

1d. Education for All by 2013 - achievable goal or utopia?

One in five people over the age of 15 cannot communicate through literacy or take any part in the surrounding literate environment. The EFA Global Monitoring Report 2002 spelled out the scope of the challenge – over 861 million people without access to literacy. Two thirds of these people are women, with illiteracy thus adding to the deprivation and subordination to which women are already subject. In an interconnected world where literacy is a key to communication such exclusion is unacceptable.

- Literacy is a human right. Basic education, within which literacy is the key learning tool, was recognised as a human right over 50 years ago, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is a scandal that this right continues to be violated for such a large proportion of humanity.
- Literacy efforts up to now have proved inadequate, at national and international levels. The Decade is an opportunity to make a sustained collective effort which will go beyond one-shot programmes or campaigns.

The Literacy Decade is an initiative of the United Nations General Assembly, adopted unanimously in a resolution of December 2001. Thus it expresses strongly the collective will of the international community, both those who face a big literacy challenge and those who may be in a position to give assistance in meeting it. The nations of the world recognise that the promotion of literacy is in the interest of all, as part of efforts towards peace, respect and exchange in a globalising world.

The Literacy Decade is also part of broader international work in education and development. The Education for All (EFA) goal of increasing literacy rates by 50% by 2015 provides the overall target for the Decade, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) set the Decade in the context of poverty reduction. Literacy promotion is at the heart of both EFA and MDG goals.