

# **The adult literacy experiences in Lusophone African countries**

## **1. Education during the colonial period and the liberation war**

When the Portuguese forced their way into the territories, they met with strong resistance, first from the different tribes and later in the 1960's from the liberation fronts organizations: PAIGC in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, FRELIMO in Mozambique and MPLA in Angola. Faced with a brutal intimidation by the colonial military forces, these fronts were forced to start an armed struggle for their national independence and mobilized broad masses among their population.

During the armed struggle, the liberation fronts of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau, established liberated areas. Health and education were given the highest priority. Education was considered as a weapon against ignorance, negative religious belief, submissiveness, as well as an instrument that would improve people's situation, to be used in the more immediate struggle and in the future, to prepare qualified cadres needed for the development of the independent countries. Education assumed the function of political and social mobilization.

Schools were created to provide education to the population, living in the area, and to cadres involved in the struggle against the Portuguese. An accelerated primary education for adults was introduced, and teachers were provided through the organization of short training courses among students with fourth grade and through the principle of self-reliance. Also adult literacy activities were organized following the principle of those who knew to read and write taught those who didn't know. Theory and practice was followed during the educational activities and students and teachers participated together in practical work. Despite language difficulties, Portuguese was used as the language of instruction.

The colonial formal school system, was addressed to the children of non African emigrants and later open to the "assimilados" (children Africans with western influence). The enrollment for those living in rural areas, was left to the few missionary schools known as "Escolas Rudimentares", (Rudimentary schools), with four years of basic education combined with agricultural work. Most missions schools did not offer the crucial final primary grade (4th) that provided the chance to continue to secondary schools.

In the cities, the state schools followed the Portuguese school system including textbooks, administrative system and trained teachers according to Portugal requirements. This school was an authoritarian institution, that followed Portuguese and catholic principles, in contrast with the African social practices, norms and culture.

A small minority of African children had access to the few existing secondary schools in the towns where enrollment was restricted by entry exams and entry age limit. Access to education levels above third grade of primary education was mainly reserved to the children of Portuguese families. (Lind 1988)

The colonial power used education as a mean of "domestication", following Freire's approach. In fact, Portuguese educational policy was oriented to produce division between Africans: a small minority trained in Portuguese schools to serve the interests of the metropolis and a vast majority with no access to education.

## **2. Education after the Independence**

The newly independent countries faced an enormous and difficult task in organizing their educational system., including building new school, training teachers, changing the curriculum and text books contents.

The educational plans aimed to prepare the population to internalize the requirements of the new society, based on their reality and free from superstition and dogmatic traditions. They had a particular interest in building a scientific attitude, an equalitarian society and the elimination of the exploitation of men by men. Education was seen as an instrument for liberation.

Primary and adult education were given priority specially considering the over 90% rate of illiteracy in most of the countries at the moment of their independence.

Accelerated teacher training and primary school monitor courses were organized, including summer courses for teachers coming from the "old system", and new textbooks started slowly to be developed. In many cases the population build schools, teachers and students run schools together and were encouraged to work together with the local population and learn from their experiences. The curriculum, included cultural and productive activities, criticism and self-criticism was practiced and all means were used to develop creative initiative and responsibilities among young people.

### **Adult Literacy Programs**

National adult literacy campaigns, using the official language, Portuguese, as the teaching language were launched in *Guinea Bissau* (1975 to 1977), *Angola* (1976-1980) and *Mozambique* with National Literacy Campaigns, NLC, (1978 to 1982). In the case of *Cape-Verde* a strategy of large scale literacy programmes was used and identified as a campaign that lasted until the end of the 80's.

Priorities were given to the most organized and motivated groups, such as the "peoples army", industrial centers, collective villages. Thousand students and people of different educational background voluntarily participated as literacy monitors with enthusiasm and dedication to build their newly independent country and contribute to its development. Time-frames were initially set up to one year, but no time for wiping out illiteracy was clearly set.

Literacy campaigns were considered successful in Mozambique and Angola, the latter earned the International Prize for Literacy in 1981. The results in the other lusophone countries was not as successful, however in 1977, the Department of Adult Education (DEA) in Guinea Bissau, acknowledge the successful results obtained after three years of educational activities through the special program addressed to the army force where 90% of the soldiers became literate.

The intensity of the campaigns diminished after few years and, the activities were concentrated in literacy acquisition and therefore new strategies were settled to eradicate illiteracy.

*Angola* and *Mozambique* used a strategy by stages with three different cycles of nine months each and ten hours per week for literacy and post literacy activities. Mozambique, adults participants had to go through a national literacy achievement test at the end of each stage. To succeed on the second test meant to be literate and have the equivalence of 2nd. grade in the formal school. The third stage, post literacy, led to the 4th grade with possibilities to continue in the formal system through evening schools or to join an adult accelerate course in some of the boarding schools that combine the formal system with vocational training. (Johnston A. 1989)

From 1980, a short scale program strategy was implemented by *Guinea-Bissau*, with two/ three years portuguese/mother tongue bi-lingual pilot projects in kriolu balanta and fula. Literacy activities using the official language continued in the basis of one year duration. No post literacy activities were included as part of in any of the projects nor other alternatives offered unless to continue studies in the formal system. During the campaign period and until 1988 adult evening schools were organized and attended both by children with no age requirement for the formal

system and adults Today there are no evening school , due to lack of students.

*Cape- Verde* as it noted above, launched large scale programs, addressed to illiterate population in general . The literacy process , in Portuguese was planned to last between one to two years and the Literacy Reader was change few times to include basic arithmetic and link the contents with the participants needs. A bilingual pilot project in kriolu-portuguese started by 1989 which included a language research. Unfortunately the results of the project were not evaluated and the linguistic material is still unpublished. Only recently attempts have been made to start with post literacy activities mainly linked to the working environment.

In the above activities, no gender approach was considered, even if among the illiterate population, women have the highest rate: 76% in Guinea- Bissau, 78.7% in Mozambique, 71. 5% in Angola , 36% in Cape-Verde (Unesco 1995)

### **3. The current situation of adult literacy**

During the 20 years of adult literacy activities participants have gained in mobilization, political and social awareness and organization skills. But as adult literacy activities mainly concentrated in literacy acquisition and language proficiency, the performance results have not been encouraging

The education sector in Mozambique and Angola has been deeply affected during their civil wars. However, African lusophone countries share common education problems.

During the field work, adult educators faced with difficulties such as lack of adequate training; literacy readers with unrelated contents to the participants basic needs, daily life and culture; the excessive length of the literacy process; lack of literate environment, inadequacy of a more selective approach, lack of link between literacy activities and work or vocational training, problems with the language of instruction .

Difficulties in the pedagogical practices affected the achievement of reading, writting and mathematics, increasing the the numbers of repeaters and drop-out .

As a result, participants motivation decreased substantially. In Mozambique, the number of participants decreased to to 46.000 in 1989 in comparison with 287.000 in 1982 . It is a fact that "motivation and need for literacy are more crucial for adult literacy participation and learning than other forms of education, due to the nature of living conditions of most adult illiterate

people" (Lind 1988 :150). Moreover , all the aspect of literacy activities such as " strategy and policy, organization and mobilization, teachers and syllabus , must be geared towards ensuring, reinforcing and maintaining motivation , without which the whole enterprise collapses " (Lind op. cit.).

Literacy activities have not been able to maintain the needed motivation among the participants and today activities are scarce, lack the initial dynamism, mobilization and motivation among adults and educators. There is a lack of support from the governments and the diferent structures created have lost leading positions within the Ministries of Education, as the case in Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique. Political will, human and economic resources allocated by the governments have substantially decrease as well as those resources coming from bi lateral help that traditionally supported this sector.

Lack of motivation and need for adult literacy activities have also been affected by the ongoing structural adjustment policies in the countries and the orthodox neo liberalism development approaches implemented. This situation has affected negatively the poor and specially the vulnerable population, such as women and refugees and the experience in other countries have shown that adult literacy is not felt as an immediate need, when families have to face survival situations. (Ballara 1992)

It is true that 20 years after the countries independence the adult illiteracy rate has decreased from the initial over 90% to : Guinea-Bissau 49.8% (m) 76% (f), Mozambique , 54.9 % (m) 78.7% (f), Cape-Verde 19% (m) 36% (f), Angola 44.4% (m) 71.5% (f) (Unesco 1994).

There is a common recognition among the governments that adult literacy activities in a certain extent contributed to decrease the countries illiteracy rate . But much of the improvement is due to the increase in the net enrollment ratio of children from age group 6-11 (DEEE 1985). Cape-Verde has reached nearly 100% (Unesco 95), and even if the other countries are far away from that percentage, the number of enrolled children have been slightly and gradually increased since the countries independence.

#### **4. Some key issues for analysis and debate in the region**

The elements set out above refer to the difficulties facing the literacy and adult education activities . Thus if large scale educational activities and strategies in favour of the poor and illetrates are not promoted, it is highly unlikely that, in this future decades, an subtantial improvement in the literacy rate will be achieved.

Education is one of the inalienable rigths of every person and has been

recognized as such by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Since in many developing countries as the lusophone african, illiteracy still constitutes a serious obstacle to social and economic development, adult literacy and education programmes assume even greater importance as indispensable elements for the countries development .

The two-track approach proposed by the Jomtien Conference (1990) should be followed by the lusophone countries. The proposed approach is based on parallel measures for children and adults, a programme for the universalization of primary education and another for non-formal adult education , including literacy.

To address the adult illetrate population, specially among refugees, girls and women, equal support to both programs should be given. To avoid relapse to illiteracy, the educational activities must consider literacy and post literacy as one only process. Planning the post literacy should also include linkages with the working environment and vocational training.

A crucial point within the education process in the lusophone countries is their language of instruction. While many authors have demonstrated the benefits of initial education activities in the participants' mother tongue, it has also been point out that the choice should take into account various criteria such as the language in which the participants are motivated to learn an can most easily use in a literate environment; the existence of written material for the language to be used; costs and human resources available and a lingustic policy that take into consideration the educational programme. (Ballara op. cit.)

In African lusophone countries , the majority of the population and specially those in the rural areas do not speak or can hardly understand iPortuguese , the oficial language , the latter todays' language of the elite.

*Guinea Bissau 's* population speaks 20 different languages, 7 of them are spoken by the larger ethnics groups, 79% of the population have an African mother tongue. "Kriolu " is spoken by 52% of the population and due to religion practices there are also contact with the arab language , 10 % of the population uses Portuguese as first, second and third language ( Pehrsson , K. 1995).

In *Cape-Verde*, "Kriolu" with barlovento and sotavento dialectal variants are used by the majority of the population, portuguese is used in oficial documents and speeches.

*Mozambique* has a wide variety of ethnics groups. The population is mainly tsonga and cangane( south), sena (center) nyanja (north-west), macua (the

largest group), yao and nyanja (north) and maconde (north-east), it correspond roughly to the division among the linguistic lines and a considerable number of dialects exist within the same linguistic group. Swahili and Zulu are fairly well understood in the areas in contact with borders countries. Portuguese is mainly spoken in the urban areas which constitute 30% of the country population.

To overcome the low achievement performance in literacy acquisition and language proficiency, all countries started bilingual pilot projects in some of the major mother tongues with the support of foreign assistance, Linguistic research have been included previous to the implementation of bilingual activities, but unfortunately they received little support from the ministerial authorities and in some cases as in Cape-Verde, even from the cadres of the adult education structures. The experiences were in general costly and until now no final achievement result of the whole process have been presented. Guinea Bissau also implemented a bilingual "kriolu" portuguese pilot project to be implemented in the two first years of primary education. The evaluation of the results has not been too positive (Pehrsson op.cit)

Beside the pedagogical aspects, a successful bilingual approach depend on several other factors. Government support, linguistic research, educators training including teaching portuguese as a second language, are important. However it is equally important that didactic material take into account the african traditions with their own code of behaviour, rules and obligations as well as education activities be plan in a flexible way and related with the time table of traditional agriculture activities where adults and children play their particular role.

Marcela Ballara

October 1995

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**BALLARA M., :1985**

*Analisis del proceso de alfabetizacion de adultos en Guinea-Bissau 1976-1985: Estudio comparativo de dos experiencias.* Stockholm: Institute of International Education- Stockholm University- Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA).

**BALLARA M. :1992**

*Women and Literacy.* United Kingdom: Zed Books

**LIND A., :1988**

*Adult Literacy, Lessons and Promises: Mozambican Literacy Campaigns 1978-1982.* Stockholm: Institute of International Education, University of Stockholm.

**LIND A. and JOHNSTON A. , 1990**

*Adult Literacy in the Third World. A review of objectives and strategies.* Stockholm: Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA)

**PEHRSSON KAJSA. 1995**

*O Sector da Educacao na Guinea Bissau.* Stockholm: Swedish International Development Authority

**UNESCO. : 1994**

*Basic Education, Population and Development: Status and Trends/1994.* Paris: Unesco.

**UNESCO. : 1995**

*Educating people: improving chances, expanding choices.* Paris: Unesco