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Review

of international experience and best practice in family literacy

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Contents

1. Introduction

Mauritania's "National Programme for Development of the Education Sector" (PNDSE 2011-2020) gives particular attention to basic education. This addresses Mauritania's challenges, with among the lowest rates in primary school enrolment and adult literacy in the Middle East and North Africa region, as well as significant gender disparities in education, to the disadvantage of girls' access. Evidence shows that illiteracy and low educational achievement are being passed from one generation to the next. Existing evidence from around the world seems to indicate that community-based family learning strategies can play a vital role in addressing the literacy challenge. Usually, the family literacy approach combines elements of adult education, parents' education and pre-school or/ and primary education – to enhance the literacy of both adults and children and to support teachers and parents in preventing future drop-out. Community-based provision strengthens the capacity of the local community to support families.

In line with the efforts undertaken by the Mauritanian government, the UNESCO Rabat Cluster Office has launched the "Capacity Development for Literacy and Non Formal Primary Education in Mauritania" project as part of UNESCO's Capacity Development for EFA 2009-2011 Programme. It is in this context that the UNESCO Rabat Cluster Office has commissioned the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) to review international experience and good practice in family literacy.

UNESCO has been promoting family literacy for decades as a holistic approach that successfully links three programme objectives: 1) the promotion of the well-being of young children and the family, 2) the quest for universal primary education and 3) the advancement of literacy for all adults. Indeed, it links all EFA goals, particularly those aiming to expand and improve comprehensive early childhood care and education (Goal 1), to ensure universal primary education (Goal 2) and to achieve a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015 (Goal 4). The annual EFA Global Monitoring Reports repeatedly conclude that Goal 1 and Goal 4 remain among the most neglected of all education goals. Furthermore, women often cite the ability to assist their children during the early stages of their school education as the main motivation behind their participation in literacy programmes, thereby supporting EFA Goal 5 (achieving gender equality in education by 2015).

Family literacy programmes can play a particularly critical role in encouraging the education of difficult-to-reach populations that are not catered for adequately by traditional educational systems. Moreover, family literacy and learning programmes can help to overcome artificial barriers between formal, non-formal and informal learning by recognising all forms of learning in different settings – at home, at school, in the community – and by encouraging all age groups (children, adolescents, youth, adults and elderly persons) to interact in the context of family and community life and learn together. The education of children and adults should not be treated as two separate fields, for they are intertwined, and the family – in its broader sense – establishes the foundations for lifelong learning.

The family literacy and learning approach is not a "model" that has been recently invented in the Northern or Western world: rather, it builds on cultural and educational practices and traditions which are – in one way or another – deeply rooted in all societies and communities. Therefore, the current literacy challenges in Mauritania need to be addressed by holistic approaches that connect to these existing practices and enhance lifelong learning opportunities for all.

2. The literacy challenge in Mauritania

Mauritania is one of the 35 most challenged countries invited by UNESCO to participate in the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE, 2006-2015)[1]. Within this initiative, and given the data gap on the real scale of the literacy challenge in Mauritania, the UNESCO Rabat Cluster Office has conducted a series of assessments from 2008 to 2010, including a situation analysis[2], which document the literacy challenge in greater detail.

In a nutshell, the situation can be summarised by the following statistical data:

➢ The total adult literacy rate (15 years old and over) in Mauritania is 56% (2000-2007): 63% for male adults and 48% for female. This corresponds to an estimate of 832,000 adults without reading and writing skills[3].
➢ The youth literacy rate (15-24) is 66%: 70% for male youth and 62% for female. Altogether 207,000 of this age group lack reading and writing skills[4].
➢ 55.9% of primary school-aged children are not attending school (male 54.1%, female 57.6%; urban 27.4%, rural 72.6%)[5].
➢ Retention rates at primary education are low: the survival rate to grade 5 was only 64% (2006)[6]. The primary cohort completion rate for the school year ending in 2006 was 20.5%[7]. Consequently, the net enrolment ratio in Secondary Education for the school year ending in 2007 was only 17%[8].

Incomplete basic schooling is combined with non-literate adults who have neither the motivation nor the possibility to send their children to school or to support them in completing their basic education. The effect is to reproduce illiteracy among the Mauritanian population. This vicious cycle needs to be tackled from different angles including universal access for children to early childhood care and education, access for all children, youth and adults to good quality literacy learning and basic education, and environments that support learning and the further development of basic skills.

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[1] UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning , 2007
[2] Mokhtar Mohamed Cheikhouna Aoufa, UNESCO Rabat, 2008
[3] UNESCO, EFA-GMR 2010, p.308
[4] Ibid. p.309
[5] UIS/ UNICEF, 2005, pages 73 + 90
[6] UNESCO, EFA-GMR 2010, p.420
[7] Ibid. P.357
[8] Ibid. P. 365

Without presenting itself as a panacea to the huge challenges that Mauritania faces in its educational, social, and economic development, community-based family literacy and learning programmes can offer viable responses and contribute to social change.

3. Origin and development of family literacy

Family literacy is a recent approach to literacy promotion but one that is based upon the most ancient of educational traditions: inter-generational learning. The term "family literacy" was first used by the US-educator Denny Taylor (1983) to describe literacy learning activities involving children and their parents alike. However, inter-generational learning practices are rooted in all cultures, and educational programmes with literacy components involving families are found in all world regions, although not always under the term "family literacy".

Given the increasing interest in family literacy as a field of specialisation, and as a contribution to the International Year of the Family, UNESCO organised a World Symposium on Family Literacy in October 1994 in Paris[9]. The purpose of the Symposium was to review the theory and practice of family literacy in both industrialised and developing countries, as well as to consider its applicability to, and potential for, promoting family education and strengthening family ties in a variety of economic, social and cultural settings. The increased attention given to family literacy reflected several significant trends in educational and social developments. First among these was the emerging awareness that the family is the child's first school and remains, throughout his or her childhood and youth, the principal source of support and motivation for learning.
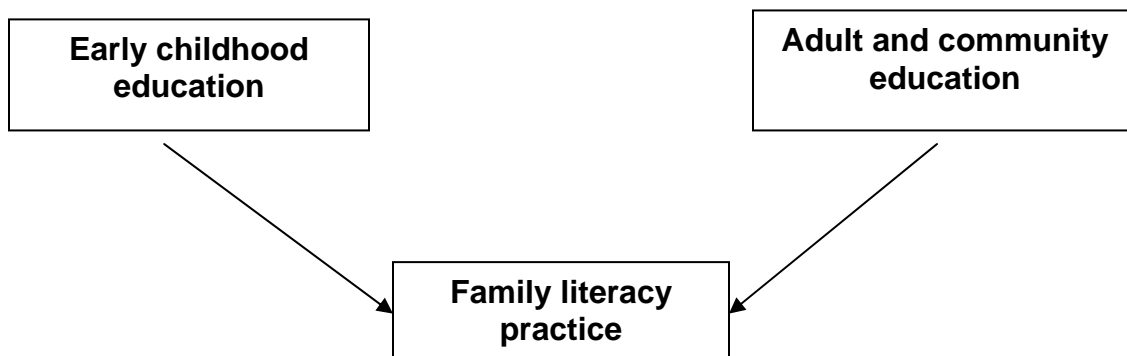
This emphasis on the role of the family has emerged from research on language and literacy acquisition that underscores the importance and complexity of the social and contextual dimensions of the learning process. The growing awareness in many industrialised countries that illiteracy and "functional illiteracy" are priority issues within their own borders, as well as in most of the developing world, has sparked a worldwide search for new and more effective approaches to promoting literacy. Taken together, these factors had resulted in a re-thinking of the educational process which placed renewed emphasis on the role of the family and the community in preparing children to benefit from schooling and in inculcating the motivations and habits that will make them lifelong learners. The Final Report of the UNESCO World Symposium on Family Literacy therefore emphasised that programmes should respond to local interest and need, and build on the strengths of families and communities.

The idea of promoting more structured ways of using literacy in the home and community environment was first developed in the USA at the end of the 1980s, especially through the *Even Start* programmes, which were funded through the US Department of Education. A model that was developed in the USA, but then imported to

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[9] UNESCO. World Symposium. Family Literacy. Final Report, 1995

the UK and other European countries, was the "*Kenan* model" of family literacy[10]. This model, which was promoted by the National Centre for Family Literacy, was intensive (three or four days a week), and long-term (over a school year), and focused on parents with low literacy levels and their pre-school-aged children. It included adult basic education for parents, quality "high/scope" pre-school education for children, parent education, and time for parents and children to engage in shared activities.

The idea of developing family literacy programmes then was extended to Europe in the 1990s, notably to the UK in the last decade. The development of family literacy programmes in the UK can best be understood in terms of bringing together two components or strands of the education system: early childhood education and adult and community education.

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┌──────────────────────┐                    ┌──────────────────────┐
│   Early childhood    │                    │  Adult and community │
│     education        │                    │      education       │
└──────────────────────┘                    └──────────────────────┘
            \                                          /
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               ↘         ┌──────────────────┐      ↙
                         │  Family literacy │
                         │     practice     │
                         └──────────────────┘
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In the UK, contrary to many other countries, family literacy developed and received funding out of the adult education field. In the context of the national *Skills for Life* initiative in the UK[11], investment in family literacy increased considerably. At present, a great variety of different models and ways of family literacy and learning exist. Many local projects and programmes, in the attempt to adapt to specific contexts, incorporate a focus on creativity, including art, music and theatre activities as well as digital skills. As family literacy programmes expanded and diversified in the late 1990s, many more programmes arose in response to local needs and were developed to enhance the linguistic competences of multi-lingual families.

While the UK is the pioneer of family literacy in Europe, there are a few other European countries with long-standing experience such as Ireland, Malta and, above all, Turkey. More recent family literacy programmes were developed and/or piloted in Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania and Romania. What they have in common is that they combine elements of adult education and pre-school or primary education – to enhance the literacy of both adults and children and support teachers and parents in preventing school failure and future drop-outs.

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[10] The "*Kenan* model" recommends that family literacy programmes should contain four core elements: 1) adult education; 2) children's education; 3) parent and child together time; and 4) parent time (focusing on parenting issues, skills and support time). See: NALA. 2004. p.31

[11] This was a consequence of the Moser Report of 1999, which reported that around 20 per cent of adults in the UK were on the lowest level of reading and writing skills.

At the same time, the family literacy and learning approach mirrors similar work in many countries around the world such as Bahrain, Canada, Cuba, Guatemala, Mali, Namibia, New Zealand, Palestine Autonomous Territories, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda and Vanuatu[12]. In Africa, Asia-Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean, inter-generational learning is a family practice, but it is less institutionalised and more community-oriented. In many cases, family learning is embedded in community-led development and focuses on the local culture and practices such as song, dance and story-telling to engage participants in discussion and as a starting point for family literacy activities.

4. The concept of family literacy

What do we mean by **literacy**?

The term **literacy** does not only refer to the acquisition of reading and writing skills but also to language, culture and oracity. Increasingly it involves digital skills ("eLiteracy") as a learning medium for literacy and numeracy. Furthermore, literacy is considered a social (inter-)action which is developed between people in different contexts and as a continuous process. Literacy is considered an indispensable foundation for further learning. It allows youth and adults to make use of other learning opportunities in the subsequent levels of the learning continuum.

Good adult literacy work:
- starts with the needs and interests of the individual and his or her family;
- involves personal, family and community development;
- includes building self-esteem and confidence;
- aims to enable learners to reflect (critically) on personal and social issues; and
- supports learners who wish to explore new possibilities.

Adult literacy provision also involves family literacy work[13]. Learning happens in all families, informally, at home and in the wider community. Family learning clearly includes family literacy. Therefore, we can say that family literacy involves broader learning activities in the family and community contexts, which in turn are integral parts of lifelong and life-wide learning opportunities for all.

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[12] http://www.unesco.org/uil/litbase/?menu=8&theme=20&language=fr
[13] NALA, 2004, p.15/16

Family Literacy or Learning?
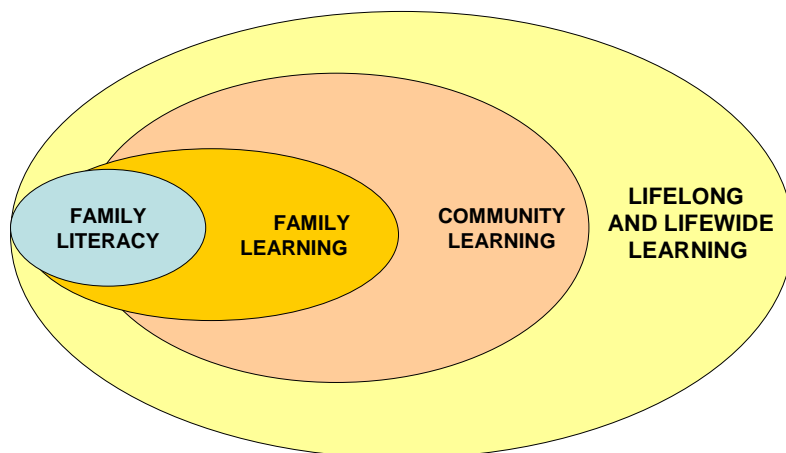
What do we mean by **family**?

The term "**family**" describes a relationship of care and support between different generations, usually over a long period. It encompasses diverse notions of family, ranging from the nuclear family to the extended family, neighbourhood or community, according to the cultural context in which they are embedded. Families include children and adolescents and the people who look after them, such as:

- parents, foster parents, step-parents or guardians;
- grandparents;
- aunts and uncles;
- brothers, sisters and cousins; and
- community members.

Family networks can be small or large and may include neighbourhoods and wider communities. Sometimes child-minders, neighbours and residential care-workers fulfil roles similar to those of parents in relation to family learning. In this document the term "parents" (fathers and mothers) will be used to mean the adults who are in a long-term caring relationship with children and responsible for their well-being and development[14].

Who are family literacy programmes for?

Many family literacy programmes focus on families with very young children, at the pre-school stage or in the early years of primary school. However, the later years are also important and challenging to parents, carers and other key family members. At present most family literacy provision involves mothers or other women caring for children. The positive aspect of this is that family literacy programmes effectively operate as access

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[14] Ibid.

programmes for women[15]. In countries where women's literacy is a major issue, family literacy programmes involve women as learners in a way that other literacy initiatives have failed to do[16], since the desire to help their children with school is a strong motivation as well as justification for many woman to engage themselves in literacy training. However, family literacy programmes also need to acknowledge and validate the important role men play in family learning. Research has found that mothers and fathers who believe in their role as primary educators equip their children to learn in different ways[17].

What does **literacy in the family** mean?

Children communicate orally from the day they are born. They develop the ability to notice, explore, think about, or manipulate the individual sounds in words. Children develop the skills to decode language during the stage of oral language development. They "build" on skills developed through the oral phase to apply them to reading and writing ("emergent literacy"). The role of the adult is to facilitate and extend this process. Children learn through observing, imitating and interacting with their parents or family members. The more they interact with them by speaking, playing, reading to them, the better it is for the development of the child's literacy skills. Family literacy programmes aim to enhance the parental support of children's literacy skills.

There is no single and officially accepted **definition of** "**family literacy**", although there have been different attempts to define it. The International Reading Association, for example, views it as "the ways parents, children and extended family members use literacy at home and in their community"[18].

The participants of a European Learning Partnership project (QualiFLY) developed the following definition: "Family literacy is an approach to learning that focuses on intergenerational interactions within the family and community which promote the development of literacy and related life skills"[19]. Underlying many of the family literacy definitions is the importance of language development and interaction between adults and children in the process of learning.

Currently, the term **family literacy** is used in two ways, which need to be distinguished clearly from each other:
- the use(s) of literacy within a family or wider community, especially activities which involve two or more generations – **family literacy**

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[15] Brooks et al. 1996. p.xii, xiv
[16] UNESCO. 1995. p.50, 59, 84
[17] NALA. 2004. p.26
[18] http://www.unesco.org/uil/en/UILPDF/themareas/Conversation_on_Family_LIteracy_Summary_Report.pdf
[19] QualiFLY (Quality in Family Literacy) was a project implemented from 2005 to 2007 which was funded by the European Union under the Socrates/ Grundtvig Programme and coordinated by UIL. Core partners involved in the project were institutions from Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Malta and Turkey. Other countries involved were Canada, Palestinian Communities in Israel, South Africa and the United Kingdom. http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/QualiFLY/

- education programmes which help to develop literacy and numeracy learning in a family context – **family literacy programmes**.

Family literacy programmes generally aim to improve the literacy skills of children by increasing the ability of parents to support their children, but they also strive for long-term changes in families and communities. Therefore it is important that these programmes work from the strengths of families, celebrate the cultural and linguistic uniqueness of communities and encourage meaningful dialogue that leads participants to make sense of issues in their lives and builds pathways for action and **social change**.

To sum up, the **family literacy approach**:
- supports the learning that happens in the home and in communities;
- breaks down barriers between learning in different contexts;
- gives vital support to parents whose own education has been limited for various reasons; and
- develops both children's and adults' literacy learning[20].

5. Rationale: Why family literacy?

The **right** to literacy is an inherent part of the right to education for all, including children, youth and adults. Early childhood care and education is also a right, recognised in the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*[21], which has won near-universal ratification. Today there is a wealth of evidence on the significance of the early years of children's lives in shaping the quality of their future education. Learning begins at birth and is fostered through children's interactions with caring human beings in stimulating environments. Early childhood is a time of remarkable brain development that lays the foundation for later learning. Research suggests that the **best time for literacy interventions** to take place is before entry to school – the chances of breaking the downward spiral of disadvantage and achievement decreases as children grow older[22].

It is far more challenging and costly to compensate for education and social disadvantage among older children and adults than it is to provide preventative measures and support in early childhood. Especially for those most disadvantaged and the hardest-to-reach children, youth and non-literate adults, it is important to develop integrated approaches centred on the child, focused on the family and based within the community. This can lead to a more equitable society[23].

Research supports evidence on the **importance of the family** in relation to children's learning at all ages. In particular, recent studies show that what matters most is parents' interest and involvement in their children's learning. This is a key point for family

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[20] NALA, 2004, p.9
[21] http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/CHILD_E.PDF
[22] NRDC, 2011.
[23] UNESCO, 2006, p.12

literacy programmes, as parents learn that they have a key role in their children's learning[24] even if they are not confident in their own reading and writing[25].

Families bring **creativity** to the multiple literacy, language and numeracy practices in which many generations are involved. They tell stories, create texts and artefacts, and give children space when they listen to them and support their meaning-making words and numbers. By building on families' strengths, their cultural resources can grow. Many practitioners already do this. Others still need to better understand and recognise diverse literacy practices within families in order to tap into their educational potential. Literacy practices in the home are often invisible to those outside the home who do not see how families relax and enjoy a range of literacy-based activities. Of course, very literate families use their skills more casually than those who struggle with reading and writing. However, there are always cultural practices to build on in order to enhance parents' skills to better support their children with learning and education. The literacy learned at home and in local communities is rich in the use of local language and the expression of the experience and history of families, communities and cultures.

Thus, as an integrated approach, family literacy and learning programmes have the potential to:
- create bridges between formal, non-formal and informal learning and education;
- reduce the gap between families with low and higher levels of education;
- enhance existing capacities for access to pre-school provision of good quality;
- overcome artificial barriers between home, school and community;
- raise awareness among adults about the importance of early stimulation of children's development;
- validate, support and develop the work that parents already do as home-based learning;
- equip parents to better support their children's development and education;
- bring adults back to learning, motivated by the desire to help their children; and
- offer opportunities for children and adults to engage in (lifelong) learning.

Photo: Grandmother Project in Senegal

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[24] NALA, 2004, p.19

[25] Data from 25 countries involved in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) revealed that even parents who were poorly educated engaged with their children in literacy activities and positively contributed to their literacy growth through positive attitudes towards reading. Park, 2008 (p. 502)

6. Different types, approaches and models: How are family literacy programmes implemented?

There is no "universal model" for family literacy programmes. However, in most cases, they tend to target pre-school and primary school children and their parents, and are based in schools or community centres. Some involve home visits. These programmes vary in focus, but all promote the literacy skills of parents and children and enhance parents' competencies to support their children's education. Some programmes focus more on the adults' literacy skills, others on the children's.

At international level a great diversity of policies, strategies and programmes based on the family literacy or inter-generational learning approach can be observed. This diversity becomes clear if we look at the different aims and objectives of such programmes as well as the different contexts, target groups or beneficiaries and the institutional settings and capacities to deliver related services.

Over the past decades a broad range of family literacy programmes has been documented. These are characterised by the following:

Main focus on:	Children, adults, or both
Place and setting:	Home (home-based activities including home visits), schools, libraries, work place, sport clubs, community (learning) centres, family and adult education centres, prisons, etc.
Educator/teacher/ facilitator:	Pre-school teachers, adult educators, literacy trainers, school teachers, para-professionals, volunteers, parents trained as "*peachers*", grandparents, or a mix of these
Target group/ beneficiaries:	Bilingual or multilingual groups, ethnic minorities, migrants, fathers, adolescent mothers, inmates, grandparents, etc. of all ages
Emphasis on:	Reading and writing skills, learning of an additional language, numeracy, digital skills, health, nutrition, parenting and other life skills

Ruth Nickse developed this **typology** of family and inter-generational literacy programmes[26]:

- Type 1: Direct Adults – Direct Children
- Type 2: Direct Adults – Indirect Children
- Type 3: Indirect Adults – Direct Children
- Type 4: Indirect Adults – Indirect Children

Following this typology, four fundamental types of approaches can be described:

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[26] Nickse, R., 1993

1. Programmes that provide broad services directly **to parents** (mothers and/or fathers) **and children** – together or separately
2. Programmes that provide services directly to **parents** (mothers and/ or fathers) with the intention to develop their reading and writing skills and indirectly those of their children
3. Programmes that focus directly on the development of **children**'s reading and writing skills by using the parents (mothers and/or fathers) as "instruments" and indirect receptors of change
4. There are also activities that are developed in the community or other spaces without directly involving the children and adults, but which have an **indirect impact on both** (for example, an awareness-raising campaign through communication media against domestic violence).

Programmes generally aim to improve the literacy skills of children by imparting short-term skills to parents, but also striving for **long-term changes** in families. These include:

- Improving parenting skills
- Teaching parents ways to support and encourage emerging literacy skills in children
- Supporting children's school education
- Improving adults' basic skills, including literacy
- Changing attitudes to lifelong learning.

Family literacy programmes generally use **multi-dimensional approaches** by operating at several levels:
- **Intellectual:** the need for early stimulation in order to optimise brain development.
- **Emotional:** promotes warm and loving interactions between parents and children, coping strategies.
- **Social:** encourages sharing of challenges and issues with other parents in a group setting, thus building links with other parents and promoting stronger social networks.

The following examples illustrate the broad range of **different approaches** to family literacy programmes:

- Parents attend a course which provides them with ideas of **literacy activities** they can carry out **at** home together with their child/ren, such as passing on family stories; playing games; weighing and measuring; making notes or lists; giving written or spoken instructions on how to do something; telling jokes; sending greetings cards; noting appointments on a calendar; explaining a point of view; scanning a TV guide; cooking with a recipe; and family finance (pocket money, bus fares, shopping, etc.)[27].

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[27] NALA. 2004. p.24

- Courses which are linked to learning to **use computers** (family eLearning clubs) have proved a good way of motivating adults and children to become involved in family literacy. General introduction to keyboard skills, the use of the mouse and, in particular, the internet and e-mail have formed the basis for a number of successful courses. This is a particularly popular model for programmes focusing on work with fathers, or other male carers, and boys.
- A family literacy approach to **homework clubs** may include separate sessions for parents focusing on both education for themselves and guidance in ways to support their children.
- Family literacy projects **in prisons** often begin with discussion on literacy and communication in a family setting and develop towards encouraging parents either to tape-record stories for their children or to practise reading stories which they can then read to their children during a visit.
- **Practical and creative activities** such as cooking, art and craft, drama or video production, with related or embedded literacy and numeracy learning, can be an effective and enjoyable way of involving both adults and children. This approach reflects the multi-intelligences philosophy of education.
- The mother or parents of each newborn child are given a small **bag of books** suitable for 0-3-year-olds. In post-natal classes they are shown how to use these books with their newborn and how to make best use of the local library once this first set of books has been exhausted. This input is reinforced during mandatory health checks during the child's first years of life[28].
- Some adult literacy centres have developed programmes based on the value of puppets or toys which young children can manipulate when they are told stories. The **story-sacks** idea, which was initiated in the UK in the mid-1990s, involves puppets kept in a bag which also contains a tape, a non-fiction book, a game and suggestions for follow-up activities. The combination of practical work, making the sacks and support materials, together with discussion of the importance of books and reading with young children, has proved particularly successful with some groups[29].

Photo: story sacks

[28] This approach of introducing all families to books was found to be highly effective in the UK (Bookstart Educational Programme). http://www.unesco.org/uil/litbase/?menu=15&programme=89

[29] NALA. 2004. p.42/43

7. Experiences from around the world

Family literacy programmes are mostly centre-based in schools or community centres. Some involve home visits. The most common has three pillars: parents' sessions; children's sessions; and joint sessions bringing parents and children together. With regard to the design of the different programmes, all are run as partnerships between different institutions and/or organisations with the involvement of a governmental or local authority. Some of the programmes are very structured and "school-like" (especially in Turkey), whereas others have very flexible timeframes and curricula (as in Germany). In some countries, the curriculum is developed together with the learners and/or teachers (Germany, Ireland); in others it is prepared by academics (Turkey, Malta). Some programmes have prioritised learning *from* families (South Africa, Uganda), while others have even made the wisdom of older generations the core of the learning content (Senegal). All programmes have some kind of in-built system to evaluate outcomes both quantitatively and qualitatively.

7.1 EUROPE

Family literacy in the United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom and Ireland particularly, family literacy has been developed from the perspective of adult education and not from the perspective of school education, as in many other countries. That is why the programmes in the United Kingdom primarily target adult learners, whereas in many other projects the parents are targeted indirectly, mainly as educators of their children.

In the 1990s the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) received funding for three Family Literacy Demonstration Programmes which were implemented in England and Wales in 1993. The BSA model had three strands: (1) sessions for parents in which they worked on their own literacy and on how to help their children; (2) parallel sessions for children in which they received high-quality early years' provision for reading, writing and talking; and (3) joint sessions in which the parents typically tried out something with their children that they had been practising just beforehand in their separate session. Evaluation of these demonstration programmes concluded that they were successful. Research evidence shows limited quantitative evidence of benefit to parents' literacy, more evidence that such programmes boost parents' ability to help their children, and some evidence of a benefit to children's language and literacy development[30].

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[30] Brooks, G., et al., 1996

Photo: Early Start Programme in the UK

There is a great variety of such programmes in the UK. In "Skills for Life" – which was set up as a major government initiative to promote basic skills for adults, including literacy and numeracy – a total of approximately GBP 37,000,000 (EUR 55,000,000) was invested in family learning programmes in 2006 alone. 95,000 families took part in family progammes that year. However, since then government funding has decreased, and family literacy, language and numeracy provision is increasingly delivered by local authorities and initiatives funded through the private sector, charities and voluntary sector, in shared partnerships and (partly) funded through the government. A meta-study showed that family literacy in the UK has contributed to parents', especially mothers', empowerment through learning, and has improved children's educational prospects[31].

Family literacy in Malta

Family literacy provision took off in Malta with the setting-up in 2001 of the Foundation for Educational Services (FES), which was conceived as a mechanism to provide a range of innovative educational initiatives in literacy support, parental empowerment and lifelong learning. The Foundation started the Ħilti (*My Ability*) Programme, an after-school family-oriented educational service that would complement and reinforce teaching and learning at school. As a follow-up to the Ħilti programme, the FES has developed and implemented variations to this model, the most important of which is the Nwar (*Late Blossoms*) Programme for families at severe risk of educational failure. The evaluation of Ħilti included questionnaires and interviews with children, parents, teachers and heads of schools. The results show a strong correlation between parental participation in the programme and children's educational progress.

The Maltese Education Ministry has now included family literacy in their new *National Policy and Strategy for the Attainment of Core Competences in Primary Education* (January 2009) as one component of community-based provision in support of families. The Strategy includes a number of tried-and-tested family support programmes, including Ħilti, for possible inclusion in school-based action plans. Their common features are that they a) target families directly; b) are interactive; c) have in-built flexibility to allow for increased parental involvement and adaptation as the programme progresses; d) include a recognition and celebration of what parents already know (and therefore are not deficit-based); and e) have the potential to lead parental empowerment and lifelong learning[32].

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[31] Brooks, G. et al, 2008
[32] Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Malta (2009)

Photo: The Hilti Programme

The programmes of the Mother Child Education Foundation (AÇEV) in Turkey

Turkey has the longest-standing experience of inter-generational learning programmes in Europe. Over the past decade, AÇEV (Mother Child Education Foundation)[33], an NGO founded in 1993, has set up family literacy programmes nationwide. It conducts research and develops and implements programmes in early childhood education and adult education, especially with disadvantaged pre-school children and their families. Its programmes are implemented across Turkey, reaching 600,000 individuals, with 7,000 instructors and teachers to date. The most widespread programme implemented by AÇEV – which is now owned by the Ministry of National Education – is the Mother Child Education Programme (MOCEP), targeting the mothers of 6-year-old pre-school children. It is a 25-week programme consisting of group meetings with the mothers alone, activities carried out by the mother with her child at home, as well as home visits by facilitators. The programme consists of three components: 1) Mother enrichment, which aims to raise mothers' awareness about subjects such as child development, health, nutrition, care and creative play activities, discipline, mother-child interaction, expressing feelings and mothers' needs; 2) cognitive training, which seeks to foster children's cognitive development by using worksheets and storybooks; and 3) reproductive health and family planning, which through group discussions makes mothers aware of issues concerning female reproduction health.

Photo: MSP Turkey

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[33] www.acev.org

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The programmes implemented by AÇEV derive from a 22-year longitudinal study, including an original 4-year longitudinal study and its first and second follow-up, known as the Turkish Early Enrichment Project (TEEP). The most surprising effect of the TEEP was identified in the second follow-up study carried out in 2004, when the children who had participated in the project were aged between 25 and 27. It was found that university attendance was considerably higher among those who had either attended an educational childcare centre and/or whose mothers had received training than for the control group (44.1% compared to 26.6%)[34]. The most recent evaluation by MOCEP has shown strong indications of empowering effects on the mothers[35].

7.2 ARAB REGION

The Mother-Child Home Education Programme in Bahrain

Based on the AÇEV experiences in Turkey, the Mother-Child Home Education Programme (MOCEP)[36] was launched in Bahrain in 2000. Prior to its launch, MOCEP was translated into Arabic and adapted to the local social systems and familial norms in order to enhance its effectiveness. Currently, MOCEP assists 200 poor families a year throughout the country with support from the Bahrain Red Crescent Society and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The latter provides the social centres where MOCEP classes are held. MOCEP is a family-enrichment education programme that promotes parenting skills and pre-readiness skills for children moving from pre-entry level to primary school. It has two components: (1) the Cognitive Training Programme, which is carried out by the mothers with their children during 25 consecutive weeks of daily, home-based pre-readiness activities and exercises, based on materials the mothers are given, that promote child development; and (2) the Mother Support Programme which provides weekly three-hour educational sessions, including lectures and discussions on effective parenting practices and awareness of early childhood development. Some of the weekly topics include: the importance of the pre-school years for learning and the mother's role; characteristics of children's growth and development; cognitive development; some aspects of personality development; the importance of play and its contribution to development; safety/first aid and mother-child relationships[37].

In order to obtain evidence on the continued effects of home intervention on child development outcomes, data were collected over two subsequent testing intervals in 2004 and 2008 when the children were in Primary II and Primary VI levels, respectively. Several child development outcomes and parenting practices were compared. Impact study results immediately following the intervention yielded the highest effects on

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[34] Kağıtçıbaşı, Ç, et.al 2001, 2005
[35] Bekman, S. and Atmaca Koçak, A., 2010
[36] www.mocep-bahrain.com
[37] http://www.unesco.org/uil/litbase/?menu=12&programme=65

outcomes. Effects were also sustained on some child development outcomes and parenting beliefs well into primary school[38].

Photo: MOCEP Bahrain

The programmes of the Trust in the Palestinian communities

The NGO "Trust of Programs for Early Childhood, Family and Community Education"[39], Jerusalem, working in the Palestinian communities, has developed and implemented a range of programmes in the areas of early childhood education, health education, parent involvement, women's empowerment, prevention of early marriage and teacher training[40].

The **Mother-to-Mother Programme** supports and strengthens the parenting skills of young parents, especially mothers. The programme was first initiated to limit and prevent the phenomenon of drop-out by schoolchildren in the Palestinian communities where in some areas 60% of the children lack basic skills in reading and writing. This is also due to a gap between the child's home and school environment, where the parents lack knowledge of how to help their children and meet school expectations. The schools on the other hand are not aware of the child's individual needs.

The programme offers a broad range of social and educational services, geared to individuals, families and the community as a whole. It offers a training programme for mothers to become para-professionals and assist other mothers of children from birth to three years old. About 600 families are reached in their neighbourhood through individual home visits and other programme activities.

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[38] Hadeed, J. , 2010
[39] www.trustprograms.org

[40] http://www.unesco.org/uil/litbase/?menu=12&country=PS&programme=55

The **Learn-by-Play Program** attempts to reverse the trend of increasing drop-out rates in elementary schools by building trusting relationships between pupils and teachers and by creating a stimulating educational environment. It is a home-visiting, community-based programme that aims to improve elementary school children's achievements and reduce high drop-out rates resulting from a lack of resources, expertise and classroom space. As well as supporting and offering training to teachers in elementary schools, the programme also trains young volunteers to work with young children in schools and at home, using games, coupled with special techniques aiming to make the educational process fun and easy to deal with. The programme also attempts to work with the parents of the enrolled children and involve them in their children's educational process.

Photo: The Learn-by-Play Programme of The Trust

7.3 AFRICA

The Family Literacy Project in South Africa

The Family Literacy Project (FLP)[41], based in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa, was started in 2000 to address the low literacy achievement of many pre- and primary school children and parents' lack of confidence in their ability to provide support for these children. Initially, sessions for the parents covered activities that can be done with young children at home using natural resources, conversations and, where available, books and pictures. The parents, most of them women, soon began asking to improve their own literacy skills, and facilitators were trained to offer courses addressing adult and early literacy using the participatory facilitation method REFLECT. Workshop units were developed, addressing topics that interest the women such as water, HIV/AIDS and child protection. The FLP also runs groups for children from the local primary schools and groups for teenagers. In addition, FLP group members visit their neighbours to share information with them on early childhood health and development, and to play with and read to children.

The lack of relevant reading material in this area contributes to low levels of literacy for both adults and children. To address this, the project runs small community libraries. It also encourages group members participating in the FLP to make active use of the Community Notice Boards, to exchange letters through pen-friends, and to write for the newsletter. The FLP supplies adults with a notebook so that they can keep a diary with a

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[41] http://www.unesco.org/uil/litbase/?menu=13&country=ZA&programme=43

child. These journals are known as *Umzali Nengane* (Parent and Child) journals. The adults and children select a picture to paste into the book or draw one of their own. They then talk about these images, and the adults write down the ensuing conversation.[42]

Photo: Family Literacy Project, South Africa

The National Family Literacy Programme in Namibia

The family literacy programme in Namibia[43] is one of the few family literacy programmes worldwide and the only one in Africa run by the government. It was launched by the Directorate of Adult Education (DAE) of the Namibian Ministry of Education in 2004 to address low literacy among young people. The 10-week programme targets parents with children in pre-school and grade one. The programme aims to enhance parents' capacities to provide better support to their children. The curriculum used is based on the grade one curriculum of the formal school system. Topics include storytelling, song/dance, play, drama, social games, household chores, environmental education, outings/visits/observations, using story-books, rules and discipline, health and homework.

Prior to the implementation of the programme, family literacy facilitators received training to provide them with an understanding of the importance of the role of the parents in the development of early literacy skills in their children, including early childhood development, storytelling and reading, songs and music, child protection, children's rights, HIV/AIDS prevention and nutrition. Supervisors from the DAE conduct annual training workshops with the newly-recruited facilitators.

As a result of the programme, the relationship between parents and teachers and the school has been strengthened, and the parents show more interest in activities at school. Many of the activities carried out in the classroom are repeated at home, because the Family Literacy Programme curriculum includes activities from the Grade 1 syllabus. That reinforces the learning. Positive side-effects, such as a reduction in domestic violence or greater confidence among children, have also been observed.

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[42] Evaluation reports can be downloaded from the website of The Family Literacy Project www.familyliteracyproject.co.za.
[43] http://www.unesco.org/uil/litbase/?menu=13&country=NA&programme=15

As in most family literacy programmes, the majority of the participants are women. Significant drop-out rates are another challenge faced by the programme, as many of the participating parents are unemployed and attend to agricultural activities or become migrant workers. Evaluations conclude that more training needs to be provided to the family literacy facilitators and their supervisors. Facilitators sometimes leave when they find a better job, as the salary they receive from the Namibian government is low.

Photo: Namibian Family Literacy Programme

The Family Basic Education Programme in Uganda

LABE (Literacy and Adult Basic Education)[44] first became interested in family literacy in the mid-1990s as a new dimension of its adult literacy work in the region, as parents wanted to support their children in their schoolwork but felt increasingly inadequate. In response to this need and to the community education plans initiated by local school management committees, concerned parents and local government and district education officials, LABE initiated a family basic education pilot project (FABE) in schools. Besides literacy and numeracy, other learning programme objectives are to enrich the abilities of teachers and adult educators in child-adult teaching/learning methods; to strengthen parental support for children's educational needs and equip parents with basic knowledge on school learning methods; and to increase parents' communication skills when interacting with children and teachers.

The programme consists of adult basic literacy and numeracy sessions for parents only and joint parent-child sessions. The adult literacy sessions are based mainly on the school curriculum but structured differently for adult learners. The joint parent-child learning sessions include activities such as playing games, and telling and writing stories together. Home visits are also organised to enhance learning at home. The teachers working on the programme are professional primary school teachers as well as para-professional adult literacy educators. The languages of instruction are English and Lusoga, the local language.

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[44] http://www.unesco.org/uil/litbase/?menu=13&country=UG&programme=9

Evaluations have shown that the parents participating in the programme have improved their basic skills and are more involved in their children's education. FABE has also produced other, sometimes unintended effects, such as a decrease in domestic violence, an increasing number of parents in school governance structures and increased governmental interest in adult basic education.

The Grandmother Project in Senegal

The Grandmother Project (GMP), an NGO working in Senegal, produces materials that promote inter-generational learning by increasing young people's understanding of cultural values and traditions, as well as respect for the experience and knowledge of the elders in their communities. The project is based on the observation that senior women or grandmothers play a pivotal role in the education and development of children, families and communities, especially in African communities. GMP produced a booklet entitled *The Role of Grandmothers in Halpular Society* to highlight this vital role. It is being used in primary schools and adult literacy classes in Southern Senegal, where the predominant ethnic group is Halpular.
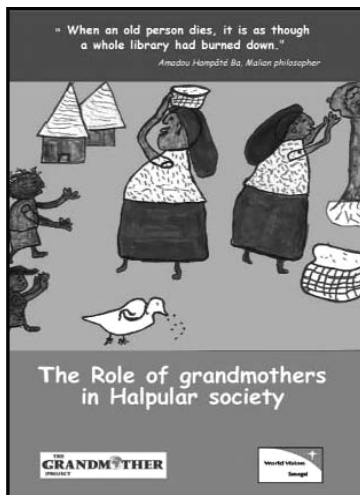
Contents include

1) Preserving and transferring cultural values and traditions to younger generations
2) Helping young mothers with childcare
3) Participating in the education of pre-school-age children in the family
4) Advising fathers on the well-being of women and children
5) Guidance for young married people
6) Advising young pregnant women
7) Promoting health and treating illness in the family

The development and dissemination of the booklet was carried out in several phases. First, a rapid community study was conducted to collect information on the roles of the grandmothers in Halpular communities. This was done through a series of group interviews with different categories of community members, young and old. Second, a drawing competition was organised with schoolchildren to produce a series of colourful illustrations on each of the roles grandmothers play in the lives of children and families. Once the booklet was published, a series of workshops, with 250 teachers, was held to discuss alternative uses of this material with students, both within the classroom and in the wider community.

7.4 LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

The CONALFA "Intra-family" Literacy Programme in Guatemala

The National Commission for Adult Literacy (CONALFA) runs the *Alfabetización Integral Intrafamiliar* (Intra-family Literacy Programme).[45] The basic idea of the programme is that one member of the family studying at 4th, 5th or 6th grade in primary school provides literacy teaching to adult members of the family unit to which he or she belongs – in most cases to the mother, but often to either parent, or to elder siblings or uncles and aunts. The programme was launched in 1999 as an inter-generational literacy programme to promote a dynamic and comprehensive development of all participants involved in the programme, that is, not only to enhance the learners' knowledge and abilities, but also to empower children-facilitators, monitors and coordinators to be actively engaged in their communities. Additionally, the programme also attempts to improve national literacy rates, especially among the under-served communities, in combination with other national literacy initiatives.

Photo: CONALFA Guatemala

So far 24,830 participants have enrolled since the programme's inception. Results from monitoring indicate that some of the achievements include: acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy skills; improvement in participants' abilities to deal with issues related to family economy; enhanced relationships between child and parent; low drop-out rates due to the location of classes being in the learner's own home; children's greater awareness about the importance of education, resulting in increased attendance at school and commitment to academic work, a desire to pursue further educational development and a greater sense of responsibility towards their families; empowerment of children to take a leadership role within their families and schools; and increased participation of learners, children and monitors within their community.

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[45] http://www.unesco.org/uil/litbase/?menu=16

The "Educate your Child" Programme in Cuba

The Cuban programme "Educate your Child" (*Educa tu Hijo*) promotes an integrated approach to early childhood development, which was developed as an action-research pilot experience in several phases in the 1980s and 1990s. It complements the Cuban Ministry of Education's institutional provision of early childhood services which has only a capacity to serve around 30% of the children aged 6 years and under. "Educate your Child" uses a non-institutional modality to reach out to the remaining 70% of pre-school-aged children. It operates through families and is carried out in rural communities and homes. While "Educate your Child" is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, it is based on a system that involves many actors, including other ministries, civil society organisations, facilitators, teachers and, above all, families. All these actors cooperate and mobilise around the welfare and development of the youngest members of the community (the children) in order to organise regular cultural, sports, recreational, health and other activities for early child development, with the participation of the families. It is an inter-sectoral programme which makes coordinated use of the existing human, institutional and financial resources in the community. This shared responsibility of Ministries of Health, Culture, Sport, Education, Women's Organisations, and other sectors ensures the integrated and community-based character of the programme.

Though there is a flexible approach to using different modalities (individual and group approaches), the implementation strategy of "Educate your Child" is supported by a well-designed organisational structure – at national, province, municipal, community and group levels – which also includes a training, monitoring and evaluation system. The content of the pedagogical support is presented in nine booklets which are used by the families to undertake activities geared towards stimulating the development of their children at home. In group sessions, for which families meet once a week with the Programme personnel, joint activities are typically developed in three steps: (1) in the beginning participants reflect upon the implementation of the instructions for "home activities" given in the previous session; (2) implementation of an activity guided by the trainer; and (3) while the children are playing under the supervision of a community member, the adults evaluate the joint activity and analyse how to replicate this at home.

The programme was evaluated in 1994 and 1999, and a longitudinal study was initiated in 1997. The results show that the participating children reach highly satisfactory levels of development (intellectual development, language, social skills, attitude, coordination and emotional development); communities engage actively in the implementation of the programme; and families perform the activities of early stimulation with high levels of capacity and awareness of the importance to engage in their own development.[46]

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[46] MINED/UNICEF/CELEP (2003)

7.5 ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

The Manukau Family Literacy Project in New Zealand

The Manukau Family Literacy Project (MFLP) is a well-documented family literacy programme in New Zealand , developed by the City of Manukau Education Trust (COMET)[47]. Manukau is home to New Zealand's most numerous and culturally-diverse groups from low socio-economic strata where literacy needs are high, especially among the Maori and Pasifika groups. The model involves adults attending a programme in their children's schools, combined with studies in child development and participation in the reading and numeracy components of their children's schoolwork.

Each programme site involves three partner institutions: an early childhood centre, an elementary school and an adult education provider. Both the centre and the school supply child participants, and the adult education provider delivers the programme's adult education component. The early childhood centres and the elementary schools work with the child participants enrolled in the programme and link with the adult components for key parts of the programme, such as the "Parent and Child Time Together" component.

The programme's design has four components: adult education, child education, parent education and parent-and-child-together time (approximately 20 minutes per day, four times a week). Adult participants attend approximately 30 hours of instruction per week.

Programme evaluations have shown that there has been a considerable impact on the participants, their families and the participating institutions. First, the MFLP has been successful in recruiting and retaining a high proportion of adult learners who have been historically under-represented in educational programmes. Second, the MFLP has been successful in improving participants' skills, self-confidence, as well as raising their long-term aspirations. Parents' employment has increased, and parents have become more involved in their children's education. There is evidence that their children are performing better academically and are more confident and active socially. Third, the MFLP also contributes to a more integrated community of educational providers.

The Vanuatu Family Literacy Programme

The Vanuatu Family Literacy Programme (FLP)[48] began in 2006 as part of the Vanuatu Literacy Education Programme. The aim was to involve parents in improving their children's school literacy and learning outcomes, and spending more time with each other. The programme has three main components: (1) literacy and the home; (2) parental roles; and (3) multilingualism. The strategy involved getting parents as supporting partners into classrooms and bridging the gap between home and school.

Typically, a general introductory session is held to communicate and discuss the reason for conducting the Programme. Next, the parents split into smaller groups to hold

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http://www.comet.org.nz/webfiles/CometNZ/webpages/images/43744/Image_Manukau_Family_Literacy-Intergenerational-30018.pdf
[48] http://www.unesco.org/uil/litbase/?menu=14&country=VU&programme=34

discussions with teachers and to study the book published specifically for them (in Bislama). Finally, the whole group gathers again to round off discussions. Parents are given story-books to use at home with their children. Home-based learning activities take place in evening sessions to encourage a love of listening to and reading quality language in stories or other kinds of prose, as well as in rhymes, poems and songs. Exposure to such language experiences have helped children to develop stronger thinking skills and active use of quality language.

Photo: Vanuatu FLP

8. Benefits and impact

Research on the results of family literacy programmes shows that there are **immediate benefits**, such as children's improved literacy and parents' increased ability to help their children. There are also wider benefits, such as increased self-confidence and learning motivation in adults, mothers' better child-rearing practices, increases in parents' employment, and parents' greater involvement with their children's schools.

Many programmes have carried out **evaluations**, mostly using qualitative, but also quantitative methods. Turkey, the USA and the UK have the most substantial experience with evaluations of family literacy programmes. The Cuban "Educate your Child" Programme was evaluated through a longitudinal study carried out in cooperation with UNICEF[49]. New Zealand's Manukau project also has a strong research base. However, to date, there is not enough comparative data available to make valid statements on the longer-term **impact** of family literacy programmes.

A unique case is the **longitudinal study** carried out in Turkey between 1982 and 2005, which showed much higher university attendance among students whose mothers had been part of a family literacy programme. The South African Family Literacy Project has used more **participatory** ways of evaluating programmes by using an adaptation of

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[49] MINED/UNICE/CELEP, 2003

Photovoice and *Most Significant Change*. These evaluations, which rely heavily on visual methods and oral storytelling, are carried out by the facilitators themselves and engage them, as well as the learners, more than "traditional" evaluation methods[50].

Research undertaken by the US National Centre for Family Literacy[51] shows that – because of the **inter-relatedness of income, adult education and child academic successes** – family literacy programmes offer parents the ability to "take charge" and make improvements in their family and life conditions by acquiring academic and job-related skills. The findings of this research include:

- Adults' academic gains in family literacy programmes were greater than those reported for stand-alone adult education programmes;
- Family literacy programmes have higher retention and programme completion rates than adult-only education programmes (59% compared to 40%);
- 43 per cent of adults were employed after participating in family literacy programmes (compared with 14 per cent prior to enrolling)[52];
- As a result of increases in income or other improvements in family conditions, adults' dependence on public assistance significantly decreased after participation in family literacy programmes (67 per cent of families were receiving public assistance prior to enrolling in such programmes, while 44 per cent were receiving assistance at the time of follow-up).

Similar studies in the USA indicate that when located in neighbourhoods, high-quality family literacy programmes draw on community strengths and reach families that otherwise may feel reluctant or unable to participate in programme activities. By connecting children and parents with local organisations and services – such as community health and library services, civic engagement, and job-centres[53] – family literacy programmes build upon and enhance a community's strengths and resources.

Research in the United Kingdom by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) into the **benefits** of family literacy and learning for the **adults** involved reveals:
- greater confidence and self-esteem;
- progress in learning;
- increased entry to employment[54].

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[50] The reports of these evaluations can be downloaded from the website of The Family Literacy Project (www.familyliteracyproject.co.za).
[51] Hayes, A., 2006. http://www.famlit.org
[52] According to another study developed by the Colorado Department of Education, 74 per cent of parents participating in the *Even Start* family literacy programme during the 2000-2001 school year were employed by the end of the programme – compared to only 35 per cent employed prior to entering the programme (Family Strengthening Policy Centre, 2007, p.8).
[53] According to the Colorado Department of Education study, 72 per cent of families participating in the Even Start family literacy programme reported more frequently using the library, voting, and accessing other community services (ibid., p.8)
[54] Tuckett, A., 2004, p.6

In some places family learning programmes have proved particularly effective in "reaching socially and educationally excluded parents[55].

According to the Irish National Adult Literacy Agency, for the **adult participants**, the **benefits** of engaging in family literacy programmes include:
- increased self-confidence;
- improvement in literacy and numeracy skills;
- increased awareness of the relevance and value of literacy experiences at home and in the community;
- learning skills and developing confidence in reading to children and choosing books;
- increased confidence in the role and skills of parenting and caring for children and young people;
- learning the skills and benefits of engaging in informal and formal learning activities with children and young people in their families and communities;
- greater knowledge and confidence in relating to schools and teachers;
- greater knowledge and understanding of the school curriculum;
- personal and community development opportunities through sharing ideas and making connections with other learners;
- gaining a certificate; and
- greater awareness of and access to further learning, training and employment opportunities[56].

The most **comprehensive study** was commissioned by the British CfBT Education Trust and the National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (NRDC) in 2005. This **meta-study**[57], which was carried out by a group of independent researchers who undertook a systematic review of existing quantitative and qualitative evidence ("best-evidence synthesis"), identified 16 projects around the world which gathered credible data on adults or children[58].

The **quantitative evidence** of this study shows that most family programmes aim to improve the ability of parents to help their children's education (eight studies). Parents also benefit in their ability to help their children in wider ways, including mothers' child-rearing practices (PEEP, UK), parents' employment (family literacy demonstration programmes and the Basic Skills Agency (UK)'s Early Start, parents' self-confidence, and parents being more involved with their children's school.

There is good evidence of benefits to **children's**, as compared with parents', skills:
1) Literacy: 12 studies reported benefits from test data
2) Language: eight studies reported benefits from test data
3) Numeracy: six studies reported benefits from test data.

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[55] The Basic Skills Agency. 2003. p.3
[56] NALA. 2004. p.23
[57] Brooks, G. et al. 2008
[58] Belgium, Canada, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Nepal, New Zealand, Romania, South Africa, Turkey, Uganda, United Kingdom, and the USA

For all three skills the evidence is mixed, and firmer evidence would be desirable.

The benefits of family literacy, language and numeracy appear to persist long after the intervention is finished. Seven studies have gathered follow-up data, and almost all of these show that benefits have been sustained over time.

Impressive results obtain where programmes have worked with mothers in a "traditional" family setting. Programmes such as FLAME[59] in Chicago and MOCEP in Turkey may involve literacy and numeracy, but are part of a broader vision of the role of parent-community integration and involvement (in the case of FLAME) and health and child-rearing (in the case of MOCEP). Similar insights are found in Nepal and South Africa.

No quantitative study has yet been carried out into whether:
- two-generation family literacy programmes benefit both parents and children
- parents in family literacy programmes make better progress than they would in stand-alone adult basic education programmes
- some approaches to family literacy are more successful than others.

The **qualitative evidence** showed that in 2008 family literacy in England and Wales was vibrant and more varied than ever before, and that it also 1) provided inspiration for some of the increasing number of interesting and effective programmes elsewhere in the world; and 2) contributed at home to parents', especially mothers', **empowerment** through learning, and improved children's educational prospects. The role of local authorities remained critical in shaping and delivering policy and practice. The strength of many UK programmes – such as *Shared Beginnings* and *Sure Start* – lay in the complex, community-focused partnerships they encouraged.

Further qualitative evidence showed that relatively new programmes in other countries, such as the Family Literacy Programme (FLY) in Hamburg, Germany, are actively working in a **multimodal** way to deliver their work. This includes story-telling, writing and singing, which opens up possibilities for attractive new programmes. In **multilingual** contexts a key value of providers and learners is respect for and building on learners' first languages. One key feature of some programmes – such as the FABE programme in Uganda – is the attempt to link **indigenous literacy practices** with family literacy programmes. Very few **fathers** have been involved in family literacy programmes, but more organisations are beginning to develop specific programmes for fathers[60], such as the Father's Programme (ACEV, Turkey) or the Father's Literacy Programme (the Canadian Federation for French-language Literacy)[61].

Another **recent study**[62] produced by NRDC for the European Commission, *Family literacy in Europe: using parental support initiatives to enhance early literacy*

[59] Flame Project (Family Literacy: Aprendiendo, Mejorando, Educando) www.uic.edu/educ/flame/
[60] Brooks, G. et al. 2008. p.9/10
[61] Brunet, L. et al. 2009
[62] Carpentieri, J. et al. 2011. UIL contributed as a partner to this research project in 2010. Full report: http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2011/literacy_en.pdf

development, concludes that involving families in literacy programmes is essential to increasing children's and adults' literacy levels. By using quantitative meta-analyses to measure the impacts of family literacy programmes, the research team found substantial benefits. The key finding is that family literacy programmes are highly cost-effective, both in improving child literacy and in improving parental support skills.

In **summary**, whether practised in the home, in a neighbourhood library, community (learning) centre, or within a school, family literacy is a community-based, family-centred educational approach that can improve the basic literacy, numeracy, language and life skills of both children and adults. Family literacy, however, can offer more than educational benefits. High-quality family literacy and learning programmes prepare care-givers to succeed as parents, employees and members of the community, enhance bonds and improve relationships between children and adults, strengthen connections between families, schools, and other community-based institutions, and vitalise neighbourhood networks, ultimately leading to community development.

9. Success factors, lessons learned, challenges and opportunities

What makes a family literacy intervention successful? First of all, family literacy and learning programmes or initiatives have to be analysed in the context of the educational needs of specific – mainly disadvantaged – families and communities as well as their capacity to mobilise and build on their existing strengths in order to make visible impacts on personal, family and community development. Each new family literacy programme needs to be tailored to the specific context and target group, and consequently prove its capacity to deliver the expected results through research evidence.

As already shown in the previous section, there is a sound body of evidence suggesting that successful family literacy programmes:
- are based on a response to the needs and concerns of the learners
- have adequate long-term funding
- have a commitment to strong partnership[63].

Among **success factors** reported by the Early Start initiative (Basic Skills Agency, UK) are:
- Clear aims and objectives
- Caliber and experience of staff
- Improvement of links between home and school or centre
- Recruitment of parents and taster sessions
- Importance of crèche facilities
- Opportunities for parents to improve their own skills
- Meeting parents' needs and flexibility
- Correct teaching levels and non-threatening learning environments for parents
- Building confidence in parents as educators

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[63] Padak et al., 2002, 31 cit. In: NALA, 2004, p. 10

- Quality time spent with children
- More time spent enjoying books with children[64].

Some **lessons learned** from **successful** family literacy programmes documented in the USA (Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy)[65] include:

- Making every effort to assure that programme outcomes are assessed, documented and reported because outcomes, both short- and long-term, are what validate a programme's (and participants') efforts and sustain the commitment of (funding) organisations.
- Building a system very early in the programme-development process for collecting, analysing and reporting data, use reliable instruments to measure progress and put in place a well-designed monitoring and evaluation system.
- Using preferably personal contact (phone calls, home visits, talking to people at community locations and events) as the primary strategy to recruit participating families.
- Encouraging a non-threatening, non-judgmental atmosphere in which participants feel cared-about and can develop a trusting relationship with staff and each other is a successful strategy to achieve good retention rates.
- Fun activities, useful incentives (such as discounts at local establishments, transportation vouchers, books to build a family library or coupons for local book stores), field trips to or discounts for museums, cultural events and so on in the community, can all contribute to good retention rates.
- Hiring carefully and thoughtfully when building a programme team. Consider personality traits and life experience as well as credentials in order to identify committed and dedicated staff who are willing to "go the extra mile".
- Utilising curricula shown by research to be effective – combined with instruction that connects directly to the goals, interests and daily lives of participants – is an important success factor.
- For programmes which have different partners providing instruction, it is crucial that there is a built-in communication and coordination mechanism.
- For adult participants, instruction should be based directly on their goal-setting and interests as well as on research-based objectives (e.g. vocabulary development, word recognition, oral reading, group reading activities and story-telling). This should include a focus on their children's literacy development.
- For children, instruction should be well-planned, intentional and evidence-based. Parents should be included in the assessment process and in the creation of individual learning plans for their children.
- Utilising a variety of venues (e.g. home visits, play groups, adult education classes) to deliver inter-generational instruction and reinforce consistent messages.
- Establishing shared responsibilities among collaborating agencies, institutions and organisations through the contribution of funds, services or materials, reinforced

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[64] Brooks, G. et al. 2008. p.88
[65] The Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy, 2009, pp.48-57

by written Memoranda of Understanding between major partners. Recognising reciprocal advantages and making sure that all partners benefit.

- Marketing the programme in the community is extremely important and should include developing a well thought-out plan, making use of public (local) media, maintaining contact with graduates/ex-participants and documenting their accomplishments for success stories and providing programme information at community events.
- Family literacy is not a "one-size-fits-all" programme. It requires flexibility and a willingness to accommodate the individual needs of families.

According to the findings of the recent study produced for the European Commission[66], four key factors shape the **long-term success** of family literacy programmes:

- Programme quality;
- Partnerships;
- Research-based evidence of achievement; and
- Funding.

Some programmes have also cited media support as a fifth factor for sustainability. According to the study, reading and learning must be natural and fun but this needs a cultural shift within societies. National programmes require flexibility to meet local and individual family needs. Parents have an active role to play in supporting their children's learning and development, and the home environment is crucial.

The study **recommends** that European Union Member States support the development and sustainable funding of three key programme types, adapted to local contexts:
1) universal book gifting or "celebration of reading" initiatives[67], which encourage the development of a culture of reading and learning that is essential in modern knowledge societies;
2) national family literacy initiatives targeted at disadvantaged families and aiming to improve child literacy and socio-emotional development[68], while also (and in part through) developing parents' ability to support their child's cognitive and non-cognitive development (which may also include developing parents' literacy skills); and
3) shorter-term, local, targeted initiatives[69] focused only on child literacy and parental support of child literacy[70].

In more general terms, they also recommend more research funding and devoting greater attention to initiatives' cultural validity , in order to ensure that they meet successfully the needs of low-income families and ethnically (and linguistically) diverse target groups[71].

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[66] Carpentieri, J. et al. 2011
[67] Such as "Bookstart" in the UK or "Every Czech Reads To Kids" in the Czech Republic.
[68] Such as the Turkish Mother-Child Education Programme
[69] Such as dialogic reading programmes for younger children and the successful literacy skills training programmes highlighted by Sénéchal, M., & Young, L. (2008).
[70] Carpentieri; j. et al. 2011, pp. 8-18
[71] For example, according to available research evidence, the cognitive aspects of programmes targeted at disadvantaged families should be more highly structured than those developed for the general population. Ibid. p.17

GOOD PRACTICE ELEMENTS OF FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMMES[72]

1. Inter-generational approach: work with parents and children, directly or indirectly, to establish an inter-generational cycle of literacy achievement.

2. Collaboration: recognise the importance of collaboration, to develop, deliver and continually improve programmes with participant and community input.

3. Build on strengths: build on literacy behaviours and strengths already present in families, and introduce additional strategies to help further enrich literacy activities in the home.

4. Responsiveness: be flexible and responsive to the needs and interests of the families who participate in them.

5. Cultural-sensitivity: use resources that are appropriate for specific participant groups.

6. Joyfulness: the essence of family literacy is celebrating and emphasising the joy of learning.

7. Sound methods: follow sound educational practices, appropriate for the literacy development of children and adults. Practitioners select from a variety of research-based approaches according to the needs of each group.

8. Staff qualifications: qualified and trained staff appropriate to the educational needs of children and adults and appropriate to specific roles and responsibilities within a particular delivery model.

9. Accessibility: held in accessible, welcoming locations. Give support to overcome barriers to participation, such as lack of childcare.

10. Monitoring and evaluation: on-going, manageable monitoring and evaluation process that produces information useful for programme development and accountability.

Some of the **challenges** that family literacy programmes face include motivation in disadvantaged families, poor literate environments, multilingual contexts, limited access to resources, as well as the quality and sustainability of such interventions.

All kinds of barriers (e.g. language, distance, gender, formalisation, rigid power relationships) may potentially block families' way to enrol and attend the programmes regularly. Particularly in rural areas of countries in the South with high levels of non-literate youth and adults, some of these challenges need to be addressed by analysing a number of key questions.

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[72] Randy Boissonnault, the Centre for Family Literacy, Edmonton, Canada, presentation 1 July 2009 at a joint UIL and Hamburg University seminar

a) Motivation of families to participate and remain in family literacy programmes
Recent studies show that what matters most is parents' interest and involvement in their children's learning. Because the circumstances of disadvantaged families are often unstable, and education is not a priority – be it because parents are uneducated themselves or because day-to-day work absorbs most of the adults' energies – it may be difficult to motivate parents to participate in family learning activities. In some cases, it may be particularly difficult to encourage disadvantaged, hard-to-reach men to take up learning opportunities. It is not unusual for families to drop out and to return only after long absences. This may make ongoing recruitment and motivation necessary. Which strategies can be applied to mobilise families successfully? Who will make initial contact with the parents and how? What motivates their regular attendance? Which hurdles and barriers exist, and how can they be removed to increase accessibility to the programme activity, especially for girls and women?

b) Limited or poor literate environment
There is a general consensus about the importance of a literate environment: an enabling literacy environment is vital to support, nurture and develop newly-acquired skills. This involves access to reading material and media of direct interest to the neo-literate as well as sufficient opportunities to use newly-acquired skills. Especially in rural and remote areas, there is very little or nothing to read at home or in the communities. In such contexts, oral communication often plays a predominant role. How can a culture of reading and learning be promoted in such situations? How can a literate environment linked to the genuine needs of communities be created and maintained? How can such an environment contribute to create a sustainable demand for (further) learning?

c) Multilingual contexts
Delivering programmes in and for a multilingual context also poses challenges. The language of instruction at school is often different from the language that children and their families use at home and in the community. Language in Africa is, for example, one of the major reasons for school failure and increases the risk of early drop-out. There is a need to cater for cultural and linguistic diversity and thereby enable people's connectivity and mobility. How can more materials that value indigenous knowledge be made available at local level in local languages? Through family literacy programmes, how can we systematically develop language skills to communicate at home, in the community, in the wider society and even internationally?

d) Limited access to resources
In the context of the financial constraints of many governments and their reliance on external aid to provide formal and non-formal education services, limited access to resources poses another challenge to family literacy programmes. A solution might be sought in creating synergies and partnerships. Very often the sub-system of non-formal education is under-funded. Compensating for limited resources, it often builds on the commitment of learners, teachers and the community, who are ready to "go the extra mile". How can a diversified funding scheme be developed from the very beginning of a family literacy programme? How can synergies and partnerships be cultivated? How can

stable cooperation schemes with shared responsibilities be built? Which incentives can help minimise staff turnover?

e) Predominance of traditional pedagogical approaches
Another challenge relates to the need to develop empowering and gendered approaches to family literacy. Very often traditional methods and approaches ("deficit approaches") predominate in programmes which assume that families cannot be relied on to provide learning opportunities at home, and need to be taught how to help their children learn. A more empowering approach is based on the learning strengths that already exist at home and aims to validate, support and develop the work that parents already do. Further, inter-generational and family learning also has to address power relationships and relationships between men and women, girls and boys, elderly and youth, mother and son, father and daughter, and so on. How can the development of empowering and innovative approaches to family literacy be encouraged? How can "what families bring", such as existing skills, traditions, cultures and languages, be valued in the learning environment of a family literacy programme? In what ways can a family literacy programme take account of both home and school practices and facilitate the links between them? How can family literacy address power relationships within the family structure and play a role in reducing gender inequities? How can staff be encouraged to use empowering materials and methodologies?

f) Staff attitudes and professional development
Teachers and facilitators form the backbone of family literacy programmes, but they require adequate training, monitoring and support. The complexity of family literacy programmes calls for highly-dedicated, skilled and trained staff. Research shows that strong, visionary and consistent leadership is at the heart of successful family literacy programmes. However, particularly in rural areas, where programmes often have to rely on multi-functional teachers, it may be difficult to find qualified staff and to provide in-service training and staff development opportunities. In addition, in poorly literate environments, many teachers are not (frequent) readers themselves, and still use pedagogical approaches that do not accept that parents as the first educators of their children also bring in their ideas, styles and own experiences. Which training and staff development strategies can ensure that staff is qualified to the appropriate requirements/standards? Which resources and opportunities are available at local level for continuing professional development? Which specific measures can be taken to facilitate attitudinal change in educators working with the families?

g) Ownership and sustainability of interventions
Family literacy programmes are successful if communities and relevant groups "own" such initiatives. This requires longer-term interventions, addressing local needs and constraints, and building local capacities. In order to feel part of an active family learning partnership it is important that parents are involved from an early stage in terms of planning and organising the programme. To be sustainable, family literacy must be "mainstreamed" into local, regional and national policy and action plans, and in financial terms. How can it be ensured that the concept and importance of family literacy is widely understood and supported by all stakeholders? How can the development of a family

literacy programme be participatory and ensure that it starts from the needs and interests of the target group? How can family literacy work become part of the local, regional and overall educational plans and budgets?

Family literacy and learning entails much more than **opportunities** to bring adults back to learning and prevent their children from failing at school. Among others, these opportunities include:

i) Bridging the distance between home, school and community
By encouraging and valuing all forms of learning – formal, non-formal and informal learning – a family literacy approach can support the development of literacy and other skills for all age groups by overcoming artificial barriers between home, school and community. Many parents feel motivated to learn themselves in order to help their children with school. This is a unique opportunity to bring new learners into adult literacy and community education programmes. Joint learning experiences between adults and children may overcome the artificial separation of formal, non-formal and informal learning and pave the way to lifelong learning opportunities for all.

ii) More effective use of resources
Another opportunity relates to a more effective use of available resources. The benefits of family and inter-generational learning and interaction can be multiplied by reaching children, youth, adults and elders simultaneously. Through family literacy programmes, parents can become "ambassadors" for learning and education in their communities and attract other adults to enrol in related learning opportunities. Family literacy work may also empower parents to use (better) the services of their communities.

iii) Traditions and community orientation
Inter-generational learning is a fact in many rural communities and deeply rooted in all cultures. It can be conducive to better valuing and preserving indigenous knowledge and traditions. This helps, in turn, both younger and older community members to think critically about how best to integrate traditional and new values within their cultural context and how to live together in harmony and with mutual respect. Therefore, family literacy and learning includes the potential to provide opportunities for mutual learning and orientation in/to the wider community.

iv) Ongoing education reforms
Ongoing education reforms provide new opportunities for inter-generational learning approaches such as family literacy and learning. There is an increased awareness of the importance of early childhood development and of engaging adults in continuing learning to keep up with emerging and future requirements. Many countries are developing more comprehensive lifelong learning systems. These provide different entry and exit points and therefore more flexibility for learners to engage in learning opportunities at different moments in their lives. There is also increased recognition that the literacy challenge has to be addressed holistically by considering the whole "chain" and by breaking the generational vicious cycle through integrated approaches such as family literacy. The perception of the role and participation of parents, families and communities in (pre-)

school education is changing rapidly in many countries, while linkages between adult learning and community development have become more visible and local governments are ready increasingly to allocate resources.

All these developments point to family literacy as a forward-looking approach. Related opportunities need to be seized by establishing the related connections and by promoting the development of family literacy and learning as integral part of local, regional and national literacy strategies.

Photo: FABE Uganda

10. Steps towards piloting a family literacy programme in Mauritania

A sustainable family literacy programme must be context-specific. Hence, a pilot project should not simply replicate an imported model; it requires an approach that has been tailored to reflect the Mauritanian context and the country's specific needs.

The following **principles** are recommended as a **basis** and **starting point** for the development of a family literacy and learning programme:

- The family is the first and primary educator of children and the home is the child's first and primary literacy resource.
- Family literacy work respects the differences between the various ways in which literacy and numeracy are developed and used within the home and in school. Cultural and linguistic differences are fully respected.
- Family literacy work recognises that learning in families is a two-way process, involving children learning from adults and adults learning from children and young people.
- Family literacy programmes are developed through discussion with the participants. Listening to families is at the heart of the process.
- Family literacy work respects the right of families to protect their privacy and separateness.

Ideally, the implementation of a family literacy programme should follow a sequential process that includes:

- **Needs analysis**

Conduct a needs analysis to pinpoint and explore the needs of the learners, families and communities. This includes mapping existing community resources and ascertaining what further resources are needed, including training. This also includes identifying agencies and people who are willing and have the resources to collaborate. The main point of this needs analysis is to spend time considering what is most important in relation to the particular target group and what needs to be in place in order for a programme to work well.

- **Analysis of good practice**

Select a number of examples of good practice from other countries across the world. Elements of these can be used and/or adapted to develop a family literacy approach and pilot programme that is appropriate to the Mauritanian context.

- **Key partners**

At the community level, identify a lead organisation (educational establishment, community learning centre, NGO or other) to form and build a network of key partners within the community. Identify the institutions, organisations, agencies and practitioners who are willing and capable to work with you and have the necessary resources. Make sure that every partner has a clear definition of their role and responsibility and put that in writing. Who else needs to be brought "on board" (ministries, local authorities, clergy, libraries, social centres and so on)? Establishing effective partnerships during all phases of a family literacy programme will foster a collaborative approach and thereby improve both the quality of provision and the rate of participation. Since building partnerships and co-operative ways of working can be a complex process, consider organising a training and project development workshop once a working partnership is formed.

- **Objectives and target population**

Define objectives and the target population of the pilot project. The objectives could be, for example, to reinforce children's/adults' literacy skills, to improve children's school-readiness or performance at school, to strengthen parental support, to develop language skills, to increase the involvement of fathers and other male family members in family learning, or to enhance the skills of specific groups. The target population of such a project could be adults and/or children from disadvantaged families, from families with no or low levels of literacy, from families with (pre-) school aged children of minority ethnic/linguistic groups, among others.

- **Type of programme intervention, topics and location**

Select a type of programme intervention which best fits your context (see section on "Different types, interventions and models"). This can be, for example, outreach courses with a short introduction to family learning (over a period of 6 to 8 weeks) for learners new to adult education and could address parents with pre-school children, primary school children or teenagers; programmes with a particular focus on the development of a particular skill such as language, reading, writing, numeracy or

using computer skills; and intensive family literacy programmes address both adult and children's learning over a longer period. Discuss with participants the core topics that are of their interest, such as understanding how schools work, books and stories, using a calculator, etc. In addition, select the best location for such a pilot programme. This could be a pre-school or primary school, a community learning centre, a library and/ or the families' homes. The choice of the location will vary according to the objectives of the pilot project, the participants and the providing partners. In any case, it is important to create pleasant surroundings for learners.

- **Resources and funding**

Identify resources and think about funding models for the programme. What resources are already in place to develop programmes in terms of financial and human resources, buildings, materials, and so on? What further resources are needed? It is often necessary to seek funding from a range of sources. How can the programme be continued after the pilot experience on the basis of a sound and sustainable funding model?

- **Workplan**

Elaborate a detailed workplan including your objectives, strategies and activities. This workplan should include the training of facilitators, development of materials, recruitment of participants, funding, monitoring and evaluation, reporting and research.

- **Teacher training**

It is crucial to involve experienced teachers/educators from the areas of both adult and children's education in the programme development phase. It is also vital that teachers and educators receive specific training for the pilot family literacy programme. What trainers are available? What qualifications do teachers have and what additional training do they need? Who can train the trainers and how can this training be arranged?

- **Recruitment of parents**

Design mobilisation strategies to recruit participants. What motivation do parents have to participate in a family literacy programme? How can they best be contacted? Recruiting participants requires plenty of time, imagination and persistence. Sometimes taster or information sessions held on one specific day are an attractive and less threatening way to make contact with people who may be interested but uncertain about taking part in a course.

- **Monitoring and evaluation**

Include a monitoring and evaluation component which is built into the pilot project. This allows the project to be improved continuously, while also making it easier to adapt it to other contexts. Monitoring and evaluation also provides policy-makers with valuable data and helps justify the allocation of funding to take the programme to scale. Define who will be responsible for monitoring and evaluating the family

literacy programme and who will participate in the process. Consider conducting an in-depth evaluation by an external evaluator at the end of the pilot experience.

- **Some practical issues**
Consider that some mothers can only participate if arrangements are made for childcare. Course venues need to be easily accessible (travel) and safe. The activities should be scheduled at times that are suitable for working parents (e.g. weekend workshops). The time of year can also be a key factor in starting a family literacy programme.

For the further development of family literacy work in Mauritania, at **national level** some important elements should be considered. Because of the cross-cutting nature of family literacy, the creation of a multi-ministry committee under the leadership of the ministry in charge of education is important. This allows for an integrated approach and provides the impetus for greater collaboration and concerted use of resources and existing programmes from national level down to community level. With input from multiple ministerial partners, the ministry in charge of education is in a position to develop basic values and goals for family literacy which are aligned with national poverty reduction and educational goals and outcomes. Ideally, family literacy should be embedded as a component of the overall national poverty reduction plan and, as part of this, the (formal and non-formal) education strategy.

Pilot programmes could then be implemented in a number of strategic communities that represent a cross-section of contexts (for example, in urban settings, in rural communities, with different linguistic and ethnic groups). These pilot experiences could be evaluated, and progressively a database of good practice models specific to Mauritania would be developed. At the same time, a national training strategy could be developed. Such a strategy should include the development of skills and knowledge of coordinators and practitioners who could intervene at the community level. Over time, with training and experience, some of the better coordinators and practitioners could themselves become trainers.

The ministry in charge of education, or likewise a specialised education research centre, should also plan for a means of monitoring, compiling data and reporting on family literacy experiences across the country. This evaluative component underlines the need to develop common evaluation and reporting tools and mechanisms that should be shared and used at community level.

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Links

http://uil.unesco.org/home/programme-areas/literacy/family-literacy/
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