

Illiteracy, Education and National Development in Postcolonial West Africa: A Re-Appraisal

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Résumé: Selon l'auteur, compte tenu des taux d'analphabétisme en Afrique Occidentale et des initiatives pour en contrecarrer les effets, on peut relever qu'il n'y a pas d'efforts soutenus pour accélérer l'alphabetisation des adultes. En 1970, l'Asie et l'Amérique Latine avaient des taux élevés d'analphabétisme des hommes mais meilleurs que ceux de l'Afrique. Seul le Ghana pouvait, en 1988, afficher un taux d'analphabétisme de 50%. C'est pourquoi, ces Etats devraient généraliser la scolarisation des enfants et leur maintien dans le système scolaire le plus longtemps possible. En outre des bibliothèques et autres infrastructures devraient être partout disponibles pour permettre à la population adulte illettrée de s'alphabetiser.

Introduction

For West Africa in particular and sub-Saharan African countries in general, illiteracy continues to be a major drawback to accelerated and balanced national development. Indeed, the 'illiteracy crisis' has continued to be a pain in the neck of all these countries. Attempts to reverse the situation through education so as to aid and ensure sustainable national development have been futile due to the many formidable obstacles that would have to be surmounted.

In such West African countries as Burkina Faso, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Sierra Leone most especially, and to some extent in Ghana, a greater percentage of the adult population are illiterate. In all these countries a high percentage of child and adult illiteracy prevails. Whereas a higher percentage of child illiteracy may be attributable to the high drop-out rate in education as well as the lack of opportunity especially for a majority of the rural poor, adult illiteracy manifests itself in several forms, to wit; those who are dysfunctionally illiterate, the semi-illiterates and the educated elite most of whom are gradually becoming illiterate because they no longer read and worse of all their heavy work schedules do not allow them to continue to read. Many of the semi-illiterates also happen to be school drops-outs. It is pertinent to observe that since 1960 illiteracy levels have remained very high thus raising several questions to which answers need to be found.

The objective of this paper is first to re-appraise the illiteracy situation within the sub-region of West Africa since 1960; secondly, re-appraise the

educational initiatives set afoot to arrest an otherwise 'galloping' situation and finally examine the implications of such a situation for balanced and harmonious national development.

Analytical Survey of Illiteracy Rates and Levels

A quick survey of the West African scene with regard to illiteracy rates/levels reveals a gloomy picture. But this picture is only a reflection of the greater problem world wide. For instance the statistics of world illiteracy revealed in the UNESCO Survey (Bown and Tomori 1979) at the beginning of the Development Decade launched by the United Nations in 1962 showed that there were around the world at that time over 700 million adults who were unable to read and write, and that women formed the majority of these illiterates. The same survey revealed that out of some 206 million children of school age, only 110 million or say 55% gained admission to school.

The West African picture was no better. In 1960 two years prior to the release of the already mentioned figures by the United Nations, percentage rates of illiteracy in the sub-region were equally high and indeed frightening. In Table 1 Hagan (1979) presents the overall percentage rate of illiteracy in some West African countries in 1960 as follows:

Table 1: Percentage Rate of Illiteracy in West Africa (1960)

Country	Percentage
Cote d'Ivoire	91
Liberia	91
Sierra Leone	93
Togo	90
Senegal	95
Mauritania	95
Mali	95
Ghana	75
Nigeria	75

Source: Kwa, O, Hagan (1979:186).

It is apparent from the table that with the exception of Ghana and Nigeria where percentage rates were fair, the remaining countries by 1960 had a greater percentage of their population being illiterates. Perhaps what is more worrying is the fact that these high percentages comprised both child and adult illiterates. Thanks to the priceless role of the missionaries and educational units regarding the promotion of child literacy as well as to the boldness of the Kwame Nkrumah Government in Ghana and the Federal Government of Nigeria in implementing both the Accelerated Development Plan of Education for 1951 and the Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Western Nigeria in 1955

respectively, it was possible to have reduced percentage rates for both child and adult literacy in both countries to 75% by 1960.

Whilst in Ghana and Nigeria these measures seemed to have contributed more to promoting child literacy, efforts in the same direction at promoting adult education simultaneously countrywide was not so profound and far-reaching. Prior to 1960, no consistent nationwide effort was made in the sub-region to systematically promote adult literacy programmes. Percentage rates therefore remained very high. From 1970 to 1980 the figures presented by UNESCO testified to the rather high rates. Table 2 presents the breakdown covering male and female percentage illiteracy rates for some West African countries. The figures cover the section of the population aged fifteen years and above.

From the table it can be discerned that women constitute a greater percentage of the illiterate population throughout the sub-region and this seems to be the case even to date. No doubt, the causes which form the subject of discussion elsewhere in this paper are not far-fetched.

Compared with other areas of the developing world, namely, Asia and Latin America it is evident that Africa, and West Africa in particular, has a long way to go. Hagan (1979:187) has indicated that whereas Asia and Latin America recorded in 1970, for instance, a total illiteracy percentage of 37.0 and 19.9 respectively for males, Africa reached a high percentage figure of 63.4. Between 1970 and 1980 the percentage figures for Africa, Asia and Latin America increased but those for the latter two continued to remain comparatively better, especially those of Asia.

In West Africa the average total percentage figure for both men and women in the ten countries listed in Table 2 between 1970 and 1980 was high, but higher especially for women. Table 2 also indicates that for the period 1970 to 1980 the average total percentage figure for women in the ten countries was 87.4. For individual countries such as Togo (1970), Burkina Faso (1975), Mali (1976) and Niger (1980) the percentage figures for females (Table 2) especially in the indicated years were over 90%. That these figures are certainly alarming cannot be denied.

Indeed, what all these point to is that West Africa and perhaps Africa generally has taken illiteracy and its negative effects on national development for granted. But perhaps, more significantly it is a pointer to the fact that governments, even though fully aware of the problem, have only paid lip-service to arresting it, or have felt themselves totally incapacitated to tackle what to them is a colossal problem. It is also possible that financially West African countries generally throughout the period 1970-1980 were not yet ready to put on the ground a meaningful and systematic programme/strategy aimed at arresting the problem once and for all.

Table 2: Number and Percentage of Illiterates by Age and Sex 1970 Onwards

Country	Year of Census or Survey	Age Group	Illiterate Population			Percentage of Illiterates		
			Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Benin	1980	15 +	556,300	814,400	1,370,700	60.2	83.2	72.1
Gambia	1980	15 +	116,200	151,800	268,000	70.9	88.4	79.9
Ghana	1970	15 +	1,285,320	2,008,000	3,293,320	56.9	81.6	69.8
Cote d'Ivoire	1980	15 +	1,302,100	1,587,900	2,890,000	55.2	76.0	65.0
Niger	1980	15 +	1,201,000	1,359,400	2,560,400	86.0	94.2	90.2
Nigeria	1980	15 +	10,801,700	15,956,900	26,758,600	54.4	77.0	66.0
Mali	1976	15 +	1,469,632	1,766,608	3,236,240	86.5	94.3	90.6
Togo	1970	15 +	318,997	503,028	822,025	73.1	92.9	84.1
Burkina Faso	1975	15 +	1,272,593	1,530,847	2,083,440	85.3	96.7	91.2
Liberia	1974	15 +	313,658	400,844	714,502	71.0	89.7	80.4

Source: UNESCO 1983.

By 1988 the percentage figures seemed to have reduced though not by significant margins. Table 3 in greater detail presents the position of West African countries with regard to illiteracy rates. The table reveals that of all the West African countries, Ghana is the only one with an overall population percentage of illiterates below 50%, with Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso recording figures more than 80%. Again a quick comparison of the phenomenon with Northern European countries, for instance, Switzerland, the Federal Republic of Germany (now part of a United Germany), Canada, Norway and Japan to the far East brings to light the fact that whilst these countries recorded zero percentages for overall population who are illiterates, the figures for West Africa were exceedingly phenomenal.

**Table 3: Percentage Illiteracy Rates for
West African Countries, 1988**

Country	Population (in million) 1988	% Illiterate (Aged 15 +) 1985	Most Recent Estimated (More) Illiteracy Rate 1988	
			% of Population Overall	% of Females Aged 15 +
Benin	4.5	74	74.1	84.3
Burkina Faso	8.5	87	86.8	93.9
Chad	5.4	75	74.7	89.1
Cote d'Ivoire	11.6	57	57.3	68.9
Ghana	14.0	47	46.8	57.2
Liberia	2.4	65	65.0	77.2
Mali	8.0	83	83.2	89.0
Niger	7.0	86	86.1	91.4
Nigeria	110.1	58	57.6	68.5
Senegal	7.2	72	71.9	80.9
Sierra Leone	3.9	71	70.7	78.7
Togo	3.4	59	59.3	71.5

Source: World Bank 1989.

Table 4: Illiterate Population - Growth Rate and Percentage Change in West Africa, 1990

Country	Population (000) 1990	Age 15-19 Illiteracy 1990	Number of Illiterates (000) % Change		Illiteracy Rate % 1990		Total
			1990	1970-90	Male	Female	
Benin	4.741	59.4	1.904	34.3	68.3	84.4	76.6
Burkina Faso	9.007	66.8	4.137	41.5	72.1	91.1	81.8
Chad	5.679	...	2.280	19.1	57.8	82.1	70.2
Cote d'Ivoire	12.596	...	2.941	23.8	33.1	59.8	46.2
Ghana	15.020	12.5	3.258	- 0.9	30.0	49.0	39.7
Liberia	2.554	32.7	839	28.5	50.2	71.2	60.5
Mali	9.362	32.7	3.398	15.4	59.2	76.1	68.0
Niger	7.109	...	2.683	19.4	59.6	83.2	71.6
Nigeria	113.016	22.3	28.723	20.2	37.7	60.5	49.3
Senegal	7.369	...	2.525	25.9	48.1	74.9	61.7
Sierra Leone	4.151	...	1.830	36.1	69.3	88.7	79.3
Togo	3.455	36.8	1.070	23.4	43.6	69.3	56.7

Source: UNESCO 1991 (106-111).

By 1990, these figures, it is striking to observe, have altered in most cases quite significantly. Table 4 presents a picturesque account of the situation for the same countries as presented in Table 3. A quick observation of the population figures indicates that for almost all the countries population had increased by more than 100,000. Indeed, in some countries such as Ghana and Nigeria population had increased by at least one million.

It is also apparent from the Table that total percentage illiteracy rates had not remained stable. Whereas some countries had their figures going up by 9% to 10%, for example, Sierra Leone, other countries witnessed a drastic decline in their total percentage illiteracy rates. For Mali and Niger the figure by 1990 had fallen by at least 15%, for Senegal and Cote d'Ivoire by at least 10% and for Ghana and Nigeria by almost 7% - 8%. No doubt, these were indicative of the renewed efforts in these countries to find prophylactic measures to the 'illiteracy crisis'.

For these countries, the renewed attempts could be ascribed to the realisation that has dawned on them that progress and national development could be achieved not only by giving attention to formal education, which in any case benefitted only a few people, but more importantly by concentrating attention equally well on adult literacy programmes. Since the adult illiterate population which was and has been in the majority were a potential for sustainable national development. Indeed, the issue assumes more importance if cognizance is given to the fact that it is the majority of these adult illiterates especially who produce the bulk of the nation's foodstuffs and are engaged in indigenous and cottage industries.

A critical examination of the situation since 1960 points to the fact that West Africa, except from 1990 onwards, has not fared well as far as reduction of illiteracy rates is concerned. Except Ghana, the rest of the sub-region's countries have for the past three decades recorded figures exceeding 50%. No doubt, the problem even though as from 1990 seems to be receiving attention continues to remain phenomenal and hence calls for immediate intervention on an unprecedented scale. Indeed, the need for combined governmental and non-governmental effort in arresting the situation becomes more imperative.

The seemingly perennial and intractable nature of the problem is underpinned by the reality confronting the sub-region. Almost all the countries in the sub-region fall into the category defined as Least Developed Countries (LDCs). Out of a total of forty-one LDCs, Africa alone accounts for more than half, in fact twenty-five. Ten of the LDCs, just about one-quarter the total number are West African States. These are Benin, Burkina Faso, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Gambia, Mali, Niger, Sierra Leone and Togo (UNESCO 1991:92).

Considering the fact that these LDCs are considered the poorest in the world it becomes obvious why the trend has not witnessed any significant

improvements over the past three decades. Indubitably, in these countries education would find itself competing with other essential social services such as health for the limited financial resources. Other services which are not social, for example, the military would equally well impinge upon the budget hence making it difficult for adequate funds to be channelled into ensuring improved levels in the promotion of literacy. Taking these difficulties into consideration, it is not therefore surprising that illiteracy levels have continued to remain colossal in the sub-region.

Causes of High Rates of Illiteracy in West Africa

Multifaceted causes can be identified as explaining the high incidence of illiteracy in West Africa for the past three decades. These can be broadly classified, among others, into finance; those arising out of traditional attitudes and practices; the developing nature of these countries and the vicious circle of poverty that engulfs them; and finally those related to educated persons and the relevance of sustaining literacy. The ensuing discussion considers these.

Financial Constraints

It is important to point out that the financial constraints that have contributed to the high rates of illiteracy have exhibited themselves in several forms.

Limited Government Expenditure on Formal Education

Government expenditure on formal education from which many children of school-going age within the sub-region have benefitted has fluctuated since the dawn of independence. Whereas in some countries expendable income on education seemed to have soared high, in others it dropped to a low figure. In fact throughout the 1980s total public expenditure on formal education in sub-Saharan Africa including West Africa declined. This was the case for the period between 1980 and 1985, though an upward trend was observed after 1985. For West Africa this was particularly true of Ghana though for Nigeria and Mali, for instance, the reverse seemed to have been the case. It is also striking to observe that between 1975 and 1988 different trends mostly unfavourable with regard to the share of public expenditure on formal education in Gross National Product (GNP) in the developing countries, particularly those of West Africa were apparent. This situation, no doubt, has been largely a result of the changing priorities with regard to public expenditure in general.

Throughout the sub-region, government apportions resources in its budget not only to education but other social services as health, hence the already reduced budget for education even though education continues to take a substantial portion. Interestingly enough it is not even other social services that create a problem for adequate funding of education. Generally in Africa, it was estimated as at 1980 that total military hardware and arms

purchased in Africa was about US \$11 billion (African Co-ordination Team 1983). In a situation where both legitimate and illegitimate governments strive to protect their administration, it is really doubtful whether much funding could be made available for the development of other sectors.

Since 1960, when it was observed that in Africa as a whole only 16% of children of school age are enrolled in schools (Cerych 1965:10), a call was made for increased budgets by African countries for the promotion of education. This call witnessed a rise in GNP allocated to 44 African countries between 1960 and 1972 from 2.8% to 4.7% and the subsequent rise in budgetary allocations from 20 to 25 and in some instances 30%.

Amadou-Mahtar Mbow, the then Director-General of UNESCO, in 1976, informed a conference of African Ministers of Education that the long-term target set at Addis-Ababa that primary education should be universal, compulsory and free by 1980 would not be achieved (Thompson 1983:89). Even though he was of the opinion that a much higher level of enrollment would have been achieved by 1980, to wit; 59.1%, and indicated that the rate of progress would fall after 1980, it has been reported that by 1980 gross enrollment ratios in first level education in sub-Saharan Africa alone was 77.1% while the 1985 figure fell to 71.0%. (UNESCO 1991:30).

Despite the fact that latest UNESCO estimates are high ranging between 85 and 100% it needs be stated that many children are still unable to have access to school. Indeed, it has been emphasized that first level enrollment ratios in some regions are still significantly below 100% and the enrollment figures, especially in developing countries, among which are those of West Africa, include large numbers of over-age children. (UNESCO 1991:31).

Clearly, government expenditure to date on the promotion of formal education throughout the sub-region continues to be restricted since other problems bordering on social services/facilities have to be met. Insofar as this continues to be the case the ultimate aim of 100% enrollment for all children of school-going age will continue to be a mirage. Many children in this category, therefore, will continue to be denied access to education and will also drop out thus maintaining a high level of child illiteracy.

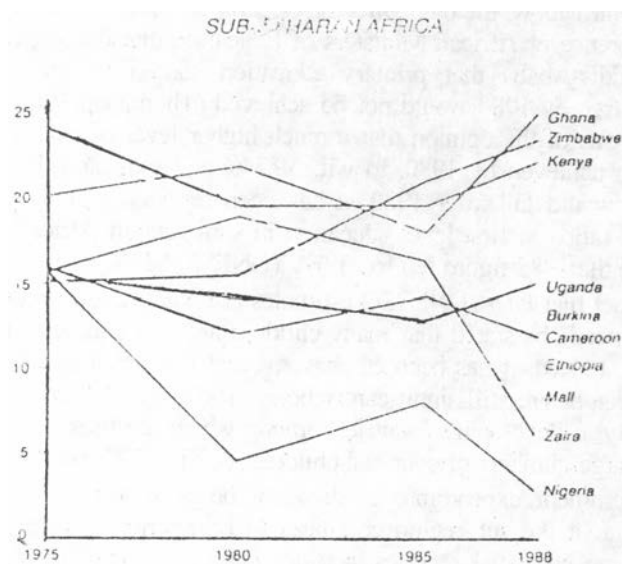
Increasing Number of Teachers and Students

The increasing number of teachers and students have resulted in decline in real incomes of the teachers and the inability of government, the main provider of education in the West African countries since independence to procure adequate school learning materials. It is interesting to observe that UNESCO estimates based on an analysis of twenty-six sub-Saharan African and twenty-five Latin American and Caribbean countries show an overall decline of 33% in public current expenditure per pupil measured in US dollars in the former, and 11% in the latter, in the period 1980-88.

In developing countries, West African countries inclusive, per pupil expenditures rose quite sharply as pupil/teacher rates fell and growth of

enrollment became increasingly concentrated on third level education. Figure 1 presents a graphical presentation of trends in percentage share of education in Central Government expenditure in some West African countries.

Figure 1: Trends in the Percentage Share of Education in Central Government Expenditure in Selected Countries, 1975-88



Source: IMF 1975-88.

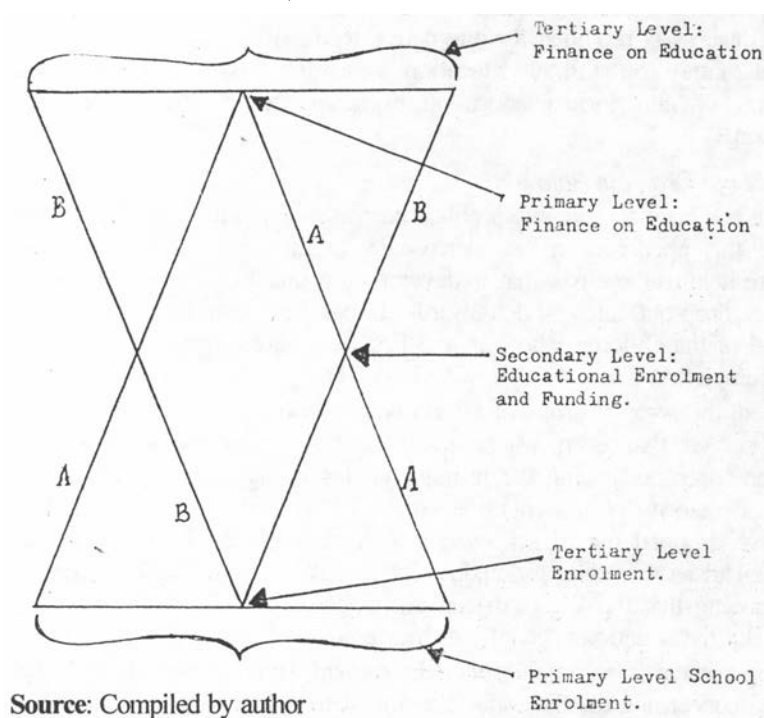
Note: The ten countries depicted are those with the largest population size, and for which expenditure data are available.

What is apparent is that in the final analysis many West African countries cannot really spend more on education or develop it in any way since the overall public current expenditure per pupil of US \$89 in 1988 is much higher than that prevailing in other regions when considered in relation to GNP per capita though it is lower than in any other region in absolute terms. (UNESCO 1991:40). The reason for such a situation is that much more would have to be spent on the education of each extra child enrolled.

Expenditure per Level of Education

Yet another dimension of the finance issue is the expenditure per level of education. It is a fact throughout West African countries that though the tertiary level consumes a greater bulk of the educational budget, it in fact has the smallest enrollment. Thus an educational pyramid that is 'inverted' is what becomes apparent. This is diagrammatically illustrated in figure 2.

Figure 2: The Inverted Structure



Triangle (a) which has the base down represents Primary Level whilst triangle (b) which has the base up represents tertiary education. The apex of the inverted pyramid (b) represents enrollment whilst that for triangle (a) represents funding. From the diagram it is obvious that despite increased enrollment at the primary level it receives the least in terms of funding as far as the three levels of education are concerned.

In 1960, it was observed that the educational pyramid expressed by the ratio in terms of enrollment rate for the three levels was 40:3:02. It was estimated that in 1965 the ratio would be 51:9:02 and by 1980 reach a set target of 100:23:2.1 (UNESCO/ECA 1961:22).

It is interesting to observe that in Ghana as of 1980 it was estimated that only 0.8% gained admission into the tertiary level while 7% entered the secondary school and the majority approximately 60-65% gained admission into the elementary school. These figures had not been altered significantly as at 1990.

Apparently, the huge investments made in tertiary education have adversely affected education at the lower echelon both in terms of finance, number and infrastructure. Compulsory and fee-free basic education though upheld as early as 1948 and re-echoed between 1951 and 1970 is yet to materialize. Many children continue to be denied access to formal education while no access is provided for alternative forms of education. Also heavy financial outlay on formal education generally has also affected the promotion of non formal education especially as it affects the adult population.

Increasing Drop-out Rate

Drop-out has been an endemic problem among students in West Africa. The trend of this phenomenon has increased with time even though contrary views are held to the effect that in developing countries, generally, the trend in school drop-out rates is downwards. It has been estimated that nearly one-third of the children who start the first grade are estimated to drop out before completing Grade 4 (UNESCO 1991:31).

Indeed, the issue of drop-out affects boys as much as it does girls. It has been observed that even where efforts are made to see girls through education 'drop-out during the primary grades is higher for girls than for boys in a majority of the countries in Africa' (UNESCO 1991:54). Many girls have dropped out of school due to broken homes, lack of funding, traditional ideas regarding girls education etc. Against this back drop, it is not surprising that the West African girl finds it difficult to stay longer in school. But the situation is equally disheartening with boys.

Using Ghana as a sample study, Brookman-Amisah (1992:80-81) has indicated concerning the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Area of Ghana that between 1987/88 and 1990/91, 980 students dropped out of the Junior Secondary School system. Of this number 518 were boys while 462 were girls, altogether constituting 25% of the drop-out rate. On the other hand Akuffo (1981) in an earlier work based on the Asamankese district of the Eastern Region in Ghana noted that more girls than boys drop out of school. It is quite unpleasant to note that even as at 1977 the number of drop-outs and those repeating classes in 39 countries in Africa, was estimated at 4 million (African Co-ordination Team 1983-84).

Rural Poverty and Traditional Practices and Attitudes

In the rural areas of West Africa, largely little effort is made towards acquiring literacy skills. What is relevant is committed to memory and

passed on from one generation to the next. In the fast changing twentieth and twenty-first centuries about to be ushered in, this process of knowledge acquisition becomes obsolete and yet it is striking to observe that the rural areas are yet to be incorporated into the mainstream of the rapid techno-scientific developments going on.

What becomes obvious in such a situation is the further entrenchment of illiteracy in the rural population. In addition, rural-urban migration develops since the majority of the youth becomes disenchanted with the situation, though the pull factors in the towns and cities do not guarantee immediate employment. Such a development further expands the population of the urban illiterates.

Rural poverty also acts as an additional factor in the high rate of illiteracy. The inability to foot the cost of education results in several cases where the youth take to the streets and do menial jobs. It needs be said that for these, though the benefits of education may be discernible, poverty, misplaced priorities and the suspicion of the effects of western formal education, not to talk of the negative attitude towards female education deter many a parent from sending their wards to school. On the contrary the marginalized within the cities/towns are unable to also support the education of their wards apparently because of the expenses of city life and the cost of education which they cannot afford. Against this background, drop-out and illiteracy are what stares the sub-region in the face.

Educated Persons and Sustenance of Literacy

The tendency to take literacy for granted has contributed gradually to an increasing illiteracy rate among educated people. For the majority of educated people going through formal education and graduating are enough 'certificate of literacy'. But as some psychologists namely Ausubel and Thorndike have indicated regarding the theory of disuse and forgetfulness, information may appear to be forgotten because it has faded through disuse; because it has been distorted, suppressed, or interfered with or because the individual does not have the proper retrieval uses (Lefrancois 1975). This cannot be doubted.

It can be realized that many secondary and tertiary school graduates make no effort to sustain their literacy levels. Many no longer read anything after school and normally excuse themselves by blaming their work burden or something else for their inability to cultivate a reading habit. The end result is graduate illiteracy or what may be referred to as 'educated-illiterates'.

The question of sustaining literacy is so crucial especially when consideration is given to the major changes being experienced worldwide. It is confounding to realize that whereas in Northern Europe and Japan literacy levels are 100% and newspaper circulation per thousand population —

evidence of the wide readership — is stupendous, for developing countries, including those of West Africa and Latin America, the figures are very low. For West Africa in particular the picture is depressing. Table 5 produces a picturesque account of the situation.

**Table 5: Newspaper Circulation Per Thousand Population
1988 Estimates**

West African Countries	Circulation	European Countries	Circulation
Benin	0.4		
		Switzerland	383.0
Burkina Faso	0.2		
Chad	0.3	Japan	567.7
Cote d'Ivoire	7.1	Germany (Federal)	410.2
Ghana	37.8		
Liberia	5.6		
Mali	0.5	Canada	221.7
Niger	0.8		
Nigeria	5.3		
Senegal	7.1	Norway	477.4
Sierra Leone	2.7		
Togo	5.1		

Source: World Bank (1989:230-31).

From the table, it is obvious that the percentages recorded for West African countries are ample indication of the lack or inadequate access of many to newspapers or that many are mostly illiterates hence patronage of the dailies is poor, or that not many newspapers are put in circulation. Certainly of the three reasons the first two seem most likely and if that is the fact then West African countries indeed, have a lot to do to promote literacy in the countries and amongst their peoples since it is only by so doing that the task of development can be made much easier.

Implications for Education and National Development

That a literate society is no doubt an enlightened, civilized and development-oriented one cannot be gainsaid, hence the need to eradicate illiteracy. To ensure total eradication both child and adult illiteracy must be vigorously tackled. Arthur Lewis observed that:

no programme is balanced which neglects adult education. In sub-Saharan Africa 80% of the adult population is illiterate, but can nevertheless be reached through systems of agricultural extension, health education and other forms of community development. It is not reasonable to make a fetish of literacy while neglecting what the illiterate can do (O'Connell 1965).

Adult Illiteracy and Education

Since independence considerable efforts have been made within the sub-region to promote adult functional literacy programme of all sorts. The objectives of these programmes have included:

- i) helping the illiterate adult attain functional literacy with a view to enabling him to acquire the art of reading, writing and numeration;
- ii) helping him appreciate his social, economic, cultural and political role within his own society;
- iii) enabling him understand his physical and biological environment;
- iv) helping him improve his skills as a worker thereby improving his own living standards and thus contributing to the economic development of his country; and
- v) above all helping him play his own role as a good citizen of his nation and the world (Fafunwa 1973:69).

By 1980 much had still not been achieved. Adult illiteracy levels continued to remain high. In recent times the strategy has been to combine traditional and functional literacy methods with more emphasis on work-oriented functional literacy. Ghana, whose adult illiteracy level remains appreciably lower than most West African countries, renewed efforts at promoting adult literacy through the Functional Literacy Programme commenced since 1985-86 and has continually received support and funding.

By September, 1992 it was estimated that about 11,000 facilitators had been trained by the Non-Formal Education Division of the Ministry of Education to help reduce illiteracy throughout Ghana (Ghana New Agency Report 1992:16). In addition to this newspapers published in the local vernaculars for example, the *Atunpan* have been put in circulation since

March 1992 as a means of sustaining the literacy levels that would be attained.

That adult literacy is an important pre-requisite in the drive towards development cannot be overlooked. In West Africa, the greater population of adult illiterates are those readily engaged in production, namely, farming of all sorts - animal husbandry, crop production etc. An illiterate population thus will have very little to contribute to increase production. Thompson (1983:224) has indicated that an illiterate population may be condemned to continuing the modes of production of its ancestors. And certainly this cannot augur well for West African countries in this new era of techno-scientific application in processes of production as well as improved means of cultivation for example, resort to mechanized farming. Education for such adult illiterates would undoubtedly enhance their productive capabilities since they would become creative and innovative in applying new ideas properly and correctly to their farming practices and hence ultimately increase production.

Education for adult illiterate women is equally important. In Africa, generally, women form the bulk of the initial working folk quite apart from the domestic responsibilities of keeping the house and raising children. The need for adequate education of women has been stressed time and over again essentially because of its enduring benefits.

The Addis Ababa Conference Report on 1961 spoke of the urgent need 'for the increased use of educated 'women power' in the working life of the community, the need to develop a new conception of the role of women in the life of the community - to improve their condition as home-makers to expand their opportunities of employment, to encourage a greater participation and leadership by women in community affairs and public life...' (Arthur Lewis, in Cowan et al, 1965:206). No doubt the education of adult illiterate women is crucial if a new role for the West African woman as far as development is concerned is to be realized.

Child Illiteracy and Education

The high rate of child illiteracy equally well implies that creative educational outlets need to be found to enable children become literate. In the first place, opportunity and access to education would have to be increased. Despite the implementation of the Accelerated Development Plan (ADP) for Education in 1951 and the Education Act of 1961 in Ghana and the Universal Primary Education in Nigeria in 1955 and 1975 respectively as well as in sister West African countries much still remains to be done as far as increasing accessibility to education for many more West African children is concerned.

In 1988 it was recorded by the World Bank that total percentage of school age children in the primary school 25-30 years ago was 69.0%, and

71.0% 15-20 years ago. (World Bank International Economics Department, September, 1989). At the Secondary level the total stood at 13.0%, 25-30 years ago; 37.0%, 15-20 years ago, with most recent estimates being put at 35.0%. In the former case - Primary Level - most recent estimates stand at approximately 73.0%. Certainly, these figures present a positive growing picture but do not register the fact that total enrollment has so far been achieved.

In addition to increasing opportunity and access to education a lot more needs to be done to keep the children at school much longer. A possible panacea to this situation is education of parents, particularly the rural folk about the benefits of formal education, improvement in the economy as well as in the income earnings of parents. Problems of broken homes, parental unemployment and irresponsibility towards their wards will also have to be addressed. More importantly, traditional views about female education need to be discarded for a more progressive thinking. The opportunities provided for children in the formal system must also be as varied as they will have to be exciting and challenging.

Libraries and study centres would also have to be provided nationwide to secure the reading needs of both children and adults. Children would also have to be encouraged to join such voluntary associations as the Girls Guide Association and the Boys Scout Association. Children, it is popularly held, are the future leaders of our respective countries. In this respect therefore, there is every need for intensive care and concern to be accorded to their educational well-being if they are to be able to play their role in future towards the development aspirations of West African countries.

Educated Persons and Sustenance of Literacy

A considerable number of graduates today have become 'illiterates' due to poor reading habits. The situation has been worsened where such graduates find themselves bogged down with office work within the civil services of their respective countries. What perhaps keeps them abreast is the occasional examinations they have to take for promotion. There is therefore, the need to encourage the literate population to keep up a healthy reading habit. In-service training and occasional courses, public talks and seminars need to be constantly promoted for the benefit of such people.

Implications of High Illiteracy Rates for National Development

A high rate of illiteracy is certainly a liability for a country since it becomes a formidable obstacle to development. Tom Gabriel (1983:305-312) has defined development as 'social and economic change, a change which involves alteration in behaviour over a wide front'. Implicit in this definition is the contention that whenever there is talk of development then reference

is made to social, economic and political processes through which conditions are improved for the majority of people.

Against this background it is apparent that the question of West African countries achieving development is an imperative one. An illiterate population would not only be unable to defend its social, economic and political rights, promote a healthy environment and ensure eradication of epidemics and diseases but it would also be unable to understand why effective measures have to be undertaken to control population growth by resorting to family planning techniques. Within such conditions it becomes difficult for the people to forge ahead in development. It must be stressed that the developed countries have advanced mainly because illiteracy levels are either non-existent or relatively low. Perhaps West African countries need to draw relevant examples from the situation of the developed countries in their attempt to eradicate illiteracy so that come the 21st century development in real terms would become a reality.

Conclusion

It is apparent that even though West African countries have since 1951 endeavoured to arrest illiteracy among children and adults much more effectively, a lot more work remains to be done. The high rates of illiteracy prevalent among both men and women has been a major difficulty in the development drive of these countries. Consequently, the need to provide a worthwhile adult functional literacy programme has dawned on these countries more than ever before. Today the adult illiterate can no longer be brushed aside. Just as much attention also needs to be focused on the tendency developing among graduates especially of the secondary and tertiary levels who backslide into ignorance and 'illiteracy'. It is perhaps within this context that the caution of Arthur Lewis regarding the education of the illiterates assumes significance. It should be hoped that West Africans will intensify efforts at eradicating this social canker worms so that in the very near future the tentacles of under-development would be shrugged off.

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