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*Education for All 2000-2015: achievements and
challenges*

**Languages in adult literacy:
policies and practices
during the 15 years of EFA (2000-2015)**

Clinton Robinson

2015

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Abstract

Linguistic diversity characterises many countries with large literacy needs. Meeting these needs will require a multilingual approach based on learning initial literacy in the learner's mother tongue, with other languages used subsequently. This paper identifies five major challenges in implementing multilingual programmes, and traces the international policy developments over the 15 years of the EFA period. Four case studies – Mexico, Morocco, Papua New Guinea and Senegal – illustrate a range of policies, showing differing approaches and levels of commitment in providing literacy acquisition based on the mother tongue. The paper concludes with six policy orientations to guide action as part of the post-2015 agenda.

1. Introduction

EFA Goal 4, adopted in 2000, called for a 50% reduction in illiteracy by 2015. However, the latest data (UNESCO 2014) indicate that 51 countries, of the 87 with data, are ‘far’ or ‘very far’ from achieving the goal. Apart from the worrying fact that over half the countries in the world have no data to assess progress, it is clear that efforts have been inadequate, inefficient or poorly designed. The relative lack of attention, internationally and nationally, to goal 4 of the EFA agenda is well attested (Robinson 2005a; UNESCO 2007), and one of the reasons for this is the diversity of literacy needs and provision for youth and adults. A key aspect of the diversity of learners is language, as the following table shows:

Table 1: Literacy rates and language diversity

Country	Literacy rate % over 15 years	Number of non-literate adults	Number of living languages
10 countries representing 72% of world’s non-literate population			
Bangladesh	58	44 137 000	44
Brazil	90	13 984 000	228
China	95	52 347 000	301
D.R. Congo	61	12 418 000	215
Egypt	72	15 631 000	28
Ethiopia	39	26 847 000	90
India	63	287 355 000	454
Indonesia	93	12 793 000	707
Nigeria	51	41 845 000	529
Pakistan	55	49 507 000	77
Five countries with the lowest literacy rates			
Benin	29		56
Burkina Faso	29		70
Guinea	25		39
Mali	29		70
Niger	33		21
Literacy data from EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013/14 (UNESCO 2014) Language data from Ethnologue (Lewis et al. 2013)			

The message of these data is clear: in order to tackle the challenge of illiteracy, the question of which language to use must be taken into account. It is equally clear that language is only one aspect – an important one – among the many factors that have thus far deprived one in five adults in the world of the opportunity to acquire literacy competencies.

What then are the consequences / implications of the linguistic diversity for the promotion of adult literacy?

2. Challenges in adult literacy and linguistic diversity

Before examining points of connection between the promotion of adult literacy and situations of linguistic diversity, two conceptual trends should be noted – one regarding languages and the other, literacy.

The dynamics of language diversity have gained greater visibility as the world's leaders became conscious that at least 50 percent of the world's approximately 7 000 languages are in danger of disappearing before the end of the 21st century. The forces of globalisation exert pressure economically and culturally, as a result of increasing mobility and migration, and through the ever-greater penetration of information technologies. At the same time, these trends have led to greater awareness of the potential loss of cultural, historical and linguistic heritage, as well as the disappearance of local and indigenous knowledge. Thus governments, activists and international organizations such as UNESCO have repeatedly called for the preservation or, better, the continued support for and promotion of local languages and cultures. Adult literacy may be part of such efforts, or – to put it the other way round – where adult literacy is promoted in endangered languages, the cultural benefits are perceived to be an important outcome.¹

Conceptually, literacy is increasingly seen as plural – taking different shape in different contexts. Along with this has gone research into the ways people actually use literacy, and this has moved the debate away from a dichotomous literate/illiterate approach towards one where literacy is seen as a continuum of competencies used for communication (Barton and Hamilton 1998; Collins and Blot 2003; Street 1995, 2005). The plural literacies (Robinson 2005b; UNESCO 2004a) must therefore be understood in context, with literacy acquisition structured both to build on the communication patterns of learners and to enable learners to use literacy – written communication – in ways and for purposes that they themselves define. Clearly, the languages that people speak, wish to use in written form or wish to learn are central parameters in defining the various literacies that can be observed in different communities (cf Herbert and Robinson 2000).

This paper proceeds on the principle that, in a multilingual society, the strategy to increasing literacy should also be multilingual. On this principle, initial literacy is best acquired in the first language, or mother tongue, since the language is already known to the learner and it is a matter of learning to read and write it. The learning of other languages, and of literacy in them, builds on the initial foundation. This has been argued by educators, researchers, planners and agencies for many years and is not again debated here.² The approach has more recently been labelled 'mother-tongue based multilingual education' (MTBMLE) and is an approach that applies equally to children, youth and adults. The paper will therefore examine policies and, to some extent, practices with a view to assessing how far the countries of the case studies have moved and are moving towards an MTBMLE approach with regard to adult literacy.

The challenges of providing adult literacy on the basis of this approach may be expressed as a series of dilemmas:

Dilemma 1: Initial literacy in the mother tongue is best, but there are too many languages. This argument is frequently expressed by national educational planners and politicians and demonstrates that there are two distinct starting points for designing policies in situations of high linguistic diversity. The first is a management perspective, which national planners often express, that the number of languages represents a problem to be solved, one which undermines trends to national unity, complicates the provision of education and gives

¹ See Trudell 2004 for a close study of the impact of language choices in education on the sustainability of local languages.

² For a summary of the arguments and references to related research, see UNESCO 2005.

emphasis to languages that will shortly have no relevance in a globalising world. The second is a communication perspective, starting with the existing and evolving patterns of communication of language communities themselves, both oral and written. These patterns of multilingual communication including the mother tongue are not problems to local people – indeed the languages they use represent assets as they facilitate a range of networks.

Dilemma 2: Acquiring literacy in the mother tongue is educationally and pedagogically sound, but what is there to read? This is a common cry in literacy programmes, both from learners and instructors. Often materials are limited to literacy primers and other learning materials, as well as functional booklets on development topics. This dilemma emerges from a heavy emphasis on literacy as reading and a neglect of literacy as writing. Unless speakers of a local language write creatively it is unlikely that there will be much of interest to read. Planning a MTBMLE literacy approach will include training and support for local writing.

Dilemma 3: What purposes can literacy in the mother tongue serve, particularly if the language community is relatively small? This question is often posed by the members of language communities themselves, as well as by planners and politicians. The purposes of further education (secondary, higher) will inevitably involve using languages of wider communication, or international languages, as will the pursuit of bigger economic goals. Local-language literacy serves purposes of immediate, relevant learning, without a language barrier, as well as validating and promoting cultural identity. These different purposes are complementary – together they require a multilingual approach, with initial literacy leading to the learning of other languages (and literacy in them too).³

Dilemma 4: Faced with choosing priorities for investment, adult literacy is often accorded a much lower priority than formal education, even where the adult literacy challenge is great (Robinson 2005a; UNESCO/UNICEF 2013). Arguments are made regarding the ‘eradication’ of illiteracy in the next generation when all children complete the cycle of basic education (Short 2001). This ignores the needs of the current youth and adult population, the low quality and non-learning of the formal system, and the fact that unschooled and poorly schooled children grow into non-literate youth and adults unless appropriate learning opportunities are provided. There is a language dimension to this dilemma also, in two ways. First, MTBMLE in formal education enables the rest of the community to understand and support school-based learning, and second, important synergies develop between the generations when both are learning, and between community and school.⁴

Dilemma 5: In view of the ambitious EFA goal on adult literacy, and of the repeated affirmations by governments that a literate population is a key factor in national development, it is surprising that investment remains so low, typically less than 1% of the education sector budget, with only sporadic support from donors. Civil society organisations have generally been among the largest and most consistent providers of literacy, usually working with minimal resources. As far as the cost of using an MTBMLE approach is concerned, the increased efficiency and improved learning outcomes may mean that such

³ On the functional and symbolic functions of language, see Robinson. 2007. Context or key? Language in four adult learning programmes. In *International Journal of Educational Development* 27(5): 549: “It is the fact that the functional and symbolic aspects of language are inseparable that makes language a key factor in designing any intervention in multilingual contexts. As an aspect of cultural behaviour—like other symbols and like the structure of social relationships—language cannot be seen merely as a functional tool. On the other hand, to focus on language mainly as a an interesting factor of cultural diversity—as some kind of cultural museum piece—is to ignore the high functional value of using a community’s first language for learning purposes.”

⁴ Family literacy programmes using the local language have proved effective in strengthening learning of parents/older relatives and children (Desmond and Elfert 2008; Elfert 2008).

programmes are better value for money, even if some higher expenses are involved at the start.

With these challenges in mind, how has the policy environment dealt with the language question in adult literacy over the EFA period since 2000?

3. Policy developments since 2000

a. Policy at international level

The last quarter century has witnessed repeated international expressions of intent to increase adult literacy rates significantly, if not to achieve 100% literacy. Ambitious targets have inspired the hope that the world will become a 'reading world' within the foreseeable future. The UNESCO-stimulated Plan of Action for the Eradication of Illiteracy by the Year 2000 adopted in 1989, the Jomtien Declaration in 1990, and the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000 all set laudable goals. In terms of the language of literacy learning, the Jomtien Declaration called for mother-tongue programmes on the grounds of culture and identity (World Declaration 1990: 76), and the Dakar Framework for Action stressed 'the importance of local languages for initial literacy' (World Education Forum 2000: 13). In terms of the six EFA goals as such, language issues surfaced with respect to goal 6: increasing the quality of basic education. This was however focused on children's schooling, and its reference to 'a relevant curriculum [...] taught and learned in a local language' was understood to apply primarily to the formal system.

The Millennium Development Goals, adopted also in 2000 hard on the heels of the EFA process, included the narrow educational goal of primary education, with no reference to adult learning or literacy (UNESCO/UNICEF 2013). As the MDGs came to define development aims and progress and in particular international development assistance, the EFA goal of adult literacy began slipping down the international agenda, with consequent neglect of its implementation. While 'developing' countries consistently listed adult literacy among their priorities, international agencies providing financial support to education focused almost exclusively on primary schooling (Robinson 2005a).⁵ Literacy has been seen by development banks and multi-/bilateral partners as an instrument for meeting other goals (UNESCO 2005), without specific programming to tackle the 'large and slow-shrinking pool of illiterate adults' (Benavot forthcoming).

New hope for adult literacy came in the form of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD), adopted by the UN as a whole in 2001 for the decade 2003-2012. The International Plan of Action (UN 2002) set literacy implementation in the framework of 'local contexts of language and culture' and 'the significance of the mother tongue in acquiring literacy and provide for literacy in multiple languages wherever necessary' (p.4). It also advocated for 'multilingual and multicultural education' (p.6). It is noteworthy that this initiative considered the learner profile, including the languages used, as a key criterion in designing adult literacy provision – this is based on the recognition that adults come to a learning experience with a well-developed sense of identity, locally based knowledge and cultural foundations. In addition to the educational arguments for the use of the learners' first language which are applicable to any age, the importance of contextual parameters for adult learners is a further reason. At the mid-point of UNLD the importance of multilingual policies and approaches was again emphasised, stressing that literacy in the learners' mother tongue or first language is also

⁵ Cf Robinson 2005a, p.441: "Representatives of developing countries list adult literacy along with primary schooling, life skills, quality, gender and early childhood care and development (ECCD) variously as a problem, an area of progress or an object of planning. However, bilateral and multilateral agencies make few such references, strengthening the assumption that EFA is about schooling for children rather than about the whole Dakar agenda."

the key to acquiring literacy in other languages (Richmond et al. 2009; UNESCO 2009). The final report of the Decade details some examples of greater use of multilingual approaches in adult literacy (UN 2013), although it is not clear how far this is a result of the impact of the Decade itself.

Quite apart from the UNLD, UNESCO published a position paper on language use in education (UNESCO 2003), building on and reflecting the position UNESCO had taken in 1951 when it first argued for what we would now call mother-tongue based multilingual education (MTBMLE) (UNESCO 1953). The 2003 Position Paper reviewed international pronouncements on the subject and articulated three principles for the use of languages in education – these principles constitute a platform for policy development in this area, based on concern for quality, equality and rights:

1. UNESCO supports mother tongue instruction as a means of improving educational quality by building upon the knowledge and experience of the learners and teachers.
2. UNESCO supports *bilingual* and/or *multilingual* education at all levels of education as a means of promoting both social and gender equality and as a key element of linguistically diverse societies.
3. UNESCO supports language as an essential component of *intercultural education* in order to encourage understanding between different population groups and ensure respect for fundamental rights.
(UNESCO 2003: 31-33, emphases in the original)

Beyond the UN system, aid agencies, civil society groups and others have argued for multilingual approaches to education, including adult literacy, during the EFA period; some important examples follow:

- The World Bank stressed the greater efficiency of instruction in the mother tongue and highlighted links between children's education and adult literacy (World Bank 2005); it also co-published work on the educational language policies of South-East Asia (Kosonen and Young 2009).
- Civil society entered the policy debate based on practical experience of children and adults failing to learn in programmes using languages they do not speak (Pinnock 2009; SIL International 2008a, 2008b).
- The francophone grouping (Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie) launched a bilingual education programme in 2011, supporting the use of African languages and French for the sake of achieving better learning outcomes.⁶ Although currently aimed entirely at the formal school system, it is a major change of emphasis in a grouping better known hitherto for promoting French.
- The Iberoamerican organisation OEI (Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos Para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura) included in its literacy plan 2007-2015 a section on intercultural and indigenous literacy stressing the need for bilingual approaches (OIE 2006). This is a reflection of a strong, ongoing Latin American thrust to develop intercultural bilingual education in which indigenous languages are used for education in indigenous communities, and are taught to non-indigenous groups; in practice, the latter purpose has rarely been fully realised, but the strategy has served to strengthen access to education and quality of learning for indigenous groups.
- MTBMLE networks have been established in Asia (Bangkok)⁷, East Africa (Nairobi and Kampala)⁸, and North America (Washington DC)⁹ in order to bring together

⁶ ELAN-Afrique: École et langues nationales en Afrique. See <http://www.elan-afrique.net>

⁷ <http://www.unescobkk.org/education/multilingual-education/>

organisations and interested parties in arguing for the adoption of MTBMLE policies and approaches. While their focus is on formal schooling, the networks include civil society organisations engaged in adult literacy provision.

In summary, the EFA period has been marked by an increasing number of voices pleading for adult literacy policies which use the languages that learners habitually speak, and this has been supported by research in mother-tongue based multilingual education, in formal and non-formal settings. International rhetoric has espoused this position, although in muted fashion, recognising the educational benefits of using the learners' first language, but ambivalent about feasibility and implementation. On the one hand, the implications of the MTBMLE approach have rarely been spelled out for the conduct of adult literacy, with discourse remaining at the advocacy level. On the other hand, political considerations create reluctance among national policy-makers to foster nation-wide multilingual approaches in situations of linguistic diversity. The fear that difference of language is a potential cause of division or conflict makes political leaders hesitant in some countries to follow through with policies based on pedagogical research and evidence of improved learning outcomes. However, language as a symbol of identity among others is rarely the cause of division, but is often manipulated in the pursuit or maintenance of power. On balance, multilingual approaches have greater purchase in educational circles than at the start of the EFA period, but translating positive discourse into tangible benefits remains slow, as evidence from the national level shows.

b. Policies at national level

The case studies in section 4 of this paper will demonstrate in detail how policies in four countries have evolved since 2000, following a brief overview of developments in some countries of Africa, Asia/Pacific and Latin America.

Africa: educational provision in terms of schooling has developed less quickly in the Sahel countries where the challenge of adult literacy is correspondingly large. Whether in Senegal (see case study in the next section), Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger or Chad, government and, above all, NGOs have been active in literacy programmes. Even though the language of formal schooling is French in most cases, it is self-evident that unschooled adults cannot directly benefit from literacy in French, and so the default option has been to use local languages, supported by a general policy position but with little government funding. Senegal, Mali and Burkina Faso have made adult literacy an integral part of government policy, as has Benin, but have not necessarily had the international support for implementation. As an example, Benin and Burkina Faso both demonstrate strong national policies both for adult literacy and for using local languages for this purpose. However, when seeking funds from international donors (in this case through FTI/GPE), it was a struggle to claim a portion of the funds for adult literacy. In spite of these external pressures to focus funds exclusively on schooling, these countries succeeded in asserting their national priorities in adult literacy (GPE 2013a, 2013b).

In Cameroon, policy towards adult literacy has been half-hearted, with small programmes in French which in fact tended to reach more out-of-school youth than adults, of whom many do not know French. National policy (and government programmes) have lagged behind research, experimentation and civil society practice. Even though policies are now in place to use local languages in formal education as well as to give strengthened support to the local-language literacy promoted by NGOs, committed implementation has not followed.

In East Africa, adult literacy efforts, largely by NGOs, have long used local languages. Government policy developed later with regard to local language use in the formal system,

⁸ <http://mlenetwork.org/category/geographic-location/africa/east-africa>
<http://www.mlenetwork.org/og/uganda-mlen>

⁹ <http://www.mlenetwork.org>

for example in Uganda and Kenya, giving de facto support to their use in adult literacy also. Political decentralisation in Ethiopia led to devolved decisions on language use in all forms of education, with local-language adult literacy well established throughout the EFA period.

In **Asia/Pacific**, the exceptional example of Papua New Guinea (see next section) in using its many languages in education hitherto has not generally been echoed across the region. However, the EFA period has seen increasing debate in Asia/Pacific on the use of local languages, particularly in formal education.¹⁰ These debates and regional interactions have created synergy and a greater confidence in the MTBMLE approach, as strategies and positive outcomes have been shared. Policies have moved towards MTBMLE approaches on the back of research (Kosonen 2010, 2013; Kosonen and Young 2009). Vietnam has built considerable experience in MTBMLE among its minority ethnic groups, while Laos has addressed the fact that most children speak a language other than Lao when growing up. Nepal promotes Nepali through the school system, but allows the use of local languages in adult literacy as a bridge to Nepali – a policy that creates space for local communities and NGOs but in fact downplays the educational basis for using their languages, since adult literacy is seen to adopt approaches that the formal system eschews.¹¹

In Africa and Asia/Pacific, in general, the new policies in formal education create a more favourable environment for using local languages in other social domains, including adult literacy. However, it must be said that language policies for adult literacy as such are rarely formulated, leaving decisions about language choice and use to communities or the NGOs that run literacy programmes. This may be seen as a devolution of decision-making to the local level, but it also leaves a policy gap where local actors are left to make their own arguments for their approaches; this often leads to constant and uninformed debate locally about which language to use, with no definitive resolution. For this reason, thoroughgoing implementation is rendered difficult and sporadic as local perceptions and power plays shift the debate one way and then another.

Latin America has a strong tradition of intercultural bilingual education based on the recognition of the rights and diversity of indigenous populations. Concern for ending discrimination and exploitation and for equitable development led to programmes which, on the one hand, gave opportunity for education through the indigenous language and, on the other, provided a possibility of accessing the language of power, Spanish or Portuguese. This dual goal was expressed, for example, in Peru's Literacy Master Plan 2002-2012, and in programmes in Ecuador, Bolivia and Mexico (see case study below). Intercultural bilingual education continues to be a policy priority, and programmes have multiple aims: offering educational opportunity in the indigenous language, preserving cultural and linguistic diversity, asserting the political and territorial rights of indigenous populations, and enabling participation in wider political, economic and educational circles through the learning of the dominant language. These policies and their various forms of implementation have a clear rationale in terms of the status and (educational) needs of indigenous populations, but remain somewhat ambiguous. The ambiguity rests on the tension, frequently expressed by indigenous populations themselves, between promoting and validating the local culture and language, and the desire to benefit from socio-economic opportunities available through the dominant language. This often results in a range of monolingual and bilingual adult literacy programmes, depending on the aims of the provider and the aspirations of learners.

With these varied regional and national manifestations of policy and practice in mind, four case studies explore the situation at national level.

¹⁰ Four international conferences on language and education in Asia/Pacific have addressed these issues between 2003 and 2013: see <http://www.unescobkk.org/fr/education/news/article/now-were-talking-a-decade-of-mother-tongue-based-multilingual-education/>

¹¹ See http://www.lc.mahidol.ac.th/mleconf2013/Ms.%20Yee-may%20Chan_Mr.%20Chhejap%20Bhote.pdf

4. Four case studies

The countries of Mexico, Morocco, Papua New Guinea and Senegal have been chosen as case studies because:¹²

- They are multilingual, manifesting indigenous languages and using also non-indigenous languages, but the language dynamics in each case are very different.
- They all have both an adult literacy challenge, and programmes in literacy learning.
- They represent different regions of the world: Arab Region, Sub-saharan Africa, Latin America, and Asia/Pacific.

Table 2: Language situations of the four countries

	Number of local or indigenous languages*	Languages of wider communication	Designated as 'official' languages	Other languages
Mexico	288	Spanish		
Morocco	14 of which Hassani	Darija (Moroccan Arabic)	Modern Standard Arabic , Amazighe	French (used consistently in administration and some higher education)
Papua New Guinea	836	Tok Pisin Hiri Motu	English	
Senegal	47 of which Diola , Malinké , Pular , Sérère , Soninké , Wolof	Wolof	French	

Those in **bold** type are recognised by name in the constitution of the country.
 * Numbers from Lewis, M. Paul, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig (eds). 2013. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Seventeenth edition*. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Online version: www.ethnologue.com.

In these four case studies therefore, the following questions will be addressed:

- What is the literacy and language situation in the country?
- What is the national policy regarding the status, use and development of indigenous languages?
- What is the policy on the use of languages in education in general, and in adult literacy in particular?
- Where possible, what lessons may be learned from literacy programmes regarding actual language use in acquiring literacy?

Brief concluding remarks in each study will draw out the salient features with regard to future prospects for the use of indigenous languages in literacy learning.

¹² The four countries were determined in initial consultations with the Acting Director of the EFA Global Monitoring Report.

c. Mexico

Indigenous groups represent 10% of the population (2000 Census, INEA 2008 report), about 7.6 million people at that time. As shown in the table above, some put the estimate of the number of indigenous languages at 288 while others list 68 ethnic groups, representing 364 language varieties (Schmelkes and de los Angeles 2009), and the National Institute of Indigenous Languages stresses that these varieties must be considered distinct languages, for reasons of differing linguistic structures and sociolinguistic considerations of self-identification by each group (INALI 2014).

In 2012, the overall adult illiteracy rate (15+ years) was estimated to be 6.2% (INEA 2012). The National Adult Education Institute (INEA) collects data disaggregated by language – Spanish speakers/speakers of indigenous languages. These data show the relative disadvantage of indigenous groups with regard to adult literacy (INEA 2008):

Table 3: Literacy rate differentials in indigenous language population

	Spanish-speaking population (% illiteracy)	Indigenous language population (% illiteracy)
2000	7.5%	33.3%
2005	6.7%	31.6%

According to the same source, in 2010, the indigenous population of 15+ which was listed as ‘left behind’ educationally numbered almost 4 million, while the ‘illiterate’ indigenous population was shown as almost 1.5 million. Within the indigenous population, women are further disadvantaged, with female illiteracy at 39.6% and male illiteracy at 23.2% (2005). The attention that Mexico has given to surveying literacy with regard to ethnicity and language is a feature of Latin America consciousness of cultural plurality, although such surveys are extremely rare in other multilingual and multicultural regions. It is clear that a survey of this kind pinpoints language as a key parameter in acquiring literacy and using written communication. How far do language policy in general and the language-in-education policies in particular support the implementation of mother-tongue based literacy programmes?

Mexico has a history dating back to the 1970s of recognising the value of its indigenous cultures and languages (Schmelkes and de los Angeles 2009), with various efforts to promote literacy among indigenous groups, but manifesting mixed motivations – on the one hand to enable indigenous populations to become literate in their own language, but on the other hand linking this with the promotion of Spanish (*castellanización*). This changed in the late 1990s, and the EFA period has seen further significant changes in policy:

- The 2001 Constitution gives Mexican indigenous communities the right to ‘preserve and enrich their languages knowledge and all elements which make up their culture and identity,’ as part of a broader set of indigenous rights. (Constitución 2014: artículo 2).
- Since 2003, the General Education Law provides for linguistic rights for indigenous groups to access education in their own language and Spanish (Ley General de Educación 2003).
- Also in 2003, Mexico adopted a General Law of Indigenous Linguistic Rights, providing protection and support for the development of indigenous languages and their value in society (Ley General de Derechos Lingüísticos de los Pueblos Indígenas 2003).
- The Education Sector Plan for 2007-2012 (Secretaría de Educación Pública 2007) proposed measures to strengthen equitable educational opportunities for indigenous

groups, also in literacy programmes, although there was no specific goal of literacy for indigenous youth and adults (Schmelkes and de los Ángeles 2009).

These policy documents demonstrate a strong commitment to enabling educational access through the languages spoken by Mexico's indigenous groups, the implication being that every group may use its own language. How far have these policy commitments translated into literacy programming?

The government's MEVyT initiative (Modelo de Educación para la Vida y el Trabajo - Learning Model for Life and Work), launched in 2000, was designed to address indigenous groups through their own language, with the possibility of learning/using Spanish as well. Two learning tracks were developed for indigenous communities: for bilingual speakers on the one hand, and on the other hand for those who are initially monolingual in an indigenous language. Choice of track is based on individual assessment. Again, this attention to the precise language dynamics at an individual level is based on maximising learning – an unusually careful concern for the role of language in literacy acquisition and adult education more generally. Between 2002 and 2004, Mexico developed experimental materials for increasing the use of information technologies among indigenous groups as well as for Spanish speakers. Since 2007 there has been a stronger emphasis on marginalised groups, in particular indigenous populations. This has led to the use of a greater number of languages for literacy learning, now numbering 45, including the development of learning materials in each of them (Gobierno de México 2012).

Looking toward the future, Mexico has developed an education sector plan up until 2018. This Plan expresses a commitment to equity and inclusion, and so gives attention to adults who have not benefited from educational opportunities. Indigenous populations are identified as facing a particular literacy challenge – one quarter of illiterate male adults and one third of illiterate female adults are indigenous. However, beyond a reference to the need for contextually appropriate programmes, the plan does not propose specific actions for indigenous groups or raise the question of the language of literacy. Indeed, no strategies for adult literacy are proposed in the plan.

Mexico has an impressive record of developing initiatives and institutional frameworks in order to give full opportunity to adults, particularly those in indigenous groups, to acquire literacy in their first or mother language, coupled with opportunities to learn Spanish. However, there is a noticeable change of discourse in the 2013-2018 plan, with less focus on the profile of the learner in favour of a greater emphasis on the functioning of the whole education system, principally the formal system (Secretaría de Educación Pública. 2013). Even though commitment to diversity and equity is clearly expressed, the difference in tone is evidenced by that fact that 'linguistic rights' are highlighted in the earlier plan, but are not mentioned in the current one, and the MEVyT initiative is omitted. The increased visibility of indigenous populations and their situation at international level, which was noted earlier, finds its echo in the specialised language and adult education institutions established in Mexico. However, this seems to have led to a position where indigenous concerns are increasingly left to these institutions, without integration into wider national planning for the future, at least in education. In conclusion, the momentum generated since the late 1990s in developing and providing mother-tongue based multilingual literacy learning risks being lost if the political will and vision on the part of central government do not continue to give focused attention to appropriate educational strategies for its many indigenous groups.

d. Morocco

The sub-title of the literacy report for 2007-2012 (Royaume du Maroc 2012) indicates the importance given to literacy in national development: "Towards the full participation of everyone in society". Steady progress in reducing illiteracy has been achieved, with a reduction from 55% in 1994 to 38% in 2006, although being a woman and living in a rural

local education authorities, for use as a means to improve Arabic learning in pre-primary and lower primary grades. A study on promoting new approaches in literacy (Moutawakkil 2009:15) proposed to ‘take account of the mother tongue...as a linguistic bridge’ to Arabic. The Literacy and Non-formal Education Strategy of 2004 (Royaume du Maroc 2004) refers explicitly to literacy in Arabic and French, linking the latter to economic development. The mother tongue of the learner does not appear to be a consideration. The 1999 Charter, a defining document for education throughout the last decade, puts adult literacy in the context of labour force development and does not refer to the question of the languages used by learners. The 2007-2012 literacy report (Royaume du Maroc 2012) also makes no reference to the language of literacy acquisition.

At the level of educational policy (as distinct from the political orientations of the constitution), therefore, there has been a relative silence regarding the language of literacy. On an informal level, articles appear in the national press and in conference proceedings which pose the question about the place that the language of instruction may have in the poor results of the school system, noting that children do not speak modern standard Arabic when they start school. It is this writer’s experience that many educators recognise the problem when asked to comment on it, but that official discourse prevents serious consideration of the issue.

If the public policy debate is more or less absent, what has been the practice at programme level? Some conclusions may be drawn from the studies documented by the above report which asked questions of graduated learners about their expectations of literacy courses. After the desire to learn to read and write, the second expectation, expressed by 86% of respondents, was to learn a language. Asked further what use they wished to make of their new literacy skills, over 90% responded that they wished to be better equipped to read the Quran. Since the Quran is necessarily read in the original (classical Arabic), it is clear that the learning of Arabic was a major goal and motivation. Given that this is the case, it is surprising that the question of the mother tongue of the learners was not addressed, even when the survey addressed other aspects of the specific circumstances of learners.

A cooperative project between the Ministry of Education’s Department for the Struggle against Illiteracy and USAID introduced the approach of using a ‘language bridge’ in female adult literacy programmes designed to inform them of the new family legal framework, from 2005 to 2008 (ANLCA s.d.). The project used Darija and Amazighe to facilitate learning of modern standard Arabic and literacy in it, with the clear proviso that using the languages people habitually speak was not an end in itself, and that their use in the literacy learning process was exclusively oral (ANLCA personal communication). Based on that experience, the National Agency for the Struggle against Illiteracy (ANLCA) recommends a thorough study and in-depth debate of the language question in adult literacy (ibid).

Looking forward, the 2013 Strategy for Non-formal Education (Royaume du Maroc 2013), which focuses on out-of-school children, not adults, shows a new sensitivity to the language question, basing its argument on both the multilingual policy of the 2011 constitution and the education principle of mother-tongue based multilingual education:

By means of a multilingual approach, the learner will be able both to acquire basic competencies in the language s/he understands best (the mother tongue) and to learn other languages of the nation and the world.

While it is too early to assess how far this strategy will be implemented, it constitutes at least a platform for further examination of the approach to be adopted for adult literacy.

In conclusion, it is clear that there is a gap between the linguistic provisions of the Constitution and their application to education. The mention of some of Morocco’s languages in the Constitution is based primarily on considerations of political inclusiveness and validation of national culture, with a recognition of diversity; educational arguments – to facilitate learning – are not in focus, or at least not yet. Further, the debate on the

educational advantages of using the learner's first language for initial literacy acquisition is muted, and as yet finding little echo among educational planners and managers. The institute charged with the development of Berber languages (IRCAM) has a role in promoting their educational use, but seems for the moment to do so largely on the basis of arguments of cultural identity rather than for reasons of educational effectiveness. However, the situation is dynamic and calls above all for detailed sociolinguistic/educational surveys to understand better where MTBMLE approaches would make a difference to accessing and achieving literacy competencies.

e. Papua New Guinea

Government estimates put the literacy rate (15+ years) at 56.2% in 2000 (National Department of Education 2008:7), and the UNESCO estimate for 2011 was 62% – 65% male and 59% female (UNESCO 2014). The language situation of Papua New Guinea (PNG) is unique, as the country has the largest number of languages of any in the world – 836 (Lewis et al. 2013); it is important to stress that these are distinct languages, not dialects, and are recognised as such by the government (Department of Education 2004). English is the official language, and two languages wider communication or lingua francas are also recognised, the pidgins Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu. Tok Pisin is the most commonly used language for inter-ethnic communication.

The development of literacy policy, and of educational policy more generally, has been closely associated with the language question. The 1975 PNG constitution includes a clause on literacy promotion and exhorts “all persons and governmental bodies to endeavour to achieve universal literacy in Pisin, Hiri Motu or English, and in ‘tok ples’ or ‘ita eda tano gado’”¹⁴ (PNG Constitution 1975: 3), thus establishing the principle that literacy in any one of PNG's languages is considered part of achieving a literate society. Such a clear expression of support for local-language literacy¹⁵ is unusual in a constitution, and all the more so in a country of such high linguistic diversity. Following this, in 1986, a government-commissioned philosophy of education recommended to use local languages in the early years of schooling, with English later (Government of PNG 1986). More recently a policy for adult literacy was published in 2000 and clearly linked the acquisition of literacy with the linguistic situation of the PNG population – four of the five goals for literacy are related to the choice of language, with a clear intention to make literacy accessible in the languages people speak. The policy starts from the premise that literacy, as communication, is a language-based activity and that therefore the question of the language of literacy is fundamental to understanding the aims of literacy learning (see Appendix 1).

As might be expected, Papua New Guinea's high number of languages has led many to doubt the feasibility of using local languages in education, in spite of the positive impact of using a language that learners speak. Litteral (2001), reviewing PNG education policy regarding initial formal education in the local language, pointed out that children learning in their own language stayed in school longer and mastered English and other content better, and went on to observe that using the local language in education connected learning directly with the children's environment and culture. While there is agreement in PNG that the acquisition of literacy in the lingua francas and English is a universal aim, the debate continues on whether education, particularly schooling for children, should start with the local language and at what point English instruction should be introduced.¹⁶ As far as adult

¹⁴ ‘tokples’ and ‘ita eda tano gado’ are respectively the Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu expressions for ‘local language’.

¹⁵ Note that the term used in PNG for local languages is ‘vernaculars’.

¹⁶ The education plan (Department of Education 2009) maintained the policy of using the local language as the medium of instruction for the first three years of primary schooling, but recent information indicates that, in 2013, the government decreed the use of English as the medium of instruction at all levels of the formal system (Guria, personal communication March 2014).

literacy is concerned, there is broad acceptance of the approach that enables adults to access literacy first in their own language. The 2008 report on adult education notes an increase in the use of Tok Pisin and lists a further 13 languages that serve as regional lingua francas within the country (National Department of Education 2008). It is not clear how far these trends affect the delivery of literacy programmes, largely because of how literacy has traditionally been provided in PNG.

In PNG, from the nineteenth century Christian missions began to promote literacy, using local languages as people understood nothing else, and this continued as the national church became established. Since independence (1975) until the present time a range of NGOs have given further support to literacy efforts (NLAS 2012). There has also been active community support for developing and using their local languages in education, including the development of materials, the selection of teachers and input into the curriculum (Litteral 2001). Community involvement was both possible and necessary in the context of decentralised educational planning and implementation, and was often supported by NGO initiatives and personnel.

The strong commitments by non-state actors in adult literacy resulted in the disengagement of the PNG government from this sub-sector, and a consequent lack of public investment. In spite of the positive policy pronouncements indicated above, adult education in general has been neglected in government policies and programmes, offering only passive support to the non-state actors; formal education has been the overwhelming priority of the government's education efforts (Department of Education 2008), and the concept of 'basic education' in the current education sector plan is limited to schooling (Department of Education 2009). This position was again stated in 2012, with the observation that the government 'does not consider these sub-sectors as their responsibilities' (NLAS 2012: 10). The education sector plan for 2005-2014 presented no goals or targets for adult literacy.

In conclusion, PNG manifests a number of contrasting trends with regard to adult literacy and language:

- Policy pronouncements are positive to the promotion of literacy in the country, as a factor of social and personal development. However, while major policy documents highlight the need to have a literate population necessary for nation building, government funding provided to support literacy programs is minimal. (NLAS 2012: 12)
- Literacy policy as expressed by the government is closely associated with the promotion and use of local languages, based on three factors:
 - a strong sense of local identity within the language community;
 - a clear understanding that initial literacy learning (and education) should use a language that the learner already speaks;
 - the long tradition of local-language literacy provision by missions, churches and NGOs;
- The relative roles of English, the two lingua francas and local languages are dynamic and changing. This situation motivates both government and some members of communities to support the continued use of PNG's many languages, while at the same time leading others to push for greater and faster adoption of English. These dilemmas, by no means unique to PNG, are far from resolved.

Looking to the future, the long tradition of local-language literacy is based on sound educational principles and augurs well for improving literacy rates and relevant use, if certain conditions are fulfilled. In addition, there is some capacity and experience on the ground, on which to build for widening literacy efforts. These efforts will have a greater chance of success if certain conditions are fulfilled, including the following:

- A re-affirmation at the policy level of an approach to adult literacy based on the MTBMLE approach, along with a clear articulation of value of all the languages, from local to international.
- The inclusion of adult literacy goals in educational planning, with a stronger government commitment (capacity and financial resources) to work consistently towards the goals.
- The continued and increasing mobilisation of non-state actors, including communities themselves, in coordinated adult literacy efforts.

Papua New Guinea has blazed a remarkable trail in local-language literacy in a situation of high linguistic diversity. The educational reasons for this are clear and have remained so even in the face of inevitable political considerations, such as the concern for national unity, for the country's 'modernisation' and its place in the world. The country's experience offers a degree of hope that adult literacy can be shaped according to the learners' profile and give a chance for the local to have an important place in the face of globalising forces.

f. Senegal

The overall literacy rate in Senegal was estimated to be 59.1% in 2012 (République du Sénégal 2012a), with illiteracy standing at 31.7% for women and 49.7% for men. According to the GMR (UNESCO 2002, 2014) the national adult literacy rate has increased from 37.4% in 2000 to 50%, in the period 2005-2011.¹⁷

The number of local languages¹⁸ in Senegal is given as 47 (Lewis et al. 2013) or as 27 'inventoried languages' (République du Sénégal 2013: 53), depending on how they are counted, and in particular on how far detailed sociolinguistic surveys have been carried out. Six languages are listed by name in the constitution, of which Wolof is a widely spoken second language in the country, serving as a lingua franca among the various linguistic communities. In terms of languages with the potential to be used for literacy, 21 languages are described as 'codified' – having an established writing system. Based on the provisions of the 2001 Constitution, this condition confers the status of being recognised officially and thus able to be used in the education system (République du Sénégal 2001, 2012a). The government literacy data presented above are linked to the use of one of three languages (French, Arabic and Wolof), with the important observation that in other languages, more women are literate than men, but at a low level (République du Sénégal 2013). The Constitution further calls on 'all national institutions, public and private, [...] to provide literacy instruction to their members and to participate in national literacy efforts in one of the local languages' (Article 22).

If these pronouncements set the stage positively for literacy in the first languages of learners, there has been a gap in implementation. In 2003 (Rapport Conakry 2003) Senegalese representatives appealed for 'a broad debate on the use of national languages' (ibid.:102) – an indication of difficulty to put the language issue on the mainstream educational agenda.

In terms of government commitment to support local languages, Senegal has had a government department with a brief for promoting local languages since the 1970s, but 'promotion' has not always been linked closely to mother-tongue literacy; it has been as much about asserting identity through the preservation and celebration of Senegal's cultural heritage. A description of the role and objectives of the department in 2000 (République du Sénégal 2000) made reference only to introducing national languages into formal education,

¹⁷ The precise year of the estimate is not given.

¹⁸ The local languages are often referred to as 'national' languages, based on usage in French. In this section, the term 'local languages' is used, in order to avoid the ambiguity, in English at least, of the term 'national'.

not to adult literacy. Despite the ongoing attention to the issue, it is questionable whether the government's commitment, in the face of competing priorities, has been strong and consistent enough to ensure thorough implementation of the policy (CRES 2012).¹⁹

Institutionally, Senegal also developed other structures responsible for both adult literacy and local languages, backed by legal provisions and political will, but by 2004 criticisms of 'chronic instability' in the institutional framework surfaced (Rapport de restitution 2004:6). Little appears to have changed by 2012, since the draft policy document of that year (République du Sénégal 2012a) notes that the institutional arrangements changed six times between 2000 and 2011, with consequent lack of continuity.²⁰ One reason adduced for the lack of steady progress is the marginal status of adult literacy within the educational structures due to a lack of resources and of qualified personnel. With the support of the African Development Bank, the government created, in the mid-2000s, a number of Multi-function Educational Resource Centres for Adults at local level in order to provide a space for both learning and promotion of the literate environment in local languages, but the aims and implementation were limited and vague: what exactly were the activities to consist of?

In 2007, the long-announced National Language Academy was created on the basis of work by Senegalese researchers and culture/language activists and along the same lines as the African Academy of Languages.²¹ The new agency had a mandate to support the development of language policy and to promote local languages as expressions of culture and instruments of scientific and technological progress. This included 'supporting the development of local languages in the education system as well as their use in private and public life as working languages.' (République du Sénégal 2008: 44). There are few data to ascertain how the role of the Academy may have impacted local-language literacy efforts.

At the programme level, Senegal has adopted a strategy of outsourcing (*faire-faire*) of adult literacy programmes to civil society organisations, and decisions about the choice of language are left to the local level. The most common approach of civil society/NGOs is in fact to offer initial literacy acquisition in the language of the community. In 2012, 19 local languages were reported as being used in adult literacy, based on the progressive development of Senegalese languages in written form, as well as literacy in French. There is no breakdown of the numbers using each language for literacy acquisition, and so no indication of how many learners access literacy in their own language. In general, it would not seem likely that the increasing use of local languages was a factor which influenced enrolment in adult literacy programmes, as availability and levels of funding were thought to lie behind the fluctuating enrolment numbers (CRES 2012, and see appendix 2). It remains unclear therefore how far the expansion of local-language literacy facilitated access to learning in general. Expansion may, however, have been a factor in the significant increase in the proportion of female learners, which reached a record of 83% in 2007 – given the higher proportion of women who do not have access to languages other than their mother tongue. In terms of impact on the quality of learning, the only data are the growing literacy rate – increasing at around 3% per year (CRES 2012). This falls short of the 5% per year required to achieve the EFA literacy goal of a 50% reduction in illiteracy by 2015.

¹⁹ In the early 2000s, the title of the relevant ministry was 'Ministry of Technical Education, Vocational Training, Literacy and National Languages'. In 2014, 'languages' was no longer included in the title, and a 'Department of Literacy and National Languages' is part of the 'Ministry of National Education'.

²⁰ The 2004 report noted the tendency to revisit constantly the same themes regarding the promotion of national languages in education (p.8): "Many experts exist, and the same people and the same themes turn up. We should not put in place yet another framework with the same objectives and the same individuals..."

²¹ We should also note the parallel with the Académie Française, whose first African member was Léopold Sédar Senghor, first president of Senegal.

Promoting literacy at the local level in Senegal

In line with Senegal's policy of outsourcing literacy to NGOs, TOSTAN and ARED²² are examples of organisations that promote literacy as part of broader community-based development initiatives.

TOSTAN's programme focuses on building local initiative and using local knowledge, in a three-year non-formal education programme, with two principal phases. In the first phase, facilitators draw on local oral traditions such as song, poetry, and drama to spark debate about issues affecting the community's well-being. The goal of this phase is to promote positive traditions while encouraging discussion of how new ideas and practices can help build a stronger and healthier community, developing a collective vision for their own development. Literacy learning follows in the second phase, where participants learn to read and write in their own language, improve their maths, and gain management skills. TOSTAN runs this programme in 6 languages in Senegal (and in a further 19 languages across Africa).

ARED has focused on the issue of providing reading materials in local languages. In programmes for speakers of non-dominant and recently written languages, this is always an issue – there is little point in learning to read if there is little to read or no chance to write and be published. In Senegal, ARED has developed 189 titles in Wolof, the lingua franca, and four other languages. More recently, ARED has leveraged this experience to promote bilingual education in the formal education system, based on children's mother tongue, with significant results in terms of better learning outcomes.

These NGO experiences illustrate, on the one hand, the links that local-language literacy has with community initiative for development, and on the other hand, its importance for respecting and validating cultural identity and knowledge.

TOSTAN: <http://www.tostan.org>

ARED: <http://www.ared-edu.org>

Demand for literacy is high and, as in many multilingual contexts, is often focused on acquiring literacy in the language perceived to offer the best economic opportunities, in this case French. These attitudes, in Senegal as elsewhere, are often a reflection of failure to demonstrate the value and viability of multilingual approaches based on initial mother-tongue literacy acquisition and the later learning of French.²³ The claims that the government's vision for literacy and local languages should 'promote global society...relying more on the use of national languages' (République du Sénégal. 2008: 18) fails to spell out how literacy as communication is connected to language use, on the one hand, and, on the other, to development.

Looking to the future, the education plan for 2013-2025 (République du Sénégal 2013) focuses on qualitative rather than quantitative goals in adult literacy, under the headings of improved quality, equitable access, and transparent governance. Although no structured multilingual strategy is proposed for adult literacy, the role of local languages is seen to be crucial in increasing access, particularly through the written development ('codification') of more Senegalese languages, and, in order to improve quality, through developing the literate environment in local languages and coordinating the government and non-governmental agencies with expertise or a mandate in that area. These proposals are positive, but they are not new, and it remains far from clear how the emphasis – now almost an assumption in

²² TOSTAN means "breakthrough" in [Wolof](#); ARED = Associates in Research and Education for Development.

²³ Enabling the demonstration of value and viability requires advocacy, monitoring and evaluation and long-term commitment – see final section, point 4.

Senegal – on using local languages and French²⁴ will impact implementation. Based on its clear policy position of promoting local languages, there is a need for Senegal to apply this policy to all aspects of adult literacy programming.

5. Priorities for the post-2015 agenda

Current national policies on adult literacy express both the need for a literate population and the desirability of interventions to tackle it, both in the four countries of the case studies and more broadly. Whatever the position adopted by governments at the policy level, pronouncements about meeting literacy needs through a multilingual approach using local languages as a starting point (MTBMLE) tend to remain just that – pronouncements with no real plan or resources for implementation. Even countries with a relatively long history of promotion of such approaches, such as Mexico and Papua New Guinea, rely on non-state actors and specialised institutes rather than mainstreaming efforts into national planning and budgeting.

The closer that leaders, development agents and educators come to the lived realities of communities speaking non-dominant languages, the more acute is their perception that the language of learning is a barrier if it is not the local language. This is one reason why educational NGOs, with their proximity to the populations they serve, regularly use local languages when they invest in literacy. Conversely, the more politicians, managers and leaders set their sights on the international arena, the global market and worldwide connections, the less attention they appear to give to local, sub-national realities. In terms of adult literacy, this leads to the mistaken belief that literacy learning in a dominant language is the fastest way to master the language and thus benefit from global development, and, worse, that the small languages of the world do not really matter any more. A multilingually conceived programme obviates this dichotomy and gives the best chance in both local and global dimensions.

Given this situation, what are the implications for the post-2015 agenda? We ask first how adult literacy and its attendant language questions have been addressed in the post-2015 discussions hitherto.

a. International deliberations

The report of the High-Level Panel (United Nations 2013b) proposed an education goal entitled 'Quality education and lifelong learning', with the implication that learning for youth and adults beyond the formal school system has a priority equal to that of schooling. However the accompanying text does not bear out that expectation, with no explanation as to what 'lifelong learning' would consist of nor what its role might be in promoting sustainable development. It is to be hoped that this omission will be rectified by the time the goals are submitted in final form. The Report refers to language as one of the factors of educational disparity.

It is important to note, however, one of the key principles which the report articulates, namely that: "targets will only be considered 'achieved' if they are met for all relevant income and social groups" (UN 2013: 29). Other processes have also stressed the need to base post-2015 goals and strategies on principles of inclusion and equity.²⁵ This philosophy offers greater hope that speakers of non-dominant and minority languages may see their distinct

²⁴ The use of French for youth and adult literacy is specifically mentioned in the policy brief for 2012-2025 (République du Sénégal. 2012b).

²⁵ UN Task Team 2012, United Nations 2014.

needs addressed, through policies that address the contextual factors, such as language, of specific communities.

The report of the consultation on education in the post-2015 agenda (UNESCO/UNICEF 2013) notes that adult literacy was neglected in the implementation of the MDG and EFA agendas, and that the post-2015 goals should redress the balance, particularly for the vulnerable and marginalised groups whose needs the report stresses repeatedly.

UNESCO's position also emphasised the neglect of adult literacy and proposes therefore a post-2015 educational objective in that area (UNESCO 2013: 8). The UNESCO paper does not discuss language issues with regard to either schooling or adult literacy but calls for an agenda that is "flexible enough to cater for [...] diversity, while also being adaptable to [...] take into account diverse national priorities and contexts" (ibid. p.7).

b. Post-2015 policy orientations

What then are the implications for adult literacy in groups speaking non-dominant languages as a post-2015 agenda is adopted?

The post-2015 development agenda is expected to focus on sustainable development (United Nations 2013b, 2014) – a process of change that engages social, environmental and economic domains. This is a more holistic agenda than the MDGs, which were dominated by the economic aim of poverty reduction. The focus on sustainable development implies social change at all levels, and across all societies. It is self-evident that social change is fundamentally a process of learning, although this principle is rarely spelled out. As a societal project, sustainable development implies learning what sustainability means in context, and what is required of us to promote it. Philosophically, therefore, sustainable development entails giving a high priority to all forms of learning for all social groupings.

A concern for adult literacy in situations of linguistic diversity reflects the commitment to provide equitable learning opportunities for the most marginalized, vulnerable – not to say forgotten – groups in today's world. In spite of protestations of the need to prioritise actions in favour of the marginalized, policies rarely result in relevant, carefully designed, sustained and adequately resourced processes.

Six areas of policy orientation will require attention on the basis of the issues that emerge from the four case studies:

1. **Clear articulation of adult literacy policy**, as an integrated key component of education sector policy, not as an afterthought or politically correct optional extra, and linked with the aim, almost universally acknowledged, of creating a learning society based on a knowledge economy.
2. **Need for a more central emphasis on reaching marginalised social groups**, based on principles of equity and social justice, recognising the way communities actually use languages and comprising realistic plans to tailor programmes to their needs, rather than expecting them to fit standardised models.
3. **Strategy based on an unequivocal conviction that the educational benefits and pedagogical advantages** of MTBMLE approaches for speakers of non-dominant languages are more important than hedging political bets with regard to ethnic, linguistic and cultural differences. Without this conviction, even where the language issue is raised in relation to literacy, ethnicities and therefore also languages may be manipulated for political ends, making some nervous about implementing multilingual policies.
4. **Strengthened advocacy** based on the demonstrated efficacy of MTBMLE approaches in adult literacy. This will require investment in close follow-up, rigorous monitoring and evaluation of programmes, with consequent documentation of processes and results. The educational and the development benefits of adult

literacy programmes become visible over the long term. Short-term experiments, all too often taken as examples of MTBMLE practice in formal and non-formal education, rarely demonstrate fully what can be achieved.

5. **Robust, sustained partnerships** between government, local language communities, and civil society. MTBMLE approaches must draw on local knowledge and culture, and adult literacy in particular gives opportunity for expression of adults' knowledge and experience, often disregarded in the development process because considered inaccessible. Civil society organisations bring a sensitivity to context and a flexibility of implementation which are key ingredients of MTBMLE approaches.
6. **Realistic, long-term and sustained funding**, managed at the lowest level possible and combining government, non-governmental, community and external resources. Fears of undue expense precipitated by multilingual programmes are often unfounded, particularly given the increase in learning efficiency that such programmes deliver.

c. Final note

These policy orientations assume that governments will make learning a pillar of their vision of sustainable development and that they will be motivated by concerns for equity and social justice. These issues are clearly articulated in the international circles where the post-2015 agenda is under discussion, and they are typically espoused by civil society, in its advocacy and its programmes. In situations of linguistic diversity, where governments adopt a vision of equitable development, adult literacy through a multilingual approach is a crucial educational intervention to facilitate the communication and learning necessary for the full ownership and practice of sustainable development strategies. Once appropriate policies are put in place, achieving effective literacy goals for speakers of non-dominant languages will depend on implementation in context. How far will governments factor social and linguistic realities on the ground into literacy programming?

6. Appendices

a. Appendix 1: Goals of Papua New Guinea literacy policy

- i. All Papua New Guineans should develop and maintain effective literacy skills;
- ii. Speaking, reading and writing the vernacular languages of PNG, as well as national languages, must be substantially expanded and improved;
- iii. The vernaculars must be the beginning language of instruction for children out-of-school youth, and adult literacy programs through basic literacy and numeracy;
- iv. Language services provided by interpreters and translators, the print and electronic media and libraries should be expanded and improved; and
- v. All Papua New Guineans must be encouraged to become print literate in their own language and the one of the two national languages, Tokpisin or Hiri Motu.

Source: Department of Education 2000: 10

b. Appendix 2: Enrolment in adult literacy programmes in Senegal, 1999-2011

Source : PDEF (10-year Education and Training) Evaluation

Adults enrolled 1999-2003 (PDEF first phase)

target: 200 000/year	99-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004
Actual:	209917	203560	172000	175 769	171 231

Adults enrolled 2005-2007 (PDEF second phase)

target: 200 000/year	2005	2006	2007
Actual:	165 422	62223	159 200

Adults enrolled 2008-2011 (PDEF third phase)

target (for 2011): 278 679	2008	2009	2010	2011
Actual	83 529	77 988	115 526	81 354

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