
INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM FOR LITERACY

Persepolis
3-8 September 1975

Declaration of Persepolis

The number of illiterates is constantly growing.

This reflects the failure of development policies that are indifferent to man and to the satisfaction of his basic needs.

In spite of the progress made in some countries as a result of far-reaching social changes, there are close to one thousand million illiterates in the world, and many more under-nourished people.

In many cases, moreover, even people who have become literate have not yet acquired to a sufficient degree the means of becoming aware of the problems of the societies in which they live and of their own problems, nor the means of solving them or of playing a real part in their solution.

There is even a tendency to a decline in literacy in the industrialized countries.

Successes were achieved when literacy was linked to meeting man's fundamental requirements, ranging from his immediate vital needs to effective participation in social change.

Successes were achieved when literacy programmes were not restricted to learning the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, and when they did not subordinate literacy to the short-term needs of growth unconcerned with man.

Tribute should be paid to those mass campaigns that have already brought about the complete or almost complete eradication of illiteracy in certain countries and to regional or more limited experiments, which have helped to prepare innovative methods with regard to the programming, means and organization of literacy activities linked to development aims. These experiments, and in particular functional literacy pro-

programmes and projects, have made a valuable contribution to the common stock of practical methods in the field of literacy and basic education. Greater use should be made of them in future efforts.

The International Symposium for Literacy, meeting in Persepolis from 3-8 September 1975, in unanimously adopting this Declaration, considered literacy to be not just the process of learning the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, but a contribution to the liberation of man and to his full development. Thus conceived, literacy creates the conditions for the acquisition of a critical consciousness of the contradictions of society in which man lives and of its aims; it also stimulates initiative and his participation in the creation of projects capable of acting upon the world, of transforming it, and of defining the aims of an authentic human development. It should open the way to a mastery of techniques and human relations. Literacy is not an end in itself. It is a fundamental human right.

It is true that all social structures give rise to the type of education which can maintain and reproduce them, and that the purposes of education are subordinated to the purposes of the dominant groups; but it would be incorrect to conclude that there is nothing to be done within the existing system.

Literacy, like education in general, is not the driving force of historical change. It is not the only means of liberation but it is an essential instrument for all social change.

Literacy work, like education in general, is a political act. It is not neutral, for the act of revealing social reality in order to transform it, or of concealing it in order to preserve it, is political.

Consequently, there are economic, social, political and administrative structures that favour the accomplishment of literacy projects, others that hinder them.

The most favourable structures would be:

- Those that, from the political point of view, tend to bring about the effective participation of every citizen in decisionmaking at all levels of social life: in economics, politics and culture.
- Those that, from the economic point of view, aim at an endogenous and harmonious development of society, and not at blind and dependent growth.
- Those that, from the social point of view, do not result in making education a class privilege and a means of reproducing established hierarchies and orders.
- Those that, from the professional point of view, provide communities with genuine control over the technologies they wish to use.
- Those that, from the institutional point of view, favour a concerted approach and permanent co-operation among the authorities responsible for basic services (agriculture, welfare, health, family planning, etc.).

Experience has shown that literacy can bring about the alienation of the individual by integrating him in an order established without his consent. It can integrate him, without his participation, in a foreign development model or, on the contrary, help to expand his critical awareness and creative imagination, thereby enabling every man to participate, as a responsible agent, in all the decisions affecting his destiny.

The success of literacy efforts is closely connected with national political will.

Ways exist of attaining the objectives which result from the definition of literacy on which the Symposium based its work.

The ways and means of literacy activities should be founded on the specific characteristics of the environment, personality and identity of each people. True education must be rooted in the culture and civilization of each people, aware of its unique contribution to universal culture and open to a fertile dialogue with other civilizations.

Literacy is effective to the extent that the people to whom it is addressed, in particular women and the least privileged groups (such as migrant workers), feel the need for it in order to meet their most essential requirements, in particular the need to take part in the decisions of the community to which they belong.

Literacy is therefore inseparable from participation, which is at once its purpose and its condition. The illiterate should not be the object but the subject of the process whereby he becomes literate. A far-reaching mobilization of human resources implies the commitment of literacy students and teachers alike. The latter should not form a specialized and permanent professional body, but should be recruited as close as possible to the masses undergoing literacy training and should belong to the same or to a related social and professional group in order to make dialogue easier.

The effectiveness of this mobilization will be increased if greater respect is paid to the initiative of the populations concerned and to consultation with them, instead of abiding by bureaucratic decisions imposed from outside and above. The motivation of those involved will be stronger if each community is itself given the opportunity of carrying out the literacy project.

The methods and material means should be diversified, flexible and suited to the environment and needs of the new literates, as opposed to a uniform and rigid model.

Literacy work of this kind would constitute the first stage of basic education designed to bring about the individual development of men and women through continuing

training and to improve the environment as a whole. It would permit the development of non-formal education for the benefit of all those who are excluded by the present system or are unable to take advantage of it. Finally, it will imply a radical reform of the structures of the education system as a whole.

The importance of audio-visual aids for literacy was fully recognized. However attempts to take over these aids on grounds of technical necessity by economic or political forces beyond the control of the peoples concerned, and their use as instruments of cultural colonization, should be rejected. Uses of audio-visual aids that would hinder active participation and human dialogue should be banned. Programmes should be drawn up in consultation with those concerned, through an exchange of information on significant experiences.

Literacy work should encourage the participants to acquire a wide range of communication skills.

The accomplishment of these tasks calls for a priority claim on national and local financial and human resources. In certain situations, the appeal of countries for complementary international financial cooperation supplied, *inter alia*, by international and regional institutions, may be justified in the light of special needs, particularly with regard to equipment and to the training of personnel. The use of complicated equipment which the recipient community could not fully control should not be encouraged, and such assistance should under no circumstances be allowed to influence national policies.

Literacy work is of world-wide concern, requiring that ideological, geographical and economic distinctions be transcended.

While its primary field of operation is in the Third World, the new international order gives it a universal dimension, through which the concrete solidarity of nations and the common destiny of man must find expression.

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