

## LITERACY IN ETHIOPIA

Kenneth G. Brooks

Enormous problems undoubtedly face every country burdened with a high rate of illiteracy, yet there are solid grounds for believing that a high level of literacy could be achieved within a generation even in those countries where the present rate of illiteracy is as high as 70 to 80 per cent. This could be done if programmes concentrated on illiterates now between the ages of ten and thirty-five, and it could be achieved with the expenditure of only that proportion of the budget which education ministers agree should be spent on this activity. Such an effort could, of course, be effective only if it were backed by determination to eliminate the problem and by efficient organisation. In fact, present estimates suggest that the cost of any such programme would be more than covered by the early increases in productivity which would follow the spread of at least this minimum of education. Seen in such terms the problem of illiteracy cogently emphasises that a nation cannot afford to refuse the required initial expenditure, for the cost of widespread illiteracy in terms of lost utilisation of a nation's human resources is enormous. The failure by both the developing and the developed countries to tackle the problem vigorously is leading to a situation where, within a generation, the world-wide proportion of two illiterate adults to three literates will be reversed. A projection of present trends confirms that this will happen unless urgent remedial action is taken.

Ethiopia has an area of about 1,200,000 sq. kms., the size of France, Belgium, Spain and Portugal, and a population variously estimated at between 22 and 26 millions.

An estimate based on recent pilot surveys gives a population density of about 18 per square kilometre — one of the lowest in the world. Its topography has always played an important part in social organisation, still does so and will almost certainly continue to do so for many years. The population is spread thinly over a desert area in the east and northeast and more densely through the rain forest area of the southwest. The most heavily populated area is the high plateau which covers nearly two thirds of the country and in which deep canyons make communication difficult; so difficult indeed that different patterns of life exist within short distances of one another. The climate varies widely from area to area, from hot and dry in the lowlands of the east to hot and wet in those of the west, with an annual rainfall varying from 10 cms. to 280 cms. The central plateau has a temperate climate, but apart from the eastern desert areas most of the country has a season of heavy rainfall which greatly influences social life and, in particular, the kind of evening activity with which adult education and literacy classes must always be linked.

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people amounts to only 1,920,000 or 7.9% of the population. This figure includes the two large towns of Addis Ababa and Asmara which together account for 850,000. The population belongs, in the main, to six or seven large groups each with its own language. Several of these have links with Amharic, which is the mother tongue of between 3 and 5 million<sup>1</sup> but which is probably understood by some 10-12 million people.

Amharic is the official language of the country and the language through which literacy is taught. The country is divided into 14 provinces, each with a Governor-General and under centralised control, but it is proposed that eventually many of the powers at present exercised by the central Government over education, health, agriculture and community development will devolve upon local government areas. At that time the low level of literacy, particularly in the rural areas, may have a serious effect upon educational and social development and emphasise the difference which already exists between town and country.

The population is increasing at an estimated rate of 2% per annum, which means that the number of children reaching school age will soon be between 700,000 and 800,000 per annum with 45% of the population below the age of 15. Thirty-four percent are under 10, 11% are between 10 and 15, 50% between 15 and 59 and 4.8% are 60 and above. Important factors which will affect these percentages are the health service which is expanding throughout the country and the spread of hospitals and clinics, which now deal with over a million visits each year. This is a small number in relation to population and need, for the death rate of children aged 0-14 varies from 175.5 per thousand in some areas to 358 per thousand in others, with a median of 276 per thousand live births. Such a heavy loss represents a considerable wastage of human capital and investment. Life expectancy is between 35 and 40 years.<sup>2</sup> Improvements in the health and education services will, presumably, improve these figures, but will at the same time magnify the problems of social organisation and give a new urgency to the need for increased agricultural production. This has been growing in recent years only at a rate of 1½% per annum as against the population increase of 2%.

The population is 92% rural and this figure will remain high for many years; neither urbanisation nor industrialisation is likely to reduce the rural population to less than 75% in this century in spite of the industrial and commercial development of the last 20 years. Industry, including manufacturing, may by the year 2000 absorb 10% of the work force. If the present annual growth-rate in this area continues at 15%, manufacturing, almost entirely concentrated in Addis Ababa and Asmara, will employ 100,000 or 1.5% of the work force in 1972/73. In spite of these low figures for urban employment the attraction of the towns for young people is strong. It appears to be particularly so for young women as is seen from Table 1, which shows the great excess of females over males in many townships.

1. The Ethiopians, An Introduction to Country and People: E. Ullendorff, O.U.P., 1967. p. 125.

2. Introduction to Health and Health Education in Ethiopia; ed. E.F. Torry, M.D., 1967. p. 4.

**Table 1**  
**Age and Sex Composition**

Towns	Age Groups as Percentage of Total Population			Sex Ratio (Males Per 100 Females)	
	under 25	25-44	0-14	15-29	30-44
Dire Dawa ... ..	57.3	29.6	99.8	68.2	94.0
Harrar ... ..	55.5	8.4	96.5	69.1	77.8
Dessie ... ..	52.5	30.9	94.5	49.0	69.0
Debre Zeit ... ..	52.6	33.4	82.0	51.3	87.5
Debre Marcos ... ..	54.0	30.2	92.0	49.1	60.8
Assela ... ..	57.0	30.0	73.8	57.4	76.4

Source: Central Statistics Office - Survey of Major Towns in Ethiopia - 1968

The small number of men of working age in some areas indicates their need to seek work away from their own hometown. However, even with only a small percentage of the population living in the towns the number actually working still indicates a serious problem of unemployment as well as under-employment. This is shown clearly in Table II.

**Table II**  
**Population Working and Not Working**  
(as % of total of working age (10+ yrs.))

Towns	Sex	Working Age Group		Not Working Age Group	
		10-44	45	10-44	45
Dire Dawa	Male	20.9	6.9	15.5	3.2
	Female	6.5	1.5	37.9	7.4
Harrar	Male	20.2	9.3	12.9	1.5
	Female	8.8	4.2	35.6	7.3
Debre Marcos	Male	14.6	7.0	14.8	2.5
	Female	9.6	4.3	33.0	7.9
Assela	Male	16.0	5.8	16.4	2.6
	Female	7.4	2.8	42.0	9.9
Dessie	Male	17.2	9.6	12.5	1.4
	Female	10.9	3.0	37.3	8.0

Source: Central Statistics Office - Survey of Major Towns in Ethiopia - 1968.


This social pattern has had, of course, a profound effect upon educational standards and the degree of literacy, both of which have in their turn influenced the social pattern.

This is the setting in which the attack on illiteracy has to be made. Nor can the attack be made in education only, for individuals have to be stimulated to greater efforts in agriculture and industry if society is to expand existing services and provide new ones so that both individuals and the community may enjoy the rightful heritage of every human being.

Speaking in Addis Ababa on 11th May, 1968, Henry B. Labouisse, Executive Director of UNICEF said, "In most developing countries something like half the total population is under 20. The odds confronting the average child in these countries are still overwhelming; it has been estimated that they are 4 to 1 against his receiving any trained medical attention at birth or afterwards; that they are 50-50 he will get no formal education; that if he does get to school they are 3 to 1 he will not complete the elementary grades. The simple eloquence of these indicators of need is so staggering that one hardly dares think of what they really mean in wasted lives and talents." How applicable, in fact, are these estimates to Ethiopia? In the matter of medical attention the adverse odds are certainly greater than those for developing countries as a whole: only one in six will start in first grade and only one in 24 children of school age will complete primary school. These figures are relevant to the problems of literacy, not only today but over the next two decades.

The following tables tell their own story for they illustrate several important factors relating to education and, in particular, to literacy and adult education. They indicate also the demands which will be made on these services within the next generation.

Table III shows the extent to which the problem is, and for a long time will remain, at its most acute in the rural areas.

Table III 

	Urban	Rural	Total
1. Population	1,700,000	20,500,000	22,200,000
% of Total	7.7	92.3	100
2. School-age Population (7-14)	339,000	4,359,400	4,698,400
% of 1	19.9	21.3	21.2
3. School enrolment	233,000	139,000	372,000
% of 2	68.7	3.2	7.93

Source: Figures provided by the C.S.O. — 1966.

No parallel figures are available for later years but the percentage of school attendance is now considered to be 9.92.

The figure of 1,700,000 is somewhat exaggerated as it includes as urban areas all those municipalities with a population above 500. If 3,000 is taken as the standard for an urban municipality this figure would be 1,500,000.

**Table IV**  
**Percentage of Age-Grade in School**

Grade	Age	1957-60	1964-65
1	7	14.9	17.8
4	10	5.1	6.3
6	12	2.5	3.8
8	14	1.8	2.3
10	16	.6	1.1
12	18	.2	.3
College	19	1	.2

**Source:** Manpower Strategy for Developing Countries, Lessons from Ethiopia, Ginsberg and Smith, Columbia University Press, 1967, p. 52.

From Table IV it is easy to deduce that, in addition to the large back-log of illiteracy among those who became adults within the last two generations there is a continuous accumulation of illiterates. Although the percentage of literates is growing, the number of illiterates is rising steadily as education fails to cope with the rise in the number of births and the longer life expectancy resulting from improved health and feeding.

Table IV assumes that pupils enrolled in various classes are of a homogeneous age-group. This is far from being so, for typical classes invariably have many over-age pupils, although efforts are now being made to exclude them from primary school. This regulation will do little to improve the literacy rate unless classes in reading and writing are provided for those pupils too old for a full primary course.

That the school system will still be unable to cope with more than a small percentage of school-age children within the next few years can be seen from Table V.

**Table V \***  
**School Enrollment 1965-69 (actual)**

Grades	1965/66	1966/67	1967/68	1968/69
1 - 4	323,404	344,082	373,208	415,549
5 - 6	55,346	65,628	79,249	98,071
7 - 8	28,812	36,480	44,777	56,889
9 - 12	21,626	23,832	26,690	32,208
Total 1 - 12	429,188	470,022	523,924	602,717

**Source:** School Census for Ethiopia, 1965/1969.

The number of children of school age in 1968-69 was about 3,500,000 of whom about 13.4% were at school. The target in the Third Five-Year Plan was to be 700,000 or 20% to 21%, but this has now been reduced to 18%. Table IV is a further illustration of the accumulation of illiteracy. ✓

**Table VI**  
**Cumulative Number of Students Completing Selected Grades**  
**1950/1968 (crudely approx.)**

Grades Reached	Total Number of Students in 18 Years
2nd Grade	759,646
4th Grade	299,628
6th Grade	182,275
8th Grade	103,772
10th Grade	40,958
12th Grade	9,426

Source: Ginsberg and Smith, p. 48, brought up to date.

In developed countries it is assumed that 4 years of schooling are the essential basis of permanent literacy — in developing countries it is reasonable to assume that six years of primary schooling should be the minimum requirement.

It is probable that a large proportion of those who do not complete the primary school course will soon become illiterate for they have little incentive to strengthen their already inadequate acquaintance with reading materials. Literacy classes must be provided at a later stage for these drop-outs if they are not to join the army of illiterate adults. The tables on the following pages make even clearer not only the size of the problem of literacy and its rural incidence, but indicate where the major difficulties lie.

Table VII estimates, by province, school-age population and elementary school attendance.

Table VIII estimates, by province, school-age population and junior high school attendance.

Table IX estimates, by province, school age population and senior high school attendance, including vocational and special schools.

Table VII ✱

Estimated School-Age Population and Elementary School Attendance by Province \*

(In Grades 1 - 6: Children Aged 7 - 12)

1967-1968

Province	Population Ages 7-12	School Attendance Grade 1-6	Attendance as % of Age Group
Addis Ababa	117,000	39,133	33.5
Shoa	638,000	58,043	9.0
Bale	191,000	5,182	2.7
Eritrea	242,000	43,492	18.0
Illubabor	118,000	14,796	12.5
Wollega	198,000	23,414	11.8
Kaffa	185,000	11,669	6.3
Begemder	234,000	20,130	8.6
Sidamo	398,000	20,863	5.2
Arussi	127,000	15,348	12.1
Gojam	255,000	22,945	9.0
Tigre	302,000	16,219	5.4
Gemu Goffa	137,000	7,706	5.6
Harrar	462,000	20,736	4.5
Wollo	377,000	19,061	5.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,981,000</b>	<b>338,737</b>	<b>8.5</b>

\* Government Schools Only

Source: School Census for Ethiopia.



Table VIII

School Age Population and Junior High School Attendance

(Government Schools Only)

1967/1968

Province	Population Age 13-14	Attendance Grades 7-8	Attendance as % of Age Group
Addis Ababa	24,900	8,733	35.1
Shoa	149,200	5,850	3.9
Eritrea	55,800	6,338	11.4
Bale	44,600	483	1.1
Wollega	46,200	1,668	3.6
Kaffa	43,500	1,087	2.5
Sidamo	93,200	2,069	2.2
Begemder	54,600	1,587	2.9
Arussi	29,600	1,300	4.4
Gojam	59,600	1,707	2.9
Harrar	107,600	2,352	2.2
Tigre	70,600	1,968	2.8
Illubabor	27,500	603	2.2
Wollo	88,100	2,078	2.4
Gemu Gofa	32,000	571	1.8
TOTAL	927,000	38,394	4.1

Source: School Census for Ethiopia.

**Table IX**

**School Population and High School Attendance including  
Vocational and Special Schools**

(Government Schools Only)  
1967/1968

Province	Population Age 15-18	Attendance Grades 9-12	Attendance as % of age group
Addis Ababa	44,700	10,493	23.3
Shoa	267,800	3,484	1.3
Eritrea	100,100	4,283	4.3
Bale	80,200	225	0.3
Harrar	193,200	2,550	1.3
Gojam	107,000	1,497	1.4
Kaffa	78,100	612	0.8
Begemder	98,000	1,314	1.3
Tigre	126,700	1,170	0.9
Arussi	53,200	517	0.9
Wollega	83,000	591	0.7
Sidamo	167,300	772	0.5
Illubabor	49,400	210	0.4
Wollo	158,200	1,072	0.7
Gemu Gofa	57,400	235	0.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,664,300</b>	<b>29,025</b>	<b>1.7</b>

Source: School Census for Ethiopia

To complete the picture of school-enrolment, which is the indicator of illiteracy over the next two generations, mention must be made of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Schools and of the non-government schools. Until 1933, when the Government schools were opened, almost all education was given by the Church or the missions. For more than sixteen centuries the Church has enabled the national culture to be passed on from generation to generation. For that homogeneity which distinguishes Ethiopia in the African continent the nation owes much to the Church. But literacy as taught by the church was not literacy as we think of it today, for the main concern of the Church was teaching the liturgy and Ge'ez, its own special language. In recent years the Church has played a part in the national education system, and a number of its schools have followed the Ministry's curriculum. In 1967/68 there were some 17,000 pupils in such schools, although most of them provided only the first few grades. Although this total had increased to about 19,000 in 1968/69 the general picture remains the same.

This is clear from Table X, which refers only to those Church Schools accepting the Ministry curriculum.

**Table X**  
**Number of Pupils in Church Schools following the Ministry Curriculum**

Number	Grade
Grade 1	8,042 ✕
Grade 2	3,964 ✕
Grade 6	604 ✕
Grade 8	253
Beyond Grade 8	336
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13,199</b>

Source: School Census for Ethiopia 1967-68

The enormous drop-out between grades 2 and 6 in the 117 officially recognised Church Schools may be caused by transfer to Government Schools, but the contribution of permanent literates by these schools is clearly very small indeed. Throughout the country there are 1,557 Orthodox Church Schools with 1,684 teachers and some 53,000 pupils. These are obviously one-teacher schools for the most part and it is doubtful whether the level of education is very high, the concentration still being on teaching the very young the prayers of the Church and giving them doctrinal instruction. In addition in many of the 13,153 Orthodox Churches some literacy work is carried out by the clergy, of whom there are about 171,000. Though the churches may well play a valuable part in local and national life, it is doubtful whether their instruction makes a substantial contribution to the reduction of illiteracy as at present understood.

In 1961 in Addis Ababa nearly half the boys aged 5-9 and over one third of the girls had attended priests' schools, and in the age-group 10-14 the numbers were almost equal for attendance at priests' schools and other schools.<sup>1</sup> Where children transfer from the priests' school to the Government school they are usually able to read and write. The ability in these subjects is likely, however, to be so low that it will soon be lost, as there are many children who do not continue their education. In the late 1950's there seems to have been a marked increase in attendance at priests' schools, indicating the new demand for education which the Ministry of Education was then unable to meet. The numbers at Government schools have increased more rapidly in recent years. The influence of the church schools in an earlier period is evidenced by the large proportion of the over-thirties who attended them.

Mission schools and private schools make a more substantial contribution to the education system than schools of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The non-government schools tend to be more highly developed at all levels in the areas where the government school enrolment is also relatively high. The part they play in the attack on illiteracy is strongest in some of the country areas, far from the capital. Even there the level of achievement in mission schools is not

1. *The Campaign Against Illiteracy in Ethiopia: A Report Prepared for UNESCO: Kenneth G. Books, 1966. Table XI.*

very high and the contribution to literacy is not as substantial as the attendance figures suggest, because there is little follow-up to consolidate the reading and writing learned in the schools.

The comparative role played by non-government primary schools in providing the early stages of education is shown in Table XI, which is given below.

While naturally the main educational interest has been the setting up of a school system, a number of organisations began literacy programmes shortly after World War II. The intention was to give fundamental education to adults, but many of the students were children who had been unable to find places in the schools. Some church and mission bodies have been working in this field since the late 1940's, but the great move forward came in 1955 with the publication of the Imperial Edict enjoining on everybody the pursuit of literacy. Most churches undertook literacy programmes for their members. The Ministry of Education offered encouragement by providing teachers, offering the use of its schools and setting up training colleges, while the National Literacy Campaign Committee was set up under the patronage of the Emperor and with very influential support.

Table XI \*

**Enrolment of Students in All Types of Primary Schools**  
1968/69 (1961 E.C.)

Province	Government	Mission	Private	Church	Total
	1-6	1-6	1-6	1-6	Grades 1-6
Addis Ababa	42,877	5,858	26,146	1,956	76,837
Arussi	17,718	1,398	1,766	442	21,324
Bale	6,701	1,342	—	—	8,043
Begemder	23,223	1,389	184	—	24,796
Eritrea	48,207	13,482	15,718	2,668	80,075
Gemu Goffa	9,366	913	—	—	10,279
Gojam	23,432	220	—	928	24,580
Harrar	24,071	2,875	4,440	1,018	32,404
Illubabor	16,337	281	—	—	16,618
Kaffa	14,164	2,250	188	152	16,754
Shoa	65,095	6,000	5,887	3,854	80,836
Sidamo	24,081	5,314	1,557	1,713	32,665
Tigre	17,668	1,930	—	3,686	23,284
Wollega	27,646	6,265	5,458	1,424	40,793
Wollo	21,414	1,297	1,131	490	24,332
Total 1968	382,000 ✓	50,814 ✓	62,475 ✓	18,331 ✓	513,620
Total 1967	338,737 ✓	41,600 ✓	54,912 ✓	17,208 ✓	452,457 ✓
Increase	43,263	9,214	7,563	1,123	61,163
% increase	13	22	14	7	14

**Note:** This table includes 1967/68 (1960 Eth. Cal.) figures of 47 Government, 33 mission, 62 private and 38 church primary schools not reported in 1968/69.

**Source:** Annual Report, Ministry of Education, Ethiopia 1968/69. Appendix 3, Tables 2 and 3.

For the most part these schemes were organised and staffed on a voluntary basis as part of the activity of an existing body. Books and other reading materials were produced and were distributed free to students by many of the organisations. As a piece of largely voluntary work the cumulative total of achievement is impressive, with three quarters of a million students passing through the literacy courses run by the various bodies during the period 1964/68. Had there been a fully-developed school system and no large backlog of illiteracy this would have sufficed to meet the demands of the expanding population. With illiteracy already at a high level throughout the country and a school system able to accept each year only 140,000 Grade 1 entrants from among more than 550,000 of the annual age-group a coordinated effort and a greatly expanded programme at the official level were obviously essential.

**Table XII**  
**Statistical Data on National Literacy Programme and Continuing Education**

In 1965 the percentage of illiteracy in Ethiopia was given in the Unesco Studies of Illiteracy as 92% of the males over 15 years of age and 91% of those over 10. While such statistics are very difficult to collect and even more difficult to assess, recent surveys conducted by the Central Statistical Office in three provinces and twenty-three main towns support these figures to within 1 or 2 percent. In figures these percentages amounted to 11,670,000 over the age of 15 and 13,796,000 over the age of 10, with 2,126,000 between the ages of 10 and 15. The number will increase each year by at least 250,000 as only one quarter of the age group enters primary school and of these only one in six stays long enough to become permanently literate.

**Table XII**  
**Statistical Data on National Literacy Programme and Continuing Education**

Year	Adult Literacy Campaign Programme			Primary Adult Education		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1964	158,778	35,172	193,950	5,027	1,418	6,445
1965	107,660	14,747	122,407	5,561	1,635	7,196
1966	126,057	19,817	145,874	6,761	2,013	8,774
1967	129,527	23,630	153,157	8,207	2,769	10,976
1968	130,753	42,703	173,456	8,613	2,532	11,145
Total	652,775	136,069	788,844	34,169	10,367	44,536

Year	Secondary Adult Education			University College Level		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1964	180	86	266	1,917	286	2,185
1965	350	163	513	1,950	276	2,226
1966	706	212	918	2,297	274	2,571
1967	717	337	1,054	2,693	15	2,708
1968	4,007	1,347	5,354	2,495	16	2,511
Total	5,960	2,145	8,105	11,352	867	12,201

**Five Years Literacy & Continuing  
Education Data**

Year	Male	Female	Total
1964	165,902	36,962	202,864
1965	115,521	16,821	132,342
1966	165,821	22,316	158,137
1967	141,144	26,751	167,895
1968	145,868	46,598	192,466
<b>Total</b>	<b>704,256</b>	<b>149,448</b>	<b>853,704</b>

**Major Participants**

National Literacy Campaign  
 National Community Development  
 Yemisratch Dimtse  
 Ethiopian Orthodox Church  
 Sudan Interior Mission  
 Territorial Army Police and  
 Armed Forces  
 YMCA and YWCA  
 Ethiopian Women's Welfare Association  
 University, Teachers Training Institute  
 and Higher Secondary Students.  
 Ethiopian Students in North America  
 Others.

Source: Department of Adult Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education, Ethiopia, 1969.

**Table XIII**

**Adult Education and Literacy Department (Ministry of Education)  
and Voluntary Organisations**

1968 Statistics (1/12/67 - 30/12/68)

Provinces	Ministry of Education			National Literacy Campaign		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Addis Ababa	2,908	2,515	5,423	4,989	1,279	6,268
Arussi	3,878	757	4,635	1,904	509	2,413
Bale	986	96	1,082	✓ 249	35	284
Begemder	3,560	1,215	4,775	1,752	312	2,064
Eritrea	4,682	1,801	6,483	3,159	1,042	4,201
Gemu Goffa	3,915	458	4,373	606	93	699
Gojam	5,260	836	6,096	1,283	313	1,596
Harrar	3,690	1,728	5,418	1,994	342	2,336
Illubabor	1,188	308	1,496	2,031	342	2,373
Kaffa	8,085	1,862	9,947	2,211	267	2,478
Shoa	3,422	844	4,266	3,292	889	4,181
Sidamo	3,132	937	4,069	2,538	459	2,997
Tigre	4,910	10,101	15,011	3,839	1,247	5,086
Wollega	9,054	2,513	11,567	1,546	482	2,028
Wollo	4,379	492	4,871	1,326	162	1,488
<b>Total</b>	<b>63,049</b>	<b>26,463</b>	<b>89,512</b>	<b>32,719</b>	<b>7,773</b>	<b>40,492</b>

Other Voluntary Participants	Male	Female	Total
Yemisratch Dimts	28,517	6,388	34,905
National Community Development	2,247	198	2,445
H.S.I. University Students	1,841	1,248	3,089
Y.M.C.A.	1,095	—	1,095
D.B. Teacher Training Institute	445	198	643
Territorial Army	605	—	605
Orthodox Church (Kaffa)	169	103	272
Ethiopian Women's Welfare Association	—	300	300
Mitchell Cotts	22	—	22
Aboare Community Centre	31	23	54
Chamber of Commerce	13	9	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>34,985</b>	<b>8,467</b>	<b>43,452</b>

**Year's Grand Total:** 173,456 of which, women: 42,703

**Source:** Department of Adult Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education, Ethiopia, 1969.

Some of those who leave school early do, however, continue their education at evening school and literacy classes, but few are able to do so. As we can see from Table XIII the number who attend classes arranged by the voluntary bodies is also comparatively small.

This is a gloomy picture for it shows a massive problem getting worse each year in spite of the efforts of many devoted people. The tables already presented have drawn attention to many facets of the problem, which is particularly a rural one. That this is so is vividly demonstrated in Table XIV, which derives from a survey of educational attainment recently made in a new settlement area in South-Western Ethiopia.

**Table XIV**  
**Education level of persons aged 7 or over in a new settlement area**

Sub-division	None	Ungraded School	Grade Completed			
			1	2	3	4-7
Farrucho	66.22	1.35	9.45	6.76	10.89	5.41
Buke	90.91	—	6.82	2.27	—	—
Dangola	96.43	—	1.19	1.19	—	1.19
Farrucho	66.22	1.35	9.45	6.76	10.89	5.41
Lelena	94.34	—	1.89	1.89	—	1.89
Lower Sepa	76.47	5.88	2.94	2.94	—	11.79
Shoya	88.23	—	5.88	2.94	2.94	2.94
Upper Sepa	75.28	4.49	4.49	5.64	2.25	7.87

**Source:** U.N. Work-Oriented Adult Literacy Project Survey 1969 (Distribution limited).

This point is made because there are economic factors involved which might make a drive for an increase in urban rather than rural literacy a more immediately rewarding exercise as far as the economic development of the country is concerned. In the urban areas 52% of the males and 16% of the females over the age of 10 are reported as literate, while corresponding percentages for the rural areas are below 10% and 1% respectively.

If, as seems reasonable, it is assumed that literacy in the more distant provinces is less than in the three areas recently surveyed — Shoa (with Addis Ababa), Gojam and Arussi — then the rural percentages are likely to be 6½ for males and less than ½% for females. For the whole country, literacy overall is about 12% for males and 1% for females. This draws attention to another factor. In Ethiopia, as throughout the developing countries, illiteracy is particularly a feminine as well as a rural problem. Tables XV and XVI emphasise the rural nature of the problem, for they show that a fair degree of literacy has existed for some time in the towns where even among the 65 plus age group the rate is 29% compared to 65% of those between the ages of 10 and 14.

This same improvement is not to be seen in the rural areas where the literacy rate for women over 25 years of age is effectively nil and in the 10-14 age group is a mere 1½%. The situation as regards rural males is even more striking and more depressing because it represents a decline in male literacy from 10-12 percent in the 20-44 age group to 7% in the age group 16-19. This may have been caused by the decline in church educational activity in the rural areas, where government schools have not yet been established, but if this is so, and if the figures for literacy have been based on attendance at church schools, then we must face the fact that any literacy achieved would not be adequate to the demands of today. Since ten million Ethiopians over the age of 10 years are country-dwellers these figures force us to the conclusion that in recent years there has been an overall increase in illiteracy.

**Table XV**  
**Literacy rates for urban area by size of town in %**

**Males**

Age Group	Population under 10,000	10,000-19,999	20,000-99,999	over 100,000	Total urban
10-14	60	53	62	71	65
13-19	60	58	62	60	60
20-24	52	51	62	60	58
25-29	44	56	51	54	50
30-34	45	47	50	) 54	48
35-39	41	40	45		
40-44	44	35	45	) 47	42
45-49	41	33	40		
50-54	35	32	35	) 41	37
55-59	40	37	34		
60-64	29	31	25	) 32	29
65-69	13	38	24		
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>52</b>



**Females**

Age Group	Population under 10,000	10,000-19,999	20,000-99,999	over 100,000	Total urban
10-14	39	30	43	51	44
15-19	33	22	26	36	32
20-24	7	6	10	18	13
25-29	3	4	7	12	9
30-34	6	4	3	)	
35-39	3	2	4	)	6
40-44	1	2	3½	)	
45-49	0	3	2	)	5
50-54	2	3	1	)	
55-59	4	4	3	)	4
60-64	3	2	0	)	
65 plus	0	1	2	)	3
Total	12	10	13	19½	16
Both Sexes	28	26	29	34	34

Based on C.S.O. samples

**Table XVI**  
**% Literacy by Age and Sex**

**Males**

Age pop.	Urban	Rural	Total %
10-14	65	7	11
15-19	60	7	11
20-24	58	12	16
25-34	50	10	13
35-44	48	11	14
45-54	42	9	12
55-64	37	6	8
65 +	29	5	7
Total	52	9½	13

**Females**

Age pop.	Urban	Rural	Total %
10-14	44	1%	7
15-19	32	1.2	6½
20-24	13	1	6
25-34	9	1	6
35-44	6	—	6
45-54	5	—	5
55-64	4	—	4
65 +	3	—	3
Total	16	½	6

Based on C.S.O. samples

That the quality of education may have improved steadily during the same period is some encouragement, but does not reduce the size of the problem. What is clear is that the overall percentage will only improve with substantial educational development in the rural areas and that, however great the need in the towns, no programme should ignore the urgent needs of the rural population, especially amongst the young.

Reference has already been made to the number of languages spoken throughout Ethiopia. As few of these have any tradition of written representation, and hence no written literature, degrees of literacy can only be measured on the basis of an understanding of Amharic, the mother tongue of the central plateau which covers the provinces of Shoa, Gojam, Begemdir and parts of Wollo and Wolega. Amharic is not only the official language of the country but also the language of all teaching in primary schools. The spread of Amharic is likely to be rapid within the next few generations as more and more children attend school, although they will probably continue to speak their mother tongue when out of school and certainly as long as their parents and elders have not learnt Amharic.

The additional difficulty in teaching literacy where Amharic is a second language is shown in the results obtained from surveys conducted in widely separated rural areas throughout the south. These make abundantly clear how big a problem the teaching of reading and writing in Amharic will be.

Table XVII gives results from Abela, one of the settlement areas in Sidamo where Unesco is engaged in a functional literacy project.

**Table XVII**

**Literacy status in Amharic of persons aged 7 years and over in an area not speaking Amharic as the mother tongue.**

Sub-division	Literacy Category			Total	Percentage of Illiterates
	Read and Write	Read only	Illiterate		
Buke	35	10	175	220	84.09
Dangola	10	—	405	415	97.59
Farrucho	100	35	235	370	72.59
Lalena	4	8	188	200	98.00
Lower Sepa	25	10	135	170	85.29
Shoya	15	10	145	170	91.18
Upper Sepa	75	40	330	445	83.15
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>1,613</b>	<b>1,990</b>	<b>86.73</b>

**Source:** U.N. Work-Oriented Adult Literacy Project Survey 1969 (Distribution limited.)

The numbers involved in the survey were small, but similar checks made elsewhere by the Survey of Language Use and Language Teaching in Eastern Africa suggest that this situation is likely to be characteristic of other parts of the country. For instance, results of similar surveys in Kaffa and Arussi, two

other Unesco sub-project areas, give only a slightly higher percentage of Amharic speakers. In Kaffa the investigation was limited to an area within 5 kms. of the main road between the coffee-producing and marketing towns of Jimma and Agaro. Here the percentage of those understanding Amharic rose to 35%. It is thought that a survey of an area extending beyond 5 kms. from the road would probably give results below those for Abela.

### **The New Attack on the Problem**

Many as are the problems confronting the organisers of any literacy campaign in Ethiopia, the situation differs only slightly from that in almost any developing country: an enormous backlog of illiteracy, a school system unable to cope with the school-age population and a budget at present quite inadequate to the need. In these circumstances the Ethiopian Government has decided to take the main responsibility for organising literacy work throughout the country. It is therefore coordinating the activities of existing organisations and has set up its own Department to undertake a programme commensurate with the problem. In addition to the programmes of the churches, missions and voluntary bodies it is hoped that two important projects will operate side by side with the national programme. One is a project of functional literacy which is financed jointly by the Ethiopian Government and the United Nations Special Fund, working through UNESCO, and the other a project undertaken by the Swedish International Development Authority as an experiment in the development of a limited area. The organisation behind each of the programmes is important since together they give some hope of reducing to a manageable size Ethiopia's related problems of illiteracy and underdevelopment.

The Government's campaign does not at first sight offer anything strikingly fresh, but in the context of Africa's campaign against illiteracy there are some important new features. The size of classes is to be limited to what teachers, mainly untrained, can manage, and the primer is written in terms of the daily activities of the students even to the extent of recognising differences in the way of life of different areas.

Most important of all, literacy will be linked with continuing education, and in this field the Ministry of Education will make not only a functional approach but will have a close relationship with such Ministries as Health, Agriculture and National Community Development.

For the first time the Government is paying a token sum to monitors for literacy classes and it is expected that there will be no difficulty in finding enough teachers, although the growth of a money economy may encourage even school boys and girls to expect a greater reward than a mere honorarium. The Scheme sets out to correct what has been perhaps the greatest weakness of all African literacy campaigns, the lack of follow-up material to ensure that students consolidate their knowledge and make certain that the newly-developed literacy does not disappear through non-use. Experience has shown that literacy can be lost almost as quickly as it was achieved. A National Council of Literacy and Continuing Education has been set up to assist the Minister and ensure coordination of the activities of all organisations concerned. This is representative of all work in this field and will carry weight in all sections of the national life: governmental, religious, academic as well as business and industrial, trade union and professional. This Council will not only make available a wide experience

but will be able to undertake the raising of funds for purposes which cannot easily be covered by a Ministry. These include the buying of books for those unable to afford them, the production of specialised reading material, the organising of competitions to encourage writers and so on. A sub-committee of this Council meets frequently and has executive power.

The administrative cadre within the Ministry consists of a Director-General, assisted by a director in charge of class organisation throughout the country and a director responsible for the production of reading materials. This section will not only ensure that the primers used initially are improved as experience is gained, but will produce ample reading material, books, booklets, pamphlets and broadsheets for new literates and will encourage the publishing industry to make these widely available. The director in charge of class organisation will work through the full-time Literacy and Adult Education Officers appointed in each province. He will also supervise the radio programmes which will be broadcast from Addis Ababa to the whole country and those on TV to Addis and the nearby areas. It is hoped that special officers will be appointed to work with such organisations as the Awash Valley Authority, which is concerned with the development of a vast river valley where plantations for the production of cotton and sugar have been started. The experience gained in working with such special groups as rural cooperatives, plantation workers, construction workers and nomad tribes in an area of this kind will be relevant to large areas throughout the country. The finding of staff for a new Department is difficult in a developing country as the number of suitable or qualified people is too small to meet all the demands made upon them. To find so many for a single Department at one time was a tremendous problem, yet on the fifteen Provincial Officers will rest a great responsibility for the success of the Government programme. The Provinces range in population from 3/4 million to 3½ million, scattered in small hamlets, often in almost inaccessible places, many cut off for months during the rainy season. Each officer is setting up a provincial literacy committee to coordinate and facilitate the work of local groups.

This committee will arrange for classes, accommodation, publicity, registration of students, and the collection of payments for books. The local committee will also help in supervision, advise the Literacy Officer on the selection of teachers and ensure that follow-up reading material is distributed regularly. The Provincial Literacy Officer ensures supplies of class materials and sets up distribution centres. In conjunction with other agencies he organises groups of young people to serve the classes as monitors, to publicise them and supplement class teaching by tutorial assistance to individuals and small groups in their own homes. Everybody who has completed 9 or 10 years' school education will have to be mobilised if sufficient teachers are to be found for the large number of classes required by the programme. The training of these monitors and teachers will be done locally under the direction of the Provincial Officer, whose job is also to set up an organisation of citizen volunteers consisting of those few in the rural areas and small towns who have had secondary education. These volunteers should arrange weekly or fortnightly meetings of new literates to discuss the follow-up material. In effect they will organise the programme of continuing education which will include community activities and civic education on a wide scale.

## The Use of Mass Media

Experiments in the use of radio for the teaching of literacy have been carried out in Ethiopia during the last two or three years. The experiments have not been on a sufficiently large scale to justify any certainty about the validity of the results, but impressions have been gained which suggest that radio can be used as an effective supplement to the monitor in literacy teaching and particularly in the continuous training of monitors and supervisors.

Monitors will be provided for radio classes in the same way as for ordinary classes, the main difference being that in the radio class the monitor will have the benefit of guidance from the radio teacher who will be chosen for his professional competence. The new primer which has been prepared for class teaching will be used by the radio tutor also, in the hope that it will be found equally suitable for all types of approach: radio, traditional and TV. If the book is found to be satisfactory, much saving in production costs in the printing of texts and in the evaluation of teachers and of their work will be achieved.

It is expected that TV will also be used as a teaching medium, but this must be confined to Addis Ababa and perhaps the small but comparatively densely populated area which extends to 60 miles south of the capital. No widespread coverage of the country by TV is expected for several years. Procedures similar to those with radio will be followed and monitors will be present during the TV lesson, to which half an hour will be devoted, the remainder of the class period being under the guidance of the monitor. These experimental classes in both radio and television will, it is hoped, show whether literacy teaching with the help of these media is really effective. Whenever possible other audio-visual aids will be used and their effectiveness measured. They will undoubtedly play an important part in the continuing education programme which is to follow the basic literacy classes.

The Ministry's organisation should support a programme of 16,000 literacy classes each year, train the 4,000 teachers required, arrange for the provision of textbooks and classroom materials, and test the students. It must also supply reading matter in Amharic for a market increasing by half to three quarters of a million annually, a big task since practically none exists at the moment.

This programme is being supplemented with help from a number of outside sources. The most important of these is the **Special Fund of the United Nations** which has started a Literacy Project in Ethiopia with UNESCO as the operating agency. This Project is part of the highly selective campaign to spread literacy throughout the world by making a functional approach. This is envisaged as a comprehensive programme linking the teaching of reading and writing to vocational training, whether in industry or agriculture, with a view to economic development and an improvement in the level of living. For the Ethiopian project four areas have been chosen for experimental work and development, with literacy as only part of a wide educational approach, involving the Departments of Agriculture, Community Development and Health, as well as Education. An increase in the number of agricultural extension agents, of community workers, and of health and sanitation officers of various kinds is paralleled by increased and more concentrated activity by the Ministry of Education. The Government, is moreover, now regarding these areas as special development areas and is encouraging new activities and more capital commitment.

The UNSF Literacy Project is concentrating its activities in the following areas: Kaffa and Sidamo in the South-West, Arussi in the South and the industrial strip stretching from Addis Ababa 60 miles South to Nazareth. Kaffa is the main centre for coffee production. This crop is of tremendous importance as the country's main export, but an increase in production is of little interest as the amount which can be sold abroad is limited by international agreement.

The object, therefore, is to produce more coffee of the best quality which sells at the highest price, and towards this end an intensive educational programme is being developed. There is already a good deal of organisation in the area: a Coffee Producers Cooperative, a Community Development Centre, and the Headquarters of the Coffee Board of Ethiopia. The Ministry of Agriculture is very active, and there is an Agricultural Technical School accommodating 200 students, giving a two-year course for those who have completed Grade 12. There is also a Comprehensive Secondary School in the district, and a Teacher Training Institute has recently been opened. There are also Health Centres, a Youth Club, and a mission training centre offering vocational training. These organisations are important because their existence makes any extension of an educational programme more likely to be successful.

In this area literacy classes will be held for 1½ hours each day, four or five days a week, between July and December each year. During the remainder of the year the whole population is busy in the plantations and in the forests, where coffee grows wild. Each adult will attend class for six months in each of two years, and during the first year instruction will include new agricultural techniques, health, home economics, cooperative education and the use of improved hand tools. In the second year literacy training is concentrated on the use of instructional manuals, and groups will receive practical training from the students of the Agricultural Technical School during the vacation. As an integral part of the functional literacy project there is to be an intensive extension programme aimed at the improvement of the quality of coffee produced and also at increasing the production of other foodstuffs. A home economics programme is planned within the project, and it is hoped this will improve standards of home life and add further incentives to seeking a higher income.

The special characteristic of the Sidamo sub-project in the South-West of the country is its recently initiated settlement scheme, which places landless tenants on holdings of 5 hectares. The heart of each settlement is a unit with primary school, clinic, agricultural extension agent, mill, workshops and trading centre. There are demonstration houses, and farmers may store produce in the central store. A farmer has title to his land and his only liability is to give his labour to the settlement on one day each week, thus helping to construct the communal facilities. There are at present two such settlements but the Special Fund Literacy Project is specifically concerned at present with only one: 600 families have already been settled at Abela, which should eventually accommodate some 4,000 families.

The UNDP project is also working in Arraka, 30 miles north of Abela, where it is operating in conjunction with the Ministries of Agriculture, Community Development and Health, which have development schemes in the area. In addition to the agricultural activities there is an active cottage industry of spinning and weaving and there is a likelihood of secondary industries being developed to deal with expanding agricultural production. Experience in this area demonstrates that coordination of the activities of many ministries in planned development can be

achieved. It is hoped that the literacy work of the Ministry of Education will multiply many times the value of the contribution made by officers of the Agricultural Extension Department and the Health and National Community Development Ministries.

The third sub-project is not linked specifically with a geographical area but rather with several of the medium-sized and small industrial enterprises now growing in various parts of the country, especially along the road South from Addis Ababa.

No additional employment is foreseen in many of these factories in the near future, but an increase in productivity is expected through an improvement of skills and a reduction in the excessively high rate of manning machines. Among illiterate industrial workers a major problem is lack of communication between fellow workers and between workers and management, which leads to unsatisfactory labour relations, a low level of productivity, inadequate industrial safety and poor hygiene. The project entails a teaching programme at two levels, first literacy and then vocational training for literate workers and advisory staff.

The fourth sub-project area is in the Asela district about 130 miles due South of Addis Ababa, where the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) in cooperation with the Ethiopian Government has selected an area for an intensive regional development project. For some years SIDA has had a team making a detailed study of the district and its problems. The improvement of marketing, the development of cooperatives, and the extension of agricultural credit have been given special attention. An instruction centre with demonstration facilities for training farmers has been built, and the Government has expanded its staff of agricultural and animal health officers so that the area is well provided with the necessary advice and supervision. Some of the problems with which the unit has to deal are common throughout the country, and it is believed that experience gained here will be valuable in tackling problems of literacy and social organisation elsewhere. The Special Fund Project has undertaken to carry out a literacy programme in association with SIDA, which is concentrating on economic and social development.

The United Nations Special Fund Work-Oriented Functional Literacy Project is of special importance and interest, for it is part of the campaign which is being waged against illiteracy in ten or a dozen chosen areas throughout the world. It is an experiment and its objectives are experimental in that the actual number of people to be made literate is not the decisive factor, although the cost of making new literates has not been forgotten. The per capita cost is obviously something which must be borne in mind if a massive campaign is ever to be mounted, based on the experiments now being carried out. The objective is to discover more effective ways of teaching reading and writing and of using the newly acquired capabilities to contribute to the improvement of the individual life and to the life and wealth of the community.

Generalised campaigns have failed to offer sufficient incentive to illiterates, probably because the relevance of education to improvement in living conditions has never been clear to people whose customs are rooted in tradition and in the

fatalism which besets all under-developed societies. For this reason the work-oriented programme being applied in the four project areas in Ethiopia adopts an intensive approach, limited in its numerical and geographical objectives so that the new learners may improve their ability to produce within their trade or occupation. The work, therefore, is concentrated among groups most likely to respond to improvements in training and knowledge. These are likely to be found in factories and in agricultural areas where problems and procedures are homogeneous. An important consideration in selecting areas is that they should have a high rating in the national development schemes and receive a large share of the expensive capital and organising ability available.

To a certain extent this selectivity is applied to the choice of individuals to whom training and teaching are offered: wherever possible an effort is made to choose individuals who are most likely to benefit from the training or be in a position to influence their fellow workers and ensure the expansion of production, for instance, foremen in factories, able and dynamic farmers in the rural areas.

There are many significant differences between the traditional literacy campaign and the work-oriented functional operation which is the core of this approach. Perhaps the most important of these, and the one which characterises most sharply the work-oriented functional programme, is that it is not applied throughout the country in a uniform way whatever the interests and occupations of any particular region. It is fundamental to the effort being applied in these selected areas that all the approaches derive from the needs of the region concerned. Special text books have been prepared using a specialised vocabulary and linked closely with practical demonstrations on the factory floor or on the farm. Learning to read and receiving vocational training form part of one syllabus which must be geared to the activities and processes of the industry or rural area in question. For these reasons the practice is growing of seeing expenditure on work-oriented functional literacy programmes as part of the development budget and not as a small section of the over-strained budget of the Ministry of Education.

The implications of this approach are many and involve differences of method as compared with the traditional campaign. For instance, experiment is an integral part of the programme, whether it is with audio-visual aids to training and teaching or to class provision, monitor and supervisor training, or evaluation.

In the project area a radio transmitting station, presented under bilateral aid by the Dutch Government, will be used in the training of instructors, for stimulating interest in the work, for the dissemination of vocational information and the guidance of teachers in class. As for evaluation, its function is now quite different from the mere computing of numbers who have passed through classes and have achieved a measurable level of literacy. It is now primarily concerned with the social and economic efficacy of the programme and so is involved in it from the very beginning. Base-line surveys have been made of the general economic levels of the country, but the most important surveys are those of the economic and social situation in each project area taken as a separate entity. These have entailed enquiries into level of living, social activities and interests, felt needs, levels of production, distances potential students are willing or able to travel to classes, the relationship of teaching content to local activity, and so on. In these ways the Project in Ethiopia is trying to work out the affirmation made powerfully at the World Congress of Ministers of Education on the Eradi-



cation of illiteracy, organized by Unesco in 1966 in Teheran. On that occasion there was general agreement that there is a causal relationship between literacy and development, and that literacy is pre-requisite if there is to be industrial, economic and social development. In fact, that unless an expansion of literacy is an accepted objective of development plans, then development will be slower, more limited and less effective than if it is a basic requirement of the whole operation. The problems of applying such a specialised programme to areas where development is only just beginning are immense, but it is believed that not only does the way to an improvement in the world situation lie in this approach but that some proofs of this will be discovered in the Ethiopian Project.

This project is typical of the new approach to illiteracy in that it is a combined operation of several international agencies and several national ministries. Unesco is the managing agency in association with U.N. Special Fund, and receives collaboration from FAO and ILO, both of which have appointed experts to the team. The Ministry of Education gives national direction, and with it are associated the Ministries of Agriculture, National Community Development, Commerce and Industry and Health. Funds are provided by U.N. Special Fund to the extent of U.S.\$ 1,521,150 and counterpart funds of U.S.\$ 2,156,800 are provided by the Ethiopian Government. The counterpart contribution consists mainly of buildings and counterparts from several ministries who are to be prepared to take over when the expatriate experts leave after varying periods of service during the next four to five years.

The budget differs greatly from that of a traditional literacy project for it provides funds for farm tools and machinery and for experiments in the development of new types which would be more effective than those now in use. Provision is also made for trials of new seeds, developed locally or imported from similar areas abroad, for experiments in forestry and methods of erosion control. The setting up of cooperatives for producers and consumers and of marketing schemes is allowed for and also the pre-vocational training of factory workers. All of these activities have their part in the text of the specially prepared primers, as well as a place in the syllabus of practical work in the literacy course.

The training course lasts from 6 to 10 months with a minimum class attendance of 100 hours. This may well have to be extended to cope with the problem of teaching reading and writing in a language which is not the mother tongue of the majority of people living in the project areas.

Experiments made so far suggest that the necessary extension in time may not be as long as was thought likely when the low percentage of Amharic speakers was first discovered. No conclusion will be possible on this point until several groups have been successfully taught.

Obviously these approaches to the national literacy problem differ from one another in significant respects although all are directed towards increased productivity. The Ministry's plan is to bring basic literacy to as many people as possible by linking teaching with their daily activities: the Swedish project is mainly a social effort in the broad sense of the word; the U.N. Special Fund project has an early increase of productivity as its major objective. There is reason to hope that from these areas of concentrated activity on the part of several bodies there will come fresh ideas which can be applied eventually to the country as a whole and perhaps in other areas throughout the world where illiteracy remains a massive obstacle to development.