

**REPORT OF CONSULTANCY ON FUNCTIONAL ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMME IN  
KALANGALA AND BUVUMA ISLANDS PROVIDED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF  
UGANDA MINISTRY OF GENDER, LABOUR AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND  
SUPPORTED BY ICEIDA**

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**SEPTEMBER 2008**

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Note: The views expressed in this report are those of the main consultant, Alan Rogers, and not necessarily those of the other consultants or of ICEIDA.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

ANFEAE	Adult and Non-Formal Education Association of Ethiopia
BMU	Beach Management Unit
CDO	Community Development Officer
DFID	Department of International Development, UK Government
FAL	Functional Adult Literacy
int	interview
KDDP	Kalangala District Development Plan
KOPGT	Kalangala Oil Palm Growers Trust
LABE	Literacy and Basic Education, NGO in Uganda
LC+number	Local Council at various levels, Uganda
MGLSD	Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Government of Uganda
NFA	National Farming Agency
P+number	Primary School years of attendance
PEAP	Poverty Eradication Action Plan
PIT	Project Implementation Team (minutes of)
PL	Post-Literacy (unpublished paper on)
S+number	Secondary years of attendance
ULALA	Uganda Literacy and Adult Learners Association

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – UGANDA

### 1. INTRODUCTION

**1.1 Case study approach:** This is a process review, not an evaluation, of the ICEIDA-supported FAL Programme in Kalangala and Buvuma islands. The team used ethnographic approaches, developing intensive case studies of a limited number of classes selected by local staff from each of three parts of the whole programme, FAL 1, FAL 2, and SBC, but not EFA.

**1.2 Telling case studies:** I do not claim these random case studies are typical or examples of good practice, simply that they tell us a number of things.

**1.3 Modern understandings:** My main concerns were to see how modern understandings of a) adult learning and teaching (i.e. using the adult learners as resources for learning); and b) adult literacy (the New Literacy Studies which see literacy as social practice rather than basic skills) are being reflected in FALP in Kalangala and Mukono/Buvuma.

**1.4 Challenges:** I am sure that there are very real achievements in this FAL programme. That we saw some things in the way of challenges to this simply means that more attention needs to be given to some aspects of the programme.

### 2. PURPOSE OF FALP

**2.1 Lack of clarity:** FALP seeks to combine the teaching of adult literacy with functionality. But the relationship between these two elements in the programme is uncertain; the measures of success are not clear. We found considerable uncertainty whether the priority is literacy or functionality; and what is meant by functionality, whether it is a) social/community development through developmental messages (health, sanitation, nutrition etc); b) group formation; c) livelihood skills training and activities; and/or d) civic participation.

**2.2 The hierarchy** between these four elements varies in different parts of the programme.

**2.3 Critical literacy:** What seems to be clear is that critical development through structural transformation is not on the agenda. The dominant view of the programme is that the causes of poverty and under-development lie with the alleged ignorance of the poor; they must change their attitudes and behaviour through increased knowledge. Society does not need to change.

### 3. PARTICIPANTS

**3.1 Recruitment of learners** was done mainly by the CDAs using village contacts and the facilitators; radio programmes are thought to be very influential.

**3.2 Educated and not-so-poor:** In our case studies, the participants are mostly the partly educated and 'not-so-poor' who come primarily to learn functionality (especially livelihoods); they are not the illiterate or very poor coming to learn literacy.

**3.3 Non-participation:** The non-participants we met were mainly deterred by the negative attitudes of the educated towards the illiterate which we found to be strong even among the organisers of FAL. It is believed that only the illiterate need to change to have all their problems solved; it is their own fault they are illiterate. They are shy of coming to classes; they believe there are standards of dress for class membership which they cannot meet. They are too busy earning enough to keep their families to take the time off for what they see as

irrelevant learning, literacy. It is odd that, whereas those who come see the classes mainly in terms of functionality and not literacy, those who do not come see them mainly in terms of literacy and not functionality.

**3.4 Men:** There were a significant number of men in our chosen FAL courses in Kalangala but fewer in our Buvuma case studies.

**3.5 FAL2** recruitment in our case studies is changing to include larger numbers of persons who have not been through FAL1 and again who come primarily for the functionality elements.

**3.6 Graduates:** In Buvuma, many graduates from FAL 1 and FAL 2 stay on in the class, sometimes for years, waiting for further provision.

**3.7 EFA:** I do not know who the recruits into EFA are or will be. Some will come from FAL 2 but how many will be new learners is not clear. This needs to be monitored.

**3.8 SBC:** there is again lack of clarity as to whether SBC is a part of the progression, drawing mainly on FAL 1 and FAL 2, or a free-standing course. In our case studies, it recruited independently of FAL.

**3.9 Religion:** We noted a strong Christian element in the recruitment which may be divisive and exclusory.

## **4. PROCESS**

### **4.1 GENERAL**

**4.1.1 Like school:** The programme has been created and is run to look as much like school as possible, against contemporary trends in adult education. The language of school/class instructor/lessons etc is used. Whole class teaching rather than the use of sub-groups, teacher- and textbook-centred learning, and a vertical hierarchy of power in the classroom rather than the more horizontal learning of adult learning groups are all features of the classes we saw. Despite this, several of the classes showed signs of the greater informality and valuing of the experience of the learners that are characteristic of adult learning groups.

**4.1.2 Venue:** in six of the seven centres we saw, the venue of the class was inappropriate. Provision of a suitable venue is not an optional add-on but as essential as providing an instructor. It should be provided like the textbooks as part of the course and the learners should not be required to pay for it.

**4.1.3 Materials:** All teaching we saw is dominated by the provided textbooks. No texts other than the primers and some school textbooks were used in the classes we saw. There are plenty of texts available in the community and these should be used, both for reading and for creative writing. The project should seek to use and build up the literacy environment of the villages.

**4.1.4 Teaching methods:** We saw some active learning and some passive learning. In some of the classes we saw, the experience which the learners bring to the classes was not utilised. There were exhortations to “apply what you learn in your homes” but no help with this was given in the class. For example, nutrition lessons were taught from the textbook; no attempt was made to draw out from the learners their existing practices or food availability. Nor was there any attempt to discover the views of the learners about literacy or development. Much of the teaching was technical and instrumental. The learners did not ‘learn how to learn’ –

they remained dependent on the instructor's assistance. More training of some instructors in **adult** learning methods is needed.

**4.1.5 The pace of learning** is too slow in all classes, including the SBC. Adults can move much quicker when they are using their own existing funds of knowledge.

## **4.2 LITERACY TEACHING**

**4.2.1 Literacy is not up-to-date:** Despite the fact that there is growing appreciation in some parts of Uganda of the more recent understandings of the "plurality of literacy" (UNESCO), the literacy being taught here and advocated in the primer is a formal school-based literacy. Teaching is based on an autonomous understanding of literacy which goes against the more recent understandings of literacy as social practice. With its rules of right and wrong, of grammar and spelling, schooled literacy contrasts with the informal literacies used and seen in the communities in the islands. The learners see literacy as something that belongs to the classroom; and it is difficult for them to see the relevance of this literacy to their everyday activities, to take the kind of literacy learned in the classroom out into their daily lives. It is vital that the new understandings of literacy and the new expertise needed for teaching literacy to adults be brought into this programme.

**4.2.2 Multigrade teaching** which characterises every class we saw or heard about is a major problem for which the instructors have not been adequately trained. It can become an asset for learning literacy.

**4.2.3 The primers** use a sequence of picture-sentence-words-other words-sentences; but this sequence was followed only once in the classes we saw, and some of the instructors said they were not aware of it. I suggest the illustrations in the primer (which are badly printed) be put onto flip chart sheets for use with the whole class and to promote discussion around the picture.

**4.2.4 Creative literacy:** The literacy being learned is not being used by the learners in our case studies, even in the classroom, let alone outside the classroom. The use of literacy is not something to be done **after** the learning of literacy; adults learn literacy by using literacy. Creative writing should be a feature of all these classes.

**4.2.5 Numeracy:** Judging by our case studies, numeracy is the weakest part of the whole programme. Levels of numeracy in our classes are extremely low, despite the inaccurate figures given on the quarterly report forms. It needs urgent attention from experts such as the 'Adults Learning Maths' group (see website).

**4.2.6 FAL 2:** There is less attention paid to developing formal literacy skills in FAL 2: this should be addressed (see below for some strategies).

**4.2.7 Certificates and tests:** We noticed a demand for certification through formal tests which are adapted to the region. These are valued when obtained – and many do obtain them. But the graduates we saw on the whole did not use any literacy in their everyday activities. They desire to use these certificates for obtaining employment but have not been successful in this, for the employers do not recognise the certificates (those who applied for jobs on the basis of the FAL certificates to some government staff on Kalangala who knew about FAL, were told to apply for cleaners' jobs).

**4.2.8 Progression:** There is a strong sense of progression in FAL. FAL 1 leads to FAL 2; this leads to EFA (there is a major demand for English at both second language and at literacy levels) or to SBC. But the value of all the certificates is very uncertain.

**4.2.9 SBC:** No formal literacy learning is included in SBC – it is assumed that all the learners here can fulfil the tasks set in the workbook. But we saw some creative literacy in one SBC class.

**4.2.10 ‘Post-literacy’:** Beyond these courses lies the provision of ‘post-literacy’ textbooks in tin trunks. We note the unfortunate use of this term despite studies which suggest the term should be abandoned since it implies ‘literacy’ learning has come to an end. The materials supplied use the formal schooled literacy of the classroom and bear no clear relationship to the informal literacies of the projects. In the area we were in, these do not seem to have been any more successful than other experiments in the provision of easy readers. In all the instances where we saw them, they are treated as the private possession of the instructors and their use is not supervised by the CDOs as is required. Their use is very limited. Even when used, they do not lead to the permanent and independent use of formal literacy in everyday life. Without on-going commercial literacy in the area, reading will not flourish.

**4.2.11 Graduates:** In both islands, we met some graduates who did not use their newly learned skills of formal literacy at all in their lives, although they continued to use the informal literacies they had before the class. Others used the formal literacy and have thus been empowered to use both formal and informal literacies when they so decide. We noted that in our cases, writing was more common and valuable than reading, although the ‘post-literacy’ provision only provides for reading, not writing.

**4.2.12 Achievements:** We were made aware of considerable literacy achievements in the programme, as measured both in terms of certificates and also in post-class uses of literacy (the radio programmes showed this). But our experience reflected little of this. The fact that our random case studies show that there are groups which do not enjoy these achievements, who do not use literacy in their daily lives, indicates a need to pay greater attention to some aspects of this programme to increase its impact.

### 4.3 FUNCTIONALITY

**4.3.1 Multiple functionalities:** In our case studies, the functionality elements are mainly economic (income-generation or livelihoods) but there are significant elements of social and community development and smaller elements of group formation and civic participation. The participants clearly attend for the economic activities and appreciate the social elements but they do not see the literacy learning as relevant. Some already possess what they feel are adequate literacy skills.

**4.3.2 Projects and District Development Plans:** The economic activities chosen by the groups do not tie in with the District Development Plans or changes in the context. Recent developments in oil palm and rice growing in the area have not been drawn into the programme, and literacy is not included in oil palm growers’ training by BIDCO, or in the local KAFIDA rice training. Tourism does not feature in the Kalangala FAL projects.

**4.3.3 Other development sectors:** Some of our classes saw a few unsolicited visits from other sectoral development staff. There are some signs of FAL classes and instructors being used as the entry point for some sectoral development programmes but there is no literacy built into these initiatives. Other sectoral development projects rarely impacted on the FAL groups; and there was no provision for literacy inside these other sectoral development programmes (e.g. village health teams; e.g. irrigation and fresh water provision; e.g. fishery enhancement).

**4.3.4 Wider issues:** There is no discussion in any of the classes we saw about other issues related to the projects, no focus on inequalities and poverty, on gender or social transformation. The organisers admit there has been no discussion in the FAL classes of local

issues such as the land issues or the oil palm growing or the reasons for and impact of the decline of fishing. Critical reflection is not a feature of the parts of FALP we saw.

#### **4.4 PROJECTS**

**4.4.1 Class projects:** The projects we saw are both individual and whole class projects. The income generation activities are chosen from a very limited range of possible livelihoods – very little fishing, many pigs and small-scale crop cultivation, some poultry and other livestock. The choice seems to be limited by the available resources from the CDOs.

**4.4.2 Training** for the projects is only technical, and there is little of that. The projects rely on what the learners already know, what the instructors have been taught in their refresher training, and on booklets in the ‘post-literacy’ provision. The CDOs do what they can across a wide range of subjects. Because of the allowance system, the classes we saw rarely if ever were able to bring in a technical expert for training the group.

**4.4.3 Other resources:** The classes (even the SBC) are rarely able to access the other resources they need for making a successful project such as credit (loans and savings). Some provision is being made for this through KAFIA but it has only reached a few in the classes we saw. Savings is the main way of raising funds for initiating a project. In many cases, infrastructure is missing. The bead makers in Buvuma said they could not sell their products.

**4.4.4 Literacy and projects:** Despite some evidence from elsewhere, none of the group projects we saw kept any written records or used any literacy in them, although some individual projects did. This needs to be made a requirement of the programme.

#### **4.5 INSTRUCTORS**

**4.5.1 Training:** The training and ongoing support of the instructors we met are inadequate to help them cope with the wide range of tasks they are expected to fulfil. The incentives are inadequate to make the programme sustainable.

**4.5.2 KAFIA** is a bright light in the programme in Kalangala and a similar body in Buvuma will be a help. But it is not clear how that can be made sustainable. Some of the responsibilities given to and resources at present available to the CDOs could with profit be made available to KAFIA and would in my opinion be better fulfilled and used.

**4.5.3 Supervision and support:** This is provided by the CDOs – although they do not have any practical experience of teaching literacy to adults and their approach to training is a very top-down one, cascading knowledge from above to the villagers. I am uncertain whether further CDO training in both literacy and adult learning/teaching will be effective.

**4.5.4 Report forms:** These are very inadequate. They have not been collected recently and the last forms (July-September 2007) like those before them (at least in the case of Kalangala where we could check them) provide inaccurate figures which have led to the MIS maintained by the Programme Co-ordinator being largely meaningless. The instructors should be requested to write creatively about their classes, not to tick boxes; and obvious inaccuracies should be followed up by the CDOs.

**4.5.5 VFCs:** Some VFCs seem to be more active than others; some members are reluctant to serve. Whether they can be motivated by additional resources and responsibilities is not clear.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

**4.6.1** The primary value of these FAL classes to the learners lies not in their literacy learning but in their developmental activities – their community development role as the entry point for other developmental projects such as public latrines and health, and their income-generation role in individual and class livelihood projects such as banana growing and pig rearing. Several participants knew the income-generation skills before they joined the class: what the class gave them was the impetus to take it further and to diversify, a sense of group identity, some limited access to credit and loans, and above all the confidence to act. And this led in some cases into increased participation in public affairs.

## **5. PROPOSALS**

### **5.1 General:**

**5.1.1 General:** I am conscious that ICEIDA is a bi-lateral agency working with the GoU and seeking to strengthen the country's capabilities to continue the programme more effectively. It is vital that ICEIDA – on its own or with its partners – clarifies its objectives and determines its measures of success. It is important for ICEIDA to be clear whether this is a literacy programme or a developmental project; and if the latter, whether it has primarily social/ community development goals or economic goals.

**5.1.2** Some suggestions concerning venue, pace of learning, training of instructors and CDOs, flip chart sheets of FAL 1 and 2 pictures, and use of other materials etc are listed in the report.

### **5.2 Key proposals:**

**5.2.1 Smaller programme:** I would urge that a smaller programme is offered and that the resources thereby freed up be used for providing increased and more effective training instead of inadequate training, and a suitable venue for all classes.

**5.2.2 Group projects:** I suggest that every learning group has a class project and that much of the learning be focused on this project (perhaps in parallel with the primer). The embedded literacy of the project will form the core of the literacy learning and will be seen as immediately relevant and applicable to the learners.

**5.2.3 Literacy updates:** It is vital for any adult literacy learning programme to develop up-to-date understandings of adult literacy and how it is taught. This project can play a significant part in strengthening the national capacity for adult literacy through strengthening some institutions both in the Ministry and in civil society which already have a lead in this (Makerere University; UGAADEN; LABE). This expert assistance should be brought into the Kalangala and Buvuma programme.

**5.2.4 Literacy promotion:** The learning of literacy should be upgraded. I suggest that the approach should be one of whole word recognition and the language experience approach based on the embedded literacies of the project chosen by the group for implementation. Literacy (especially creative writing) should be promoted both inside the class and outside; a list of some thirty possible activities is included in the report. The aim of the literacy part of all the classes must be creative writings, using materials from the environment and the literacy tasks of the project.

**5.2.5 Learning literacy for tests:** Those who wish to take the formal NALP tests can be provided with formal teaching in short courses using the primers and some other appropriate textbooks; this part of the programme can perhaps be opened to other persons in the village.

**5.2.6 Numeracy:** The weakness of numeracy in this programme must be addressed. Expert assistance should be brought in.

**5.2.7 Adult teaching methods:** Those instructors who do not at present use them must be assisted to use more appropriate adult learning methods, involving the learners in discussion, using sub-groups, freeing the learners to bring their existing knowledge and experience into the class, so that the instructor learns from the learners. The instructor and the textbooks are not the sole source of learning. Peer learning must be encouraged.

### **5.3 Other proposals to enhance the programme**

**5.3.1 Widening participation:** FAL classes can be launched for specific target groups such as fishermen or oil palm growers or TBAs. These can be shorter programmes than the current two year programme, aimed at learning literacy through the embedded literacies of the target group and at the same time developing further the activities of the target group.

**5.3.2 Sectors:** Other sectors can be facilitated to come into the FAL groups; and literacy can be included in the activities of these other sectors.

**5.3.3 Material enhancement:** to encourage discussion in the FAL 1 groups, the illustrations from the primer can be reproduced on large sheets for display in the class as in SBC.

**5.3.4 FAL 2:** the literacy element in this needs strengthening.

**5.3.5 Creative writing:** The aim of the literacy part of all the classes must be creative writings, using not only the textbook but other materials from the environment (see Appendix for detailed suggestions).

**5.3.6 EFA:** The new materials must not dominate the teaching but be supplemented by other material brought in by the learners and instructors.

**5.3.7 SBC:** I would like to see some more 'real' activities in these classes, again using the textbooks as guides rather than straitjackets, and bringing in other material especially by the learners.

**5.3.8 Instructors:** I would like to see them being encouraged to read and write more, especially creative writing. They need much more and much better training in both literacy and adult learning methods.

**5.3.9 VFCs:** I would wish to see these bodies given more responsibilities and resources to support the class project; they should be freed from the influence of the LC1 chairman where appropriate. I believe this would attract a better group of persons into these bodies.

**5.3.10 CDOs:** Their understanding of both literacy and adult learning needs to be developed further. But they must also be encouraged to surrender control of the programme to the VFCs, the instructors and the learning groups.

**5.3.11 KAFIA:** KAFIA needs to be strengthened.

## **1. PREFACE**

### **THE UGANDA CONTEXT**

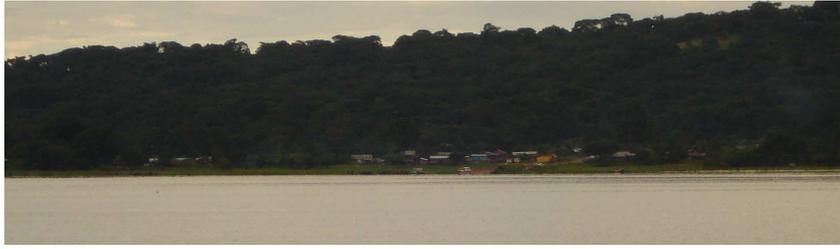
This is a study of the FAL programme supported by ICEIDA in Kalangala islands and Buvuma islands (Mukono District).

I found Uganda very different from Malawi. There is in this country far more of a sense of 'get-up-and-do-it-ourselves', more initiative and innovativeness, more self-reliance than in Malawi. Its recent history, both under Idi Amin and President Museveni, has helped to create this; and although the democratic climate of the country still leads to unrealistic promises of future bliss by local politicians (like the MP who promised on the radio to provide FAL groups with iron sheets for the roofs of their learning shelters), these are treated with a healthier scepticism by many of the people. There is still great poverty and still begging for outsider inputs (as we experienced) but, compared with Malawi, signs of dependency were relatively fewer and they inhibited action to a much smaller degree.

And society is changing fast, and all aid interventions will either support resistance to or encourage these changes. Among those which materially affect the islands are substantial changes in fishing, the increase of tourism in Kalangala, commercialisation of farming, and the growing influence of modern methods of communication, especially mobile/cell phones. This latter is having a profound effect on literacy in the island areas under review.

On the other hand, I found much stronger negative attitudes and intolerance towards the 'illiterate' in Uganda than in Malawi, even among those who were working in providing adult literacy learning programmes. The spread of education throughout society has increased the sense of the normality of literacy and a feeling that the failure of some to conform to those norms was their own fault.

I am conscious of the nature of the islands with their special populations, large number of languages and consequent omnipresence of English, high levels of mobility and migration, unusual distribution of populations in the landing sites and inland villages, lack of services and infrastructure etc. But since these are well known to ICEIDA, I have not taken space here to recount them. But recent studies have pointed to some of "the positive aspects of island life as well as real threats facing islands and islanders" (id21 November 2007).



The isolated nature of some of the landing sites in Kalangala



An example of numerous signs in English in Kalangala

I am also conscious that the ICEIDA-supported programme in the islands comes as part of the package of support given by ICEIDA to the Government of Uganda Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) programme located within the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD). ICEIDA is a bi-lateral international aid agency working with the national government and with the ultimate aim of strengthening GoU and other bodies to carry on the work after the interventions have come to an end. But ICEIDA has been able to enjoy considerable autonomy in its promotion of development in the field (the islands). This relative autonomy is indicative that the Ministry in general understands, agrees with and supports what ICEIDA is trying to do. I have worked on the basis that this kind of relationship will continue, although the modalities are likely to change.

This is a process review, not an evaluation. It confines itself to that matter which is appropriate to a process review. It does not seek fully to assess the achievement of the goals of the programme or the wider impact that the programme is having on the society of the islands. Rather, it seeks to understand the processes being employed and to suggest ways in which these processes may be enhanced to fulfil those goals more fully – to **widen** the programme to reach more of the potential participants and to **deepen** the impact on all those participants.

## THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF ADULT LEARNING AND ADULT LITERACY

It is very important that the position adopted by the researcher is set out before starting the journey. I come with expertise and experience in two related fields, adult learning and teaching, and adult literacy.

### a) Adult Learning and Teaching

The major principles of adult learning programmes have been the subject of much research and writing in recent years, and a number of general approaches to adult education are widely accepted (Rogers 2003; Rogers 2004; Barton and Tusting 2006). I see these principles as five – four of which are generally held and one has within it a built-in tension.

1. **Adults come to learning programmes for a purpose** and (since most learning is voluntary) that purpose must form the basis of all learning activities. That purpose may be different from the goals set by the providers of the programme. The purpose may not be clear in the mind of the learner, and the purpose may well change as the learning programme proceeds. But the aspirations, goals and expectations which the adult learner brings to the learning programme are the foundation for all adult education, including literacy and numeracy learning.
2. **All adults come with prior learning**, and all new learning builds on prior learning. There have been many recent studies especially of informal learning and the implications for adult teaching programmes of this kind of learning. Adults do not learn only in class; they learn everyday and in every context through informal learning. That learning builds up huge “funds of knowledge” and banks of skills. Much of this is unconscious and yet much of it is being used every day for the process of living (Rogers 2007). Adults have already learned much about literacy from observation and encounter. They have skills of learning. All adult education must help the adult learners to identify their existing knowledge and build on it, not treat the learners as ignorant and unskilful.
3. **Adults – being adults – are accustomed in some measure to control** their own lives and indeed those of others. They need to control the learning process of our programmes, not leave the control to the instructor or provider. They should decide what they are to learn, when and where and how. A horizontal relationship rather than a vertical relationship should characterise all adult education; a hierarchy of power may be appropriate to teaching children but not to helping adults to learn.
4. The fourth element is that **adults learn best when they engage in the activity itself for real** rather than learn *in preparation for* some task. In their daily life through informal experiential learning, adults learn how to be mothers by being mothers, not by attending lectures without experience; they learn how to cook by cooking for real, how to fish and farm informally from others. It is a process, not of learning **for** some possible

future doing (which is the normal approach of schooling) but of learning **by** doing (which is the approach of informal learning in everyday life).

5. The problem with this fourth principle is that it can at times run counter to the others, especially the third. Many (but not all) adults come to adult learning programmes with an expectation that it will be like school, using the approach of 'learn first, practise later'. Many (but again not all) of them want to be treated like school pupils, not like adults, to be taught rather than to learn. If we are to give adults control of their learning, then we need to take this desire seriously and not impose our ideology of adult learning on them. The most effective strategy to cope with this would seem to be the fifth general principle: to '**start where they are**', with their agenda and their desired approach but without sacrificing our agenda. It is usually possible to encourage adult learners to move from a top-down approach with which many will come to a more bottom-up approach after some time. Teaching adults takes time and a great deal of concern for their aspirations.

In this process review, then, I am looking to see

- how far the aspirations of the learners match the goals of the providers;
- how far the existing knowledge and skills of the learners are used in the classes, what the learners contribute to each class;
- how far the learners control the programme;
- how far the learners are learning literacy and numeracy through experience;
- and how far the learning programmes are starting where the learners are.

## **b) Adult literacy**

Adult literacy studies have undergone a major revolution in the last twenty years. The traditional approach has been based on a view of literacy as a neutral set of skills which a person either possesses or does not possess: the literate and the illiterate can be easily distinguished. Once these basic skills have been grasped, the literate can read and write everything. This view believes that learning literacy brings with it new ways of thinking, new understandings, new capabilities. Without literacy, there can be no modernisation, no development.

This view has been widely and increasingly challenged by a view of literacy as social practices, the so-called New Literacy Studies (Street 1984; Papen 2005; Barton 1994). This view points out that there are multiple literacies, not just one; to learn to read the Qu'ran in Arabic does not help one to be able to read a local newspaper. The key text in this field, Brian Street's *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (1984) points out three main sets of literacy – what he calls 'commercial' literacies (the literacies of the shop and the market), religious literacies (e.g. reading the Qu'ran), and 'schooled' literacy (the literacy taught in the

classroom). Other studies have developed this (e.g. Baynham 1995); 'occupational' literacies (the different literacies found in different occupations such as tailoring, carpentering, and other workplaces), 'bureaucratic' literacies (such as forms etc) and so on have been identified. People can become expert in one or other of these and yet still be 'illiterate' in the other literacies. The literacy practices of a taxi driver (Prinsloo and Breier 1996) and of a hospital porter, hairdresser and fisherman are very different, and their learning approaches will be different. The formal literacy and especially the numeracy practices that are being taught in schools and adult literacy classes are not the same as the informal literacy and numeracy practices which are being engaged in in everyday life. Formal literacy has rules of spelling and grammar which the informal, sometimes called local (Barton and Hamilton 1988), vernacular or indigenous, literacies do not possess. Each literacy is bound up within a context of power and practice; the schooled literacy is all-powerful (Crowther and Tett 2001) and dominant, the others are subaltern. Each literacy has its own functionality.

What is more, non-literate persons engage in literacy practices. They may do this by mediation, or they may adopt other strategies. And they all have experience of literacy in some form or other, especially of literacy as an excluding activity. It is therefore not possible to distinguish starkly between literate and illiterate; many recent studies have shown how many non-literate persons have acquired through informal learning some understanding of literacy and its power and some informal skills. Today, much (ethnographic) research is being directed towards understanding the everyday literacy practices of all sectors of the population (Rogers and Uddin 2005; Uddin 2005). This is even more true of numeracy, for everybody engages in some form of counting and calculating in their everyday life, using their own (often very local) practices in the process. Unless we understand and build on these existing practices, our teaching of formal numeracy will be ineffective.

Such views have become increasingly influential in adult literacy programmes in developing countries (Prinsloo and Breier 1996). UNESCO now talks about the plurality of literacy (UNESCO 2007). This is the position that I hold. I am therefore looking to see in this functional literacy programme

- what kind of literacy practices are being taught
- and how these formal literacy practices relate to the more informal literacy practices of the functionality elements of the programme.

My view is that unless the formal teaching relates to the informal literacies of the functionality, the work of the classroom will be seen by the learners as irrelevant.

### **Changing Literacy Policies and Practice**

Looking at the policy and practice of providing literacy learning programmes for adults, I see a number of trends

**Literacy for poverty relief:** First, such programmes have been influenced by the concentration on poverty relief, so that other functionalities for literacy such as citizenship (participation in existing political structures) and literacy for social transformation, although they still remain, are less prominent. Literacy for economic development is the order of the day; the learner as worker is the construct. The rights-based approach to literacy is now focussing its attention on economic outcomes.

The relationship between literacy and poverty is however no longer seen as a simplistic one – that a man or woman is illiterate because they are poor. As Agneta Lind and others have pointed out, “poverty causes illiteracy”. The relationship between illiteracy and poverty are symbiotic, not causal. Learning literacy skills will not automatically reduce poverty; but using literacy skills in economic activities will enhance those activities and their productivity.

**Literacy for livelihoods:** But literacy for poverty relief too has seen changes. There is less concentration on literacy for employment in the formal sector of the economy, for it has become evident that literacy (and education) cannot create jobs. Rather the concentration has recently been on literacy for family/individual livelihoods, learning the embedded literacy of that livelihood.

**Literacy for SMEs:** And from there, the justification for providing literacy learning is focussed on literacy for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). This is very strong in western Africa.

**Literacy for groups:** This coincides with a move from literacy seen as a purely individual skill to literacy as a means of group communication. The emphasis is now on group formation and capability strengthening. REFLECT is an example of this.

**Literacy as an on-going activity:** Finally there is a growing appreciation that literacy learning is not simply a one-off imparting of a skill once and for all but supporting an on-going activity, partly and especially by building up the literacy environment but also in other ways. Not short courses but longer support to group activities, including literacy as one component.

**Literacy as part of (adult) education:** There is however a contradictory tendency in process at the same time. In many parts of the world, adult literacy is moving towards what

I would wish to call a wider 'adult school movement', from literacy alone to Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET). Education for All (EFA) lays stress on a wider adult lifelong learning (the learning needs of youth and adults). In various different contexts, there is a good deal of demand for this from the field; certificates (and their equivalencies with the formal system) and progression into new forms of formal and non-formal learning programmes are features of almost all adult literacy classes today.

**A mission statement for adult literacy today:** I see the aim of adult literacy learning programmes as being to support self-sustaining groups which use literacy to advance their economic well-being. Government and donor provision in adult literacy today needs to focus its attention on working with existing or new groups of adults engaged in a livelihood activity and using the embedded literacy activities of that livelihood to enhance the work of those groups, not just 'injecting' skills in a one-off programme. This should go alongside the provision of a progressive wider programme of learning opportunities.

**Paying for literacy and other learning assistance:** There is also a growing perception that most groups of adults can afford to pay very small sums for such provision; what is now needed is a safety net for those who really cannot afford such sums to ensure they are not excluded. Some self-formed adult groups in very poor countries (e.g. Nepal) are already contributing towards paying their own 'teacher'. Nevertheless, there is a powerful lobby for recognising adult education (and literacy especially) as a state obligation and benchmarks have been established (Benchmarks 2005)

## **THE METHODOLOGY OF THE PROCESS REVIEW**

The fieldwork on which this report is based was conducted between 17 and 25 May 2008 in two parts. I worked in Kalangala with Janice Busingye, and Dr George Openjuru and Diana Nampijja worked in Buvuma. Despite difficulties of communication, there was some limited contact by mobile phone between the two teams during the field work. And we worked to a common brief and with sympathetic approaches; our separate reports dovetailed nicely but made for different data.

**Ethnographic approach:** Both teams adopted an ethnographic approach – that is, we took a limited sample and worked to create in-depth surveys (what ethnographers call 'thick descriptions') of these as 'telling case studies' rather than take a wider sample and create shallow impressions of typicality (Brice Heath and Street 2008). The aim was to take one or two centres and look at all their activities and context over a period of one week, to see what they can tell us about the process of the FAL programme.

But there were in the case of Kalangala serious limitations caused in large part by the inaccurate data held by the Project Co-ordinator (PC) and SCDO there. Every appointment made for us on the basis of information which he possessed proved to be wrong in some respect: the wrong day of meeting, the wrong time, the wrong groups meeting. The arrangements made by ourselves were more satisfactory but in fact revealed again that what was thought to be the programme was not so.

Further, our visits were seriously marred by the fact (as several instructors told us and we ourselves heard at Njoga) that the PC went round telling the groups to put on a special show for us and not to "shame the programme" by saying anything negative at all about it. One instructor in particular found the visit very stressful, likening it to the visit of a government inspector to a school. It is natural, but unfortunate, that such approaches should be adopted during a process review.

There were fewer such difficulties in Buvuma where the SCDO seemed to have firmer information and a greater willingness for the research team to see it as it is. But in both places our work was again limited by the fact that the classes in these islands met only once or at most twice a week instead of more frequently. So that we were not able to develop really 'thick descriptions' of teaching processes as in Malawi.

I cannot vouch for the truth of what follows. I can however vouch that everything stated here is based on what we either heard or saw during our field work. There is very little a consultant can do if we were not told the truth, although we triangulated as far as we were able.

I have prepared from the data collected four case studies – Kasenyi in Kalangala (FAL 1 and 2); Maggyo in Buvuma (three different FAL 1 and 2 combined classes); Njoga village in Kalangala (whole village study); and Lutoboka in Kalangala (SBC). I also saw one further session of an SBC class at Bumangi in Kalangala.

I am not claiming that these random case studies are in any way typical or examples of good practice, but simply that they tell us a number of things. In particular, they suggest that the carefully selected case studies which were chosen for broadcast on the radio to illustrate very significant achievements in the FAL programme in Kalangala and Buvuma need to be taken in context, for these too cannot be claimed to be typical without extensive further research. These carefully chosen cases tell of successes; our random case studies tell of significant areas of failure. Neither can be taken as typical; both tell us lessons.

In addition, in both locations we met with groups of instructors, CDOs and more senior Ministry staff at district and central government levels, NGOs and other organisations including some private sector bodies. Further, during this review and the FAL process review conducted last year, I have consulted a very wide range of documentation relating to FAL in Uganda and other aspects of the study. It is not possible to include details of all of this in this report but it can be provided if required.

### **The Course Structures**

We were surprised and at times confused by the language used for FAL. In Kampala, we were informed the programme consisted of FAL 1 (a nine months' literacy learning programme with primer), FAL 2 (a six months' second level literacy programme with increased functionality), and a 'post-literacy' programme consisting of a tin trunk with booklets. Onto this ICEIDA has added an English language course (EFA) which GoU has not yet approved but has gone so far as to help develop new teaching-learning materials and a proficiency test for such a course, and a six-month (or longer) Small Business Course (SBC) which MGLSD is watching with keen interest. These last two courses are being implemented in Kalangala islands (and are shortly to be introduced in Buvuma) with the co-operation of the District authorities under powers recently given through decentralisation. The two sets of islands thus differ in the programmes provided. Buvuma, having been started later than Kalangala, only has FAL 1 and FAL 2; EFA and SBC are just starting. Kalangala has the fully developed programme of FAL 1, FAL 2, EFA and SBC.

But in the field, the term FAL is used to cover all four courses, so that on occasion when we talked about FAL courses, meaning only FAL 1 and 2, responses came covering all four programmes. We also found the use of the terms FAL Main, FAL Basic, FAL Intermediate and FAL Advanced. In this case, FAL Advanced was apparently FAL 2 but FAL Main was at times FAL 1 only and at times both FAL 1 and 2, especially when combined in one class. For example, the instructors at Njoga spoke of FAL main levels 1 and 2; and the instructors in Buvuma, talking about the need for more training, said, "Facilitators need to get training in FAL main, SBC [Small Business Course], and EFA [English For Adults]". It is confusing: when one of the instructors spoke of having "received a refresher training in FAL main ... However, he was the only person trained in FAL main", it is not clear exactly what training is meant.

Since the English course (EFA) is starting again very shortly on an entirely new basis, I have omitted it from my process review. There is no point in commenting on a process which has now ceased to exist. But much of what is said here and in the final part of the report will apply to EFA as well.

My aim in Kalangala then was to take a FAL 1 and a FAL 2 course, preferably in the same village, and follow them for the whole week; and to follow an SBC for the whole week. In Buvuma, we agreed to take a FAL 1 and a FAL 2 course and follow them for the whole week.

This did not prove possible. The FAL 1 and 2 courses initially chosen in Kalangala (Njoga) turned out not to be meeting that week; the FAL 1 and 2 courses chosen to fill the gap (Kasenya) turned out to meet only once a week, so we saw teaching on only two occasions (a FAL 1 and a FAL 2) by the same instructor. The SBC course chosen turned out not to be meeting any longer – it had collapsed. It was artificially revived for our visit (and we hope has now decided to continue); we saw it twice. We also saw a second SBC course for one of its two weekly sessions. Much the same happened in Buvuma – only one instructor was seen teaching twice. And there were no separate FAL 1 and FAL 2 classes available to us in those islands. Watching a facilitator in Malawi teach four times in succession was enormously rewarding; the first occasion was revealing as an artificial construct – i.e. how the facilitator thought he/she *should* teach and the class behave; the later ones progressively showed us in depth how they usually behaved. This was not possible in Uganda.

Despite these difficulties, we saw a programme which has many excellent points about it. There are very real achievements in this FAL programme. That we saw other things in the way of challenges simply means that more attention needs to be given to some aspects of the programme.

To save undue repetition, I am including all three elements – FAL 1, FAL 2 and SBC – under each heading below.

## 2. PURPOSE

In examining the objectives of the programme, we need to determine whether we are speaking about the purpose of the programme as seen by the providers or the purpose of the programme as seen by the participants/learners. The two may be very different.

**Literacy and functionality:** The aim of the providers of FAL 1 and FAL 2 is to help adults to learn literacy through functionality: "literacy and business", as a graduate from Kasenyi put it. There are two causes of questioning here – a) whether the literacy element or the functionality element predominates (i.e. if the programme succeeds in functionality but not in literacy, is that to be regarded as success?) and b) what exactly is meant by functionality. There is a substantial uncertainty on this issue.

In the minds of most of those involved, literacy and functionality are seen to be distinct: as one learner in FAL 1 in Buvuma put it: "She joined the FAL class in 2006 and since then, she has managed to compute larger amounts, read and write in Luganda together with [learning] functional skills like animal rearing, bead making and brickmaking". "Other than developing skills in reading, writing and numeracy, the FALP encourages other activities that focus on improving the quality of life for the learners. The main focuses of these activities have been income-generation activities" (Status 2003 p12). Although literacy itself is seen by some to be a part of development, it is not in itself felt to be a functionality; the measures of success for functionality in this programme rarely include literacy. And there is a general agreement that the functional element in FAL 1 is relatively small, the main emphasis there is on literacy learning; but functionality is much greater in FAL 2: "the functional element in cycle 1 is limited; there is more in cycle 2" (int MGLSD).

Some put literacy above functionality: "the learners who come to the FAL classes come with the expectation of learning how to read and write and to get money in order to enable them start income-generating projects" (Buvuma FAL Coordinator). Literacy is the basis from which the other benefits such as functionality spring: "the purpose of the FAL programme is to alleviate illiteracy in our community. This is because illiteracy has many problems; among these problems are diseases. Illiteracy counts as the number one problem. It has an impact on people because it cannot make them work [i.e. prevents them from working]. They will not be able to do so many things; they cannot do because there is darkness in their thinking. Poverty alone cannot be addressed without tackling the problem of illiteracy". "The meaning of FAL was to learn how to read and write and how to organise home duties like farming, rearing and sanitation" (graduate learner). According to the CDO in Buvuma, "the purpose of FAL is to help those who were not able to go to school in their childhood to learn how to read

and write. It aims at improving the socio-economic welfare at both the household and community levels”.

That the programme is linked to poverty alleviation or reduction was asserted by all we talked to. “The programme is generally in line with the Ugandan Government’s Poverty Eradication Action Plan” (PEAP) with its five pillars of economic growth, structural transformation, good governance and security, income generation and quality of life (MGLSD). “The FAL is supposed to be fitting in with the goals of the PEAP since it is a government programme. It is designed to focus its objectives on the objectives of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan. The primary purpose is supposed to be poverty eradication which has some aspects like improved sanitation and promoting agriculture” (CDOs). “The primary purpose of FAL is to get people out of poverty and contribute to the wider government objective of poverty eradication” (PC).

### **Measures of success**

We tried to clarify this lack of clarity about the primary purpose of FAL by asking what measures of success the respondents would use to judge the FAL class by.

Some saw these clearly in mixed literacy and functionality terms: “when the learners have passed their assessment proficiency tests and are awarded certificates. Secondly, if there is a noticeable improvement in sanitation in the home of the learners and other proper health practices such as boiling water; when income-generating projects are initiated and owned by the learners; and when the learners are participating actively in community leaderships” (CDO Buvuma). “Being asked what they would set as a measure of success among their learners, many [of the Buvuma instructors] focused on the ability to read and write and passing the standard tests given by the Ministry, [and on] behaviour change among the learners, especially when many begin practising the taught functional skills in class, like sanitation, improved farming methods etc”.

Often we received very vague answers – almost always something like “if they practise at home what they learn in the classroom” (MGLSD). In other words, the aim of the programme is to get messages across which the learners will accept and implement, based on a view that under-development is caused by the ignorance and bad practices of the villagers (a deficit model), and if they change to do what they are being urged to do by the FAL programme, all will be well. “I will feel successful”, said the FAL Co-ordinator in Buvuma, “if when I go into a ... home, I will see the sanitation, if he/she is sending his/her children to school, etc; if women’s empowerment is evident by participation in community meetings and contesting for leadership positions; if people are stopping illegal fishing and having good toilets”.

Other measures of success were identified. For example, an increase of confidence which leads to participation in other developmental initiatives in their local community (ICEIDA-Uganda); “work outside the classroom” (CDOs); a demand for change in the villages, such as a willingness to erect public latrines (ICEIDA-Uganda) etc. But these are rather more muted voices.

### **Meaning of functionality**

One key issue here is what is meant by ‘functionality’ in FALP. Judging by the official FAL curriculum, four different elements seem to be involved – a) social development (getting messages across), b) group formation, c) economic development (skill training for income-generation/livelihood activities), and d) ‘civic’ development (participating in community activities). For most of the participants, learners and instructors, the functional element in FAL is income-generating activities. The graduates in Buvuma, while waiting for their next stage, were engaged in ‘functional’ elements – making beads and mats to sell. But the FAL curriculum emphasises both economic and social development, with themes such as agriculture, co-operatives, marketing and trade being taught alongside health, gender, culture and civic consciousness.

**Group formation:** The essential first step for any functionality is to form a group. This came through time and again. The Agricultural Extension Officer for Buvuma said, “FAL is a good programme because it ... helps some farmers to work as a group under the FAL programme”. The CDOs in Kalangala said, “They [the learners] are being encouraged to turn into groups so as to tap opportunities from other agencies ... access to services is through a group: the vet for poultry won’t come out to an individual but will for a group”. The District Resource Team set up to support FAL in Kalangala said that they will respond only to requests from groups.

One or two spoke with a different voice: “Concerning income-generating activities, joint ventures do not work well, nor do class projects. We encourage individual enterprises; we did encourage small groups but they did not work well” (PC). “FAL groups do not have group projects as elsewhere – we don’t have a group project spirit here. ... They are individualistic rather than social” (ICEIDA-Uganda). But everywhere else, the future is seen to lie with small groups. The Maggyo FAL learners “had varying expectations in joining the FAL class. The first was reading and writing, essential to all participants; some joined to set up projects, and others *to have a sense of belonging in a group*, for many thought of developing agencies as targeting people already organised in groups” (Maggyo, my italics). One of the learners in the FAL programme claimed that he already “had the basic literacy skill with his educational

background of P7. His motivation for the FAL class was to learn the functionality aspect of the programme in things like farming, health, sanitation and setting up small businesses. His other aim was to mingle in the spirit of togetherness since *most development initiatives today target organised groups with a stronger foundation*" (Maggyo, my italics).

**Getting messages across:** But the most important element of functionality for the Ministry is not income-generation or group formation but getting messages across for what the CDO in Buvuma called 'tangible welfare'. The Ministry seems to be quite clear about this: "We don't deal with these [factors which make for a good income-generating activity] as our main focus is not income generating; there are other players, we can link our groups to these" (MGLSD). "The primary function is functionality - applying what has been learnt in practice. One would look out for good sanitation, attending meetings regularly (because of increased confidence), people no longer thumb printing in meetings, people being confident enough to ask questions to those who train and bring them programmes; people writing and doing written communication for trade; people taking up leadership positions" (PC). "Poverty eradication, sanitation, agriculture etc – that is functionality" (CDOs). The VFC at Njoga suggested that to them "functional is implementing what you study – sanitation, livestock, agriculture, business, keeping records", and that it meant "loving enough of what you learn to put it into practice ... cleanliness, hygiene, sanitation, agriculture and business record keeping. Functionality to them [the learners] is more important than basic literacy". While the learners said "that it is when one puts into practice what they have learnt in class" (Njoga). The instructors at Njoga held similar views: Functionality is "if someone is able to do his business, for example, sell his or her fish using the knowledge that has been acquired; the learners putting into practice what they are learning". Among the measures of success, they cited "learners who have stood for elections, for example, a learner from the EFA class is on the BMU committee" (Njoga). In Buvuma, one measure was when "the Chairperson of Maggyo women's group from this FAL class was representing women at the sub-county level". Among the definitions of functionality held by the instructors in Buvuma was "to provide people with the functional skills like initiating income-generating activities, rearing, improved farming, sanitation etc, since before, literacy was in existence but not functional. ... Functionality in all life spheres including health, business, accountability, and reading and writing to become an all-round person. Here learners are expected to put into practice what they have learnt in class" (Instructors, Buvuma).

**Livelihoods:** But overwhelmingly, the learners we met saw functionality as livelihoods. FAL meant skill training and resources for local projects run by individuals, partners or the whole class. We shall see much of this below.

To summarise, the functional classes we saw provided an opportunity for people to meet together, to listen to exhortations about health (Maggyo Bugongo) and nutrition (Maggyo Central) and sanitation, to discuss some aspects of skill development and to plan a joint project together (Kasenyi). All of this could have been done by a women's group or a village development project, not a literacy class.

**Hierarchy of elements in FAL:** Among this menu of different purposes, it is not clear where the **primary** impulse for FAL lies. Discussing the difference between 'basic literacy' and 'functional literacy', the Buvuma instructors said, "Basic literacy has literacy and numeracy alone, while functional has other aspects [such as] sanitation, fishing, agriculture, energy saving, income-generating activities, civic rights and gender". They felt that even in FAL 1, "[income-generation] projects should be introduced to attract the learners so that they do not feel like they are *learning useless things*. A suggestion of starting a piggery project was given" (Instructors Kalangala, my italics). In a hierarchy suggested by this, income generation came first, developmental messages second, and literacy learning (a 'useless thing') third.

Functionality then in many parts of FAL takes precedence over literacy: "Teaching people only reading and writing without functionality is useless. That is why we encourage home inspection etc. I always start with the facilitator's home. I try as much as possible to see to it that these people put into practice what they are learning in class. If they cannot implement, then they are 'nothing doers'" (FAL Coordinator Buvuma). The instructors took the same line. The Maggyo FAL 1 lesson we saw was on nutrition: "In her explanation, she encourages the learners to practise this knowledge of nutrition in their everyday life".

There are some who see FAL as mainly or indeed only functionality. As one non-participant put, "The programme is good and has helped many women in her village since many have joined income-generating projects and are working in groups"; the literacy element is ignored. The BMU chairman at Busindi saw the value of FAL in stressing "the need to have sanitary facilities in their homes and living in a clean environment, ... to be able to eradicate the illegal fishing practices" (radio reports), rather than in literacy. The poem from the FAL class at Lutoboka read out on the radio "was praising the achievements gained by the adult learners and advising the general public particularly women to avoid HIV/AIDS through abstaining, having one faithful partner or 'Use Condoms' – this was portrayal of what information they get from the FAL classes" (radio reports).

As this last quotation shows, the radio programmes which feature highly in the consciousness of the providers concentrate on the non-literacy measures of success. Here too

we hear the voice of some of the learners. When selecting examples of good outcomes from FALP for the purposes of motivating others to join, they did not look for changes in reading and writing – such changes are rarely mentioned or are less highly considered than the other changes: “All the learners [interviewed] were expressing satisfaction with the outputs they had acquired from the FAL program especially in business management and the ability to keep records of their businesses. However, the women expressed special pride in their acquired ability in preparing nutritious meals for their children” (radio reports). They looked for participation in local government (“the LC1 chairman/learner who is proud of FALP for making his leadership of the village easier and wishes to become a councillor to LC3”). The MPs who when asked on the radio what the value of FALP was for the islands “acknowledged the great change in attitude and practices of the people in his constituency in relation to positive personal behaviours, hygiene and sanitation, personal development and commercial level activities – he attributed all that to the FALP success in Kalangala”; and who “expressed satisfaction with the output of the FALP in his constituency especially in the ease he finds now in communicating to his constituents and in mobilizing them to fight against evil practices like illegal fishing, smoking of drugs, domestic violence etc”, seeing the main purpose of FALP as the informing and empowerment of the people through “the health care services projects ... and the savings and credit village bank” - these MPs did not perceive *literacy* as a major purpose for FALP ( radio reports).

Even the instructors in Buvuma omitted literacy from their list of purposes: “To improve the standard of living, train people in managing small businesses, remove primitiveness [sic] from those who did not go to school, to help each other”. On the other hand, their measures of success did include literacy performance: “Good performance in the proficiency tests, acquisition of the ability to read and write, and change in the standard of living of the learners”. Thus most join the two together. In Buvuma, the LC3 Chairman said, “Its purpose is to educate the adult to learn how to read and write and to help them participate in other programmes such as poverty alleviation”. To the learners of Maggyo Central, “the meaning of FAL was to help adult learners who dropped out [from school] to have a second chance and learn reading and writing and also other activities like modern farming, sanitation, health and others”.

**Social transformation and critical reflection** on the causes of poverty do not appear on this agenda, although they do (rhetorically, at least) on the providers’ agenda. “In the FAL approach, rural people are [seen to be] poor because they lack the knowledge and skills they need to improve their living conditions” (Openjuru 2004 p423); any concept of structural causes of poverty or exploitative practices by others is hidden. “The National Adult Literacy Strategic Investment Plan (NALSIP) states that literacy is a key in *helping the poor extract*

*themselves* from conditions causing poverty, particularly through access to information” (ULALA 2, my italics). But those “conditions causing poverty” are never explored in FAL. The problem is assumed to lie with the poor: if the poor change, all will be well, according to the messages conveyed by the FAL programme. In the Maggyo class, for example, there was no general discussion on **why** there is a problem with nutrition in the village – it is assumed it is because the villagers’ ignorance which FAL will dispel. New knowledge will always lead to new patterns of behaviour. The availability of good food supplies, the gendered nature of food habits in the country and other factors are not considered and certainly not challenged. According to the organisers, part of the aim of the programme is to sensitise the villagers around issues relating to “gender, marriage, succession, inheritance (wills), and children’s rights” (PC), but this is done in a non-radical way.

Although the language of rights is sometimes used, the FAL in the islands that we saw adopts an instrumental approach rather than a structural approach. We were told (but did not see) that the FAL groups addressed critical issues: “Functionality is human rights, empowerment” (ICEIDA-Uganda). But even here, “the government policy on social transformation is changed attitudes” of the learners, not of others (ICEIDA-Uganda). “The learning process aims at addressing issues that are already a part of the participant’s life *to help them do those in a better way*. To ensure this link to daily life, the approach aims at immediate application of what is learnt in real life situations” (Instructors, my italics). It is the learners who must change, not society.

**Learner purpose for FAL, literacy or functionality?** What then was the purpose of the programme from the view of the learners? Most repeated the mantras given to them by the CDOs during the mobilisation phase; but one stated quite clearly that “he joined FAL ... primarily to learn how to make money and how he could expand the business he had” (Lutoboka learner). A Kasenyi participant said she had come to class “to learn to fish, cultivate and sanitation, to be able to keep her home clean”, and another, “to learn modern fishing methods”. The learners in Bumazime Maggyo class said they were looking for ‘something tangible’ from the classes: “when other community members see us coming to class regularly and they do not see us going out with something tangible, they start saying we are wasting our time”. “They also said they find it difficult to keep the cows since it needs a lot of money. Without money they will not be able to apply the knowledge that they are getting from the literacy class”. Literacy skills do not feature here. For others, the purpose of the course lies in the opportunities it provides to get employment: “The participants [say that they] are expecting to get jobs after getting their certificate of proficiency in reading and writing” (Buvuma). One learner said he only joined the group to benefit from any developmental intervention “that may be directed to the group” (Buvuma).

**SBC purpose, literacy or functionality?** When we turn to the SBC, the purpose as seen by the providers was well summarised by the Programme Co-ordinator: "Its primary objective is to encourage expansion and diversification of the businesses they own. It improves the existing businesses and supports those who wish to start new ones" – for example, by adding poultry keeping to agriculture. But there is no real provision in the curriculum of SBC for further literacy or numeracy learning except learning to keep accounts.

Literacy; the implementation of messages on social development; forming groups to access resources; learning new productive skills and generic business skills for livelihoods; more generalised objectives such as the empowerment of women – all these are given as the main purpose of FAL. The aims of providers and participants at times differ. And the measures of success are not at all clear. FAL needs some clarification of its goals.

### 3. PARTICIPANTS

My impression of the participants recruited to all three parts of the programme are that they are very diverse.

**Recruitment** starts with the CDOs going to a village and persuading them to have a class. Then the chosen instructor is expected, with the appointed Village Functional Committee to identify and mobilise the learners.

**Radio:** This is backed up by a series of radio programmes, "the radio announcements, the famous CBS 88.8 fm with Ssenoga Amza's programme on Functional Adult Literacy in Kalangala every Sunday morning 7.30am - 8.00am", the aim of which is "to popularize the FALP in Kalangala and Mukono and mobilize people to enrol in it and all stakeholders to participate through keeping the masses informed and educated about what is taking place in the field and how people are benefiting". The aim of this set of programmes is openly propagandist; although it aims to discuss "community/environment/gender/social service issues at stake", little of that is done in the programmes. It is a publicity instrument, seeking not to develop any critical examination of what is happening but choosing items carefully to put over the best possible picture, even if somewhat overdrawn. And it is based on a strongly autonomous approach to a single 'literacy' rather than the multiple literacies approach. Certainly the series has been effective with a certain section of the population: the providers, donors and instructors in both Kalangala and Buvuma valued these programmes highly (Buvuma; ICEIDA; KAFIA; CAO; Instructors Kalangala; radio reports), and they have been successful in mobilising a number of persons to attend – at least initially.

According to the Programme Co-ordinator, after the large initial enrolment has faded away, the CDOs try to insist on a group of 15-20 and say they would close any group smaller than this. I have cause to think that the PC's picture of what is happening in the classes is unreal. Most of the classes we saw were registering lower enrolments and attendances. In Kasenyi in 2006, the FAL 2 class was only 8, while in our year (2008), FAL 1 was down to 4 and FAL 2 down to 7. Maggyo Central in Buvuma had 8 in FAL 1, 2 in FAL 2 and 5 graduates who continued to attend; Bumazime Maggyo had a total of 20 but only 2 were in FAL 1, 10 in FAL 2 and 8 were "graduates who are waiting for the English class". The SBC attendances were larger, Bumangi 15 and Lutoboka 12.

According to ICEIDA, the programme is aimed at all adults (i.e. over the age of fifteen). There are no signs now of children coming in to the classes as occurs in many other programmes in view of the lack of primary school provision in the villages: "Some children

may come in especially on small islands with no primary school" (MGLSD). "There used to be some children who would drop in. The government on the whole is discouraging the dropping out of primary school children, so there are not so many getting out of school. Now, the instructors send them away to schools when they come to attend and [they are] shown or told the right place they should be" (PC).

**Educational experience of participants:** The FAL Co-ordinator for Buvuma stated that "in relation to the target participants, the target group was first and foremost the illiterate people. That is, someone who had never seen the blackboard. Secondly, people who have studied up to P1 or P4 and they have been out of school for a long time and can now not read and write well. Thirdly, people who feel that they want to acquire functional skills". The programme is aimed at all "irrespective of whether schooled or not" – all who feel they had a problem with their literacy (ICEIDA-Uganda). "Participants are non-literates over 15 and drop outs up to primary 6" (MGLSD).

### **Non-participants**

The fear of public humiliation which is referred to several times illustrates one of the most significant barriers to an effective programme, the negative attitudes towards 'illiterates' held among the general public, especially the educated part of society. This is an issue which needs to be addressed in any literacy promotion programme. "It is hard to change attitudes", said the CAO on Kalangala (CAO). As LABE reiterated, "It is difficult to get people thinking differently" (LABE). A non-literate non-participant woman in Maggyo put it succinctly: "She had been approached by both learners and facilitators [to join the class] but her greatest worry was that in most classes, new people like her who do not know how to totally read and write are laughed at and criticised by both learners and facilitators. She promised to join a class with time but not the one next to her area". This is a very real fear among many people and there are sound reasons for it.

As I have noted above, even among the senior staff of the ICEIDA-supported FAL project, we found strong negative attitudes towards the 'illiterate': "These people cannot appreciate anything because they are illiterate", "because there is darkness in their thinking" (Buvuma staff). Local criticism of the programme among the more educated does seem to be strong, especially in Buvuma. One factor mentioned is that the learners do not have anything else to do: "Minimisation of the programme generally especially by men who ... think that people attending have nothing to do and just attend for the sake of lack of what to do". "The major barrier facing the programme are those who look down on those who are not able to read and write". "The literates in the community are also a challenge. Here [in Buvuma], the elites

discourage others from attending and they translate the FAL programme to “*FALA*”<sup>1</sup>. So this means that whoever participates in the FAL class is a *fala*”. Much the same was found in Kalangala.

This negative attitude towards the non-literate can of course be for some a motivating force to help them to join FAL. For these people, the desire to learn literacy skills springs from a sense of inferiority rather than a sense of inadequacy. A non-literate farmer in Bumangi who admitted to a lack of skills in calculating prices nevertheless said that “she would like to be able to read and write *on her own*. She says she does not mind what she learns to read or write as long as she learns”. It was not so much a feeling of need in her farming that she felt as a sense of status, of wishing to belong to the ‘literate’ part of society. The fisherman at Kasenyi who said that “he would like to learn to read and write anything that would allow him make some money. He would also like to learn to write his name and stop using a thumb to sign, because every time he uses it, people stare at him. They say, ‘That is a fisherman, they are the ones who did not go to school’” shared that feeling. But in most cases this sense of inferiority keeps them away: “They do not come because they feel ashamed of their inability to read and write. People know the yellow primer that it is at level 1 and they will point their finger at those who have them as illiterates” (Instructor Kasenyi).

Openly expressed negative attitudes led to a feeling of being ‘shy’ which we found very widespread, especially among women: “When I asked her why some female non-literates are not coming to class, she said it’s because they are shy of being seen”; “although people who are not able to read and write can participate in poverty alleviation programme, they are usually very shy”; “those who are not coming for the programme are shy”; “some people are shy and would not like to reveal their identity as people who are not able to read and write”; “some people are shy to expose their inability to actually read and write for themselves because the community assumes that they are able to read and write, so they do not want to make it known that they are not able to read and write” (Buvuma report).

This sense of inferiority extends to other aspects of identity. We found a feeling that their dress did not meet what they felt that society expected of a learner in a FAL class. The CAO in Kalangala recognised this: “dress is difficult for some people to participate”. The researchers in Buvuma commented on “the way the learners are all dressed in good clean *gomesi* and all are having nice looking shoes on their feet”; “they all look well dressed in *gomesi*”. Some non-participants expressed hesitations about their dress. Literacy to some means a specific way of living, not just reading and writing.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a Luganda word which literally means someone who is dense, dormant and not knowledgeable. The person in this category is just pushed around, directed, conditioned and ignorant in most cases.

On the other hand, wealth among the non-literate can increase this feeling of inferiority: as one worker in Buvuma said, indicating their own prejudices, "Being proud and also fear of losing one's status also affects many, especially the rich [illiterate]. They fear to unveil their darker or weaker side to the community". For some, age is a reason given for non-participation: "shyness among the old peoples; many have fear since they didn't want their children to see them in class learning the vowels, a e i o u; many think they are too old and don't see any chance of improvement in life since their turn for studying passed" (Buvuma instructors).

Learning literacy has a lower priority for many people than their livelihood activities, especially among fishermen who work at nights: "Busy working schedules also affect many in attending since they only get rest at night in the late hours" (Buvuma). "Those who are not able to read and write but do not go to the adult literacy education classes do not go because they think they do not have time for FAL learning". "Poverty is also a problem because it means people have very little time to come and attend classes because they spend most of their time looking for what to survive on". HIV/AIDS raised its head only once: among the reasons given by facilitators in Buvuma for non-participation was "HIV/AIDS scourge; a majority of the people are living with HIV/AIDS, so they don't see any value in FAL since they know that they are to die any time. So they spend the little time left on earth with other things like working harder for their children".

Among other reasons for not participating given were: "some are not coming because of distance from the nearest class, and some have problems at home, for example, monkeys destroying people's crops. There are also those who keep moving from one place to the other"; "migration among the fishing communities is also a big problem, since people move from one place to another". "While the ADRA programme was on, learners had to pay the facilitator 1000sh, and this mentality is still running in people's minds that FAL also will force people to pay at one time and this hinders many". "Some male non-literates do not want to come to classes being run by female facilitators" (Buvuma). Several non-participants claim they did not know about the programme or some aspect of the programme which attracts them: "I did not know there was a loan scheme" (a secondary 6 leaver Bumangi shopkeeper referring to SBC). Uncertainty about the benefits of the programme also exists: "Many are waiting to hear about the immediate tangible benefits from FAL like money and animals for rearing" (Buvuma).

**Educational experience of learners:** The non-literate then are deterred from participating - and thus it is that in our case studies in Kalangala and Buvuma non-literate persons are not

the majority. The official literacy rate for Kalangala is some 85% but these figures are always suspect and often meaningless; certainly the villages we took for our case studies showed a much lower literacy rate, whatever that may mean. But in fact it would seem that the FAL programmes only rarely recruit the illiterate: "we are not reaching all; the question is how to widen the programme" (ICEIDA-Uganda). And those being reached are on the whole educated, for they will respond to the recruitment methods used. Although the Programme Co-ordinator says that "80% of the participants have not been to primary school and 20% approximately have been in school but still cannot write their names", there are signs that larger numbers of people with substantial amounts of primary school experience and high levels of literacy skills have joined FAL 1. The Ministry's view is nearer to what we saw: "we feel only 30% are non-literates, the rest are primary 3 upwards; they come for the functional skills" (MGLSD). It would appear that FAL attracts mostly those who have had some schooling and know what they are missing.

This was certainly true in our case studies. In the initial enrolment at Kasenyi, out of 31 enrolled at first, only a third (11) had never been to school; among the other two thirds was one who had attended up to primary 7. In Lutoboka, we met people who came into FAL 1 having had schooling for five or seven years. In Maggyo Central, learners in FAL 1 had P6 and P7 experience, although there were also some with P2: "Agnes ended in P2 and she only knew how to read and write the vowels and her name, since she crammed this while still young". While schooling does not necessarily mean literacy skills (one primary 5 learner told us that when she joined the FAL 1 class, she could not even sign her name), it is quite clear from our case studies that many of those who join already had some literacy skills, although they used them rarely. They were attracted to FAL by the 'functional' element and felt or were told that they should enrol in the FAL 1 class.

There was initially a feeling that learners need to take the whole package, It may be that this is weakening somewhat – current enrolments at FAL 2 and now SBC do not draw on the pool of people who have completed a previous course. The instructor at Maggyo Central (Buvuma) said, "Those who join at the second level are those who have attended some two to three years of school education, and they are reported to be coming to the literacy classes to improve their English and mathematics". The chairman of LC3 in Buvuma reported that "when the programme began, we were targeting only those who are not able to read and write but later other people who are able to read and write came for the knowledge content".

**Poor:** "We do not target the poor specifically but the programme is generally in line with PEAP and its successors. Everyone is poor if defined by loss of opportunities. There are some rich non-literates and we target them but they don't come. Some take private tuition"

(MGLSD). So that, despite the several assertions, the FAL classes do not enrol the very poor, the people who, in KAFIA's vivid phrase "have nothing to buy paraffin or soap". "Those who attend in Kalangala are very poor and others are the not-so-poor. The learners are able to pay for their own pencils and pens" (PC). In Buvuma, the CDO stated, "The programme does not target only the poor people", and one of the researchers noted: "From the way the learners are ... dressed ..., they do not strike me as people who are poor by Ugandan standards". "We do not recruit the poorest – but all are very poor here; they have no cash reserves for crises" (ICEIDA-Uganda). This is not because of the alleged nature of Kalangala and Buvuma society: "In Kalangala, there are not so many very poor as on the mainland. We have a village campaign to reach the very poor periodically because of the transient population" (PC). Rather, it is characteristic of all adult literacy programmes. The priorities of the very poor are on immediate income, not formal schooled literacy which will at its best yield advances in income only after several years. This is recognised widely.

Apart from the 'poor', there are no targeted programmes for FAL – nothing specifically for fishermen or for farmers (livestock or arable), nothing for shopkeepers or oil palm growers, focusing on their specific literacy (and numeracy) needs.

**Gender balance:** The balance between men and women in the Kalangala FAL programmes would seem to be rather different from classes on the mainland. ICEIDA and the Ministry assert that most learners are women (54% women, 46% men overall; 57% women in the FAL 2 programmes, ICEIDA-Uganda; PC); "There are more women than men because of the economic activities. Women are more settled and have a better attitude. Men have ego; there is a stigma for men attending classes; men wish to be thought of as more independent" (MGLSD). But our survey suggested that in many parts of the FAL Kalangala programme, there are more men at all levels than elsewhere, and indeed sometimes more men than women (Kasenya FAL1). And this despite the programme being specifically aimed at women: "Our aim is the women because they are the most dynamic part of society" (ICEIDA-Uganda); "We should bring in women to educate the children and the nation" (CAO Kalangala).

**Male participation in Kalangala:** It was suggested to us by the SCDO and others that "men are a majority in SBC but men are few in FAL" (PC; CAO); our experience suggested the opposite. In Bumangi SBC, there were only two men to 13 women in attendance and 9 men to 16 women at enrolment; at Lutoboka SBC, there were 3 men and 9 women.



Kasenyi FAL 1 learners.

What is certain is that there are many men in both FAL and SBC in Kalangala. The CAO there attributes the male participation to the islands' population figures which (she said) give 180 men for every 100 women<sup>2</sup>: "therefore men come into classes". While the pressure from bodies like the BMUs with their insistence on candidates for committee membership having a literacy certificate may be significant ("The BMU committees in their village do not allow non-literates to serve in a position of leadership on the committee", Njoga), I do not believe this is the sole cause, but other reasons are hard to find. Men, it was said, are more attracted than women by the livelihood projects and the loans scheme (Bumangi); but again that is doubtful: the women were certainly attracted by both of these. What was told to us several times is that once a significant number of men do enrol, it becomes easier for other men to join. "Men are no longer being laughed at for joining FAL because they get benefits from it" (Njoga). The encouragement given by government and other officials and the example of male instructors who are common on the islands may also be among a number of contributing factors:

"Initially, the programme was looked at as targeting women, the weak, but continued sensitisation has led to a change in the attitudes of people to appreciate it. At first, men did not come but the encouragement of the CDOs and extension workers led to an attitude change; also male instructors persuade men to come and attend FAL; there are influential men in FAL classes or on the VFCs who have attracted others to the FAL classes; the fish boat owners are encouraging their crews to get into FAL for empowerment; the BMUs whose act provided that literacy skills would be a prerequisite to getting a fishing licence has also contributed positively; and District political leadership has encouraged more and more people to join FAL and has advocated for FAL because they have lost votes due to the votes of their electorate being invalid due to their inability to read and write" (PC).

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<sup>2</sup> These figures may be doubted; and in any case firm figures for the islands are impossible to obtain since the population is largely migrant.

The position in Buvuma seems to be different. In Maggyo Central, "The class had 15 learners. .... Only 2 out of the 15 participants were men". In Bumazime Maggyo, there were 12 women only, in Bugongo Maggyo class, there were 16 learners, all women. Is it possible that a pattern is emerging of enrolments for the first two or three years being largely confined to women but after some time, more men join the programme?



Buvuma FAL class

**FAL 2** initially enrolled only learners from FAL 1 but that is changing. Some of those who now enrol in FAL 2 come straight in at that level. "New participants come in to post-basic classes for functional skills" (ICEIDA-Uganda). "Cycle 2 takes in new participants" (MGLSD). And they may be even more advanced, secondary school leavers. One learner in FAL 2 at Kasenyi had been a secondary 4 level student and was literate-active; in other words, he was attending for the functionality element, not the literacy element, using FAL 2 as if it were a SBC.

**Graduates:** In Buvuma, there was no EFA or SBC to progress to, but significant numbers of past learners (graduates) continued to attend while "waiting for the English course". "On the advice of the Co-ordinator ... , the learners who had already completed the programme and been issued with certificates were advised to rejoin the class as they wait for the English programme to be introduced". Although encouraged to do this by the CDOs, I do not believe this is the sole reason; they appear to value the space which the class gives to them for some measure of social interaction, and some are waiting for the SBC as well as the English course. But (as we shall notice below) they particularly come to "keep their literacy alive".

**SBC:** The SBC "is intended for those learners [of FAL] that already know how to read and write but want to continue with their studies. It is also hoped that the course will attract new learners" (Status 2003 p11). Thus the SBC programmes grew out of FAL 1 and FAL 2; no SBC (so we have been informed) has been created where there has not been a FAL course. Although the Programme Co-ordinator in Kalangala suggests that "the majority of the

learners in the SBC are graduates of FAL level 1 and 2", in our case, the SBCs seem to have recruited largely new people. At Lutoboka SBC, out of 15 enrolled, only 3 came from FAL, 5 from EFA and 5 were new. At Bumangi, in the current SBC, all the participants were said to be new; none had been in FAL 1 or FAL 2, although in the earlier SBC, there had been learners who had been through FAL 1 and FAL 2. These newcomers too were mainly schooled, from primary 3 to secondary school. We were informed that SBC also on occasion enrolled some non- or semi-literate persons but that they were sent off to FAL 1 or FAL 2. The SBC instructors confirmed this: "In the SBCs, some people come when they cannot read or write and they are sent back to the FAL level 1 and 2 to first learn basic literacy. ... The level of education of some learners is too low, such that some of the learners cannot write their names and yet they want to join the SBC classes" (Instructors Kalangala).

One aim of SBC is to recruit men and women who already have a small-scale business so as to strengthen this. It would seem that they have been successful in this in some cases: "Most of those in SBC class have their own income-generating activities" (PC). In Lutoboka, we were told that every learner already had a small business, although that does not seem to have been true at Bumangi. But a good number of participants in FAL 1 and FAL 2 also have businesses, some having multiple occupations: "She is a housewife, and farming is her main activity at home. ... She makes mats and baskets and she learnt the skills from her auntie while still young" (Maggyo learner). "Francis engages in activities like brickmaking and farming" (Buvuma). "For business then, she has a small shop in this town which she operates with her S2 daughter" (Bumangi).

**Religion:** We were struck by the strength of religion in the practice of the classes and wonder about its impact on recruitment. Bumangi SBC meets in a church building and is clearly tied to that religion: the instructor asked some of the group "to meet on Sunday after Mass", despite the fact that, as some of the instructors indicated to us, "some learners who are not Christians are not willing to go into churches". Many of the learners and graduates, when asked what they read, said, "the Bible", service books or "prayer book" (Kasenyi). "Before joining the FAL class, she had some skills in numeracy and reading since she used to sell her mats and was also reading the Bible plus some Christian hymns, being a choir member" (graduate Buvuma). "Many [participants] testified to the acquired reading and writing skills since they could read verses in church"; as one learner said, "About his daily reading and writing skills, he reads the primers and follow-ups plus the Bible, and today he had read a chapter in Proverbs 2". "She also engages in reading and the materials she reads included the primers level 1 and 2 and the Bible" (Buvuma).

The specifically Christian links are fostered by the programme organisers. "The programme is also supported by the priests who are encouraging their flocks to join the programme in large numbers"; "We try to use community leaders such as religious leaders to mobilise the people" (Buvuma Instructors). The CDOs ask for announcements to be made "at Sunday meetings in church". It would be regrettable if the nature of the provision prevented non-Christians from participating in the programme.

#### 4. PROCESS

In Kalangala, we saw one FAL 1 class in Kasenyi (an aberrant lesson) and one FAL 2 class in Kasenyi (much better). In Buvuma, we saw FAL classes at Maggyo Central, Buzimane Maggyo and Maggyo Bugango (two classes) – these were mixed FAL 1 and 2 together, both groups of learners being taught at the same time. We saw two SBC classes at Lutoboka and one at Bumangi. We met many others involved in the programme.

#### I GENERAL COMMENTS

**Like school:** The National Adult Literacy Programme (and FAL in Kalangala and Buvuma) deliberately sets out to be as like school as possible. It tends to keep terms, even in the SBC: “We want them to start at same time; they must finish at same time for the proficiency test” (PC). It calls its meetings ‘classes’, its teachers ‘instructors’ and its participants ‘learners’, although we notice that increasingly they are being called ‘participants’. It keeps a class register, sometimes called formally as in a school class: even the Bumangi SBC learners were told to “stand up and say ‘here’”, and absentees are questioned as severely as school truants. Its sessions are ‘lessons’. It uses textbooks with material chosen by ‘experts’, which set out the material in a pre-set sequence. In all the classes we saw, even in SBC at Bumangi (but not at Lutoboka), the learners put up their hands to answer questions and stood up to speak individually – other responses were made in chorus as in formal school (Maggyo). The instructor “asks one learner to volunteer by show of hands to read some sections of the primer” (Maggyo Central). The learners called the instructors *Musomesa* (Teacher/Master) or ‘Sir’ and ‘Madam’ or, as the SCDO told us, they used the same terms as their children use for their school teachers; and they see the classes as one step in a progression towards ever higher levels of study and qualification. “At one point when the facilitator observed the learners talking amongst themselves, she intervened and asked the learners to ask her if they have any question” (Maggyo Central) – peer discussion is not allowed even in an adult class. The instructors are trained to keep a lesson plan book, give the learners formal homework rather than developing home and community literacy practices, and when marking, “the formal system was followed, one by one handing in, and [the instructor] using a red pen to mark and commenting accordingly”. *Adult* learning processes are in many cases missing. This was less true at Kasenyi FAL 2 and Lutoboka SBC.

Elsewhere, the hierarchy of knowledge and the control by the instructor were both implicitly and explicitly acknowledged; and at least in most of the FAL 1 and FAL 2 classes (Bumazime Maggyo was an exception), the seating arrangement, in rows all facing the blackboard and

instructor, confirms that in these classes, all knowledge comes from the instructor who controls the textbooks and that the learners have no significant knowledge which they can share among themselves. "The class is progressing in a typical classroom model with both the facilitator and the learner closely reading from the primer and the facilitator leading the discussion that is based on the text read from the primer" (Bugongo Maggyo).

We saw only whole class teaching, no small sub-group work in any of the classes we visited, although one or two of the instructors we met suggested that they did use such groups at times. As the SCDO with his usual optimism said, "He is going to be absolutely honest. The sitting arrangement encourages teacher-centred learning, but the delivery is different. For example, the sitting arrangement encourages the students to face the teacher, the teacher introduces the topic, learners are sent into buzz groups to discuss what came out in the lesson. This (to him) is typical of a classroom of adult learners" (PC). But in all of our case studies this picture is unrealistic: buzz groups just don't exist (for one thing, the learning groups are too small). The instructors told us, "learners are sub-divided into sub-groups in the SBCs but not in the FAL classes" (Instructors Kalangala), although one instructor told us that he divided his class into small groups to discuss the picture of the chosen lesson "and after that they get into the teaching". "There is not much peer learning" in FAL according to some of the organising staff (ICEIDA-Uganda). Only in the SBC at Lutoboka did the greater measure of informality which characterises adult learning contexts appear, but even here, sub-groups were not employed.

Both MGLSD and ICEIDA Uganda say that they are happy with this school approach, even though it denies many of the basic tenets of adult education: for example, that the learners should control their own learning process; that the material used should be chosen by the learners to ensure its relevance and to meet their own aspirations, that it should be followed in a sequence determined by the learners. that the learners bring to the learning much existing knowledge and experience which they should be encouraged to share in class, that horizontal rather than vertical relationships of power should be the key feature of adult learning. It is widely recognised that a one-size-fits-all approach such as FAL is not appropriate for adult learning but the FAL approach is very much one-size-fits-all. KAFIA is aware of the need to break away from the schooling model which dominates this programme: "It can be designed better to make it different from formal school as much as possible". And some instructors are aware of the need to change some of this approach: "One instructor says she has made a change in her class by taking a lesson from the primer in one lesson and focusing the class on problems that affect them in another". But the CDOs encourage the formal arrangements.

**Difficulties:**

Apart from the structural problems of applying a schooling model to adult learning, there are a number of features of the programme which hinder the effectiveness of the learning. Learners come and go throughout the whole class time – this makes continuity of teaching difficult. Bumangi mentioned “late coming of learners” in its monthly reports. The instructors constantly complain of ‘late coming’ – another sign of the school-like approach. Absentees too are frequently mentioned: again to take one example, Bumangi SBC recorded attendances of between 6 and 13 in its last 14 meetings, so that the instructor was not always teaching the same group as the previous class. Interruptions to the teaching programme are frequent: instructors are called away for training (Njoga) or other reasons: at Bumangi SBC, the well-kept register showed that the class was interrupted in one year by instructor refresher training, International Literacy Day, learners being absent because of a court case, holidays, the instructor being called away for KAFIA meetings and SACCO meetings.

**Venue:** But the biggest problem of all seems to me to be the inappropriate venues which many classes meet in. It continues to amaze me why so many government bodies and aid agencies are willing to accept meeting conditions for adult learners which they would not tolerate for children’s primary schools – out under a tree next to main roads in the full gaze of passersby and open to the vagaries of the heavy rain which characterises the region from time to time.

Bumangi SBC meets in a church room which (they say) is sometimes required for other purposes and in any case they feel it is a “bad learning centre”. Kasenyi has started constructing a meeting place for itself which is in large part complete: “Her class needs roofing materials as they have already contributed and got the timber and built it up. It is partially covered with a tarpaulin on this particular day. She says she has been to the sub-county and the District trying to see what help they can get from there but so far she has had no positive response”. But such action is unusual. Njoga FAL meets in the open air or “classes are held in a video hall provided by the BMU chairperson. They need a class[room] from which they can study”; the EFA meets at the instructor’s home. Lutoboka meets either under a tree alongside the ferry road and meets jeers from neighbours, or squashed under a veranda which makes class discussion and activities such as role play very difficult. Maggyo Central meets “under a shop veranda near a passing road”; Bumazime Maggyo “is being conducted under a mango tree that is located at a home of one of the local leaders – during rainy seasons conducting the class becomes a problem”. Bugongo Maggyo “is in the middle of someone’s compound with a shelter of a big tree”. Some of the members of the class listed as meeting in the market “tell us that their class is no longer running because they

failed to find a shelter in which they could have their classes". Lutoboka gave as the main reason for ceasing to meet the bad venue.



One of the best SBC classes forced to close because of the provision of unsuitable venues.

The instructors we met in focus group meetings had similar venue problems. All of them met in the open air and cancelled the classes when it rained or adjourned to a nearby learner's home (Instructors Kalangala). As we were told many times, "Venues for the learners are a problem because most of them are in open spaces. So you find people clapping, singing and mocking the learners in areas where the community is not very supportive. During the rainy season, people go to their gardens". We experienced both of these – jeers and rain at Lutoboka.

This provision of unsuitable venues is well known: but in answer, it is assumed that the cost of renting a room for FAL classes should fall on the learners. The instructors in Kalangala "discussed the issue of renting; to which some instructors reacted that ... the learners might not be willing to pay rent for a premises: Rent a room? The class would not be willing to pay. It costs 15,000sh to rent room for a month. The village community does not support FAL – they do nothing". But they gave no justification for requiring the participants to pay for their learning accommodation, even when it was pointed out that we do not require children or their parents to pay a rent for their school buildings. One suggestion in Buvuma was that the organisers need to "provide some temporary shade for learners like tents, since many classes are affected by the rains and also the issue of privacy for the adult learners". But why any provision should be just a temporary tent is not clear: if we wish to help adults to learn effectively, providing a suitable location is just as important as providing an instructor, and the cost should be borne by the programme. The thinking (if there is any) behind such a policy eludes me. For this failure to provide a proper venue is one of the biggest barriers to non-participants joining FAL classes, and that barrier is created by the providers.

**Materials:** It is interesting that when one talks about 'materials' to many people in the field, they mean by this term notebooks, pens and pencils and flipchart paper rather than teaching-learning materials. We noted in Kalangala that this kind of material was available relatively cheaply in the shops, especially on the main road as at Bumangi. But 'materials' also refers to teaching-learning materials; in this programme, these were the primers at all levels – FAL 1, FAL 2 and SBC (with its multiple materials of flipchart sheets, comic book, participant workbook and cassettes), together with instructors' manuals.

In the programmes we saw, even in SBC, the teaching was dominated by the textbooks available - although there was in every class, especially at FAL 2 level, a shortage of these: one instructor informed us that she had ordered a FAL 2 instructor's manual several times but it had never come. The primer is often in short supply in the classes. In several classes, we saw examples of the following: "Some shared but three women had no access to the books, they just looked on and listened from others" (Bugongo Maggyo). In Maggyo Central, "the primers are limited and the learners are sharing one between two of them"; and we were told that "at some classes learning materials do not reach in time which affects performance". The instructors in both Kalangala and Buvuma made a strong request for the provision of more textbooks and instructors' manuals as a major plank in their discussions.

But even if in short supply, on the whole the textbooks were well used. In Bugongo Maggyo FAL class, for example, "the facilitator was regularly asking learners to read from the follow-up [i.e. FAL 2] manual ... After reading the passage [about diseases], the instructor introduced a generative picture summarising the passage. Here learners were asked by the instructor on what they were seeing in the pictures and the majority raised their hands to identify the pictures ... After the generative picture, there was an exercise below and this was given to them as homework".

The FAL 2 instructors used the subjects of the textbooks to set out the messages which the guide books told them to pass on to the class members. It seems that a special Luganda "follow-up reader had been developed with a focus on the daily life in fishing and farming communities" (Status 2003 p12), but we did not see this; the FAL 2 primer used in the classes we visited was the standard FALP 2 primer entirely about cultivation and health – and there was a shortage of even these. It is therefore not surprising that (as others have commented) there are virtually no projects related to fishing in this FAL programme.

The SBC teaching-learning comic books we saw were used either for reading round the class or for role plays. We saw the SBC workbooks being used in Lutoboka imaginatively, the learners being encouraged to write their own words on separate sheets of paper and getting

them marked before copying the correct responses into the workbook. But the comic book used in Bumangi was without such imaginative approaches.

My fear is that the instructors (even the SBC instructors, but not I gather the English instructors) may be too tied to these books, fearful of free discussion and creative writing (although Lutoboka used creative writing), and uncertain about the use of other materials in class. No other materials were brought into the classrooms.

**Other materials:** Opportunities exist in all classes for developing writing skills. The class members are expert in creating songs and poems, several of which have been sent to the radio programmes; but these have not been written down by the instructors and used to help the learners to read and develop further their writing skills. Outside the classroom, in both sets of islands, we saw many texts in the local communities which could have been used for literacy learning. Some of these were in English but others were in Luganda, and used in the classes could have provided the literacy learners with opportunities to learn to read and indeed to write their own texts. While some letters were written to the radio programmes, most of these came from non-participants or from past participants. Creative literacy is not a strong feature of these classes except in Lutoboka.



Notices like these can be the sites for learning literacy and experimenting with creative literacy





The formal school model being so strong in FAL and teaching-learning material being so short, it is not surprising that on several occasions we were told that the instructors used books from the schools in the FAL classes. This was particularly true of mathematics, for numeracy is greatly neglected in NALP. One instructor told us that the materials that “she uses in class include primary school mathematics books”. The FAL Coordinator in Buvuma said, “We advise them to be innovative, for example, by borrowing some learning materials from the formal schools system and adapt them to the teaching of adult literacy education” (but no explanation was given as to what they meant by such an adaptation, and no training has been provided for such adaptation).

**Pace of learning:** Because the primer material is almost the only material used in class, in the programmes we saw in Kalangala, the pace of learning was much too slow. Many of the literacy learners in FAL 1 and FAL 2 classes were frankly bored and filled in their time looking through the primer or doodling in their notebooks. The CDOs admitted that “the pace of learning may be too slow”. “The learners are visibly bored and so are we” was the report of one of the researchers (Kasenyi). In Maggyo, one of the learners told us that “now she is demotivated since she sees no progress at all”.

Even in SBC is this true: one of the research team noted in Bumangi SBC that “others [of the learners] are fighting to stay awake as the radio plays”, and at Lutoboka, although there was no boredom because of the lively interaction among the class learners, the time spent on one topic was excessive. This course is meant to be a six months course but seems to be extended to several more months than that. The teaching of each topic is extended across several class sessions at the discretion of the instructor. But it does not require more than half an hour with a group of men and women already engaged in small business to stress that planning is important, not two or three sessions of two hours each. What they need is **how** to plan (which is missing from the book), not exhortations to plan. In all programmes, my view is that the planners of all parts of FAL in Kalangala have under-estimated the learning abilities and the motivation of the learners.

The instructors in Buvuma told us that the CDOs there had said much the same: “when they come to monitor, they just want to hear that you have finished the syllabus before the learners sit for their exams. So this puts many of us under pressure to finish the content”. However, one of the instructors in the area said, “the providers should know that we come from different localities with different activities; at times our learners do not turn up because of some activities in the year”, and this causes the slow pace.

### **Teaching methods**

The teaching methods on the various ‘functional’ subjects which we saw varied. Some were very active with much learner involvement, some consisted largely in preaching sermons to passive learners. Both were closely tied to the primer; no other material was used. This was even true in SBC, where deliberate attempts had been made to introduce multi-media activities – flip charts, comic books which lent themselves to role plays, workbooks and recorded tapes. My impression of the tapes which we did see and hear being used on this and on a previous occasion is that they are too long and the listeners found them boring. Bumangi used one (I have a feeling this was done specially for us, since the cassette-player had been borrowed) and some of the learners clearly ‘switched off’; which may be why Lutoboka had given up on the tapes.

That is not to say that there was no active learning in any class we saw. Omitting the FAL 1 class at Kasenyi in which the learners did nothing except individually come up to the blackboard and identify and pronounce letters, all the others did see considerable activity among the learners. The FAL 2 lesson at Kasenyi was again a maverick lesson in that it was carefully rehearsed among the learners but it showed clearly what the instructor thought should happen in class. Here the learners brought plants to illustrate the lesson (cultivation) into the classroom; they asked questions; they played role plays and repeated information which they had learned when doing that same lesson some weeks earlier. The Maggyo FAL classes showed considerable student participation, though mainly by level 2 and graduate learners, not level 1 learners. The SBC classes at Lutoboka were very different. There was much more informality, greater discussion and debate among the learners which the instructor wisely allowed to run for a considerable time. And here the instructor did ask the learners to contribute material from their own experience relating to the theme for the day (the value of planning ahead). It was adult learning at its best, very unlike school despite the terms and textbooks.

### **Certificate and Tests**

Despite the preference of the participants for functionality over literacy, there is still pressure for the programme to feed the Ministry's statistical machine with figures of "people made literate". And that means tests and certificates.

Not that these are unwelcome to some of the learners. Alongside the demand for income-generation training, there is a parallel demand from some for certificates. There is no motivation for the learners to use literacy in their income-generation or any other daily life activity, but many of them do want to obtain status by gaining a certificate to say that they are no longer 'illiterate' but 'literate'. "Those who have not been to school expect to learn how to read and write and to acquire a certificate" (CDO Buvuma).

Both FAL 1 and FAL 2 lead to formal tests set by the Ministry, but "the proficiency tests are made to the specifics and circumstances of Kalangala" (CDOs Kalangala). "We take a Ministry test of proficiency but it is localised" (ICEIDA-Uganda). Even SBC takes a proficiency test (Lutoboka report). This is part of the contract with the Ministry: "they all do the proficiency test at the same time even though they will have started at different times" (PC). The latest figures from Kalangala available were that in 2005, 893 out of 1387 learners (of whom 38% were men) from 103 classes took the test and all (100%) passed, while in 2006 1809 out of 2329 learners from 146 classes took the test and 1688 (72%) passed (Report on tests 2007). EFA and SBC between them accounted for some 40% (slightly more in EFA) and FAL 1 and FAL 2 nearly sixty percent of those who took the test (the figures for passes are not available). Language remains a problem: in Buvuma, "we gave a proficiency test in which the questions were in Luganda but the response to the questions were being answered in Luo or Kiswahili". The Buvuma instructors suggested that the tests contained material "which are not even in the primers".

"Successful completion of the test leads to a certificate being issued" (Buvuma report). But these certificates are felt to carry with them limited social value because there is no equivalency with the formal education certificates. KAFIA highlighted this: "We want a certificate for adult learners with equivalency. ... They use proficiency tests to assess the learners, but the certificates have no equivalent on the formal school scale" (KAFIA). The LC5 Chairman in Kalangala told us that "they have been asking for an equivalent of their certificates to the formal system. There is a need to equate the certificates they get in FAL"; and the instructors at Njoga reported that there was a need to formalise "the certificates the learners get against their equivalent on the formal school system. How does one know when they have the equivalent?".

The purpose of getting such equivalent certificates is to get a job, not to gain access into school. However, the MGLSD certificates do not count for that purpose: "One of the SBC learners in the [Kalangala] market organised a small group of three to go to the CAO to ask for jobs and had been told to apply for cleaners, sweeping jobs etc" (KAFIA). "People here feel marginalised, forgotten; but FAL makes them feel belonging. 'Give us jobs', they shout in the market, "because we now have certificates, we can speak English'. They want their certificate to be recognised by the formal education system" (LC5 Chairman, Kalangala). The learners in Maggyo, Buvuma, told us that they "are expecting to get jobs after getting their certificate of proficiency in reading and writing". But the certificates are valued as they stand: as a graduate from Lutoboka told us, "She did all the levels of FAL and then joined the SBC ... . She shows me all her certificates which she has got over the years. She finished Level 2 in 2006, after sitting the proficiency test and passing it".

**Progression:** But once the certificate has been achieved, what does this lead to? The influence of formal education on FAL is strong. The certificates obtained at each level marks a staging post in a progression. "Level 1 certificate leads to level 2; level 2 certificate leads to SBC; but where does SBC certificate lead?" (KAFIA). The CAO saw it in terms of going on to school: "What next? We need an opportunity to go (back) to school. The Ministry of Gender needs to draft plans. Perhaps they could use distance education using community radio – but there is a distribution problem, especially for migratory population. ... There is no firm qualifications framework but there is a need to establish equivalency. FAL level 1 – what equivalency? FAL level 2 is meant to enable someone to get into primary school but at what level? And for getting jobs? The EFA test – we use local language [in the schools] up to P4, so the EFA test should be at least P5 or above. And the SBC certificate – what equivalency?" (CAO).

This sense of FAL being "a foundation" (CAO) for further study is strong. "We encourage graduates of FAL 2 to go on to EFA or SBC; the majority go to SBC" (PD); and in Buvuma, the four stages are set out clearly: "the different levels are reading and writing, functional skills, English, small business skills". "We thought that after cycle 2, they would be self-sustaining but they demand 'what next?'" , said the Ministry staff (MGLSD). This was a key question at Njoga – "What next after literacy? ... People ask what they will get out of FAL after they are trained" (Njoga). In Buvuma, this is even stronger, for there many graduates from FAL are waiting for SBC and especially for English: "Our attention is drawn to three of the learners who are sitting at the back and working on making beads. The facilitator explains to us that those were the FAL class previous graduates who are now waiting for the English Class. In the meantime we are told they are engaging in the functional skill of making beads". The LC3 Chairman in Buvuma saw the programme as being even more structured: "The FAL

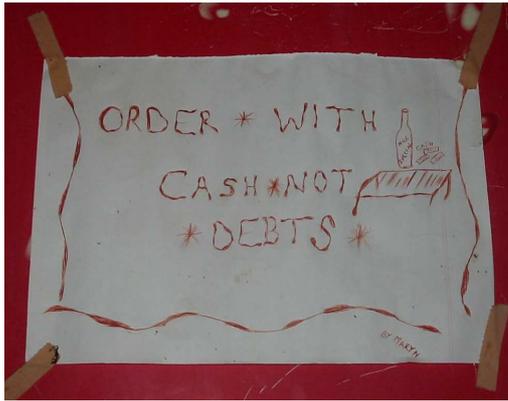
learners should be allowed to extend to higher levels; FAL classes should have levels like the schools system going up to university”.

**English:**

I did not look closely at the process of the English course because the existing programme is coming to an end. Until now, “EFA has no instruction materials, so the instructor devises their own means around the content” (Instructors Kalangala). But new course materials are now being made available.

But we found a great deal of evidence about the importance of English for the local people. The wide range of languages spoken in both sets of islands and the growth of tourism on Kalangala make English as a *lingua franca* more important and recognised: “English is more important for Kalangala because of the range of languages spoken here” (CAO). There is widespread knowledge of English, at least in Kalangala: I noticed that one student at Kasenyi, when copying out the alphabet from the blackboard, unconsciously included the letter X which does not occur in Luganda and was not even on the blackboard. English words are included – again unconsciously – in Luganda speech. The training material which the Department of Fisheries used for the BMU committees was mostly in English, as were the handouts and flipchart sheets left behind (Njoga). Notices regularly used English words throughout. The facility of many people in English is striking. Interviews with instructors and CDOs in both sets of islands “were conducted in a mixture of English and Luganda”; and the reports written for us by the SBC instructors from Lutoboka and Bumangi classes were in excellent English. “Kalangala is becoming very busy – for example, the ferry; tourism is growing. English is wanted for mobility, for status. It is government policy to promote English; and English is used as the medium of instruction in many schools, especially private schools” (ICEIDA-Uganda). And English is used unconsciously in many contexts: the CDOs when creating a T-shirt for the learners, without thinking, wrote the slogan in English, not in Luganda (although the majority of those who wore them cannot read English!); and all the instructors marked the exercise books with words like ‘Good’ in English .

All of which means there is a huge demand to learn English judging by our case studies. The Buvuma students who, having completed FAL 1 and FAL 2, continue to attend the classes



waiting (most of them) for English rather than SBC; the statement made to us that men will attend to learn English but not to learn literacy in Luganda; the urgency with which the existing learners in FAL 1 and FAL 2 said that "learners like him are also keen about learning English" – all these point in one direction. "Most of them want to come and learn English" (Buvuma SCDO). As one Buvuma graduate from FAL 1 and FAL 2 put it: "she realised she had a problem of not knowing how to read and write English. This became a motivation for her to join the FAL class: learning how to read and write English. To her, all her expectations

are met apart from the English course since her aim was to learn and speak English". In addition to providing the English *language* course, I believe that some English *literacy* classes could with profit be introduced (as they have been in South Africa), rather than requiring learners to learn literacy in Luganda and then proceed to English language.

There is a more muted demand for the SBC in our case studies. The co-ordinators, instructors and learners in both Kalangala and Buvuma told us of the demand to learn business skills. Certainly at Kasenyi, the instructor reported that "the graduates of Level 1 and 2 want to study the business course because many of them are involved in small businesses. They have someone in their community who will be able to teach the course". Each community will make its own decision between EFA and SBC – a one-size-fits-all approach does not work with adults.

### **'Post-literacy'**

The demand for some progression is met in part by the provision of 'post-literacy' materials.

I note the use of this term. Studies of 'post-literacy' have suggested that the term be abandoned since it implies that all 'literacy' (i.e. literacy learning) has come to an end; whereas the approach which sees literacy as a social practice views all persons as continuing to learn different literacy practices throughout life (see DFID 1994 and DFID 1999). I strongly recommend the term be abandoned and some such term as 'village library' or 'reading centre' be used instead.

The programme provides the instructor with a tin trunk containing a number of booklets of 'improving reading' for the class to use. The instructions which accompany the box state clearly that "the boxes are strictly for books and not for personal use" by the instructor, but all those we saw were used by the instructor to keep his or her personal items in; one contained a towel which the instructor used throughout the teaching session.

A 'Follow Up Reader' series of 38 booklets "suitable for all levels" has been specially prepared and printed on topics which the providers feel the learners will be interested in; once read, they will not be used again. "The Book Box service is aimed at all adults (15 years and above) who are or have been participants (learners and instructors) in the Functional Adult Literacy Programme (FALP) in the [Kalangala] district" (PL paper); it is not clear why they cannot be used by other members of the village, especially as the instructor is told to inform the chairman of LC1 in the village of the box's existence in the village. Their use is supposed to be monitored by the CDOs: "every quarter the CDOs will ask instructors for the book boxes and check all the books to see if the books are being used in a proper way" (PL paper);

but there is no sign that they are so monitored. The loans book says that each borrower should deposit 3000sh for each loan, and the books we saw showed this sum against each borrower's name; but the PIT informed us that in fact no such sums had been collected (Bumangi; PIT). The rule that each booklet shall be borrowed for no longer than three days subject to a fine of 1000sh per day (surely this is rather draconian for adult learners in FAL) seems to be broken regularly. As is usual in such programmes, after an initial flurry, the box tends to be less used.

Some of these booklets could with profit be used for learning in class; for adults will learn to read very quickly if the material they are using is on a topic in which they have both experience and a keen interest. For example, those who want to rear pigs can quickly learn to read a booklet on pig rearing; for one of the results of research into teaching literacy to adults is that adults do not need to go through a stage of simple to more complex words; they will learn very 'difficult' words immediately if these are words which they use regularly and which relate to their experience and keen interest. 'Difficulty' of words lies in the context, not the word itself.

Such materials should help to "develop a reading culture" but it is very doubtful if this will result from such actions without the regular stimulus of commercial reading material (regular newspapers and magazines) and a changing library provision. It is intended that the readers in Kalangala shall read only approved and improving literature rather than what they want<sup>3</sup>. It is no wonder that the instructors on Buvuma should ask that the FALP should "make available some other reading materials to the learners other than the primers and follow-up to ensure sustainability of the acquired literacy skills". The proposed Community Resource Centre for Buvuma, if "filled with [a continuous supply of] relevant books" would be an improvement so long as the books are such as those who provide it would wish to read for themselves and provision is made for regular updates. But beyond this, since the (literacy) aim of FAL in the islands is to encourage the people of the islands to use reading and especially writing throughout their *daily lives*, independent of such inputs as the 'post-literacy' tin trunk, rather than to read special literature when they have the leisure to do so, new steps need to be taken to build up the literacy environment.

There are two main elements in FAL, as we have seen, literacy learning and functionality. It will be helpful to take these separately.

## II LITERACY LEARNING

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<sup>3</sup> An evaluation of a Freirean literacy programme in Brazil criticised the learners for not reading improving literature but fashion and sports magazines and for only writing Christmas greetings cards, Stromquist 1999.

## **1. Lack of literacy expertise**

There is a serious lack of expertise available to the field workers in the two sets of islands in the area of teaching literacy to adults, a task universally recognised as calling for special skills and insights backed up by much research and training – which is at the moment at an embryonic stage in Uganda. It is true that there is in Uganda a good deal more interest in and knowledge of the new thinking about literacy than in many other countries in Africa. The staff of MGLSD are aware that they have limitations in modern understandings of and approaches to adult literacy; some of the staff there take a strongly 'autonomous' view of literacy rather than the more recent 'social practice' (New Literacy Studies) view. LABE is one of the leading agencies in this area and recognises that it is still moving towards a more updated view of literacy. The key centre at the moment is the Institute of Adult and Continuing Education at Makerere University which has gained considerable expertise in the new ethnographic approaches to adult literacy through recent research undertaken by some of its staff in association with Kwa-Zulu Natal University in South Africa and with ANFEAE in Ethiopia and is developing its experience of the practice of adult literacy also.

The ICEIDA Kalangala project has taken advantage of some of this expertise, and there have been attempts to surround the project with new thinking and debate – particularly through the radio programmes and through occasional seminars and conferences such as the ICEIDA-Action Aid Symposium of September 2004 on *Contemporary Issues on the Practice of Adult Learning in Uganda* (although the title of this paper talks about 'adult learning', it is all about 'adult literacy', having been held on International Literacy Day).

Some of the New Literacy Studies approach to adult literacy learning can then be found in the country. It is affecting this project through KAFIA, some of whom have begun to develop multiple literacies approaches; some of them recognise the difference between the formal literacy of the classroom and the informal literacies of livelihoods and the community.

But this is not getting through to the classes, for (as we found and were told) this has not got through to the CDOs. The CDOs have a small amount of formal training on literacy in their initial training courses; this is based on out-of-date material in both literacy and adult learning, and has virtually no numeracy in it. Some of them are undergoing further training including in 'Adult Education' but this is unlikely to take into consideration the newer approaches to adult literacy as social practice and the ways in which understandings of adult learning and teaching adults have developed (see above pages 13-14 and references there) .

And above all the CDOs have no *experience* of teaching literacy and numeracy to adults, while at the same time, there is no source for up-to-date reading material on either literacy

or adult learning being made available to them. Apart from any formal training courses they may have been sent on, they have read nothing on literacy since leaving college, and I understand that they have used none of the available websites on adult literacy and numeracy. They have heard little about literacy mediation (of which we found many examples during our visit), of multiple literacies, family literacy (despite this being a key feature of adult literacy in Uganda), embedded literacy (vital for functional literacy), workplace literacy, proximal literacy, literacy as social practice, and above all 'the literacy environment' which is now the third plank in UNESCO's programme to achieve the Education for All goal of literacy (GMR 2006); even 'functional literacy' has changed its meaning in recent years. None of the recent books relating to adult literacy in developing countries (for example, the two recent OXFAM handbooks) had been seen in Kalangala.

The lack of this expertise is very serious – and quite out of keeping with ICEIDA's concern for fully trained and qualified technical staff in other sectors of its aid programme. Health, fisheries, water engineering etc all have their specialists. But it is felt that general social development staff can manage an adult literacy programme with occasional support from local consultants such as LABE. Training is seen as a single injection of knowledge which (like the 'banking principle' which Freire criticised) is meant to last them a lifetime. This is, in my view, completely inadequate, especially in a field which is changing very fast (see Uppingham Seminars website).

It is essential that up-to-date expertise be available to the programme as it develops. I strongly recommend that the project seeks to strengthen these new movements in Uganda and thus enhance the country's capabilities in the New Literacy Studies; and that it makes arrangements for on-going support be made with an appropriate agency such as the Institute at Makerere University (if they are willing) to ensure that contemporary perceptions and practices in adult literacy and especially numeracy are always available to the programme.

## **2. Multigrade teaching**

We saw relatively little teaching of literacy; most of the lessons we saw were on functionality – vegetable growing, nutrition, health. In part, the reason for this is that this is quite clearly where the key motivation of the learners lies – in functionality rather than literacy. And in part it lies in the way in which FAL is being implemented in this part of Uganda.

As we have already seen, FAL in Kalangala and Buvuma is offered as a complete package of FAL 1, FAL 2 followed by either EFA or SBC. Anyone joining seems to be expected to take the whole package, starting in FAL 1. Thus there are in FAL 1 classes people who have never

been to primary school and also people who have studied up to Primary 7 and even above. In the classes we saw, the majority of those in FAL 1 classes could already engage in some literacy activities; their motivation for attending was more on functionality. This issue for the instructors is made worse by the fact that several centres try to teach FAL 1 and FAL 2 together. So that it is natural for the instructors to focus more on the messages contained in the primer which apply to the whole group than on the varied literacy skills of each level.

The instructors commented very strongly on the difficulties this caused: "Level 1 has people from illiterate to P7. ... In the FAL classes, learners come in from different levels of formal school, so the instructors are inevitably involved in multigrade teaching" (Instructors Kalangala). The problem of multigrade (and multilingual) teaching is particularly acute in Buvuma, where the graduates from FAL 1 and FAL 2 stay on waiting for either EFA or SBC. "Some literacy facilitators mixed the different groups of learners and teach them all at the same time. This includes different languages and different levels of learning. We always advise them to start with the beginners and move on to the other levels of literacy learning" (FAL Co-ordinator, Buvuma). This creates real problems for the instructor, especially as the classes are so small in numbers: as one instructor put it, "it is like mixing P3 and P7 in the same class" (Kasenyi). At Maggyo Central, where out of fifteen enrolled learners, 8 were at Level 1, 2 at Level 2, and 5 were graduates, the instructor took a lesson from FAL 2 primer on nutrition and taught the whole group of eight learners who were present, four of whom were FAL graduates: "The facilitator is now holding two primers for both first and second level of literacy and consulting them one at a time. She is giving a long explanation about nutrition while the learners are listening and responding to the questions she is posing in terms of unfinished statements"; only the graduates and some of the FAL 2 learners were completing these sentences; the FAL 1 learners kept silent. At Bumazime Maggyo class, there were enrolled two learners "at FAL 1 level, 10 at FAL 2 level and eight graduates who are waiting for the English class"; 13 of the 20 attended the class; "two of the women have been in the class since it started in 2005". The instructor "informed me that, because some learners join the class late, she provides individual attention to those learners to help them catch up with the rest of the class. She also does that for the slow learners. In relation to the different levels, she said that both level one and two are taught on the same day and time but given different activities". The instructors of Kalangala in their focus group discussion said they adopted different approaches to this problem: some said they handled the two class levels on separate days, some said they handled them on the same day but at different times, while in some centres, there were two facilitators, so that they were handled on the same day but with separate facilitators. But this was rare among the Buvuma instructors we met, for "one instructor among the sixteen treated the classes separately while the rest combined the different levels in one group meeting at the same time on the same days."

“There is a need to provide two chalkboards for the two levels since the majority of the instructors were handling two sets of learners at once” (Instructors Buvuma. In Bugongo Maggyo class,

“there are two groups of learners in this class all being taught or learning at the same time in one class. These are level one and level two. ... 16 learners attended (all women) at all levels, each sitting according to their levels. Level one learners sat on mats and level 2 plus graduates were on the benches. ... I realised that there are two different set of activities that are going on in the class. One group (I later learnt this was level 1) were given work to do while the level 2 learners had handed in their notebooks to the facilitator for marking. The facilitator is sitting on his chair and marking the work and the learners would go to him to collect their books. As they approach him to receive their books, they would kneel down.

The instructor was using the level 2 primer even for beginners but later when interviewed he said level 2 book issues affect beginners as well. ...” (see cover photograph).

And in the literacy lesson which followed,

“Whilst observing the level one class, the level two learners were busy working on their assignments which they took yesterday as homework. Some had finished and were bored, although others who did not get time were working on it. Interactions were common among level two learners as regards their exercise. ... After level one facilitation, the instructor left them working on the given exercise and switched to marking level two exercises”.

In this case, it was the more advanced learners who benefited most from this arrangement: In this same class, Bugongo Maggyo, “The mode of reading was voluntary, one by one reading a sentence and the instructor stopping to explain the harder words in the sentence and their meaning. After the reading, the instructor ... asked questions and learners raised up their hands to answer the questions. However, I realised later that the most participative learners were ... women who were graduates and had already gone through this plus its details. Some when interviewed said they were waiting for the English course and that if they stayed at home, their learnt aspects would fade”.

**Aberrant literacy lesson:** One literacy lesson we saw was completely aberrant; the instructor, overwhelmed by our presence and the warnings of the SCDO, froze. She jumped from lesson 2 to lesson 22 in the primer (misreading lesson 22 completely) and simply wrote capital and small letters on the board and asked the learners to say them aloud, at first in a chorus of ‘big A, little a, big B, little b’ etc, later individually at the blackboard, going through

the whole alphabet. She did not ask them to copy these into their notebooks, and in short there was no literacy learned at all. But this class was exceptional and we do not take it as in any way representing the work of FAL in Kalangala and Buvuma islands on literacy. But it does show that some instructors do not have enough training and confidence to teach adults meaningfully.

### **3. Primers and teaching-learning materials**

I seriously doubt the extent of the literacy and especially the numeracy being taught in the FAL classes. The primer has a number of limitations in terms of literacy (as distinct from its developmental messages) and its material can be covered in a relatively short time. Its main aim is getting messages across to the learners, and so the literacy element is concentrated more on reading than on helping the learners to write. By the end of the first primer, the learners can read some simple sentences but have no incentives to write anything but separate words. And the numeracy aspect has only led to multiplying 30 by 5! Those who have planned these lessons have greatly under-estimated the ability of adults, *when they use their own experience*, of learning quickly and applying this learning in their daily lives.

The FAL primers are old and have been made for general use throughout the country. They are not specifically adapted to the island region: there is (so far as I know – the copy of the FAL 1 primer given to me has been bound inaccurately so that one section is missing and another section is duplicated) nothing on fisheries in these books. I understand that there is a revised version of the FAL 2 primer made for the islands and containing material about fisheries but we did not see this; the only FAL 2 primers we saw were the standard ones. However, since several of the topics chosen as the basis for literacy learning have general significance (e.g. sanitation), this does not matter so long as other material can be brought in to the classes by either the instructors or the learners. The standardised nature of the contents to ensure relevance throughout the country makes the importance of supplementing this material with local material even greater. For example, texts relating to oil palm growing could be made available to the FAL classes – we saw several papers on this subject during our short stay in the islands and material is available from KOPGT which could have been used in the classes. Other material such as newspaper and magazine articles on subjects relevant to the FAL primer topics and other areas of interest to the learners (for example, fashion and sports) could also be used (see Appendix). The CDOs could help in this respect.

It is difficult for me to comment on the contents of the primers, for they are integral to the programme and cannot at this stage be altered. The basic curriculum developed by the Ministry in a document outlining content areas, aims and objectives in terms of both

functional and literacy learning outcomes focuses on three key areas – agriculture (crop and animal), health, and a mixed bag of gender, culture and civic consciousness. If the curriculum document had been followed more closely in the primers, so that when discussing any of these issues *the literacy practices of that sector* were learned, this would have made the material more relevant and effective; but the FAL 1 primer is a watered down version of the curriculum document, and it is argued that some of this literacy work is done at the FAL 2 stage.

We did hear some few comments about the contents not being relevant to local conditions but these were on the whole muted: one learner felt that “there was no practical relationship between the classroom material and her business”; “She tells me that even though she is involved in business and knows how to use her literacy and numeracy skills, she has found it quite difficult to apply” what she learned in the FAL classes (Kasenya learner and graduate).

We have already noticed that the view of development given here is one which (as is normal, coming from government sources) does not engage in critical reflection on contemporary power structures but asserts that if the poor change and ‘join’ the society, all will be well. ‘Social transformation’ is not on the agenda. But the topics suggested in the primer do open the way for general discussion if the instructors are encouraged to do so and if they are given more material by the CDOs on these areas of development. But this relatively rarely happens: the lesson on nutrition at Maggyo Central, for example, came entirely from the teacher, not from the learners who could surely indicate why they are not able to provide their families with better diets.

**Picture and generative words:** We noted the Freirean picture-[possible discussion]-sentence-word-syllable approach to literacy adopted in the FAL 1 primer, of which some instructors (more, it seemed, in Buvuma than in Kalangala) were aware: “In relation to the process, the CDO [of Buvuma] said, level 1 was for teaching basic knowledge that is based on a topic which is relevant to the learners and [on] a picture that is related to the topic”. The topics which are said to be “relevant to the learners” have been chosen by the writers of the primer, not by the learners. “The instructor is expected to use the picture provided to generate discussion from which a generative sentence will be selected going on to the selection of generative words which will be broken down into syllables”. These sentences are not however selected by the instructor or learners; like the topics, they are already chosen and written down in the primer. And in most cases, it was only the individual words and syllables which were copied into the learners’ notebooks, not the sentence in the primer. Certainly this approach is a great improvement on the letter-word approach which some other adult literacy learning programmes adopt: “One [instructor] said, ‘I used to wonder

why the books begin with pictures instead of a b c d e f....'. But later [he said that he] received a refresher training in FAL main and then he realised the importance of generative pictures". One CDO expressed the view that "the picture did not always match the content of the lesson".

But this approach is still limited and textbook-dominated. The pictures are not well printed and often cannot be distinguished, which is why some instructors ignore them. They are small and their meaning is often not clear. It would be good if these and the sentences (with spaces for learner-generated sentences to be added) could be reproduced on large flip chart sheets to display to the whole class as is done in SBC. We saw no discussion on any picture in any of our groups, and the learners were not given any opportunity to devise new sentences orally relating to the picture and learning to read their own words. The model of teaching devised by the planners is good; the implementation poor.

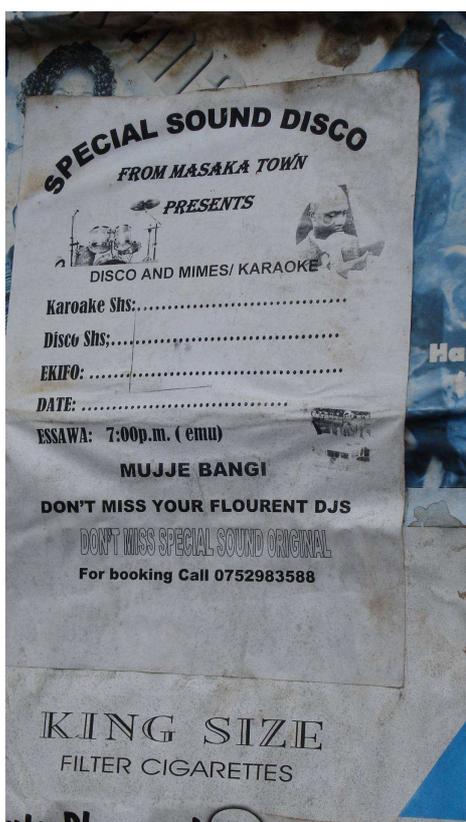
**Other literacy learning materials:** We did not see any other literacy material brought into the classes at any level either by the instructor or the learners: one instructor told us, "she only uses the literacy primers" (Buvuma instructor). The only additional material given to the instructors is the tin trunk of 'post-literacy' booklets, and none of these was used in the class by the instructors – they were seen as strictly materials to be read individually outside of the classroom. Here is a valuable source of literacy learning not used in class, although since there is only one copy of each booklet, the instructor will have difficulties in using these during the lessons.

One instructor told us (probably with some exaggeration) that in his class "learners bring letters, receipts, cheque leaves. The instructor then helps the learner to read the letter". But this is more common in the English course: "In EFA, some learners come with receipts/bankslips/forms and the palm oil grower forms which are usually in English" (Instructors Kalangala). The Ministry informed us that even in FAL "the learners can bring in their own material – for example, immunisation cards, child reports, bank forms etc." They claimed that the "instructors can cope with this. They have links to other extension workers". But they also admitted that the instructors have not been trained in how to use such additional material; they "are embarrassed if they don't know" (MWCD). And it did not happen in our case studies.

**Literacy environment:** Nor did we see any attempt by the instructors or the CDOs to use the literacy environment in the villages. We saw many missed opportunities for learning really relevant literacy because the instructors either had not been encouraged to adopt them or because they felt that they had to stick to the textbook.

Creative writing by the learners is not encouraged. The CDOs admitted that it was they who had designed the slogan for the FAL T-shirts (and in English) rather than encouraging the learners to write their own slogan in any language they chose. The SCDO in Kalangala claimed there was a newsletter in which learners could write but the CDOs said they had never heard of it. The BMU at Njoga talked about having a blackboard newspaper in the village on which the FAL learners could put their own writing.

Some of many informal signs in the villages not used for learning literacy, despite their immediate relevance to the learners. Note the omnipresence of English, even in the more remote villages.



And reading other material than the primer is also not encouraged. It may be true, as the CAO in Kalangala told us, that there was no culture of reading in the islands; she expressed the hope that "the FAL boxes will help to build up a culture of reading". But we saw the

commercial distribution of newspapers in the islands and the demand for them; the CAO's office issues a quarterly newspaper in Luganda for the Kalangala District which did not reach the FAL classes we saw. We were told by several people that there is keen interest in sports magazines but that they are not easily available (Bumangi). The culture is there but not the resources; and the FAL classes could become a centre to bring in some of those resources. The list of ways in which adult literacy learners can be encouraged to practise in the community the reading and writing skills which they have learned in the classroom is almost endless (see Appendix) – and none of it is being done in the part of the programme which we saw. My impression is that the literacy element is being swamped by the 'functionality' element.

#### **4. Literacy learning and use**

Literacy learning is largely confined to the FAL 1 stage – and even there, in our case studies the teaching focused mainly on the functionality element. How much real literacy learning there is in FAL 2, we were unable to identify; the thrust in the FAL 2 primer is on functional messages (nutrition, airborne diseases, growing plants etc). And by the time the learners pass on to SBC, there is no longer any significant ambition to build literacy practices into the learning. The whole is focused on learning skills for small businesses; it is assumed that the participants have enough literacy (and numeracy) skills to cope with any demands which might be made. There is no requirement in SBC for extended writing, only keeping accounts. At Bumangi, minutes of the loan scheme were kept by the treasurer of the group; the SBC learners in general did no writing as part of that or any other scheme. Only in Lutoboka did we see creative writing by the learners.

We heard a great deal from the instructors and providers about "applying what you learn in your daily lives"; but by this, they meant the health and farming aspects, not the literacy. We saw no encouragement of the learners to write anything outside of the classroom except to do some "homework" (like school); we saw nothing given to them to read except booklets from the 'post-literacy' tin trunk made available to some past graduates; as we have seen, these were not used in the classes. Literacy in FAL is not seen as something for the everyday: a common theme among the graduate learners in Buvuma was that they had to continue to attend the class because otherwise they would forget everything they had learned, for they did not have any reason to practise it at home: "if they stayed at home, their learnt aspects would fade" (Buvuma). Literacy was something they only did in the classroom or using classroom material. Not even in their class projects was literacy or numeracy used. At Kasenyi, we saw a number of projects run by FAL members, growing bananas, cassavas and other plants; but the group engaged in no literacy at all.

The classes we met rarely used the literacy they were learning even in the class. The Lutoboka SBC class wrote and distributed fund-raising letters throughout their village, and the instructor there asked them to write *in their own words* material related to the topic. But this was unusual. None of the class members in FAL kept notes of their meetings. The instructors wrote lesson plans and reports by themselves instead of getting the learners to help. Although the instructors attended those meetings of the VFC which were held, rarely were minutes kept except at Lutoboka. The only writing done in the FAL classes was copying – from the book or from the blackboard: creative writing (the literacy learners writing their own statements) is apparently felt to be outside of the remit of the FAL classes.

**Numeracy:** There is growing understanding in most adult literacy learning programmes that the systems of counting and calculation used outside the classroom (in the home and in the markets, for example) are different from those being taught in the classroom, and that the teaching of numeracy to adults is best facilitated if the home and community numeracy practices are taken into consideration (see the website of ALM). That the learners engage in calculations before they join FAL is of course common knowledge; they buy and sell in the market; they cook with all that is implied in calculating amounts and times, they keep calendars, they use measures of length, time and weight all the time. Many of them have cell phones and some acknowledge that they use the public phones. They adopt many different strategies for such activities. We noticed for example several examples of finger counting and one use of sticks, and an inability to use these to obtain accurate results. A farmer in Bumangi told us that

“she finds it hard to sell anything on her own because she cannot count money. I am interested when she tells me that counting money is so difficult, so I did some simple calculations with real money to see if she can truly give back the correct balance. She did not get any of the questions correct, even for sums as little as 500-300. I look at how she is counting and I realise that every time she holds her fingers to count, the first finger she holds she counts as a 2 or ‘200’ and the rest represent one, so she ends up being one point higher than the correct number.

She tells me she relies on her neighbour who sells for her. Their stalls are near each other, so the neighbour sells all of [her goods] as if they were hers and gives her the amount that she owes her. I ask her how she knows if they have cheated her or not, and she tells me that she does not know if they cheat her as long as the neighbour gives her some money. In some other cases, she avoids counting as much as she can since she knows that she cannot count. When she has to, she uses sticks that

she has in her house; and she brought them and showed and counted for me in her way. She says she cannot attempt to sell anything just in case she is cheated”.

A non-participant in Buvuma said, “She knows all the current notes and when one buys a mat, she uses her fingers and her feet in case of large amounts to count but not writing. She learnt the practice informally from her aunt while still young since they used to sell mats together”.

Others were more efficient in their calculations but they had learned their numeracy before joining FAL: a learner in Maggyo told us that “she makes mats and baskets and she learnt the skills from her auntie while still young. She is a housewife, and farming is her main activity at home. Before FAL, she knew some numeracy skills, since she could sell her mats to different vendors in the village. Here she could only accept changed money to avoid problems of miscalculations. Through social interactions, she had learnt the different notes of money and some basic counting using her fingers mainly”. Another learner told us that before she joined FAL, “she knew adding figures on paper and also mental work. She used such skills in operating”.

But in FAL, as the Ministry acknowledge, “numeracy is our weak point; we need functional numeracy”. The numeracy we saw being taught (Buvuma Maggyo Central and Bumazime Maggyo) consisted of simple sums made up by the instructor, and the primer material on numeracy is undemanding. There is little on weights and measures, and even basic ‘sums’ are limited. The instructor at Bumazime Maggyo class brought into her class “primary school mathematics books used for teaching addition, subtraction, multiplication and division”. The instructors are demanding more “mathematical books, since many claimed that the learners were assessed in harder calculations which are not even in the primers”. Another instructor requested “the provision of math books since the ones he was using were materials from ADRA he acquired when still facilitating then”.

**Literacy outcomes:** This is not an evaluation, so I did not set out to measure the achievements of the programme. My concern is with the process, to see ways in which it can be made more effective. Nevertheless, I felt that we needed to look at some of the graduates from the programme to see how far they were using their new literacy (and numeracy?) skills in their daily lives – for that seems to me to be the main objective of the whole programme. The transfer of the literacy and numeracy practices into daily life where the learners are already using different literacy and numeracy practices is clearly a problem – in Kalangala and Buvuma as elsewhere.



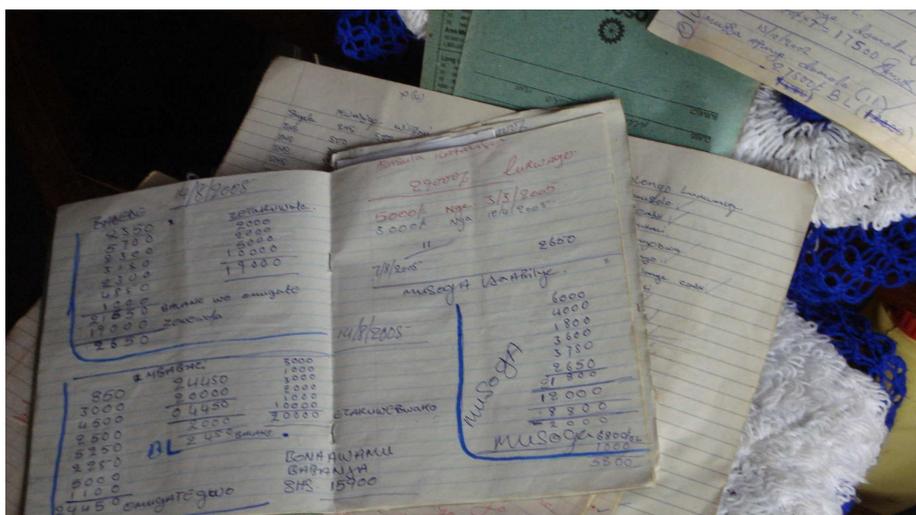


The writing on the wall by a SBC graduate; this shows clearly the difference between the formal learning of the FAL courses and the informal literacy practices in the community.

This echoes the words the Kasenyi graduate who said there was no practical relationship between the classroom material and her business.

Not that we should take these graduates to be the whole story. We met and heard about some graduates who did use formal literacy in their daily lives – although again in almost all cases, they were persons who had had successful primary (and at times some secondary) schooling. There was the woman in Kalangala market who had been through FAL 1 and FAL 2; we found her receiving a long written order for goods from one of the island's hotels, and she read the list and put the items together for despatch to the hotel. There was the woman from Buvuma who said on the radio that "after learning the skills of writing and reading and learning about the importance of keeping records in all the projects they do, she started writing everything she did in her piggery project. She confessed that she never thought keeping records was such an important tool that helps one to understand whether she is making a profit or not" (radio reports). And there was the graduate we met at Lutoboka who told us,

"She keeps written records of her purchases on a weekly basis. She shows them to me and they show a part for income and another for expenditure. She also decided to write her own history so that her children will read through when they are grown and see what wonderful things their mother has been through and the tough times she has encountered. She shows me her book, she had done three pages. She last wrote in her personal book in March 2008. I ask her where she got the idea and she tells me that it is what they were taught in the FAL to learn to keep records about their lives so that their children will be inspired reading it".



One thing which struck us was the way in which some past participants choose when and how to write and when not to write. In Maggyo, we met a graduate from FAL 1 and FAL 2 who said she had studied up to Primary 6 and could read well before joining FAL but had problems writing; her main aim in joining FAL was to learn English. She became the chairperson of the class project (banana growing and a piggery) and a leader in the NFA [National Forestry Agency]. She told us that

“in the FAL class, she learnt reading and writing in Luganda and that she was trying to put the learned aspects into practice. She last wrote on March 15 2008 in the NFA meeting when *she wrote the agenda* (welcoming visitors, prayers, introductions and the way forward) but she does not remember where these are now. She was also the chairperson of the group project but *did not have records for the projects*” (my italics).

In other words, she kept the formal records of NFA because that was required, but not the more informal records of the class project which were felt to be optional. Another graduate in Maggyo who works as a brickmaker and farmer said that he “was a P.7 dropout who joined the group for the purpose of benefiting from any development activities that may be directed to the group. This learner is involved in brick making and he is able to read and write in Luganda. ... He only used reading and writing to calculate the number of the bricks he has made during the day and once he has got the number right, he keeps the information mentally and discards the paper on which the calculation has been done. In the class he is very active in beads making. ... When asked why he did not keep record of his business, he had no explanation”. The FAL programme had widened the range of literacies available to these learners and empowered them to decide when and what to write.

Writing seems to have been more important to the FAL graduates than reading. Another graduate in the same class also engaged in multiple occupations “like animal rearing, bead making and brickmaking ... In all these activities, she kept no records apart from the shop business where she managed to write only those who take products on credit and some shopping lists. I managed to have a glance at her shop records but only lists of clients in debt were in. This however was not organised and accurate like her class book”. In other words, even when reasonably advanced formal literacy skills have been developed through a mixture of schooling and FAL, the individual decides when to employ those skills or continue with more informal literacy and numeracy practices or none at all. A woman in Maggyo who had run a hairdresser’s shop and then a restaurant but was now growing and selling cassava and making baskets to sell, told us that

“the reading and writing activities she engages in are reading *Bukedde* (the local newspaper in Luganda) and writing minutes at village gatherings. But she last read the paper last month, since she no longer sends someone to buy for her from the mainland; and for the minutes, she wrote in the recent BIDCO meeting on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2008. The content she captured was the agenda and how to plant and manage palms.

We asked to have a look at the materials and she smartly said that her young kid at home spoils them, so she cannot find them. We asked her whether she records some information in the cassava selling and basket-making business, but she does not do this. She said that she used to record in her restaurant business but she cannot do this any more since her business is on a small scale”.

Learning literacy skills does not imply that they will be used; other factors come into play in this decision whether or not to use literacy in daily life and which literacy (formal or informal) will be used.

For on the whole, although there is much informal literacy, there is little of a formal literacy environment in Kalangala and it would seem even less in Buvuma. The BMUs and some of the VFCs keep written minutes but most transactions are undertaken without formal literacy activities. And writing appears to be more important than reading. A fish merchant at Njoga landing site bought fish without any writing being involved – he told us he had written records at home but they related to his dealings with the factory, not with the fishermen on the islands. Part of the long-term objective of FAL in the islands is to build up the literacy environment – not just by producing new booklets but by encouraging informal as well as

formal reading and especially writing throughout all the activities of the project and in other ways (newsletters; competitions, etc – see list in Appendix).

Activity	Target	Responsibility	Time Period	Amount
Committee Meetings	Regular	Committee	10/01/06	5000
Office Buildings	Office Buildings	BMU Committee	2006	5000
Stationery	Stationery	Treasurer	10/01/06	1000
TOTAL				11000

Names	Office
1. ANTHONY B.	CHAIRPERSON
2. KAPPA MOSES	SEC/SECRETARY
3. OLUR CHARLES	SEC/FINANCE
4. NABANTANGI REHEMA	PRODUCTION/ENVIRONMENT
5. NANGOBI EDITH	WELFARE/GENDER
6. NABWIRE TEO	INFORMATION/PUBLICITY
7. OLVI TESTAYEN	REGULATORY/LAW/EDUCATION
8. OGWOKENIRI MANUEL	SANITATION/HYGIENE
9. MAFUTA JAMES	TECHNICAL GUIDANCE
10. OPUS. TI TO	SEC/DEFENCE
11. OCHENGA ARONSO	COMMITTEE MEMBER
12. NANGOBI ROSY	COMMITTEE MEMBER

BMU notice board: note the use of Luganda and English

### Achievements

We must not however underestimate the achievements that even with its limited approach, FAL realises. Another learner told us that before she joined FAL,

“she had some basic knowledge of money notes and potentially could add up a few figures using her fingers. I developed an interest in her right from the focus group discussion with the learners where she mentioned that ‘her motive to join FAL was to learn how to read, write and count, since she had a problem with the latter where she used to be laughed at by the members because of giving a lot of balance to those who had purchased’. For her business then, she has a small shop in this town where she operates with her S2 daughter. Agnes testified that before joining FAL, she used to have problems in computing the larger sums of money and when a customer came with bigger notes, she would send them away to slowly compute the prices with the pen and a paper ... She joined the FAL class in 2006 and since then, she has managed to compute larger amounts”,

although the records she kept in her shop showed a lack of precision even now.

But as with so many other programmes, transferring what is learned in the classroom into daily life is difficult and requires greater attention: as one learner put it, “She tried to do it the way she learnt in the SBC, so that she could do it formally, but she failed and she says that when the things are many she fails to write” (Bumangi). A graduate from the programme in Kasenyi said that “she could count small numbers in her head and used her fingers in units of five to one hand”. The numbers given in the quarterly reports from all the classes greatly exaggerate the numbers of graduates who have developed effective numeracy skills and thus could be expected to keep records of fish catches, to trade effectively in the market place or in their retail shops and workshops, to calculate profit and loss on items of income and expenditure and to plan stock – all of which the learners ask for and expect as one of the outcomes of their participation in the programme.



### III FUNCTIONALITY

The fact that, even in FAL 1, the emphasis within the teaching programme in Kalangala and Buvuma is on functionality rather than literacy would seem to reflect the priorities of the learners, for it is clear that this is what most of them come for and this is what most of them take away rather than literacy.

#### 1. THE NATURE OF FUNCTIONALITY

We have seen that there are four main elements within the functionality paradigm –

- social/community development functionality through messages (health, nutrition, sanitation etc),
- group formation functionality for access to resources,
- economic functionality: skill development for income-generation activities,
- and civic functionality leading to participation in community affairs.

The functionality element in FAL starts immediately – the first lesson in the first primer is ‘Cultivating is important’ (as if the learners did not know this already!). Functionality is stronger in FAL 2 and is almost the sole element in the SBC.

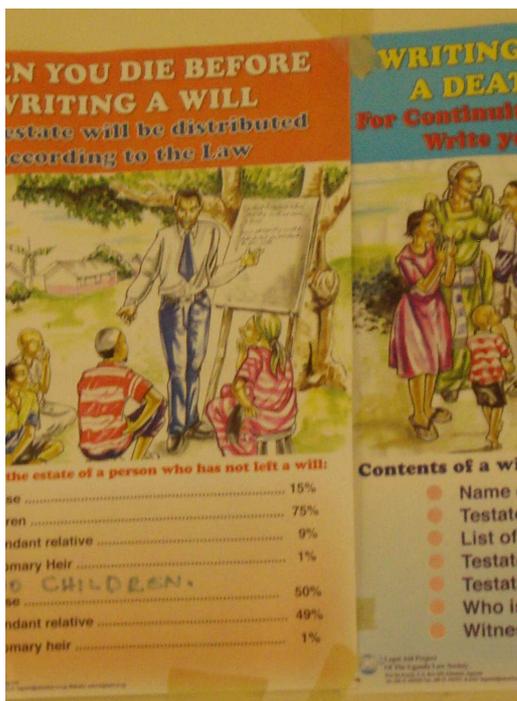
**Economic functionality:** One of the main elements in the functionality element is the promotion of economic development, especially livelihood and income-generation activities. The Uganda FAL programme is quite clear about this: “In this FAL approach, literacy is taught together with issues of *economic* functionality” (FAL Manual 1996 p8, my italics). The function of the learner is as worker. The social/community development aspects are mainly messages in the area of health and nutrition and some infrastructure development, the economic development mainly in the area of agriculture with some limited crafts. There is no training for employment in the formal economic sector apart from basic literacy and (very weakly) numeracy.

**Functionality and local development:** The primers in FAL 1 and FAL 2 are standardised national primers compiled by ‘experts’ and intended for national use. And the issues discussed were those relevant to the 1980s when the primers were developed. There is no specificity to the islands or more up to date discussions (the special FAL 2 primer we heard about was not in evidence). The course books for SBC have been developed with the islands specifically in mind, but the issues raised in them are generic, common to most individuals and small groups setting up in business. The framework for development in the whole programme is a national one. There is no relationship between the functional elements in

Kalangala FAL and the District Development Plans, nothing on the key components of local development (for example, tourism which is growing in the islands). "The KDDP is not involved in the FAL programme at all" (ICEIDA-Uganda). Thus not all the messages being got across from the primer are relevant to the islanders; and issues such as landholding, the large-scale oil palm cultivation clearances, and the landing sites and fish regulations are not included in the formal curriculum. And the projects are chosen locally without any reference to the overall district development plan.

We were told that the FAL classes provide a space for the learners to raise and discuss these and other local, community and even personal issues. "The instructors said that sometimes the class discusses other pertinent issues affecting them rather than sticking to the pre-prepared lesson. ... Issues that were common in such instances were about domestic violence (because it is common in their area), women's rights, marketing and food thefts from gardens". The SCDO is certain that "the FAL class is the major forum in each village; in the District, FAL classes stand out as a forum for other programmes' discussions ... People talk about gender, rights, marriage, inheritance, children's rights and all are matters of debate" – much of it no doubt at the instance of the CDOs and using material they have distributed.

But this seems rather over-drawn, especially as almost all the material displayed in the CDO office is in English, not Luganda. We did not see or hear of any such discussions in any class we visited.



Two of many posters on the walls of the CDO office – materials for use in FAL classes in Luganda would be more useful.

The CDOs admitted that on the land issue in the islands and on the oil palm development, there had been little discussion in the classes although much in the islands in general. Some discussion of local issues no doubt does take place in some classes under a particularly good instructor: one instructor told us that she took one formal lesson from the primer and the next she left for the learners to raise informally any issue which they wished to discuss – but she also admitted that not many instructors feel confident enough to do this. KAFIA was clear that issues such as local violence “should be discussed when they arise, not when the syllabus says” (KAFIA). But encouraging such independent activities in particular groups of adult learners is alien to the schooling ethos of the programme.

Such a programme will make heavy demands on the instructors. The SCDO said, “Where the instructor is not qualified, a subject matter specialist is called upon to handle that (usually an extension worker). The instructor concentrates on the business skills while the extension worker handles the technical parts. At the district level, there is a District Resource Team (DRT) composed of the CDOs, Agri-business and the fisheries officers. These meet on a monthly basis” (PC). But how far such expertise is brought in in practice is not clear. None of our FAL instructors had brought anyone in, although another instructor we met said he had brought in a health official to help with the class session on health, and an agricultural officer to talk about the importance of farming. Such actions are regarded as ‘informal’ (LC5 Chairman); “the formal link should be through the CDO and the DRT”. The instructors we met “reported that they have never got anyone from the fisheries department, because they invite them and they refuse to come and help, unless one gives them money for fuel for their motorbikes” (Instructors Kalangala). This issue is just as strong on Buvuma: as the CDO there said, “The role of the CDO is to link other departments to the community. The problem is other staff will always ask for allowances to come and participate in FAL programmes”.

In SBC, the informal use of ‘experts’ seems to be more common. At Lutoboka, the instructor had brought in a banana grower, an expert on making paper bags (since plastic bags were to be abolished) and a tailor to talk about her business (the tailor so enjoyed her time there that she enrolled as a learner!). This sort of linkage seems to depend on the quality of the instructor and on the accessibility of the class to the extension staff rather than on the formal efforts of the CDOs.

**Other sectors:** The links between the FAL functionality programme and other sectoral development activities even in the same villages are also informal. These sectoral activities – even those supported by ICEIDA – are not involved with FAL. ICEIDA is engaged in Kalangala on health, schooling and fisheries, but there is no literacy training element in these

and (apart from isolated items of health included in the FAL primers) these do not feature in FAL. The inclusion of literacy in the training of the village health teams being promoted by ICEIDA has not been considered. Literacy is presumably seen as a decontextualised set of skills to be learned in a classroom and later practised in the community health programme, rather than as a set of practices which a health workers learns and uses.

Nor does the BMU training programme contain any literacy learning. KADIFA is providing training to farmers in rice growing and the Kalangala Oil Palm Growers Trust has launched a major training programme for the islands, requiring their growers to keep written records and to be able to read the material sent to them. But neither of these provide any literacy learning, merely sending the non-literate growers to the FAL programme. The LC5 Chairman in Buvuma said, "I expect to see wider cooperation in health, farmers, illegal fishing gear and craft making".

The wish of the District officials is to use the FAL groups as an entry point for other development programmes and bodies. As the LC5 Chairman said, "FAL is an entry point, for example, the instructors are useful even though their engagement with the District is a coincidence". "Making the instructors into entry points for development" is part of the objectives of the CDOs in Kalangala, and the SCDO asserts that "they have served as very useful entry points for other development programmes" (PC; also ICEIDA-Uganda). The FAL Coordinator in Buvuma said that she felt that "the technical staff [in Buvuma] feels FAL has put a structure in place which they can use. For example, NAADS [the National Agricultural Advisory Service] uses FAL structures to implement their projects although this is not official". Two credit officials from MUSACCO had visited the Kasenyi FAL class. Thus although the instructors do not bring in experts to help the group, when extension and other government staff seek to enter the village, the FAL group is sometimes one of the first points of contact. In both Buvuma and Kalangala, we heard of health workers in immunisation and the registration of births and deaths coming to FAL instructors as an entry point (Instructors).

But again this element seems rather over-stressed. Linkages to other services are apparently rare from what we saw and heard: "Technical people are not available to teach some technical aspects which the instructors cannot handle". And when other sectors do create such links, literacy is not included. Many developmental programmes work in the villages through the established structures or through specially constituted village committees and once again literacy is not built into such projects. Commenting on this process, the Health Inspector in Buvuma said, "Presently the link between the FAL programme and the other technical staff is informal and not formal. In his work, he mainly uses the local councils to pass health-related information through the local council and local community meetings and

occasionally through the FAL classes. He also uses their own structure which has 62 community health workers at the community level. Some of the community health workers are by coincidence also FAL facilitators". It works in some places but not in others.

## **2. PROJECTS**

There is nothing inherent in FAL to say that the learners should engage in new developmental projects. Insofar as such projects are considered, the aim of FAL is to link the learning of literacy with the expansion or further development of existing livelihood activities. People who are already engaged in individual, family or small group enterprises may learn through FAL, especially in the SBC, how to run these enterprises more effectively. "Most [of the learners] have income-generating activities; our main aim is to improve or expand these income-generating activities and also diversification – for example, to add poultry to agriculture" (PC). The LC5 Chairman in Buvuma was looking for "diversification of economic activities away from only concentrating on fishing to other activities like piggery and cattle keeping". The MP from Kalangala urged the FAL groups to "come out with a viable project especially in livestock farming so the people can change their lifestyle from depending entirely on fishing" (radio reports). For many, such activities are a necessity rather than an extra: "She was not into business [beforehand] because her husband used to provide most of the needs in her home, but he fell sick for a long time and he could not do it any more. She took on business in so many things and tried to diversify because she and her children had to survive" (graduate in Bumangi).

Almost all the development projects we saw or heard about were income-generation or livelihood projects. Few were community development except a tree nursery and the provision of public latrines which however were seen as additional to FAL; the agricultural/forestry and health agencies decided to use the FAL group structure to help villages develop such activities. And the class projects were all in a very limited range of activities, mainly agriculture (both cultivation and livestock) with some small-scale productive projects such as beadmaking and mat making.

**Individual, group and class projects:** Projects can be either individual or family oriented, small private group (informal partnerships) oriented, or whole class oriented. There is some uncertainty as to whether FAL should promote individual or small group projects. "Projects are both individual and group. ... Individual is better, there is more motivation and higher benefits. But a group can access public resources" (MGLSD). What did surprise us was the assertion made several times that there are no class projects, when we found several both in Kalangala and Buvuma: "FAL groups do not have group projects as elsewhere – Kalangala does not have a group project spirit. It is individualistic rather than social" (ICEIDA-Uganda).

Buvuma, it is asserted, is different: "In Buvuma, basic level classes have some classroom projects such as animals, cassava, rice etc" (ICEIDA-Uganda). But even in Kalangala, while it is true that many classes do not have class projects, some do.

**Individual projects:** We heard of many learners who were already engaged in a wide range of livelihood activities: making sweaters, distillers of *nguli*, saloon operator, shop attendant, mat makers including table mat makers, basket makers, small shop keepers, laundry, farmers, fishermen, pig growers, tailor, retail, charcoal, fish processing, market stall holders. "Learners in her class have individual income-generating projects such as piggery, poultry, craft making, and cattle rearing. They do not have a joint class project" (Bumazime Maggyo).

We found very few partnership projects. But in Kasenyi, the projects run in association with the FAL class included a small group project of a plantation of cassava and bananas.

Class projects (except for loan schemes) would seem to be less appropriate in SBC than in FAL literacy classes, but more frequent in FAL. KAFIA told us of one instructor in Kalangala, who "said that her class has decided to have a water melon project where the learners come with their hoes and go to a garden and dig. She says that she felt that if the learners learnt and at the same time got something to put in their pockets, they would be happier instead of teaching them letters in literacy. They are about to plant their water melons". Bumangi SBC had created a class loan scheme and also had a group project called *Nigrina* – 'Secret Friend', a kind of co-operative lottery. But it is in Buvuma that class projects have flourished. Maggyo Central has "2 projects, piggery (2 piglets) and banana plantation (100 improved banana suckers).The latter was shared with a neighbouring FAL class since the land belonged to the sub-county". "The choice of the class project depends on the interest of the learners. Sometimes the sub-county may decide to support the FAL class projects, for example the banana nursery was supported by NAADS and PMA [Plan for the Modernisation of Agriculture]" (CDO Buvuma)



## Pig project in Buvuma

A distinction is sometimes drawn between teaching the skills of a specific livelihood activity and teaching general business skills and approaches: "There are two kinds of learning – some engage in the teaching of new production skills with business skills, others in business skills only. For the production skills training, we bring in specialists, extension staff. The FAL instructor concentrates on business skills" (PC). But we did not see evidence of this.

Indeed, the role of the FAL literacy programme in these projects is hard to see, or where the detailed training required came from. Some of course takes place through the primer; some is special training provided by the CDOs or other extension staff. The formal skill development lesson we saw (vegetable growing in Kasenyi) came directly from the FAL primer, there was no specialist input; indeed, much of the knowledge was already in the possession of the learners who appear to have already known as much as, if not more than, the instructor. The class gave them confidence and group motivation. Booklets on a number of topics are available in the 'post-literacy' collection: in the pig rearing project, much of the information was taken from a booklet found in the tin trunk. In Kasenyi, we saw one learner reading a booklet on rearing pigs during the literacy learning lesson. NAADS has given some technical advice on projects; information about oil palm growing came from BIDCO inputs. The real value of the class is that it provides an opportunity for like-minded persons to get together, it provides a stimulus to action. The class also provides access to some additional resources: "for example, ICEIDA provided some cabbage seeds to one class" (CDO Buvuma).

**Loans and savings:** Projects will often call for more initial funding than the group members can provide from their own resources. Credit is apparently not easy to obtain in the islands although there are government schemes and also private money lenders (ICEIDA-Uganda). "Credit facilities are not yet established in the villages because people are still fearing them. There have been reports in many places outside Kalangala about credit institutions that have robbed people and gone away. ... To start small businesses, many people save up until they have got enough to start them off as capital. They tend to engage in business that requires little start-up capital" (Instructors Kalangala). Loans from government or commercial sources are not readily available to some of the people of Kalangala: as the instructor at Kasenyi told us, "to get into a savings and credit scheme (as at Bumangi), the members must stay in the same place, and Kasenyi is too mobile; it may be moved again".

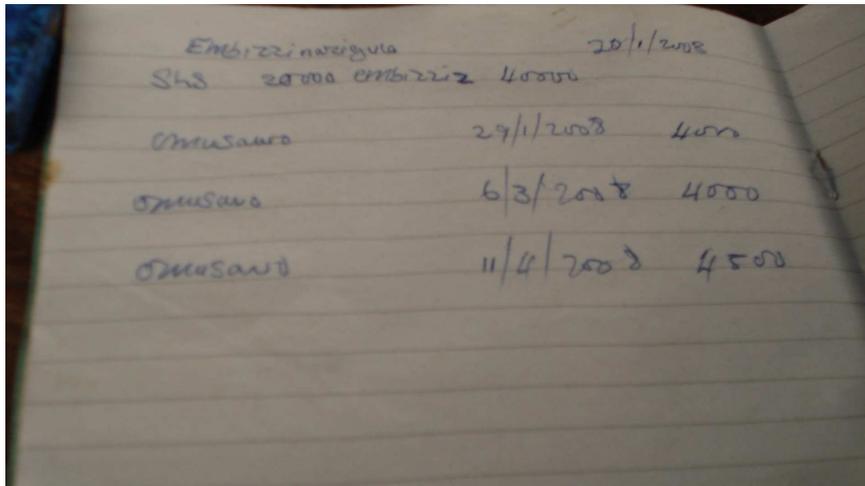
Such savings and credit schemes are a major contribution to the projects, for several persons told us they would join to obtain a loan: "If there were a savings scheme here, she would join

to buy a net for fishing" (Kasenyi non-participant). "The learners need credit and microfinance facilities to enable them get capital to invest" (Njoga). The FAL instructors in Buvuma demanded "setting up low rate loan schemes for learners and instructors to manage their small projects". "Some people expect tangible welfare support benefits such as money to be given to them other than 'mere knowledge', as they refer to it". It was argued that the loan scheme in particular would attract men (Bumangi).

Savings is a part of the SBC course provision: one of the Lutoboka SBC learners told us that "she has a house of her own and says that she completed it recently because of the savings she made as a result of joining the SBC class. She says that before she joined FAL, she did not know what saving meant. When they learnt about savings, their instructor encouraged them to get boxes (piggy banks) where they would just throw money each month. By the time she opened hers at the beginning of last year, she had enough money to enable her to build on the plot". A graduate from the SBC course agreed: "She sells fish for a living and I found her washing her net near the shore. She has two men with her who are stitching the net. She says she employs the two of them. She used a piggy bank to save up enough money to establish herself. She learnt this in the FAL where they were taught that from all the money one works for, they should save a little. By the time she checked, there was enough money to buy her a net and a boat. She also cultivates bananas, and has ducks that she keeps for sale". The Bumangi SBC had "started a revolving fund in August 2006 and it has now grown to be a loan scheme for the learners which learners said they borrowed money from. There was a lady who said she borrowed money and used it to expand and make sweaters and scarves for sale. They charge an interest of 11% on the principal amount taken by a borrower and one usually has three months to pay back". KAFIA is in process of launching a savings and credit initiative (SACCO) mainly for instructors: "They have tried to develop a loans policy so that they can start off the SACCO".

**Literacy in projects:** But – and this is the most significant point – apart from the loan schemes, few of these projects have included any literacy practices in them. The individual piggery project at Kasenyi had some written records but the person running it had been a secondary 4 level student and did not attend FAL for literacy learning but for piggery learning. He told us that he "stopped school in S.4 and now he is a fisherman and also rears pigs. He says that he writes down the things he spends money on. On further inquiry, he says he notes down the dates when the pigs are immunised and he had not done it for two months because that is when the pigs last got immunised. He brings us a book that has all the information he writes down". But in the banana and cassava plantation from the same class, no literacy practices were included. The same is true elsewhere: one graduate

engaged in her own project “tells me that she does not do any significant writing and that her book is too disorganised to qualify as putting into practice what she learnt” (Bumangi). The



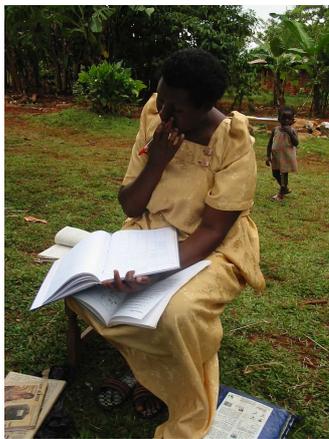
Page from pig rearing project, Kasenyi

chairman of the Maggyo class projects, both crops and the piggery, when “asked for the records, claimed to have things in her head. This shows how the learnt skills are not put into practice and what they call functionality is teaching them how to stay healthy and clean in their homes, how to set up small businesses to earn money: which knowledge can be got from elsewhere anyway”. We heard about other “piggery projects undertaken by many of the FAL classes in Nairambi sub-county” in Buvuma, in which “all the learners interviewed could show their records in their project books”, and of a Catholic charity which “chose to support FAL learners due to the fact that they could keep records”, but how far these were common or exceptional we cannot say. What we saw was that none of the group projects and few of the individual projects kept records on the basis of what they learned in the FAL classes. It is possible that the achievements of FAL in Kalangala and the growing achievements of FAL in Buvuma lie mainly in the functional element rather than in the literacy element.

## 5. PERSONNEL

### 1. INSTRUCTORS

Despite the reference in the *Report on FAL proficiency tests 2006* to the “inadequate commitment of some instructors”, the instructors we met were a highly committed group. Some were very able indeed, perhaps beyond the tasks they were called upon to do. They came from the villages in which they taught and almost all had other occupations: farmer, fisher, bricklayer, livestock keeper, tailor, shopkeeper, small scale business, town council collector, etc. Undertaking this work was one way in which they improved their status in the village, their own competencies and confidence, and their opportunities.



Their tasks are many. Apart from teaching, “the instructors are supposed to carry out a needs’ assessment before they start any class. ... The instructor is supposed to follow up learners to make sure that they are practising what they learn in the class”. “The instructors are encouraged to pick out the topics relevant to their local situation” (CDOs Kalangala). The instructors at Njoga said they buy books for their learners. Some we found giving additional instruction to some of the learners outside class hours in private arrangements: “learners come for help from the instructor all the time and the forms of help differ” (Njoga). They are called upon by other agencies as a general local development worker; their time outside the class has been purchased.

And their core activity, teaching adults, is very difficult, as we have seen, with multigrade learning groups, with learners coming and going throughout the teaching hours and with learners enrolling at different times of the year.

We did notice that some of the instructors at all levels are not a role model of what they are teaching. Apart from the literacy activities required by the programme itself, several of the

FAL instructors did not use literacy in their daily lives – they read and wrote very little outside the classroom. For them, literacy was a formal activity done in the classroom or its general context; it was an imported activity and not indigenous to their village life. What literacy did exist in their community, affecting their lives, was an informal variety unlike that taught in the classroom with its rules of spelling and grammar etc, and to them it did not count as 'literacy'. Literacy was keeping to the rules of the textbook.

The SBC instructors too, although they usually did run their own small-scale business, sometimes did not keep formal records or do the formal activities outlined in the textbooks of this course. The one outstanding exception to this we saw was the SBC instructor at Lutoboka who ran several businesses (some together with her husband) and who kept detailed and immaculate records of each of them.

**Instructor training:** For all these activities, they have themselves been inadequately trained. Some have received some initial training outside FAL – through Action Aid REFLECT programme, or through the UNICEF Complementary Primary Education (COPE) programme which has limited attention paid to *adult* learning. But for the rest and for the refresher training, the CDOs are responsible for this training, even though they have never taught an adult literacy class. They reproduce their own training (again non-experiential): "The instructors go through training in the approaches that are used in the teaching of literacy to adults, i.e the psycho-social, the traditional and the integrated. The learners' needs [as assessed by the CDOs rather than the expressed desires of the instructors] are the basis of planning for these approaches" (CDOs Kalangala). It is a very top-down (cascade) and out-of-date approach.

And despite the picture painted by the SCDO in Kalangala and by LABE of extended training ("14 days training, then 7 days after 2 to 4 months"), the reality is very different. Although some instructors had had some extended training, the instructors we met had all had one week only of initial training (one of these was in 2003) and some refresher training: and as KAFIA said, "refresher trainings are about refreshing the primers". Instead, KAFIA and the instructors wanted to "have refresher trainings that focus on the ... issues [raised by the instructors] instead of going through the primers all over again" (KAFIA; Instructors Kalangala). There is no desire here for more training of the same kind: "The training is enough for them, but it is still long because they have other family responsibilities like children and men whom they leave at home, making the training seem very long" (Njoga). In Buvuma also, where again extended training was provided for some, at least on paper, we found that the instructors we met had had one week initial training (again in 2005) and one

refresher training of 7 days in 2006 and 2007: "The training was enough but we need more trainings" [by which I suspect she means "different training"] (Buvuma instructor).

We looked in detail at the timetable for the training programme and the reports of the latest training sessions. They combined all three programmes – FAL 1 and FAL 2, EFA, and SBC - in one large course. It was very content-oriented – there was far too much for the instructors to master in a week. The constraints on training, we have been told, are financial: "The actual training of the FAL facilitator takes six days because we do not have sufficient resources to extend the training for a longer time. We know that six days are not sufficient but what can we do? We encourage them to support each other and we also advise them not to go into technical areas but to use technical staff. Refresher training is organised every year" (FAL Co-ordinator Buvuma). But this is a false 'saving', for if the training is inadequate, the task will be done inadequately. Training needs to dictate the budget; the budget can never dictate the training needs.

And the 7 day refresher course was itself curtailed. "The initial training was followed by a refresher training in 2006 at the sub-county headquarters which lasted for 4 days and in this, what they learnt in the initial training was dealt with in-depth, especially on how to design a lesson plan. [One of the instructors] exclaimed, 'I truthfully left the first training without learning how to design a lesson plan but I got it clearly in the refresher training 2007'". Asked how they viewed the training, many thought the content was too much and "each trainer wanted to finish in the shortest time possible, hence not abiding by the principles of adult learning" (Buvuma instructors' focus group). Some commented on the lack of training materials: "During refresher training, notes and handouts should be distributed to the instructors to remain with them for reference".

**Incentives:** Training and attendance at meetings (with expenses paid) was one form of reward the instructors obtained from their work: "the FAL instructors participate in the programme expecting further training". The issue of incentives featured in most of the discussions we had with the instructors. It was pointed out that they received payments only for one class even when they were teaching two groups in the one classroom, and that such payments often came late. Some were grateful for what they had gained: "many thought the programme had benefited them especially in opening bank accounts to avoid inconsistencies in money delivery, allowances given to them – 30,000shs each month, T-shirts and bicycles for mobility" (Buvuma instructors). But the withdrawal of their remuneration was filling many with despair: "I will keep teaching, but am not motivated as I was when the payment was there"; "I hoped there would be a change" (Instructors Kalangala). Not all of them took the attitude of one instructor: "She loves to teach in the

FAL because even when the pay was not there, she was still teaching. She will keep teaching even if the payment is not there". A loan scheme being launched by KAFIA is supposed to be part of the remuneration package.

One criticism which is particularly unjust is the allegation by outsiders that the instructors are making a lot of money from the project: " Many think it's the instructor's business, where he earns a salary every month. So they end staying where they are, since they have a feeling that this only benefits the facilitators and not the learners" (Buvuma CDO). This accusation and hostility on the part of some local leaders we found on several occasions in Buvuma, one local politician claiming that the instructors were earning very substantial sums through FAL.

**KAFIA** is an initiative of the Kalangala programme – an association of instructors. Although a rival organisation has been formed from a splinter group (KAFIR) (Kasenyi instructor; Instructors Kalangala), KAFIA seems to be getting well established. "KAFIA is aiming at projects that can [keep] the instructors at work when the donor's support ceases. We are targeting an instructors' motivation scheme [with the support of] the Kalangala Local Government, NAADS, a Savings and Credit Scheme, improved seeds like rice, oranges, mangoes for sustainability. We are also advocating for the MGLSD into payment and qualification of FAL instructors nationwide" (KAFIA statement 2008). KAFIA has considerable potential for running short training courses, as their recent workshop on savings and credit shows.

**Informal networks:** KAFIA is not the only network of instructors. We found that the two instructors in Njoga and the one from Kasenyi had formed an informal group and visited and assisted each other: "three friends working together" (Njoga). Elsewhere, we found instructor relating to instructor informally. The Buvuma instructors requested the facilitation of exchange visits, but in Kalangala, when exchange visits had been mooted, it had been ruled out on grounds of cost. "If there was peer monitoring, they would be able to learn from each other".

Such links are probably proposed because they are seen to be more effective than the official support they receive from the CDOs.

## **2. SUPERVISION AND SUPPORT**

We looked at the way the CDOs supervised the classes. Despite claims that they are "hard-working" (ICEIDA-Uganda), it seems to be very perfunctory in our case studies. "There is a lack of monitoring" (ICEIDA-Uganda). There are problems of their allowances and the cost

of fuel to make journeys to the classes, but even when such journeys are made, we were told that all that happens is a very brief appearance of the CDOs on their motor cycles simply asking for the written reports from the instructors and often making no comment on the class at all. "The CDOs go along, drop the forms and pick them up when they are filled" (KAFIA). The instructor at Kasenyi informed us that "she gets monitoring tools [i.e. a report form] every quarter, fills them in and sends them back to the CDO. She cannot recall the last time she filled in one". And since the written reports are only quarterly, such visits would seem to be rare; they are certainly rarely recorded in the class records we saw. Even the PIT said that "the presence of the CDOs was invisible" (PIT minutes). The Bumangi SBC was visited by a CDO in September, December, February and April only, and that class is on the main road, very easily accessible and relatively close to the CDO office compared with Njoga and Kasenyi. The Kasenyi instructor collected her quarterly report forms from Bumangi as the CDOs rarely ventured down the steep road into Kasenyi village.

The CDOs themselves told us that they "are supposed to instruct on what is to be done" (CDOs). There are two problems with this statement: The first is that frankly the CDOs do not possess the experience from which to "instruct" the instructors. Their approach to literacy, based on their own training, is decidedly antiquated, and LABE regretted that it is difficult to get them thinking differently (LABE). The second is the relationship which it implies, one of control rather than of mentoring and assistance. "The supervisors inspect more than support" (LABE); "The CDOs are seen more as inspectors rather than providers of support to the instructors", and as a result (as KAFIA told us), many of the instructors "hide their problems from the CDOs". They cited one example where an instructor had to go to the mainland because her husband was ill and had feared to tell the CDO. Certainly we found in Kalangala that changes had been made to the classes, and indeed some had ceased to meet, and the CDOs were not aware of these situations. It would seem that in Buvuma the supervision is rather more frequent and effective but the evidence here is thin, although there were comments about "the delayed monitoring mechanism for the classes on the ground".

**Report forms:** KAFIA informed us of their opinion that the quarterly reports were inadequate to indicate what is really going on in the field; and the completed forms we saw confirmed this. They are designed to feed the statistical machine rather than throw real light on the situation. We were shown none after the July-September quarter in 2007; it appears none had been collected for the final quarter of 2007 and none so far from the start of the new session in 2008. They make no provision for any creative writing by the instructors, no narrative of what is happening in their class. Only statistics and boxes to be filled in or ticked are requested.

Nor are they checked carefully. We noticed many reports where the figures given did not add up, or where statements of need were made which were not followed up. They were simply processed and filed. This accounts for the fact that the MIS held by the Programme Co-ordinator is incorrect in many particulars.

### **3. VFCs**

The role of the CDOs as supervisors could have been taken by the village FAL committees; these are expected to "support, monitor and supervise" (MWCD). The VFC in Njoga was fairly active and the chairman (the LC1 Chair) was a learner in the class, but even there "the committee rarely meets" and there are no minutes of any meeting. The VFC in Kasenyi did not work at all. The names of the VFC members are listed in the Bumangi register but there are no signs of any meetings, although the instructor said it meets every three months to discuss how to build their own learning shelter; in the last quarterly report from this class, the instructor said, "Limited support from the community" (Bumangi Report July-Sep 2007). The VFC for Lutoboka met regularly and kept very good minutes (the exceptional SBC instructor was the secretary). But even here the chairman of the VFC, the LC1 chairman, admitted that he had never once attended a committee meeting - he told us that "he has been too busy to handle issues that affect the classes".

This failure of the VFCs is generally recognised. The CDOs in Kalangala themselves told us that they "accept that there is a big gap in the structures because they realise that the FAL committees have not been as useful and effective as they should be". The Kalangala instructors we met were clear: "The village community does not support FAL – they do nothing". They added, "The FAL committees are not functional, so the instructor has to do all the work by him/herself". KAFIA said, "They are not functional, they only exist in name. They are all chaired by the LC1 chairmen who are not interested because the instructors are a threat to their jobs". Much the same seems to be true in Buvuma: the FAL Coordinator admitted "that some local community leaders are not very supportive", although in Maggyo, the LC5 chairman asserted that there is more general community support:

"The local leaders are helping to mobilise the community to love FAL as a programme by informing them of the benefits of FAL. He also said that the local leader contributed some money for the programme. When we asked him to give us the figures, he said he was not very sure about the exact figure. The programme is also supported by the priests who are encouraging their flocks to join the programme in large numbers".

## 6. CONCLUSION

**The primary value of the FAL classes:** It would then seem that the primary value of the FAL classes to the learners lies not in their literacy learning but in their functional activities – their community development role as the entry point for other developmental projects such as public latrines and health, and their income-generation role in individual, small group (rarely, so far as we could see) and class projects such as banana growing and pig rearing. Even here, we need to avoid exaggeration, for several participants told us they knew the income-generation skills before they joined the class: what the class gave them was the impetus to take it further and to diversify, a sense of group identity, some limited access to credit and loans, and above all the confidence to act. And this led in several cases into increased participation in public affairs: “I observed during community meetings that some people who could not talk during meetings are now doing so after attending FAL classes” (LC5 leader, Buvuma). “The other thing she claimed she got was the confidence from such a class since she stood for a leadership post and was elected as the women’s representative at village level” (graduate, Maggyo). Some graduates were “attending meetings regularly because of increased confidence” (PC). But as a tool of literacy learning and use, the programme has very limited results.

## 7. PROPOSALS FOR UGANDA FAL

### Introduction

I see room for the expansion of FALP with its associate programmes of EFA and SBC but no radical changes.

I am conscious of the need for the programme to work within the framework of NALP in co-operation with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development at central and District level (under decentralisation). I am aware that many within the Ministry are very supportive of the approaches which have been adopted by ICEIDA and which are proposed here.

I have made some recommendations within the report (above) – for example, about the pace of learning, flip chart sheets from FAL 1 and FAL 2 primers, use of other materials in class etc. I shall not repeat these in any detail here.

**Smaller programme:** Difficult decisions have been made concerning the allocation of resources between training, venues, teaching-learning materials and other aspects of the courses. Some of these appear to me to be unjustified. I would urge that a smaller programme is offered and that some of the resources thereby freed up be used for providing the proper amount of training instead of inadequate training, and a suitable venue for all classes. This will make for a more effective programme. The budget must not control the training; the training needs must control the budget.

### Clarify purpose and measures of success

**Priorities:** It is essential that any lack of clarity about the main purpose of the programme should be clarified. I am aware that it seeks to combine literacy with functionality but is it **primarily** a literacy learning programme or a functionality programme? In other words, when we report that in almost all that we saw on both sets of islands, the programme led to a number of developmental projects but not to increased literacy, is this to be seen as success or failure? We do need to know what ICEIDA's main aim is, either on their own or in association with the Ministry.

For myself, I see this as a failure, since literacy practices are not advanced. I see FAL as primarily concerned with promoting literacy activities through functionality.

**Functionality:** We also need to clarify what is meant by functionality in this context; for example, whether functionality is primarily income generation or social community

development (latrines, forestry etc). And is it group (i.e. class) projects or individual/family livelihoods? Or does ICEIDA/MGLSD wish to leave that to the learning groups to decide?

If functionality is seen as an essential element within the programme, then increased provision must be made for two things, both of which are present at the moment in limited terms: a) training in skills development; and b) start-up resources for the developmental activity.

The easiest way to tackle this is for ICEIDA to agree with the Ministry for each element of the programme (FAL 1, FAL 2, EFA and SBC) what measures of success they would look for in any monitoring of the programme.

For myself, I see the primary value as lying in whole class projects which can then become the basis for literacy learning; a number of varied individual and small partnership projects will make literacy teaching more difficult.

## **LITERACY**

**Doing literacy:** I am assuming the programme is primarily a literacy programme, and that the aim is to increase the use of literacy in individual/family/community life outside of the classroom through various functional activities. And this means promoting both formal and informal literacies – not as a set of skills but as social practices. We are not interested so much in whether any learner **can** write and read a formal text as shown in a proficiency test but whether he/she **does** write and read in practice, either formally or informally. Both kinds of literacy are valuable, both have their own functionalities. If they can 'read and write' but don't in either form, I treat that as a measure of failure.

**Literacy expertise:** The literacy learning in the programme is the weakest outcome and will remain so unless there is a change of direction. I have noted in the report the lack of expertise in two fields, a) literacy and numeracy, especially modern understandings of literacy and numeracy practices, and b) modern approaches to adult learning. **This gap must be filled** – it is vital for any adult literacy learning programme to develop up-to-date understandings of adult literacy and how it is taught. Everything which follows will be wasted if the current approaches to literacy are continued. This project can play a significant part in strengthening the national capacity for adult literacy in Uganda through strengthening some institutions both in the Ministry and in civil society which already have a lead in this field (Makerere University; UGAADEN; LABE). No further activities will be any more effective than they are at present. Expert assistance should be brought into the Kalangala and Buvuma

programme. I see the best hope for this is to draw on the resources of the Institute of Adult and Continuing Education at Makerere University which is developing a more up-to-date approach than other bodies in Uganda.

**Learning literacy:** The learning of literacy should be upgraded. The existing primers (if suitably updated in terms of printing and illustrations) can continue to be used; what is needed is better classroom practice. I suggest that the approach should be one of whole word recognition, using the language experience approach based on the embedded literacies of the project chosen by the group for implementation. Other texts should be brought into the classroom. Literacy (especially creative writing) should be promoted both inside the class and outside; a list of some thirty possible activities is included in this report. The aim of the literacy part of all the classes must be creative writings, using materials from the environment and the literacy tasks of the project.

**Learning literacy for tests:** Those who wish to take the formal NALP tests can be provided with formal teaching in short courses using the primers and some other appropriate textbooks; this part of the programme can perhaps be opened to other persons in the village.

**Numeracy:** It is recognised in the Ministry that numeracy in FALP is an exceptionally weak spot in the programme. A numeracy expert needs to be brought in to develop this part of the programme. The international organisation Adults Learning Maths (ALM) could assist with this – see their website.

**Training in adult learning and teaching methods:** In making proposals to enhance the FAL programme, I have borne the principles of adult learning programmes (see above pages 13-14) in mind. It is clear to me from our case studies that more training on how to help adults to learn and the difference between teaching adults and teaching children is needed for many instructors. Those instructors who do not at present use them must be assisted to use more appropriate adult learning methods, involving the learners in discussion, using small group work, freeing the learners to bring their existing knowledge and experience into the class, so that the learners control the curriculum and the instructor learns from the learners. Peer learning and sharing of experience and insights should be encouraged. The confidence of these instructors needs to be built up so that they allow the learners much more control of the content and process. The manual they possess tells them what to teach more than how to teach it; they need to learn that the instructor and the textbooks are not the sole source of learning. Literature on adult approaches to learning should be made available to them. [Two booklets are attached to this report to demonstrate some of the material which is already

available in this area]. KAFIA is aware of these understandings and can be used to help the CDOs to learn.

And this means making the classes free to be as unlike school as they wish to be. They can start when the learners wish; they can meet as often as the learners and instructors agree; they can find and use any texts for learning which the learners wish to use; they can set their own measures of success – in short, they can become **adult** learning groups, not schools. I suggest that the language of school be put aside and that the classes be called 'centres', learners become 'participants', the instructors be called 'tutors' or facilitators, and school-like practices such as raising hands to answer questions etc be abandoned as in Lutoboka. The school atmosphere needs to be replaced by an adult learning group context.

The control of the CDOs need to be replaced with control of the participants and the assistance of the CDOs.

## **WIDENING LITERACY PRACTICES**

**Literacy for different target groups:** I see the programme offering FAL literacy learning (subject to the comments about deepening the programme below) to specific and different functional groups, for example to a) fishermen and b) oil palm growers. Other groups may be identified within the islands, for example, c) mothers of school-going children (one aspect of family literacy) or d) small shopkeepers etc. This is not to offer them a standardised decontextualised literacy but to help them with the specific (embedded) literacy practices of a) fishing, b) oil palm growing or of c) mothers with school-going children, or d) shopkeepers. The functional literacy practices of running a small-scale shop are different from those of mothers with school-going children just as the functional literacy practices of fishermen are from those of oil palm growers – and they all need to learn their own different embedded literacy practices.

This is not difficult to provide under FALP. The CDOs are skilled at identifying interest/ functional groups in their areas. And just as new materials have been prepared for the English course, and new 'post-literacy' materials have been produced, some of which can be used in class for learning, new relatively informal materials for targeted groups can also be prepared. I see these as shorter courses, say three to six months at the most, in which the basic informal and formal literacy practices of the target group are learned. The easiest way to accomplish this is to identify as instructor a fisherman who does keep records of fishing, an oil palm grower who keeps records, a school teacher or a mother of school-going children who manages the literacy practices of the school, or a shopkeeper who does keep written

records. This last has already been done with the SBC instructors. And the process would consist of first an exploration of the informal literacies of the focus activity (the informal record keeping of different fishermen and shopkeepers) before moving to the more formal literacies of reading school reports, keeping accounts in standardised formats, and budgeting for income and expenditure, etc. This is not impossible and will be more effective than finding someone to be a general instructor of a decontextualised 'literacy' and expecting him or her to be able to teach across a wide range of different literacy practices.

What is more, the formal literacy of the classroom is rarely of great value in the context of some of these interest groups. As stated above (pages 15-16), I was looking to see how far the literacy practices of the classroom matched the literacy practices of the functionality. My general conclusion is that the two did not match. There is no attempt in FAL to try to discover the local literacy practices or the embedded literacy practices of the functionality activities. The aim is to take the formal literacy of the classroom out into the community rather than to bring the informal literacy and numeracy practices into the classroom. But developing from formal literacy practices to informal is not only difficult; it is less motivating than starting with the relevant informal embedded literacy practices of the target group and moving to the more formal standardised practices of the classroom.

**Literacy and sectoral development:** Secondly, I see other sectoral programmes linking up with these FAL project groups; and at the same time FALP offering literacy provision inside other sectoral development programmes. I am surprised that village health teams can be established without provision for their specific literacy practices; that irrigation and clean water schemes can be provided without any consideration given to their specific literacy practices (e.g. using the pump manual); that fishing enhancement programmes can be run without any concern for writing at all. I would wish to see literacy in all its forms inform all of ICEIDA's programmes, as much as gender and environmental issues do. It is a cross-cutting theme of human advancement. But it must be based on a concept of literacy as social practice, not a standardised literacy common to all of these sectors. Each sector will have its own literacy practices, some formal and some informal.

**Focusing on a class project:** The most effective way for this to happen is to focus the teaching in each adult centre around a theme which the learners can choose for their class project. If, for example, they choose to grow water melons or bananas or to rear pigs, the learning, including the literacy learning, can be focused round that topic. The literacy practices embedded within growing water melons and bananas, or rearing pigs, can be engaged in by the whole class.

Such projects need not be limited to the range of activities which the CDOs feel they can service but allow the learners freedom to decide for themselves what they want to do. Additional materials will need to be provided by the CDOs and/or other extension workers. Motivation will be much higher; the work of the class will be seen as relevant and enjoyable. The failure at Kasenyi of the FAL 2 class to keep any records relating to their projects is a missed opportunity to demonstrate the true value of literacy for these projects.

There is no need to dispense with the FAL primer if this approach is adopted. I suggest that the classes meet twice a week and that one session be devoted to the primer and one to the project. One session a week on the primer topics is in most cases quite enough; for the existing pace of learning is much too slow.

**Materials enhancement:** One important contribution to the improvement of the use of the FAL 1 primer would be to supply the classes with full-sized flip chart copies of each of the illustrations from the book, as is done in the SBC course. This would enable discussion of the theme to take place in every class. From this discussion, the instructors should be expected to write on the blackboard two or three sentences, using the spoken words of the learners and chosen by the learners to cover the main points of the discussion, and these sentences should be used to help the learners learn their literacy skills. This creative literacy is after all the intention of the designers of the FAL programme, as the instructors' guide shows. The instructors have not been trained to do this.

**FAL 2:** The **literacy** learning element in FAL 2 (using again the embedded and at times informal literacy practices of the project(s)) needs to be strengthened rather than the class going unthinkingly through the primer concentrating on the various functionality elements. The project should be the focus of learning, not the primer. Creative literacy is vital here.

**Creative literacy:** With the assistance of the 'literacy expert' mentioned above, every centre should be encouraged to engage in creative writing by all the learners, using not only the textbook but other materials from the community environment (see Appendix for detailed suggestions). To give but one of many examples, I would require every class at the end of (say) every two weeks to prepare a brief statement about what they have learned (about the project as well as literacy) during that period. This is even possible with beginners – although there are few beginners in the FAL classes. These can be encouraged to *speak* their reports which the instructor or someone else can then write on the blackboard for them to learn to read and to copy into their notebooks. They will be learning to read their own words. The (literacy) aim of the class is to help the learners to become regular users of writing and reading every day, not to learn to read the primer and some of the 'post-literacy' booklets

only. I am minded of one learner (in another context) who told me, "I can read the primer but I cannot read anything else". That is no use to anybody, least of all to herself. It is the lack of imagination of the organisers and the inadequate training of the instructors that is holding this back. Some of the instructors we met are fully capable and would be excited by such an approach; but at the moment they feel they must do only what the CDOs tell them. The CDOs must empower the instructors and the classes to *feel*/free to do whatever they want in these areas. At the moment, many of them feel the training is a command system and they must follow it rigidly.

### **EFA**

The sooner the new EFA programme is launched in both sets of islands, the better – the demand is very high.

Here again, it will be important for the facilitators not to allow the new teaching-learning materials to control the process. These should be treated as supportive material, not a guidebook. The participants must control the programme, bringing in texts in English they wish to read, developing for themselves items they wish to write in English, both formal and informal. Passing the proficiency test can be achieved by a short intensive course (A2E: Access to Education) prior to taking the test.

### **SBC**

The SBC we saw varied. Lutoboka was excellent – it is a pity that the lack of a suitable venue is the reason why it ceased to operate. The answer, in my opinion, is not to ask the learners to build something – that is unreasonable and unrealistic and will take too long. The provision of a suitable location for the courses is an **essential part** of any course just like providing an instructor and teaching-learning materials.

Bumangi SBC on the other hand was much more formal, losing the interest of some of the learners, and what was learned was not implemented afterwards as the graduate showed. The instructor needs to stop 'teaching' and allow the learners to take much more control, to determine what to learn and to contribute from their own experience and funds of knowledge – i.e. to adopt more *adult* approaches to learning than a school approach.

**Materials:** The multi-media materials are on the whole good, although I have hesitations about the tapes as being too long and rather boring. They are on occasion ignored. But again this pre-prepared material needs to be supplemented by immediately relevant material that is available locally, brought in by the CDOs, the instructors and the learners.

**Learning for real:** The learners should during every lesson be asked to work on their own small business project, adapting the material to the lesson to their own work. The lessons we saw on 'planning' for example, should be applied by the learners to planning their own livelihoods at the time and in the class, not afterwards; only in this way will the relevance of what is learned be appreciated. The instructor and other members of the class can provide extremely useful feedback on the individual proposals. The current approach in all parts of the FAL programme, of learning something general first and applying it later, needs to be replaced with a learning by doing approach. Adults learn by doing, not by listening to teachers; SBC learners can each have their own project on which they work throughout the whole course.

## **INSTRUCTORS/FACILITATORS**

**Quality:** It may be that some of the instructors should not have been appointed. We must never ask someone to perform something which is beyond their capabilities, for that will be to destroy their own sense of identity. It is never a good excuse to say that we must employ some such person because there is no other person available; it is better not to have a class than to have one using as facilitator someone who is stretched beyond their abilities and who could thereby be damaged.

**Instructors using literacy:** One criteria for the literacy instructor must be that they do in fact use literacy in their own daily lives. Some of those we met do not do that. The programme should encourage this for all instructors – by asking them to write quarterly reports in creative text, not filling in boxes and answering questions briefly, by providing them with much reading material and asking them to write more extensive accounts of their work, sharing their experiences. On-going training using distance learning methods would be a good way of helping the instructors with their writing, of keeping in touch with them and promoting their interest.

I would like to see the instructors having a wider role of **community literacy promoter**, acting as a drop-in centre for those in their village. There are some signs this is already happening but it should be formally recognised and rewarded.

**Training:** All the instructors we saw need both more training and much better training. As I have suggested, it is false economy to cut back on initial and refresher training on grounds of lack of resources, for it weakens the programme and makes for ineffective learning. It is better to run fewer classes with better trained instructors than to have a widespread but

ineffective programme which will hinder the work in the area for many years to come. A large programme with inadequate training will simply waste money.

The training of instructors should be strengthened. There are many ways in which this can be done; it only requires some thought and imagination and very few resources. An expert in adult learning could help this programme, not the CDOs. One way is for a regular forum for instructors to meet together and for them to control the agenda: the training programme I saw was strongly in the control of the CDOs, not the instructors. I would like to see some of the better instructors used as trainers; the instructor we saw at Lutoboka would make an excellent trainer provided she were given proper material on how to teach adults. I would like to see KAFIA taking the lead in this, for example, providing the instructors with a newsletter which the instructors themselves wrote, an outlet for all the experience and problems which they have. I would like to see every instructor having training materials delivered to them every month with written exercises for them to complete and obtain feedback (this can be done in small groups of three or four instructors if they so wish). And so on. What we need to do is to strengthen the competence and confidence of the instructors.

**Understandings of adult learning and teaching** (as well as of formal and informal literacies) need to be strengthened with both CDOs and instructors in all parts of the programme. These are very weak.

### **CDOs**

It is not easy to make recommendations about the CDOs, for, although supported in many ways by ICEIDA, neither they nor their training are under the control of the programme. Although ICEIDA has paid for some additional training for some of them, none of this has impacted on their practice in terms of literacy or adult learning. How far ICEIDA can influence the District officials who control them is not clear.

The CDOs do need to be encouraged to surrender some of their desire to control the programme and to allow greater freedom to the classes and the instructors. It is of course natural to them to wish to manage all that goes on but this springs largely from a view that illiterate people cannot do anything without help and that the appropriate model for adult literacy is the primary school – which it isn't. This needs to be changed. Centres should be free to meet when and where they wish, even irregularly if they wish.

**Training:** Again, the CDOs need much better training than they receive. It needs to be updated to bring in the more modern approaches to both literacy and numeracy as social practice, and to teaching adults. They express a great desire for more training – they see it

as a reward for their work, a time away from the field, a time to obtain additional funding in expenses – but not as a time for changing any of their basic attitudes. Several people told us that “it is hard to change their attitudes” and working patterns. However, while some of them lack the imagination and creativity to invent new ways in which the programme could be more productive, others have considerable potential.

And (although I know this will be very unpopular) they do need to give up much of their role of trainers. They simply do not possess the experience of teaching adults or of literacy and numeracy to train others in these fields. They may be good at training in areas of community development but not teaching literacy to adults.

**KAFIA:** Some of the CDOs’ responsibilities should perhaps be given to others – perhaps to the DRT and especially to KAFIA. KAFIA is a body which is capable (at the moment) of shouldering considerable responsibility, and they show real appreciation of adult learning and some appreciation of the newer approaches to literacy. Some of the resources could with profit be switched from the CDOs to KAFIA. But the long term viability of KAFIA must remain doubtful.

I would hope that in the interim some resources could be made available to KAFIA for them to develop their function as training organisers – not perhaps so much to offer training themselves as to bring in trainers from outside the region at the request of the instructors. They are better placed to do this than the CDOs, for they have the experience which the CDOs lack. And some of the instructors could with profit train other instructors. But they too require some theoretical as well as practical basis for this role.

To give a hypothetical example: the learners and their instructor in one class may ask for some training in (for instance) accounting or poultry. I see the class either on their own or in association with their VFC approaching KAFIA to help with such training. KAFIA (again either on its own or in association with the DRT) would organise a special training activity on accounting or poultry for that class or perhaps a group of classes, paying any charges for it (to the accountant-trainers or agricultural extension workers) from resources made available to it. The learner class may even be willing and able to pay a small charge for such an event. Such training activities could be as little as half a day or as long as two days. And not a one-off event (single injection model) but part of an on-going process. Training can also be offered to the VFCs. KAFIA already has some experience of arranging such events.

In short, FAL in Kalangala and Buvuma needs to develop a flexibility which enables a whole range of different adult learning events to take place around a central theme – local

development projects chosen by the learning groups, and the embedded literacy practices that go with those projects. We need to get away from learning (a formal) 'literacy' and embrace the learning of different literacy practices within specific contexts, including English language and small business development.

## **OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Religious recruitment:** care should be taken to ensure a religious balance in the provision

**Illustrations:** Consideration should be given to printing the illustrations from FAL Primer 1 (and perhaps FAL Primer 2) onto large laminated sheets for display as has been done successfully or SBC

**Other texts:** Efforts should be made to ensure that there are plenty of local texts in the literacy classes

**Pace of learning:** Instructors should be encouraged to go at a faster speed to keep the learners moving at an appropriate speed and retain interest.

**Creative literacy:** all literacy classes should be characterised by creative literacy, getting the learners to speak and then later to write their own statements and to learn literacy through these learner-generated statements.

**Mediation** should be seen as an asset, not as a disadvantage – getting non-literate members to speak what they wish to say and these being written down by others is often a first step to learning literacy skills for themselves. Every non-literate class member could be twinned with a member who has more advanced literacy skills and peer learning be encouraged.

**Discussion in classes:** All classes should engage in full and open discussion on relevant topics during every class session, not always led by the instructor. Some of this will be in full group and some will be in smaller groups which should be a feature of every class meeting.

**The presence of children** in the group can be seen as an advantage since the mother can be encouraged to keep a written record of the child's development (age, height, weight, diet, first words etc)

**Report forms:** The report forms should be replaced by or accompanied with forms which encourage the instructors (in association with the learners) to write a narrative account of the class at regular intervals.

**Writing in 'post-literacy':** Consideration should be given to how writing can be included in any 'post-literacy' provision for the class members. Written records of the group projects should be kept and made available to the CDAs.

**Further incentives** should be available to the instructors.

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Website: [www.uppinghamseminars.com](http://www.uppinghamseminars.com)

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## **APPENDIX: THIRTY SUGGESTIONS FOR PROMOTING LITERACY ACTIVITIES IN REAL LIFE**

While in Malawi, I drew up a list of some thirty different projects which could have been undertaken in the literacy learning groups – all of which I have seen in other literacy programmes. I have adapted this list to the Ugandan islands. My feeling in both countries was of missed opportunities.

These are all being done in small groups, not as lone exercises – adults learn co-operatively by asking the help of others, not individually as at school.

With all of these activities, there must be extensive discussion; they should not be done mechanically. The aim is to challenge the learners to think about what they are doing, not just to do it (e.g. copying). There should be lots of talk in the adult classroom.

### **ACTIVITIES INSIDE THE CLASS**

1. Some of the groups sang songs – but we did not find any facilitator writing down the words of these songs for the learners to read. They could then make up additional verses.
2. some of the classes started and finished with prayers – but again the opportunity to write these on the blackboard for the participants to learn was not taken; and again make up new prayers.
3. it is possible for the group to design their own motto, badge or T-shirt logo with words rather than leave this to the CDOs (in the language of **their** choice, not necessarily in English as the CDOs decided)
4. it is common elsewhere for groups get the learners to talk about their life histories. Parts of these are then written up by the facilitator in the learner's notebook and the learner reads his/her own words.
5. many groups have used local histories of the village – stories from the past collected by the learners – to learn to read and write, again first spoken and then written by the instructor and then used for learning literacy
6. some groups get the learners to make up stories which are told and used for learning (see box below)

**Stories:** One of the most exciting lessons I have ever attended took place in a coastal village in Tamil Nadu in the late 1970s. I planned to spend ten minutes in that circle before moving on to another – but I stopped for two hours. When I arrived, there were small groups all talking excitedly with lots of laughter. The facilitator told me that in their area, it was customary for women to tell each other stories they made up each evening, so she had asked them in four small groups to make up a story – “I simply told them, ‘Imagine you are a fish...’”, she said. The participants told their stories out loud: one was about avoiding being eaten by a big fish; another about being nearly caught by some men in a boat with a net; another about a big storm and diving down deep to get into calmer water; the fourth told about the coral the fish saw upon the bottom of the sea. Everyone was interested in every other story. As they told their stories, the facilitator wrote lots of key words on the blackboard – I noticed she spread them all over the board, she did not keep the words from one story in one part of the board. At the end of the stories and after discussion, she asked them in their groups to write down into their notebooks only the words from the board which related to their own stories – again there was much discussion about which words belonged to which stories as they were scattered across the blackboard. As she said to me while they were writing, “When they are at home, the words will remind them of their story and their story will remind them of the words”. This was true adult literacy learning in the REFLECT mould – using their own words to help them learn literacy. No moving from simple words to complex words, no breaking down into syllables, just learning to read their own words as they spoke them. And they were all keenly interested.

7. in Yemen, the women learners make up and learn to write their own poems

8. books of recipes have been compiled by women's groups, first spoken, later written; they learn the literacy of cooking
9. in Nepal, mothers with small children keep a baby book in which they write the name, date of birth, weight, height, food etc of their children and show off with great pride. There are many women with infants in the FAL classes and they can be encouraged to do the same; this would turn a 'problem' into a resource for learning and provide much grounds for discussion
10. some women bring their children's school books into the literacy learning circle for others to share.

### **LITERACY IN THE COMMUNITY**

11. many classes elsewhere have sent the learners out into the community to copy all the written signs on the buildings and then return and learn to read them and discuss them – who wrote them, why, what is their meaning etc. In several villages, we got the learners to map these texts (around the school or clinic or police station or local government offices or church/mosque or temple etc, both where they are and where they are not!), again leading to much discussion and learning
12. in Sierra Leone, the groups have collected and spoken and then written up local proverbs, traditional songs and sayings
13. many of these and other items have been produced in a small occasional newsletter which the group writes and circulates round the village; the CDOs can provide resources to duplicate these newsletters.
14. in India, many villages put the class blackboard (when it is not being used in class) outside the learning centre under a verandah and use it as a village newspaper, with members of the group writing up some item of news (the weather, the size of the fish catch, local births or marriages, village meetings or political events etc) or a poem every day
15. in a programme in Pakistan, every learner keeps a literacy corner in their own houses in which they keep every bit of reading and writing material they can find
16. some groups ask each of the learners to keep a journal of what they read at home, especially what they read to their children. In it, they also write what the children read out loud to them. They start off by getting the children to write these lists, but gradually they learn to write them themselves.
17. some groups have a group outing, say to Kalangala town, or even to Entebbe or Kampala – and write up about the visit
18. in Bangladesh, some village literacy classes run a small stationery shop, going into town once a month to buy notebooks, pencils, envelopes, stamps etc and selling these in the village
19. in other groups, the women are helped to write the literacy associated with the birth of their child (registration), with marriage (every women is encouraged to get a marriage certificate) and with a funeral.
20. some write about village ceremonies and the activities of village committees
21. religious activities provide many opportunities for reading and some for writing – hymns, prayers, religious texts etc
22. many learners write real or imaginary letters to others
23. many take real bills or receipts which they have received for discussion, sometimes even rewriting them in simpler language to see what they would look like, identifying the real difficulties with these forms for people who have limited literacy skills and experience.

24. many groups write about health matters in their family or community lives, especially visits to hospitals.
25. local politics often form the basis for some writing – e.g. getting the women to design a poster about some issue or other, or a petition to the local politician.
26. in one programme in Pakistan, every learner has to have a ‘buddy’ who is not a group member and the participant teaches to the buddy what they have learned in the class session
27. in India, one women’s group learned reading (and writing) through a water pump manual which the village had been provided with along with the pump. Finding similar material in the village and bringing it into the learning class is part of the role of the instructor and CDO.

### **THE CLASS ITSELF**

28. the literacy learning class itself can provide some occasions for writing – e.g. a written report of each lesson, or of the discussions which (ought to) take place.
29. writing involved in the programme itself – we did not find any written records of the literacy classes except the register, the facilitator’s lesson book (not every facilitator kept one) and the instructor’s quarterly reports. What writing is done is done by the facilitator, not the literacy learners. Some of this could be done in association with the learners – for example, the quarterly report could be prepared by the whole class, not by the instructor alone, either orally for beginners or in written form by those who have the skills to do so.
30. the class project (growing bananas or water melons, rearing pigs or poultry, etc) will have literacy activities connected with it (keeping records of planting and fertilisers etc, of pests and diseases, or records of purchases and sales, etc). All these should be done in the classes.

There are many other writing and reading activities which an imaginative instructor and his/her group can identify in their local context – videos shown in the landing sites, local events like a storm etc etc.

*It may be argued that ‘illiterate’ learners cannot do any of this. Experience proves that those who are non-literate can engage with all of these orally and that others will write down their words and then the learners can learn to read their own words. Mediation can be used as a tool for learning literacy. It can be done – because in every case it has been done somewhere.*