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**TOWARDS THE NATIONAL  
MASS LITERACY CAMPAIGN**

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PAPER IX

MASS MEDIA IN A MASS LITERACY CAMPAIGN:  
GUIDELINES FOR ACTION IN AFRICA.

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*ILLITERACY SITUATION:*

Virtually all developing countries face the problem of a large illiterate population. And because illiteracy is seen as a function of underdevelopment, these countries are very anxious to 'eradicate' it within the shortest possible time. In their rush and anxiety to succeed, they take such an atomistic view of the problem that many things basic to success are left either badly done or completely undone. The result is that their efforts yield very minimal results. And so, after almost two decades of efforts to 'eradicate' illiteracy its prevalence continues. And educational and development planners feel very uncomfortable, while leaders see the preponderance of illiterate citizens as a big dent on their natural prestige.

Much as the concern of these authorities and their countries is genuine because of the debilitating effect of illiteracy, it must be pointed out that the resistance of illiteracy to eradication is a world-wide phenomenon. If there are any parts of the world where illiteracy has been completely eliminated, they must be very few and far apart. Even the United States, seen as the leading country in the world has not been spared the effects of illiteracy. A little over one percent of her citizens are illiterate. It may be argued that this is because of a large black population which was kept out of the mainstream of national activities for a long time. But the United Kingdom, which is basically white and is a leader in the field of education, having introduced Universal Compulsory Education one hundred and ten years ago, had, by 1975, about two million illiterates.<sup>1</sup> With all the massive efforts made in the socialist countries, notably Russia and China, illiteracy still rears its ugly head.

*LITERACY/ILLITERACY RATES IN SOME  
SELECTED COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD*

*Advanced Countries*

	Population (Million)	Literacy (%)	Illiteracy (%)
Austria	7.5	99	1
Canada	21.6	98	2
Germany F. R.	61.3	99	1
Japan	105.0	99	1
Sweden	8.1	99	1

*Europe*

Greece	8.9	82	18
Ireland	3.0	98	2
Spain	34.0	94	6

	<i>Central America</i>		
	Population (Million)	Literacy (%)	Illiteracy (%)
Costa Rica	1.7	89	11
Dominica Rep.	4.1	51	49
Jamaica	1.96	86	14
Mexico	52.4	76	24
Trinidad & Tobago	1.0	90	10
	<i>South America</i>		
Brazil	93.2	67	33
Chile	9.9	90	10
Paraguay	2.4	79	21
Peru	14.4	72	28
Venezuela	10.6	81	19
	<i>Asia</i>		
China (Taiwan)	14.9	82	18
India	551.1	29	71
Iran	29.8	37	63
Jordan	2.4	59	41
Philippines	37.9	72	28
	<i>Africa</i>		
Algeria	14.4	25	75
Chad	3.7	7	93
Ivory Coast	5.2	9	81
Nigeria	70.0	25	75
Mauritius	0.8	80	20

Source: World Bank, Education: Sector Working Paper, December, 1974, p. 18

Note: The Illiteracy percentage is added by the author.

In the developing world, in spite of efforts being made by various countries to change the illiteracy/literacy ratio in favour of literacy, the prevalence of illiteracy is still so obvious that concerned observers are almost giving up hope. This is why as late as 1977, UNESCO openly lamented that illiteracy has grown to alarming dimensions; that whereas the efforts undertaken by national and international organisations brought about a considerable decrease in illiteracy rate in the developing countries, the population growth has not only off-set the gains made but also worsened the absolute situation of illiteracy.

### *Enhancing orientation*

The gloomy picture painted above may appear to be suspect because it appears to be an attempt to discourage effort or to frustrate burning desires for the emancipation of the underprivileged. Indeed, the intention is not to say that Africa should resign herself to the situation where about 90% of our people live under conditions that inhibit the full use of their potentials. The seemingly gloomy picture has been painted for four reasons.

1. To reiterate that illiteracy is a universal problem. This being so, it is a problem which, though it deserves to be conscientiously worried about and tackled, is nothing to be ashamed of as if it were peculiar to Africa;
2. To point out that what is debilitating to development. is not pockets of illiteracy but widespread illiteracy. Countries with pockets of illiteracy have developed politically, socially, culturally, and economically. There is no reason why African countries cannot. Let 'eradication' be the ultimate goal. But for now, let us aim at and plan for REDUCTION of both the rate of illiteracy and the absolute number of illiterates so that when we set out results against our objectives we can have something to show for our efforts. The effect of this on government support and on the morale of those in the field cannot be over-emphasized. To be so unduly concerned as to set the immediate goal at the highest peak — eradication of illiteracy — will ultimately lead to disappointments, frustration and despair.
3. To draw attention to the fact that although progress appears not to have been made in the fight against world illiteracy, successes have been recorded in a number of countries. Many people have been made literate. Why then is the effect of the total effort so minimal? It is because of the impact which high rate of population growth, illiterate social milieu, illiterate parents and neighbours, non-availability of study materials, indirect relevance of literacy per se to basic daily needs of life and so on, have on new literates. Unless all or a good number of these are taken into consideration, the hope of maintaining successes, let alone improving on them, will not materialize. To be able to take the above impeding factors into account, there must be a

thorough re-examination of the methods of programme planning and of the strategies for executing the programmes.

4. To emphasize the relevance of 'content' of illiteracy to development. No doubt, illiteracy does not begin and end with inability to read and write. There are political, social, cultural, environmental and economic 'illiteracies' A person can be literate in one but illiterate in others and vice versa. And the extent to which he is literate in all or some of these aspects determines his personal development as well as his performance, and therefore, his contribution to national development. The type of illiteracy in the United Kingdom, for example, is not loaded; it is very light — consisting mainly of inability to read and write. No wonder it is not 'seen' on those concerned or badly felt in the national economy. In the developing world, especially in Africa, illiteracy is very loaded, especially in the rural areas which hold the greater part of the total population. This is why it is important that when we talk about mass literacy campaigns, we should be thinking not only of reaching the total illiterate population but also of covering the total illiteracy categories, demarcating in the process the areas of concentration of each category.

These points have been raised so that we can have a better perspective of the topic under discussion. Illiteracy is with us and will be for quite some time to come. But so it is with many peoples of the world. There is therefore no need for Africa to start a break-neck race to eradicate it, and shout it so from the roof tops, so that the world will hear and so take note! When little achievement comes out of massive plans a situation is created in which both the people and the government lose confidence in the actor's ability to deliver the goods. This is part of the problem of planning and strategy. Another aspect is the tendency to see the literacy student as an island to himself. On the contrary he comes from a social and physical environment, both of which have strong impacts on him. He has friends, he has a family, all of whom make definite demands for meeting the needs of daily living. Planners of literacy programmes should not lose sight of these factors. They should also not lose sight of the fact that illiteracy has many facets, and that tackling one without a thought about the others, especially about those that bear on daily needs, almost invariably results in waste of time, energy and money, for it usually leaves the 'students' not merely not better off but disillusioned.

The experience of Tanzania is a classic example of how to integrate illiteracy with other development problems. The mass campaigns carried out so far in that country have been built around issues which treated illiteracy only as part of the total social problems of development. The result is that the people responded tremendously and the illiteracy level in that country has been reduced to about 39%.<sup>2</sup> Literacy has to be seen in the context of helping to solve crucial life problems and meeting basic needs of people. And human problems cannot successfully be itemised and treated each in isolation. Life is an integrated whole and so problems of living should be seen as having

direct bearing on each other. Illiteracy is part of the problems of living. If it has to be tackled properly it should not be treated in isolation, but as part of the total effort directed at improving the quality of living. This holistic approach to situations is best met if learners are part of the concrete action projects to solve such problems as ignorance, poverty and disease, and if planners and workers understand the total effort and the part which education plays in these efforts.

Obviously, it is an enormous task trying to meet all these demands that make for a flawless literacy programme. When one thinks of the expanse of land to be covered and the large population, and in particular, the larger percentage of that population that has to be reached with the literacy programme, the task becomes almost frightening. It is partly because of this that decentralisation of literacy activities has been followed for years. But even this has faced difficulties of scattered, isolated and heterogeneous communities, poor communication network, and scarcity of trained manpower, among other difficulties. There is also the problem of lack of sympathy from the literate members of the society. Perhaps, what has mostly affected literacy programmes has been the concentration of efforts on the three Rs — Reading, Writing and Arithmetic — which barely touch on the basic and immediate needs of life for the illiterate adult. This concentration is of course, a consequence of the scarcity of trained personnel to handle effectively and efficiently other aspects of literacy that have direct bearing on the people's daily life. What is being done in this regard at present is so small that it barely scratches the problem on the surface.

#### *THE COMPLEMENTARY MEDIA:*

Since the beginning of the fight against literacy on this continent, we have always faced these problems which militates against literacy programmes carried out through the traditional face-to-face methods. The problems are so difficult to tackle that to say that the continent should wait to solve them directly would mean saying that literacy work has to continue crawling or to stop altogether. Therefore we have to try to find ways to circumvent the problems and reduce if not eliminate their sting. One way to do this is to employ the use of the media of mass communication. Experience from some parts of Africa and from Latin America has shown that the media can be effective if properly employed, especially as a complement to the face-to-face method. In Ghana, Tanzania, Ivory Coast, Niger, Colombia,<sup>3</sup> to mention a few, different media of mass communication have been used to off-set the disadvantages of the face-to-face approach while at the same time making the best use of its advantages.

The media approach has enabled literacy barriers to be crossed and distances to be eliminated; it has made the services of the few experts around available to the whole nation; it has ensured motivation and general mobilisation; it has helped to enlist the sympathy and empathy of the urban and literate population. In addition, the use of

the media helps to reduce the occurrence of one of the less talked about pitfalls in literacy programmes — the inability of many experts, government officials and extension agents to operate successfully at the project level.

The problem that usually arises when a decision to use the mass media has been made is the choice of the right medium or media. On this depends whether or not the target audience is, in the first instance, reached. On it too depends, to a large extent, whether the individuals concerned will make the initial effort of granting their attention. Choice of media also affects what people learn and how quickly and well they learn. However, recent thinking on the use of the mass media for education and public enlightenment strongly favours a multi-media approach. This is because some media are best suited to certain activity than others. In an integrated mass literacy campaign therefore, the concern should be not determining how to choose the right medium or media, but rather ascertaining which medium is best suited for what assignment and at what level of operation. To be able to do this properly, the characteristics of each medium, as well as its ownership and distribution pattern on the continent, should be well studied.

The three most popular media — Television, Radio and Newspaper — are available in many African countries, but the extent of their availability, usability and accessibility differs greatly between the urban, and the rural areas. Some marked differences also do exist in these respects between the urban and the sub-urban area. The use to which each of these media can be put in a mass literacy campaign cannot but be affected by these three factors of how available, how useable and how accessible each of them is to the different socio-economic groups in each country. The determination of these factors ensures appropriate and fruitful utilization.

#### *TELEVISION:*

Because of its Sight and Sound characteristics, the television has very significant advantages over the Radio and the Newspaper in the field of education. Not only can the teacher or the animator be seen and heard while using the television, but also his demonstrations and examples can be followed to advantage. Therefore the television can be an effective medium for mass literacy campaigns. However, when one looks at the present situation of television in a country like Nigeria the temptation is to rule out its use for such a campaign. For although all the States in the Federation have a television station each, ownership of television sets is very small. Estimated total number of sets in the country is about one million. Worse still is the fact that these sets are almost all completely concentrated in the urban areas. If therefore television sets are not available in the rural areas where over 98% of our illiterate population live, then the use of the medium for mass literacy campaign looks questionable.

This view, however, is based on a wrong premise, that is, the premise which sees illiteracy as an issue which concerns only the rural areas and the illiterate masses that



inhabit them. But illiteracy is a national problem affecting practically every facet of national life and therefore it concerns both the urban and rural areas, both the educated and the uneducated, both the rich and the poor. In order to accomplish a successful literacy campaign, the nation as a whole must be mobilised. In such a campaign, the willingness of the illiterates to submit themselves and to participate is hardly more important than the sympathy, support and understanding of the literate urban dwellers. The television is an invaluable medium for eliciting this sympathy, this empathy, this understanding, this moral and financial support which are necessary to reassure animators and learners and also to physically see the programme through to a successful end. Furthermore, the urban areas and their principally educated inhabitants are very close, (though very uneasy), companions of the sub-urban areas and their basically half-educated and uneducated inhabitants. The television which is available to the urban areas is generally available to the sub-urban areas, the majority of whose inhabitants need literacy in one form or another. In addition, viewing centres can be built in the rural areas to enable the rural people benefit from the enhancing characteristics of the television.

#### *THE PRINT MEDIA:*

The print media have an enduring characteristic which neither radio nor television has. The newspaper, for example, can be read and re-read at convenience thus allowing for fuller understanding of content materials and the preservation of materials that are considered important. Because of this, the printed word would appear to be best suited for mass education of illiterate and semi-literate population which are generally slow in learning. Newspapers are regular and carry current and varied information on cultural, social, economic and political activities. They are also capable of carrying literacy materials and of serving as reading materials for new literates, thus ensuring that illiterates do not only learn how to read, but also read to learn.

In spite of these qualities, very strong arguments have been adduced against the use of newspapers for literacy programmes. Perhaps the strongest of these reasons is the fact that the newspaper is a literate medium. If people are illiterate, they cannot directly make use of a literate medium. And with regard to the rural population, the problems of cost and distribution of newspapers and their urban-elite orientation have been pointed out as factors that make the newspaper an unsatisfactory medium for literacy campaigns.

Again, these points, strong as they may appear to be, do not take a holistic view of the problems of illiteracy and the possible solutions to them. For the sake of brevity, there is need not to repeat what has been said above about the television and the urban elite. The reasons given above about Television also apply in the case of newspapers. However, the situation is different with regards to the sub-urban and slum population. Here, the newspaper is a potent force for education. The 1940s practice of "You buy; I read for you", is still very much in vogue in certain parts of Nigeria. Both

the working illiterate and the semi-literate do buy newspapers, apparently for the sake of prestige. But because they cannot read, they call on the reading service of those who can read. And because rendering this service enables them to save what they would have spent on buying newspapers, these literate friends and neighbours who can read are usually very willing to oblige. What is particularly noticeable about this practice is that it engenders acceptance and reassurance. Those who read are generally those that are trusted and respected and the reading is usually followed by discussions, questions and answers, all of which help understanding and compliance.

For the illiterate population of the rural areas, the newspaper as we know it today, is out of it. But if we want to use the newspaper for a literacy campaign, we do not have to use it in the form in which it now exists. What we need is the Rural Press<sup>4</sup> — dedicated to the production of rural mimeos and/or newspapers basically for the rural population. Such mimeos and newspapers, produced and printed by the rural people themselves are suitable for literacy campaigns. They highlight the problems of the rural areas in relation to the nation, and can serve as media for carrying literacy materials. They are cheap to produce, carry materials relevant to the solution of problems affecting the community, and do not suffer distribution problems because they are produced in the community. More importantly, they help to sustain literacy for they serve as cheap and readily available reading materials for new literates.

#### *RADIO:*

This is the one medium which almost all experts agree is best suited for rural emancipation. Even the UNESCO lends credence to this opinion. For as far back as 1965 it noted that, "In the developing countries, the greater part of the people live on the land, are frequently isolated by illiteracy and lack of transport. Effective communication with rural people and their active participation in the life of their country are essential for developing society. Radio broadcasting, when skilfully used, has proved to be the most effective medium of communication with this far-flung population." The reasons for this confidence in radio are many. Radio beats distances and thus has an immediacy effect. It beats literacy barriers for one does not need to know how to read and write before one can learn from radio. It is individualistic and so has that personal touch that lends urgency to change. On the other hand, radio is a populist medium, thus it enhances the chances of getting educational messages across to a very wide segment of the population. More importantly, radio is the only medium of mass communication with which the rural population is very familiar, because it is widely owned, in the rural areas.

This near total confidence in radio does not, of course, lose sight of the fact that radio is a Sound-Only medium. The absence of the sight characteristic is a great handicap. For example, one cannot effectively teach reading and writing on radio. To be successful, there has to be an agent at the reception end to provide the missing link. It is precisely because of this fact that the Radio Farm Forums of Canada, India and Ghana, as well as the Radio Schools of Colombia and the Radio Study Group of

Tanzania were organised.<sup>6</sup> To be effective in education and communication as opposed to mere information, the radio needs an intermediary between it and its target audience. If this medium must be used, (and it is strongly recommended), in a mass literacy campaign, it is important to begin right from the initial stages of planning, to think seriously of what type of arrangement to make for the reception end in order to assure effectiveness of whatever is sent to the people through the radio. There has to be an organisational structure to foster participation and discussion. Allied to this issue of organised listening and discussion is the issue of Access to stations and Participation in programme production.<sup>7</sup> It is strongly argued that the effectiveness of radio when people have access to stations and participate in programming will be by far greater, especially in rural areas, than it is when the audience just sits and listens to programmes planned and produced by distant 'experts'

### *GUIDELINE TO MEDIA USE:*

It must be clear at this stage that this paper supports the use of all three popular media in mass literacy campaigns in Africa. The contention is that they are all necessary for the successful implementation of such campaign. Each has the potential for playing a specific role or roles that are important in mass campaigns. One or the other of these media provides a channel for direct teaching, magazine programmes (a mixed-grill of materials — short talks, riddles, music, questions and answers, jokes and discussions), spot announcements, drama, features, playlets and documentaries. A suggestion as to which of these programmes is most likely to be most effective on which medium and at what level of the campaign is given in the following pages.

### *TELEVISION:*

#### *Pre-literacy level*

- General mobilization of the nation
- Motivation of policy-makers as well as the influential and educated members of society to pressurize them into speedy actions.
- Motivation of the educated to participate in literacy work.
- Motivation of the illiterates to get them to look out for, seek and want to participate in, literacy classes.

#### *Types of Programme*

1. Talks
2. Plays — dramatic forms, and playlets
3. Discussions
4. Documentaries (films)
5. Spot Announcements

*(b) Implementation level*

- Reports of activities
- Appeals
- News and Information
- Direct Teaching
  - (a) reading
  - (b) numeracy
  - (c) writing

*Types of programme*

1. Demonstrations with groups and participating classes
2. Documentaries
3. Magazine programmes
4. Discussions
5. Interviews
6. Talks
7. Features

*(c) Post Literacy level*

- Reports
- Advanced teaching for the new literates
- Teaching of a second language
- Information on and exhibition of literacy materials
- News and Information

*Types of programme*

1. Direct Teaching and Instruction
2. Magazine Programmes
3. Interviews
4. Discussions
5. Demonstration Programmes
6. Talks
7. Features

## *RADIO:*

### *(a) Pre-literacy level*

- Mobilization of the general public
- Motivation of policy-makers and educated population
- Arousing the interest of the illiterate members of the Community.

#### *Types of programme*

1. Magazine
2. Drama
3. Discussions
4. Spot Announcement
5. Talks
6. Short Stories

### *(b) Implementation level*

- To support teachers
- Create enhancing mood
- Reinforce previous lessons
- Support written materials
- Create avenue for participation

#### *Types of programme*

1. Variety and light entertainment
2. Playlets
3. Talks
4. Discussion
5. Interviews
6. Short stories

### *(c) Post Literacy level*

- Propagation
- Dissemination of results
- Sustenance of efforts and motivation
- Sustenance of literacy gains

## TYPES OF PROGRAMME

1. Interviews
2. Features
3. Drama
4. Talks
5. Discussions
6. Magazines

## PRINT MEDIA

### A. Pre-literacy level

- Motivation ) of the literate members of the society and of the
- ) policy makers.
- Mobilisation )

#### *Types of Materials*

1. Features articles
2. Analysis
3. Cartoons
4. Short stories
5. Pictorial stories

#### *Implementation level*

- To support teachers
- create a learning atmosphere
  - reinforce previous lessons
  - provide reading materials

#### *Types of Materials*

- |                             |   |              |
|-----------------------------|---|--------------|
| 1. News stories             | ) |              |
| 2. Features articles        | ) | Rural mimeos |
| 3. Cartoons and photographs | ) | and          |
| 4. News interviews          | ) | Newspapers   |

(b) *Post-literacy level*

- To reinforce the project
- sustain efforts
- reinforce reading and writing ability
- ensure reading to Learn
- provide opportunity for writing
- give a voice to the people

*Types of materials*

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. Short stories        |   |
| 2. Features articles    | } Rural Mimeos<br>} Newspapers<br>} Readers |
| 3. News and Information |   |
| 4. Reports              |   |
| 5. Interviews           |   |

The variety and extent of these programmes which the media are to carry out obviously points to the need for co-ordination between the authorities and the media, cooperation between the media and the different agents for rural emancipation, and dynamic interaction among all three on the one hand and the target audience on the other.

Furthermore, it is very necessary to point out here that whatever medium is employed, and whatever the type of programme used, a very clear distinction must be made between talking at and to the people, and talking with the people. The former is mere information whose success in education is very doubtful. The latter is communication which involves discussion and exchange of ideas between the source and the receiver and which is the key to understanding and therefore to education. While dumping of news, facts and figures (information) on the uneducated creates a dominance/submission atmosphere to which they are usually unwilling to submit, discussion and exchange of ideas (communication) creates rapport, restores confidence, engenders an atmosphere of trust, respect and goodwill — all of which enhance

acceptance of ideas and compliance with decisions. These two factors — acceptance and compliance — are basic to any action directed towards the emancipation of the underprivileged among us. To be able to assure these two factors, we must first of all learn about the people determine their problems and their views of life about themselves and about the nation, and be conversant with their ways of life. Without these, we cannot hope to communicate effectively with them. But unless we do this and win their confidence, we cannot gain their cooperation.

In the struggle for national development, the uneducated cannot be left out without devastating repercussions. In the race to enlist his co-operation and positive contribution, the mass media cannot be ignored to advantage; and in the attempt to use the media to liberate, enlighten and educate him, the strategy should be one which gives priority to the aims of not mere information distribution and transmission, but of Participation, Expression and Communication. 8

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