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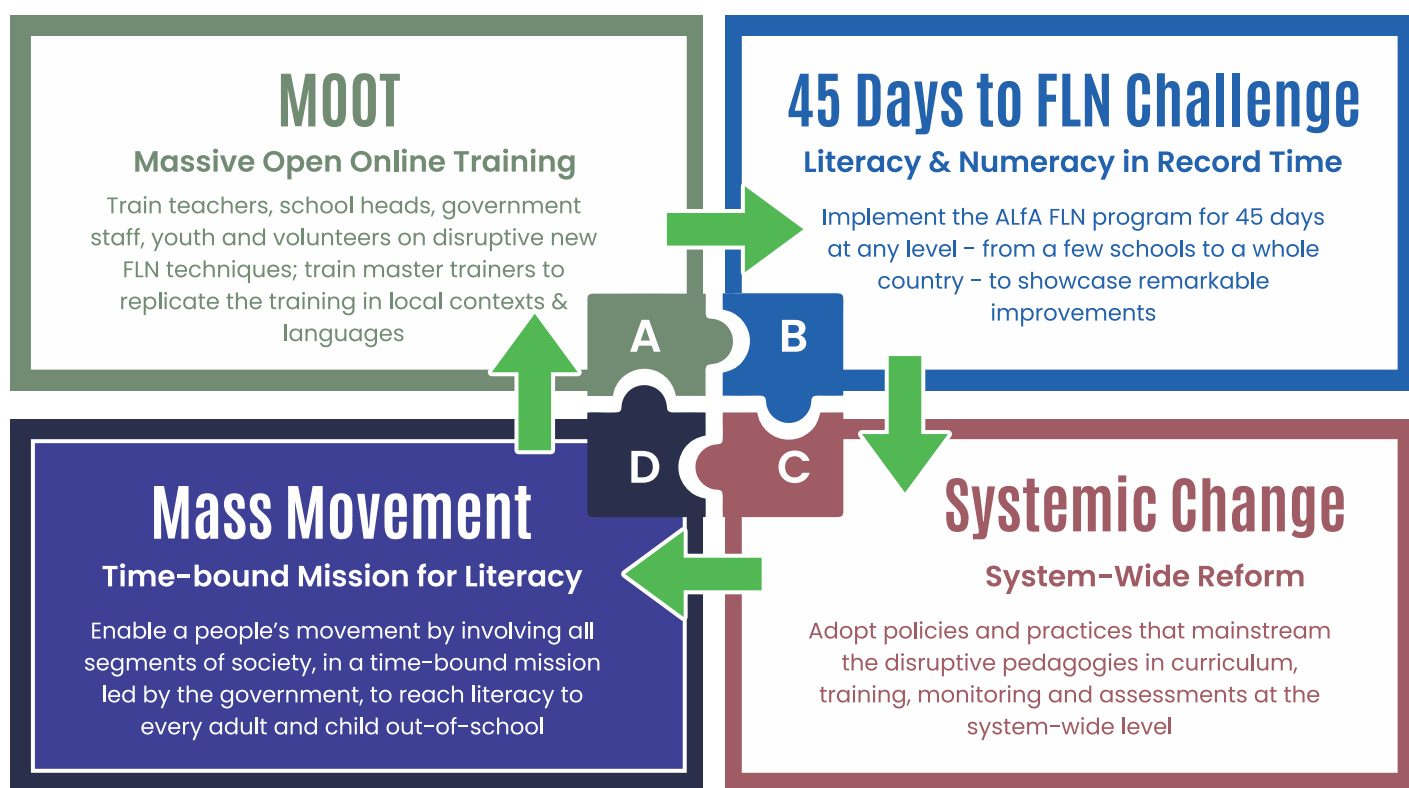
PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT FOR LITERACY

learning from history to shape our future



A CALL TO ACTION

FOUR CRUCIAL STEPS TOWARDS ACHIEVING UNIVERSAL LITERACY



Scan the QR to view other reports and videos on these four acts.

The year is 1989.

A people, long captive, become free. Thousands of ordinary citizens participate in this liberation by knocking down a barrier to progress and prosperity, demolishing an impediment to dignity and democracy.

The fall of the Berlin Wall was indeed an iconic moment in world history. But the above lines also ring true for another chapter of history, unfolding quietly in the same year on the other side of the world.

In 1989, Ernakulam united in a mass movement for literacy which liberated tens of thousands from the bondage of illiteracy, and saw it become the first fully literate district of India. Even today, over three decades hence, there is a lot we can learn from the history of literacy movements in Ernakulam and around the world.

Mass movements for literacy have been a remarkable part of the 20th century. As this report chronicles, countries as diverse as Cuba, Nicaragua, Tanzania, Vietnam and South Korea demonstrated impressive improvements in literacy rate through concerted efforts to mobilise their whole populations.

Warm regards,



Dr Sunita Gandhi

Founder & President,
Dignity Education Vision International
Chief Academic Advisor,
City Montessori School (World's largest school)
Former World Bank Economist
PhD (Physics), Cambridge University

It's time to renew the mass movement model for the 21st century, to ensure that everyone learns the basic, life-changing skill: the ability to read. This report analyses historic mass movements to create a 10-step roadmap for a future global literacy movement.

The Covid Pandemic has struck a severe blow to the education system, with school closures impacting hundreds of millions of students. There are still 770 million adults who can't read. We urgently need a movement to reach those who have been left behind.

Literacy movements can bring great transformation at a whole range of scales. Our campaign in Kurauni (p20) showed that a handful of committed individuals can make a village literate.

They say the whole word is a village, so what are we waiting for?

Spread the word far and wide. Join the campaign to make the world literate!



SOME OF THE 20th CENTURY'S MOST REMARKABLE MASS MOVEMENTS FOR LITERACY



IN THE 21st CENTURY LET'S BUILD A
GLOBAL LITERACY CAMPAIGN

LEADERS SPEAK WITH WORDS AND DEEDS

“Our people plan to wage a great battle against illiteracy with the ambitious goal of teaching every last illiterate person to read and write. To this end, organisations of teachers, students, workers, that is, the people as a whole, are preparing themselves for an intense campaign, and Cuba will be the first country in America which, at the end of a few months, will be able to say that it does not have a single illiterate person!”

Fidel Castro, President of Cuba, 1960

“The government has decided that within a year from now, all Vietnamese should know writing. Let those who already know it teach others; let them make their contribution to popular education. Illiterates should make an effort to learn. Husbands should teach their wives, those who are older should teach the younger, children should teach their parents, the head of the household should teach those living under his roof.”

Ho Chi Minh, President of North Vietnam

“I will teach at least 10 people who cannot read and write how to do so.”

Dr APJ Kalam, President of India

“Schools held night classes for illiterate adults, while during vacations, students had to teach the illiterate members of the village as part of their 'vacation homework'. They even had to receive written confirmation from the village head that they indeed had taught the illiterate. I also did this 'homework' when I was in fourth grade. The first illiterate adults I taught to read and write were three women. They were my mother and her two friends.”

Kim Shinil, a student volunteer, who later went on to become South Korea's Deputy Prime Minister

Mass literacy campaigns are defined by three key elements:



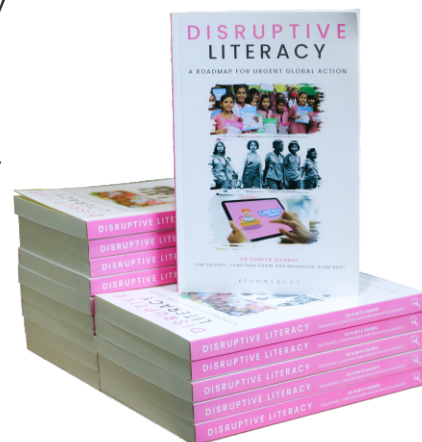
Mission: Strong commitment from the top, and across all levels and departments of government, to giving literacy top priority, setting ambitious goals, and taking rapid action.



Mobilisation of all sectors of society: community groups, schools and colleges, NGOs, corporations and individuals from all walks of life. Youthful energy, volunteerism and passion for the cause are crucial.



Methods that enable anyone with minimal qualifications to teach literacy efficiently and enjoyably with easy-to-use, learner-centred materials.



While there are many differences in how these movements played out across various times and places, there are also striking similarities and themes. Based on analysis of these landmark campaigns and our own experiences, we have created a ten-step roadmap for a mass literacy movement (overleaf). This draws from and updates our book, ***Disruptive Literacy: A Roadmap for Urgent Global Action*** (Bloomsbury, 2022).

Table 1: Statistical highlights of six notable historic mass literacy campaigns

Country/ District	Time Period	Baseline Number of Illiterates	Number Made Literate	Literacy Rate Shift (%)	Number of Volunteers/ Teachers	Present- Day Literacy Rate	Typical Learner : Volunteer Ratio
Cuba	1961	979,000	707,000	77 to 96	268,000	100	3 : 1
Nicaragua	March– Aug 1980	722,000	406,000	50 to 77	96,000	83	4 : 1
Tanzania	1971–75	5.3 million	3.1 million	33 to 61	88,000	78	30 : 1
South Korea	1945–48	7.9 million (12 years+)	5.4 million	22 to 59	300,000+	100	20 : 1
Vietnam	1945–58	25 million (12–50 years)	20 million+	5 to 93	800,000+	96	25 : 1
Ernakulam	1989–90	200,000 (5–60 years)	175,000	77 to 96	20,000	96	10 : 1

Roadmap for a Mass Literacy Movement

1 Political Will



Liaise with top government officials to discuss the importance of literacy for all.



2 Planning

Conduct stakeholder consultations, building coalitions for literacy.

3 Survey



Provide Target Population Survey App



4 Mobilise

Create and share literacy promotional materials

5 Training



Conduct online training for teachers, and empower master-trainers to conduct in-person trainings in local language.



6 Teach-Learn

Provide the ALfA materials, which enable FLN to be learnt swiftly, with just 90 instructional days.

7 Monitor



Share the ALfAway app, to be used for monitoring literacy classes



8 Evaluate

Provide testing materials to check the progress of the learners. Analyse data & write reports.

9 Certify & Celebrate



Organise celebratory events, spread the word through national & international media.



10 Continue Learning

Give access to online platforms for further learning.

1. Political Will

Rapid gains for literacy will be achieved only if there is strong political will from the very top leadership of the country. Literacy deserves top priority, as it is central to the nation's social, economic and political progress. This entails taking urgent action throughout the nation, with clear-cut targets being allocated amongst stakeholders. It means a no-excuses mission mode, in which all of society is united towards a single goal of literacy for all.

Strong political will and national unity are most often seen in times of war (or other crises, like COVID) when tremendous resources are mobilised, and remarkable sacrifices are offered for the cause. We should take inspiration from historic examples of political will, to treat literacy like an emergency, tackling it in mission mode.

Case Study: Vietnam

In the 1940s and 50s, Vietnam was fighting a war of liberation. Most leaders in his position would focus on the fighting and leave education on the backburner, but Ho Chi Minh knew that in order to help his people gain freedom, the war on illiteracy was just as important as the war with the French colonialists. The political leadership of Ho and the efforts of millions of his compatriots enabled Vietnam to go from 10 per cent illiteracy to 90 per cent literacy in just over a decade - a remarkable achievement.¹



South Korean university graduation rates are among the highest in the world, building on the foundations of their mass movement in the mid-20th century

Case Study: South Korea

South Korea had a literacy rate of just 22 per cent when it was liberated from Japanese occupation in 1945. The government immediately made a powerful push for literacy, establishing compulsory elementary education and providing adult literacy classes. By 1948, just three years after their independence, the literacy rate had grown sharply to 59 per cent.²

The unlucky country was soon torn apart by another war, which killed some three million people. Yet the South Koreans' passion for education shone through. In 1954, the South Korean government launched a five-year movement to eradicate illiteracy. By 1958, their campaign had achieved a literacy rate of 96 per cent.³

In the decades to come, strong investment in education laid the groundwork for remarkable development, transforming one of the poorest countries in the world into an economic powerhouse. Today an astonishing 86 per cent of South Korean school graduates enter university.⁴

1. Malarney, Shaun. 2011. *Literacy for the Masses: The Conduct and Consequences of the Literacy Campaign in Revolutionary Vietnam*. International Christian University, Tokyo. <https://bit.ly/3rSIII4>

2 & 3. Byun, Jong Im et al., 2012. *Development process and outcomes of adult literacy education in Korea*. Seoul: KDI School of Public Policy and Management. <https://www.kdevelopedia.org/Resources/view/04201210100122077.do>

4. Asia Society. N.d. *South Korean Education Reforms*. Global Cities Education Network. <https://asiasociety.org/global-cities-education-network/southkorean-education-reforms>

2. Planning

To translate political will into successful action requires thorough planning. Top leadership needs to set up a coalition of various government departments aligned to the common goal of achieving mass literacy. A coalition would, from the outset, involve the various implementation partners, including NGOs, voluntary associations like unions, mass media and corporations. School, college and university heads should also be invited in the planning process, as many of the volunteers of the movement will be students.

Case Study: Ernakulam

The movement was headed jointly by the district collector and a prominent non-government organisation, the Science and Education Centre of Kerala. The district was divided into 20 project areas, and a coordinator was allocated to each area, reporting directly to the district.

The Ernakulam movement was so well planned and prepared that when volunteers realised that some 75,000 people who were illiterate also had eyesight issues, volunteers organised massive eyesight testing camps. Community fundraising enabled tens of thousands of free spectacles to be delivered. This motivated many who otherwise could not have joined the classes to also learn to read.⁵

Case Study: Nicaragua

The Ministry of Education appointed delegates of 25 different civil organisations, unions, media, churches, ministries, universities and other institutions to set up the National Literacy Commission.⁶ Several layers of parallel commissions were established at the municipal and local levels. This decentralisation of responsibilities promoted direct participation of the population.

Case Study: Cuba

Marvin Leiner describes how the huge number of volunteers were organised: 'The teaching structure was built around a ratio of 2:1, two illiterates to each alphabetizer [literacy volunteer], and a Literacy Unit composed of about twenty-five literacy workers... Each province and each municipality had Commissions of Coordination, Execution, and Inspection... the mass organisations were integrated in a decentralised mode of operation that built on the [local] experiences.'⁷



5. P.J. Joseph. 1996. The Total Literacy Project of Ernakulam: An Epoch Making Experiment in India. Convergence. Vol 29, No 1. http://www.gurusmarana.ihrd.ac.in/files/thetotalliteracyprojectofernakulam-anepochmakingexperimentinindia_654.pdf

6. Hanemann, Ulrike. 2005. Nicaragua's Literacy Campaign. UNESCO Institute for Education. <https://bit.ly/3lDknwJ>

7. Leiner, Marvin. 1987. The 1961 National Cuban Literacy Campaign. In: Arnove R.F., Graff H.J. (eds) National Literacy Campaigns: Historical and Comparative Perspectives. Springer, Boston, MA. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4899-0505-5_8

3. Survey

A survey provides vital information for the effective implementation of the campaign. Surveys: provide baseline data about learners, including their numbers, level of literacy, location and what are convenient times for them to learn.

help identify community members who can work as literacy volunteers.

identify illiteracy hotspots—these may be geographical areas, e.g., urban slums and remote villages, or socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, e.g., women, religious minorities, economically weaker sections. More resources can be allocated to such areas

How to test literacy?

Indirect methods of assessment, that is, the respondent self-reporting their literacy status, routinely overestimates literacy rates. Direct methods of assessment like reading a text from a newspaper or solving basic numerical operations are more reliable. A UNESCO study of 20 countries, primarily in Sub-Saharan Africa, found that the literacy rate calculated from direct testing was, on average, 8 percentage points lower than the official self-estimation-based literacy rate.⁸

Direct vs Indirect testing in Lucknow

We also used direct testing of literacy in Global Dream's Target Population Survey, which covered more than one million adults aged 15– 60 in Lucknow. The survey checked Grade 3 level foundational literacy, including the ability to read short paragraphs in Hindi. It was found that the literacy rate of Lucknow was 65 per cent, much lower than 77 per cent as per the Census 2011, which used self-reporting.⁹

Case Study: Nicaragua

The Census brigades were composed of students, parents, teachers, labour union and citizens' association members, army personnel and peasants. All surveyors, who usually worked in pairs, were given a letter of identification which helped them to get free transportation. In Nicaragua, the Census was a miniature campaign in itself. It helped inform people about the upcoming literacy movement, overcome cultural barriers between urban and rural areas, and connect learners & volunteers.

Case Study: Ernakulam

The surveyors identified groups and areas where illiteracy was disproportionately high, which was important to plan logistics. The Ernakulam movement successfully mobilised religious minorities, Scheduled Caste/ Tribe members, and women to become literacy instructors, which was crucial to reaching these lower-literacy groups. The Ernakulam survey was done with great fanfare, using street plays, marches and traditional folklore to generate excitement.

8. UNESCO. 2015. "Education for All 2000–2015: Achievements and Challenges," Global Monitoring Report, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/report/2015/education-all-2000-2015-achievements-and-challenges>

9. Gandhi, Sunita et al., 2021. The Inconvenient Truth of Illiteracy Inequality: Compounding Effects of Sociodemographic Disadvantage. *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol 56, Issue 34. <https://www.epw.in/journal/2021/34/special-articles/inconvenient-truth-illiteracy-inequality.html>

10. Hanemann, Ulrike. 2005. Nicaragua's Literacy Campaign. UNESCO Institute for Education. <https://bit.ly/3IDknwJ>

11. Dreze, Jean & Sen, Amartya. 1997. *Indian Development: Selected Regional Perspectives*. Oxford University Press. DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198292043.003.0004

4. Mobilisation

The survey naturally flows into an effort to mobilise the whole of society to take part in the movement as learners and volunteers. It is vital to use a variety of approaches to attract a large number of people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.¹²

Case Study: Nicaragua

School and college students, who were overwhelmingly urban, were sent to rural and remote areas for five months. Along with them went volunteer health brigades from medical schools who provided the volunteers with basic medical services, and cultural brigades from universities who travelled throughout the country recording folktales, histories and customs of the rural people. Back in the city, literacy in the workplace was organised by the labour unions, such as the Workers' Militia of Literacy Promoters.

Case Study: Ernakulam

Hundreds of thousands of learners and tens of thousands of volunteers were motivated through science-art processions, literacy foot marches, public skits, radio and television messaging, flyers, banners and cinema slides.¹³

Case study: South Korea

A wide array of organisations and groups joined the campaign: teachers and students of each school, the Adult Education Association, the National Society, the Wives' Association, the Young Women's Association, rural guidance personnel, and community leaders.

Case Study: Cuba

A large-scale drive was conducted to recruit literacy instructors called alfabetizadores (adult volunteers) and brigadistas (school-age volunteers). The campaign was promoted widely as a brave and patriotic project on radio, in newspapers and through billboard posters, developing great excitement in the youth to participate.

Case Study: Tanzania

The movement used mass radio broadcasts, including songs for literacy which were listened to and sung by students in adult literacy classes. Regional newspapers, rural library programs, and vans to show films in villages were also crucial ways to mobilise volunteers and learners, building momentum for the movement.¹⁴

12. SOLAS. 2017. National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Awareness Campaign. <https://www.nala.ie/publications/2016-national-literacy-and-numeracyawareness-campaign-evaluation-phase-1-nala/>

13. Kumar, S.M. 1993. Literacy Movement in Kerala: One Step Forward, Two Step Backwards. Economic and Political Weekly, October 9, 1993. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4400251>

14. Unsicker, Jeph. 1987. Tanzania's Literacy Campaign in Historical-Structural Perspective. In: Arnove R.F., Graff H.J. (eds) National Literacy Campaigns. Springer, Boston, MA. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4899-0505-5_10

5. Training

Before starting the teaching-learning process, it is crucial to train the literacy volunteers in how to teach effectively.

Case Study: Cuba

A teacher's manual was created as a guide for the literacy instructors to provide the background knowledge. Volunteers were also provided training to orient them to the hardships of rural life, including small houses, lack of electricity and running water!





1.5 million copies of the primer were printed such that every learner could receive a copy. Each volunteer received a package that included the primer and the teachers' manual, a pair of boots, two pairs of socks, two pairs of pants, an olive-green beret, a hammock, and a lantern to provide light for lessons in homes without electricity, and for travel on unlit country roads.

Case Study: Ernakulam

Nearly 20,000 volunteers came forwards, out of which 700 people with better academic qualifications were identified as master-trainers. A three-day camp was used to train these master trainers in how to use the primers and on building the motivation of volunteers and learners. After this, the master-trainers conducted workshops for literacy volunteers in 20 locations throughout the district, in batches of around 50 people. The food was arranged through local contributions from the community.¹⁶



A hundred thousand Cuban students powered the mass literacy movement.

HINDI	
Numeracy	Literacy
	
ENGLISH	
Numeracy	Literacy
	

Check out the latest Massive Open Online Training run by DEVI Sansthan

15. Cuban Literacy Campaign. In: Arnove R.F., Graff H.J. (eds) National Literacy Campaigns: Historical and Comparative Perspectives. Springer, Boston, MA. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4899-0505-5_8

16. PJ Joseph. 1996. The Total Literacy Project of Ernakulam: An EpochMaking Experiment in India. Convergence. Vol 29, No 1. http://www.gurusmarana.ihrd.ac.in/files/thetotalliteracyprojectofernakulam-anepochmakingexperimentinindia_654.pdf

17. Unsicker, Jeph. 1987. Tanzania's Literacy Campaign in Historical-Structural Perspective. In: Arnove R.F., Graff H.J. (eds) National Literacy Campaigns. Springer, Boston, MA. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4899-0505-5_10

6. Teaching-Learning

As we've seen, many countries relied on students to do the majority of the volunteer work. This had tremendous benefits for the young people themselves, as serving the nation gives a sense of purpose and motivation.

Case Study: South Korea

The government opened literacy classes in each village and town for two to three months, twice a year. Local schools and public areas were used for learning spaces. Classes were also opened in factories under the active support of employers. Civil servants and the general public who had teaching skills could also join the program as instructors by the appointment of the superintendent or the district chief.

Case Study: Cuba

Nearly 100,000 young people from schools and universities were mobilised, with an average age of 14 to 16 years, and more than 50 per cent being female. Three-quarters of the young volunteers were from urban areas, who were allocated for teaching in rural areas. But it wasn't just students; the whole of society was involved, with ordinary people teaching neighbours and relatives in their own homes. Literate factory workers taught their unlettered colleagues, unpaid, after shifts.

Case Study: Ernakulam

The campaign primer included lessons on food, work, the dignity of labour, disease prevention, drinking water, oral rehydration therapy, India's freedom struggle, panchayats, post offices, the equality of the sexes, fair-price shops and immunisation. This discussion-based approach ensured that people were empowered not just with the skill of literacy, but also learnt about many highly relevant issues.

Case Study: Nicaragua

A huge number of brigadistas (young volunteers) went for five months to mountainous and rural areas. Besides teaching literacy, these young people also shared the life and work of peasant families in their homes and fields.

Julia was one such brigadista, who, being from an urban middle-class background, would not greet the campesinos (peasant farmers) or take any interest in them. At the end of the literacy campaign, Julia knows personally how most Nicaraguans live. She spent five months eating beans and tortillas, sleeping with fleas, getting up at 4 am, sharing a room with a whole family. She has made friends with many campesinos from the village.



A school student teaches his maid. Lucknow, India (2018)

18. Byun, Jong Im et al., 2012. Development process and outcomes of adult literacy education in Korea. Seoul: KDI School of Public Policy and Management. <https://www.kdevelopedia.org/Resources/view/04201210100122077.do>

19. Dreze, Jean & Sen, Amartya. 1997. Indian Development: Selected Regional Perspectives. Oxford University Press. DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198292043.003.0004

7. Monitor

However well the movement has been planned, and despite the enthusiasm of hundreds of thousands of volunteers and learners, all campaigns experience challenges and hiccups along the way. In this context, it is vital to monitor the whole process to provide greater support where needed. Most movements made very clear expectations that everyone should participate.

Case Study: South Korea

This well-organised society had many institutions in place to ensure the campaign's rapid uptake and smooth completion.

School: School students were given 'holiday homework' of teaching illiterates in their village, and had to receive written confirmation from the village head that they had indeed taught someone how to read. For adult literacy programs conducted within the school premises, principals personally inspected the classes as well as appointed teachers to be responsible for them.

Military: With compulsory military service for all young men, the military screened out those among each year's new recruits who were illiterate. They were included in military training only after being taught to read and write, thereby making all young men literate.

Police: police chiefs made the heads of each police sub-station promote the project and encourage more people to join. Police officers would even question people on the street in order to find people who did not join the program.

Government: All organisations that participated in the literacy movement reported the number of illiterate people they had taught throughout the year to a supervisory organisation. The government would compile these statistics and present the accomplishments of the year along with the current literacy rate. Regions with a low accomplishment rate were chastised by the central government, which gave them plenty of incentive to do better the following year.



College students run literacy classes in a slum community of Lucknow, India (2019)

20 & 22. Byun, Jong Im et al., 2012. Development process and outcomes of adult literacy education in Korea. Seoul: KDI School of Public Policy and Management. <https://www.kdevelopedia.org/Resources/view/04201210100122077.do>

21. Shinil, Kim. 2013. Adult Learning and Education in Korea. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. <https://bit.ly/3r3EJJI>

8. Evaluation of Neo-literates

Each country with a mass literacy movement had a stream of neo-literates to evaluate. This evaluation process was crucial to check people's literacy level.

Case Study: Cuba

There was a mid-line evaluation to determine the progress of the students, as well as a final test. This was composed of reading two short paragraphs from the primer, a brief dictation, and writing a letter to Fidel Castro, who surely never was able to read the hundreds of thousands of epistles he received!

Cuban Student Volunteers Speak

"If I am asked about the most important single experience in my life, I have to say that it was the literacy campaign, because it was this event which has profoundly affected my individual beliefs... it put me in contact with a kind of poverty, a kind of reality which I never had dreamed could exist in this world." **Rene Mujica**

"I was thirteen years old... We were given forms to be signed by our families. All my friends and classmates were involved in this, and I wasn't going to be left behind. We all got together, some of us with more support from our families than others, but we all decided to fulfil this duty... Nobody [in my family] wanted to sign... I signed it myself... when the time came, I got on the bus with nothing but the clothes I had on, and off I went."

Leonela Relys Diaz, a student volunteer who went on to found the 'Yes I Can' Literacy Program, which has since helped over 5 million people become literate.

Case Study: Nicaragua

Nicaragua used a series of tests to determine the progress of literacy students during the campaign. From writing their own name, the learners were then tested on their ability to read and write letters, words and sentences. The test concluded with some harder exercises: comprehension of a short story, and having the learners write a composition of their own.

People who completed all sections successfully were considered literate, but those who could read and write only a few words were classified as semi-literates. People who could write their own name but no more were classified as illiterate. Nicaragua adopted a very caring approach: along with test results, volunteers recorded observations about individual learning difficulties, health problems, and areas of personal interest for future study.²³



Neo-literate women take a test. Lucknow, India (2015)

23. Hanemann, Ulrike. 2005. Nicaragua's Literacy Campaign. UNESCO Institute for Education. <https://bit.ly/3IDknwJ>

9. Certification and Celebration

Everyone who participates in the movement as a learner, a volunteer, or a supervisor deserves to be honoured. In many campaigns, this has been done through certificate ceremonies and celebrations at local, regional and national levels. Various exceptional volunteers and learners have their stories highlighted in the media to foster excitement about the movement.

Case Study: Ernakulam

In 1990, one year after the launch of the Ernakulam movement, Prime Minister V.P. Singh declared that Ernakulam had become the first fully literate district of India. The postal department of India issued a stamp in celebration. As a mark of recognition, the Kerala government awarded certificates to learners, instructors and master-trainers in public functions.

Case Study: Cuba

There were mass graduations of students, with ceremonies to celebrate in work centres and union halls. More than a million people participated in these events, at which leading popular musical groups and singers performed. Outstanding workers received both material rewards and social acclaim.



Stamp Issued in International Literacy Year, 1990 to commemorate Ernakulam's Mass Movement



Students of City International School, Lucknow, celebrate with the out-of-school children they taught how to read



Volunteers receive their certificates after helping the women of Kurauni village become literate

24. Hanemann, Ulrike. 2005. Nicaragua's Literacy Campaign. UNESCO Institute for Education. <https://bit.ly/3lDknwJ>

10. Continuing Education for Neo-literates

Neo-literates need post-literacy classes to enable them to continue their education. For the achievements of short-term movements to be sustained over the long term, it is crucial that they be integrated into national learning systems.²⁵ In each of these remarkable movements, learners found that their lives changed dramatically, thanks to their new skills. Once they started learning, they didn't want to stop!

Case Study: Cuba

The national campaign initially made people literate to a Grade 2 level. In the post-literacy phase, a national commission was established to ensure that workers and farmers achieved a greater level of literacy (Grade 6). The Cubans have found that workers teaching each other is the most effective form of instruction. Thus, in 1976–77, 53 per cent of the 24,200 adult education teachers were themselves workers.²⁶

Flexible academic calendars were adjusted to specific working conditions in different industries. Further, thousands of new texts were developed to achieve advanced literacy goals. An independent study program was also created, utilising TV and radio, classes in factories and farm centres, and night schools. To this day, Cuba has one of the best education systems among low- and middle-income countries, and adult education is a major focus.

Case Study: Tanzania

Tanzania's Neo-literates speak of the impact that the literacy movement made on their life:

These days when people see me, they say to themselves, 'You cannot deceive or intimidate this old man... he knows [how to read].'

Now that I have become literate, I feel that before I was carrying a small lantern, but now a [bright] pressure lamp has been brought to me.

The word 'education' used to terrify me... [it] had the aura of some kind of magic. But now I know that anyone can learn and anyone can get education....²⁷



Neo-literate women pursue vocational education and livelihood training with painting and handicrafts

25. Hanemann, Ulrike. 2005. Nicaragua's Literacy Campaign. UNESCO Institute for Education. <https://bit.ly/3IDkwnJ>

26. Leiner, Marvin. 1987. The 1961 National Cuban Literacy Campaign. In: Arnove R.F., Graff H.J. (eds) National Literacy Campaigns: Historical and Comparative Perspectives. Springer, Boston, MA. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4899-0505-5_8

27. Unsicker, Jeph. 1987. Tanzania's Literacy Campaign in Historical-Structural Perspective. In: Arnove R.F., Graff H.J. (eds) National Literacy Campaigns. Springer, Boston, MA. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4899-0505-5_10

Interview with Rosa Acosta, Cuban Student Volunteer

Kian Rey How old were you when you started to teach people to read and write with the Literacy Campaign?

Rosa Acosta Well, imagine! I was 10 years old when the Literacy Campaign started. I taught three or four people to read and write.

KR Do those people still live in the town? Do you still have contact with the people who you taught to read and write?

RA Only one of those people is still alive—the boy that was the youngest of them... He's always very happy to see me and introduces me to his children and tells them that I was the one who taught him to read and write.

KR What difficulties did you face during the Literacy Campaign and during that time in general in the countryside in Cuba?

RA There were a lot of difficulties back then. In 1961 the living conditions in the countryside were still very poor. Most people lived in houses without concrete flooring—the floors were just dirt. All the houses I taught in had earthen floors. There was only radio, no other means of communication. People only had the radio. The only time in the day that they had to learn was with me, the rest of the time they just worked in the fields. Sometimes I would arrive at 7:00 pm and the boy still hadn't arrived back home and I would have to wait until 8:00 or 9:00 to make sure he wouldn't miss a class.

KR It's funny—you had just learned to read and write yourself when you first began to teach others to do the same.

RA Yes, exactly... It was decided that I would teach the illiterate families instead of the elementary teacher or my father because I was more patient. I would really take them by the hand in learning the vowels. They felt more comfortable with me because I was just a child.

KR A lot had changed after the Cuban Revolution in 1959, perhaps in every area of society. As a specialist in pedagogy, how do you believe the educational system changed after the revolution?



The Cuban mass movement for literacy mobilised hundreds of thousands of people

- RA** Everyone in Cuba will always recognise this incredible feat in literacy that was a product of the revolution. A million illiterate people were taught to read and write. It was truly something to witness how the tears would run down the people's faces when they were finally able to read the cartilla (student workbook) or to read the newspaper when it began to be distributed in the town. Some of the people I taught would call me because they wanted to show me that they could read the newspaper. In the end, the revolution virtually eliminated illiteracy. People that lived even in the remotest mountainous areas totally isolated, with parents and grandparents that were totally illiterate, were suddenly able to get as far as studying at the University of Havana. I am an example of that. I am a Black woman. That a very poor Black person could end up studying at the University of Havana... it was really a huge feat. I have a doctorate. Before the revolution, that would've been completely impossible. Unthinkable.
- KR** Of course, it's incredible. And that happiness, that excitement, felt by the people who you taught to read and write, was really at the national level, isn't that right? It was felt all over Cuba.
- RA** Yes, exactly. It was felt all over the Cuba. Some people weren't even able to read medicine labels. It was such a huge difference after.
- KR** You are from the countryside originally, but isn't it true that most of teachers in the Literacy Campaign were from the cities?
- RA** Yes, from Havana, from the city of Pinar del Río, or from other provincial capitals.
- KR** In that regard, isn't it true also that for those that went to the countryside for the first time to teach, ended up learning a lot about life in the countryside and nature, paradoxically?
- RA** Yes, that's true. For the teachers that formed the brigades from Havana, the Literacy Campaign was a very important experience. It was a tremendous experience for everyone involved. Both for those that learned to read and write and for us teachers that taught literacy. All in all, we really showed what was possible. Some were saying that the Cubans are crazy, how are they ever going to be able to teach people to read and write who don't even know how to write a single letter? But yes, it was possible!

Community Mobilisation for Literacy

The Story of Kurauni village

Can twenty-two people make a whole village literate? Can the power of commitment overcome a lack of material resources? We were surprised by the answers as a reading revolution took hold in the sleepy village of Kurauni.

Teaching and learning is a community experience. Individuals working alone may struggle to continuously motivate themselves, but communities working together for literacy can generate powerful momentum. As literacy spreads, it has the power to transform a community.

Kurauni is a small village around 30 kilometres southwest of Lucknow's city centre. Out of a population of 4,365, our survey revealed that 1,211 people aged 7–70 were illiterate in their mother tongue, Hindi; two-thirds of them were women. With our

modest financial and human resources, it was clear that a conventional approach—renting literacy centres, paying tutors, heavily structuring and supervising a program—would not work to reach this large group of people. We started wondering: is it possible for people of all ages and qualification levels to become literacy tutors? Would people be willing to volunteer without a payment?

To begin, we knew we had to motivate people and generate interest. We organised songs and marches for literacy, tapping into local art forms and folklore to mobilise potential learners and volunteers. This culminated in a village level meeting, gathering curious people to explain the program. It is crucial for literacy movements to generate and harness the power of social momentum.



Village leaders, volunteers and government officials pose with the ALFA Literacy materials in front of Kurauni school

We found 22 women who were willing to become mentors—and give their time to this cause, without payment. The group was quite diverse: some of them were college graduates, whereas others had only passed Grade 5. Many were young and unmarried, but plenty of older, married women were also there.

We conducted a four-hour training for this group of mentors on how to teach literacy. We provided each with a Literacy Box containing enough materials to teach 20 people: mats, chalk and slates, and the Global Dream booklets [Global Dream was the precursor to ALfA]. This tiny group then set forth with a big mission: to make the village literate.

The mentors, whom we had drawn from several hamlets across the village, started spreading the word amongst their neighbours, relatives, and friends. Quickly and organically, small groups of women started meeting in open spaces or in the mentors' houses, typically for an hour or so each afternoon, to learn how to read and write. Along with learning literacy, these groups provided a conducive environment for socialising and building community networks.

These 22 literacy mentors reported that the first batch of 180 women had become literate in just two months. In August 2015, these women sat the National Literacy Mission test. For some of them, this monitored exam was their first time inside a school! 135 formerly illiterate women passed the test on their first attempt. The women were delighted to receive certificates of literacy from the Government of India—certificates which they could now read.

In subsequent batches, hundreds more have become literate. Many of the neo-literates have continued meeting to further their education, including some learning English and a few pursuing formal qualifications. Some have formed self-help groups and built livelihoods together, running small pickling or craft-making businesses. Most have felt the impact of literacy in multiple spheres of life, from greater domestic dignity to empowerment in broader society.

Kurauni stands as a powerful example of what community mobilisation for literacy can achieve. With minimal expenditure and limited external inputs, hundreds of women learnt to read and write within a short period, which ultimately led to greater social and gender equality.

Hindustan Times

Sunday, September 8, 2019

A week ago, 40-year-old Gudiya, a native of Karauni village in Lucknow's Sarojini Nagar block, went to a nationalised bank to inquire about the balance in her savings account. The bank staff told her a figure, but Gudiya insisted he recheck it. When the staff refused, she told him that only that morning she had

received a text message, according to which ₹15,000 had been credited into her account. The staff rechecked and found her to be right. He apologised. 'I told him I wasn't illiterate. I learned how to read and write ever since the Global Dream Literacy Mission started in my village,' Gudiya told HT.



**See more
news reports**

Why a Mass Movement?



Swift

unlock rapid gains in literacy rates in just a year. Tremendous energy can be harnessed when there's a concerted effort over a short period of time.



Cost-effective

Volunteerism is a key success factor for a mass literacy movement.



Uniting a nation

All segments of society – schools & colleges, NGOs, corporations, community groups – work together for a common cause, forging a greater national identity.



Foundation for growth

Countries that achieve universal literacy then tend to go on to greater peace and prosperity – Singapore, South Korea and Vietnam are all powerful examples.



Name Literacy: Learning to sign can be a powerful step in the journey of dignity and empowerment

A Global Literacy Movement for the 21st Century More Possible Now than Ever Before

As we take inspiration from 20th century mass movements, it's time to launch a literacy campaign for the 21st century. Three factors are working in our favour, making it more doable than ever before.

- 1. Better Materials and Methods:** New, research-based, disruptive techniques such as Accelerating Learning for All (ALfA) program enable basic literacy to be taught even more rapidly than the programs used in the 20th century movements. This ensures that the transaction of literacy happens a lot more quickly and that it meets the imagination of both learners and volunteers, who may themselves be young school students. ALfA is available in 30 languages internationally, with more on the way.
- 2. Increased Value of Literacy:** In a world saturated with text, the public understands the value of literacy more than they did several decades ago. There is increased demand for literacy, as people realise the importance of reading, writing and arithmetic in their daily lives. With ALfA, the learner starts recognising 5–10 letters and forming words in the first session itself, which is only 15–30 minutes long. This rapid gain motivates them and keeps them coming back to classes, hungry to learn.
- 3. Technology:** The 20th century movements discussed above used technologies which we now consider outdated—like paper forms to conduct surveys, and short-wave radio to coordinate! Technology such as internet-enabled smartphones allows decentralised, zero-cost teaching using apps. Other key parts of coordinating and planning a movement are also much easier now – collecting data on learners and volunteers, matching volunteers with learners, monitoring progress and facilitating collaboration.

The time is ripe for a mass movement to achieve universal literacy throughout the world. We can harness the power of the 20th century's idealism and passion, and combine it with the technologies and pedagogies of the 21st century, to make rapid gains towards universal literacy, in shorter timeframes than ever before.



NAME LITERACY

A person learning to sign their own name is a powerful motivator.



**DEVI
SANSTHAN**
Dignity Education
Vision International
Leave no one behind

SDG 4
**disruptive
FLN at scale**
Foundational Literacy & Numeracy



PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT FOR LITERACY

DEVI Sansthan (Dignity Education Vision International) is a small NGO with a big vision: to help India and the world achieve universal Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN). DEVI is pioneering transformative pedagogies, empowering teachers, and leveraging policy change to enable rapid gains towards literacy for all.



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