The financing literacy project: key findings and reflections on Adult Literacy Benchmark 12

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The financing literacy project started in June 2010; five years after the International Benchmarks on Adult Literacy were published by the Global Campaign for Education. Benchmark 12 stated that: 'Governments should dedicate at least 3% of their national education sector budgets to adult literacy programmes. Where governments deliver on this, international donors should fill any remaining resource gaps'. The financing literacy project set out to collect data on exactly what governments are spending.

When Benchmark 12 was agreed, there was awareness that adult literacy was drastically underfunded and marginalised within education ministries around the world. One reason for the neglect of adult literacy is the belief that the best, and most cost-effective, long-term strategy to achieve literacy is to focus on primary education, which will lead to future generations of adults growing up literate. This reasoning is problematic for several reasons: it paints an overly optimistic picture of the potential of universal primary education in many countries, it ignores the role of adult literacy in children's education and it means denying millions of adults their right to literacy.

However, while the neglect of literacy was well established, there was a lack of information about how much governments were actually spending. This lack of data meant that tracking progress was

difficult and there was uncertainty about whether the 3% target proposed in the International Benchmarks on Adult Literacy was appropriate. Therefore, the financing literacy project was started to collect and collate data on government spending on literacy and adult education internationally. Additionally, the project has conducted case study research on a range of countries that have increased their investment in adult literacy. This has enabled the project to look at both the quantity and quality of literacy financing.

The aims of this article are twofold: firstly, it will provide a brief overview of some of the key trends identified from the data and secondly, in the light of the findings, it will reflect on the usefulness of Benchmark 12 and offer some broader thoughts about the recording, analysing and tracking of data on literacy financing.



Adult literacy in Uganda

Key findings

Data on government spending on adult literacy and adult education was found for around forty countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America. A summary table is provided overleaf. The full collection of data can be found at: http://www.reflect-action.org/ financingliteracy and this probably constitutes the largest existing collection of data on literacy financing. Data was collected from CONFINTEA reports, Education Sector Plans and other government and civil society sources. More data was found than expected. Where data could not be found this was often an indicator that little investment was being made in literacy – and sometimes this was officially acknowledged. For example, the education plan for Belize states that: 'a primary goal for the ALE sector would be to have a specific budgetary allocation from the government'. This highlights the role that international targets could play in assisting national advocacy efforts.

- No country has reached the 3% benchmark, although two countries have come close. South Africa reportedly spent 2.78% of the education budget on adult literacy in 2008 and Brazil 2.76% in 2006.
- Countries including Chad, Thailand, Burkina Faso and Brazil have increased the percentage of the education budget allocated to adult literacy or adult education.
- A larger number of countries have decreased their allocations

Government spending on adult education and adult literacy as a percentage of the education budget

Country	Year	% of education budget spent on adult education	% of education budget spent on adult literacy
Africa		-	*
Cape Verde	2005	8.71%	
Chad	2001		1.58%
Equatorial Guinea	2008	19.50%	0.65%
Eritrea	1997		
Gambia	2008	0.30%	
Ghana*	2015	1.30%	
Guinea	1990-2000	0.02%	
Kenya	1998-2008	Less than 1%	
Malawi	2007-2008		0.15%
Mali	2008	1.40%	
Mauritania	2005		0.36%
Mozambique*	2010	0.70%	
Namibia*	2007/2008	3.08%	
Nigeria	2008	1.41%	
Rwanda	2008		0.50%
Senegal	2008		0.70%
Sierra Leone*	2007	0.10%	
South Africa	2009		2.07%
Zambia	2010		0.01%
Asia			
Cambodia Cambodia	2008	2%	
China	2006	1.86%	
India	2008	1.0070	0.02%
Lao	2006-07	1%	0.0270
Nepal	2005/6	1.13%	
Pakistan	2009-2010	1.1370	0.37%
Papua New Guinea	2005	4.60%	0,0770
Thailand	2007	1.73%	
Vietnam	2005	2.83%	
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Latin America			
Bolivia	Annually	3.22%	
Brazil	2008		0.82%
Columbia	2008		0.26%
Costa Rica	Annually	0.02%	
Dominican Republic	2008	2.72%	
Guatemala	<u>Annually</u>		Less than 1%
Jamaica	2007	0.78%	
Peru*	<u>2</u> 011	7.27%	
St Lucia	2007/8	14%	

- Where there are spaces, no figures are available Countries with a * next to the name show planned spending from Education Sector Plans
- The full collection of figures is available at: http://www.reflect-action.org/financingliteracy

to adult education and adult literacy as a percentage of the education budget and these include Pakistan, Malawi, Mauritania, Nigeria, China and the Gambia.

For some of these countries (e.g. Nigeria and China) real spending on adult education has actually increased while the proportion spent has decreased. For others (such as Pakistan and Malawi) there have been real decreases in

spending on adult education. However, even where spending has increased in real terms, decreasing percentages still indicate that adult education is being deprioritised relative to other sectors and is therefore not receiving the benefits of increasing overall funds to education.

Some countries (such as Vietnam and Ghana) have increased real spending on adult literacy or education in line with increased overall allocations to education, but have kept the percentage spent at a fixed allocation (1.3% on adult education in Ghana and 2.83% on adult education in Vietnam).

■ In some cases, decreases in spending have been explicitly linked to pressure to divert resources away from adult education to the primary sector.