

GHANA LITERACY PROJECT

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The Project

The ODA component of this multi-donor project, which was aimed at mitigating the social costs of economic adjustment, commenced in 1989. It covered provision of equipment, consultancies and training valued at £1.4m to support a pilot literacy project in two regions, implemented by the Division of Non-Formal Education (NFED). The immediate objective was to make 15,000 people literate, with a longer-term objective of developing materials, training methods and programme management to support later expansion throughout the country. In the event, the Government decided to start a nation-wide literacy campaign in 1990 before the pilot project was fully under way, and ODA resources were used in support of a much larger programme than intended. The World Bank took over funding of the programme in 1992.

The Evaluation

The evaluation was undertaken in September 1994 by a team including consultants in economics, social development and education. It was based on a study of reports, discussions with UK and Ghanaian agencies involved, and short field visits to the pilot areas, supplemented by an impact survey of 50 learners in the pilot areas.

Overall Success Rating

The rapid transition to a full-scale national programme complicates performance assessment against the pilot project's original objectives. Separate statistics were not collected in the pilot areas, and there was no time to develop and test methodologies and infrastructure there for the national programme. In terms of actual achievement against its revised scope, the evaluators judge the ODA project to have been *partially successful*.

The Main Findings

- The impact of the national literacy programme has overall been very positive. In poor, remote areas, in badly lit buildings or in the open air, with limited resources, learners and volunteer facilitators meet on 3-4 evenings a week. The programme has stimulated strong demand for literacy, reintroduced large numbers of people to the educational process, and developed a strong community identity
- Two positive features of the ODA project were that: (a) it helped strengthen NFED's programme delivery system during the initial rapid expansion, and; (b) it developed a model closely similar to that of the national literacy programme.

- In other respects, however, the impact of the ODA support was less than it might have been. No Management Information System was set up during the pilot phase to help to evaluate success and refine the model. FM radio was a key element in project design, but a decision by Government not to expand the FM network restricted the use of radio largely to publicity. Even where FM radio was available, its use has not been fully integrated with classroom teaching. The original strategy of using NFED as a coordinator of the many other agencies in Ghana with experience of running literacy programmes was abandoned. NFED became implementor rather than coordinator and the other agencies (despite receiving a substantial part of the ODA resources) were neglected.
- The impact of some ODA inputs was less than it might have been. There were more consultancies than could be absorbed effectively, and advice was often not followed up. Vehicles, useful in the short run, have not proved a long-term asset. Many training awards went to agencies which played minor roles. UK project management took too long to set up. Too many agencies were involved, with loosely defined contracts, with no single person responsible for the project full-time.
- Intended to benefit the most vulnerable, especially women, the project's voluntary nature, whilst crucial to its success, precluded an active bias in selecting participants. Most learners were probably from low income groups, but socio-economic status was not monitored. Large numbers of women, many with no other access to education, have participated, but the project did not always meet their expectations, and their ability to benefit was limited by competing claims on their time. An important achievement was the establishment of some successful income-generation schemes which have developed into wider community activities.

Lessons

- Functional literacy programmes are best designed in partnership with learners, using materials and topics relevant to everyday life. Design needs to allow flexible implementation.
- Aid for literacy is best focused on institutional support for the managing agency at HQ and field level.
- Simple monitoring systems, in place from the start, are essential in a pilot project, and need supplementing by periodic assessments of levels of literacy achieved, and by additional research, for example into how far disadvantaged groups are benefiting.
- Where participation is voluntary, positive action may be needed to ensure that the disadvantaged are not discouraged. Target groups need defining, and attendance targets agreed and monitored. Where field workers are also volunteers, motivation needs maintaining. A WID strategy needs to be incorporated from the outset, for both women learners and women staff in the implementing agency.

- Intensive consultancy inputs may be ineffective in a new and unsophisticated agency. Support is best identified jointly with the agency, to match both its needs and its absorptive capacity. With a complex project and an untried agency, clear conditions on implementation need to be established and monitored, and backed up by retaining some leverage, for instance through funding some essential recurrent costs.
- The multi-disciplinary approach needs to be applied from the beginning. The fact that the project is primarily the responsibility of one discipline should not preclude the involvement of others in project design. Clear responsibility for UK project management arrangements also needs to be established in advance. If more than one agency is involved, care needs to be taken in defining roles, and the major contractor should have a presence in the country.
- Project managers should decide on the amount of overseas training offered. This should be governed by the funds available and the needs of the project, rather than being expressed as a fixed number of awards, which may discourage take-up of shorter courses.
- In projects where neither an income value can be placed on benefits, nor an economic rate-of-return calculated, the appraisal needs to include a target cost-effectiveness analysis as a basis for monitoring project performance.