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LESSONS FROM EASTERN AFRICA

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Introduction

Efforts to bring literacy in reach of the world's entire adult population have been championed by UNESCO, other donor agencies, and by many national governments since the early 1950s. Africa remains the world region in which the problem of illiteracy is most acute. There are a number of reasons for this, including the complexity of the language situation in most African countries and the late development of writing systems for the vast majority of African languages.

A number of different types of literacy projects have been mounted in African countries since the start of the 1960s, ranging from pilot projects to national campaigns. It is important to examine the effectiveness of these efforts, in their African contexts, to learn how to tailor future literacy initiatives to the special needs of literacy development on that continent.

This paper will compare three campaigns in East Africa: the campaign of 1971-1981 in Tanzania, the campaign of 1974-1975 in Somalia, and the campaign started in 1979 and continuing until 1987 in Ethiopia. The analysis presented here is primarily sociolinguistic, rather than political or methodological. As such, it focuses on:

- the impact that differences in the previous history of language use have for the long-term effectiveness of literacy campaigns, and
- the lessons they teach for planning and follow-up of future literacy campaigns.

Approach

The three campaigns compared in this paper exhibit a number of similarities, and by no means cover the full range of literacy efforts attempted in Africa. Nevertheless, because they resemble each other in some important ways, the effects of language development upon the outcomes are the more salient. All three campaigns were undertaken as nationwide efforts by socialist governments early in their regimes. All chose African, rather than colonial, languages as the vehicles for literacy. This analysis of their courses will:

- indicate the significant choices that were made about the language of literacy,
- review the historical development of the languages chosen, particularly as it relates to their use for writing,
- review organizational similarities and differences between the campaigns themselves. While some of the differences are clearly related to political factors in each country at the time of the campaign, others can be traced back to differences in the sociolinguistic context of the three campaigns.

The Tanzanian and Somali campaigns have run their full courses, according to their original plans. The Ethiopian campaign is still in operation. This discussion will relate the results of the first two campaigns to the course of continuing literacy activities in Ethiopia and, in conclusion, will point out lessons and emerging issues for literacy planners to consider in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

Language Choice and Language Development in Tanzania, Somalia, and Ethiopia

In each of the three nations -- Tanzania, Somalia, and Ethiopia -- there is one African language that, by virtue of its widespread use or development, can be considered a prime candidate for choice as an official or national language. In Tanzania this language is Swahili, in Somalia it is Somali, and in Ethiopia it is Amharic. The reasons why this is so, however, are as diverse as the differences in patterns of language use within their borders.

Tanzania: In Tanzania, Swahili has long been used as a trade language and a language of inter-ethnic communication, yet it is basically an "imported" language in the area included within the nation's borders. There are about 125 languages native to Tanzanians, but the home area for Swahili is the Kenyan coastal area around Malindi and Mombasa. The overwhelming majority of these languages are Bantu languages, as is Swahili. Over 90 percent of Tanzanians thus speak languages related closely enough to Swahili to make learning it relatively easy for them. And no other language in Tanzania commands a large enough body of politically active speakers to present itself as a rival national language.

The usefulness of Swahili throughout Tanganyika was both recognized and enhanced by both German and British colonists. Swahili had long been used as a lingua franca by Moslem traders up and down the coast and by trade caravans into the interior of the continent as far as the copper-mining regions of Katanga. German settlers and missionaries coming to the area in the late nineteenth century found Swahili widely used as a contact language and contributed to its development by creating a romanized orthography for it, publishing religious tracts in it, and using it for teaching, preaching, and administration. When the British took over, after the first World War, they continued the practice of using Swahili as the language of local administration in the area. Traditional forms of poetry, originally oral literature, also exist in the language.

With the rise of ethnically heterogeneous nationalist groups in the 1920s and 1930s, the use of Swahili was advocated as an expression of African political aspirations; its symbolic value in politics was further enhanced by Nyerere's use of it in formulating his doctrine of ujamaa.

At independence the policy of replacing English with Swahili as the national language in Tanzania was greeted with enthusiasm. The steps taken toward its implementation encouraged expansion of publication and the growth of a modern literature in the language. Regulatory bodies were formed to direct the development of the language for modernization: the Institute of Swahili Research in 1964 and the National Swahili Council in 1967. In addition independent organizations of writers and poets were established. (For more complete discussion of the development of Swahili as a national language, see Whiteley 1969 and Abdulaziz 1971.)

By the time the literacy campaign was inaugurated in 1971 Swahili was firmly entrenched as a national language and was the obvious choice as the nation-wide language of literacy. Journalism and publication of books and pamphlets in Tanzania was active and continues healthy. In 1980 Tanzanian presses produced 368 book titles, as well as 144 pamphlets, in comparison with 150 books for Ethiopia. A further indicator is that Tanzania's paper

consumption for printing and writing, of 9200 metric tons in 1981, is 160 percent of Ethiopia's 5700 for the same year, although Tanzania's population is only about 57 percent as large as Ethiopia's.

Somalia: In contrast to Tanzania, with its multilingual population for whom Swahili is a second language, Somalia is one of the rare African nations with a linguistically homogeneous citizenry. Somali, a Cushitic language, is the mother tongue of 95 percent of the population. It is a language with a long and brilliant oral tradition but with no traditional written form.

Somali was the obvious choice as a national language for independent Somalia, the more so because under colonial administration modern Somalia had been divided, the northern half under British rule and the southern tier under an Italian administration. Thus English was used as the language of administration in the north and Italian in the south. Added to these was Arabic, taught in Koranic schools throughout Somalia. Uncounted Somalis were familiar with the Arabic script, for Somali males, as Moslems, had a religious duty to learn the Koran. And they were literally uncounted, for literacy statistics never reflected the number of Somalis who could read and write Arabic. At independence in 1960, English, Italian, and Arabic were all official written languages in Somalia, and Somali was the national spoken language.

Debate over the choice of a script became an arena for political factionalism. The first independent government immediately convened a committee to select a script, choosing between suggested romanizations, Arabic orthographic adaptations, or even one of several invented scripts. The committee report was considered so controversial, however, that the government never released it. It was not until Siad Barre's rise to power in 1970 that the question was finally decided in favor of a Latin script and the current official orthography (see Adam 1969, Andrzejewski 1962, and Laitin 1977 for further details). The announcement of the new national script was made dramatically on the third anniversary on the October revolution in 1972, as planes, overflying the celebration ceremonies, dropped into the crowd pamphlets containing copies of the President's speech, written in Somali. This was the announcement of the Somali literacy campaign.

Ethiopia: The language situation in Ethiopia is more complex than those prevailing in either Tanzania or Somalia. Although numerically fewer languages are spoken in Ethiopia than in Tanzania -- about 70 to Tanzania's 125 -- they include languages of several major language families, and the groups of speakers are larger. Five or six tongues have over a million speakers apiece; fourteen or fifteen have over a hundred thousand speakers

and together constitute the mother tongues of 93 percent of the population.

Ethiopia never came under European colonial rule to any significant extent, but Amharic, the language of perhaps 30 percent of its population, was incontrovertably the language of the Imperial Ethiopian government. It fulfilled many of the functions of a colonial language in non-Amhara areas. Under the reign of Haile Selassie, it was the only Ethiopian language developed for modern use in communication and administration. All government business, anywhere in the empire, was conducted in Amharic, and official documents were published in Amharic and English, with the Amharic version taking precedence.

Amharic was the only Ethiopian language used as a language of education since the end of World War II. Today it is spoken by over half the population, either as a first or second language. Oromo is spoken by at least as many people as Amharic as their first language but less frequently as a second language. Moreover, Oromo has several distinct dialects, while Addis Ababa Amharic is the national standard, and regional speech forms approach it closely.

Amharic has always been a written language. Its parent language, Ge'ez, was brought across the Red Sea to the African continent in the first millenium B.C. by South Arabians who brought their syllabary script, as well. Its sister language, Tigrinya, shares the heritage of writing.

The long tradition of writing laid a base on which modern publishing developed. During the forty-six-year reign of Haile Selassie, Ethiopia gradually built the beginnings of a modern Amharic press. By the early 1970s over half a dozen private and government presses, printing in Amharic and English, were well established in Addis Ababa, and several more were operating in the north in Asmara, using Tigrinya, as well. A wide variety of materials -- newspapers, school texts, government pamphlets, magazines, original novels, literary translations, and even pot-boilers -- were published and available in bookstores in the capital and in Asmara. In recent years, the revolutionary government has nationalized a number of the private presses, and the number of new works, aside from government-issued publications, has fallen off noticeably.

Over the two generations that the imperial language policy held it was very effective in imposing a form of linguistic/cultural integration upon non-Amhara Ethiopians. Because of the emphasis

1. The languages in question are: Amharic, Oromo, Tigrigna, Wolayto, Somali, Kambatta, Hadiya, Kunama, Tigre, Gedo, Afar, Gurage, Kaffa-Mochi, Saho, and Sidamo.

on exclusive use of Amharic in modern domains, the vocabulary of that language has begun to expand to meet twentieth century needs. Today it is rapidly acquiring terms to express communist concepts as well (cf. Tubiana 1984). Even today, Amharic clearly retains an aura of prestige (cf. Teferra 1979). To a significant extent, this is because no other Ethiopian language has been developed to the point where it can be used in its stead. The current government has nonetheless deliberately rejected a policy of national integration through linguistic unification.

The current socialist government has objected strongly to the imposition of Amharic on the non-Amhara majority. Its original political base was multi-ethnic. As part of an effort to enfranchise all the peoples of Ethiopia, the government has proclaimed all of the fifteen most widely spoken languages to be national languages. In principle, the national literacy campaign is to be conducted in all fifteen when it is fully operational. Thus the government has chosen to forego the economy of using an African language that has functioned until now as the major lingua franca of the country in favor of drawing other elements of the national population into more active participation by preparing their languages for use in literacy and by teaching most illiterates to read first in their mother tongues. The consequences of this policy decision will be discussed more fully in describing their effects on the Ethiopian literacy campaign.

The Organization of the Campaigns

The literacy campaigns in Tanzania, Somalia, and Ethiopia are very similar in their purposes and goals, but in organization the Somali campaign more nearly resembles the year-long Cuban campaign than either of the two others. The Tanzanian and Ethiopian campaigns, by contrast, are each multi-stage, long-term campaigns with similarly designed follow-on activities and institutions; the Tanzanian campaign has completed its ten-year planned course, while the Ethiopian campaign is now in the fifth year of its eight-year plan. This section will describe the general organization of the three campaigns and will examine their results in terms of their immediate effectiveness and of the establishment of institutions that can maintain and continue their accomplishments.

All three campaigns, as revolutionary socialist activities, have broader goals than just widespread adult literacy. Each hopes to promote broader political awareness and participation, as well as economic development and better health and education conditions, especially in non-urban areas, through a nation-wide mobilization effort. Indeed, literacy campaigns in many parts of the world,

starting with Cuba, have proved an effective way of mobilizing literates and illiterates alike and generating enthusiasm for a fledgling revolutionary government concerned with serving its entire population.

The Somali campaign: The Somali literacy and rural development campaign is the simplest of the three in its organization and implementation. Operating at its fullest during the school year of 1974-1975, it was planned as a two-year, all-out effort to eradicate illiteracy throughout the country. It had two stages, the first phase an urban literacy campaign that trained all government employees, including teachers, to read and write the new written form of Somali. The Rural Development Campaign of 1974-1975 constituted the second and main phase. For this effort schools were closed for the year. Teachers trained and supervised all students from grades 10 and 11 as campaigners who fanned out over the entire country, many of them living with nomadic pastoralists, following the herds, teaching human and veterinary health and literacy, and compiling a census of the population.

The "long-tailed" drought of 1975 altered the course of the campaign; that and the subsequent war on the Ethiopian border caused the government to shelve permanently much of the original plan for follow-on activity. As the effects of the drought became acute, students in the most severely affected areas were transformed into disaster relief workers -- their valiant efforts saved many lives during the crisis. The literacy and rural development campaign of 1974-75 was thus cut short seven months after its inception.

The original plans had called for widespread basic education classes to follow the campaign year. The high proportion of the population who practiced pastoralism, 60 to 70 percent, meant that planners had to take innovative approaches to reach them. Radio broadcasts were planned as a means for reaching this mobile majority; classes would have been conducted by establishing listening groups, each led by a particularly capable student from among their number.

Instead, the Somali government has since relied heavily on donor projects with outside funding, mostly smaller scale and more localized, for follow-on activity. By 1983, the main institutions that had been established for continuing adult education were Regional Education Centers, located in provincial centers and catering mostly to women's classes, and Nomad Education Centers, which were more evident on paper than on the ground, since most were planned for border areas where hostilities prevented their construction. The two or three that were built offered only very short two or three week courses of dubious value, seven or eight years after the end of the original campaign.

The Somali campaign also labored under several unusual handicaps. First of all, because the writing system chosen for Somali had never been used for it before, the government had, in effect, to teach literacy to 100 percent of the population. Secondly, because there had been no agreed-upon script until shortly before the campaign, Somalia had no prior experience with literacy projects on which to base planning or from which to draw trained staff. The major pre-campaign planning activities consisted of the deliberations of the script committee of 1961 and the production of a second committee convened in 1969-1970 to prepare basic school texts in Somali (using Olivetti typewriters). In fact, during the campaign, those teachers who were not engaged in training and supervising student campaigners were set to work to translate school texts for all twelve grades of primary and secondary school into Somali.

On the other hand, Somalia's linguistic unity allows some economy in the design of teaching materials, at least in comparison with most other African countries. Moreover, its population, then somewhat under three million, is only a quarter the size of Tanzania's and about eighth as large as Ethiopia's. Although the mobility of a considerable portion of the people made it harder to reach them, it was not completely unreasonable to hope to train a sizeable proportion of them to use a well-designed script in the space of a year.

The Somali campaign's accomplishments were impressive. In the course of a single year it reached over 1.7 million people and brought the literacy rate from under 5 percent to nearly 70 percent, according to the government's figures. In 1975 the Minister of Education was awarded a UNESCO prize for progress in literacy. The major problem since then is recidivism.

Ethiopian and Tanzanian campaigns - common factors: The Tanzanian and Ethiopian literacy campaigns both contrast with the Somali campaign in a number of significant and similar ways. To begin with, each was a multi-year campaign, begun in urban areas and extended gradually into rural ones.

Both countries had also had long experience in using an official African language in writing. Swahili was written in Tanzania for nearly a century, and Amharic (and its predecessor, Ge'ez) in Ethiopia for millenia. Both therefore had operating presses and at least a core of trained personnel who could run printing establishments.

Furthermore, each had the benefit of having had a UNESCO Work-Oriented Adult Literacy Pilot Project (WOALPP) operating in the country just prior to, and in the case of Tanzania during, the campaign. These UNESCO projects were considered unsuccessful, judged in terms of the numbers of people they made literate (see Hall 1975, p. 103). Nevertheless, the professional training they provided for Ethiopians and Tanzanians to plan and

staff the campaigns and, particularly in Tanzania, the set of literacy and post-literacy readers they produced were valuable resources for the full-scale campaigns that followed and that succeeded in teaching large numbers of non-literates to read and write. The UNESCO WOALPP project in Tanzania overlapped with the country's literacy campaign, which commenced in 1971; because of this the WOALPP materials were tailored to the needs of the campaign. In Ethiopia the UNESCO project had run its course before the campaign was started in 1979. As a result, the planners' eventual decisions about the types of literacy readers they wanted meant discarding the WOALPP materials and designing new ones. Nevertheless, the writers trained by the WOALPP project were still available to prepare the new campaign readers.

Some of the infrastructure for implementing the two campaigns was also similar. Because both nations mounted their campaigns not as initial mobilization activities but only after their governments had first established themselves through other programs, both used already existing political mobilization units as the basis for organizing their literacy campaigns at the local level. In Tanzania these units were TANU cells in urban areas and ujamaa villages in the countryside; in Ethiopia the urban neighborhood associations and the rural peasant associations carry out the campaign activities.

Finally, planners for both campaigns gave considerable attention to the question of providing post-literacy reading materials to neo-literates, especially in rural areas. The Tanzanian adult education campaign devised several innovative types of library for circulating reading materials in the countryside. These include branch libraries in outlying towns, book boxes that can be transported to more remote areas, and book-lending by mail. There are, not surprisingly, some problems in retrieving borrowed books from rural patrons, and others in finding enough materials in Swahili written at an appropriate level of difficulty and appealing in content.

The Ethiopian campaign is still under way and has not yet penetrated to all rural areas. Its plans also include construction of reading rooms and community education centers and provision of book boxes, containing ten copies of each of 50 titles, for rural communities of 800 or 900 (Bhola 1983). For readers of languages other than Amharic, however, the choice of books is actually limited to four graded readers composed of short sections devoted to various aspects of health and rural development, since nothing else is written for them.

Differences between the two campaigns: There are several notable differences between the Tanzanian and the Ethiopian literacy campaigns. First of all, literacy statistics indicate that, before the start of either campaign, Tanzania claimed that 25 percent of its adult population was literate, while Ethiopia

claimed only about 7 percent literacy. These figures must be taken as rough, not to say inaccurate estimates, at least for Ethiopia. Coptic church schools, especially in northern highland areas, have long taught reading skills to rural boys, but these traditional literates are not captured in the statistics, which were based on the number of fourth-grade completers in government schools.

The statistics do suggest that there was a larger pool of modern-educated potential literacy teachers in Tanzania than in Ethiopia. They also indicate greater penetration of government schools into rural parts of Tanzania, schools that provided some of the meeting-places for literacy classes. Tanzania did indeed use elementary and secondary school teachers working after hours as adult literacy teachers, while Ethiopia relies heavily on secondary school students to teach literacy during after-school hours and over the summer holiday.

Second, Ethiopia elected to use its national script (Amhr: fidel) for literacy in all Ethiopian languages, while the alphabet used for Swahili is the Latin alphabet. Ethiopia has had presses for three or four decades that regularly print with the Ethiopic script, but typing it is still an awkward process, and the results can be hard to read. This makes production of inexpensive pamphlets and readers somewhat more difficult.

Finally, Tanzania's decision to use Swahili exclusively in its campaign has meant that the development of readers and teaching materials concentrated on production of readers appropriate for adults engaged in different subsistence occupations and the provision of post-literacy materials was relatively straightforward.

Ethiopia's opposite decision, to teach literacy in fifteen national languages, has meant that considerable time and effort has had to be expended just in developing orthographies -- in fidel -- in each language and then translating the same standard set of booklets in each. The question of how to provide adequate post-literacy materials in the languages of initial literacy, other than Amharic, or alternatively, how to design the bridge to literacy in Amharic is still unresolved and is a thorny topic, both pedagogically and politically. One translator pointed out to me that he faced continual problems with copyreaders who were unable to correct proofs of materials in a previously unprinted language.

Follow-on

It is of little use learning to read if there is nothing around to read afterward. In addition to differences in the plans of the campaigns themselves, there are major differences in the availability of reading materials in the three countries. While Ethiopia and Tanzania have built up publishing capacity over the course of this century, Somalia had little opportunity to do so. And, although there are certainly problems getting books, newspapers, pamphlets, or letters to rural areas in all three countries, in Ethiopia and Tanzania some materials have circulated outside the capital for several decades. In Somalia virtually nothing, aside from a few hand-carried letters, makes its way outside provincial centers or local schools -- and even textbooks are in desperately short supply.

All three campaigns made plans for follow-up of literacy teaching with adult education activities. In Somalia, the original plan of widespread basic education classes for adults has ceded to that of establishing adult education centers in district centers, centers that can serve only a small proportion of the people the campaign first reached. Ethiopia, so far, has been providing basic education through the fourth-grade level to most adults, particularly in cities and towns. Some of these new literates are continuing on to complete elementary or even secondary education. In rural areas community education centers are being built to offer more skills-oriented continuing education, but it is not clear how acceptable this alternative to academic training will prove to be.

The circulating rural libraries and "book boxes" in Tanzania and Ethiopia have already been discussed. At this point, book production in Somalia is too poor to allow such plans.

The production of printed books for the general reading public has also been mentioned. Book production is, among other things, a rough indicator of the nation's capacity to cater to the requirements of new literates. In this, Tanzania apparently leads. Of the 368 titles printed there in 1981, 114 were new. UNESCO (1983) does not give figures for new titles in Ethiopia, where a total of 150 titles appeared during the same year, but according to a library acquisitions staff member, approximately three or four new novels have been printed in as many years. Of course, Ethiopian presses are still employed in producing teaching and reading materials for its campaign.

UNESCO provides no figures for Somali book production in the early 1980s, but knowledgeable Somalis note that the Somali

Academy of Arts and Sciences, which is responsible for selecting and editing books for print, has a backlog of hundreds of manuscripts, 40 or 50 of them edited and ready for printing, but the State Printing Agency has only been able to produce three or four a year because it must give priority to government materials first and school texts after that. Even publication of schoolbooks has been slow. In 1982 the texts for eleventh grade, prepared eight years earlier, finally were ready for distribution.

Both Somalia and Ethiopia have nationalized their presses in recent years and prohibit or control private printing. This is slowing production of printed materials. Before 1973 Somalia's presses printed mainly foreign-language books, journals, or documents for the country's literate few, so the effects of nationalization are hard to judge, but during the 1960s and early 1970s a number of private printing companies in Ethiopia turned out a healthy variety of books in Amharic for the ordinary urban reader. In the 1980s this stream has slowed, ironically just as the literacy campaign was gearing up.

Simply to cite figures for book production is to overlook the other serious problems of materials supply, maintenance, and more pressing priorities and needs for scarce foreign exchange that affect the printing industry all over Africa. While these will not be discussed here, they cannot be ignored. Still, it seems a waste of time, money, and effort to mount a national literacy campaign if the problems of producing something to read are not carefully considered as a part of it.

Another form of literacy reinforcement is traditional widespread existence of written documents that empower their users, giving them access to material, social or spiritual advantages. In Ethiopia, some traditional written records are preserved, even by those who cannot read them, in the countryside, at least in Amhara and Tigre areas. These include bibles, tax receipts (which formerly served as a form of evidence of title to land), and court decisions concerning property. In addition, some merchants kept written accounts.

In Somalia, too, written contracts existed, some concerning clan and subclan alliances (Somali: xeer), others recording trade terms and agreements, but these, like the Koran, were written in an Arabic script and cannot be read by the new literates. Moreover, the present government does not recognize Arabic script documents as legally binding. Conceivably, modern rural development extension bulletins, licences, order forms, modern contracts, and the like could become modern counterparts of these traditional written documents.

Results of the Campaigns

The reported literacy rates for Somalia, Tanzania, and Ethiopia over the past fifteen years, shown on Table 1, reflect the effects, and the effectiveness of the three campaigns. These literacy rates must be viewed with caution. They are, for the most part, estimates, based on different types of measures and of varying reliability. Thus the literacy statistics for Somalia in 1970 and for Ethiopia in 1970-1975, before the start of their campaigns, are based on government figures for fourth-grade completers, disregarding literates who could read because they had a traditional religious education. In both Somalia and Ethiopia this last group was not insignificant, particularly in view of the low number of literates with secular education.

The 1970 figure UNESCO gives for Tanzania is probably based on a literacy census conducted through the local branches of the TANU organization as a preliminary to the nationwide literacy campaign. Figures for Tanzania in 1975 and 1981 are based on literacy campaign national testing, as is the 1981 figure for Ethiopia. The 1975 statistic for Somalia is an end-of-campaign figure. The source of UNESCO's 1981 literacy rate estimate is not given; no subsequent survey or sampling has been done to check literacy retention, as far as I could ascertain.

TABLE 1: LITERACY RATES FOR SOMALIA, TANZANIA, AND ETHIOPIA

	1970	1975	1977	1981	1984
Somalia	5% or less	60 %	---	"much less than 50%" ² /7%	---
Tanzania	25 %	60 %	73 %	79 %	---
Ethiopia	5 - 7 %	5 - 7 %	---	35 %	62 %

That said, the pattern that results is still telling. The campaign starting dates must be borne in mind: 1971 for Tanzania, 1974 for Somalia, and 1979 for Ethiopia. Thus 1970 is a baseline rate for all three countries. The rate for 1975 represents the end of the campaign for Somalia, the first third of the campaign for Tanzania, and the pre-campaign rate for Ethiopia.

 2. The first figure is from a Ministry of Education official, the second from UNESCO Statistical Yearbook, 1983.

Somalia, then, went from 95 percent (possibly higher) illiteracy in 1970 to 60 percent literacy after its one year campaign in 1974-75, and then back to as low as 7 percent literacy over the next six or seven years. This last UNESCO figure probably exaggerates the situation somewhat. In 1982, when I asked Somali Ministry of Education staff about current literacy rates, the responses were, first of all, that no one had even considered any recensus or sampling to determine the amount of recidivism; second, that there was undoubtedly a great deal of relapse, especially in more remote areas; and third, that the politic answer was that the literacy rate was around 50 percent, maybe a bit lower. Undeniably, a marked gain in literacy was maintained in and around Mogadishu and to some extent in other provincial centers. The relapse rate was much higher in rural hamlets and farming areas and near-total in pastoral regions, to judge from the experience of education officers in a rangelands development project in the Mudug region. The overall pattern can be characterized as a form of flash-in-the-pan literacy, followed by widespread relapse, except in or near urban centers.

The literacy growth pattern for Tanzania was more gradual and appears to be more sustained. The leap from 25 percent literacy in 1970 to about 60 percent in 1975, though dramatic, still amounts to teaching about 35 percent of the total population to read and write over the course of four years, rather than 60 percent in one year, as Somalia claimed to do. In 1977, six years into the campaign, the rate had climbed another 13 percent and by the end of the campaign, in 1981 had risen 6 percent more to stand at 79 percent. It will be particularly interesting to see if the rate remains constant from now on.

It is, of course, too early to judge Ethiopia's ability to sustain the accomplishments of its campaign, but the early rise to 35 percent literacy over the first two years and later progress to over 60 percent appears, predictably, to resemble Tanzania's pattern rather than Somalia's -- hardly a surprising result, since the plans of the Ethiopian and Tanzanian campaigns are similar in so many ways.

Conclusion: The Problems Facing Ethiopia

Literacy campaigns are social experiments on a national scale. They can accomplish many things: mobilizing the entire population in a national cause; building awareness of national issues and development opportunities among underprivileged groups within the population; providing access to education for skills training and for personal satisfaction; and greatly improving the communication network within the country -- all by creating and sustaining a literate citizenry. The question behind this

comparison of three campaigns is how best to do that.

Because the Ethiopian campaign is still in progress, while the other two, at least in their original form, are complete, it is appropriate to conclude by asking what issues the Somali and Tanzanian campaigns raise for Ethiopian planners to consider. Although some of the emerging issues look obvious, their resolution is less so. Comparison of the three campaigns is worthwhile if it enables us to evaluate various solutions to the following problems:

- Literacy teaching without follow-up does not last and so wastes scarce resources. Two main types of reinforcement of literacy are exemplified in these campaigns -- provision of continuing education and reading materials after the campaign, and provision of post-literacy basic education during a sustained campaign. Many events can interfere with the follow-on activities, particularly on a continent prone to drought, famine, and war, as the Somali campaign demonstrated. How far to push for national literacy in these conditions is an open question. To the credit of Ethiopian literacy planners, it is one they have considered seriously and taken into account as far as possible.
- It is much easier to conduct a literacy campaign in one language than in many. This does not mean it is always desirable to choose just one language among many and to restrict the campaign accordingly, but it is certainly simpler logistically. In this respect Somalia and Tanzania both differed from Ethiopia's plan, Somalia because it had but one African language, and Tanzania by choice. The political and linguistic situation in Tanzania permitted this decision; the Tanzanian experience demonstrates that it can work, other things being equal. Clearly, the political reasons for Ethiopia's different decision cannot be ignored, but the time and effort expended just to re-produce literacy materials in each of the national languages has been an added burden.

Many more African countries resemble Tanzania and Ethiopia than Somalia in their linguistic complexity, so the degree of success these two countries achieve in their campaigns and the ways they devise for solving their problems will provide models to imitate or avoid for the rest of the continent. Tanzania has gone the route of choosing one language for all to learn and read. Ethiopia, with larger language groups speaking more diverse languages (though not more languages), has chosen the opposite path.

- It is considerably easier to spread literacy in languages that already have traditions of writing. Tanzania was able to build on an established writing system and publishing capacity for Swahili. Somalia, on the other hand, like many

other African countries, needed to promote literacy in a previously unwritten language. Its record can help others to recognize the problems and difficulties inherent in doing this and to plan for them intelligently.

The emerging question for Ethiopia is what it will do to sustain the literacy of neo-literates who learn to read in languages other than Amharic, the former official language of the imperial regime. The literacy campaign's multi-year and multi-stage plan builds a solid bridge from beginning literacy to basic education for adult neoliterates -- if they speak Amharic. The follow-on materials and the distribution system for books and pamphlets also seem best adapted to the needs of Amharic speakers, since materials in other languages are less plentiful, even in Tigrinya, the other written Ethiopic language, and all but non-existent in the rest. Basic education texts are reportedly being prepared in the various national languages, but the task is forbidding and progresses slowly.

There appears to be a planning gap in how to provide follow-on materials (other than the primer pamphlets, the four post-literacy readers, and grade-school texts) for neoliterates in languages other than Amharic or, alternatively, how to provide an educational bridge to Amharic as the unifying national language. The political and practical solutions to the problem conflict, and planners hesitate to opt for one over the other.

One unofficial attitude toward the problem seems to be to hope it will go away. This may not just be wishful thinking. Over the course of the last forty years the spreading use and knowledge of Amharic among other mother tongue groups has been undeniable. The number of Amharic second-language speakers is large and probably still growing, although no recent figures are available at the moment. For people like these, the transition from literacy in their mother tongue to Amharic may not be unduly demanding, and reading and writing in Amharic is still clearly practical in present-day Ethiopia. A do-nothing policy for post-literacy follow-on in minority languages can be successful if enough minority language speakers also know Amharic; but as far as I know, no one has measured whether the proportion of Amharic second-language speakers in Ethiopia is large enough to make it work. The paradox of the Ethiopian campaign is that perhaps the past effectiveness of the old imperial language policy will be the foundation on which the success of the socialist and multilingual literacy campaign will build.

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