



Power of Youth, by Ik-Jong Kang. Photo: © UNESCO/Patrick Lagès



The winners of the UNESCO  
International Literacy Prizes

2008

the <sup>UNESCO</sup> Courier features

The winners of the UNESCO  
International Literacy Prizes

2008

Curitiba City Council (Brazil)

***Alfabetizando com Saúde Programme***

Winner of the UNESCO International Reading Association Literacy Prize

People's Action Forum (Zambia)

***Reflect and HIV/AIDS Programme***

Winner of the UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize

Adult and Non-Formal Education Association (ANFEAE) (Ethiopia)

***Literacy Plus Programme***

Winner of the UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy

Operation Upgrade (South Africa)

***Kwanibela Project***

Winner of the UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy

#### **HONOURABLE MENTIONS**

Intégration Association, *Reading Access for the Visually Impaired in Marrakech* (Morocco)

Honourable Mention of the UNESCO International Reading Association Literacy Prize

BBC-RaW *Reading and Writing* (United Kingdom)

Honourable Mention of the UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize

*Koïchiro Matsuura,  
Director-General of UNESCO*



© UNESCO/M. Ravassard

## Message from Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, on the occasion of International Literacy Day 2008

**M**ORE THAN HALFWAY through the UN Literacy Decade launched in 2003, one in five young people and adults aged 15 years and over does not possess the most elementary skills required to read a street sign, a child's book, a map, a newspaper, names on a voting ballot or instructions on a medicine bottle. In a world increasingly driven by knowledge and technology, a staggering 774 million adults are illiterate. We are far from the goal of halving the number of illiterate persons around the world by 2015. Even though literacy rates have risen, the absolute number of illiterates has increased in some regions due to population growth. This represents a genuine threat for human development. This year's International Literacy Day puts the spotlight on the connections between literacy and health. Today's gravest health concerns cannot be adequately addressed unless literacy finds a central place in public health policies and strategies. An illiterate person is simply more vulnerable to ill-health, and less likely to seek medical help for themselves, their family or their community. Nearly ten million children die before reaching age 5, most often of preventable infectious diseases, and it is children of the poor who are less likely to be treated for serious illness. The risk of contracting malaria – which claims over one million lives each year – is increased significantly amongst illiterate populations, with literacy levels having a direct impact on health-seeking behaviours. Women with post-primary education are five times more likely than illiterate women to know facts about HIV and AIDS. This is why the Millennium Development Goals directly or indirectly related to health eradicating extreme poverty, promoting gender equality, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, and combating HIV and malaria cannot be reached without a literacy dimension.

Literacy is about empowerment. It increases awareness and influences the behaviour of individuals, families and communities. It improves communication skills, gives access to knowledge and builds the self-confidence and self-esteem needed to make decisions. A woman who participates in a literacy programme will have better knowledge of health and family planning. She will more likely adopt preventive health measures for herself and for her children; she will more easily seek medical help and make use of the available medical services; finally she will be able to follow medical instructions more easily to ensure adequate treatment for herself or close-of-kin. In short, literacy is a powerful yet too often overlooked remedy to health threats, with the potential to promote better nutrition, disease prevention and treatment. The winners of the 2008 UNESCO International Literacy Prizes offer inspiring examples of how literacy impacts powerfully on the promotion of healthy societies. Operation Upgrade's "Kwanibela Project" in South Africa offers an innovative approach to integrating knowledge about HIV and AIDS into literacy programmes. The "Reflect and HIV/AIDS" programme in Zambia organized by the People's Action Forum is remarkable for its cultural programmes in mother tongue languages. The Brazilian programme "Alfabetizando com Saúde" shows the benefits of successful collaboration between municipal health and education bodies in the city of Curitiba. The programme reaches people with various long-term illnesses, enabling them to take better care of themselves and break their sense of isolation. In Ethiopia, the "Literacy Plus" programme targeting rural women has led to the increased use of malaria nets. These innovative and successful literacy practices show that when health is at stake, literacy has a major role to play. UNESCO is actively engaged in encouraging countries to adopt policies that explicitly tackle literacy and build on the valuable work often led by civil society. Several initiatives, including UNESCO's Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE), a series of six high-level regional conferences on literacy in 2007-2008, and the forthcoming Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) to be held in Belém, Brazil, in May 2009, point to renewed momentum. But this is just the cusp of change. It is essential for countries to show greater leadership and to increase spending on literacy, and for donors to give it a higher profile in their aid portfolio. There is an urgent need to scale up youth and adult learning programmes, to improve their quality, and to develop a rich literate environment where individuals of all ages are encouraged to sustain and use their newly acquired skills. The challenge ahead is our collective responsibility.





BRAZIL

## H as in Hygiene, O as in Osteoporosis, A as in AIDS...

A good idea, positive social impact, multiple benefits: the equation sums up the success of the programme “Alfabetizando com Saúde”.

It received the **UNESCO INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION LITERACY PRIZE** this year. Its founders had intended for it to last only a short time!



© UNESCO/Curitiba City Council

**T**HE PROJECT “Learning to read and write in good health”, launched in 2002 by the municipality of Curitiba, capital of the state of Paraná, in southern Brazil, is bringing literacy to adults in underprivileged neighbourhoods. The educational method combines alphabet and health: H as in Hygiene, O as in Osteoporosis, A as in AIDS...

This fight against illiteracy in adults that goes hand in hand with promoting their health is a result of the collaboration of two municipal sectors, Education and Health. Their experts produced photocopied lessons that they handed out to learners. They also set up a very simple mode of operation: volunteers sign up and undergo four hours of training, after being assigned to one of the city’s care centers. Since the launch of the programme, 163 volunteers have been trained in this way.

Fernanda Portela, 23, a student in chemical engineering, is one of them and has been a facilitator for several months. “I discovered I enjoyed doing it,” she explains, on her way to the class where 12 students are waiting for her. “It’s fantastic, because I notice that all of them have already made progress.”

Following the first stage of volunteer training, it is the task of the community agents to rally the population concerned: people who can’t read. Bernadette de Sa, 63, mother of four and with four grandchildren, has been going to the Alvorada Center, where she recently learned the letters of the alphabet.

Proud of her success, she says that now she can read the price and names of the products in her neighbourhood market, and she can even take the bus by herself – impossible for her until recently, because she couldn’t read the destination signs.



© UNESCO/Olando Azevedo



© UNESCO/Curitiba City Council

She has also learned to pay attention to possible symptoms of illnesses people in her age group are prone to. “As well as learning, one can pass on the information to others, she says, describing herself as a “chatterbox” who like to spend time talking to friends and neighbours and uses the opportunity to share what she has learned in class.

### Literacy and lucidity

The number of students per class varies and the duration of the learning period depends on each person’s capacity to learn. On the average, 400 people pass through some 30 city centres every year. In six years, more than 2000 people have learned to read thanks to this method. Their ages range from 48 to 80. Consequently the health information is mainly focused on the chronic or acute diseases that are most common at these ages. This year, 48 volunteers are working in 31 centres and 338 people are taking classes in Curitiba.

Project coordinator Marisa Giacomini says enthusiastically “We have succeeded in bringing a large number of people out of the darkness of illiteracy.” Indeed, becoming literate is not only learning to read and write but also to look at the realities of life with greater lucidity. This is why many people are interested in the classes, simply to gain greater independence: take a bus, write a little note to a distant relative, read the label of a medication or just read the Bible.

The project is tailored to the adult learners’ needs. Volunteers work on the basis of the experiences and

practical know-how of the learners themselves, taking into account their social position and worldview.

A committee of experts is responsible for monitoring the progress of activities by visiting centres monthly. Among the programme’s greatest benefits can be cited improving the quality of life of learners and their families, disease prevention, and boosting people’s self-esteem and reinforcing their sense of identity – notably when for the first time the learner writes his own name.

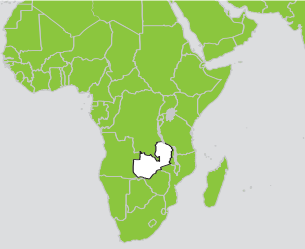
### The project is spreading to Africa

The project was launched in 2006 in Cabo Delgado in Mozambique. Brazilian experts were invited to develop two courses – one for teachers and the other for students – with contents based on local epidemiological data.

In 2007, thanks to this partnership, 30 teachers and 1200 literacy agents were trained. The programme “Alfabetizando com Saúde” has taken root in four Cabo Delgado districts.

Luciano Ducci, now deputy mayor of Curitiba, was the head of the Health department when the programme was created. What’s special about it, in his view, is its ability to provide significant benefits at little cost. “The founders’ wish is that the programme last only as long as it is needed to wipe out illiteracy,” he states. And it won’t need to last very long, in his opinion. ■

Liliana NEGRELLO, Brazilian journalist.



ZAMBIA

## Reading the world



© UNESCO/People's Action Forum

The **UNESCO KING SEJONG LITERACY PRIZE** was awarded this year to the People's Action Forum in Zambia for its programme "Reflect and HIV/AIDS" that empowers communities through literacy education to tackle issues linked to the pandemic. The programme uses local languages and cultural activities in its innovative strategy.

**A** SOCIAL GATHERING UNDER A TREE – an image easily dismissed as a relic of old-time African societies. Yet this traditional model, far from being outmoded, is proving effective to improve the lives of thousands of villagers in three of Zambia's nine provinces, thanks to the work of the Peoples' Action Forum (PAF), a non-governmental organisation providing non formal adult literacy education in rural areas. Undeterred by lack of conventional infrastructure, throngs of people are getting together in the shade of trees, with makeshift blackboards, to receive instruction and discuss issues of importance to the community, including HIV and AIDS.

For the past eight years, PAF has preached literacy as reading not merely the word, but the world. Working with whole communities, especially with women and children, PAF's approach is to help local groups realise that their development is not some abstract body's responsibility, but their own.

### The REFLECT method

To this end, PAF applies an educational approach known as REFLECT, acronym for "Regenerated Freirian Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques". It stresses dialogue and action, awareness-raising, cooperation and empowerment. Adult learners explore development challenges and find ways to overcome them. The approach not only upholds the old African adage that two heads are better than one, but also borrows methods typical of an African village. REFLECT takes place in "Circle" groups whose philosophy is that no one comes to the learning



Photos: © UNESCO/People's Action Forum

process empty handed. Facilitators are members of the community who have received training.

“It is one of the most effective participatory approaches to adult learning for social change and transformation,” explains PAF’s energetic executive director Jennipher Chiwela. Prior to founding PAF, she spent over 20 years in the civil service, rising to the position of Zambia Teaching Service Commission chairperson before retiring in 2003.

Early on, PAF decided to pay particular attention to the crucial issue of HIV and AIDS, a major obstacle to any progress a community can make. “We provide education to communities in rural areas where HIV and AIDS is rife. In the course of counseling and testing people, we realized that the major gap was ignorance, so we moved in with literacy programmes,” explains Chiwela. “In the face of HIV and AIDS, non-formal education opens up the minds of communities to be more assertive.”

### **Theatre for raising awareness**

PAF’s work to raise HIV and AIDS awareness, in cooperation with other organizations, includes not only training people in basic HIV and AIDS knowledge to be community facilitators but also teaching drama and performance skills to members of Anti-AIDS Clubs, who then put on shows. Theatre is a way to get the locals, particularly young people, involved in spreading the message. While performances are going on, HIV and AIDS counseling, testing and information distribution also take place.

“This approach has broken silence around sexuality and HIV and AIDS, dispelling myths and making

way for communities to seek solutions to the numerous related problems,” says Chiwela. “And through learning basic and essential literacy skills, people come to understand the nature of this pandemic and share the messages of prevention, care and mitigation.” ■

Andrew MULENGA, *The Post* (Lusaka, Zambia)  
and Cathy NOLAN (*The UNESCO Courier*)





## ETHIOPIA

## Women are the future of mankind

Writing workshops, business management and disease prevention – all are classes offered by the “Literacy Plus” programme launched by the Adult and Non-Formal Education Association in Ethiopia (ANFEAE), for which the NGO received one of the two 2008 UNESCO CONFUCIUS PRIZES FOR LITERACY.



© UNESCO/ANFEAE

“**B**EFORE, we knew nothing about sheep, poultry, different kinds of vegetables, and even less about family planning. It was ANFEAE who taught us all that,” explains Workenesh Getachew, a 39-year-old farmer and mother of six children.

Since she signed up for the “Literacy Plus” programme, Workenesh earns as much as 300 birr a month (about US\$30) selling eggs from imported hens (which lay more than local hens) as well as vegetables she grows in her kitchen garden with seeds provided by ANFEAE. This income supplements earnings from the village’s annual grain harvest. It may seem a paltry sum, but her family is now able to make ends meet.

Workenesh is even able to save money, instead of being completely dependent on her husband like before, as women in her village generally are. Though at first her husband was hard to convince. He thought spending two hours in class twice a week was a waste of time!

### Read, write and succeed

Women are the future of mankind, the saying goes. True, they run the household, raise the children and till the soil alongside their spouses. This is why ANFEAE made them the priority. The association addresses mainly women in Ethiopia’s more remote regions, stressing literacy and family planning.

Before, families in Beke – a small community 56 km north of Addis Ababa, where ANFEAE established a centre for adults in 2003 – were very large, despite their meagre incomes. In Ethiopia, notably in rural areas, having many children is considered genuine wealth, even without the means to raise them.



Today in Beke, thanks to ANFEAE's non-formal education programmes, 20 women aged 28 to 65 have succeeded in finding their place in the economic system and thus become independent. They are gaining men's respect with their learning. The association is bridging the gap left by the formal educational system.

Founded in 1995 and operational since 1997, ANFEAE aims to educate the least privileged, mainly in rural areas. According to a survey conducted by the Ethiopian Ministry of National Education in 2001, illiteracy concerns 30% of the population, living mostly in the countryside. Public spending on education increased by 26% in 2000-2001 to face the problem. And primary school enrolment increased from 61% in 2001 to 68.4% in 2004. Enrolment of girls in the same period rose from 41 to 59.1%.

ANFEAE is active in only three regions within the country (Oromiya, Amhara and Gambella) but the "Literacy Plus" project is an undeniable success. "We have reached about 8000 adults in the country," says NGO director Alemayehu Haily Gebre. According to a survey his group conducted of 3000 women, out of the total of 6,200 that took part in the literacy programme, "Half of them, or 1,500, increased their revenues by 25%," he explains.

He is proud of the results, though one concern remains: "Our goal was to enable these women to have access to microcredit, but NGOs are not allowed to engage in savings or lending activities."

"We have five centres and we can provide basic education, particularly to the poorest women," the director adds. "We have also trained 1,200 civil servants in different districts and published 17 training manuals translated into four national languages."

Educational material is developed by a group consisting of teachers, learners and representatives from health and agriculture organizations. The training course lasts two years (300 hours of instruction in all) in classes of 25 participants, and costs a total of US\$240,000, or less than US\$40 per pupil. Funds come from USAID Via Pact Ethiopia, SIDA Via Pact Ethiopia, the Addis Abeba, World Bank-Small Grant Programme as well as donations from ANFEAE members.

Some former learners become teachers, after a month's training. Each is responsible for 50 pupils and receives a monthly salary of US\$45.

### Customized education

Education for all in Africa, particularly for women and young people, is a major challenge that demands resolute action on the part of African leaders to meet the development goals they have set themselves. Education is crucial for integrating the new realities imposed by globalization, in order to understand them and develop an African adaptation. It is the essential tool African societies can use to stop the progress of HIV and AIDS, generate responses to global business challenges and above all, win the fight against poverty.

Yet despite efforts made in recent years, girls are those who suffer the most from exclusion in the traditional educational system, which is furthermore unable to meet the diversity of educational needs. Non-formal education in this context represents a godsend. It provides customized solutions for a population that is often deprived by the formal system's failures and deficiencies. ■

Tsigie SHIFERAW, BBC correspondent in Ethiopia



SOUTH AFRICA

## Hope for a forgotten land

One of the two **UNESCO CONFUCIUS PRIZES FOR LITERACY** was awarded this year to the NGO Operation Upgrade (South Africa) for its “Kwanibela Project”. Its innovative methods have proven effective in promoting rural women’s literacy and empowerment. An example to follow.



© UNESCO/Operation Upgrade

**F**OR JABU SITHOLE, a trip to the clinic was nothing less than traumatic. The softly spoken mother of five could not read or write and her illiteracy had a profound impact on her children’s health.

“I have five children. Each child has a clinic card bearing his or her name. But if one of the children got sick, I did not know which card to take. I had to take the sick child and all five cards and ask the clinic sister to find the right one. The nurses laughed at me. I would delay taking my children to clinic because I was embarrassed and ashamed.”

But after just three months of attending literacy classes, Jabu could recognise each child’s name – her life was beginning to change. Not only was Jabu learning to read and write, she was learning how to cope in a place called Kwanibela.

Kwanibela is an isolated area deep in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The closest town, Hluhluwe is over 50 kilometres away. No wonder some call it “God’s forgotten land”.

For the past eight years there has been little rain. Aside from a lack of water, there is no electricity or phone lines, maize is considered a luxury and only 26 percent of the population is literate.

Some people, usually men, leave their families and head for the big city in the hope of a job, while others try to eke out a living on the tribal land that’s home to some 26 000 people.

### Reading brings nourishment

However, over the past four years, there has been a glimmer of hope. Jabu, and many others like her, have joined The Kwanibela Project, an adult



Photos: © UNESCO/Operation Upgrade

literacy project run by a non-governmental organization called Operation Upgrade, founded in 1996.

The new project started in 2004. The project, which has had considerable impact on Kwanibela residents, offers mother tongue, English and numeracy classes using interactive methods and theme-based lessons, integrating such issues as HIV and AIDS.

“Literacy classes must reflect the social context. So while English is an option for the learners, HIV and AIDS and food security are part of almost every lesson. You cannot be in a literacy class if you can’t feed your children,” says Pat Dean, director of Operation Upgrade and the Kwanibela Project.

It’s this approach that has resulted in 28 classes, facilitated by 18 educators and catering for over 400 adult literacy learners.

A major achievement of the project has been the establishment – by the learners themselves – of food tunnels using hydroponic methods. Every one of the 28 groups has a tunnel which not only offers some form of food security but also a source of income. In fact, so successful has it been that one of the groups has been given a contract to supply spinach to a major South African supermarket group.

### **Fighting back against AIDS**

However, there are many challenges ahead, says training co-ordinator Itumeleng Petersen: “It’s sad to see the men who come back from working in big towns like Johannesburg and Durban. Many are infected with HIV and they return to sometimes four

or five wives. They infect them all. But through our work the women are learning to protect themselves and to access medication when they are infected.”

AIDS education is a huge part of the project. The literacy educators, who are also trained AIDS educators, take the AIDS message out to the community and incorporate it into their literacy lessons.

The Kwanibela Project has even tackled the critical problem of water head on. Some learners have been provided with ‘hippos’ (a rolling device that makes water transportation easier) and others have had their homes fitted with rain water harvesting systems.

Such is the commitment to the project that the majority of learners walk for hours to their literacy classes – it’s not uncommon to walk 20 kilometres a day just to learn. But clearly the rewards far outweigh the efforts. Says Petersen, “When they start stringing a sentence or two together you can see their eyes light up. To them it’s like striking gold.”

Nomonde Diko, a Kwanibela Project trainer, adds that nothing can compare with driving into the area to start work.: “Even though they cannot read ‘Operation Upgrade’ written on the car they know it’s us, and their warm welcome brings a smile to my face.” ■

Corrinne Louw, South African journalist for the Durban-based weekly *Kwana Newspaper*

## Contacts

**BRAZIL**    **Alfabetizando com Saúde**

Curitiba City Council / Municipal Health Department  
 Rua Francisco Torres  
 830 CEP 80 060 130  
 Cristo Rei  
 Curitiba Paraná  
 Brazil  
 PHONE: +55 41 33 50 94 28  
 E MAIL: [opup@operationupgrade.org.za](mailto:opup@operationupgrade.org.za)  
 WEB SITE: [www.curitiba.pr.gov.br](http://www.curitiba.pr.gov.br)

**ZAMBIA**    **Reflect and HIV/AIDS**

People's Action Forum  
 33709, Lusaka  
 Zambia  
 PHONE: +260 211 231 201  
 E MAIL: [edoffice@paf.org.zm](mailto:edoffice@paf.org.zm)  
 WEB SITE: [www.paf.org.zm](http://www.paf.org.zm)

**ETHIOPIA**    **Ethiopia Literacy Plus**

Adult and Nonformal Education Association in Ethiopia  
 Addis Ababa, Arada Sub city  
 Kebele, 13/14  
 Ethiopia  
 PHONE: +251 11 124 86 34  
 FAX: +251 11 124 86 38  
 E MAIL: [anfeae@ethionet.et](mailto:anfeae@ethionet.et)  
 WEB SITE: [www.anfeae.org](http://www.anfeae.org)

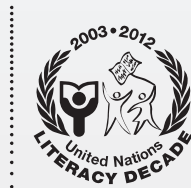
**SOUTH AFRICA**    **Kwanibela Project**

Operation Upgrade  
 PO Box 371 Hyper by the Sea  
 4053, Durban  
 South Africa  
 PHONE: +27 31 579 43 43  
 E MAIL: [pat@operationupgrade.org.za](mailto:pat@operationupgrade.org.za)

## Acknowledgements

**UNESCO wishes to express its profound appreciation and deepest thanks to:**

- The International Reading Association whose generous support has made it possible to award the UNESCO International Reading Association Literacy Prize since 1979.
- The Government of the Republic of Korea whose generous support has made it possible to award the UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize since 1989.
- The People’s Republic of China whose generous support has made it possible to award the UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy since 2005.



**United Nations Literacy Decade Coordination Unit**

**Division for the Coordination of United Nations Priorities  
in Education**

UNESCO  
7, place de Fontenoy  
75 352 Paris 07 SP, FRANCE

PHONE: + 33 1 45 68 09 52

FAX: + 33 1 45 68 56 26

E MAIL: [literacyprizes@unesco.org](mailto:literacyprizes@unesco.org)

WEB SITE: [www.unesco.org/education/en/literacy/prizes](http://www.unesco.org/education/en/literacy/prizes)



Literacy is the best remedy

[www.unesco.org/education/en/literacy/prizes](http://www.unesco.org/education/en/literacy/prizes)