rate – the interpretation generally used in preceding Reports; and (b) to reduce the illiteracy rate by 50 percent. In developing the 2006 Report we will experiment with both measures – it is unlikely, however, that the identification of countries and groups where most attention is needed will be markedly different, whichever interpretation is used.

Chapter 6: Explaining Global Progress – The Determinants of Literacy

- 6.1. Literacy acquisition and use is the result of factors that can and cannot be influenced by public policy. The principal purpose of Chapter 6 is to identify these factors, in order to pave the way for Chapter 7’s discussion of policies and strategies for literacy. It will do this through historical analysis; through examining technical, socio-economic, political and religious change; through considering the role of public policy, including literacy policies per se; and through a special look at cases where literacy has declined or where illiteracy persists in countries that have largely achieved EFA. The broad conclusion will be that public policy can very significantly accelerate the global literacy transition, with the caveat that not all the determinants of literacy are amenable to public policy influence.
- 6.2 **Historical Perspective.** Literacy developed as a specialized tool among the elite that was used for administration and business purposes and was soon associated with religion, the arts and indeed political power. Literacy has not resulted just from public policy interventions by the State but from a broader set of factors. These will be explored.
- 6.3 **Technical, Socioeconomic, Political, Cultural and Religious Change.** Literacy is increasingly vital as the complexity of technology and economic and social organization increases. Literacy is thus correlated with industrialization and economic change but this

correlation is hard to unpack into what is determining what. Notions of literacy also shift with technology and with economic evolution, e.g. a basic mastery of English and of computer skills are increasingly required on OECD labor markets. Discussion will draw heavily on economic studies of the returns to literacy (and education) including agricultural modernization in developing countries and the PC Revolution in the late 20th Century; it will also take note of countries where the lack of such change may have hindered the development of literacy. Other aspects of social and political change will be examined, particularly the changing role of women, especially on the labor market (critical given how many of the world's illiterates are women), the transition from socialism, and the impact of globalization. Religious institutions are often one of the main providers of literacy and both permit and restrict literacy acquisition. The Report will discuss the impact of religious values, institutions and schools on the spread of literacy. Finally the tension that exists between the spread of skills that constitute "modern" literacy and the evolution of "traditional" skills and representations of the world will be discussed in the context of broader technical, economic, social, religious and political change.

- 6.4 **Public Policy.** Two types of public policy are relevant to literacy. The first consists of policies that are not formal literacy policies but that affect the demand for literacy, promote its uses and help create a literate society. Such policies can be both national and local. They include, for instance, economic policies that affect the returns to education and hence demand for learning among the uneducated. They also include policy on gender and language. What distinguishes countries that have developed a political commitment to literacy through such policies from those that have not?
- 6.5 The second type of public policy is that specifically designed to increase literacy. The two most common policy areas are those concerned with formal schooling and with youth and adult literacy programs. Complementarities between enrolling children in schools and including out-of-school children, illiterate adolescents and adults in literacy programs will be the key preoccupation of this chapter. In countries with young and still quickly growing populations, reducing future adult illiteracy rates depends critically on universalizing primary schooling of good quality. This will certainly be easier to achieve if adult literacy programs are run simultaneously. Furthermore, it seems that countries that have already reached relatively high levels of adult literacy can successfully address a large part of the remaining illiteracy through targeted programs.
- 6.6 Formal schools are the institutions in which most persons acquire literacy, yet the links between formal schooling and literacy are complex. First, even the primary curriculum goes beyond basic literacy and numeracy. Second, given low retention rates and low quality in formal schools in many countries (as discussed in the 2005 GMR), many pupils leave the school system, whether before or after completing the primary curriculum, without being functionally literate. Third, formal schools may not adequately teach all the skills that constitute literacy, and they may not be expected to do so independently of their environment. The extent to which formal schooling provides literacy skills is thus an important topic, which conventional definitions of literacy status derived from grade attainment have eschewed. Questions to be addressed include the number of schooling years required for the effective and sustained achievement of various degrees of literacy,

- conditional on school quality and the literacy environment; and the relationship between formal schooling and other formal, non-formal and informal channels of literacy acquisition.
- 6.7 Youth and adult literacy programs, as well as specific programs targeted to out-of-school children, may have the potential to raise literacy rates in a different way than formal schooling, and to promote different concepts of literacy. These programs may not be focused on literacy acquisition per se but may achieve it as part of a different purpose e.g. health education or micro-business development. What is the demand for such programs? Are they successful? Are there examples of mass campaigns that have succeeded in permanently raising the adult literacy rate? What is the impact of such campaigns on formal schooling?
- 6.8 **Resources.** Much more is known about the costs of schooling than the costs of youth and adult literacy programs, including mass campaigns. This section will attempt to assemble available information to inform the policy choices discussed in Chapter 7. A particular difficulty will be separating out the cost of the literacy component of adult programs with complementary objectives (such as health, livelihoods etc.).
- 6.9 **Literacy Reversals and Persistent Illiteracy.** Declines in literacy have occurred in countries that have gone through structural crises, such as conflict or prolonged economic decline, and countries in which education and literacy policies have not been sustained. These exceptions to a positive global trend affect millions of persons for several decades, and will therefore be analyzed.
- 6.10 A related question is the persistence of illiteracy, and the development of new forms of it, in countries that have made literacy nearly universal, such as those in North America and Western Europe. What causes this kind of illiteracy, and to what extent does it differ across countries? Are there lessons that can be drawn for developing countries in which literacy rates have been sharply rising in the last decades (i.e. what can they do to avoid remaining with a small but significant proportion of illiterates)? Is the literacy diffusion process pervasive and inclusive enough to affect whole societies? This discussion will be linked to the broader consideration of social inclusion in Chapter 3.

Chapter 7: Policies and Strategies for Literacy

- 7.1 The global challenge to enable hundreds of millions of people to acquire and use literacy to improve their own lives and those of others is formidable. But it is a challenge that has to be addressed if the Dakar literacy goal is to retain any meaning. Drawing on the insights and the lessons of the preceding chapters, particular attention will be given to public policies for literacy. Five issues are addressed: the aims of national literacy policy; acquiring literacy skills; creating and sustaining enabling learning environments; defining national policy frameworks; and defining the place of international aid for literacy.

7.2 **The aims of national literacy policy.** Learners or potential learners come first. The situations of youth and adults – men and women – are varied and their circumstances complex. This being so, it is important to address three core questions:

- For whom is literacy policy and practice defined and by whom? To what extent should literacy policy focus on the poorest and the most disadvantaged in society? With such a starting point (building on the evidence of Chapters 4 and 5), does this necessarily lead to a variety of aims and responses that reflects diversity of circumstance, priorities and need? And within this context should governments (as some have) be setting major national targets for the acquisition of literacy consistent with the Dakar goal, and if so, how should these targets be set and defined?
- Literacy for what? Building on the analysis of costs and benefits, how should public policy define the outcomes that should accrue from literacy programs, with the implications that this has for the direct involvement of government and/or the creation of enabling environments for literacy activities to take place?
- In the light of the above, which literacy skills should be given prominence, in order to extend personal choice, freedoms and options and for sustainable personal and societal benefits?

7.3 These questions will be answered recognizing a set of important contributory factors. Poor people across different cultures share many common circumstances. The analysis of demand, need and circumstance must be gender aware and gender proactive. No literacy program starts with a blank check, literacy exists in many forms and in different literacy environments. Understanding which languages are used and which are perceived to be of value is crucial to understanding and defining aims, objectives and skills. And the significance of supply-side activities, including strong advocacy for literacy, can contribute to heightened learner motivation and to program responses that match perceived needs.

7.4 **Acquiring Literacy Skills.** Defining approaches to the effective teaching and learning of literacy is critical. Literacy curricula options will be analysed and good practice assessed – whether literacy is the defined outcome of a program or whether it is one of the means to wider social, economic and political ends in a variety of development programs.

7.5 Approaches to the teaching and the learning of literacy and numeracy for both children and adults are debated strongly. The pedagogy of adult learning and of literacy within it will receive attention. Different approaches have enjoyed various degrees of success, in different environments, at different times, and using different educational technologies. Program evaluations and case and country studies will be used to understand the reasons for success and failure.

7.6 Close attention also will be given to those who teach and facilitate literacy programs. Who are they? Have they a uniform or diverse profile? Their circumstances, motivation, basic education, learning needs and career opportunities deserve more consideration than has usually been the case in many literacy activities.

- 7.7 Recognition will also be given to the more informal acquisition of literacy (e.g. workplace literacy, family literacy and the enabling role of literate environments). In this context the concept of *post-literacy* will be discussed, given that the evidence of numerous evaluations is not encouraging with regard to the retention and application of literacy skills. Is this primarily a reflection of ineffective programs and/or does it mean that separately designed post-literacy programs are needed through the consolidation of skills, their application to particular practical needs and through making literacy materials more widely and readily available? Designing literacy strategies that address the literacy and language environments of whole communities and aim to bolster learning environments more generally is one way forward.
- 7.8 These are complex issues. And yet if literacy is to be addressed prominently in national policy, a set of clear and accessible messages and guidelines should emerge from this analysis. This must include information about the cost and the cost-effectiveness of different approaches to the acquisition of literacy. In an area where there are limited data and analyses, it nevertheless seems clear that both unit costs can vary significantly and that there is a spectrum of ways by which programs can be funded (within and outside of government), all of which suggests that there is room for manoeuvre in making literacy programs more cost effective.
- 7.9 **Creating and Sustaining Enabling Learning Environments for Literacy.** This section will examine the organizational, management and program environments within which literacy skills are, can and should be acquired. The distinction will be reiterated of the different roles that public policy can play in terms of providing literacy programs directly, providing and supporting programs within which literacy is a constituent part (health, livelihoods, water and sanitation, HIV/AIDS,) and consciously addressing wider issues which are enabling of literacy to flourish (e.g. through language policy, freedom of information, encouragement to the voice of civil society, IT policy etc). The section will also examine policies that shape the literate environment, e.g. policies toward book publishing, newsprint availability, etc.
- 7.10 It will also recognize the existence in most countries of a multi-channel approach to literacy through formal, non-formal and informal means (and in some instances, through distance learning); through the public and the private sector; through NGOs and faith bodies, etc. The relevance of the different scales of programs will be assessed. The extent to which partnerships between different providers offers real opportunities for the more effective delivery and sustainability of literacy will receive attention and the space for more bridges between formal and non-formal learning including through mutually agreed qualification frameworks will be assessed.
- 7.11 **Defining National Policy Frameworks.** All governments have made commitments to improve levels of literacy. But few set out coherent national policies for youth and adult literacy, either because this is not deemed a priority (for both political and economic reasons) or because co-coordinating the delivery of programs and/or creating more enabling and proactive literacy environments is deemed difficult and complex. It is also the case that the benefits deriving from higher levels of adult literacy have strong

beneficial effects on primary education and its outcomes – a relationship which receives insufficient attention and will be elaborated here as a key message of the 2006 Report.

- 7.12 Understanding the place of literacy in national and state government policies requires analysis at a number of levels. The extent to which literacy figures strongly in PRSPs is important and will be assessed. The place of literacy within education and sub-sector plans is critical, including the weight which is accorded to schooling as the primary vehicle for the acquisition of literacy skills and of the relationship which is given (or not) to schooling and adult learning within wider continuing and lifelong learning frameworks. The place of literacy within language policy has already been noted as crucial. And the extent to which literacy is well defined, as a contributory factor in meeting the objectives of a wide spectrum of development programs is equally important. If there is action across a number of fronts, is a more coherent overarching policy on literacy required? If so, what are its key constituent parts?
- 7.13 There is some evidence of the revitalization of both literacy and adult learning more generally in both developing and industrialized countries. It is important to understand why this is so (for example, for women, for globalization, for the new technologies, for the environment) and where it is leading in terms of the articulation of policy, the allocation of resources and the governance of programs. The potential for new relationships and partnerships between the state (nationally and locally) with non-governmental and civil society organizations is important in this regard.
- 7.14 In this section, an attempt will be made to assess – in different contexts – the financial implications of different literacy objectives and targets and the extent to which these are manageable propositions, for governments and for other stakeholders for whom widespread literacy is important.
- 7.15 **Defining the Place of International Aid for Literacy. Accurate data are scarce** (although the attempt will be made in Chapter 3, as we have seen, to bring together what figures there are) but many literacy programs are funded directly, or indirectly through NGOs and CSOs, by aid agencies. The aid community sponsors much of the literature on literacy. And there are examples of agencies having considerable impact at different times on literacy policy. All of this will be summarized and some assessment made of where the potential of the international community best lies over the next decade, including through the vehicle of the United Nations Literacy Decade.
- 7.16 **Key Elements of an Agenda for Action.** Drawing on conclusions from the above, a set of propositions will be introduced to help inform a clearer articulation of national policies and strategic options for meeting the goal of mass literacy. These will obviously be context-bound. Provisionally, this will address:
- Articulating literacy and language policies within wider development frameworks, including the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All;
 - Defining cost-effective strategic options to achieve literacy for all, using both schools and youth and adult programs, for the medium to long term;

- Recognizing the institutional, financial and human resource implications of these strategies;
- Setting good practice parameters for a) demand side analysis; b) the teaching and learning of literacy; c) institutional and coordination arrangements; d) the role of aid in supporting national programs; and e) monitoring progress.

Chapter 8: EFA and Literacy for Development – Making It Happen

A short concluding chapter will attempt to combine the key messages of the entire report to suggest ways forward for national governments and the international community, to achieve EFA by 2015 and specifically to achieve the Dakar literacy goal.

As part of this consultation, readers are invited to suggest the key messages that their experience indicates the Report should highlight.