

One-third of world population illiterate

By Barbara S. Moffet

National Geographic News Service
NEW YORK - Almost one-third of the people in the world -- 814 million -- don't know how to read or write, according to UNESCO estimates.

That includes two-thirds of the people in Africa and a third of those in Asia, excluding the Soviet Union.

In at least 10 African countries and four Arab states, the estimated illiteracy rate surpasses 80 percent. In numbers of illiterates, the top 10 nations are India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nigeria, Brazil, Ethiopia, Egypt, Iran, and Afghanistan. Each has at least 10 million.

PUPIL EXPLOSION:

Population booms in some countries are wiping out gains in the classroom. Literacy campaigns in India, for example, have not kept up with the numbers of people needing instruction. By the year 2000, India is expected to have half of the world's illiterates.

completely literate, although some persons are more literate than others."

In the early 1950's, as world attention first turned to illiteracy, UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, drew up this definition: "A person is literate who can with understanding both read and write a short, simple statement on his everyday life." But, as has been pointed out since then, does such a test mean anything in an advanced society such as the United States?

"You go into the South Bronx or Brooklyn and find people who can perform better than literates in the Third World, but it's worthless because they can't get a job without a high school education," said Carman St. John Hunter, co-author of "Adult Illiteracy in the United States."

The United State's official literacy rate is 99 percent. Yet the actual number of illiterates is not

again within three years.

UNESCO learned that literacy is not merely an educational issue but also a psychological, cultural, sociological, and economic one. And the program raised the chicken-and-egg question: Which comes first, literacy or economic development?

"Many nations believe literacy is the key to development, and this is probably false," author Hunter said. "If you learn to read but there's nowhere to use your skills, it does little good. The highest levels of literacy have come out about in countries already on their way to industrial development."

Mrs. Hunter is a technical specialist for World Education, a New York-based organization that is changing its approach to spreading literacy.

"The priority of World Education used to be straight literacy, but we found that it wasn't the learner's priority," a staff member explained.

economists. "Of all the disparities, none is of greater hindrance to development than that based on sex," a World Bank policy paper states. Studies have shown that women with even marginal reading skills take better care of infants and practice birth control more effectively.

Third World literacy efforts suffer from other problems. In Senegal in western Africa, literacy programs must be carried out in six languages, Wolof, Serer, Peul, Diula, Mandingo, and Soninke. In Somalia, on the eastern African coast, roads had to be built in rural areas before literacy classes could begin, and teachers battled rough living conditions as well as prejudice among their nomadic pupils. Severe drought finally curtailed the effort.

There have been some well advertised successes, many in socialist nations where a literacy class can come with a dose of ideology.

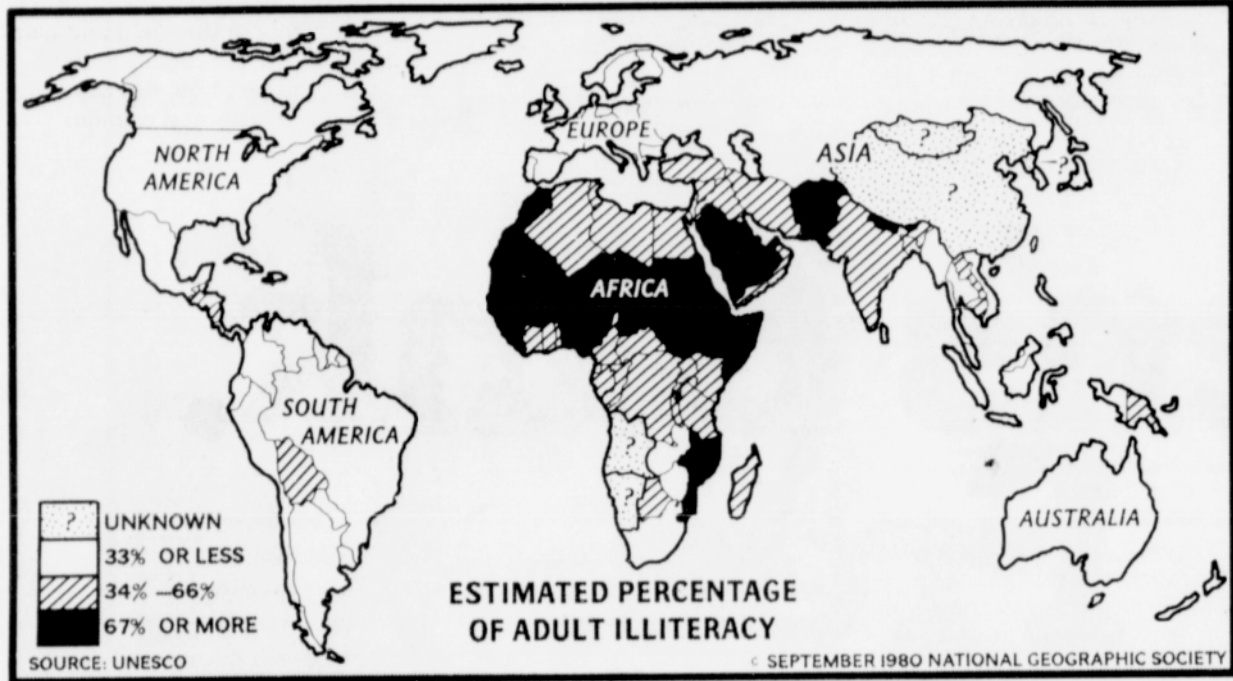
UNESCO figures are not available, but China claims to have reduced illiteracy from 85 percent to 15 percent since 1949, intertwining the program with language reform and destruction of class barriers. The Soviet Union asserts it eliminated most illiteracy before World War II. In Cuba Castro sent brigades of young teachers out to eradicate illiteracy in 1961. They apparently came close.

Pockets of illiteracy persist in the Caribbean, notably Haiti, where an estimated 71 percent of the people can't read or write.

Some Latin American countries have used the methods of Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator who has advocated literacy as a tool to help the poor improve their lives. Under this method, students might discuss building with bricks, the construction of their houses, and housing as a community problem before the written word for brick is ever introduced.

ARMY OF TUTORS:

In one of the most ambitious recent campaigns, Nicaragua has sent out an army of tutors, some as young as 11, to teach 600,000 peasants and laborers to read and write. Cuba is helping Nicaragua in the \$20 million drive.



ILLITERACY is concentrated on two continents -- Africa and Asia -- according to UNESCO. The only African countries believed to have 33 percent or less illiteracy are Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. Figures are not available for Angola and Namibia (indicated by question marks). In

Asia, illiteracy is highest in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, and on the Arabian Peninsula. Figures for North Korea, Mongolia, and China are not known, although China claims to have reduced illiteracy to 15 percent. In South America, only Bolivia has a rate higher than 33 percent.

(National Geographic Society)

In most parts of the world, women illiterates outnumber the men. Female illiteracy in Africa and the Arab states, where women have less access to schools, is about 85 percent. In Yemen, on the Arabian Peninsula, 99.5 percent of the women can't read or write.

According to projections by UNESCO, there will be 884 million illiterates worldwide by 1990, a rise of 70 million in a decade. But the prediction is not as grim as it sounds: The percentage of illiterates is falling.

Increasing school enrollments have gradually educated larger proportions of the population so that the estimated number of literates is rising faster than the number of illiterates. The projected 884 million will represent only about 26 percent of the world population, down from a current rate of about 29 percent.

And there are other bright notes. The governments of Cuba and Tanzania, for example, claim their literacy drives have turned predominantly illiterate societies into more literate ones.

Although some who are burdened with the task of eradicating illiteracy might pat themselves on the backs over the successes, others caution that literacy figures, especially predictions, are suspect.

ROSY STATISTICS:

"You have to take those projections with an enormous pinch of salt," warned Dr. Kenneth King of the International Development Research Centre in Canada, which funds research on world problems including illiteracy.

"For one thing, the figures assume that attending school ensures literacy. We know a lot about how many kids start grade one, but less about who attends grade four, and even less of what the kids know later."

Governments taking literacy surveys often rely on the individual's word about his reading abilities. So literacy figures can represent mere guesses, sometimes inflated to boost a nation's image. Actual illiteracy, some authorities say, is more widespread than statistics show.

"Some countries have confessed illiteracy rates that are extraordinarily high, so the actual figures must be really extreme," King said.

The biggest problem is gauging world literacy is that no one knows exactly what it is. As a UNESCO publication mused: "No one is

known, according to Paul Delker, director of Adult Education in the U.S. Department of Education. Besides uncounted illegal aliens, there is an unknown number of high school graduates who have diplomas but not the ability to read a job application.

FUNCTIONAL INCOMPETENTS:

A University of Texas study found 20 percent of American adults to be "functionally incompetent" -- lacking the skills to perform such a basic task as writing a note to their child's teacher.

Illiteracy in the United States is proportionately highest in the South and, predictably, among minorities, the poor, and the elderly. Private organizations and the government spend millions of dollars every year on the problem, but probably attract only a small fraction of the illiterates, some of whom are financially successful and keep their illiteracy closeted.

For Harry Harper, a 34-year-old sheet metal worker who grew up in New York City, the inability to read became an intolerable frustration. Now he takes an elevator twice a week to the top of a Manhattan skyscraper for free reading lessons offered by the Literacy Volunteers of America.

He hopes to pick up what he missed before dropping out of school in the seventh grade, blaming "the system" for failing to teach him the basics.

"I felt left out of a lot of things," Harper said. "I want to read some good books, like American history and mystery stories."

Teaching the rest of the world to read is a more complicated prospect. UNESCO tried it from 1967 to 1973 in a campaign that encompassed 11 nations. Its aims -- to demonstrate the economic and social values of literacy and to pave the way for a larger world literacy effort -- were only partly met.

"Neither literacy nor development can be willed into existence by international agencies," a UNESCO report later concluded. "At best they can perhaps prick the conscience of national governments."

ILLITERACY RELAPSE:

The program did spawn literacy campaigns by the governments of Algeria, India, Mali and Tanzania. But it was plagued by problems such as high dropout rates, and in at least one Asian country the majority of pupils finishing four years of primary education were illiterate

Now the organization promotes community development with projects such as one in a town in Kenya, where women have organized a bakery to raise money. The project led to the women's desire to improve sanitation facilities in the town and now many have asked for literacy classes.

TIGHT BUDGETS:

Economic and social realities are holding back progress in much of the Third World. Developed countries spend far more per inhabitant on education than developing countries do. About half of the school-age children in Africa and Asia do not go to school.

A high percentage of those are girls, a situation that concerns


Honor Atiyeh

The Oregon Human Development Corporation will bestow its highest award, the Golden Aztec, on Governor Victor Atiyeh, OHDC Vice President Candido Morales announced.

"It's only fitting," Morales noted. "The Governor has demonstrated commitment and leadership in causing major and statewide changes in public attitudes toward ethnic minorities in Oregon, especially for Blacks and Hispanics. He initiated the Racial Harassment Bill (HB 2479) and, by executive order, established the Black and Hispanic Affairs Commissions." The Governor was nominated for the award by members of the Hispanic Affairs Commission.


The Golden Aztec Award will be presented at the OHDC's upcoming first annual Recognition Awards Dinner-Dance at the River Queen Restaurant in Portland. Tickets are \$15.00 and may be ordered through local OHDC offices or purchased at the door. The event will take place on Saturday, May 16th, beginning at 6:00 P.M.

Oregon Human Development Corporation administers job training and other human services in Oregon. The yearly recognition awards dinner-dance is part of OHDC's effort to honor individuals and groups who have worked to improve human services for members of ethnic minority groups, for women, and for other under-employed or unemployed people.



Pacific Power

Citizen of the Week



Cindy Jackson is an eighth grader at Boise Elementary School - a model student. A excellent student, she participates in the TAG program (Talented and Gifted). Described by her teachers as very conscientious and faithful with assignments. She is a student who wants to achieve. Cindy is a page editor for "Boise Speaks" and is always willing to work - "Call me anytime."


At Boise she participated in College Bowl during her 8th grade year, and last week came in third in the 400 meter dash.

Cindy has been accepted by Benson High School, where she intends to study electronics and be an engineer or an Editor.

She is active in the Maranatha Church youth group.

Cindy is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Edison Jackson. She has seven brothers and sisters.

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From the Front Door

By Tom Boothe

THE KEY

The wisdom, the knowledge and the understanding of purpose -- preparation -- Direction and Consistency is the KEY to the development of a responsible, Respectful and Constructively Productive citizen. This KEY opens the door to the proper spirit of being, the proper mental attitude toward self and others and the proper physical values of self and others.

With this KEY comes the power to overcome prejudice, to recognize opportunities and to secure and maintain your right to live a Responsible Productive life on Earth.

Without this KEY you will not be able to recognize opportunities or open door to self fulfillment. You will become a victim of those who have found their KEYS.

Herein is the incentive and motivation to seek out your purpose, prepare yourself, and know your Direction and be Consistent.

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