

Chapter 5: Improving Adult Literacy

5.1 Introduction

Literacy is accepted as an educational tool of crucial importance to life in a literate society and an indispensable instrument for access to further learning and training opportunities. The statement of the UNESCO that “A person is functionally illiterate who cannot engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the country’s development” (Lestage, 1981) underscores the importance of literacy for life. Literacy contributes economic prosperity, to good health, to cultural identity, civic participation and tolerance and to individuals’ ability to realise their potential (UNESCO, 2006).

Moreover, illiteracy is more likely to affect the underprivileged than the privileged: the poor, the female, ethnic, cultural or linguistic minorities and the disabled are particularly at risk. “Illiteracy is not merely an inability to read and write but a complete, socio-economic phenomenon rooted in poverty and deprivation and requiring a comprehensive approach” (Ryan, 1985). As Roberts (1995) points out “Given the value placed on literacy in the contemporary social world, the stigma attached to ‘illiteracy’ can be devastating. Illiteracy is treated as a stigma which strongly devaluates the person, an attitude which is revealed in such statements as “A person who can’t read may as well be blind because he doesn’t know half the world around him and has to ask others.” Literacy here serves mostly a face-saving function (Carragher, 1984). Even when illiteracy exists on a limited scale, in small pockets of economic or social deprivation, it cannot be disregarded as of minor consequence, for in

the life of the illiterate individual it extends beyond education: it affects his/her social status, economic possibilities and access to many forms of culture (Gunawardena, 1997).

The UN Millennium Development Goals (UNDP, 2003) include Achieve universal primary education as Goal 2. Literacy of 15-24 year olds has been identified as Indicator 8 under Target 3 under this goal and the ratio of women to men, 15-24 year olds is given as Indicator 10 under Goal 3. Yet the UN uses the Human Development Index as a summary measure of human development among its member countries. It measures the average achievements in a country in three basic dimensions of human development:

- Long and healthy life, as measured by life expectancy at birth,
- Knowledge as measured by adult literacy rate (with two-thirds weight) and the combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio (with one-third weight) and
- A decent standard of living, as measured by GDP per capita.

The above description of the calculation of the HDI clearly indicates the relative emphasis placed by UN on adult literacy.

EFA Goal

The basic learning needs spelt out in the Declaration of Education for All in 1990 as given in Article 1 are reproduced below. *“Every person, child, youth and adult shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to*

survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning”.

Here literacy and numeracy are categorised as essential learning tools.

The EFA Goals were further developed in 2000, at the Dakar World Education Forum. They constitute a considerable strengthening and revision of the earlier EFA goals (developed in Jomtien, 1990). Goal 4 was specified as “Achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults”. The EFA goals do not contradict the education-related MDGs, but considerably expanded on them. Dakar Framework for Action clearly explains the action needed to ensure improvement in the rate of literacy thus:

“Adult and continuing education must be greatly expanded and diversified and integrated into the mainstream of national education and poverty reduction strategies. The vital role literacy plays in lifelong learning, sustainable livelihoods, good health, active citizenship and the improved quality of life for individuals, communities and societies must be more widely recognised. Literacy and continuing education are essential for women’s empowerment and gender equality. Closer linkages among formal, non-formal and non-formal approaches to learning must be fostered to respond to the diverse needs and circumstances of adults.

Sufficient resources, well-targeted literacy programs, better trained teachers, and the innovative use of technologies are essential in promoting these activities. The scaling up of practical, participatory learning methodologies developed by non-governmental organisations, which link

literacy with empowerment and local development, is especially important”.
(UNESCO, 2006)

5.2 Literacy in Sri Lankan Context

5.2.1 National Action Plan/Education Reform Programme

The Constitution of Sri Lanka has among its goals, “the complete eradication of illiteracy and assurance to all persons of the right to universal and equal access to education at all levels” (Article 27(2)h), and “to promote with special care the interests of children and youth so as to ensure their full development, physical, mental, religious, social and to protect them from exploitation and discrimination” (Article 23(13)). Literacy represents the core of the development spelled out in the above two articles. The enactment of Compulsory Education Regulations in 1997 to be implemented from January 1998 was measure identified to achieve the above goals. While compulsory education was conceptualised as a strategy to ensure universal education of all children aged between 5 and 14, it does not take cognisance of the full spectrum of the issue of literacy. On the one hand, Compulsory Education Regulations have not been implemented with the same level of understanding that prompted its enactment (Perera, 2003). Secondly mere enrolment in education does not guarantee learning achievement or even basic literacy. Literacy in Sri Lanka is defined as the ability to read and write in the first language and the procedure used to assess literacy is to ask the respondents whether they can read and write. Thus due to the lack of a standardised procedure being used to assess literacy as no actual literacy assessment is being carried out, the validity of these rates are open to question. From 1945, the medium of instruction at primary school level in Sri Lanka has been

mother tongue. From 1950, gradually and sequentially, switchover to the mother tongue was effected at secondary school level also and from 1960, even at university level, the medium of instruction is mother tongue. This means that every child, be he or she Sinhala, Tamil or Muslim has the opportunity to study in his or her own mother tongue. As a result, the majority children would either study in Sinhala or English, while the Tamil and Muslim, who both use Tamil as their mother tongue, study in Tamil or English. However, as the last Census, 2001 had not been conducted in seven districts all of which are in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, where a substantial percentage of the Tamil-speaking residents live, no comprehensive data on literacy by medium is available. While a substantial proportion of the population in the country would be literate in more than one language due to the language policy adopted by Sri Lanka which accepts English as the Second Language and which teaches a Third Language (Sinhala for Tamil students and Tamil for Sinhala students) there is no accurate estimate of the percentage which is declared literate in more than one language.

5.2.2 Description of the EFA Goal and Specific National Targets

The Ministry of Education (1999), the EFA Assessment Country Report for 2000 has included “providing functional literacy programmes to meet the needs of all males and females who failed to receive a basic education” as one of the goals to be achieved under non-formal education. The goal does not specify a clear target nor does it take into account that reality that even after going through a period of basic education, certain proportion of children may not acquire literacy.

It is noteworthy that in the Three Year Action Plan for Education for All (2002-2004) the

fourth dimension of Adult Literacy which included two indicators (Adult Literacy and Gender parity in literacy) has been included in the fourth segment of Non-formal education. Under this segment, Improving the adult literacy programmes, is one of the four specific goals identified.

Thus while the Dakar Forum had a specific target of 50% improvement which for Sri Lanka could have been interpreted as 100% literacy (considering that already the achieved rate was 91%) Ministry had given a general expectation rather than a specific goal.

The Action Plan for 2004-2008, on the other hand, is more specific and detailed, keeping Goal 4 of the Dakar Forum in focus. The objective for the period from 2004-2008 is to ensure that out of school youth in the compulsory education age group receive functional literacy. This objective, once again does not take care of the needs of illiterate adults who are above 18 even though in the long run, catering to out of school youth would ensure that they gain literacy.

Draft Action Plan has also been developed for the period from 2007-2010. It has identified four objectives related to literacy. These are

1. Development of Basic Literacy among youth and adults from 91% to 100% in 2010
2. Development of Functional Literacy among youth and adults
3. Development of Life Skills/ Practical Skills
4. Developing both practical and technical skills required to succeed in life, through the schools system

Under each of the above objectives specific objectives also have been identified. Thus under the first objective – development of basic literacy among youth and adults, specific communities lacking literacy such as urban slum community, fishing community, rural working class, urban working class, plantation

community, rural peasant community, prison community and gypsy community have been identified for future action. It may be necessary to include displaced, refugee and conflict-affected also into these target groups.

5.3 Strategies to Achieve Literacy

The MoE (1999), the EFA Assessment Country Report for 2000 spells out the actions to be taken with regard to Adult Literacy from 1999-2003. They are:

1. Establishment of 1000 reading centres for adults
2. Establishment of 1500 non-formal technical units in 1AB schools
3. Provision of equipment to 1500 non-formal education units located in 1AB schools
4. Provision of perishables for 1500 non-formal training units in 1AB schools
5. Establishment of 2500 training centres for non-school going children and adults.

The emphasis here appears to be skill development rather than literacy. The Report, however, also mentions that the Non-Formal Education officers employed at divisional level by the Ministry will organise literacy and skill development programmes through their Regional Learning Centres and that the literacy and skill development projects conducted by the Ministry of Social Services would be continued without disturbance.

This goal of Improving the adult literacy programmes identified under the Three Year Action Plan for Education for All (2002-2004) was to be achieved through the establishment of 300 Community Learning Centres for adults and by establishing 90 activity schools for children.

The Action Plan on Education for All (2004-2008) specify the action to achieve the objective (stated as current activities) are

1. reorganisation of literacy centres as functional literacy centres in appropriate locations,
2. develop special centres for street children, and improve the quality of the functional literacy programmes.

The MoE was identified as the implementing agency.

The Non-formal Education Branch of the MoE (2005) had identified five activities for implementation related to Improvement of Literacy. These were:

- initiating Literacy Classes,
- Initiation of Functional Activity Learning Centres,
- Initiating Community Learning Centres for street children,
- Strengthening of Community Learning Centres and
- Providing literacy skills for women who are going abroad for jobs

The Community Learning Centres are strictly speaking not imparting Literacy but these would have some impact on functional literacy due to the engagement of participants in these activities.

The National Institute of Education established an Open School in 2004. The Open School in Sri Lanka, perhaps in consideration of the fact that the national literacy rate and the participation rates in primary education are high does not focus that much on literacy programmes or even on the provision of basic education. It appears to focus more on supporting those students whose Learning Achievement is low to enable them to complete a secondary education. The first course of the Open School, the foundation course on Open Secondary Education was launched in March 2007. It was developed with the “aim of facilitating learners to awake with strong base for a successful start to carry on their secondary education. This foundation course will also support the target group to develop their

language abilities and will strengthen their self-confidence in progressing in their studies. Further the foundation course will be a strong orientation for moving learners towards self-directed learning culture”. Even though the specific focus on literacy is absent the course could contribute to the improvement of literacy skills especially in the context of the low levels of learning achievement among students enrolled in school.

Overall, the examination of these Action Plans from 2000 to 2004-2008 indicate that the importance of ensuring universal or near universal literacy (which is a realistic goal in view of the achievements made so far by the country) has not been adequately recognised. Firstly, a specific target percentage of literacy has not been identified as expected from the Dakar Framework. Secondly, the findings from research (Gunawardena et al, 1997) which question the validity of official statistics on literacy, indicating a clear difference between claimed and actual literacy, have not been considered. Moreover, the implicit assumption in planning to improve literacy with specific targets being out of school children, appears to be that participation in basic education enables students to become literate which has been refuted by recent studies on learning achievement (NEREC, 2003). Fourthly, literacy needs to be a goal for development of not only children and youth but even for adults in the context of interest in life-long education.

The Draft National Action Plan (2007-2010) on the other hand, appears to have paid attention to the concerns implicit in the above studies. It has thus considered for each of these target groups mentioned above, common issues, specific issues to be addressed, strategies, stakeholders to be involved and monitoring and evaluation. For example, for the urban slum community strategies include:

- i. a need survey – identify the gravity of the problems and specific needs/ problems of the community,
- ii. Establishment or support for development of drop-in centres with facilities for Non-formal Education for Adults,
- iii. Introduce an awareness program for adults (Drug Abuse/HIV AIDS/Sexual abuse),
- iv. Introduce vocational training /basic literacy programmes, life skills for adults as well as parents,
- v. Support mechanism & for education, health care,
- vi. Awareness programme for teachers and principals
- vii. Improve housing of slum areas and
- viii. Introduce Incentive scheme

For the development of functional literacy among youths and adults too, strategies such as

- i. Prepare suitable courses for learning programmes,
- ii. Strengthen Monitoring of delivery and
- iii. Identify needs provide human and material resources

have been identified. The groups listed under youth and adults here include those in livestock farming, agricultural communities, fishing, and construction labour, those seeking foreign employment, tourism industry, and both rural and urban poor.

It also envisages to make use of data available at drop-in centres, Ministries of Samurdhi, Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, Rural Development & Small Industries, and where databases do not exist, to initiate data collection and maintenance in the Ministries of Social Welfare, Plantations and Infrastructure Development, Education in the NFE Unit and Special Unit, Youth and Sports, Agrarian Services & Farming, Agriculture, Housing and

Construction, Labour Relations and Foreign Employment, Tourism, Mass Media, Health Care and Nutrition, Local Govt. and Enterprise Development as well as in the Provincial Councils.

It is clear that the current Draft National Action Plan has conceived of literacy as a broad over-arching repertoire of competencies rather than mere ability to read and write. Literacy has been perceived as tool for empowerment of people which they could use for their own, as well as the country's development. What is noteworthy is that the Draft Action Plan has taken into consideration the findings of studies conducted in the country and without being complacent about the literacy status as portrayed by the official data and has striven to plan keeping a target in view. Realisation of the need for collaboration with other ministries and organisations is also a healthy factor. Yet the Plan is ambitious and will need to succeed in obtaining funds and commitment from various stakeholders if it is to be implemented as envisaged.

Ministry of Education (1999), the EFA Assessment Country Report for 2000 had given the timeframe for establishing 300 Community Learning Centres for adults as from March 2002 to March 2004 and establishing 90 Activity Schools for children (10-18 years) from March 2002 to December 2004. An allocation of funds for these activities has also been stated in the Action Plan. Those targets, however, do not appear to have been met as even by 2005 (Non-Formal Education report, 2005) only 136 were functioning. There is no mention of Activity Schools for Children.

The Action Plan on Education for All (2004-2008) indicates that at present existing literacy centres are being reorganised as functional literacy centres in appropriate locations. In addition, special centres are being developed for street children. The implementing agency is the MoE.

The extent to which these activities are implemented is shown in the table (Table 5.1) presented below.

5.3.1 Implementation Programmes

Table 5.1: Literacy Programmes conducted by NFE Branch – 2005

Type of Centre	No. of Centres	Types of other centres	No. of programmes	No. of participants		
				Female	Male	Total
Basic Literacy			261	2535	1640	4175
Functional Literacy			179	2148	1648	3796
Community Learning Centres	136	CLCs for Street Children (6)	530	7063	2960	10023

Source: Ministry of Education, Non-formal Education Branch (2005)

Table 5.2 shows the number of Basic Literacy Programmes and the number of participants from 2000 to 2005.

Table 5.2: No. of Basic Literacy Programmes and No. of Participants– 2000-2005

Year	No. of Programmes									No. of participants		
	WP	CP	SP	NWP	NCP	NEP	UP	Sab.P	Total	Female	Male	Total
2000	197	58	135	59	16	27	71	211	774	8894	7139	16033
2001	234	54	156	97	44	32	77	231	902	9598	8697	18295
2002	202	64	198	35	33	128	260	46	966	10142	10160	20302
2003	140	44	106	30	19	36	15	41	431	3842	3744	7586
2004	140	65	108	36	04	70	45	27	495	6003	5100	11103
2005	139	58	95	04	09	64	42	29	440	4683	3288	7971

Source: Ministry of Education, Non-formal Education Branch (2005)

Table 5.2 indicates that the number of Literacy Programmes had increased from year 2000 to 2002 but had varied from thereon. There is a rapid decrease in 2003 to 431 which had risen to 495 the following year but again decreased to 440 in 2005. Year 2003 also records the lowest number of participants decreasing from

20302 in 2002 to 7586 in 2003. In 2005 the number stood as 7971. Except in 2002, more females seem to have participated in these programmes.

Table 5.3 shows the number of Basic Literacy Programmes and the number of participants in year 2005.

Table 5.3: No. of Basic Literacy Programmes and No. of Participants – 2005

Province	Basic Literacy Programmes (No.)	No. of Participants		
		Female	Male	Total
Western	123	833	292	1125
Central	8	74	129	203
Southern	70	921	689	1610
North Western	4	25	44	69
North Central	--	--	--	--
Uva	11	120	125	245
Sabaragamuwa	18	221	135	356
North East	27	341	226	567
Total	261	2535	1640	4175

Source: Ministry of Education, Non-formal Education Branch (2005)

The provincial breakdown of the Basic Literacy Centres showed that the highest number had been conducted in Western province (123 out of a total of 261) and that none had been conducted in the North-Central Province. The availability of these centres in Central (8), North-Western (4), Uva (11), Sabaragamuwa (18) and North-East (27) Provinces, especially in view of the fact that Uva, North-Western and Sabaragamuwa provinces have literacy rates which are lower than the national rate, were woefully inadequate.

When the number of participants was considered, in Basic Literacy Programmes the numbers varied from 1610 in Southern Province to 00 in North-central which had no programmes, to 69 in North-Western. More females seem to have participated in these programmes in four out of the seven provinces. Table 5.4 shows the number of Community Learning Centre Programmes and the number of participants for the year 2005.

Table 5.4: No. of Community Learning Centre Programmes and No. of Participants–2005

Province	No of Centres	CLCs for street children		Community Learning Centres		No. of Participants		
		No. of Programmes	Instructors	Programmes	Instructors	Female	Male	Total
Western	16	05	05	74	67	1064	519	1583
Central	16	03	03	62	66	821	316	1137
Southern	23	11	11	133	118	1502	851	2353
North Western	17	--	--	34	24	604	207	811
North Central	8	--	--	34	43	419	208	627
Uva	14	05	02	67	56	642	498	1140
Sabaragam.	28	05	05	100	102	1884	249	2133
North East	14	--	--	20	17	127	112	239
Total	136	26	26	530	493	7063	2960	10023

Source: Ministry of Education, Non-formal Education Branch (2005)

The Community Learning Centres were much more equitably distributed among the provinces. Here the highest number was in Southern Province (23 out of 136) with the lowest numbers being in North-East (14) and North-Central (8). Two of the Community learning centres for street children were located in Uva Province and North-Central, North-East and North-Western had no centres. All the other provinces had one each. In the Community Learning Centre Programmes the number of participants varied from 2353 in Southern Province to 239 in the conflict-affected North-East. The number of females was more in

all the provinces. While the lower number of CLCs and the participants from the North-East was probably due to the conflict situation, the low number of CLCs in the North-Central province is noteworthy. The number of instructors also differed widely with more instructors being available in the Southern and Sabaragamuwa provinces and the lowest numbers available in North-Western and North-East provinces. In 2005 179 Functional Literacy Programmes were reported as functioning in eight provinces (Table 5.5).

Table 5.5: Functional Literacy Programmes and No. of Participants (2005)

Province	Functional Literacy Programmes (No.)	No. of Participants		
		Female	Male	Total
Western	16	152	72	224
Central	50	700	250	950
Southern	25	381	194	575
North-Western	--	--	--	--
North-Central	9	130	59	189
Uva	53	504	832	1336
Sabaragamuwa	24	257	203	460
North-east	2	24	38	62
Total	179	2148	1648	3796

Source: Ministry of Education, Non-formal Education Branch (2005)

In the case of the above programmes, the number of participants ranged from 1336 in Uva Province to 00 in North-Western (no programmes were available) to 189 in North-Central. The largest number of participants were in Uva (53 out of 179) and Central 950) provinces. Here North-Western had no programmes and North-Central had nine and North-east only 2 programmes. Once again regional disparities in provision are striking. In all three types of activities, the worst-served appeared to be the North-Central, North-

Western and North-East provinces. This is a cause for concern as the literacy statistics for North-Central province (Polonnaruwa 88.7% and Anuradhapura 88.8%) and for North-Western (Puttalam – 90.3%) were lower than the national literacy rate. Literacy rates for districts in the conflict-affected North-eastern province are not available. The number of the students by sex, age, level of education and the type of education/training received in year 2007 through the Open School course is given below (Table 5.6).

Table 5.6 Participation in the Open School

Centre	Province	No. of Learners		Level of Education			Age		Vocational Training
		Female	Male	Non-schooling	Primary	Other	15≤	15>	
Negombo	WP	--	97	04	28	75	01	93	43
Matara	SP	42	28	02	02	66	--	96	70
Puttalam	NWP	21	15	-	01	34	--	36	41
Galle	SP	12	06	--	09	09	13	05	18
Ayagama	Sab.P	61	12	--	08	65	08	65	69
Hatton	CP	27	25	--	05	47	06	46	52
Kalpitiya	NWP	--	70	--	08	62	41	28	--
Matale	CP	--	60	--	14	46	10	50	--
Total		163	313	06	75	404	79	419	293

Source: National Institute of Education, 2007

The above table indicates that more males than females are enrolled in the Open School. The centres of the Open School are limited to only four provinces – Western, Central, Sabaragamuwa and North-Western provinces. The School also appears to be catering to participants who are older and who have been to school beyond primary level.

5.3.2 Progress in Achieving EFA Goal - Literacy

The non-identification of specific targets or performance indicators to be achieved in relation to literacy at the overall national level, regionally or gender-wise, prevents an accurate assessment of progress achieved being made. Therefore what can be reported is progress achieved without attempting to link it with the action plans. Nor had any attempt been made

to assess literacy using reliable assessment instruments and non-specification of levels of attainment creates problems in assessing progress.

Ministry of Education (1999), the EFA Assessment Country Report for 2000 points out that the literacy rate of 15-24 year olds had changed little in the past two decades (1980s and 1990s) and that it is not possible to find out whether this is due to a measurement error. It states that main issue is that at the end of 1990s 20-24 year population would remain illiterate. Here the age range is given as 20-24 and not 15-24. Of the 15-24 year olds, Sabaragamuwa and Central provinces had higher rates of illiteracy than the other provinces.

The Report showed the Literacy gender parity index to be 0.95 in 1999. In districts where overall literacy was low, such as Nuwara Eliya

and Monaragala districts, gender disparity also was shown as high. Micro-level studies of literacy (Gunawardena et al, 1995) had indicated that gender parity was low in

disadvantaged communities. The lowest was in urban slums (0.2) and the highest was in fishing and rural working class communities (0.9).

5.4 Policy and System Indicators

Table 5.7 Literacy Rates of persons 10 years of age and above by District and Gender – 2001

District	Total	Male	Female
Colombo	94.7	95.3	94.0
Gampaha	95.4	95.7	95.1
Kalutara	93.2	93.7	92.6
Kandy	90.5	92.4	88.7
Matale	88.3	90.2	86.4
Nuwara Eliya	82.6	87.6	77.7
Galle	92.3	93.2	91.5
Matara	90.3	91.9	88.9
Hambantota	88.9	90.9	87.0
Ampara	85.9	88.9	82.9
Kurunegala	92.7	93.9	91.5
Puttalam	90.7	91.2	90.3
Anuradhapura	90.5	92.1	88.8
Polonnaruwa	90.0	91.2	88.7
Badulla	85.2	88.9	81.7
Moneragala	86.0	88.1	83.8
Ratnapura	88.4	90.4	86.3
Kegalle	91.4	93.0	89.8
Sri Lanka	91.0	92.6	89.7

* Seven districts in which the literacy data could not be completed are not included.

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, Census data – 2001

5.4.1 Implementation Gaps and Disparities or Variations (using disaggregated indicators to show disparities or variations)

All citizens aged above 18 years of age are defined as adults. The adult literacy rates for 1981, the census year before the Dakar Forum were 87.2 for the country and 91.1 for males and 83.2 for females (Table 5-7). By the most recent Census year (2001) the rates had improved to 91.1 for the country and 92.6 for males and 89.7 for females. Gender parity Index for Adult Literacy was 0.96. These statistics are limited by the fact that the census did not cover seven districts in the conflict-affected Northern and Eastern provinces.

The above statistics indicate that in all districts the rate of literacy is lower for females than for

males even though the disparity is low. The disparities are more pronounced district wise with the highest rate of 95.4 being in Gampaha in Western province and the rates for plantation districts of Nuwara Eliya (82.6) and Badulla (85.2), and districts with pockets of disadvantage where remote and inaccessible areas, impoverished agricultural communities and plantation labour are found such as Hambantota (88.9), Ampara (85.9), Moneragala (86.0) and Ratnapura (88.4) having lower rates of literacy.

Table 5.8 shows the literacy rate of 15-24 year olds by sector and province as estimated by the 2001 population census.

Table 5.8: Literacy rate of 15-24 year olds by sector, province and gender - 2001

Sector/Province/District	Total	Male	Female
Sri Lanka	95.6	95.1	96.0
Sector			
Urban	95.5	94.9	96.0
Rural	96.3	95.7	96.9
Estate	85.5	87.0	84.0
Province			
Western	96.2	95.5	97.0
Central	94.9	95.0	94.8
Southern	96.0	95.5	94.8
North-western	93.4	95.2	96.5
North-Central	94.1	93.8	94.4
Uva	94.1	93.8	94.4
Sabaragamuwa	94.8	94.2	95.4
District			
Colombo	95.3	95.2	96.2
Gampaha	97.3	96.7	97.8
Kalutara	96.0	95.2	96.8
Kandy	96.4	96.4	96.5
Matale	95.1	94.3	96.0
Nuwara Eliya	91.8	92.7	91.0
Galle	96.2	95.7	96.7
Matara	95.4	94.9	96.0
Hambantota	96.6	95.9	97.3
Ampara	93.5	93.1	93.9
Kurunegala	96.7	96.1	97.3
Puttalam	94.2	93.5	94.9
Anuradhapura	96.1	95.4	96.7
Polonnaruwa	95.2	94.5	96.0
Badulla	93.9	93.8	94.0
Moneragala	94.5	93.8	95.2
Ratnapura	94.1	93.5	94.6
Kegalle	95.8	95.1	96.5

Source: Census of Population and Housing, 2001

* Data not available the districts in the Northern and Eastern provinces other than Ampara.

The above table shows that while Sri Lanka has a very high rate of literacy among its youth (95.6) the female rate of literacy was higher than the male literacy rate in this age group. The Gender Parity Index for Youth Literacy was 1.009. Among the sectors, the estate sector had the lowest rate (85.5) while unlike in the other two sectors in this sector the female rate was lower (84.0) than the male rate (87.0).

Among the provinces the highest rate in total literacy as well as for females was in the Western province. It is interesting to note that in six out of the seven provinces for which data is available, the female rate is higher. The only province in which the female rate is lower

is the central province which has a substantial proportion of its population coming from the estate sector.

This trend of female dominance is evident in all the districts except Nuwara Eliya once again with a high percentage of estate population. This trend is possibly a reflection of more girls remaining in school than boys. The situation in the conflict-affected districts/provinces in the North-East could be quite different from the rest of the country.

The study conducted by Gunwardena et al, (1997) pointed out the discrepancy between claimed and actual rates of literacy and numeracy in disadvantaged communities (Table 5.9).

Table 5.9: Literacy Rates: Claimed and by Test Performance

Community Type	No. Claimed to be literate	%	No. actually literate	%	Discrepancy in rates	Total No. of respondents
Rural Peasant	372	92.5	241	60.0	32.5	402
Rural Working Class	245	80.3	197	64.5	15.8	305
Urban Slum	217	67.6	100	31.1	36.5	321
Urban Working Class	380	81.8	306	66.0	15.8	464
Fishing	420	92.0	324	71.0	21.0	457
Plantation	135	73.4	106	57.6	15.8	184
Total	1769	82.9	1274	59.7	23.2	2133

Source: Gunawardena, Chandra, W.A. de Silva and N.G. Kularatne (1997) "Interventions to Improve Literacy in Selected Deprived Communities in Sri Lanka". *Case Studies in Education Research and Policy*, Asian Development Bank Manila .

Table 5.10 shows the data related to numeracy.

Table 5.10: Numeracy Rates: Claimed and by Test Performance

Community Type	No. Claimed to be numerate	%	No. actually numerate	%	Discrepancy in rates	Total No. of respondents
Rural Peasant	382	95.0	269	66.9	28.1	402
Rural Working Class	250	81.9	192	62.9	19.0	305
Urban Slum	263	81.0	163	50.7	30.3	321
Urban Working Class	395	85.1	326	71.5	14.4	464
Fishing	416	91.0	327	70.2	20.8	457
Plantation	136	74.0	109	59.2	14.8	184
Total	1842	86.3	1386	64.9	21.4	2133

Source: Gunawardena, Chandra, W.A. de Silva and N.G. Kularatne (1997) "Interventions to Improve Literacy in Selected Deprived Communities in Sri Lanka". *Case Studies in Education Research and Policy*, Asian Development Bank Manila

Even though the above study was carried out in 1995, it is unlikely that a radical change in the situation would have occurred during the last ten years and the clear discrepancy between claimed and actual literacy and numeracy underscores the need for a reliable assessment.

Examples of how illiteracy is related to poverty and a probable tendency to indulge in crime exist in Sri Lanka. Thus analysis of poverty statistics and data on literacy indicates a probable relationship between these two variables (Table 5.11).

Table 5.11: Poverty (Head Count Ratio) and Literacy Rate in Poorest DS Divisions (2002)

Ranking by Poverty	District	DS Division	Poverty (Head Count Ratio)	Literacy Rate
1	Moneragala	Siyambalanduwa	51.80	83.3
2	Badulla	Rideemaliyadda	51.15	80.0
3	Badulla	Meegahakivula	46.50	72.7
4	Badulla	Kandaketiya	46.10	75.8
5	Puttalam	Kalpitiya	45.34	75.8
6	Puttalam	Mundel	41.08	86.6
7	Moneragala	Madulla	40.70	85.0
8	Puttalam	Vanathavilluwa	40.31	83.1
9	Ratnapura	Elapatha	40.10	86.5
10	Ratnapura	Weligopela	39.20	86.6
15	Kandy	Minipe	37.50	82.2
18	Kegalle	Aranayake	36.10	91.1
20	Hambantota	Sooriyawewa	34.80	88.9
21	Matale	Ambangangakorale	34.80	82.5
24	Nuwara Eliya	Hanguranketha	34.60	84.8
25	Anuradhapura	Padaviya	34.33	86.8
35	Galle	Neluwa	33.40	86.8
39	Kurunegala	Rideegama	32.70	89.0
45	Matara	Hakmana	32.00	91.5
49	Kalutara	Wallawita	31.40	92.0
100	Colombo	Hanwella	14.20	90.6
102	Gampaha	Mirigama	18.20	95.1
111	Polonnaruwa	Welikanda	24.72	86.6

* Literacy figures for the other districts are not available

Source: Ministry of Education, Non-formal Education Branch (2005)

The above table gives statistics on poverty and literacy in the ten poorest DS Divisions and the poorest Divisions in different districts included in the poorest 119 DS Divisions in the country. While there is no direct correlation between the two variables, it is clear that on the whole poor divisions tend to have lower rates of literacy in relation to national literacy rate. In Kegalle, Matara, Kalutara, Colombo and Gampaha districts, the literacy rate is higher than 90 even though they are also amongst the poorest DS Divisions.

The above table indicates a clear relationship between poverty and illiteracy with the districts which have a poverty headcount ratio of more than 30 (Matale, Hambantota, Badulla and Moneragala) having a literacy rate below 90. Puttalam and Kegalle districts also have a poverty ratio higher than 30 but the literacy rate is just above 90%. Table 5.12 below presents data on poverty ranking, type of employment and the literacy rates in selected DSD divisions.

Table 5.12: Poverty Ranking, Type of Employment and Literacy Rate in Poorest DS Divisions (2002)

Ranking by Poverty	District	DS Division	Employment			Literacy Rate
			Govt.	Self-employed	Unpaid family worker	
1	Moneragala	Siyambalanduwa	9.9	54.6	24.1	83.3
2	Badulla	Rideemaliyadda	6.9	46.2	35.4	80.0
3	Badulla	Meegahakivula	8.2	42.7	24.0	72.7
4	Badulla	Kandaketiya	10.0	49.2	27.4	75.8
5	Puttalam	Kalpitiya	6.1	35.5	4.0	75.8
6	Puttalam	Mundel	5.9	27.8	4.0	86.6
7	Moneragala	Madulla	11.4	46.6	36.4	85.0
8	Puttalam	Vanathavilluwa	12.8	31.6	3.8	83.1
9	Ratnapura	Elapatha	8.4	23.2	3.1	86.5
10	Ratnapura	Weligopela	5.9	52.0	26.5	86.6
15	Kandy	Minipe	6.8	48.5	27.5	82.2
18	Kegalle	Aranayake	13.2	30.2	7.1	91.1
20	Hambantota	Sooriyawewa	5.1	53.7	22.0	88.9
21	Matale	Ambanganakorale	10.2	33.6	6.8	82.5
24	Nuwara Eliya	Hanguranketha	9.7	39.2	19.8	84.8
25	Anuradhapura	Padaviya	20.8	56.3	10.8	86.8
35	Galle	Neluwa	3.9	41.7	27.0	86.8
39	Kurunegala	Rideegama	11.5	35.4	10.0	89.0
45	Matara	Hakmana	16.7	34.9	9.4	91.5
49	Kalutara	Wallawita	13.0	32.6	11.2	92.0
100	Colombo	Hanwella	14.2	18.5	2.5	90.6
102	Gampaha	Mirigama	15.3	20.1	2.3	95.1
111	Polonnaruwa	Welikanda	21.7	47.9	20.0	86.6

Source: Census Department

The type of employment – whether the person is employed in a government sector job, is self-employed or is an unpaid family worker may be determined by various factors such as the location of a division including proximity to urban centres, nature of income-generation enterprises functioning or the interest of political authorities in providing employment for the residents. Yet literacy could be considered as a basic eligibility criterion for employment in the government sector.

The above table shows that in the nine divisions which rank lowest in literacy (with a literacy rate of below 85), except for three (Kandaketiya, Vanathavilluwa and Ambanganakorale) all the others have a percentage of less than 10 of their residents employed in the government sector. Table 5.13 shows the literacy rate of 15-24 year olds by sector and province as estimated by the 2001 population census.

Table 5.13: Literacy Rate and Unemployment Rate of 15-24 year olds by Sector and Province - 2001

Sector/Province/District	Male		Female	
	Literacy	Unemployment	Literacy	Unemployment
Sri Lanka	95.1	23.8	96.0	34.3
Sector				
Urban	94.9	24.0	96.0	28.2
Rural	95.7	23.8	96.9	35.1
Estate	87.0	NA	84.0	NA
District				
Colombo	95.2	26.2	96.2	23.2
Gampaha	96.7	28.6	97.8	19.6
Kalutara	95.2	28.7	96.8	33.4
Kandy	96.4	29.9	96.5	48.8
Matale	94.3	22.7	96.0	30.5
Nuwara Eliya	92.7	12.8	91.0	20.5
Galle	95.7	33.0	96.7	41.8
Matara	94.9	26.4	96.0	49.1
Hambantota	95.9	27.7	97.3	60.7
Ampara	93.1	NA	93.9	NA
Kurunegala	96.1	20.2	97.3	38.8
Puttalam	93.5	16.9	94.9	35.6
Anuradhapura	95.4	13.9	96.7	45.3
Polonnaruwa	94.5	21.9	96.0	60.0
Badulla	93.8	14.7	94.0	24.8
Moneragala	93.8	11.5	95.2	25.8
Ratnapura	93.5	24.5	94.6	45.2
Kegalle	95.1	28.5	96.5	47.4

Source: Census of Population and Housing, 2001

* Data not available the districts in the Northern and Eastern provinces other than Ampara.

The above table shows gender to be a determinant of unemployment with only two districts (Colombo and Gampaha) having lower rates of unemployment for females than for males. In both these districts, the rate of literacy too is higher for females. Yet in fourteen other districts which have higher rates

of female literacy have also higher rates of unemployment for females.

Statistics related to the education level of youthful offenders (offenders who are between the ages of 16 and 22 years) for the years 2001 to 2005 indicated a relationship between these two variables (Table 5.14).

Table 5.14: Youthful Offenders by Level of Education

Level of Education	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
No schooling	15	12	29	07	05
Grade 1-5	7	19	15	10	15
Passed Grade 5	08	16	23	06	14
Passed Grade 8	14	14	19	19	17
Passed GCE O/L	--	3	14	--	4
Passed GCE A/L	--	-	01	--	--
Total	44	64	101	42	55

Source: Department of Prisons (2006) Prison Statistics of Sri Lanka Silver Jubilee Vol. 25, Colombo

Table 5.15 presents the convicted prisoners' level of education for years 2001 -2005. In the first three years of the survey (2001-2003)

around 40 per cent of the convicted prisoners either had never been to school or had left without completing grade 5.

Table 5.15: Convicted Prisoners by Level of Education

Level of Education	2001		2002		2003		2004		2005	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
No schooling	1701	7.6	2083	8.3	2417	8.7	1764	5.5	4398	13.3
Grade 1-5	6742	30.3	7889	31.5	6089	22.0	5249	16.3	5449	16.5
Passed Grade 5	5346	24.0	6238	24.9	7511	27.1	5957	18.5	6160	18.6
Passed Grade 8	6222	28.0	6373	25.5	8183	29.6	9592	29.8	9808	29.7
Passed GCE O/L	1841	8.3	2066	8.3	2862	10.3	6337	19.7	6414	19.4
Passed GCE A/L	379	1.7	367	1.5	609	2.2	771	2.4	791	2.4
Graduate	8	0.03	7	0.03	10	0.04	12	0.04	14	0.04
Total	22239		25023		27681		32158		33034	

Source: Department of Prisons (2006) Prison Statistics of Sri Lanka Silver Jubilee Vol. 25, Colombo

The above table does not bring out a direct relationship between illiteracy and the proneness to engage in crime. However, there is a likelihood that those who drop out of school early, that is, without even passing Grade 5 are more likely to have a lower level of literacy. What is significant that as the level of education increases there is less

possibility of being convicted.

In fact analysis of examination data related to the two subjects of Sinhala Language and Tamil Language at GCE O/L Examination in year 2001 showed that percentage of students who obtain fail grades is quite considerable (Table 5.16).

Table 5.16: Students receiving Fail grades at GCE (O/L) Examination (Selected Variables)

Sector/Type of Community/District	% with failing grades (W)		Total Number Sat
	Male	Female	
Sinhala Language			
Most congenial schools	23.8	8.7	99735
Congenial schools	36.6	15.0	60851
Not difficult schools	41.4	19.9	31537
Difficult schools	43.9	24.0	14835
Most difficult schools	44.8	24.4	3874
Sector			
Urban	18.0	6.1	45799
Rural	36.7	15.6	165032
Tamil Language			
Most congenial schools	23.5	10.9	15336
Congenial schools	31.2	15.9	15337
No difficult schools	29.8	17.1	4506
Difficult schools	30.8	20.7	5997
Most difficult schools	22.8	26.2	4178
Schools by sector			
Government	27.3	13.2	40964
Estate	30.4	23.8	5013

Source: DMR/MoE

Table 5.16 indicates that boys tend to perform poorer at the GCE O/L Examination in their mother tongue, in general, except in Tamil Language in most difficult schools. In Sinhala Language, the percentage of boys failing in most difficult schools is 44.8, while in Tamil Language the corresponding percentage is 22.8 for boys and 26.2 for girls. There is also a discrepancy between urban and rural schools in Sinhala Language and between government and estate schools in Tamil Language. Here the argument is not that for literacy passing the first language at GCE O/L is necessary rather than to point out that there is a likelihood of these students who fail the subjects are likely to lack advanced literacy skills which are required for survival in today's knowledge economy. Especially in the Sri Lanka context, where the nation invested heavily in improving the level of education of its people for more than six decades, even before international conventions had been formulated,

it is necessary to target higher levels of achievement.

While remaining in school up to grade 4 or 5 is considered as tantamount to access in literacy, this too necessarily does not mean an acquisition of mastery in language or mathematical skills is shown by studies of learning achievement of children which indicate a disturbing picture. The study by the National Education Research and Evaluation Centre of the University of Colombo, (NEREC, 2003) has indicated high regional variations in average learning achievement in the primary education cycle. In the total sample of 16383 pupils, 8265 (50.4%) were boys and 8118 (49.6%) were girls. The proportion of grade 4 students attaining mastery of their first language, Sinhala or Tamil, varies from 54.5% in the Northern Province to 72.8% in the Western Province. Similarly, mastery of primary mathematics ranges from 50.3% in the Northern Province to

71.1% in the Western province, and mastery of English language competencies varies from 35.6% in the Northern and Eastern provinces to 54.3% in the Western province. The urban-rural differences in mean values in all three subjects were significant at the level of 95%. The percentage that could not reach mastery level in first language was 49.7 in urban schools and 66.8 in rural schools. In mathematics the respective percentages were 48.7 for urban schools and 65.2 in rural schools. In English Language, the percentage that could not achieve mastery was 78.4 in urban schools and 93.3 in rural schools. In four districts, the percentage of students reaching the level of mastery in the upper group of districts – Colombo, Gampaha, Matara and Kalutara (three of which are in Western province) is high. Trincomalee, Nuwara Eliya, Batticaloa, Mullativu and Kilinochchi are at the lowest level in average scores and percentages reaching mastery. In all three subjects, the maximum differences – 19.2, 20.3, and 20.1 in First language, Mathematics and English Language respectively, are between 1AB and Type 2 schools. When mastery levels were considered, in all three subjects girls had performed better.

The above study does not indicate whether the level of mastery expected at the end of grade four is on par with or above the level of literacy. Yet the fact that after four years of schooling, the students lack mastery in three key subjects of first language, mathematics and English brings into question the official national rates of literacy.

A second study, (NIE) on performance of grade 5 students (Suranimala and Fernando, 2003) was carried out in 394 schools throughout the country and it compared the findings with those of a study carried out in 1994. They conclude (i) that the mean

percentages of student performance for Sinhala medium (no Tamil medium sample was included in 1994) in Literacy (from 61.8 to 66.7 in 2003) and Numeracy (from 45.1 in 1994 to 54.6 in 2003) as well as percentages of students who have reached mastery level had improved. Mean scores in literacy progressively decline with school type with 1AB schools having the highest score (82.0) and type 3 a score of 59.3. There was a slight difference in performance between urban and rural sectors with urban 1AB schools having a score of 82.0 and rural 1AB schools having a score of 69.9 only. Rural type 3 schools had a score higher than that of urban type 3 schools (59.3 as against 66.2). In the Tamil medium also the urban score in literacy was 62.2 and the rural score 57.8. The percentage achieving mastery level in literacy varied from 64.5% in the North-western to 29.0 in Uva province. The North-Eastern Province, (in which some of the worst districts had not been included in the sample) a conflict affected region, had a percentage of 31.1. In numeracy, the percentages ranged from 15.9 in the North-Western province to 6.8 in Uva. Among districts, Kurunegala (in North-Western Province) had the highest mean score in literacy and Monaragala in Uva Province, the lowest mean score of 52.1. In numeracy, the highest scorer was Ratnapura (58.2) and the lowest of 40.7 in Mannar (in North-East Province).

A third study by the National Education Commission (NEC, 2006) assessed the language and mathematics skills of 4054 children in the Sinhala medium and 1097 children in the Tamil medium in grade 6. First language skills were assessed in the aspects of handwriting, usage of correct words, writing words correctly, spelling and essay writing. Cumulative assessment of language skills in first language is given below.

Table 5.17: Achievement in First Language by Medium

Level of achievement	Sinhala Medium		Tamil Medium	
	No.	%	No.	%
Good	51	01	08	0.7
Satisfactory	1607	40	130	11.9
Poor	1650	41	259	23.6
Very Poor	746	18	700	63.8

Source: National Education Commission, (2006) Survey of Language and Mathematics Competencies of Students in Grades 6 and 10. National Education Commission, Colombo

In Mathematics, skills in addition, subtraction, multiplication and division were assessed. Analysis of scores is depicted in Table 5.18. It indicates that the achievement in Mathematics is higher but the low percentages gaining good or satisfactory level of achievement in the first language as well as the disparity between the

two media is a cause for concern. The message clearly is that enrolment in school does not guarantee literacy or mastery of key skills in language (even in the mother tongue) or numeracy for all children. This situation undoubtedly has repercussions on the national rates of literacy.

Table 5.18: Satisfactory Achievement in Mathematical Skills by Medium (%)

Medium	Addition	Subtraction	Multiplication	Division
Sinhala	84	63.8	48.8	47.5
Tamil	81	56.5	41.8	39.0

Source: National Education Commission, (2006) Survey of Language and Mathematics Competencies of Students in Grades 6 and 10. National Education Commission, Colombo

5.5 Successes and Remaining Gaps in Implementation of EFA Goal

5.5.1 Successes in Implementation of EFA Goal

Sri Lanka indicates a moderate level of success in implementation of its literacy programmes. With regard to the conduct of Literacy Programmes the Non-Formal Education Branch states that the level of attainment of the participants of these programmes (See Table 5.3) is assessed by a committee consisting of the Divisional/Zonal Directors of Education, the

Non-Formal Education Officers and the Literacy Programme instructor. Those students who attain the expected level of literacy are enrolled in formal school to the relevant grade. The number of children who were enrolled in formal school after studying in literacy classes by province is given in Table 5.19 below.

Table 5.19: No. of Children Admitted to Formal Schools

Province	2003		2004		2005	
	No. of programmes	No. of children	No. of programmes	No. of children	No. of programmes	No. of children
Western	140	520	140	292	139	725
Central	44	428	65	257	58	1200
Southern	106	581	108	333	95	129
North-Western	30	136	36	196	04	184
North-Central	19	80	04	40	09	06
Uva	15	207	45	284	42	421
Sabaragamuwa	41	548	27	368	29	124
North-East	36	--	70	1230	64	1757
Total	431	2500	495	3000	440	4546

Source: Ministry of Education, Non-formal Education Branch (2007) Personal communication

It is difficult to identify trends and relationships from the above table. The number of students who had been admitted to formal school does not seem to depend on the number of literacy classes. Thus the total number admitted to school had increased over the three-year period even though the number of classes had varied. Similarly, in Western, Central and Southern provinces, while the number of literacy classes had either remained the same or increased from 2003 to 2004 but the number of students admitted to school had declined. In 2005 in the Western, Central, Uva and North-east provinces, the number of literacy classes decreased but more students had been enrolled in school. Especially the case of North-central and Sabaragamuwa provinces where the number of students admitted to formal school had decreased substantially from 80 to 06 in 2003 to 124 in 2005 in the former and from 548 in 2003 to 124 in the latter causes concern. At the same time, it is necessary to bear in mind that attendance at a literacy class would not guarantee a smooth transition to formal school. The majority of these participants would either be those who had never enrolled or dropped out of school early. Previous studies have shown that the factors related to reluctance to attend school, originate mostly from the home – poverty, need to help with work, absence of

parents and lack of interest of parents. At the same time, peer attitudes, perceived discrimination by the teacher and lack of academic competency also appear to be pushing children out of school. It is also interesting to note that two children had stated ‘there are no jobs for educated people’ implying a disillusionment with education as a channel of mobility (Jayaweera and Gunawardena, 2004). It is essential that specific programmes such as those on literacy which have a specific objective – increasing the level of literacy among the participants be regularly monitored to track progress.

The Non-Formal Education report (2005) indicates that out of the 111 Community learning centres assessed, 90 had reported progress. Of the 9116 who participated in the centre activities, 5296 (58.1%) had gained employment with 3893 (42.7%) being self-employed. The percentage of the number who gained employment out of those who participated in the programmes by province was as shown in the following table (Table 5.20). It is relevant to note that while a very small number of participants (91) had participated in these programmes (that had been assessed) from the North-East province the percentage gaining employment (35.2%) was also the lowest in that province.

Table 5.20: % gaining employment after participating in CLC programmes & Literacy - 2005

Province	District	No. participating in CLC programmes	% Gaining Employment	% of Literacy - 2001		
				Male	Female	Total
Western	Colombo	1292	62.2	95.3	94.0	91.0
	Gampaha			95.7	95.1	95.4
	Kalutara			93.7	92.6	93.2
Central	Kandy	2460	55.7	92.4	88.7	90.5
	Matale			90.2	86.4	88.3
	Nuwara Eliya			87.6	77.7	82.6
Southern	Galle	1614	50.1	93.2	91.5	92.3
	Matara			91.9	88.9	90.3
	Hambantota			90.9	87.0	88.9
North-Western	Kurunegala	770	60.1	93.9	91.5	92.7
	Puttalam			91.2	90.3	90.7
North-Central	Anuradhapura	667	55.9	92.1	88.8	90.5
	Polonnaruwa			91.2	88.7	90.0
Uva Province	Badulla	1114	68.7	88.9	81.7	85.2
	Moneragala			88.1	83.8	86.0
Sabaragamuwa	Ratnapura	1108	61.4	90.4	86.3	88.4
	Kegalle			93.0	89.8	91.4
North-East*	Ampara	91	35.2	88.9	82.9	85.9
Sri Lanka		9116	58.1	92.6	89.7	91.0

Source: Ministry of Education, Non-formal Education Branch (2005) & Dept of Census & Statistics Census -2001

5.5.2 Remaining Challenges in Implementation of Literacy

Measurement of literacy is perhaps the foremost challenge faced by a nation intending to develop its human resources optimally to ensure both individual and social development. Proxy indicators such as enrolment in formal schooling or completion of certain grade at school are no longer sufficient to estimate acquisition of literacy. While the procedure used in Sri Lanka used at present, asking the respondents whether they can read and write is totally acceptable for estimating literacy, it is necessary to understand that a literacy survey needs to test “not just whether someone can understand and transcribe letters and words but whether they are able to interpret and use written materials in situations they may

encounter in their real lives (UNESCO, 2006).

It is also necessary distinguish between low-literacy adults who can only perform basic tasks and those unable to read or write at all. Thus it is necessary to differentiate between literacy in the domains of prose literacy, document literacy, numeracy and component skills consisting of reading, writing, and numeracy skills as advocated by UNESCO.

The ultimate goal of improving literacy is not only to ensure that all people including young adults become literate but also that they have opportunity to reach higher levels of proficiency in literacy to improve the quality of their life. Thus the objective should be not only to estimate the percentage of population (adults and young adults) who gain literacy but to classify the levels of literacy that they have

mastered so that continuing improvement can be supported.

Assessment of literacy should also taken into consideration the fact that even literate persons can relapse into illiteracy if the skills gained by them are not used. Thus disaggregation of data by age levels and other variables such as employment and residence may be necessary. It is especially important to take cognizance of the trends, disparities in literacy rates by district and even by DS Divisions, by community type, gender and age when literacy classes that have emerged from existing studies, when Functional Literacy Centres and Community Learning Centres are established and reorganised. There has to be a logical order in organising these classes as the areas of need has to be identified in order to satisfy the need and to improve the levels of literacy.

Thus deciding upon the provision of literacy classes needs to be made available not only to those aged between 15-24 years but also to those aged above 24. While the youth are a valuable resource that needs to be developed optimally, in the Knowledge Society that we live in it is not possible to leave out the older people as not having a right to opportunities for enhancing their capabilities.

A further factor that needs to be taken into consideration is the level of learning achievement of children who continue to study in school.

The above analysis clearly presents a justification for a standard literacy assessment to be carried out in the country. Literacy Assessment through Household Based Literacy Module which can be incorporated in the various household surveys is relevant here. This will provide useful information about households by asking information on the literacy environment and personal behaviour on reading and writing in daily life in addition to educational background.

5.6 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.6.1 Conclusions

1. Review of the policies, legislation, plans and actions that have targeted the achievement of literacy in Sri Lanka, undertaken above, clearly indicate that progress made in literacy and formal education in the space of six decades, and especially in relation to the other countries in South Asia should not make us complacent. The policymakers as well as practitioners in education should identify universal literacy as a realistic goal on which it is not possible to make any compromises.
2. It is also necessary to take cognizance of the fact that in the absence of any accurate measurement of literacy being undertaken, the literacy rates about which we are proud of, can actually be an exaggeration.
3. It is clear that illiteracy exists in pockets of disadvantage such as urban slums, estate and fishing communities, in remote rural and conflict affected areas where the refugee and internally displaced populations are concentrated.
4. Even though efforts are made to improve literacy in identified locations and communities, it is possible that the success of these efforts are affected by such factors as reluctance of adults to participate in literacy classes due to shyness, unwillingness to forego participation in income-generation activities or household work, non-availability of trained and committed facilitators who can deliver literacy effectively and lack of resources that can motivate adults to participate in these programmes.
5. While success achieved in improving literacy can be mainly attributed to the democratisation of formal education to reach the unreached, declining standards in

learning achievement in formal school caution us not rely only on formal education as the means of gaining universal literacy.

6. Similarly, in an age of lifelong learning and continuing education literacy of adults cannot be considered as of lower priority.

5.6.2 Recommendations

1. It is necessary to identify the following as the **priority target groups** that should be given consideration in literacy programmes.
 - i. Those who lack literacy in disadvantaged communities such as urban slums, estate, fishing, remote rural and conflict-affected communities, gypsies and prisoners,
 - ii. Those who have lapsed into illiteracy as a result of non-utilisation of literacy and numeracy skills such as early drop-outs, child workers and
 - iii. Children with special needs, child workers, children in detention camps and disabled adults who have never received the opportunity of enrolling in school, and
 - iv. Children who are in school but whose learning achievement is low.
2. **Strategies** for attaining the unattained targets and reaching the unreached would be as follows:
 - i. Identification of those who lack literacy by their assessing literacy. This could be done through the Household Based Literacy Module which can be incorporated in the various household surveys where probable illiterates (those who lack formal educational qualifications, or not employed in jobs requiring literacy) are tested,
 - ii. Identification of pockets of illiteracy and organizing functional literacy programmes to motivate the participation of adults and buttressing such programmes through provision of

resources and engagement of committed and trained facilitators who are remunerated adequately for their services,

- iii. Throughout the entire course of education, from kindergarten to university, educational institutions must provide 'life skills' knowledge, integrating such knowledge into the subject matter being taught as appropriate and wherever possible.
- iv. Negotiation of collaboration of non-governmental organizations, development partners and community-based organizations to sponsor such programmes through justifying them as needing priority,
- v. Regular monitoring of these programmes to ensure that they are effectively implemented,
- vi. Implementation of compulsory education regulations, policy of inclusive education and enrolment of children who achieve required levels of learning achievement in school, to ensure full participation of all children aged 5-14 in school, and
- vii. Improvement of the quality of teaching-learning in schools through improvement of teacher quality and learning environment.

The target to be achieved could be 100 per cent literacy by the year 2010. The **milestones to be achieved** over the remaining period need to be scheduled so as to close the gap in a short period of three years. This is indeed a challenge, considering the barriers that need to be surmounted which include political, cultural and economic factors. This would necessitate a plan of action to be formulated after wide consultation, to be implemented efficiently with dedication and commitment by all stakeholders. The Draft National Action Plan to improve literacy developed by the MoE can be used as the base in this respect (Appendix).

