

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

**Online consultation: Key issues and implications**

**1. Introduction**

The writing of the 2006 EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR), scheduled for release next 9 November, is taking shape, enriched by the many valuable contributions to the on-line consultation conducted in March. Our consultation objective was to assure that the report is fully aware of the range of views, concerns and policy experience prevailing in the field of literacy. This consultation was addressed to individuals and organizations with experience in the field of literacy and education for all, and more broadly, with expertise on development issues. The following report sums up contributions on the main themes addressed by participants and indicates some of the consultation's key implications for the drafting of the current GMR.

We would like to apologize for the delay in posting this summary of discussions, and assure participants that this in no way reflects a neglect of input from the consultation. Backstage, the team has invested time in taking stock of the valuable contributions made during this exercise.

**2. Consultation Process and Participation**

This was the first online consultation organized by the GMR. It was scheduled to run from 11–25 March 2005, but the process was extended to 31 March due to popular demand. Around 1500 individuals were invited to participate and were encouraged to inform their partners who might have valuable contributions to make.

The outline was posted in English, French and Spanish. The consultation was based and moderated in English; however, interventions could be made in other languages (French and Spanish). In the latter case, individual interventions were not translated into English but were posted and reviewed in the language in which they are submitted.

This consultation was moderated by Dr Agneta Lind, literacy expert and special advisor to the current edition of the EFA Global Monitoring Report. Participants could comment on individual chapters or on the outline as a whole under a rubric entitled "Overall comments". At the end of each week, Dr. Agneta Lind provided a

summary of the discussion and invited participants to further develop certain key themes.

The initial statistics indicate that there was active participation in the consultation.

<b>Key Statistics</b>	
1. <b>Total readers:</b>	3 715
2. <b>Total registered members:</b>	114
3. <b>Total forums:</b>	6
4. <b>Total topics:</b>	112
5. <b>Total posts:</b>	164

**Additional statistics are presented in Annex**

The Report team is fully aware of registration difficulties experienced by a number of participants. During the consultation, we did our best to attend individually to every complaint and to post contributions ourselves when participants were unable to register. This has been a learning experience for the team and more broadly, for UNESCO, and we shall endeavour to simplify the procedure in the future and to facilitate participation for the disabled.

## **1. Key Thematic Questions**

A majority of contributions covered one or several of the following categories. Far from being a comprehensive presentation of contents, these provide a sense of overarching concerns expressed.

### **1. Literacy for Whom?**

Should the Report address literacy for *all*? Contributors debated the merits of promoting literacy for one group—adults, out-of-school-youth, school children, or disadvantaged women—over literacy for all. Concern was expressed that programs often start out as Education for All but attention quickly diverts to one or more groups. Adult and youth living in poor rural areas and other marginalized groups, especially women, are often neglected. While advocating a holistic approach, most contributors were of the opinion that the spotlight should be on these disadvantaged groups.

**Age.** Participants disagreed about where literacy provision efforts should be focused. Several people argued that efforts should center on illiterate adult and out-of-school youth as their needs have been overshadowed as the international community pushes for universal primary school education. Others argued that literacy for all is precisely for *all*, and that there is no need for competition among different age groups. Echoing this was a general sense that literacy programs that bring adults and children together are particularly effective. The positive correlation between increased literacy levels of parents, mothers in particular, and their

children's acquisition of literacy was reiterated. In response to the need to provide literacy for all ages and creating inter-generational links, one participant suggested a three-pronged approach: adult literacy in the context of work and civic participation; support for school-based literacy development for children; and activities that help to bridge home- and school-based literacies. Another participant argued that adult literacy in and of itself was justified regardless of additional benefits to primary schooling.

**Formal versus non-formal.** Concern was expressed that non-formal learning often takes a back seat to formal schooling. One contributor argued that the report was heavily biased towards school literacy. Many participants extolled the benefits of life-long learning.

**Marginal groups.** It was observed that while literacy is a problem for the majority living in absolute poverty in developing countries, there are many individuals and minority groups in all countries who are not only marginalized from society, but also from literacy provision and acquisition. These individuals include: the disabled, indigenous groups, child workers (sex and slave-wage), stateless people, and among them especially women. It was also suggested that greater emphasis should be placed on literacy in crisis or post-conflict situations.

**Developed countries.** It was stated that the GMR should not neglect the 5-10% of people in developed countries who are not literate.

**Rural vs. Urban.** It was noted that 70% of the world's population is rural, where the lowest literacy rates are found, and therefore the GMR should highlight Education for Rural People.

## 2. Definitions of Literacy

Perhaps the most difficult question posed by the 2006 GMR is 'What does literacy mean?' There were rich contributions, ranging from ideas about literacy as reading the world to different definitions of literacy used by UNESCO, various NGOs, other UN organizations, and those discussed in the context of various conferences (Jomtien, Dakar).

**Literacy and Skills.** Most contributions on the meaning of literacy did not think literacy should be applied as a metaphor for other skills (computer literacy, emotional literacy, etc.). The importance of including numeracy in the literacy theme was agreed. There was also much discussion about ICTs (interactive TVs, mobile phones, SMS, internet) and their relationship to literacy both as an area of growing demand for literacy application and as a possible aid in learning and developing literacy.

### 3. Language and Literacy

Issues relating to multiple-language situations came repeatedly. Should literacy be taught in the local language or in a national or more wide-spread and economically-advantaged language? This question pertains not only to formal primary education but also to adult literacy classes. Several participants agreed that learners should have the right to learn the dominant languages, in addition to literacy in local or mother tongue languages.

**Language difficulties and literacy.** It was observed that learners often study in a language that they do not speak particularly well, and that this is one of the most underestimated difficulties in the acquisition of literacy

**Semiotics of literacy.** It was pointed out that people who learn to read in a local language are able to easily transfer these skills to a second or third language.

### 4. Policy Issues

EFA goals are far from being achieved. What are the political commitments of governments and stakeholders? Why are they often reluctant to address the issue of literacy? Many contributors had valuable suggestions about policies that work or counter examples of public policies that failed. More resources and human resource capacity development of literacy workers were called for.

**Top-down or local initiatives, stand-alone vs. embedded programmes.** Contributors discussed the merits of a top-down, government-led campaign versus programs that began as local initiatives, as well as the roles that governments, CSO and NGOs should play. Several contributors pointed out the importance of national policies that allow successful elements of local initiatives to be scaled up, provide guidance and sensitivity to context. Many examples were given on linking literacy to local development.

**Literacy Promotion Resources.** How can human, material, and financial resources best be mobilized? What strategies are needed? One solution that was proposed by many was partnerships between organizations, NGOs, governments, universities, and civil society organizations. For example, one contributor suggested combining food aid with literacy programs. It was questioned whether the private sector should be involved at the policy stage. One contributor noted that a publisher in Africa might be able to give good suggestions on book policy and advice on practical initiatives.

## 5. Literate Environments

Contributors were generally in agreement that literacy needs to be supported by an environment that enhances and sustains literacy. One contributor defined a literate environment as one that not only has newspapers, but people ‘who are eager to read them and discuss what is in them with their friends.’ Recommendations concerned the role of libraries, community centers, ICTs, and artistic education in promoting literacy. The importance of inexpensive newsprint was also raised along with the need for adequate textbook publication and distribution with a view to long-term educational requirements.

## 6. Empowerment and Gender

**Does literacy empower?** One contributor gave the example of Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* as an example of a daughter of a Chinese immigrant who views learning English at school as enabling her to break out of the traditional role expected of her by her Chinese family. Other contributors highlighted the intangible benefit of self-confidence that comes with literacy acquisition. Yet other contributors were quick to point out that literacy programs are not always empowering, but may reinforce oppressive sexual stereotypes. Furthermore, in some situations, adult literacy programs are viewed as second-rate alternatives to formal schooling.

## 7. Research

Contributors were adamant about the positive role that research, both applied and basic, has on literacy. Journal publications, networking, and an active, global exchange of ideas help give more visibility to the literacy question. Yet a caveat was added that research about literacy always takes place in the context of on-going work—we should not wait to complete more research before attempting to eradicate illiteracy.

## 8. Monitoring

At its base, the GMR’s mandate is to monitor. Some contributors asked fundamental questions about the process of monitoring itself.

**Monitoring Literacy.** Much of the debate was over the definition of literacy that was used for monitoring purposes. Other questions were related to fundamental problems with monitoring. How does the GMR go about monitoring when country statistics are not always reported accurately to UIS? Does the GMR address the quality of literacy while monitoring? What are the practical implications of using the framework in Chapter 4 of the outline for monitoring?

**Accentuate the positive.** One contributor pointed out that when monitoring literacy, many of the results are bound to be disappointing. He

suggested that the GMR highlight specific situations where the news is good.

**Contextualization and the practicality of monitoring.** Many contributors support contextualizing literacy and studying it from a nuanced, ethnographic perspective. Yet it was acknowledged that this method raises significant problems for comparability.

**Monitoring EFA.** One contributor suggested that now that several GMRs have been completed, it is time to ask how the GMR team has been monitoring in general? What are the standpoints of the GMR ideologically and epistemologically? What content has been used? Has analysis been transformed into recommendations?

#### **4. Implications for the Report**

Reflecting on the contents of the online consultation, the moderator has summarized some key conclusions that are currently informing the preparation of the report.

1. The report will be based on the view of literacy as a human right embedded in the universal right to education, and as an integral and necessary component of all the EFA goals. The challenges of literacy for the world's nearly 800 million illiterate adult women and men are linked to those of combating poverty and transforming school systems to better serve the learning needs of all. They are also intertwined with accessible print materials and media, cultures of reading and writing and bolder political engagement towards education and, more broadly, the building of literate societies.
2. In the GMR, literacy will be considered a context-bound continuum of reading, writing and numeracy skills, acquired and developed through processes of learning and application in school and in other settings.
3. The report will recognize the multiple uses and purposes of literacy in different contexts, and consider the more or less complex meanings of literacy across languages. For example, the term "alfabetización" in Spanish, and the equivalent term in Portuguese and French, normally refer to the initial process of learning to read, write and calculate among adult illiterate women and men, while, in English, the term "literacy" is often used as a metaphor for competencies of different natures and levels.
4. The GMR 2006 will emphasize the overall goal of developing literate societies. Beyond individual literacy acquisition, this sets literacy within a broader development context. To achieve this goal, the report will argue in favour of a multi-pronged strategy that includes the following:
  - a) fee-free quality primary schooling for all children,

- b) a wide range of educational and development programs to meet the basic learning needs of adults and youth, and
  - c) the broader promotion of literate environments.
5. The GMR 2006 report will stress the importance of holistic approaches to literacy, including assuring that children learn and use literacy in schools, in languages that they understand and can use for further learning and other activities. The report will give more specific attention to literacy promoting strategies outside the school. These will comprise literacy-led, literacy informed and post-literacy programs and activities, because of the variety of demands and contexts in which literacy is acquired and used. Conducive learning environments, where access to different kinds of communication tools is made widely available, are required for society as a whole, not just in connection with adult literacy programs. Education policies alone are not enough. Some of the conclusions that will likely be drawn are:
- Ministries of education could pay more attention to literacy for out-of-school youth and adults. Other institutions, such as the media, universities, other governmental ministries, local authorities and civil society could also be involved in promoting literacy and supporting new literates through training programs, especially those geared towards poverty reduction and the inclusion of marginalized and disadvantaged groups. Multi-sectoral partnerships and resource mobilization at all levels, together with community ownership and participation, will likely be required to accelerate progress towards the development of literate societies in countries where illiteracy is widespread.
  - Literacy, organized as a process of adult learning that develops and encourages the practice of literacy skills, often needs to take better account of adult education principles and practices of participation. Programs can also respond to the variety of adult learners' prior experiences, knowledge and motivations, according to gender, age and other background variables.
  - National governments could consider adopting effective policy frameworks and developing enabling environments, supported by adequate institutional, human and financial resources. They could work towards truly inclusive education and language policies, in the context of overall development plans focused on poverty reduction. This will require strong support from the international community and aid agencies as a consequence of their commitments to EFA.

**Annex: Statistics on registered members**

<b>Type of organization</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
Academia	35	31%
Bi-lateral agencies	7	6%
Independent experts	14	12%
Ministries	5	4%
NGOs	34	30%
Private companies	1	1%
United Nations Agencies	18	16%
Total	114	

<b>Location</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
Arab States	1	1%
Central Asia	1	1%
Central and Eastern Europe	1	1%
East Asia and the Pacific	3	3%
Latin America and the Caribbean	15	13%
North America and Western Europe	73	64%
South and West Asia	6	5%
Sub-Saharan Africa	14	12%
Total	114	

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	51	45%
Female	63	55%
Total	114	

<b>Language</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
English	87	76%
French	20	18%
Spanish	7	6%
Total	114	