

REPORT

**PRELIMINARY EVALUATION OF
ADULT LITERACY PROGRAM**

TAWAL, RI VDC

March 2014

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TAWAL, RI VDC

A. Background to the Ri VDC literacy program

This report provides a preliminary evaluation of the adult literacy program at Tawal funded by NAFA. The adult literacy program in Tawal began in 2009 following a meeting initiated by Tawal women during NAFA members' visit to the village. Approximately 30 women met with NAFA members with a proposal for adult literacy classes. At that time almost all adult women in Tawal were illiterate or had low literacy. Funding was provided for classes for one year.

The following year HRDC requested that the program be extended to other nearby villages of Dusheni, Ladap and Salleri, which was done.



Women's literacy classes Tawal, before electricity availability

In 2010 Chandra Tamang advised that the government was now providing teachers for adult literacy in the Ri VDC and that NAFA need not continue literacy funding. However, in November 2011 at a meeting with women at Tawal to discuss their development priorities, the need for adult literacy classes was raised again. We were told that the government run classes had not been successful with teachers not turning up for classes and poor quality teaching. Women again placed literacy as their most pressing development priority. In 2012 NAFA recommenced funding the literacy classes at Tawal. Classes at Ladap were funded from a private donation sourced by Chandra for one year. To date it is not known if the Ladap program will continue.



Women's meeting to discuss development priorities 2011

B. Broader issues surrounding literacy

There are different ideas about the nature and function of literacy. The 1978 UNESCO definition, still in use today, describes a **literate person** as someone who 'can with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his (or her) every-day life' and a **functionally literate person** as someone who can 'engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his (or her) group and community and also for enabling him (or her) to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his (or her) own and the community's development' (UNESCO General Conference, 1978, cited in UNESCO, 2006).

More recently UNESCO has acknowledged the **social dimension of literacy**: 'creating literate environments and societies is essential for achieving the goals of eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, curbing population growth, achieving gender equality and ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy' (UNESCO, 2006, p.31). While the extent to which literacy underpins a country's development is debated, there is general acceptance that adult literacy is linked to the achievement of other desirable social goals.

Similarly educating girls and women is viewed as the lynchpin for women's empowerment and family well-being: 'As well as boosting their own chances of getting jobs, staying healthy and participating fully in society, educating girls and young women has a marked impact on the health of their children and accelerates their countries' transition to stable population growth' (UNESCO, 2014, p.13).

Despite United Nations and other institutions efforts to improve literacy worldwide, the most recent UNESCO report shows that 'the number of illiterate adults remains stubbornly high at 774 million, a fall of 12% since 1990 but just 1% since 2000. It is projected only to fall to 743

million by 2015' (UNESCO, 2014, p. 2). Women make up almost two-thirds of the total illiteracy numbers, and there has been no progress in reducing this share since 1990 (UNESCO, 2014, p. 4). The drive to improve adult literacy and women's literacy in particular remains a significant social goal worldwide.

Literacy rates in Nepal

Nepal has been conducting mass literacy programs focusing on reading and writing skills since 1953 (Robinson-Pant, 2000, p. 35). According to the most recent Nepal census data (Population Census, CBS 2011), the national literacy rate of those 5 years and above in the population is now 65.9%, an increase of 11.8% since 2001.

However, the gender and location data (Population Census, CBS 2011) tells a different story. The national male literacy rate is 75.1%; while the female rate is 57.4%. The national urban literacy rate is 82.2%; while the rural rate is 62.5%. The reported gender literacy rates in rural Nepal that are available are not considered reliable as they are based on very old surveys. However, due to the clear disparity between overall male and female literacy rates, mass literacy campaigns in Nepal are largely targeted at women.

Nepal is a signatory to the United Nations Millennium Development Goal (MDGs). While Nepal has made progress towards achieving **Goal 2: Universal Primary Education**, it is not on target to achieve the sub goal of an improved ratio of literate women to men aged 15-24. Similarly, Nepal is not on target to achieve **Goal 3: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment** (Millennium Development Goals Needs Assessment for Nepal 2010). Caste, ethnic and gender discrimination as well as rural/urban disparities are proving extremely difficult to overcome (United Nations Development Assistance Framework for Nepal 2013-2017, p.4).

Women's literacy: motivations and trends

Research shows that women are motivated to become literate for a range of reasons (Lind and Johnson, 1990):

- To be able to sign their own name, instead of the humiliating fingerprint
- Help own children attending school
- Get employment or a better job with higher salary and prestige
- To avoid being cheated by knowing how to check calculations or read contracts
- Strengthen self-confidence
- Make it possible to get further education.
- Acquire more knowledge about social rights and duties to be able to participate in and influence social and political life
- To keep accounts and minutes within social or political organizations
- To teach others to improve living conditions.

High drop out rates of up to 60% and low attendance are common problems with women's literacy classes (Lind and Johnson, 1990). Factors that explain low attendance and weak individual motivation include: poverty in rural areas, lack of self-confidence, disillusionment, discouraging teaching methods, and lack of easy and useful reading material (Lind and Johnson, 1990).

Teaching and learning approaches to women's literacy need to reflect local contexts and realities. With electronic forms of communication becoming more available, even in the more remote areas of Nepal, motivations to acquire literacy will change. For example, the role of functional literacy such as learning to read to access health information may become less relevant if good quality information can be gained from watching television. In this context, there may need to be greater emphasis on creating a literate environment (provision of newspapers, books, posters, radios, TVs, phones, computers and Internet access), to build literacy skills, a reading culture, and access to information (Robinson-Pant, 2010, p.143). Similarly, there is already a trend towards women wanting more formal (class-room like) education that leads to recognised qualifications, and these learner generated trends should be taken seriously by NGOs (Robinson-Pant, 2010, p.143).

It is against this background that NAFA's small scale literacy program currently in Tawal and previously in other villages in the Ri VDC, endeavours to make a modest contribution to improving women's literacy and thereby women's empowerment.

C. The current program

In Tawal the current program commenced with 50 women divided into two classes:

- 1) For women with low literacy.
- 2) For women with low education, namely up to grades 3 – 5.

Two teachers were employed to teach two classes 5 days a week from 5.00 am to 7.00 am. This enables the women to finish the classes before starting household chores and field work. Many women attend classes with their babies.

The cost of the program to NAFA in 2013 was approximately \$1,000. To date these funds have been generated from earmarked donations.

D. Evaluation method

This report is very preliminary due to data collection problems. A survey questionnaire for participants translated into Nepali was prepared in Australia (see appendix one). It was pre-arranged that a FEAT graduate, Reli Maya, would administer the survey. Reli Maya undertook to survey the participants, but was subsequently unable to carry out the task and decided to give the surveys to the literacy teachers, who then conducted the interviews without an initial briefing discussion.

The surveys were returned as NAFA members were leaving Tawal, meaning that clarification of responses, a planned focus group, and follow up interviews with the teachers was not possible. During this time, the literacy classes had been suspended for two weeks to enable women to bring in the millet harvest, meaning that NAFA members could not observe classes in progress.

Clearly the administration of the surveys did not proceed as planned. The data is therefore compromised. The participants' responses may have been influenced by the teachers, and the data on women's progress needs to be treated as preliminary, since it is not known how the teachers rated progress.

Despite these limitations, the information provides a beginning understanding of the meaning of literacy to the women and their experiences of the program. Most importantly it provides a basis for an in-depth exploration of the program in late 2014. Focus groups and teacher interviews will be conducted to obtain further information.

E. Participants

There are 50 women enrolled in the two classes: 20 in the basic class and 30 in the advanced class. Interviews were conducted with 14 women in the basic class and 21 in the advanced class (n=35) representing a solid sample of 70% of participants. There are a small number of dalit women (not from the majority Tamang ethnic group) in the classes but only one appears to have been surveyed.

F. Age and number of children

The average age of the women in the total sample is 26 years (1 missing); with an age range of between 15 and 35 years. Twelve participants (34%) did not have children. Those with children had between 1 and 5 children. At follow up it will be interesting to explore if having children affects attendance.



Lala Tamang is an enthusiastic participant

G. Level of schooling and years since attending school

Twenty-five women reported having never attended school (71%); 12 in the basic group and 13 in the advanced group. For those who had attended school, the highest level reached was grade 3. The number of years since attending school ranged from 5 to 25 years with an average of 13 years since last attending school.

H. Attendance

According to the two literacy teachers, the women's attendance rate is approximately 60%.

I. Beginning and post class literacy levels

Table 1: Beginning and post class literacy levels: Basic class

Levels	Pre-reading level	Post reading level	Pre-writing	Post-writing
Nursery	5	-	5	-
Grade 1	6	-	5	-
Grade 2	3	6	4	5
Grade 3	-	4	-	7
Grade 4	-	4	-	2

Table 2: Beginning and post class literacy levels: Advanced class

Levels	Pre-reading: no at each level	Post reading: no at each level	Pre-writing	Post-writing
Nursery	-	-	-	-
Grade 1	2	-	3	1
Grade 2	9	5	7	5
Grade 3	4	7	5	4
Grade 4	3	4	5	7
Grade 5	3	5	1	4

While it is not known how literacy levels were determined, the results show that the women in the basic class have low literacy, with over three quarters having nursery or grade one level of reading and writing. Post class intervention, the participants are said to be reading and writing at grade 2- 4 levels.

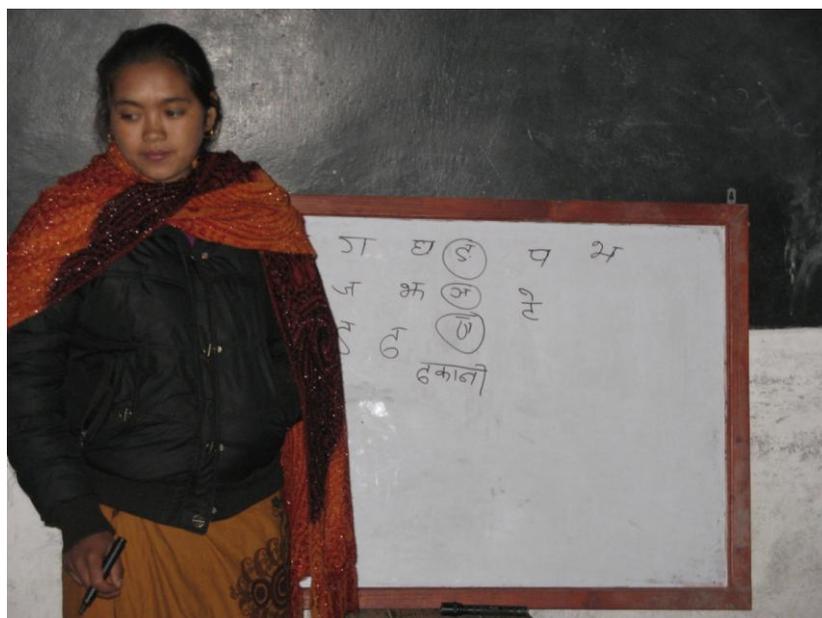
In the advanced class, as expected, the women have higher beginning levels of literacy with approximately half reading and writing at grade 1 and 2 levels and the other half reading and writing at grades 3 and 5 levels. However, the post class levels indicate that approximately two-thirds are writing at grade 4 to 5 levels. This suggests that the majority of the advanced class moved towards a higher level of reading.

J. Improvement in literacy skills

Table 3: Extent to which women are perceived to have improved literacy skills

Levels of improvement	Basic class reading	Basic class writing	Adv. class reading	Adv. class writing	Total reading	Total writing
No change	-	-	10	11	10 (28.5)	11 (31%)
One level	4	5	9	8	13 (37%)	13 (37%)
Two levels	8	6	2	2	10 (28.5%)	8 (23%)
Three levels	2	3	-	-	2 (6%)	3 (8.5%)
Totals	14	14	21	21	35	35

The data show that overall over two-thirds of the women are said to have improved their literacy skills. All women in the basic class are said to have improved while just under one third of the advanced class made no improvement. The majority of those who improved their literacy improved by one or two levels, while a small number improved by three levels.



Teaching literacy focuses on building individual skills

K. Ways women want to use their reading and writing skills

Table 4: Ways participants want to use literacy skills

Intended use for literacy skills	Frequency mentioned Basic class	Frequency mentioned Adv class	Total
1 In agriculture/business (eg shop/fishery)/economy	8	15	23
1. Sewing/knitting	6	20	26
2. Help children with reading and writing	4	-	4
3. Deal with negative aspects of our community	4	-	4
4. Help community become aware of good practices (eg health)	4	-	4
5. Build confidence to express point of view	2	-	2
6. To be a meaningful citizen in the future	2	-	2
7. Training	-	1	1

The most frequent response is simply ‘sewing’ and ‘knitting’ (26); however it is not known what is meant specifically by this response. The second most frequent response (n=23) shows that the women want to apply their literacy skills to income producing, economic opportunities. If the women also see ‘knitting and sewing’ as an income producing activity, then the combined responses suggest that greater participation in the local economy is of paramount importance and a major motivation to acquire literacy. Factors 3 – 6 can be broadly grouped as practicing good citizenship and developing the local community along positive lines. Other ways women want to use their literacy skills relate to good parenting.

L. Desire to complete SLC

All but two participants want to go on to complete grade 10 SLC. This information suggests the women’s motivation to obtain literacy involves both functional application (income producing activities) and desire for formal qualifications. SLC is considered the ‘gateway’ to further education in Nepal.

M. What women like best about the classes

Table 5: What women like best about the classes

What women like best	Frequency mentioned Basic class	Frequency mentioned Adv. class	Total
Content of the class materials <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poems & stories • Cleanliness • Community & group togetherness/helping/reconciliation • Discipline • Respect • Removing superstition • Importance of sending children to school 	20	58	78
Process of the classes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equality/no discrimination • Teacher qualities • Expressing own point of view 	4	5	9

The responses suggest that the women particularly enjoy the content of the class material. Participants named a range of topics which appear to relate to positive societal values and citizenship, as shown in Table 5 above. Less frequently mentioned was the importance of positive processes in the class, such as being treated equally, having a good teacher and being able to express viewpoints.

These responses may reflect the nature of the texts commonly used in adult literacy in Nepal. The text book '*Nayo Goreto*' (meaning a '*New Trail*') focuses on functional literacy, such as health, hygiene, agriculture and family planning (Robinson-Pant, 1990, p. 36). Limitations of these and other less used texts related to gender bias and reinforcement of women's subordinate role in Nepalese society have been noted in the adult literacy literature (Robinson-Pant, 1990).



Many women attend literacy classes with their small children

N. How could the classes be improved

Table 6: Ways the classes be improved

Suggestions for improving classes	Frequency mentioned Basic	Frequency mentioned Advanced	Total
Study harder/put in more time	-	10	10
Run classes for longer period	6	2	8
Less household work	3	3	6
Run classes for longer term (months and years)	5	-	5
Having materials	-	5	5
Hold classes on more regular basis	3	-	3
Run classes at appropriate time & place	2	-	2

The importance of studying harder or putting more time into study is the most frequently mentioned response for improving the classes. This was mentioned by women in the

advanced class. Running the classes for a longer period of time was the next most frequent response, followed by the need for less household work. Women in the advanced class mentioned the need for materials to improve the classes.

“If I have less jobs around the house, there will be more time for studying” (participant aged 22)

O. Other comments

Nine participants from the basic class focused on thanking NAFA for the opportunity to have the classes, for example:

“We (mothers) have learnt a lot from this class, so therefore (we are) thankful towards the organisation who planned this. We’d like to say thank you and best of luck for the future” (participant aged 17 years).

“We are very happy from the day this class opened. We got an opportunity to attend these classes at a later age. I hope I will get a chance to see you again and hope to learn much more” (participant aged 25 years).

Seven participants from the advanced classes focused on the need for resources such as pen, paper and bag. This brings the number to 12 participants from the advanced class who mentioned this need (seven plus five who mentioned this when commenting on ways the classes could be improved).

Discussion

This preliminary evaluation provides a beginning understanding of the value and outcomes of the women’s literacy program at Tawal. It appears that the women primarily want to improve their literacy so they can become involved in income producing activities. They also want to be more active citizens in improving their community and in helping their children to study. These preliminary findings are consistent with studies on women’s motivation to attend literacy classes.

It will be important to explore with the women what they meant by ‘sewing/knitting’ as a response to how they want to use their literacy skills. If as assumed, they are thinking of setting up a business in this area, it will be important to hear from the women how they envisage this would work in the context of Tawal where there are already several sewing businesses in operation. The women’s responses on how they want to use their literacy skills reinforces earlier surveys in Tawal which suggest that women are keen to be involved in income producing activities. The feasibility of many women becoming involved in similar businesses would need further discussion.

The women’s responses also suggest that they value the learning content on citizenship, developing community relationships and enhancing community wellbeing. This suggests that

the literacy classes are to some extent meeting the desire to use literacy to improve their local community. It is not known if the classes are meeting the women's plans to use literacy in business such as sewing, knitting etc. It will be important to explore further women's expectations from the literacy classes in relation to learning outcomes.

The estimated attendance rate of approximately 60% is above the average rate reported in literacy studies.

While keeping in mind methodological limitations, the data on learning outcomes suggest that the classes are largely successful in improving women's reading and writing skills. However, the finding that under one third of the women in the advanced class made no improvement requires further exploration.

Areas for follow up

This evaluation raises a number of questions and issues that require further exploration as follows:

1. Outcomes

- Were beginning literacy skills' levels formally assessed and if so, how?
- Are ongoing formal assessments of participants' literacy skills conducted. If so when and how?
- Was the assessment of literacy skills for the purposes of this survey based on the views of teacher, participant or both?
- Depending on answers to the above questions, is there a need for a formalised way to assess literacy levels and improvement over time?
- To what extent is the literacy program meeting desire to 1) become involved in income producing activities 2) help children with homework 3) citizenship – improving relations and community conditions 4) improving confidence?
- Why have one third of women in the advanced class made no improvement in literacy? For example are these women low attendees; have more children etc?
- Is there a need for business literacy, which would include numeracy skills?

2. Clarify expectations that literacy will lead to participation in income producing activities

- What do women mean by 'sewing/knitting' as a response to how they want to use their literacy skills?
- How do women envisage becoming more involved in income producing activities?

3. Barriers to participation

Further information is needed regarding any links between level of participation and number of children and household duties. Current satisfaction with timing, structure and length of the program and ideas for improvement needs further investigation.

4. Resources

Women in the advanced class raised the need for resources (pen, copy). When the classes commenced the HRDC was advised that the women would need to supply their own learning materials. Clarification of expectations with regard to supply of materials is needed.

In 2013 \$188 was provided to establish a small library of books for use by the women participating in the classes. It will be important to find out how these books are being used.

5. Teaching methods

What opportunities and interest exists in Tawal for the creation of a more literate environment to supplement traditional teaching methods?

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APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNAIRE: ADULT LITERACY CLASSES AT TAWAL

CONFIDENTIAL

No.	
Interviewer	

Part A. Personal information

1. Age: _____
2. Gender _____
3. No of children _____
4. Did you go to school YES NO
5. If so, which is the highest class you reached _____
6. How many years ago did you last go to school _____
7. Which literacy class are you in now: BASIC ADVANCED (circle one)

Part B Outcomes

8. Before coming to the classes at what level could you read? (circle one)

Not at all

Like a student in one of the following school classes:

nursery 1 2 3 4 5 other (name)

9. Before coming to the classes at what level could you write? (circle one)

Not at all

Like a student in one of the following school classes:

Nursery 1 2 3 4 5 other (name)

10. What is your reading level now?

Like a student in one of the following school classes (circle one)

Nursery 1 2 3 4 5 other (name)

11. What is your writing level now ?

Like a student in one of the following school classes (circle one)

Nursery 1 2 3 4 5 other (name)

12. How do you want to use your reading and writing skills?

13. Do you want to go on to complete SLC? YES NO

14. What do you like best about the classes?

15. How could the classes be improved?

16. Any other comments?
