

Session 1: Plenary Session

Synthesis of Literacy Studies in Southern Africa

Compiled by Rosalina Maponga

1. Background (Participating countries, objective of the studies)
2. Key Findings
 - Literacy Situation (definitions, statistics, policies, government structures and governance, literacy programmes, training of literacy teachers and use of ICT)
 - Example of good practices
3. Impact of Covid-19
4. Recommendations to UNESCO ROSA on how Member States can align their policies with the UNESCO Strategy for Youth and Adult Literacy (2020–2025)



1. Background

- Commissioned by UNESCO ROSA and carried out between July and September 2020. The Synthesis report was completed in February 2021.
- Nine countries participated: Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.
- Major purpose of the studies: to assist UNESCO ROSA develop strategies to enhance its literacy interventions in Member States.
- The studies had to take into account the effects of the fast-changing digital world and the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of UNESCO's Strategy for Youth and Adult Literacy (2020–25)



2. Key Findings

Literacy situation:

Definitions: Diverse definitions are found in the various official documents and international reports and declarations.

- It is evident that the definition of literacy is not static; it responds to global lifestyle and development trends, and needs to be rethought/reimagined to be constantly relevant.
- The period of reference also determines the definition used in many of the documents, with two distinctive periods for the region being the pre- and post-independence periods.
- **Statistics:** In 2015, the global adult literacy rate for the population aged 15 years and older was 86.3%, compared to the global youth literacy rate of 91%.
- For sub-Saharan Africa, the rates stood at 64% and 70% respectively. Common to all countries is that, overall, women are more literate than men (exceptions are Zambia, where the level of education attained has been used as a gauge for literacy, and Mozambique, where illiteracy rates for young girls and women are alarming, especially in rural areas).
- However, in other age groups, men are more literate than women (e.g. senior citizens in Botswana).



2. Key Findings (cntd2)

Literacy situation (cntd2):

Policy frameworks: The pre-independence era has a strong bearing on the state of literacy in the region, when the native population's access to education was restricted due to discrimination.

- On attaining independence, each of these countries prioritised closing the pre-independence literacy gap by building on existing the educational structures.
- Furthermore, the 1990 Jomtien World Education Conference, the 1994 Salamanca Declaration, among other international declarations that followed, gave the impetus for the development of strategies and policies with the objective of closing the education gaps.
- While all nine countries do have ongoing literacy programmes and literacy strategies, only (Malawi (2020), Namibia (2003) and Zimbabwe (2015) have dedicated literacy policies in place. However, even in those countries with literacy policies, there is still much that needs to be done to ensure their effective implementation. The UNESCO Strategy for Youth and Adult Literacy (2020–2025) thus comes at an opportune time for the region, especially now with the COVID-19 pandemic's adverse effect on the delivery of literacy programmes.



2. Key Findings (cntd3)

Literacy situation (cntd3):

Government structures and the governance of literacy programme delivery: The history of literacy development in the region shows that:

- Both government and non-governmental entities are involved.
- Literacy education cannot be the exclusive remit of a single government ministry.
- While literacy is usually housed in the ministry responsible for education, a number of other ministries, departments and non-governmental, national and international partners also take part in the implementation of literacy strategies.
- Major similarity across the nine countries: youth and adult literacy provision is governed by the ministries responsible for education.
- Inadequate state funding to support literacy programmes is reported by all nine countries. This gap is covered to a certain extent by various partners such as international organisations, NGOs and cooperate institutions and faith based organisations.
- UNICEF , UNESCO, World Education Initiative, Plan International and DVV are the dominant international literacy programmes partners.



2. Key Findings (cntd4)

Literacy situation (cntd4):

Literacy programmes: A variety of literacy programmes are in place across the region but all have a common purpose: to eliminate illiteracy with a focus on girls, women and disadvantaged communities; and improving the livelihoods and well-being of citizens, especially in rural communities.

- The programmes take different intervention angles depending on their particular objectives.
- Common and main pathways include basic literacy programmes, compressed formal primary school programmes and livelihood/ functional literacy programmes.
- All nine countries have a programme or programmes in place for **basic literacy**. What differs are the **target age groups** and sometimes the **language** used (mother tongue or the country's official language).
- Similarities in youth and adult programmes in the region include: the provision of **functional literacy** in various forms under different names and the availability of **multiple learning pathways** giving learners various options for continuing education.



2. Key Findings (cntd5)

Literacy situation (cntd5):

Training of literacy teachers: Of the three countries with a policy in place, **Namibia** spells these details out, **Zimbabwe** does not and, in **Malawi**, any details that may have been included in the new 2020 literacy policy were not given in that country's report on youth and adult literacy for this survey.

- The situation varies in the other six countries, ranging from well-organised recruitment and remuneration structures to a mixture of volunteers who get in-service training, literacy diploma holders, qualified primary school teachers who the receive literacy in-service training, and professionally trained literacy teachers.
- Literacy teachers are given different names across the region: teachers, promoters, facilitators, tutors, educators and instructors.
- Remuneration depends on whether the employer is the government or a non-governmental entity. In most cases across the region, remuneration is widely by honoraria.
- Funding challenges across the region stand out as the key factor that dictates the recruitment and remuneration and retention of literacy teachers at national level.



2. Key Findings (cntd6)

Literacy situation (cntd6):

Use of ICT: Across the region, information and communications technology (ICT) is sparingly used in the delivery of literacy programmes.

- While cell phone and the internet use is widespread in the region, their penetration and use in the education sector is at a snail's pace. This is mostly due to network availability in remote areas and the excessive cost of data.
- While strides are being made in ICT use in formal education, there is an absence of a proper strategy to broaden ICT use in non-formal education.
- The unexpected advent of the COVID-19 pandemic exposed this challenge when ICT stood out as the only feasible mode to for teaching and learning.
- The only exception where ICT is widely used for non-formal education in the region is in distance education, where learners access their modules and assignments via the internet.



2. Key Findings (cntd7)

Examples of Good practices: While each country claims good practices, the outstanding ones include the family literacy programmes (Malawi, Mozambique and Namibia) and the effort to use local languages for youth and adult literacy (Malawi and Mozambique).

- **Family Literacy Programme:** **Malawi** strengthens family ties and empowers families to break cycles of under-education and poverty by offering parents and their children adult education classes, parenting education, early childhood development education for the children, and parent and child together-time; **Mozambique** (PROFASA initiative) encourages and empowers secondary school students to teach reading, writing and numeracy to their relatives and neighbours, **Namibia** provides parents with skills to assist their Grade 1 children with school work.
- **Use of local languages:** **Malawi** provides basic literacy in other local languages besides Chichewa: In 2020, introduced a Tonga version of an instructional primer for adult literacy learners; Bible Society of Malawi translated certain curricular materials into the Yao and Lomwe languages.



3. Impact of Covid-19

- No country in the region was spared the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on both formal and non-formal learning.
- The education sector in the region was caught unaware, without an appropriate response to lockdown conditions.
- The use ICT was a natural response to ensure continuous learning while face-to-face learning was suspended, especially in the literacy programmes. However, due to scarcity of resources, the first priority within the education sector was given to formal learning, leaving the youth and adult literacy education in the region in a vulnerable state.
- Three out of the nine countries made an effort to ensure the continuation of teaching and learning in the youth and adult literacy sector during the first lockdown phase namely, Eswatini, Mozambique and Namibia.



3. Recommendations to UNESCO ROSA on how Member States can align their policies with the UNESCO Strategy for Youth and Adult Literacy (2020–2025)

- Support all countries that do not have a literacy policy to develop one.
- For countries with literacy policies in place, support the review of the policies with a view to improve their implementation and adaptability to the ‘new normal’.
- Support the development of blended learning in literacy programmes for both literacy teachers and learners.
- Broaden awareness of the vast e-learning resources made available by UNESCO online for teachers and learners, as part of its COVID-19 response.
- UNESCO can, through its educational platforms and partners, promote the humane face of education brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic by widely sharing and bringing meaning to the Joint Statement on the COVID-19 Crisis (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 14 April 2020).



Thank you



unesco

Sub-Regional Consultation for Eastern and
Southern Africa for CONFINTEA VII 2022



unesco