



# Policy Brief 9

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Inter-Regional Inequality Facility  
sharing ideas and policies across Africa, Asia and Latin America

## National Functional Literacy Programme

## Ghana

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### Objectives

According to recent estimates, nearly half of the population in Ghana is illiterate. Moreover, there are marked differences in illiteracy rates, between rural and urban areas, men and women, and across regions and income groups. Prior approaches to illiteracy eradication in the country had been characterised by short national campaigns, interspersed with periods of neglect associated with political and economic instabilities. More often than not, adult literacy activities were left in the hands of a few religious organisations and non-governmental organisations.

In this context, the Government of Ghana launched in 2000, the second phase of the National Functional Literacy Programme (NFLP), after the completion, in 1997, of what had been considered a successful first phase. The Programme aims to address inequalities in access to literacy and life skills, by targeting specific groups: rural communities, the northern regions and women. Its target is educate about one million non-literate adults, especially the rural poor and women, by 2006.

### Details

The NFLP is being implemented in every administrative district in all ten regions of Ghana. Around three quarters (75%) of classes are located in rural areas. Participants in the NFLP obtain functional literacy in a Ghanaian language (and, in some cases later on, English), numeracy skills, and participation in development and income generating activities, all at no fee. Although no criteria for eligibility are enforced, the programme is self-targeted at groups for which illiteracy rates are highest. The total estimated cost of the NFLP is US\$46 million. Of this, 60% is provided by World Bank credit, 30% by the Government of Ghana, and the remaining 10% by communities and NGOs. Between 1992 and 2002, close to 2 million adults had been recruited to the programme, and around 1.5 million had completed the programme.

### Lessons learned

Recent survey evidence suggests that the NFLP has made significant achievements in terms of the reading skills of participants. Participants have also been shown to be more likely to send their own children to school, and have gained new knowledge in healthy living, their civic rights and livelihood activities. Officials at Ministry of Education also believe that the NFLP has reinforced public health campaigns, and contributed to reductions in the incidence of epidemics.

Despite these achievements, there remain concerns about weaker achievements in writing skills, that participants lost a significant level of their skills after completing the programme, that female participation has not been high enough, and whether government resources will be adequate to continue service delivery beyond 2006, when current sources of external funding run out. The effectiveness of the programme can be enhanced by strengthening attempts to create a literate environment in programme areas, giving more emphasis to local conditions in programme design, and by bolstering the policy framework for the provision of literacy to ensure government commitment.

## Background

According to the Census of 2000, nearly half (46%) of the population in Ghana is illiterate. Moreover, there are marked regional disparities: the proportion of the population that is illiterate in Greater Accra is 21%, whereas in Ashanti it is 40%, in Brong Ahafo it is 54%, and in the three northern regions it is 76% and over. These wide disparities follow similar trends in other development indicators, including poverty, child mortality, maternal mortality, and malnutrition.

Inequalities in literacy rates are also marked between men and women, rural and urban areas, and between income groups. According to the Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire (CWIQ) Survey (carried out in 1997), 64% of women are illiterate, as compared with 38% of men. In rural areas, 74% of household heads in the poorest income quintile were illiterate, compared with 15% in the richest quintile. In urban areas, similar gaps were observed, although absolute levels of illiteracy were lower (62% and 4% respectively).

Prior approaches to illiteracy eradication in Ghana have been characterised by short national campaigns, interspersed with periods of neglect associated with political and economic instabilities. In the late 1940s the British colonial administration had embarked on an adult education programme in selected southern regions, which was expanded in 1951 into a Mass Literacy and Mass Education plan. After independence, Nkrumah's socialist government prioritized mass literacy in the light of its obligation to fulfil the right of the people to education. However, political unrest commencing in 1966, and economic decline a decade later, caused disruption in the Mass Literacy Programme. Adult literacy activities were left in the hands of a few religious organizations (pursuing their own ambitions of making members able to read scriptures) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that incorporated literacy in life skills projects.

In 1987, the government of Ghana set out to revive mass literacy programmes. The Non-Formal Education Division (NFED) was set up within the Education Ministry to rally public support, coordinate and implement programmes to eliminate illiteracy by the year 2000. The UK Department for International Development (DFID) funded pilot literacy projects in two regions, and these proved successful. The Government of Ghana subsequently expanded the projects nationally, under the policy named the Functional Literacy Skills Project (FLSP), which lasted between 1992 and 1997.

## Details

The National Functional Literacy Programme (NFLP) was launched in 2000, as the second phase of the earlier FLSP. Its aim is to educate about one million non-literate adults, especially the rural poor and women, by 2004. In December 2004, the period was extended to December 2006.

## Coverage

The NFLP is being implemented in every administrative district in all ten regions of Ghana. There currently are a total of 1,237

literacy centres (or 'zones') in the country offering literacy classes. The Northern Region holds the highest number, followed by Eastern, while Greater Accra Region holds the least. About 73% of the classes are located in rural areas.

## Benefits and eligibility requirements

Participants in the NFLP obtain functional literacy in a Ghanaian language (and, in some cases later on, English), numeracy skills, and participation in development and income generating activities, all at no fee. No criteria for eligibility are enforced; all residents in the community in which a literacy class is based who are non-literate are eligible to enroll. However, since provision of basic literacy is the main activity, the programme is self-targeted at women and adults from the three northern regions, where illiteracy rates are highest.

Instruction is based on a modified form of the Friarian Methodology, which involves discussion of composite pictures describing an object or situation, and use of syllabization to form meaningful words and sentences. Topics include public health, safe drinking water, farming techniques, immunization and reproductive health. In selected districts (from all regions), an English Literacy component is included in the programme, on a pilot scale. Learners are taken through the Primer of English for a 21-month period, assuming the participant has completed the full course in a local language.

## Funding

The total estimated cost of the NFLP is US\$46 million. Of this, 60% is provided by World Bank credit, 30% by the Government of Ghana, and the remaining 10% by communities and NGOs. According to government's medium term expenditure framework (MTEF) for 1999-2001, about US\$2 million of the education sector budget was allocated to the NFED in each year, equivalent to between 0.6% and 0.7% of the total sector budget. Total education sector expenditure as a percentage of total discretionary public recurrent expenditures during the period was between 35% and 40%.

## Improvements over the FLSP

The NFLP improves on the earlier Functional Literacy Skills Project in three main ways. First, it places more focus on the quality of service and institutional efficiency, particularly in remote rural areas. Second, there has been an improvement in the Paulo-Friarian method of teaching, and moves to localise teaching content to suit the interests of participants in particular localities. Third, the Occupational Skills Development Programme has been expanded by adding other credit financiers and entrepreneurial development organisations.

## Implementation

The NFED is the main implementing organization responsible for policy formulation, programme co-ordination, programme design and development, materials design and production, radio programme development and general supervision of programme implementation, evaluation and monitoring of the NFLP. It is organised into three main departments: logistics, materials development, and research and monitoring.

Monitoring of the programme is carried out by around 1,000 permanent employees who carry out regular supervision of literacy classes in their zonal areas. District staff supervise the zonal centers, and regional staff supervises district offices. Staff at the headquarters in Accra make periodic visits to local and district-level administrators to monitor compliance with guidelines. Overall programme performance is monitored through several objectively verifiable indicators of literacy skills, knowledge utilization, improved attitudes and practices in family health, parenting, community participation, and agricultural activities.

Studies are also conducted on the efficacy of the reading materials, learning support systems (e.g. radio listenership), income generating activities, facilitator incentive awards and the supervision systems. Monitoring outputs demanded by the World Bank at each stage of the timetable for fund disbursement act as an in-built conditionality that helps NFED comply with the programme plan and objectives.

## Impacts

By the end of 2003, about 2.2 million people had been recruited to the programme since 1992, about 0.7 million of which had enrolled in the second phase. Around 75% of recruits are aged between 15 and 44. Drop out rates were sometimes high in the first phase of the programme – 24% and 20% in the 2nd and 5th batches respectively – but have been lower in more recent years (Table 1).

Table 1 Recruits and graduates of the NFLP, 1992–2004

Year	Recruits	Graduates	Drop-out rate
1992–94	201,760	167,461	17
1994–95	278,209	209,763	25
1995–96	211,226	174,059	18
1995–97	209,226	175,431	16
1996–98	219,299	175,383	20
1997–99	207,325	180,554	13
1998–00	187,550	163,781	13
2000–02	196,170	172,453	12
Feb 2003–05	312,907	–	–
Nov 2003/05	182,037	–	–
Total, 1992–2002	1,710,765	1,418,885	17
Total, 1992–2005	2,205,709	–	–

Source: Non Formal Education Division, Accra

Generally, female participation is higher than that of males: 60% and 40% respectively. Nevertheless, to achieve gender parity, it is estimated that 75% of the beneficiaries should be female. Also, drop-out rates among women have been higher than those among men.

In terms of impacts, studies by Blunch (2004) and Blunch et al (2002) suggest that Phase 1 of the programme had only modest effects on participants' literacy skills. However, effects have been larger in more recent years. A survey of 1,200 beneficiaries from batches 8 and 9 (2000–2002 & 2003–2005) showed strong achievements in reading skills, with 80% scoring 21 to 30 on a 30-point scale (Aoki 2004). Weaker achievement in writing was

observed however: less than 40% could write a simple letter of a few paragraphs. The study also raised concerns that many learners had lost a significant level of their skills since completing, and that learning takes place mostly during the first year of programme enrolment, and incremental skills learnt in the subsequent year is minimal.

Nevertheless, there are other impacts to consider. Officials at NFED believe that the NFLP has reinforced public health campaigns, citing the case where long-standing traditional beliefs that 'the gods' caused certain epidemics among communities (eg guinea worm ulcers in the Afram Plains) have been demystified. Furthermore, instructions in healthy lifestyles (eg safe drinking water, sanitation) have contributed to improvement in the incidence of epidemics (cholera, tuberculosis, guinea worm disease etc) in recent years (interview communication, 2005).

Finally, the NFLP provides an organized front for sections (poor and illiterate) of society that would otherwise be termed excluded or voiceless. For instance participants are well represented in national activities like Independence Day anniversary parades, May Day and Farmers' Day celebrations. They have opportunity on such occasions, and also through the media, to express themselves through staging dramas about the proper use of fertilizers, the benefits of literacy, the need to educate children, prevention and management of HIV/AIDS and so on.

## Factors contributing to success

### Domestic political commitment

Commitment of the Rawlings government to adult literacy has been key to the successful establishment of the NFLP. The question of social justice and equality of opportunities for the deprived sections of society prompted the state's responsibility to adult literacy programmes. Law 42 (1987) passed under the Rawlings regime stressed the need to *provide educational facilities at all levels to make education available to the greatest extent possible*. The need was recognised to create opportunities for 'every Ghanaian to be able to read, write and function usefully in the society' (MOE, 1987). Accordingly immediate consideration was given to the eradication of illiteracy and in so doing the government began vigorously to seek the required resources.

The issue of equality of opportunities was again taken up in the transition to democratic governance as the 1992 Constitution states 'all persons shall have the right to equal educational opportunities and facilities and with the view to achieving the full realization of that right ... (d) functional literacy shall be encouraged or intensified' [5, section 25 (1)]. The Government subsequently demonstrated its commitment by continuing the FLSP even when the IDA credit came to a close in 1997. This was followed by seeking further credit for the second phase beginning in 2000. Subsequent governments have continued to support the programme.

### Role of external support

Donors have provided much technical support to the programme, e.g. DFID support for the training of senior and middle level management and UNESCO funding for training trainers. In

addition, as noted above, much of the programme's funding has come from external sources. NGOs have also collaborated well with NFED, such as in the development of the English Literacy Programme with World Vision Ghana, and adoption of Action Aid's Reflect method of teaching. The Ghana Institute of Literacy Languages and Bible Translation (GILLBT) and the Ghana Institute of Languages have also been instrumental in translation and publication of literacy materials.

## Complementary policies

The Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) policy was introduced in 1996 to improve access to basic education for all. This might prove successful in diminishing the flow of young illiterates. However, it appears unlikely that formal basic education will succeed in eradicating illiteracy in the immediate future, given current quality indicators though enrolment rates are improved. From the demand (participants) side also, the NFLP is perceived important not only in terms of literacy, but more so in the occupational skills and livelihoods improvement activities.

## Availability of volunteers

One important factor behind the success of the NFLP has been the willingness of many people work voluntarily as facilitators. They are rewarded, with a bicycle, sewing machine or other token, but only upon successful completion of the learning cycle.

## Lessons learned

There are various ways in which the impact and effectiveness of the NFLP could be improved. These include:

- Strengthen attempts to create a literate environment in programme areas. In the past cycle, only two districts had undertaken community newspaper production; problems include delays in disbursement or the lack of funds and materials (NFED, 2004a, 2004b).
- Give more emphasis to local conditions in programme design. This includes scheduling classes to fit around periods of harvesting, cultural or religious festivals, and using participatory rural approaches to ensure that lessons are relevant and meet the needs of participants.
- Strengthen supervision. Supervisors in several districts have clearly failed; class visits are irregular, monitoring reports are delayed and often do not reflect the situation on the ground. Many do not reside in their zones. Much still needs to be done to reduce management problems, and to ensure uniformity in the criteria for selection of award recipients.
- Strengthen of the occupational skills development component. Reports (NFED, 2004a) indicate that many facilitators feel inadequate to teach occupational skills. New partnerships could be sought with NGOs with specialized development focus, eg business training and technical support for rural ventures.

Further research could improve the targeting and impacts of the programme. This includes research on the determinants of literacy and cognitive skills, especially among vulnerable groups (rural poor women) targeted (Blunch, 2002). Such studies should have a multidisciplinary approach, encompassing not only psychological

or cognitive factors but also cultural, economic, and social relations. It also includes analysis of the factors determining participation or non-participation, especially among women. National household surveys (eg GLSS) should be improved to identify participation or non-participation in literacy programmes, and analyse the characteristics of non-participating households.

Finally, there is the question of whether government resources will be adequate to improve or at least ensure the present level and quality of service delivery when the World Bank credit closes in 2006. Despite government's clear enthusiasm from the start, it has committed less than 1.6 % of education sector budget to the programme (World Bank, 1999). The issue is whether legal instruments and policy can be strengthened to mandate the full commitment of government.

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