

# LITERACY INITIATIVE FOR EMPOWERMENT IN THE GAMBIA (LIFE)

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Research on the implementation of LIFE in the  
Gambia

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LIFE is a collaborative framework; it is neither a project nor a programme, but a strategy and an operating mechanism, for the attainment of the UNLD, EFA and MDG objectives to drastically reduce illiteracy at the global level and the successful achievement of national literacy objectives.

## **Methodology:**

1. Literature Review
  - At ANFEU
  - BAFROW
2. Interviews and discussions
  - The research is conducted through interviews and discussions at:
    - At national coordination level at (ANFEU)
    - Key operators
    - Regional levels
    - Facilitation (or implementation) level
3. Questionnaires
  - Questionnaire prepared by UNESCO was use at executive levels
    - i. Finding incorporated in the report
4. Report writing
  - LIFE objective and principles used as guides to write the report.
  - SWOT analyses used to conclude the report in general terms



## **Introduction:**

Statistics has shown that about 774million adults in the world are illiterate and 80million young people are out of school and about two-third of these people are women and girls. Many of those enrolled in the formal school systems drop out without adequate literacy skills. It is believed that literacy is freedom, it is empowering, a source of making informed decision and means of escaping from the saddles of poverty; therefore it is the right of everyone.

It is an area that has been given insufficient attention by many countries, in some of which it is endemic. Therefore a global collaborative approach is needed to uproot this endemic ailment from the face of earth. It is for this reason that pronouncements in the UNLD, EFA, UNESS, UNDESD etc were made.

## **LIFE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES**

LIFE is a collaborative framework; it is neither a project nor a programme, but a strategy and an operating mechanism, for the attainment of the UNLD, EFA and MDG objectives to drastically reduce illiteracy at the global level and the successful achievement of national literacy objectives.

The criteria for LIFE country qualifications are, the country must have:

- Adult illiteracy rate of less than 50% and or
- Over 10million people without basic literacy skills.

It is found that 85% of population with insufficient literacy competencies reside in 35 countries and 23 of the 35 (about 66%) of these countries are in Africa.

The implementation of LIFE is in the following phases, these are:

- Phase1; identifies 11 countries that have started implementation in 2006
- Phase 2; 12 countries that have started implementation in 2008
- Phase 3; 12 countries to start in 2010.
- A global Assessment of LIFE in 2011 and
- Sustainability programmes from 2012 to 2015.

The Gambia is in phase two of LIFE implementation, indicating that elements of it should be in place, i.e. up and running in the country.

LIFE framework aims to contribute to the achievement of three of Dakar goals, which emanate from an international conference held in Dakar in 2000, and these are:

- Goal (3); Meeting the learning needs of all young people and adults
- Goal (4); a 50% improvement in adult literacy
- Goal (5); achieve gender equality in education

The strategies are at all levels from global to local:

- At the **global level** UNESCO will
  - lead LIFE strategies
  - Foster collaborative actions to enhance literacy
  - All national literacy policies and action be country-led
  - Support country planning, implementation and evaluation processes.

The **strategic areas of LIFE** focus on:

- Advocacy and communication to make literacy a priority agenda of different stakeholders
- Capacity building in policy development for sustainable and empowering literacy
- Capacity building for delivery of empowering literacy programmes of good quality
- Sharing knowledge and inspiring innovation to continuously improve literacy policies and practices

LIFE employs the following **six principles for the provision of literacy** within a wide developmental and cultural context:

1. Stressing acquisition of basic literacy using integrated approaches
2. Mobilizing communities
3. Focusing on mothers and their children (especially in rural areas)
4. Strengthen the literacy environment
5. Capitalizing on ICTs
6. Give attention to bi-and multilingual contexts.

UNESCO as the lead agency for UNLD and LIFE will continue to facilitate and promote the **building of global partnership**: therefore link the following initiatives:

- UNESS and GAP
- Existing regional and international organization
- EFA initiatives (FTI and UNGEI)
- International NGOs
- Private sector such as the book and publishing industry

This simply translated to mean that UNESCO will be the lead facilitator in the Implementation of LIFE at international or global stages.

### **LIFE AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES**

In the African context, **Regional Meeting of African LIFE countries** (held in Maputo, Mozambique, 29 – 31 Jan 2008) was organised and was geared towards bringing common understanding of LIFE because different countries had different perception of LIFE at the time. The meeting adopted a Strategic Platform for Africa:

- Which stated that LIFE is a most for Africa
  - During the meeting urgent attention areas were indentified for Africa and it was agreed that there is an urgent need to:
    - Include literacy and non-formal education among priority of stakeholders foremost of which is government,
    - Adopt LIFE as a common framework of intervention,
    - Allocate adequate and tangible funding from national education budget (3% of the budget) to literacy and
    - Adopt and implement as African Literacy and Language Charter

Some pertinent recommendations were made and these were:

To use NGOs and CSOs ability

- to reach out the most excluded populations,

- To harness their knowledge and experience and
- Extend the scope of LIFE

It is also recommended to partner NGOs and CSOs to:

- Intensify advocacy
- Participate in capacity building (transfer of good practices)
- Monitor the quality of programmes
- Constantly holding partner and stakeholder (local, national and international) to account.

During the meeting some good practices in some Africa countries were share; countries like Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal had strong political commitment and national structures like creating ministries of education; unfortunately all these countries are Francophone countries.

The First Ladies in Burkina Faso, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Niger and Nigeria were found to be instrumental in adding their weight in advocating for literacy in their countries, while Eritrea was sighted for efficiently using radio and television to promote literacy.

In the area of capacity building, the adaptation of curricula using bi – or multilingual approaches, the use of media, professional development and monitoring and evaluation were prominent but it was agreed that there was much to be desired in advocacy.

Nigeria committed approximately USD 8.7million from the Nigerian Debt Relief Fund to literacy and the visit of the First Lady of the United State of America help to draw national attention to illiteracy in the country. The radio programme “Each-one-teach-one” also added great impetus on literacy campaign in Nigeria.

The presence of Brazil has also highlighted that while a holistic partnership approach is important, government and in particular ministries of education must take the lead in policy formulation.

One major problem was that LIFE was mis-conceptualized as a funding programme by many rather than a framework and strategy for proactively building on national resources. The need for involving untraditional partner like the private sector was found to be unexplored.

LIFE in essence was found to have registered country specific progresses and was faced with country specific challenges, therefore country led initiative were encouraged.

### **LIFE GAMBIAN PERSPECTIVE**

The Gambia with a literacy population of 42% nationally and 28% for women qualified her to be recognized as a LIFE country meeting the criterion of having less than 50% of literate population. In The Gambia Adult and Non-Formal Education is an integral part of the basic education system, hence it operatives are under the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE).

In the MoBSE there is a unit under the Directorate of Basic and Secondary Education Programmes dedicated to Adult and Non-Formal Education, in short ANFEU. The head of this unit is the National Focal Point for LIFE in the Gambia.

The Gambia is placed in the second phase of implementing LIFE; which start in 2008. The government, LIFE country focal point and NGO representative attended, in their various capacities, various meeting on LIFE (e.g. Dakar in 2000 and Maputo in 2008 etc.).

### **Policy and LIFE in the Gambia**

A national conference to launch LIFE in the Gambia was organised <>. This conference attracted high power delegation from UNESCO, other UN agencies in the Gambia, NGOs, CSOs, the private sector and other stakeholders. The conference was under the theme "*Rethinking Adult and Non-Formal Education for a more Efficient and Effective Service Delivery*". The conference was geared towards identifying the gaps in Adult and Non-Formal Education, ANFE, review addition information for the finalization of the first draft of the National Policy on Non-Formal Education. The draft policy has been validated and it is at this stage await approval. Time is a major factor in implementation and the urgency of the policy to be approved cannot be overemphasized.

The policy emphasises ANFE through which:

- Literacy, numeracy, civic education and indigenous languages featuring across the acquisition of life and livelihood skills.
- The use of the five major languages to reduce illiteracy by 50% by 2015,
- The respect for the rights of the individual and
- The integration of cultural diversity and local knowledge are ensured.

Although the policy on non-formal is yet to be approved, The Education Policy at national level is somehow committed, in a piecemeal manner, to the elements of LIFE's framework and strategies. Therefore a collaborative and collective approach would be fundamental in realising the EFA, MDG, DESD and UNLD goals through LIFE in The Gambia.

Out of the 21 National Education Policy objectives, the following are devoted to the literacy:

- xi.** Improve learning outcomes at all levels - at least 80% of students will attain minimum grade competencies/mastery levels by 2015
- xii.** Increase the enrolment ratio of Early Childhood by 50% especially in the rural areas by 2015
- xiii.** Increase access, for adults and out-of-school youth, to functional literacy and numeracy programmes in order to half the illiterate population by 2015
- xiv.** Provide marketable and social skills to enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life
- xv.** Introduce the teaching of the five most commonly used languages – Wolof, Pulaar, Mandinka, Jola and Sarahule to be taught at the basic, senior secondary, tertiary and higher education levels as subjects.

### **National strategies and operational approaches**

The education sector on its part has put up a number of implementation strategies to measure to its commitment to literacy. In the Upper River Region, URR, where the problem of illiteracy especial with regards to girls' education is prominent, girls friendly schools are encourage, in which tuition fees and the provision education materials for girls are taken care of by government. There is also a great commitment in the side of the president in creating an education trust fund for girls, which has a wider support from both private and individual; many farmlands are cultivated and their proceeds are committed to the trust fund. This political support, initiated and spearheaded by the president has earned considerable number of children, not only girls, education sometimes up to university level. The national policy of free and continuous basic education is also keeping an unprecedented number of children through basic education, i.e. up to Grade 9.

The proliferation of new schools especially in the rural areas has availed a lot of children opportunity to be educated.

In the case of Adult and Non-Formal (ANFE) it is fundamental to first look at structural setup of the operation of the sector. At the ministerial level, ANFEU is responsible for coordinating ANFE

activities in the country. The unit is responsible for facilitating the achievement of 50% increase in literacy in the country. Because the unit is part of the bigger basic education sector, in collaboration with the Regional Education Directorates scout for personnel to implement ANFE literacy activities in the country.

In the regions they have focal points responsible for coordinating ANFE activities at regional levels. These focal points are employees of the ministry in the regions but they are not primarily appointed on ANFE activities. Therefore they are subjected to be moved to other units where their services are needed. In the same vein most of the literacy facilitators are also appointees of the ministry and are therefore subjected to the same condition.

The other key traditional operative in non-formal education nationwide in the Gambia is the Department of Community Development, interested in providing functional literacy skills like tie and dye, soap making etc. there are a number of NGOs (e.g. TASTAN, WAEC etc) also operating in the rural areas. The Social Development Fund (SDF) also provides microfinance credit to participants in functional non-formal educational programme in order to empower them in utilizing their skills.

I will endeavour to gauge my findings of the achievements of ANFE in the Gambia against the strategy focus areas and principles of LIFE, identified in meeting of LIFE African countries:

### **Advocacy and Communication**

There is a weekly Education Forum programme on Gambia Radio Television Services (GRTS), which sometime features adult and non-formal education programme. But there is not specific programme delegated to the promotion of non-formal education in the Gambia. According to findings it seems there is a weak focus on advocacy, which could be attributed to an oversight in policy and operational strategies.

The regional consultative meetings in all the six educational regions and the national conference on adult and non-formal education were landmark initiatives to bring stakeholders in literacy together. Such forums should be encourage on a regular bases to enhance common understand and course of action and they can even serve as means of marketing the literacy programmes developed.

The Gambia LIFE Focal Point is also in good communication with terms UNESCO; indications are that she is constantly in touch with UNESCO in terms of LIFE issues affecting the Gambia.

I would recommend the involvement of high profiled personalities like the president, first lady or even the vice president who is very prominent in promoting women affairs in the country. The fact that women are most affected with illiteracy could be used to engage the vice

president, in particular, in promoting literacy in the country. Such prominent involvement will help to raise awareness and as a means of advocating for private sector involvement. This good practice could be learnt from countries like Burkina Faso and Mali.

It would be important to intensify to use of the media by understudying Eritrea and Nigeria and probably replicating their strategies in the Gambia. The reason for the Maputo meeting of LIFE countries is for African countries to learn from one another and this is an opportunity to learn from them through study tours, attachments and etc. The fact that the genesis and nature of African literacy problem are similar, I believe there is a lot to learn from each other at continental level and we should intensify the use the African forums on LIFE to foster strengthened bilateral relationships.

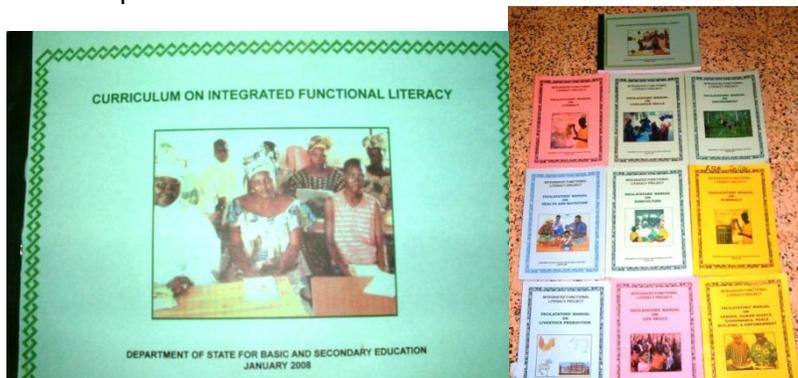
Music and sports can also play a big role in promoting literacy in the Gambia. As mentioned earlier, women are the most affected and they tend to like music of musicians like Jaliba Kuyateh. He is also a good will ambassador of UNICEF and he could be use to create clips on literacy and he can also help in literacy promotional campaigns.

It is important that advocacy and communication is given rigour to raise awareness so that participation at all levels is improved and good understanding of the values and benefits of literacy are extensively spread.

### **Capacity building in policy and development for sustainable and empowering literacy in the Gambia**

The Gambia under the auspices of the ANFEU with participation of other stakeholders has developed an expanded policy on ANFE using LIFE framework and strategies. The policy is geared towards building partnership for sustainability and this can be visibly seen in the regional setup proposed by the policy. The policy is calling for integrated approach to planning and implementation of literacy programmes. One of the key policy pronouncements is the *“integration of multilingualism/cultural diversity and local knowledge into strategies”* which is very much in line with LIFE objective.

The units with partners in development were able to produce manuals for facilitators in all issues related to functional literacy. These manuals, pictures shown below, are used as guides in helping facilitators to deliver their trainings effectively. They are also organisational capitals that would foster uniformity in approach and provide sustainable programme that will empower trainees.



*Curriculum and Facilitators Manuals  
(courtesy of ANFEU)*

In other to further strengthen literacy, the unit and other partners has recently developed a draft curriculum for the delivery of ANFE in the country. If approved the curriculum is going to be used by all literacy providers in the country.

Capacity building development for sustainable and empowering literacy ushered in the construction of **27 Multi-Purpose Centres (MPCs)** throughout the country by the Community Skills Initiative Project (CSIP) in which functional literacy, library facilities, skill development, income generation activities and micro credit facilities are provided to adult; this will go a long way to sustainably laying the bases for reducing illiteracy to 50% and likewise alleviate poverty.

## **SOME KEY PLAYER IN LITERACY IN THE GAMBIA**

### **Adult and Non-Formal education Unit (ANFEU)**

ANFEU is the unit under the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE) responsible for implementing functional literacy programmes in the country. The LIFE country focal point is the head of this unit. She has represented the country in LIFE forums and currently using her experience to lead the country's process of implementing the framework and strategies. This can be clearly seen in the new integrated and partnership approaches initiated in the Gambia. Some of these are:

- The new registration process for literacy providers
- The new policy for literacy provision,
- The new curriculum to standardise literacy provision,
- The building of fortified partnership with various providers by signing MOUs and
- The capacity building programme to improve quality.

All these and other activities can be linked directly to LIFE objectives and strategies. The only problem with the partnership is that the unit is failing to sensitizing key player in the country about LIFE to enable them associate their functions to LIFE. During the cross institutional interviews it was found that both CSIP and BAFROW managers do not hear about LIFE even once. Sensitizing them will help a great deal in accelerating and strengthening the integrated approach advocated by LIFE.

The unit has also established a number of Mothers' Clubs in CRR and these clubs can be seen supported by CSIP. The manager CSIP emphasized that their project is interested in community development programme and therefore they are associated with all serious providers that needed their help. The creation and support of **Mothers' clubs** of Child Friendly Schools Initiative (CFSI) with financial support from UNICEF in the Upper River Region (URR) has engaged mothers in functional literacy programmes. Table below indicates the number of facilitators trained to service in these Mothers' Clubs and they are scheduled for a minimum of two training activities (pre-service and in-service trainings). Each of these facilitators serve in centres with approximately 25 mothers undergoing training in literacy and other functional skills.

<b>UPPER RIVER REGION TRAINED MOTHERS' CLUB FACILITATORS</b>			
<b>YEAR</b>	<b>PRE-SERVICE</b>	<b>IN-SERVICE</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
2007	20	0	<b>20</b>
2008	15	20	<b>35</b>
2009	20	20	<b>40</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>95</b>

With the availability of funds this programme is expected to continue and rollout to other regions so that in the long term it can produce a pool of qualified human resources to help achieve EFA and MDG literacy goals through LIFE framework and strategies. The programme this year trained 40 facilitators 50% of whom are pre-service facilitator. Every facilitator according to the programme will be given a minimum of two trainings; a pre-service and in-service training.

The number of mothers trained since 2007 is about 1,075 and an impact evaluation exercise starting from Monday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2009 is going to be conducted by ANFEU in CRR. This exercise will determine the impact of the Mothers' Club functional literacy programme on the mothers and their school going children.

The major problem with sustaining the trained facilitators is that they are primarily employed by the MoBSE and they are subjected to redeployment to other areas of operation. This needs to be discussed at the level of postings so that even were they are transferred to other schools they are engaged with literacy. This will help to maintain a considerable core of facilitators with ANFE activities, if not they might sometimes be disengaged from ANFE.

The trainees are usually supplied with the required materials after training but sometimes the material supply is delayed and this is posing adverse consequences in the operations of the facilitators. This condition is attributed to delay in the provision of fund from development partners to reproduce the materials. Therefore I would recommend that advance plans and

arrangements are made to outsource fund for the production and delivery of the material in time and that the bottlenecks of bureaucracy are minimised at donor levels to expedite the availability of materials.

The unit also setup regional coordinating committees that coordinate the implementation of functional literacy in the regions. The composition of the committee across all regions is:

1. Community Development (CD);which provides skills through Community Skill Improvement Project (CSIP),
2. Social Development Fund (SDF); which provide funds (Loads),
3. Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE), represented by the regional Focal Point
4. Local NGO (programme specifics) and
5. Local communities; which provides participants.

This committee is responsible for coordinating ANFEU activities in the regions.

The replication of Multi Purpose Centres base on societal labour structure is strongly considered by the main literacy provider, ANFEU. In the interview with ANFEU it came to light that they are going to take account of the way of life and techniques employed by those engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing, health, environment and other income generation activities to promote literate communities. Such communities shall have all the signs of a living literacy society; i.e. labels on facilities like clinic, school etc and environment like trees. Such literate communities will serve as sources for educating, employing and empowering of participants and the community at large through their already established cultural heritages as springboard.

## **BAFROW**

BAFROW is a local NGO that is also engaged in literacy programmes especially for women. It was founded in July 1990 and it is a national registered NGO. It is focusing on three major but integrated areas; these are:

- Health
- Empowerment and
- Environment.

It has built a model literate village in Mandinaba; the village has a multi-purpose centre, in which a learning centre for women, a day care centre, a bakery, cereal processing cottage industry and clinic are available. All these services employed graduates or products from their literacy programme as bakers, nurse attendance, ambulance driver, care mothers etc. BAFROW

also help to provide them with market outlets, a very good market constructed at the roadside with both retail and wholesale facilities has attracted the traffic that passes by. This has extended the scope or reaches of their product.



*Pictures of women in their functional literacy education programme at Mandinaba Model Village (courtesy of BAFROW).*

An interview with the director reveals that their approach is simply identifying community needs and design programmes that respond to those needs. The community with the help of BAFROW identify their problems, development plans and strategies to remedy them. BAFROW provides the training, employment and financial support to the participants. The products of their cottage industries especially with cereal products are now reaching the urban markets. The interview further revealed that the project has faced out 15 multipurpose centres. These centres are currently managed by the communities themselves. Although BAFROW would still want to further develop the faced out projects but funding constrains are hampering such effort.



*Pictures of women from Mandinaba using skills learnt into secured gainful employment (courtesy of BAFROW).*

The literature review also indicated that women in the project are able to take informed decisions in term of family and sexual lives. They are contributing immensely to the welfare of

their families. I quote *“more girls are receiving support from their families to continue their education resulting in fewer school dropouts among girls and reducing forced marriage”*. Men are now seeing women as partners and are involving them in family decision making. There is a reproductive health programme conducted by the project, which involved home visit to address health issues affecting members in the community.

The project has a quarterly newsletter produced by its participants. The news letter is written in the community’s language and touched on crosscutting issues affecting women in the community. The quarterly newsletter is a means of advocacy and communication for the community and therefore very pertinent tool for reaching out to potential beneficiaries.

The microfinance scheme attached to the project is helping participants to use their financial management skills to borrow and save with the scheme and more interestingly the scheme is ran and managed by the participants themselves.

At the time of this research BAFROW was going to sign an MOU with MoBSE to consolidate their relation in implementing non-formal programme in the country. This MOU can be a source of learning and transfer of good practices in non-formal education in the country. It can also strengthen the resource base of their programme areas in the country. MoBSE and others have a lot to learn from BAFROW from planning to implementation of functional literacy programmes.

### **Community Skill Initiative Project (CSIP)**

CSIP is a government project under the Department of Community Development. It is directly involved with providing functional skills to communities. It also collaborates with and supports MoBSE to provide literacy and numeracy skills. Because it is a government agent it is not mandated to run microfinance schemes therefore, it also collaborates with and supports the Social Development Fund (SDF) to issues out microfinance credits to empower participants or community involved in income generation through non-formal education programmes. Hence it is a major player in the implementation of LIFE framework and strategies in the Gambia through the main coordination body, MoBSE.

CSIP is the project that constructed the 21 multipurpose centres throughout the six administrative regions in the Gambia. These centres are location as in the table below:

REGION	NUMBER OF MPC	LOCATION
Great Banjul Area	2	Abuko, Bakoteh
Western Region	4	Brufut, Omurto, Somita, Bondaley
Lower River Region	3	Karantaba, Koliior, Nyamale
Central River Region	4	Jarreh, Cha Kunda, Kaur, Wassu
Upper River Region	4	Hella Kunda, KulKulleh, Njendeh, Jai Kunda
North Bank Region	4	Sara Kunda, Kerr Jariga, Jufureh, Berending
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	

These centres provide literacy and income generating activities for the communities in which they are located. This is done in partnership with MoBSE and SDF. MoBSE provides literacy and numeracy facilitators, the Community Development provides skills training and SDF provides the microfinance credits to educate and empower the participants. CSIP also participated by taking a fundamental role in developing the various teaching manuals for facilitators in the various skill development areas. They were also fundamental in the development of the ANFE policy, which is validated and awaiting approval. To strengthen the integration process CSIP has signed an MOU with MoBSE in order to consolidate stronger bonds in implementing literacy programmes. This I believe will be an opportunity to strengthen resource (both human and material) base of non-formal education programmes in the country.

Their operation is not only limited to activities conducted by MoBSE but also to other community support activities in the Gambia. They are providing technical and material support to functional literacy programmes where every necessary. It was quite clear from the interview with the manage CSIP that their functions or areas of operation are not limited to women as with other organizations. This was manifested in the composition of trainees in a particular programme in LRR, which is 15 and 11 for women and men respectively.

### **Capacity building for delivery of empowering literacy programmes of good quality**

The key building block of good quality empowering literacy programme country-wise is the consolidation of activities of all actors. The policy reinforces partnership building and currently a registration process of literacy provider has been initiated. 15 functional literacy providers have already registered and they are to benefit from training led by ANFEU to help improve their ability to provide quality trainings. The unit is partnering up with the Department of Community Development, who leads in providing functional skills like tie and dye, soap making etc to collectively provide quality training. In a similar vein the Social Development Fund (SDF) is been partnered to provide microfinance credit to participants in literacy programmes to help them establish small business to help improve their family lives and particularly take care of their children's education.

The continuous training or development of the facilitators is also expected to help deliver quality trainings. It is important that all those involved with the delivery of literacy are given relevant training in literacy, because out of the four Regional Focal Points (FPs) met one is not trained. This FP is seeing himself as a mere liaison between the facilitators and the aligned offices involved with literacy programmes. The reason given for the untrained FP is that in 2007 all the Focal Points were trained. Because they are staff of the Regional Offices they are also subject to change of postings. This particular FP was not part of the trained ones and the fact that the trained focal Point for that particular region is redeployed a vacuum was created, which is filled by the said untrained FP.

This shows that there is the need not to limit the number of trained FP to one but probably to train assistant FPs in the regions so that if one is moved there is the opportunity for him or her to be replaced by trained personnel. The absence of a trained FP has created a visible delivery gap in providing assistance and guide to the facilitators. Therefore it is recommended that ANFEU with the support from partners assess the structural competency setup and work out ways to train enough focal points and facilitators to avoid such situation, if not quality will be compromised. This is an opportunity to revisit the hierarchical reference of functional literacy provision in the country and create buffer to avoid weaknesses in service provision.

Comparing the above mentioned FP to another one in LRR, who is trained in literacy, he also understands the setup and operations of literacy in his region. The amount of planning, the cooperation between him and the interviewed facilitator, the use of literacy jargons and more importantly his understanding of the operations of literacy have placed him well above the previously mentioned FP. The FP was able to provide me with composition of the Regional Working Group and the function of each member in the committee. When asked about the meaning of LIFE, the facilitator was able to provide me with the meaning, while neither the first FP nor the facilitator could tell me the meaning of LIFE. This clearly states the level of awareness in the second group. When the two facilitators were asked whether they have any good practices to share with other; the first facilitator because she is trained for the first time could not share any good practise but the second facilitator said that he has development a banana farm with his trainees as part of their project and this has attracted a good number of people to register with the programme. He suggested involving in agriculture and similar livelihoods might help a great deal in attracting people to literacy programmes. This suggestion I found is very much in line with the new policy, curriculum and facilitators' manuals in functional literacy.

Enrolment and regular attendance to NFE programmes is a pre-requisite to benefiting from the farm. This has encouraged a lot of members of that community to register with the

programme. His programme has also register a significant number of male attendance; 10 to 11 out of the 26 members, this year alone.

It is found that stakeholders' involvements are eminent in some areas i.e. the:

- Women's Bureau
- Regional Planning and Implementing Committee (DPIC)
- Non-formal Education Unit (NFE)
- Community Skill Initiative Project (CSIP)
- Social Development Fund (SDF) and
- Local NGO's are involvement in meeting to collective plan and strategise implementation of literacy programme.

This is a very encouraging situation but one of the key weaknesses to such partnership is that some of these partner are programme specific in their approach; health, skills etc. The fully integrated approach will further strengthen and foster renewed commitment and steadfastness to the course of literacy.

The provision of material is a concern because the some facilitators(e.g. in region six) are yet to receive teaching and learning materials and that of region four could not have enough material though provided with moral and profession support from Community assistant of CSIP.

## **SOME KEY THINGS THAT WILL LEAD TO EFFECTIVE FUNCTIONAL LITERACY**

### **Understanding of the Community**

It is also becoming apparent that community acceptance and participation are fundamental to the realisation of LIFE objectives. Social constructs and gender labour designs are key to designing implementation programme because two cases emerge that showed the need to understand a community to effectively implement any literacy programme.

One of these cases involved a Jahangka community URR in which Mothers' Club members are registered with NFE programme in their community. After planning and drawing schedules with them on two occasions their attendance rate is still very poor; they claim to be busy even after been involved in drawing up the schedules. There is a Fula community nearby that is currently providing most of the participants. This has created a communication problem or barrier between the trainees and the facilitator because the facilitator is a Mandinka. In a similar vein in region 4 the focal point claimed to have closed an NFE centre and transfer the activities to a nearby village because the community in the previous location was not receptive to the programme.

Therefore, knowledge about a community and, advocacy and awareness programmes should be the bedrock for community involvement in literacy programmes. According to statistics the 774 million illiterates in the world are mainly in rural communities, for which the Gambia as a LIFE country is no exception. Therefore our efforts should initially be geared towards understanding the social construct of these societies to help design programmes that will help halve illiteracy by the end of Education Policy period 2004 – 2015. The BAFROW approach of total ownership might help to achieve this objective. Communities are encouraged first identifying and understanding their problems, are involved in designing solutions to the problems and take a lead in the implementing the solutions will encourage the zeal to achieve. The figures in the assessment conducted on the BAFROW projects in 2001 and 2002 have shown high early achievements by the projects, especially in Dumbutu, Brefet, Ndemban and Mandinaba (Report on the Evaluation of the Adult Literacy (REFLECT) Programmes, 2001 & 2002).

The policy is lamenting on societal cultural integration as a step of introducing and sustaining non-formal programme and a case study on BAFROW will be a giant step in winning the hearts of communities to register with future and existing programme.

The target group of LIFE is extended beyond NFE to all those unable to access formal education, particularly out-of-school children, as well as adolescents, youth and adult with insufficient or no literacy skills. It stated that *“Emphasis will be on mother and their children – girls and boys – living below the poverty line, especially those living in rural areas”*. It further stated that *“The promotion of literacy through technical support in the areas of policy, advocacy. Partnership-building, capacity-building and innovations through LIFE*

## **Partnership**

Partnership building is a major strategy in achieving LIFE objectives. The ANFEU is striving hard in this area. The signing of MOU with major players in literacy (e.g. CSIP, BAFROW) is ushering in a new form of consolidated and serious partnership. This will bring about openness, access and sharing between ANFEU and other actors in functional literacy.

The new registration process and criteria for operating in literacy programmes in the Gambia will help to bring much more seriousness in the side of operators. As state in the interview with manager CSIP there are sometimes briefcase NGO operating in the country that are not at all serious with what they are doing. If we mean business and are concerned about quality then standards must be straight. When asked about minor operator forming alliance, she said they cannot be force into alliance because of benefits involved but if standards are set they would have the option of either alliance or quit.

The emerging serious partnership since 2008 between ANFEU and the other actors in ANFE has a lot of benefits to the sector, some of which are:

- The development of facilitators manuals in various subjects,
- The development of a standard curriculum for all operators,
- The recently developed draft policy
- Integration of operations of players for diversity
- The registration of all operators for support and ensued quality and
- Learn and share experience and good practices.

These are the underpinning facts about the integrations and they are in line with the strategies recommended at the African Meeting of LIFE countries in Maputo.

The only weakness I can see is that the non-existing level of communication about LIFE at country level. None of the heads of both CSIP and BAFROW are aware of LIFE, while they are seemingly operating in the LIFE framework and strategies of it. Therefore ANFEU should make effort to sensitize all other operators in ANFE about LIFE. This will foster better understanding and participation in realising the goals set by LIFE. Although ANFEU is the lead agent for LIFE in the country they should make sure that others are not only taking part but do understand and also take an ownership role in achieving LIFE objectives. The BAFROW and CSIP projects have a lot that other LIFE countries, especially those in Africa can learn from. In as much as we should learn from other countries in terms of advocacy and, monitoring and evaluation they also can learn about the Model Villages and standardization processes taking place in the Gambia.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of ANFE in the Gambia**

During the interviews at ANFEU, CSIP, BAFROW and the regions it became obvious that the ANFE programmes are weak in the area of M&E.

At ANFEU it was found that statistics are difficult to get. It is usually by estimation that statistics like how many women are trained through the Mothers' Clubs can be acquired. Their skill levels of attainment cannot be acquired also.

At CSIP although they have an M&E unit but they cannot conduct longitudinal assessment of their programmes because they are usually overtaken by events.

At BAFROW they had two assessments in 2001 and 2002 that were quite comprehensive but since then they could not conduct one. They said those assessments were project funded and that funds are not available to further conduct subsequent ones.

At the regional levels capacity in terms of number and competency are not there to conduct appropriate monitoring and evaluation activities. The Cluster Monitors (CMs) that could be

used have no training in orthography and cannot help with monitoring ANFE activities. Likewise the focal points even were they are trained in ANFE they will not be able to conduct regular monitoring of the programmes because they have their prime function as education officers.

The opportunities are there to train the CMs in ANFE to help with the monitoring of ANFE programme. The CMs have immense training in monitoring and they can be used to gather information on ANFE programmes for eventual analyses. They can be used to operate as Community Development Assistants (CDAs) do and this will help to improve standards in ANFE. Alternative, in the new partnership, Community Development might increase their number of CDAs to also help in monitoring other programme areas. In effect both strategies could be used in a coordinated manner to maximise the potentials for monitoring and evaluating ANFE programmes.

Another opportunity is that the M&E unit of CSIP could be reinforced in terms of numbers and expertise to functionally monitor and evaluate all literacy programmes and information be equitably shared by all partners. The new partnership can also help in this area.

The main treat is that the process is going to incur additional cost, in terms of training and maintaining them in monitoring and evaluation, and, therefore sustainability might be a problem.

## **GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Strengths**

Non-Formal Education Programme have quite a number of strengths that needs to be noted and build upon. Some of these are:

- The tremendous amount of resources both human and material resources from various operators. The sector has a lot of manpower with immeasurable experience that needed collaborative approach to maximise their usage.
- Most Gambians are bi or multi-lingual hence facilitator could be selected from such people.
- The integrated approached in terms of operations and processes are a strength that could bring in a lot good to the sector.
- The standardization of the curriculum and other teaching and learning materials can help to easy access to resource.
- Cooperative approach to operations is a spirit that should be continually strengthened.

### **Weaknesses**

The implementation of LIFE has it weaknesses that needed redress and some of which are:

- It is not well advocated for and there is the need to build in effective communication mechanisms to get stakeholders more involved.
- It lacks an articulated means of monitoring and evaluating the impact of literacy programmes nationwide.
- It lacks adequate pool of staff, facilitators and focal points, to respond to uncertainties of the movement of education staff
- Some of the major programmes are dependent on ANFEU to provide material resources; therefore there is usually shortage of learning and training materials.
- Diversity of interest by different operators; personalisation of areas of operation.
- Some of the operations are not male attracting.

### **Opportunities**

There are lots of opportunities to improve the sector and some of these are:

- Persuade MoBSE to commit at least 3% of national education budget to ANFE.
- Involve UNESCO and others international bodies to help improve capacity in the areas of monitoring and evaluation.
- Visit other countries and organisations in Africa on study tours and attachments to tap best practices.
- Involve high profile personalities in advocating for providing support to functional literacy.
- Push for more political commitment in the side of government; national assembly and cabinet.
- Collaborate all actors in functional literacy towards a national approach to meeting literacy goals in EFA, UNLD, and UNESS etc.

### **Threats**

There are a number of threats outside the control of the sector and therefore there is the need to change them into opportunities and some of these are:

- Social construct like gender and labour structures in communities that are negative to literacy.
- Inability to acquire adequate funding in time from donor partners to implement certain programmes due to bottlenecks in bureaucracy.
- Punctuality and regularity of participant to sessions.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

There are a lot of good things currently going on in the Gambia with regards to LIFE but nonetheless few other things need to be observed, i.e.

- Call for a national conference of ANFE operatives to revisit LIFE documents both national and international to further strategies, rather than the seemingly top-bottom approach.
- Create a national database on operators and beneficiaries to help gauge the scope and depth of implementation.
- Collectively conduct longitudinal monitoring and regular evaluation of progress make through which early signals are be picked up and remedied.