

A response to the *Education
for All Country Report 2010:
South Africa*

ADULT LITERACY & ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

John Aitchison

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Adult literacy

Adult literacy and the EFA goals

Adult literacy is explicitly addressed in EFA goals 3 and 4:

Goal 3: Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes.

Goal 4: Achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women; and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

and implicitly in goals 5 and 6:

Goal 5: Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring females' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.

Goal 6: Improving all aspects of quality of education, and ensuring excellence for all, so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills

In assessing whether South Africa is meeting these literacy related goals, these statements of goals can be turned into the following questions:

1. Do all young people and adults have equitable access to appropriate literacy programmes?
2. Will there be a 50% improvement in the levels of adult literacy from 2000 to 2015 (such improvement especially including women)?
3. Will there will be a equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults by 2015?
4. Will gender disparities in both access and achievement be eliminated in adult basic education by 2015?
5. Will all adult learners achieve recognised and measurable learning outcomes in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills?

In examining the [draft] *Education for All (EFA) Country Report, 2009: South Africa* of 16 November 2009 the following will be noted:

- Have the above questions been addressed?
- Is sufficient evidence provided so that an informed judgement can be made?
- What judgement can be made on the likely achievement of the EFA goals.

1. Do all young people and adults have equitable access to appropriate literacy programmes?

Has the above question been addressed?

In a fairly general way it is addressed largely through the material on the Kha ri gude literacy campaign and public ABET provision.

Is sufficient evidence provided so that an informed judgement can be made?

The evidence is not really adequate (and in any case might be quite hard to generate and analyse (particularly with the decline in adult education research capacity in higher education institutions)) because there is nothing said about demand for access that is not serviced. The right to adult basic education enshrined as a right in the 1996 Constitution is officially met through the policies and programmes of the national and provincial departments of education. The report does say that “Public provision of ABET has not received adequate budgetary or policy support in the face of the immense demands on government by the school system, the FET colleges and universities, and uptake and throughput of learners has been disappointing.” and it acknowledges that “The model of public adult education provision and regulation is again under serious review ...”. Thus, answering this question would require a research base that currently is not present or very weak in the adult education sector (and notably absent in the national department).

The report does not comment on the fact that the Kha ri gude campaign was originally supposed to get access to over R6 billion and that the current and planned operational budget is much less than that (though this is partly balanced by rigorous cost savings). This has inevitably reduced the capacity of the campaign to take up more learners and capped provision in the first two years. Thus the report’s observation that “the Kha Ri Gude basic literacy campaign, ... has been an unqualified success” must be tempered by the fact that it could have been a greater success if it had been provisioned on a scale nearer to what was originally agreed to.

What judgement can be made on the likely achievement of this EFA goals.

Not much more can be said. Obviously the Kha ri gude campaign and some SETA programmes have shown the state's commitment to access (including of the disabled) to literacy development. That it is not enough is common cause. More has to be done.

2. Will there be a 50% improvement in the levels of adult literacy from 2000 to 2015 (such improvement especially including women)?

Has the above question been addressed?

Yes. The report is correct in saying that, though measuring adult illiteracy levels is difficult using only schooling grade levels as proxies (as measured in General Household Surveys by Statistics South Africa), the Khasi gude literacy campaign will be largely responsible for enabling South Africa to achieve the 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015.

Is sufficient evidence provided so that an informed judgement can be made?

Because this is an important achievement to gain it requires some looking at the evidence and its analysis.

Firstly, the goal itself is a somewhat ambiguous one. Is it a 50% improvement in the literacy level or a 50% reduction in the number of illiterates? The latter is the one that makes most sense.

Secondly, how many adult illiterates are there in South Africa? The Ministerial Committee on Literacy of 2006 that planned the Khasi gude mass literacy campaign based its estimates of the number of total and functional illiterates aged 15+ on the 2001 census data:

- 4.7 million total illiterates (no schooling) (16% of adults)
- 4.9 million functional illiterates (less than grade 7 schooling) (16% of adults)

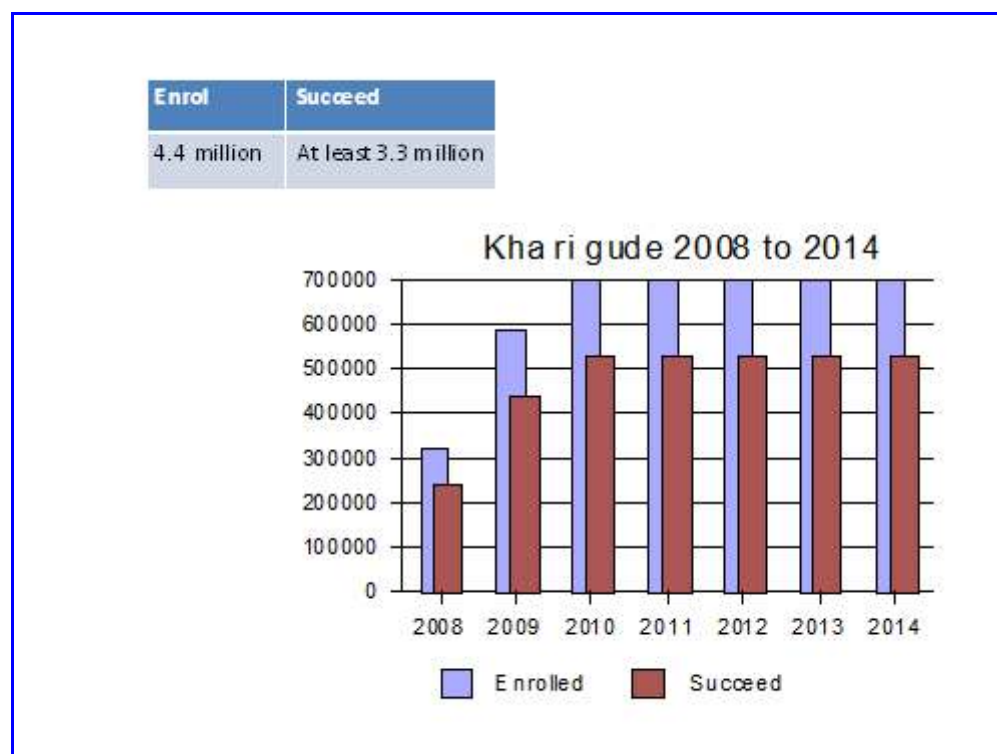
Deducting from this total of 9.6 million (32% of adults) about 1.5 million truly uneducable people and those aged over 74 one was left with a total of about 7.6 adults (50% of which is 3.8 million) as the target of the campaign (which set itself an enrolment target of 4.7 million so as to allow for some inevitable drop-out and attrition).

[Subsequently some of the Statistics South Africa Household surveys have come up with figures suggesting that either the 2001 Census figures were wrong, or that there has been a dramatic decline in illiteracy, or that the recent survey figures themselves are inaccurate. Whatever the truth of the matter, the actual number of illiterates may be less than the 9.6 million estimate, possibly about 8.25 million (25% of adults) (Gustafsson *et al*, 2009, p.21, p. 14). The statistics problem affirms the need for a well conducted literacy survey such as those run in Kenya and Botswana (which both showed the actual literacy levels to be lower than previously estimated).]

Thirdly, can the current provision of literacy and adult basic education successfully reach some 4.125 to 4.8 million totally or partially illiterate adults before 2015?

Let us start with the Kha ri gude in current operational mode rather than originally planned model (which aimed to reach 4.7 million by 2012). A number of technical points need to be made. The majority of Kha ri gude participants have had no (about 74%), or virtually no, schooling – Kha ri gude is targeting the genuinely functionally illiterate. In the first year of operation (2008) three quarters of the participants engaged in a formal externally validated assessment process and of these a negligible number failed – one can therefore assume a minimum 75% success rate. One can also assume that Kha ri gude will target at least 700 000 people per annum in the following years of operation until 2014.

Thus can be generated the following graph which show that 4.4 million adults can be enrolled and a conservative estimate of 3.3 million succeed (and gain a SAQA certified form of recognition).

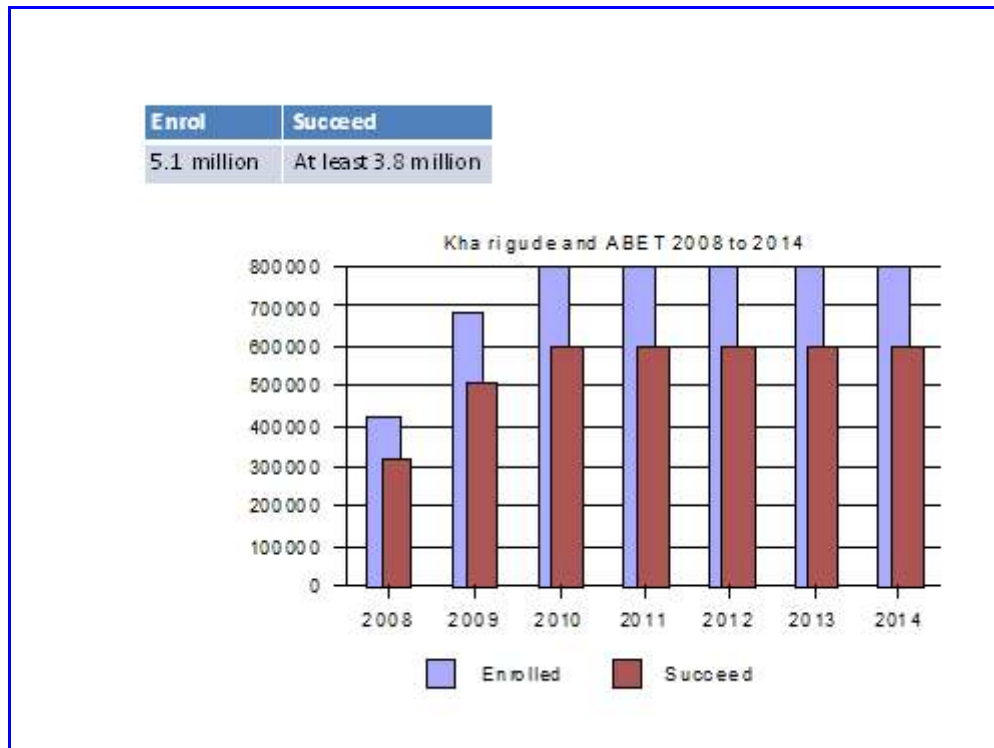


There are two obvious caveats: firstly that, Kha ri gude will need to be funded adequately to continue to do this (and be better funded because it will be the hard to reach learners who will have to be enrolled in the latter years of operations), and, secondly, because its current cost structure has been cut to the bone, it has little slack for unforeseen problems or disasters.

We also have to take into account of the learners who gain basic literacy through other literacy and Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) programmes. So far their impact on reducing illiteracy levels has been pretty insignificant (Gustafsson et al, 2009, p. 15). Table 13 in the EFA Country Report records the long standing inability of the Department of Education to disaggregate figures for genuine ABET (up to NQF level 1) and those for students studying for the Senior Certificate (NQF level 4). One cannot therefore use this table to make estimates on the ABET contribution to reaching the 50% reduction in illiteracy. Gustafsson et al (2009, p.15)

notes a survey finding of about 50,000 per annum in ABET classes. The Independent Examinations Board had an average of about 40 000 examination entries over the years 2007 to 2009 (but these come from individuals writing several examinations) in industry and SETA sponsored programmes. Probably one can be generous and estimate 100 000 learners a year in ABET levels 1 to 3 programmes. And also assume a 75% success rate.

When one then adds this 100,000 per annum to the graphical projection up to 2014 the answer is clear. South Africa can make the 50% reduction.



Without the Kha ri gude intervention South Africa will fail to reach the goal. Indeed Kha ri gude provides a model of effective service delivery.

What judgement can be made on the likely achievement of this EFA goal

The 50% reduction is likely to be achieved and women have been the main beneficiaries of the progress made.

A caveat to this success story is that basic literacy acquisition can be rapidly undermined by lack of use and further development of reading, numeracy and associated skills. It is not clear that the post literacy provision has been geared up adequately.

3. Will there will be a equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults by 2015?

Has the above question been addressed?

This is in a sense a follow up question to the one on equitable access to literacy education – is there post literacy support through ABET and various forms of continuing education and skills development? There is material in the report on the National Youth Development Agency, ABET and the FET colleges and, of course, a somewhat purple passage on how the new Department of Higher Education and Training “offers the opportunity for the first time to assess adult learning needs in society and the economy in a comprehensive manner.” But the report frankly acknowledges the failure of the ABET system to deliver on scale (only 8 152 learners have exited fully qualified from the system since 2001) and states that “As a mechanism for addressing the learning needs of adults with no or little basic education the apparatus of public adult education governance, provision, curriculum and support has evidently proved unequal to the task.” There is also little evidence that the Department of Education nationally or the provincial departments have geared up or are capable of further servicing the graduates of the Kha ri gude campaign (in spite of the Ministerial Committee on Literacy having warned about this in 2006).

Is sufficient evidence provided so that an informed judgement can be made?

Although some of the evidence is in the form of silence, there probably is enough evidence to suggest that this goal is unlikely to be achieved without urgent action.

What judgement can be made on the likely achievement of the EFA goals.

The goal is unlikely to be achieved. The previous Minister of Education recognised this in 2005 when she said the ABET system would have to be revamped. It is now four years later. Although a Ministerial Committee Report on Adult Education was completed in mid-2008 and printed soon thereafter, it was only on 5 March 2009 that a by invitation only colloquium was held to present the report. No request seem to have been publicly made for comments on the report until in early April there was a hard to discover reference to a call for submissions on the national Department of Education website and that the end date was 30 April. It is now near the end of 2009 and the EFA Country Report states that actions on its proposals will now be the responsibility of the new Ministry of Higher Education and Training, as part of its proposals for a co-ordinated post-school learning system. Such an exhibition of lethargy bodes ill for achievements by 2015 (or for multi-stakeholder cooperation).

4. Will gender disparities in both access and achievement be eliminated in adult basic education by 2015?

Has the above question been addressed?

Yes. Generally, though there is a gap between men and women's education levels in South Africa, the gap is not large among those who are functionally literate (as seen in Table 9), though this small gap is remaining fairly constant (the 2007 figure with the gap virtually closed is likely to be the result of a sampling error).

What judgement can be made on the likely achievement of the EFA goals?

The EFA goal is more or less achieved and gender disparity may gradually cease to be a problem as a result of compulsory schooling. However, given that it is largely women who attend literacy classes (thus 80% of the Khasi literacy campaign enrollees in 2009 are women), there may remain a substantial number of male illiterates. Some challenges still remain.

5. Will all adult learners achieve recognised and measurable learning outcomes in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills?

Has the above question been addressed?

Though there is brief mention of examinations in ABET there is very little information provided. Amazingly, given the involvement of both the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and Umalusi in the recognising of learner achievements, only the former gets a brief mention in relation to SAQA's verification of the Kha ri gude assessment instrument and its marking and the registration of successful learners onto the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD).

There is however considerable frank discussion of the testing of reading and mathematical competencies amongst schoolchildren which though not directly about adult illiteracy does explain why many schoolchildren graduate into functionally illiterate adults.

Is sufficient evidence provided so that an informed judgement can be made?

Not on the basis of what is in the report. External to the report there is ample evidence that this is potentially one of the strong features of the South African system, though of course inadequate provision may inhibit all adults benefiting from the qualifications framework.

What judgement can be made on the likely achievement of this EFA goal.

Clearly all adults will not gain such recognition, though many will gain recognised SAQA registered qualifications and the Kha ri gude campaign has ensured that its successful learners gain such credit.

Reference

Gustafsson, M., van der Berg, S., Shepherd, D. and Burger, C. 2009. *The costs of illiteracy in South Africa*. Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch