

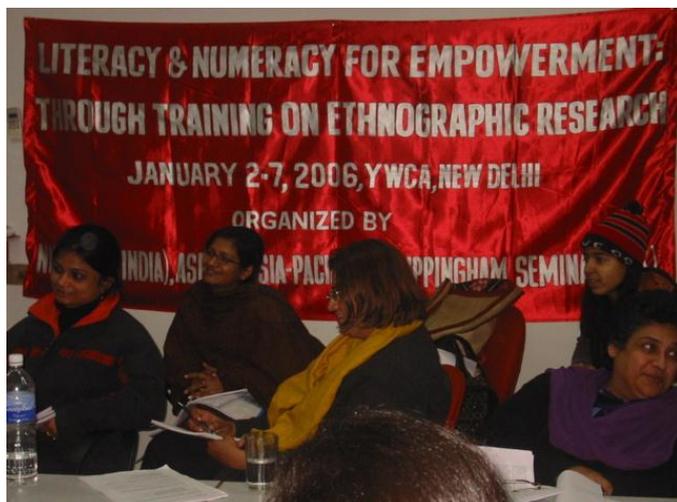
## LETTER

### (Learning Empowerment through Training in Ethnographic Research)

The LETTER project was first developed as a collaboration between an NGO in the UK, Uppingham Seminars (Convenor Alan Rogers) that has experience in working with literacy and numeracy as a social practice in the context of international Development programmes, and Nirantar in India, an NGO with experience of working especially with rural *dalit* women extending their numeracy, literacy and other communication skills aimed at their increasing empowerment (hence the title of the programme). The project drew on the experience of Professor Brian Street with particular expertise in ethnography and literacy (King's College London) and Professor Alan Rogers in adult education and course development (Uppingham Seminars). Others who have been involved in India and subsequent projects in Ethiopia and Uganda include Dave Baker (Institute of Education, University of London), particularly contributing on numeracy learning and teaching; Dr Elda Lyster University of KwaZulu-Natal, S Africa who worked on the writing of reading material for learners, using ethnographic approaches to explore original (oral) material such as local stories; and Dr Rafat Nabi from Pakistan whose book on *Hidden Literacies* is a key text in this approach.

The longer term aim of the project is for the participants to gain first-hand experience of ethnographic-style approaches to the existing local literacy and numeracy practices of the participants in Development programmes in order to support teaching and learning in these areas, and to produce some form of training guide to the methodologies so that they themselves can diffuse these approaches more widely

LETTER India  
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The **LETTER working sessions** are usually planned to consist of a series of three one week-long training workshops usually about three months apart, with two periods of field work in between. Participants in the LETTER project are expected to commit themselves not only to participation in all three workshops but also to the fieldwork between them and the writing of their research reports. The workshops aim to train the participants in ethnographic approaches to researching the literacy and numeracy practices of the learners and their communities, and international experts in these fields are invited to contribute as well as local trainers of trainers. Local fieldwork is conducted during each workshop. During the **first workshop**, the participants go out into the locality to observe local literacy and numeracy practices and report back to colleagues. Participants then design a small piece of original research that will be conducted in their own home context between the first and second workshops. They write up these case studies with the support of the LETTER training team (by email and correspondence).

Different scripts for writing in Ethiopia



During the **second workshop**, the participants present their case studies to the whole group who comment and give feedback, and a beginning is made in identifying some of the key findings from the research in order help participants to identify ways of using this material in developing curricula and teaching-learning approaches for their learners. At the **third workshop**, participants present their finalised case studies, and the group then explores how to utilise the findings in the development of teaching and learning in their home contexts. A final meeting may be held to disseminate the findings and the approach more widely in the country and to colleagues in neighbouring countries who might be interested in developing such a project themselves.

A key principle is that LETTER is not presented as an exclusive alternative to existing adult literacy learning programmes but as an additional resource to increase the effectiveness of adult literacy learning

programmes and other Development extension programmes. It seeks in a practical way to train those who train literacy and other adult teachers (facilitators, animators, tutors) how to examine the local everyday literacy and numeracy practices of the communities from which adult literacy learners come, so as to build new learning programmes on existing activities and perceptions.

**Publications** available to a wider public have been produced from all of the projects so far. A book was written and published by Nirantar based on the workshops there, *Exploring the Everyday: ethnographic studies of literacy and numeracy* (Nirantar 2007; available by free download at [www.nirantar.net](http://www.nirantar.net)). Following the Ethiopia workshops, a book was written locally and published, *Everyday Literacies in Africa: ethnographic studies of literacy and numeracy in Ethiopia*, edited by Gebre Alema, Rogers Alan, Street Brian and Openjuru George (Fountains Press, Kampala, 2009). A publication related to the everyday literacy and numeracy practices of individual case studies from Uganda is currently being prepared. In addition, *Hidden Literacies* edited by Rafat Nabi, Alan Rogers and Brian Street is available from Uppingham Seminars Press ([www.uppinghamseminars.co.uk](http://www.uppinghamseminars.co.uk)). It is hoped to make these publications available free on the web.