

TOWARDS SELF SUSTAINING LOCAL LEARNING STRUCTURES IN GUINEA-CONAKRY

1. Context

IIZ/DVV has worked in Guinea since 1993. In 1999 we opened our project office and since then we have enlarged our partnership from one NGO to about 10, plus the Service National d'Alphabétisation (SNA) and a teachers training institute. The illiteracy rate is estimated at 62% among men and 79% among women. One can assume that being literate in Arabic script is not included in this estimate. However, there are large disparities among regions. For example, there is said to be an illiteracy rate of about 90% among local council members in Upper Guinea.

The literacy programme in Guinea is based on a different concept than that of Senegal. [Please clarify the following: We have the basic literacy course with 45- 60 days —5 days per week with 6 hours per day = 270 h up to 90 days with 4 days per week and 3 hours per day = 297h.] After the basic literacy course some NGOs are flexible in offering lessons to strengthen the competencies. Following this is the post-literacy course which is tailored to the needs of the learner and therefore varying in length.

It is important to realise that practically all literacy programmes and activities claim to integrate the instructions [whose instructions are these?] of means of subsistence and livelihood training; be it in the framework of development aid programmes (World Bank, Unicef, FIIDA, FAO, AFD, GTZ), or on a smaller scale in NGO projects.

In a considerable number of multilaterally financed programmes, literacy was discovered to be a missing link, necessary to achieve other developmental objectives. The aims of these projects cannot be achieved without a certain level of knowledge in arithmetic, reading and writing. In most cases, the financing agency contracts NGOs to undertake the literacy activities. The NGOs then have access to an important means of external financing, though they have little influence on programming.

There is also support for the development of NGO-owned projects by Northern support agencies [as NGOs ?]. In these projects the NGOs present themselves to self help groups who endeavour to assist in their organisational development.

2. The advantages and weaknesses of current practice

In order to analyse current practice in 2002, IIZ/DVV Guinea invited its 10 partners [check exact number], as well as two organisations from Senegal (ENDA-Graf and Alphafemmes) to discuss their experiences. The meeting identified examples of good practice and opportunities for its execution, as well as the constraints and difficulties in on-going activities. In a subsequent workshop, the context of the presented programmes was analysed, as well as the efficiency of the resources employed and the

effectiveness of the applied strategies, bearing in mind the desired results, effects and impacts. Finally, conclusions and recommendations were discussed and a draft version of a harmonised literacy strategy was formulated.

It was easy to reach a joint understanding that literacy is the means to improve livelihoods and to intensify local participatory development. This is often called integrated literacy. Literacy programmes should be centred around supporting self-help within local communities, [check that this sentence conveys the intended meaning] and to do this effectively the following key elements should be taken into account: self-management, self-financing, suitable instruments of monitoring/evaluation, applicability by all implementers, and validation by the national literacy policy. These characteristics have a common denominator in favour of viable self-help - the progressive disengagement of the external supporter (in other words, the growing of local ownership).

Among NGOs one can find attempts to work towards an integrated literacy approach. General work in this regard consists of: support to the self-help group and its development in favour of self-organisation, support to the functioning of the literacy centres, training in facilitation skills, and sometimes support for activities which aim to generate income for the literacy programmes.

All providers of literacy activities claim that theirs are functional, needs building on, as well as strengthening local capacities.

Literacy programmes conducted by local NGOs face the following major constraints among others:

- Lack of coordination and consultation between NGOs and the Service National d'Alphabétisation (SNA) on the one hand, and between NGOs themselves on the other
- Insufficient training of instructors/facilitators
- Diversity of methods and approaches disregarding the needs of learners
- Confusion over terminology
- Deficiencies in efficient utilisation of human and financial resources
- Insufficient studies of the profitability and feasibility of the IGA
- Insufficient training, monitoring and counselling related to the IGA
- Under-estimation of the costs of an integrated literacy
- Unavailability of relevant external evaluation exercises

[Please check that the following concurs with the sense intended: It is necessary to establish the realities in the field regarding planning and organisation. Operators of

literacy programmes rarely undertake a needs appraisal, normally because of insufficient competence or the lack of finance.]

Consequences:

- Programmes are of small relevance
- No negotiation between donors/operators and beneficiaries
- Integrated literacy limits itself to the instruction of local facilitators and the participation of the community to find the literacy centre
- Absence of saving and credit schemes (as? Does this mean ‘such as’, ‘affiliated to’, ‘from the’ etc?) Association de Services Financiers (ASF)
- Income generating activities for financing charges related to literacy programmes (what about them — have they increased?)
- Predominance of the donors in conception of projects

[Maybe some sort of linking sentence here?]

Realities in the field — conception of pedagogical material for literacy and post-literacy

- Proliferation of production of materials with the same content but with great differences in quality
- Inappropriate contents
- Weak competence in methodology
- Weak articulation of daily life issues
- Stagnation with regard to post-literacy and lack of experience in this educational practice
- Insufficient consultation with the SNA regarding script and quality

Realities in the field regarding local participation

- Local participation in terms of human resources and purchase of [individual] furniture is possible
- However, 95% of finance is from external contributions
- Limited local capacity building of human resources
- Contracting exists on only two levels: facilitator/NGO and donor/NGO
- Absence of ownership building

- Lack of appropriation and absence of sustainability in literacy centres
- Lack of synergies with other development activities

In general terms, it can be said that in Guinea there is no structure organising literacy that follows the ideals allowing local ownership and disengagement. The current practices give sufficient evidence to prove this statement.

3. With regard to these insights and considerations, IIZ/DVV and its partners have started to search for solutions in the field of interventions:

The greatest challenge for a self-help based approach is the weakness of a working strategy of disengagement on the side of the external actors, the NGOs and the donors.

Searching for alternatives, we identified the following principles:

1. Participatory needs appraisal prior to the planning of the activity — the need in literacy has to be expressed by the target group, preferably learners organised into self-help groups
2. Identification of the role of literacy in the given developmental context, and validation by the community
3. Participatory decision making when planning activities with regard to language, time, responsibilities of persons, material and financial inputs
4. Follow a strategy of self-management
5. Pursue a strategy of financial participation and self-financing. For example, IGA [which?] are sufficiently profitable to contribute and later cover the local costs of the literacy activity and/or establishment of Associations de Services Financiers, a self organised saving and credit scheme
6. Creating ownership and responsibility on all levels through contractualisation between all actors (this includes the local government and the relevant technical services of the government)
7. Chances for upgrading of competencies of the facilitator and staff of NGOs
8. Permanent lobbying and advocacy for literacy starting at the local level
9. Application of suitable instruments of monitoring, counselling and evaluation at all levels (from self-evaluation to external evaluation)

PRINCIPAL HYPOTHESES FOR A SUCCESSFUL LITERACY PRACTICE

For a process of progressive disengagement of the supporting structures, which will ensure the sustainability of the projects, it is important that all involved parties share the same viewpoint. The following points detail the ideal outcomes of a successful project:

- The learner who knows how to read, write and calculate will have an opportunity of daily application for his economic, social and cultural well being
- It is the entire community who should finally enable a literate environment. The focus should not be limited to the first group of learners but extended to involve other members of the community as well, including members of the local council
- The NGO will achieve satisfaction by (i) being able to successfully disengage from one community in order to work within another (ii) their contribution to the development of the community, and (iii) the sound utilisation of the resources put at their disposal
- The SNA, with its country-wide structure and staff, will finally fulfil its role of monitoring and policy guidance, which in turn will allow the inscription of local actions in the national literacy policy as well as the ability to capitalise on experiences at any moment
- The resources of the donor will be deployed with efficacy and durability for an improvement of living conditions in local communities

4. Challenges to take up

To implement work towards local ownership and a successful disengagement strategy, agreements between the different levels of actors need to be formulated.

Systemisation of contracting would favour ownership building on all levels, as well as a greater efficiency in the implementation of programmes. This would have the advantage of being an agreement of collaboration instead of a service plan, and also would allow the inscription of local actions into national literacy policy, and the ability to capitalise on relevant experiences, under the condition there is a sustainable structure.

Desired levels of contracting:

- NGO/community
- Facilitator/community
- Directeur Prefectoral d'Alphabétisation/NGO
- NGO/donor

5. Support strategy of LIZ/DVV

It is reasonable to believe that within a three-year time frame, self-sustaining local structures can evolve. This ideal will most likely extend to members of those structures to benefit later on from further opportunities to share experiences, upgrade competences, access new information and teaching/learning materials, and to enlarge

the scope of learning activities (for example environmental education, HIV-AIDS education and civic education).

For IIZ/DVV this vision, shared by its partners, translates into a support strategy which utilises the ideals and principles outlined as criteria for judging the project proposals of NGOs. Judgement criteria refer to:

- Needs appraisal done?
- Base line data gathered?
- Local participation facilitated?
- Innovation intended?
- Income generation activities and saving/credit scheme planned?
- Methodology of 'Evaluation du Progres vers les Changements-EPC' applied?
- Monitoring/evaluation budgeted?
- Training and upgrading of local facilitators and staff of NGOs planned?
- Local council involved?
- District literacy service (Dirécteur Préfectoral d'Alphabétisation) involved in class monitoring?

In such a scheme of local capacity building, ILZIDVV and its partners have to pay attention to addressing in a flexible manner existing and emerging training needs, e.g. in participatory approaches, methods of monitoring, evaluation and information management, IGA/microprojects and saving/credit schemes such as ASF, organisational development of the self-help groups and development of a literate environment. However, we are working on the assumption that it is not training alone but also the application of newly acquired skills that will ascertain the local capacity building. Hence, addressing training needs implies monitoring, counselling and backstopping of the participants in the process of application.

In summary, what we aim for is:

The possibility for the NGO and donor to withdraw within a reasonable time period allowing the local learning processes to continue in the ownership of the community.

The French version of our strategy for an integrated literacy approach in Guinea-Conakry may be obtained at: iiz-dvv@sotelgui.net.gn

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