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United Nations Literacy Decade

EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

Presented at the UNESCO sub-regional Conference *Addressing Literacy Challenges in East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific: Building Partnerships and Promoting Innovative Approaches*. (31 July - 1 August 2007, Beijing, China)

Programme name: Family-based Learning through Distance Education

Implemented by: National Centre for Non Formal and Distance Education, Ministry of Education

Basic facts

Country: Mongolia

Starting year: 2004

Outreach: 3500 illiterates, 4500 semi-literates **per year**.

Target Population: Illiterate adults (aged 15 and above): neo-literates, semi-literates and out-of-school youth

Language of instruction: Mongolian

Operating in: 6 aimags (provinces), namely Bayan-Ulgii, Khovd, Uvs, Zavkhan, Bayan-Khongor and Sukhbaatar and some districts of Ulaanbaatar city in 2005 and additional 6 aimags in 2006-2007: Tuv, Umnugobi, Dundgobi, Dornogobi, Khentii, Gobi-Altai

Facilitator/Beneficiary ratio: 1 per 20-30

Main Funding: UNESCO

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Brief Description

UNESCO and the National Centre for Non-Formal and Distance Education (NCFDE) under the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (MoECS) have jointly implemented a three-year project (2005-2007) "Literacy through distance learning" which aimed at providing literacy for illiterates and conducting post-literacy programmes for semi-literate adults through various means of distance learning.

Rationale

The rural population of Mongolia consists to a large extent of nomadic herders, living in *gers* (movable structures) in single or multiple family units. Economic patterns were disrupted by the transition from a planned to a market economy during the 1990s, with an increase in the school dropout rate as families needed extra labour to tend their newly privatised herds. At that time, there was a reduction in the literacy rate from a peak of almost universal literacy. Through a number of innovative projects in non-formal education, a new approach in Mongolia at the time, methods were developed to address the learning needs of both school dropouts and adults requiring new practical livelihood skills. These projects used the family unit both as the place of learning and as a means of reaching out to further learners.

The *Literacy through distance learning* programme builds on prior experiences by using ICTs, radio, CD-ROMs and other distance learning tools, along with facilitators to work directly with learners.

Since the learning attitude of the people is very good both in the urban and local areas due to the high value given to education in the socialist time and taking into consideration that at least one person in each family is a functional literate, the programme utilized the family unit and the intergenerational learning approach as the most appropriate approach to reach the target group. The programme focuses on two forms of training: 1) training at *bagh* centre and 2) training at *ger* school.

It was useful to organize training at *bagh* centre since *bagh* is very close to local people it could families living close by get together and the most important thing is that all information regarding the location of the each family and educational level of each family member is maintained by the *bagh* director. Regarding the second form or *ger* school, the teachers visit the learners where several families live close by usually during the summer time. However, these families living close by have a master among them who is more educated and mostly respected, and this master has a leading role for educating the others in accordance with the teacher's guide. This practice refers to the seasonal schooling, one of the most appropriate approaches reaching the rural people since the people nomad year around.

Objective

The objective of "*Literacy through distance education*" is to improve the population's literacy level and living standards and to create a friendly learning environment in order to reduce poverty by using ICT tools and radio.

Conceptual Model and Methodology

The programme provides face-to-face teaching for illiterates and multi-grade teaching methodology for different ages and different levels of learners through training at *bagh* centre as well as distance learning with mobile teachers for neo-literates through radio and DVD. A seasonally organized '*ger* school' offers practice-oriented sessions for families living in close proximity to each other. Furthermore, children and parents are encouraged to learn together through intergenerational sharing and coaching.

Since there was a supportive learning environment at the family level, the most crucial step to take within this programme was to develop the learning material. The

literacy textbook for illiterates was developed in an integrated way including reading, writing and mathematics, basic skills. Examples were taken from the real life to meet the adults' needs. Since most of the learners could afford a radio and CD based learning materials, audio and video lessons were developed together with printed materials.

Regarding the appropriateness, most of the learners who need literacy training were the people from rural areas, so the content was mostly on their life and work style. Especially the post literacy learning materials focused intensively on their needs such as veterinary, conserving vegetables and fruits, sewing traditional dresses etc. Learning always goes along with practical skills training.

Innovative features

The programme has resulted in increasing capacity in distance learning provision, particularly in the production and deployment of a wide range of tools and methods. Organizing the literacy training based on families provided a comfortable environment for the learners to become literate and advanced the educational level among all members of the family. The family-based training has encouraged the relationship and communication between parents and children to be more open and democratic while reducing illiteracy and motivating parents to ensure their children attend and stay in school.