

# AFTER LITERACY, WHAT NEXT?

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Illiteracy is a form of oppression to the extent that it has narrowed the scope of so many of our adults and has inhibited them from participating fully in solving problems and making decisions that affect their day-to-day existence.

The oppressive nature of illiteracy in the United Republic of Tanzania and the seriousness of its impact on our people can be seen quite vividly. It is estimated that there are over 13 million Tanzanians of whom 7 million are adults and 6 million are under 15 years of age. Over 80 per cent of the adults cannot read or write.

This data has been drawn from a census conducted in 1967 in the United Republic of Tanzania (mainland). As a result of a literacy campaign embarked on after the census, the rate of illiteracy has definitely dropped but exact figures are not yet available.

These are the people who form the productive sector of our population. In order for them to participate in development and change they must, in the first place, be conscious of the need to develop and change. We are not saying that people cannot bring about development and change merely because they are unable to read and write. We are saying, rather, that literacy is a useful tool and that it may quicken the pace of both these processes.

It is further estimated that out of Tanzania's 6 million young people about 3 million are of school age. Yet half of these do not go to school at all, either because no schools are available near their homes or because of a general apathy towards schooling. This means that in addition to the illiterate adult population there are some 1.5 million youngsters in danger of growing up without learning to read and write.

It is estimated, moreover, that well over 90 per cent of Tanzanians live in rural areas where the rate of illiteracy compared to that of the urban areas is overwhelming. The efforts of the adult educator to create a favourable environment for literacy therefore must be focused largely on the rural areas.

Furthermore, the lack of follow-up reading materials means that each year over 60 per cent of those adults who once knew how to read and write relapse into illiteracy. This poses another grim challenge to the adult educator, and calls for a two-pronged attack in the war against illiteracy.

As adults are being made literate, sound steps must be taken simultaneously to prepare reading materials which will motivate the newly literate to keep on reading and retain their knowledge. There is no single or simple answer to this problem because the number of adults to be attended to is so vast and their tastes for reading materials are inevitably varied.

Finally, while the estimated rate of illiteracy among men is over 80 per cent, among women it is over 90 per cent. There is an urgent need for something specific that will appeal to parents and especially to mothers and housewives so that they may be induced to continue reading after they have become literate. It would be unthinkable to set about promoting development and change without taking account of women, who have such a significant role to play.

From these few facts and figures we can fairly describe our country as a nation of illiterates. And so the problem is how to teach reading and writing meaningfully and, at the same time, prepare the required follow-up reading materials.

In attempting to find at least a partial solution to this problem we turned to materials which originated from adults themselves, influenced by ideas and reactions against the "banking" concept of education in which, in the words of the Brazilian educator and sociologist, Paulo Freire, "the scope of action allowed to students extends only as far as receiving, filing and storing the deposits."

We imagined that such raw materials as traditional stories could provide a base upon which follow-up reading materials could be produced through the participation and involvement of adults. Such materials are likely to appeal to them more than those produced outside the country. So we chose Tanzanian traditional stories and selected a tentative system consisting of seven easy and distinct steps.

First, we located tribal elders who had earned a reputation as story-tellers and who were willing to share those stories with somebody from outside their tribal grouping.

Then we visited and made friends with them individually. In the communities we visited, story-tellers were accorded the respect that is due to teachers. We introduced ourselves as young teachers who were keen to learn from older

teachers and we were made to feel most welcome.

Thirdly, we exchanged views on the significance of traditional stories and the importance of having them recorded permanently. A date was set during which story-tellers from around the village would be invited to contribute and participate in a seminar-workshop on the production of reading materials.

When they came we were faced with the problem of creating an atmosphere that was conducive to story-telling. The elders themselves dictated these conditions.

They decided when they would work, when they would go for a walk, when they would eat, in short the general conduct of the seminar-workshop that would produce reading materials from their stories. The chairman, whom they themselves elected, spoke both their own language and Kiswahili fluently.

In the fifth phase, before taping the stories, we again discussed the importance of having stories and other traditional materials recorded. Emphasis was put on the fact that we do not have sufficient reading materials and that elders were in a position to provide us with such materials. It was also stressed that the materials contained values which would soon disappear if we did not write them down while the teachers were alive.

Then there was a rehearsal before the actual taping. This was meant to enable the elders to recall the stories and be as fluent as possible.

In the seventh and final phase the stories were recorded. When one elder completed a story, it was played back immediately, first, to give an opportunity for correction, and also to amuse all participants, who enjoyed hearing their own voices from the tape recorder.

But before the tapes were stored, the stories had to be translated into Kiswahili — Tanzania's national language — and then printed. Here the chairman of the seminar-workshop also had a crucial role. Every sentence was examined until the chairman was satisfied that its equivalent in Kiswahili had been found.

It was only after checking against the original statements from the tape recorder that sentences were transcribed into Kiswahili. The process of checking and counter-checking went on until a whole story had its equivalent in Kiswahili.

Next, manuscripts were turned into the first (rough) typed draft of a booklet. This consisted of typing the manuscripts into the shape, size and pages that the completed booklet would have.

Then, the first typescript was stencilled, and the stencils were numbered and duplicated according to the number of booklets required. In this way the adults' own reading materials were born. Could this be an instance in which the participants had "said their own words and named the world" as Paulo Freire has put it, thereby making a tiny but significant move away from the "culture of silence?"

The problems we ran into in collecting and printing these materials included travelling long distances sometimes in order to get to know only one elder in an entire village who was reputed as a story-teller and who was willing to recount one or more stories he had remembered for so long.

On several occasions it was not easy to convince elders to leave their homes in order to be involved in a seminar or workshop.

Despite the excellent work done by the chairmen of these seminar-workshops and the fact that they could speak fluently both the languages of their fellow-participants and Kiswahili, it was not always easy to find exact translations of the original texts. We were more concerned with the general meanings of sentences and phrases than with individual words.

The elders agreed to give away their "copyright" on these stories for the sake of producing relevant and readable materials and of recording in print a part of our culture which is in danger of vanishing as tribal elders pass on. This is a problem that calls for urgent action.

The problems we encountered are nothing at all compared to the satisfaction we derived from seeing, holding and reading booklets that had been produced by our adults.

Transforming the texts into books is a minor problem, compared to the major ones of gathering the materials and recording them permanently in typescript, manuscript or even tapes.

Nevertheless, in stencilled form, the stories may not be attractive to adults who are used to reading primers with larger print. Then, of course, there is the question of illustrations; our adults prefer books with pictures to those without them.

Nevertheless, the question of publishing books out of the typescripts should be considered secondary to the problem of securing the raw materials. We have already prepared five booklets with a total of 28 stories and 59 proverbs. Already we have distributed over 500 copies within the Mwanza region of Tanzania alone and we have standing orders for over 1 500 copies of the typescripts. So even in typescript form the materials can be very popular.

If we send the typescripts to private publishing firms we run the risk of defeating our purpose. Whereas we are interested in preparing the materials as abundantly and as cheaply as possible, private publishers are interested in maximizing profit. And so, when sufficient typescripts have been secured, we suggest they be handled by non-profit-making national institutions.

The stories produced so far are brief and appeal to people who are not used to reading long texts. They have been written in Kiswahili, a language most adult Tanzanians understand even if they cannot speak it fluently. Through this language a reader interested in finding out something about the culture of Wanyamwezi or Wasukuma can do so by reading these stories even though he cannot speak Kinyamwezi or Kisukuma. The stories have humour which can be appreciated by all those who are familiar with the culture of Tanzania.

Thus far we have discussed the production of these reading materials as a solution to the problem: "After literacy, what next?" But gathering and printing traditional stories is more than a mere exercise in procuring reading materials.

Such materials incorporate the type of education that our forefathers practised. They embody learning and teaching situations which may help us to find better ways of serving our adults. By collecting and printing

the materials we are, in fact, perpetuating adult education as it was known by our forebears.

More research should be carried out to find out how traditional education can be used to make today's education more effective. The practice of telling stories is dying out and such innovations as radio are taking its place. When the elders who preserved such oral materials die, our unwritten culture dies with them.

In this experimental programme, then, we handled only traditional stories. But many other aspects could be treated, such as historical backgrounds (as remembered by elders); outstanding personalities; songs; maxims; riddles; poems; birth; marriage and death ceremonies; and proverbs.

The list of possibilities is long and exciting. The United Republic of Tanzania has more than 120 tribal groupings, each with its own way of life. Suppose only stories were

worked on and that about 30 of them were gathered and printed from each tribal grouping. This would produce 3 600 stories for our adult readers. Similar treatment of poems, proverbs, etc., would provide a tremendous amount of reading material bearing the stamp of Tanzanian culture.

The United Republic of Tanzania is a young nation, only 13 years old. Before it attained political independence it was made up of many different tribes and one of the tasks facing us is to shape the former tribal groupings into a united nation.

Fortunately, there already exists a powerful unifying factor, namely the Kiswahili language. Another great force for unity is the traditional culture in which Tanzania is so rich. It is thus essential that we should gather and print in Kiswahili all our oral traditions so that they become available to Tanzanians and to the world at large. □

## DEATH OF PHAKAMILE MABIJA



Phakamile Mabija.

On Thursday July, 7th, Mr Phakamile Mabija, a detainee under the Riotous Assemblies Act, plunged to his death after allegedly jumping through a louvred window on the sixth floor of the Transvaal Road Police Station in Kimberley.

Phakamile had been detained on 27th June, after an alleged stone-throwing incident in Vergenoeg Township. At the time, he was a full-time youth worker for the Anglican Diocese of Kimberley.

As a member of the Anglican Church's NOMAD team (a team of young people doing diocesan youth work), Phakamile had been a delegate on the National Youth Leadership Training Programme, a 3 and a half month training course held at the beginning of this year in the Durban area. Those of us associated with NYLTP got to know Phakamile as a forceful yet gentle and non-violent man.

It was thus with great pain, shock and disbelief that we learned of Phakamile's death on Friday, July 8. At a memorial service held that same day, a group of friends identified themselves with the appended statement.

We would be grateful if you could give this statement and the background thereto maximum publicity in your newspaper. If Christians and the public in general may, through this, become more fully aware of the evil of detention and if this awareness will lead to some meaningful action against this evil, then perhaps Phakamile's death has not been totally pointless.

Reiner Holst

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