

Background paper prepared for the
Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2006

Literacy for Life

Ethiopia: where and who are the world's illiterates?

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2005

This paper was commissioned by the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* as background information to assist in drafting the 2006 report. It has not been edited by the team. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and should not be attributed to the *EFA Global Monitoring Report* or to UNESCO. The papers can be cited with the following reference: “Paper commissioned for the *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006, Literacy for Life*”. For further information, please contact efareport@unesco.org

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By Mammo Kebede Shenkut**

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABE=	Alternative Basic Education
ANFEAE=	Adult and Nonformal Education Association in Ethiopia
ARM=	Annual Review Meeting
BS=	Both Sexes
CRDA=	Christian Relief and Development Association
CSA=	Central Statistics Authority
DAE=	Department of Adult Education
DHSR=	Demographic and Health Survey Report
EFA=	Education for All
ESDP=	Education Sector Development Programme
ETB=	Education and Training Board
ETMB=	Education and Training Management Board
ETP=	Education and Training Policy
EMIS=	Education Management Information System
FDRE=	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
HDR=	Human Development Report
MEDAC=	Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation
MoCD=	Ministry of Community Development
MoE=	Ministry of Education
MOFED=	Ministry of Finance and Economic Development
NDR=	National Democratic Revolution
NFBE=	Non-formal Basic Education
NFE=	Non-formal Education
NGO=	Non-government Organization
NLC=	National Literacy Campaign
PL=	Post literacy
PMAC=	Provisional Military Administrative Council
PTA=	Parent-Teacher Association
SDPRSP=	Sustainable Dev't and Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme
SNNPR=	Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region
TTS=	Teacher Training School
WHO=	World Health Organization
WOALP=	Work-oriented Adult Literacy Programme

Introduction

Ethiopia has a history of having its own alphabet for centuries, the only country in the Sub-Saharan Africa. It is paradoxical, however, to possess an alphabet for centuries and yet be one of the countries with the lowest literacy rate. It was for this reason that some writers identified Ethiopia as a country with the alphabet and thumb print (NLC, 1989).

The illiteracy rate of Ethiopia in 2000 was recorded as 60%. One of the goals of the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) to which Ethiopia is also committed is to reduce this rate by at least half, (i.e. to 30%) by 2015.

Unfortunately, evidences are very sketchy regarding literacy efforts in Ethiopia after 1990. Although the Education and Training Policy (ETP, 1994) indicates that basic education will focus on literacy, numeracy, environment etc, no responsible body is assigned for the implementation and follow up of literacy. Neither the Education and Training Policy (1994) nor the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP) I (1997/98 – 2001/02) explicitly mention government position on literacy and adult education. In ESDP II (2002/03-2004/05), however, literacy is mentioned as a component of NFE which is planned to focus on out-of-school children and adults. It is a good sign that at least some regions have began reporting on the achievements of ABE/NFE in 2003/04.

Currently, the available literacy sources did not provide consistent figures on adult literacy rates. The total literacy rate Ethiopia Child Labour Survey Report 2001 (CSA) reported is 31.3 percent in 2001 whereas the 1994 Census Report gives 32.4 percent for 1994 (i.e. 7 years earlier).

Though discrepancies were observed in these literacy rates, they are taken as reference points since they have provided disaggregated rates by sex and regions. And using these sketchy references, the writer has tried to provide an overview of the after 1990 literacy picture in Ethiopia.

1. An Attempt to Define Literacy

The meaning of literacy can be broadened or narrowed depending on the objectives of the planners and providers of it. The meaning of literacy varies from country to country and from time to time even in the same country. Jones (1990) tells us that: *“... there can be no absolute or universal style of literacy, no single measure, nor any single cluster of universal literacy skills.”*

Generally speaking, literacy is a set of skills acquired by individuals for purposeful (life-promoting) activities.

There are subjective and objective measures of literacy: people think that they are literate (subjective) but when they are required to apply it, to test its application (objective), they fall short of what is expected. It is stated in a study by Schaffner (2004), for example, that:

“... individuals with just a few years of schooling (a great majority of schooled people in Ethiopia) tend to think they are literate more frequently than they are found to be literate by a simple objective test” (p.6)

So there is a gap between what people think of themselves and what the actually situation is. Those who think they are literate will not remain literate because those who attended less than six years of primary education do not seem to acquire the skills to permanent literacy level unless they are provided with the opportunity to apply those skills regularly.

The other aspect of it is that literacy is no longer a uniform concept. Roy-sing (1990) agrees that: *“ Literacy is no longer viewed as a simple concept bound up with the coding and decoding of signs in which the main problems are technical”.*

He says that the literacy debates have been enriched by reflective research, creative insights and added new dimensions to it (p.3).

However diverse and varied meanings literacy may have, it also has some, generally accepted characteristics. Literacy is a tool of communication; it is the ability to code and decode symbolic systems usually in the mother tongue, eventually transferring them to other languages as well. UNESCO (1979) once defined literacy as: *“The teaching or acquisition of reading, writing and numeracy skills to prepare persons ...”* to be able to use those skills for the betterment of individuals and the community at large. What was stated 30 years ago in the Declaration of Persepolis (1975) in Iran regarding the purpose of literacy was to bring about change in society. It says:

“ Literacy ... [is] 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”.

Thus, generally speaking, literacy is understood as an instrument of communication with others or oneself through written symbols for purposeful developmental activities.

2. Literacy and Development

Knowledge as becoming an essential commodity for mankind, a basic raw material which is indispensable for development and even for mere survival (UNESCO, 1997).

Learning is an internal process of empowerment, an indispensable key to personal and social improvement and a development of an all-time and life-long resource. Levin (1989) testifies that:

“There will be no break-through in agriculture and industry, no progress in community health, and indeed, no change in living conditions without the right to learn”

Literacy as a means of communication through the use of written symbols opens the minds of people and makes them receptive to changes, new ideas and practices. It helps them to adopt new styles and methods of production and practices thereby raising their income. According to Bhola (1990:8): "*Literacy even by itself sharpens consciousness, creates discontent with the unacceptable, and adds potential to individual capacity for participation*".

Literate people are mostly ready to accept changes – changes in their life styles, in their methods of production, health practices, etc. thereby enabling them to apply technologies and benefit from such interventions.

Literacy is a set of skills that serve as the entry point to basic education. It contains a set of skills through which individuals and eventually the society in general make all-round development and actively participate in the development process through the acquisition of more knowledge, skills, capabilities and attitudes. It is believed that education:

" Cultivates the cognitive, creative, productive and appreciative potentials of citizens by appropriately relating education to environment and societal needs" (ETP, 1994:8).

Ki-Zerbo (1990) believes that education is indispensable if human beings are to produce better, trade better, communicate better and relate better to one another. The United Nations Secretary General's statement reiterates that literacy is a liberating set of skills by saying: "*... literacy is the key to unlocking the cage of human misery... a key to opening up a future of freedom and hope*" (Kofi Anan, 2003).

Researches have shown the correlation between a one percentage point in the national literacy rate to a two-years' gain in life expectancy (Lockheed, 1999).

Other researches (UNESCO, APPEAL, 1998, for example), provide similar findings on the economic, sociological, cultural and psychological dimensions of poverty. The findings indicate that: literacy, numeracy, problem solving and productivity skills:

- (a) must enhance capacity for labour and creativity to respond to income earning opportunities;

- (b) must help the acquisition of knowledge and skills required for healthy living, use of new techniques of production and intelligent and sustainable use of natural and environmental resources;
- (c) must raise awareness in people themselves, about independent thought and decision-making and roles in development with reference to education, health, family-size, occupational pursuits; and
- (d) must help to overcome ignorance, superstition, fatalism, attitudes of indifference, and promote the enhancement of self-esteem, development of the value of cooperation, the ability to take positive initiatives and action on their own behalf (UNESCO, APPEAL), Bangkok, 1998.

One of most urgent development challenges of the 21st century is, therefore, the inadequacy of better information and education. Information and education empower people to make changes for the betterment and improvement of their social, cultural, economic and environmental conditions. And the ability to read and write allows people to acquire new knowledge, raise their level of awareness about their surrounding and understand their rights. It enables them to claim their individual and collective rights to participate in society, and participation is an important factor in development.

3. The Beginnings of Literacy in Ethiopia

The existence of an alphabet in Ethiopia dates back to the fourth century A.D (Moore, 1990). In its subsequent development, however, the Ethiopian alphabet was associated with the Christian religion and thus literacy was left to the clergy only to be used as a means of religious instruction.

It was only in the 1890s that literacy and basic education were realized as a means of development and modernity. Emperor Minilik II issued a declaration in 1886 E.C. (i.e, 1893/4) to the effect that every child, male or female, should get education after the age of 6. This effort was eventually strengthened by the establishment of a modern school in 1908 and other proclamations issued by subsequent government leaders.

More and more schools were opened as time went by and more and more children joined schools.

Being one of the African countries selected for pilot testing of Work - Oriented Adult Literacy Program (WOALP), Ethiopia introduced it in a tripartite agreement with UNESCO and UNDP in 1968. WOALP raised the awareness of both government officials and the public at large about the need of education in general (see page 6).

Literacy has now become part of basic education which is usually equated with grade four formal, primary education. According to the ETP (1994), primary education is composed of basic education (grades 1 - 4) and general education (grades 5 - 8). And the objectives of basic education (i.e. grades 1 - 4) is stated as providing functional literacy, numeracy and life-skills (TGE, 1994: Article 3.2). ESDP II's program Action Plan (2002) indicates that non-formal basic education program has a three-year cycle and is equivalent to the formal basic education (grades 1 - 4).

Nowadays, quite a significant number of NGOs, religious institutions and the private sector provide basic education in addition what the government does. Most NGOs cover four years of basic education in three years after which the graduates are accepted in grade 5 of government schools (see annex I for content and duration). The same measures are usually applied for young adults who adult literacy and basic education.

Recently, however, some studies are questioning whether or not four years' basic education, be it in formal and NFE, provides permanent literacy. One of the reasons for this doubt arose from the fact that fourth grade children across the country who took tests which were designed for the level, were able to answer only half of the items correctly (World Bank, 2005:34). They were expected to do much better than what they have actually achieved in that test.

Thus, the Study Team says:

"... it would appear that completion of the first cycle (grades 1 - 4) may be insufficient to ensure that most children achieve permanent literacy"
(World Bank, *op.cit.*).

The Study's recommendations implicitly indicate that basic education should be extended to at least five or six years of education but "... *completion of eight years may go beyond what is minimally required*" with the current economic status of the country (World Bank, op.cit.). This writer shares these concerns and concurs with the recommendations.

4. Literacy Efforts in Ethiopia before 1990

Literacy has a long history in Ethiopia as indicated earlier. Leaving aside the efforts made before the 1960s, sometimes sporadic, some other times concerted efforts were made to provide literacy and adult education in Ethiopia in the last 30 – 35 years.

4.1. Literacy Programs during the Imperial Era

4.1.1. National Army for the Alphabet

The first attempt to provide literacy education to a wider target group was made by a voluntary organization established in July, 1962 with the name roughly translated as "*Association of the National Army for the Alphabet*" with a guiding motto of "*Let Everyone Learn*". It was organized by some notable, high government officials with Emperor Haile Silassie as their patron¹.

At about the same time, a Ministry of Community Development (MoCD)² was established to guide, organize and coordinate rural development activities including provision of basic education. One of the priority programs of MoCD was basic education as a component of community development literacy being an integral part. And surprisingly, MoCD used to publish a report of its activities and achievements in a booklet entitled "*Education for All*" since 1957 E.C.

¹ *Constitution of the Association, 1955. E.C*

² *Ministry of Community Development was changed by the Derg Regime to the current Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs*

4.1.2. A Tripartite Experimental Literacy Program

The second large scale literacy program was *“Work-Oriented Adult Literacy Programme (WOALP) (1968 - 1973)*, which was an outcome of the 1965 Teheran World Conference. This program is noted for its contribution in developing good and relevant learning materials for basic education. The materials served as the basis for developing more and better literacy books for programs and campaigns in the subsequent years.

4.2. Literacy Efforts During the Derg Regime

4.2.1. Campaign for Knowledge and Work

The pro-socialist, revolutionary government (commonly known as Derg) took government power in February 1974 and soon issued a proclamation known as *“Development in Cooperation- Campaign for Knowledge and Work”* (MoE, 1989). This Campaign had literacy as one of its nine programs for nation-wide implementation with heavy emphasis on the rural areas including those that were very remote and neglected. 60,000 campaigners participated in the program for two years and were able to make 160,000 people literate (MoE, 1989). The Campaign was a landmark in developing scripts and the development and use of literacy texts in four previously unwritten Ethiopian languages. Similar texts were in the process of preparation and translation in other Ethiopian languages when the Campaign was over.

4.2.2. The National Literacy Campaign

The most extensive and large scale program during the Derg Regime was the National Literacy Campaign carried out all over the country between 1979-1983.

The Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC) announced a Program of *“National Democratic Revolution of Ethiopia”* (NDR) in April 1976 in which it expressed its commitment to eradicate illiteracy in Ethiopia. PMAC stated in the NDR that *“All necessary measures to eliminate illiteracy will be undertaken”* (NLC, 1989:16). The PMAC confirmed its commitment

with the formation of the National *Literacy Campaign Coordinating Committee* in May 1979 (NLC, 1980:17) (see the chart on page 9).

The Committee had a membership of 35 institutions (13 relevant ministries, three religious institutions and 10 other government and mass organizations (Mammo, 1979:9). The Committee was chaired by the Minister of Education at national level but the regional, provincial and wereda committees were chaired by their respective administrators. There were four operational committees at each level responsible for Materials Procurement and Distribution; Recruitment, Training and Placement; Propaganda and Aid Coordination; and Data Collection, Supervision and Certification. Propaganda and Aid Coordination Committee was chaired by the Minister of Information at national level. All the Campaign offices including Propaganda and Aid Coordination Committee, from national to the wereda (district) level were housed within the MoE structure.

The Campaign extended its horizons year by year and reached over 22 million people (51.7% females) in ten years of which 20.3 million (50.5% females) passed the beginners literacy test. Over 18 million (45.5% females) joined the post-literacy stage and 13.8 million (45% females) successfully completed the program (NLC, 1989:33).

Over 51 million texts were produced and used in 15 languages in over 447,000 literacy centres in ten years. More than two million (21% females) campaigners participated and several millions of learning materials (blackboards, exercisebooks, etc.) were distributed (NLC. 1989)*.

*Data was obtained only for the first 16 rounds on these items.

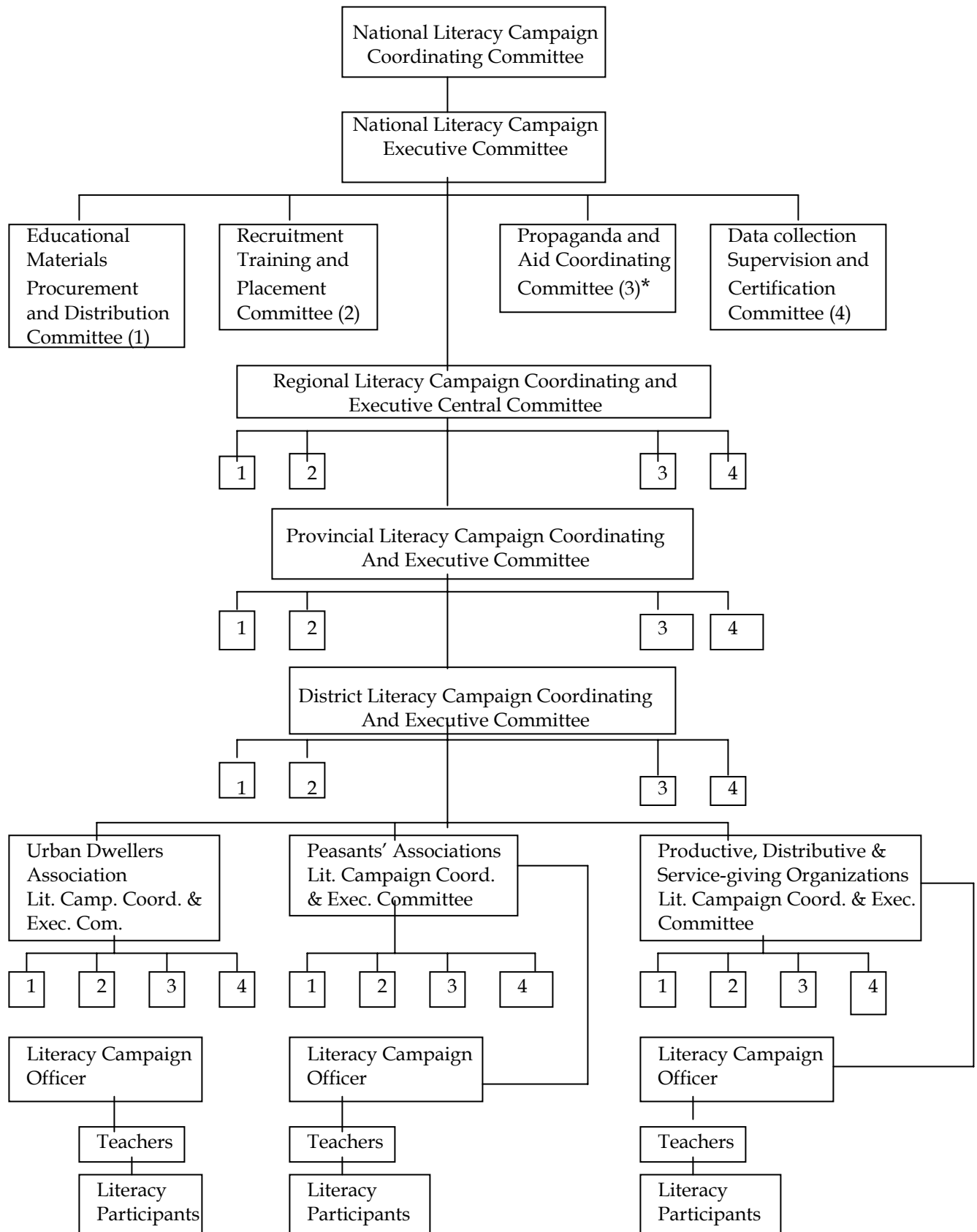
4.2.3. Financial Sources for NLC

There were various sources of finance for the NLC: government budgetary support, community contribution and cash contributions of bilateral and multi-lateral organizations. The following figures indicate the expenses of NLC up to the 19th round.

a) Government budget allocation	ETB	47.30 million
b) Local cash contributions	“	39.00 “
c) International cash contributions	“	5.85 “
d) Estimated value of inkind contributions of local and international organizations and the Ethiopian communities abroad	ETB	<u>18.78</u> million
Total expenses	ETB	<u>110,93</u> million.

NLC depended on a lot of other, unrecorded resources as well such as: the support of thousands of peasant and urban dwellers associations, the free services of millions of the youth campaigners, the free service of thousands of committee members and other operational costs at various levels amounting to **ETB 406.95 million*** which brings the grand total to **517.88 million Birr**.

THE NATIONAL LITERACY CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



* Chaired by the Ministry of Information at national level

4.2.4. Strategies

A number of strategies were used during the Campaign to mobilize the whole society for literacy. Catchy slogans were used frequently as one of the effective strategies such as:

“ Let the educated teach and the uneducated learn”;

“ I pledge to eradicate illiteracy either through teaching or learning”;

“ To be free from illiteracy is like to be reborn”, etc.

Another contributing factor was frequent emphasis by all such government officials, leaders of mass organizations, the clergy, and professionals about the importance of literacy. High government officials including the Head of State visited and taught literacy at different centres to set examples to other stakeholders.

National and regional seminars which were held every year to assess the overall progress and problems of the Campaign, served as a third strategy. Seminars at national level were opened and chaired by the Head of State himself or his most senior representative which was also attended by party and/or government high officials from all the regions.

A lot of competitions were carried out in the seminars in terms of financial contributions and the kinds of innovative approaches they used, and the number of people they freed from illiteracy. Similar seminars were held at regional, provincial and district levels in order to involve the various government sectors and representatives of the masses.

Another spectacular strategy was the mobilization and dispatching of the literacy campaigners colourfully celebrated at national and regional levels in the presence of high officials, parents and sympathizers and replicated at woreda and local levels. Similar celebrations were repeated when the campaigners returned to the capital after the completion of their assignment.

** Estimated by experts based on certain approximations*

4.2.5. Notable Achievements

The Ethiopian National Literacy Campaign made a number of achievements:

It raised the expectations of millions of people and offered the chance for learning. To cite a one time example, a total number of 393,418* individuals continued their education in formal schools in grades 3 – 12 and an additional number of 153 were in higher education institutions in 1985 after being initiated by the Campaign.

Moreover, although there might have been a quick relapse into illiteracy in the following years, the literacy rate at national level was calculated at 83.2% in 1989 (see Annex II). This was an extra-ordinary achievement of the Campaign.

The development of literacy and post-literacy texts in 15 languages was another outstanding achievement. Thirteen of the languages did not have written symbols prior to the Campaign. Production and use of local newsletters in most of the languages and the establishment of more than 8000 rural (or village) reading centers in the rural and urban areas was another initiative and achievement of the Campaign.

The Campaign created awareness among several communities to initiate and manage their own educational programs rather than wait until the government comes in.

The achievements of the Campaign were crowned by several, international awards such as International Reading Association's Literacy Prize, Honourable Mention of UNESCO (Krupskaya) Literacy Prize and NOMA Literacy Prize all from UNESCO (NLC, 1989). The Campaign also received a Medal and Certificate from the Academy of Simba (Italy), Iraq Literacy Prize and a prize from International Gold Mercury (Mammo, 1989:29).

*The figure was obtained from regions through a questionnaire

4.2.6. Problems and challenges

Understandably, the Campaign had to face a number of problems and challenges, which included the following:

➤ **Inadequate preparation for post literacy (PL)**

Literacy campaigns need adequate preparations for the post-literacy stage so that the new literates can continue learning and consolidating their literacy skills. Unless opportunities are provided for continuation and consolidation of the literacy skills, the likelihood for relapse is high. Correlation was observed between the supply of easy-to-read materials, such as local newsletters, to those newly literate people and their achievement and maintenance of the literacy skills (MoE, 1987:VI).

In the case of the NLC, although several PL books were produced and distributed widely, they were not contextualized. They were produced in Amharic and translated into 14 other languages without proper localization and contextualization to the taste and situation of the potential learners/readers (Mammo 1989:)

➤ Shortage of paper and printing facilities in the regions and provinces coupled with shortage of trained writers of readable materials hampered provision of post-literacy materials and local newsletters. This situation might have contributed significantly to the relapse of a large group of new literates into illiteracy.

➤ Another and serious problem was lack of trained humanpower to handle the data at various stages, i.e. from literacy centers to the national level. There are doubts that, in some instances, there may have been double counting when a participant repeats or joins remedial classes.

➤ Another and still considerably serious problem was lack of a literate environment especially among the rural communities. Primarily, the objective realities of the lifestyle of the rural communities did not demand the skills of literacy that much. Most of the rural communities could live the way their

parents lived. Moreover, supply of localized literacy materials was either non-existent or in short supply.

⇒ On the same account, there were not many people among the rural communities who could take over and manage the post-literacy program and support the new literates to consolidate their new skills to the level of functionality. Thus, the new literates were left alone to fend for themselves, which, eventually, might have contributed to relapse into illiteracy.

5. Adult Literacy after 1990: Policy and Practice

5.1. Policy

Literacy is a very important entry point to basic education and provides knowledge and a set of skills to the adult target groups.

Countries are usually assessed in terms of their efforts to discharge their responsibilities and obligations regarding the provisions they make for adult literacy. They are assessed on the basis of their policies and framework for action which sets time-bound goals and strategies to be employed for attaining the set of goals.

In this regard the existing policy document of the FDRE indicates that basic education will focus on literacy, numeracy, environment and related areas but in practice it has been emphasizing formal education only (ETP, 1994:10). Although the ETP (1994), under one of its sub-topics, (Educational Structure), declares that non-formal education (NFE) will be provided and be integrated with basic education at all levels of the formal education, it was not included in ESDP I. However, after a lot of internal and external pressures, MoE was forced to accept NFE as a mode of delivery for basic education and included it in ESDP II.

In ESDP II, MoE underscored that NFE is an alternative to the formal education and accepted that the three-year cycle of alternative basic education is equivalent to the formal basic education (grades 1 - 4). Program Action Plan of ESDP II (June 2002:16) even indicated that 320,581 out-of-school children of 7 - 14 years attended alternative basic education in 2000/01. The same document mentioned that 1,049,061 whose age

was 15 years and above attended adult and NFE in that same year (PAP, 2002:16). But all these figures were not recorded in the Education Statistics Annual Abstract.

In a recently issued draft ESDP III (2004) document, non-formal and adult education is included and properly addressed (PP.26 - 27). The document invites and encourages local governments, religious and international organizations, the private sector and communities to offer NFE and training. The document says that the government will play its roles in policy formulation, the development of curricula and strategy, production of learning materials, setting standards, providing professional assistance, and facilitating access to school buildings.

Inside sources also indicate that the Department of Gender and Educational Equity is envisaged within the MoE organizational structure to deal with adult and NFE, gender, pastoralist education, special needs education and to include eventually pre-primary education.

Non-formal and adult education will have alternative basic education for out-of-school children of 7 - 14 years, literacy for youth and adults whose ages are 15 years and above, and basic skills training to youth and adults (MoE, PAP, 2004:26).

Realizing the importance of non-formal and adult education, MoE has began collecting the data of the participants in these programs. The following table records the data of participants in 2003/04.

Table 1
Participants in Adult and Nonformal Education*

Regions	Participants					
	7 - 14 years		15 and above		Total	
	BS	F	BS	F	BS	F
Tigray	31844	14316	16435	5886	48279	20202
Amhara	—	—	—	—	212337	99712
Oromia	476197	207689	352212	108350	828409	316039
Benishangul-Gumuz	4276	1626	4882	1232	9158	2858
SNNPR	82768	37875	74948	35648	157716	73523
Gambella	1781	855	5065	2476	6846	3331
Harari	—	—	3497	672	3497	672
Addis Ababa	17655	11612	27108	17972	44763	29584
Total	614521	273973	484147	172236	1311005	545921

Source: MoE, (EMIS), 2005.

In the third Education Sector Development Program (ESDP III), it is stated that:

“Decentralization of education offers opportunities to strengthen local governance, encourages initiatives, increases sense of accountability, broaden the participation of communities, and improve school management and transparency” (MoE, 2004:26

The wereda council gets budgetary support in the form of block grant for the implementation of all its programs in the wereda. The block grant is substantially supplemented by community financial contribution, free labour and material support.

The activities undertaken as a result of the decentralization are indicative of a good trend in that they open up ways, among other things, for responding to the educational and learning needs of the specific areas and the opportunities for people’s ownership of the programs and active participation in the process.

* The writer has merged the figures given in tables 1.5 & 1.6 in the Education Statistics Annual Abstract, 2005:7

Experience in some woredas show that decentralization is creating a positive and competitive atmosphere where different woredas, kebeles and schools compete in raising enrolments, in contributing to the expansion of schools through different means, i.e. through labor, materials and finance. PTAs have established committees to make a follow-up on tardiness and regular attendance of students, especially that of girls. However, these lower organs have difficulties in discharging their duties and responsibilities properly due to lack of manpower and logistics.

5.2. Practice

There is no clear and concrete evidence yet on how adult literacy is to be practiced in the regions. In their annual reports, regions mention adult and non-formal education but only to talk of the 1st cycle education of school age children in formal schools. Alternative or adult and NFE were mentioned for the first time in the Annual Review Meeting (ARM) of 2004/05 and indicated that 1.2 million (47% female) children attended ABE*.

Though a step in the right direction, it is still not clear how the adult literacy is to be carried out. It is still not clear who is going to be responsible for literacy. Because there is designated body for literacy, different sources mention different literacy rates for the same year. To cite a few examples, MOFED's report on adult literacy rate for 1990 was given as 29.4% while World Health Report (1990) puts it as 33%. Monitoring Report of EFA (2001) gave an adult literacy rate of 38% for 2000 while UNICEF's New Website gave 39% for the same year. And still, DHSR gave a literacy rate of 39.6% in 2000. It seems that there is no authority to rectify such differences and provide the right one.

Be it as it may, what all the sources indicated is that Ethiopia's adult literacy rate is much lower than the average literacy rate of developing countries (76.7%), that of least developed countries (52.5%) and that of the sub-Saharan African countries (63.2%).

* ABE attendants were not reported from 6 regions (MoE, ARM, 2003/04).

The Ethiopian Government has recently introduced a decentralized system of Organizational Structure for the Management, Community Participation and Education Finance. The Guideline for the decentralization indicates the powers, duties and responsibilities of MoE at Federal level and those at regional education bureaux, zonal departments, wereda (district) education Offices and schools.

Although wereda education offices are given the powers to establish and administer primary, secondary and technical-vocational schools (MoE, 2002:6), it is yet not clear what responsibilities they will have with regard to adult literacy.

6. Geographical Patterns and Trends of Literacy and Illiteracy

These patterns can be looked at from two geographical features in the case of Ethiopia, namely, the highlands and the lowlands. These physical features have a significant role in determining the livelihoods of the people and their exposure to the processes of modernity. Illiteracy, among other things, is an outcome of several barriers of these physical features contributing significantly to exclusion, marginalization, neglect, and poverty.

People are settled and live on farming in the highlands where it is easier and more convenient to provide them with literacy programs and create the environment for their attendance. Thus, the literacy rate is relatively higher among the highlanders (such as Tigray, Amhara, Oromia, Harari, part of SNNP) when compared to those in the low lands (such as Afar and Somali) (see Table 2).

In the vast but often dry lowlands, people are pastoralists and live on raising cattle and are forced to move from place to place in search of water and grazing land. This obligatory mobility makes provision of literacy programs more difficult than in the settled areas. The following table demonstrates that in terms of literacy rates, the settled peasants are better off than the pastoralists.

Table 2

Literacy rates in 1994 by region and sex

Region	Literacy rate,%		
	M	F	Total
Tigray	27.9	13.6	20.5
Afar	8.7	5.4	7.3
Amhara	23.5	12.1	17.8
Oromia	29.3	15.6	22.4
Somali	10.8	4.6	8.0
Benishangul-Gumuz ¹	24.9	10.5	17.7
SNNPR	33.9	15.2	24.4
Gambella ¹	38.6	19.5	29.3
Harari	59.8	49.4	54.5
Addis Ababa ²	89.1	76.4	82.5
Dire Dawa ²	57.4	45.7	51.5
Total	29.8	16.9	23.4

Source: 1. CSA, 1994 (P.85)

The total literacy rates of the two pastoralist regions were extremely low. They were 7.4% for Afar and 8% for Somali. Moreover, the females of the pastoralist regions are the most disadvantaged in terms of literacy, i.e. the literacy rates for the men were 8.7% and 10.8% for Afar and Somali respectively while the corresponding figures for the women were 5.4% and 4.6%.

The 1994 Census result also shows that illiteracy is extremely high especially among small pastoralist ethnic groups. At least seven of these ethnic groups had less than one percent literacy rate in 1994 (CSA, 1994) as shown in Table 3.

¹ Although Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambella are among the lowlands, the inhabitants are mostly settled.

² Highly urbanized

Table 3

**Literacy rates in rural and urban areas among
Small, pastoralist ethnic groups**

Ethnic groups	Rural areas*	Urban areas*
Mursi	0.5	88.9
Hamer	0.8	68.6
Charra	0.5	100.0
Suri	0.5	75.0
Tsemay	0.9	56.9
Dasenech	0.7	51.9
Ganjule	0.8	88.9
Nyangatom	1.7	78.9

Source: Population & Housing Census, 1994

It is understandable that offering literacy lessons to these pastoralist groups can be a serious challenge because they speak different languages, live in inaccessible and hot lowlands, move from place to place frequently and do not have peace among the different ethnic groups. Furthermore, they appear to be complacent with the way of life they are leading and are not easily adaptable to changes of modern life.

The rural-urban disparity is another trend in literacy. The overall literacy rate in rural areas was only 23.4 percent as indicated in table 4 while the corresponding figure for the urban areas is 73.7 percent giving such a high difference of 50.3 percentage points. This demonstrates amply that the large majority of the illiterates are among the rural masses.

It seems generally true among minority groups everywhere too. Robinson (1990) says, for example, *“Minority peoples have frequently come off second best as far as literacy goes”*.

* Only the aggregated figures were given in the Census.

Table 4

Literate Population aged 10 years* and over by Region, Sex, Urban and Rural areas: 2001

Region	Urban + Rural			Urban			Rural		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Tigray	32.8	43.8	23.0	64.5	82.2	52.5	26.5	37.4	16.2
Afar	31.8	39.1	24.5	64.7	79.8	51.9	11.1	16.7	4.8
Amhara	24.8	34.1	16.0	68.2	81.9	58.1	19.7	29.2	10.3
Oromia	29.5	42.0	17.3	72.0	84.8	60.4	24.0	36.8	11.6
Somali	30.4	44.0	17.1	53.8	73.5	34.6	13.5	22.7	4.4
Benishangul-Gumuz	38.3	54.0	22.5	73.5	84.8	61.8	34.5	50.7	18.3
SNNPR	29.5	42.4	17.7	73.4	84.4	63.1	25.5	38.5	13.6
Gambella	44.2	60.3	28.8	63.7	80.6	48.4	35.6	51.7	19.9
Harari	56.7	69.4	45.4	77.1	89.1	66.7	23.2	38.7	8.6
Addis Ababa	83.0	91.7	75.6	83.7	92.6	76.3	45.0	51.8	38.2
Dire Dawa	55.9	67.6	46.2	71.8	86.8	59.9	12.3	20.1	4.9
Total	31.3	42.7	20.6	73.7	86.0	63.4	23.4	35.1	12

Source: Ethiopia Child Labour Survey Report 2001 (CSA)

A third pattern of literacy/illiteracy is the disparities between males and females irrespective of where they lived. It is indicated in table 4 above that there was a difference of 22.1 percentage points between the male and female literacy rates at national level. A similar difference is observed between male and female literacy rates in urban areas, i.e. a difference of 22.6 percentage points. The difference becomes even more conspicuous among the rural dwellers in which case males had a literacy rate of 35.1% while that of the females was only 12.0%, a difference of 23.1 percentage points.

It is to be noted also that there is a very sharp difference of 51.4 percentage points between literacy rates of urban and rural women. These figures show that women are the most disadvantaged groups be it in urban or rural areas.

* Some researchers taken 10 years, others 15 as the lowest cut-off point for measuring adult literacy rates.

7. Characteristics of the Illiterates

Illiterates in Ethiopia share those attributes that are common among peoples with high level of illiteracy: they are mostly poor and marginalized, the females being the most deprived of all the groups. The coincidence of illiteracy with poverty and deprivation is a phenomenon long realized by experts (Roy – Sing, 1990:2). The illiterates are the sector of the society that are denied their rights to education and most excluded from information and knowledge sources and opportunities.

Due to the exclusion from information and knowledge sources and opportunities, the illiterates are those who lack perceived learning needs and demand or whose need and demand are very much limited in scope. They are people who are kept in the dark unaware of the advantages and values of literacy and education. They are people who lack the knowledge of their needs as demands or who have difficulties in translating their needs into effective demands. Most illiterates are people who are faced with disadvantaged economic and social conditions, which can have either direct or indirect negative impacts as they have neither the free time nor the energy to learn. As a result, the illiterates are characterized by their disempowerment.

8. Significance of External Aid in Promoting Effective Literacy Education in Ethiopia

It is obvious that the Ethiopian Government receives external aid for purposes of expanding access, equity, and efficiency and to reduce regional, gender and rural-urban disparities. But one does not find any indication whether or not literacy benefits from such external aid and loans at present.

What is indicated in the Consolidate National Performance Report of ESDP II (2003/04) by MoE is an annual, total recurrent budget of 1.6 million Birr out of which 73.5% was expended.

Regarding recurrent budget and expenditure for 2002/03, the document indicates that out of 731.6 million Birr allocated for primary education, 93.7% was utilized. The total allocated budget for running cost for primary education, the utilization was 116.7% of the allocated budget (ESDP II: 19).

The document also indicates that 257.8 million Birr was allocated for capital budget for primary education which was 47.6% of the total amount (ESDP II).

It is a step forward that the Statistics of Alternative Basic Education was included in the Education Statistics Annual Abstract this year (MoE, 2003/04:7). The enrolment of alternative basic education was recorded as 2.8% of the total enrolment for both sexes which raised the GER to 71.2% even with the exclusion of ABE enrollees in regions which did not report.*

According to the data, 442,906 (45.3% females) of age 7 - 14 and 477,664 (35.6 females) of over 15 age - group were enrolled in 1773 centres run by both government and NGOs (MoE, 2003/04:7).

One of the goals of EFA in the Dakar Framework for Action (April, 2000) is to achieve a 50 - percent improvement in levels of adult illiteracy by 2015. The illiteracy rate of Ethiopia in 2000 was 60.4 percent of the adult population (DHSR, 2000). This figure indicates that the growth rate of literacy was about 16.2 percent in six years or 2.7% per annum since a literacy rate reported in 1994 (CSA, 1994) was 23.4%. If one assumes that this growth continues without any change and if the population growth remains constant, it may be safe to assume that the literacy rate of Ethiopia may be raised to over 60% by 2015, but not to 79.2% as planned by the Dakar (2000) Framework.

However, there are over 84 NGOs that are providing basic education and literacy currently. The trend is that more and more NGOs are realizing the pivotal role of basic education for poverty reduction and are taking education as a component of their development programs.

* *Seven regions did not report ABE participants*

Moreover, at least 500 additional, alternative basic education centres are to be established soon by about 25 NGOs all over the country and provide both basic education for children and functional literacy for adults with the support of PACT Ethiopia/USAID (TEACH, 2004). Some large NGOs such as World Vision, Action Aid Ethiopia and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus are already serving a large group of children and adults with basic and literacy education some integrated with livelihoods. Adult and Non-formal Education Association in Ethiopia (ANFEAE) is one of those indigenous NGOs which gives equal importance to the ABE for out-of-school children and adult literacy. Currently, it is reaching 4000 out-of-school children and 1500 adults with basic education and literacy in 30 ABE centres.

The ever increasing number of NGOs and CSOs would extend their services in basic education and literacy if more resources were available. Appropriate literacy materials could be developed in the languages of most (if not all) ethnic groups, pre-tested and widely used by the beneficiaries. More and more facilitators in the languages of the learners can be properly trained, proper teaching manuals can be developed and distributed to facilitators with properly illustrated contents of adult psychology, class management, interactive teaching methods, administration of tests, and the like which can enhance the provision and raise the quality of the programs.

In addition to literacy materials, participatory, easy-to-read supplementary materials based on the actual cultural and socio-economic status of the learners can be produced and distributed for use to strengthen their literacy skills and promote their reading habits if more resources could be available.

9. Literacy in Ethiopia Ten Years from Now

We have mentioned earlier that the government is encouraging all stakeholders to expand non-formal and adult education in the country. It has committed itself to playing its roles of policy formulation, curriculum development, standard setting, professional support, etc. It is also indicated that a department is proposed at Federal level to guide and coordinate non-formal and adult education programs. MoE is encouraging all stakeholders to organize NFE programs that are responsive to the different needs and varying contexts of the adult literacy and education participants.

One can be hopeful that all these positive steps can contribute a lot to achieving the EFA goals and MDGs by 2015.

However, one should also consider the unpredictable variables that disrupt projections substantially such as population dynamics, the effects of HIV/AIDS, drought, internal and cross-border conflicts, etc.

However, being positive that things continue with the same pace and achievement and if literacy grows at least at its current rate of 2.7% per annum (see page 23), the minimum achievement will be 66% in ten years time. But if the above mentioned positive steps come to fruition, one can boldly assert that the total literacy rate of Ethiopia will be much higher and surpass the set goals by 2015.

This writer sees a promising progress with regard to expansion and coverage of formal, primary education. Obviously, taking the country's size and its physical features, it would be very challenging to reach all the children everywhere with basic education in the coming ten years even with vigorous expansion. If the government is serious with its promise of EFA, it has to consider adult literacy as one important component of basic education with which it can reach the out-of-school youth and adults. And if one can be sure that it can continue at the same pace and other variables remain constant, it seems likely that Ethiopia can reach all, school-aged children by 2015. The adoption of the Government to implement ABE as a delivery

method and allowing the strategy of using low-cost schools to be constructed where necessary may facilitate the possibilities of reaching almost all children in the country provided that community participation is consolidated and the expenditure is shared. It is also believed that communities can initiate effective and functional literacy programs related to livelihoods for the adult population possibly with some support from NGOs.

Thus, one of the assumptions of the decentralization is that communities can expand basic education and take action against illiteracy. And the synergic effects of primary, ABE and literacy programs will substantially reduce the illiteracy rate in the coming ten years.

Over and above these positive steps, however, the following actions are recommended.

- Sustained adult education and literacy policy, designed in collaboration with partners (civil society organizations and other stakeholders) should be put in place as soon as possible. It is also very important that the rights of adults to education should be reflected in the state's education policy;
- The perception of literacy and adult education should be taken beyond becoming literate and be understood and accepted as a process of development through building literate environments and societies;
- Adult literacy and education must have adequate financial support to bring a substantial change in the society, and
- Adult literacy and education should be made relevant and useful to peoples' daily lives and development activities.

10. Challenges associated with the projections

- Adult literacy and education has been suffering from neglect that emanated from lack of political will on the part of the government. As a consequence, adult literacy and education remained peripheral to education policies and the resources allocated to it have been kept to the minimal. One of the challenges is, therefore, to convince the government to attach high importance to the development of adult education and literacy and design policy, in collaboration with social partners and other stakeholders to promote adult education.
- Though very important, the political will and designing the policy can be meaningful only if it is backed by the allocation of the necessary resources.
- Civil society organizations (including NGOs) and other social partners, as they are young and up-coming and also few in number, may not be in a position to influence or make a pressure on the incumbent to positively respond to the popular demand; this is also another area of challenge.

Thus, it is believed that if the recommended actions are taken and the challenges are overcome, it is possible that Ethiopia will meet its Dakar obligations by 2015.

11. Executive Summary

1. The paper has tried to provide the definition of literacy in general and in the Ethiopian context. It has also some brief explanation on the contributions of literacy to economic development.
2. This is a study conducted on the progress made in terms of putting in place the necessary provisions for the promotion of adult literacy and education to meet EFA goals as laid down in the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000. The study divided the efforts of providing literacy and basic education to the adult population into two distinct periods – Literacy before 1990 and Literacy after 1990.
3. In the first part (before 1990), the historical development of literacy and the salient points beginning with the 1960s has been treated. The strategy, achievements and challenges are also discussed.
4. The second part of the study focused on the efforts and provisions made in terms of promoting adult literacy and basic education since 1990. This part looked into the progress of adult literacy and education from the standpoint of policy design and the efforts made to translate the policy into practice.
5. Comparison is made to some extent, between government and NGO of activities to promote adult literacy and education.
6. Analysis of literacy and illiteracy is made from different perspectives. They are discussed from the points of view of geographical patterns and trends, from the perspectives of ethnic minority groups, from rural and urban settings as well as from gender perspectives.
7. The question of who constitutes the illiterates and the areas of their concentration were also points of discussion indicating that the rural masses (especially women and, ethnic minorities) are the most disadvantaged.
8. Recently, the demand for literacy is growing and the significance of external aid to respond to the increasing demand of adult education and literacy has been highlighted.
9. Projections for the coming ten years and the anticipated challenges are also highlighted and discussed.
10. In general, the prospect of reaching all children with basic education by 2015 seems close to reality although the achievement of Dakar commitment on adult literacy seems unclear a bit dubious.

Duration of programs by some NGOs and Subjects

No	Organization	Length of program	Time frame	Subjects taught				
				Vernacular	Numeracy	Environmental science	English for children only	Others
1	Action Aid Ethiopia	Throughout the year	Based on the participants availability	Vernacular	✓	✓	✓	Civic education
2	Facilitators for Change Ethiopia	Throughout the year	Based on the participants availability	Vernacular	✓	✓	✓	
3	ANFEAE	For 11 months	September to July	Vernacular	✓	✓	✓	Livelihood programs
4	Amhara Development Association	6 months for adults and 10 months for each of three levels of children education			✓	✓	✓	
5	FSCE	10 and a half months	September to Mid-July	(Amharic) (All in urban areas)	✓	✓	✓	
6	Action for Development	4 – 6 months	October to March	Vernacular	✓	✓	✓	

Source: *Focus on Adult and Non-Formal Education in Ethiopia Newsletter No. 9 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Decembe*

THE PROGRESS OF THE NATIONAL LITERACY CAMPAIGN
(A Summary History 1979 – 1989)

Round No.	Dates	Notes and Events	Certificates (cumulative '000)	Literacy Rate (A)
-	May 1979	NLCCC Established. First National Literacy Seminar		8.8
1	July - September 1979	Campaign launched in Urban areas (5 languages used)	1,544	11.4
2	October 79 - March 1980	National Seminar to design rural strategy (opened by Head of State)	2,202	
3	May 1980 - September 1980	Campaign moved to rural areas. Top Government officials participated in teaching. Ethiopia awarded the International Reading Association's Literacy Prize. (NLCCC)	3,175	
4	November 1980 - March 1981		3,962	
5	May 1981 - September 1981	10 languages used Unesco Appeal for Assistance. (June 81)	5,406	23.5
6	November 1981 - March 1982		6,221	
7	May 1982 - September 1982	Honourable mention - UNESCO (Krupskaya) Literacy Prize. (Peasants Associations). 15 languages used.	7,451	
8	October - 1982 January 1983		8,330	
9	April 1983 July 1983	50% literacy rate reached.	9,568	50.5
10	October 1983 - January 1984	(September) National newsletter "Development through Post-Literacy" launched in 3 language editions. Ten million new literates reached.	10,454	
11	April 1984 - July 1984	(May) National census-New Planning figures! 5 th Anniversary of the Campaign.	11,350	
12	October 1984 - January 1985		12,037	
13	April 1985 - July 1985		12,885	
14	October 1985 - January 1986	NOMA Literacy Prize Awarded to the Campaign. 1st literacy participant entered University	13,771	
15	April 1986 July 1986		14,725	58.4
16	October 1986 - January 1987	Urban literacy rates 75 - 80%	15,570	
17	April 1987 - July 1987	First National Workshop for Rural News-letter producers.	16,742	
18	October 1987 - January 1988	Total of 8000 Reading Rooms constructed.	17,688	
19	April 1988 - July 1988	First Workshop on Post-Literacy Strategies.	18,726	75.3
20	October 1988 - January 1989	Second National Workshop for Rural Newsletter producers	(19,726)	(77.5)
21	April 1989 - July 1989	First participant graduates from University. 10 th Anniversary of the Campaign.	(20,500)	(79.8)
22	October 1989 - January 1990	International Literacy Year.	(21,500)	(83.2)
(A). Literacy Rate (10+population) including students reaching grade 4 of the regular school. (Unofficial estimates calculated by the Campaign Office on the basis of the 1984 Census figures) Figures in brackets are estimations of possible levels of literacy up to 1990.				

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