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Author(s): K. Mundy

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Focus on Southern Africa

Toward a Critical Analysis of Literacy in Southern Africa

K. MUNDY

This article questions some of the basic assumptions about literacy that emerged in the 1980s and that have helped to generate an international consensus about the centrality of mass literacy to development in Southern Africa. Using the national literacy policies and programs of Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and Botswana as examples, it explores the way in which the international discourse on literacy efforts in the 1980s has tended to neglect emerging issues of critical importance to Africa's peoples. Ultimately, as the African Association for Literacy and Adult Education (AALAE) has made clear, what has been offered are a range of policy options and "solutions" to Africa's ills that are, at best, inadequate and, at worst, insulting. Thus AALAE angrily remarked in its critique of the World Conference on Education for All: "Basic education for all is not achievable by the year 2000, neither is it feasible nor a priority . . . it must be realized that it is not a lack of these skills that is threatening the survival and quality of the African peoples' lives."¹

The framework used for the evaluation of literacy efforts in sub-Saharan Africa has largely relied on an ideological belief in literacy as an absolute value (a basic human need and right) combined with the faith that literacy is a causal agent in economic expansion and political modernization.² Although both of these assumptions have been challenged in research on literacy, schooling, and development in Western industrialized countries,³ the literacy experiences of Southern African countries continue to be evaluated as if "literacy" itself were an unproblematic goal.

¹ African Association for Literacy and Adult Education (AALAE), *Education for All by a Few: A Critique of the Basic Education For All Initiative, Jomtien 1990* (Jomtien: AALAE, 1990), p. 25.

² See, for example, World Bank, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Development* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1989), *Education in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1988); World Conference on Education For All, *Meeting Basic Learning Needs: A New Vision for the 1990's*, Background document for the World Conference on Education For All, Jomtien, Thailand, March 5–9, 1990 (Paris: Unesco, 1989).

³ For example, E. Jennings and Alan Purves, eds., *Literate Systems and Individual Lives* (New York: State University of New York at Albany, 1991); Harvey Graff, *The Labyrinths of Literacy* (London: Falmer Press, 1987), and "The History of Literacy," *Interchange* 17 (1986): 122–34; Ian Winchester, "The Standard Picture of Literacy and Its Critics," *Comparative Education Review* 34 (1990): 21–37.

Even where a more critical perspective of the impact of literacy has been adopted, the international and academic discourse has tended to focus on and applaud national political commitment in making literacy a "success." This evaluative frame often obscures the contradictory intentions of the state in launching national literacy programs and campaigns and has tended to ignore a range of external determinants, such as shifts in the world economy and the influence of external aid and expertise on the development of national literacy policies.

This article attempts to present an alternative framework for analyzing and evaluating literacy efforts and outcomes, one that situates literacy in the context of Africa's unequal and worsening position within the world system and that relates literacy policies and their outcomes to shifting patterns of resistance, reaction, compliance, and accommodation at the national, local, and individual levels. It begins with a general history of national literacy strategies in Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and Botswana, drawing largely on the work of H. S. Bhola. The analytical framework for understanding national literacy efforts developed by Bhola (one of the most prolific and well-respected scholars of literacy in Southern Africa) is a central example of mainstream discourse on literacy and development. The article then reviews recent and more critical analyses of educational reform in Tanzania, the most studied of the three countries, not least because its apparent success in extending literacy has been correlated to its choice of an alternative (socialist) development path. These analyses however, point to contradictory patterns in the policy and outcome of the mass literacy campaign and open the way for a critical reevaluation of Bhola's political model for understanding literacy strategies. They also challenge his assertion that literacy is "inherently progressive . . . even radical in its assumptions and consequences."⁴

Finally, the article suggests an alternative framework for comparing the literacy efforts of Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and Botswana. It reviews the deteriorating position of Africa within the contemporary world system and considers how the new international division of labor, the nearly universal adoption of Structural Adjustment Programs, and the recent emergence of internal and external pressures for "democratic" political reform present challenges to any attempt to assess the value of national literacy efforts.

Literacy in Southern Africa: The Dominant Framework for Analysis

All nine countries that belong to the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) have committed themselves to the

⁴ H. S. Bhola, "Adult Literacy for Development in India: An Analysis of Policy and Performance," in *National Literacy Campaigns*, ed. R. Arnove and H. Graff (New York: Plenum, 1987), p. 267.

eradication of illiteracy in the region through the joint strategy of universalizing primary education and promoting literacy among youth and adults.⁵ In the Harare Declaration of 1982,⁶ literacy was identified as an essential component in the economic development of the region. More important, universal literacy was understood to be essential for mass participation in socioeconomic and political transformation. The achievement of adult literacy was linked to the region's ability to disengage from South Africa and follow policies of self-reliance and growth with equity.

Although the problem of illiteracy is recognized by all the states in Southern Africa, the level of commitment to its eradication varies greatly. Bhola contends that in that region there is a discernable dialectical relationship between a nation's political culture, the development paradigm it has chosen, the literacy promotion strategy that it follows, and the success of its literacy efforts.⁷ In Bhola's analysis of three countries from the SADCC region—Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Botswana—political ideologies are viewed as major determinants in the success of literacy policies. The developmental model followed by each country—whether gradualist, reformist, or revolutionary—appears to be a direct factor in the extension of adult literacy.

Botswana

Botswana gained partial independence in 1964 and held its first full-fledged parliamentary elections in 1965. The Botswana Democratic party

⁵ The Southern African Development Coordination Conference was established in 1980. Member states are Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and, more recently, Namibia. For a recent update on the work of SADCC, see Ruth Ansah Ayisi, "Waiting for the Giant," *Africa Report* (March/April 1992), pp. 65–67.

⁶ The Harare Declaration is cited in H. S. Bhola, *Campaigning for Literacy: Eight National Experiences of the Twentieth Century, with a Memorandum to Decision Makers* (Paris: Unesco, 1984).

⁷ Bhola's political model for understanding national literacy activities was first presented in H. S. Bhola, *Campaigning For Literacy* (Paris: Unesco, 1984). See also H. S. Bhola, with Piet Dijkstra and Josef Muller, *The Promise of Literacy: Campaigns, Programs and Projects, Report of the International Seminar on Campaigning for Literacy*, Udaipur, India, January 4–11, 1982 (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1982), p. 2; as well as the following articles by H. S. Bhola: "Adult Literacy Policies and Performance in Malawi" (paper presented to the workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1985), "Literacy in Revolution and Reform: Experiences in the SADCC Region of Southern Africa, Revised" (revision of paper presented at the International Conference on the Future of Literacy in a Changing World: Synthesis from Industrialized and Developing Nations, University of Philadelphia, Graduate School of Education, Literacy Research Center, Pennsylvania, May 9–12, 1985), "Literacy for Development: An African Perspective: Notes from a Sabbatical" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the African Studies Association, Madison, Wisconsin, 1986), "Literacy for Revitalization in the SADCC Countries of Southern Africa" (paper presented at the Modern Language Association Right to Literacy Conference, Columbus, Ohio, September 16–18, 1988), "The Uses and Consequences of Literacy in the Daily Lives of Ordinary People: From an Evaluation of Adult Literacy Association of Zimbabwe (ALoz)" (paper presented at a seminar sponsored by the Federal Interagency Panel for Research and Development on Adulthood, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., April 13, 1989), "Adult Literacy for Development: The Logic and Structure of Economic Motivations" (paper presented at a seminar on Adult Literacy and Development, New Delhi, November 1990), and "Adult Literacy for Development in Zimbabwe: The Third Phase of the Revolution Examined," in *Culture and Development in Africa*, ed. Stephen H. Arnold and Andrew Nitecki (New York: Africa World Press, 1990), pp. 93–106.

(BDP) won the initial election and continued to rule the country and shape its political ideology into the 1980s. The BDP was the least radical of three political parties that struggled for independence: it advocated gradual reforms, economic development, and a liberal democratic form of government.⁸

At the time of independence, Botswana's economy was composed of rural subsistence agriculture, some commercial cattle ranching, and the wages of laborers who migrated to work in the South African mines. The colonial government had paid little attention to the development of rural agriculture, and there was virtually no industrial development.⁹ There have been a number of economic windfalls within Botswana in recent years, mainly in the discovery of diamonds and other mineral resources. The development of these resources is the reason for Botswana's relatively large gross national product (GNP).

During its first decade of independence, Botswana, like Malawi, followed the dominant development paradigm of the time. It emphasized manpower development and investment in higher productivity. Its first national development plan focused on creating a rationally planned and guided economy without stifling private initiative.¹⁰ This development strategy shifted in subsequent national plans, especially after the discovery of diamonds. The quest for rapid economic growth was then modified by a concern for social justice, economic independence, and sustained development.¹¹

The government of Botswana envisioned collecting the resources for the development of rural agriculture and the extension of health services and education from the mining sector. These expectations were not entirely met. Though the mining industry has increased the GNP and governmental revenue, it has also promoted a dependent relationship with South Africa due to an increased reliance on expatriate (largely South African) technology and manpower. There is some indication that the GNP is not evenly distributed. In 1985, 83 percent of the population was still practicing subsistence agriculture.¹²

Parallel to the growing concern for social justice in the national development plans came a shift in the government's focus from manpower training to human resource development. The report of the National Commission on Education in 1977 recommended that the government

⁸ Alec Campbell and Thomas Tlou, *History of Botswana* (Botswana: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 229–37.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

¹⁰ H. S. Bhola, "Report Card on a National Literacy Program: The Case of Botswana" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Comparative and International Education Society, Stanford University, Stanford, Calif., April, 1985), p. 4.

¹¹ Campbell and Tlou, p. 238.

¹² Bhola, "Report Card," p. 6.

turn its concern from secondary and higher education to the universalization of primary education and the establishment of nonformal education for adults.¹³ Free, compulsory primary education was established at this time, leading to a 30 percent increase in the gross primary enrollment ratio between 1970 and 1983. But primary education has fallen short of the aim of providing equal educational opportunity in two respects: there remain some remote areas in which children do not have access to primary education, and the quality of primary education is inconsistent.¹⁴

Until the late 1970s, literacy activity within Botswana was limited to a few programs sponsored by the Department of Community Development and the Botswana Christian Council. Unesco recommended a functional literacy program to eradicate illiteracy within the country, but this was refused as too ambitious.¹⁵ In 1978, the government established a Department of Non-Formal Education within the Ministry of Education. The importance of literacy was linked to the need to use print media for rural education and extension work in a country covering such a large area and with such low population density. Two pilot projects in adult literacy were sponsored by the government in 1977–78, and a governmental commitment to the eradication of illiteracy was established.

The government initiated the Botswana National Literacy Program (BNLP) in 1980, beginning with 1 experimental year during which material and infrastructures were built and 15,000 learners covered. The program aimed to cover 50,000 learners in each of 4 subsequent years in order to achieve near universal literacy by 1986. It was built on a curriculum that covered the three R's and some functional skills. Voluntary literacy teachers were recruited and overseen by district adult education officers who had a great deal of training.

The program did not reach its goal, and the national development plan extended the BNLP for the period 1985–91. Bhola identifies a lack of articulated political support for the program as one of its chief problems. Perhaps because the government was able to rely heavily on external financing for the program, reducing its contribution to less than 30 percent of total costs, it was not forced to use its powers of political mobilization to gain support for the program. The government was also unable to integrate the literacy program with other extension work and with formal education. Bhola suggests that this is symptomatic of the government's hesitancy to extend its development strategies beyond the planning

¹³ H. S. Bhola, "Adult Literacy Policies and Performance in the SADCC Region" (paper presented to the eleventh annual Third World Conference, Chicago, Illinois, April 4–6, 1985), p. 14.

¹⁴ H. S. Bhola, "Reflections on the Botswana Literacy Programme," in *One Billion Illiterates, One Billion Reasons for Action*, ed. Paul Fordham (Bonn: Deutsche Stiftung für Internationale Entwicklung and International Council For Adult Education, 1983), p. 82.

¹⁵ Bhola, "Report Card," p. 10.

of programs to a broader integration of programs geared for the rural majority.¹⁶

The Botswana government has viewed literacy chiefly as a medium for the achievement of other rural development plans.¹⁷ Mass participation in constructing these plans has not been its concern; literacy has been viewed as a set of technical skills.

Tanzania

Tanzania has the distinction of being the first of the SADCC countries to achieve independence and of having the most radical or revolutionary government. Under the leadership of Julius Nyerere, the country declared that its political structure would be that of a "one-party state" and that Tanzania would follow a socialist path, based on self-reliance at all levels and the creation of a nondependent political economy. Through these measures, Nyerere envisioned a fundamental transformation of the colonial economy of rural subsistence and white commercial agriculture.

The Arusha Declaration of 1967 stressed the imperative of rural development based not simply on planning but on the full understanding and participation of the Tanzanian population in national development. Unlike the early policies in Malawi, Botswana, and Zambia, popular education was a fundamental part of Tanzania's development strategy from independence onwards. The basic values expounded in the Arusha Declaration, subsumed under the concept "ujamaa," were communal work and ownership of land, equitable distribution of basic necessities, and respect for the rights of each member of the society. Villages were to be reorganized and established as the center of a cooperative agricultural economy. Although this reorganization of the traditional agrarian economy turned out to be ineffective in terms of economic productivity, the government was able to mobilize the people in support of the extension of social welfare measures such as health and education.¹⁸

Nyerere identified the importance of adult education within Tanzania in his introduction to the First Five-Year Development Plan (1964–69): "First we must educate adults. Our children will not have an impact on our economic development for five, ten or even twenty years. The attitudes of the adults . . . on the other hand, have an impact now. The people must understand the plans for development of this country; they must be able

¹⁶ H. S. Bhola, "Evaluations of the Botswana National Literacy Program: The Politics of Renovation and Control" (paper presented at the annual conference of the Comparative and International Education Society, Atlanta, Georgia, March 1988). See also Bhola, "Report Card."

¹⁷ Bhola, "Report Card," p. 11.

¹⁸ See F. B. Liser and D. E. White, "African Development and the Elusiveness of Basic Human Need: Physical Quality of Life Index and a Case-Study of Tanzania," in *Africa Projected*, ed. Timothy Shaw, Olajide Aluko (London: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 187–209.

to participate in changes which are necessary. Only if they are willing and able to do this will this plan succeed.”¹⁹

Perhaps because of the early recognition of the immediacy of adult education, Tanzania did not attempt to make the great strides in extending primary education that many other SADCC countries attempted after achieving independence. In 1960, Tanzania's gross primary enrollment ratio (at 24 percent) was the lowest of the three countries under consideration. It was still the lowest in nearly 10 years after Independence, at 34 percent.²⁰ Not until the Second Five-Year Development Plan (1969–74) was the enrollment of all school-aged children (by 1989) targeted.²¹ In 1974, this target was moved forward to 1977 and very nearly achieved.

During the first decade of independence, literacy had not yet assumed the central focus that it would be given in the 1970s; it was subsumed within the concept of adult education. In 1961 a Ministry of Community Development and National Culture was formed and charged with the responsibility of mobilizing people for social and economic progress. Tanzania was one of a dozen or so countries to participate in the Unesco/United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Experimental World Literacy Project. Teams of literacy specialists were trained and a great range of teaching materials produced and tested.²²

Nyerere proclaimed that 1971 would be Adult Education Year. In that year, the Tanzanian government committed itself to a 4-year campaign for the eradication of illiteracy, involving the mobilization of thousands of students, teachers, and community workers as literacy teachers and the establishment of adult education committees in every village. Quite unlike the literacy efforts in the other two countries being considered, Tanzania's campaign made full use of the party's structures for mass mobilization.²³ It also appears to have been at least partially successful in making its literacy activities mesh with its overall strategy of participatory development. Thus, Zakaya J. Mpogolo, from the Ministry of Education, affirmed what other observers had reported: “The campaign has had more success achieving the political and social aims than the economic ones. As a result of the campaign the majority of the people are more

¹⁹ Quoted in Bhola, *Campaigning for Literacy* (n. 7 above), p. 138.

²⁰ World Bank, *Education in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1970), p. 131.

²¹ H. J. Mosha, “A Reassessment of Indicators of Primary Education Quality in Developing Countries: The Emerging Evidence from Tanzania,” *International Review of Education* 34 (1988): 17–45.

²² H. S. Bhola, “The Tanzanian Mass Literacy Campaign,” in his *Campaigning for Literacy* (n. 6 above), p. 143.

²³ Bhola, “The Tanzanian Mass Literacy Campaign,” p. 144.

conscious of the policy of socialism and self-reliance and their knowledge of Swahili has increased."²⁴

Tanzania was able to reduce the national rate of illiteracy from 71.9 percent in 1967 to 15 percent by 1985. There was also an increase in popular political participation and knowledge of the political philosophy guiding the government.²⁵ An unexpected effect of the literacy campaign was the growth of parental support for formal schooling.²⁶

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe had the largest settler population, was most closely economically linked to South Africa, and developed the greatest manufacturing capacity of the three countries under consideration. It was also characterized by the greatest disestablishment of the black majority, which lost its use of large tracts of land and was resettled on inferior areas known as "tribal trust lands" during the colonial period.

Zimbabwe was the next-to-last of the SADCC members to attain independence and the only one to do so after prolonged armed struggle. In a negotiated settlement, known as the Lancaster House Agreement, the new country accepted a parliamentary form of government and a policy of land redistribution, that would respect private (largely white) land ownership. In spite of these limits, the government of Zimbabwe under the leadership of Robert Mugabe made clear that it intended to move toward a single-party state structure and pursue a radical development strategy, broadly socialist in its objectives.

Zimbabwe is the least "underdeveloped" of the former British colonies in the region, mainly because of the infrastructures built for Rhodesia's large white settler population and its integration with South African commerce and industry. Its economy is the most diversified of all the SADCC countries, and its transport and communications networks are the most well developed. It also continues to be heavily tied into the South African economy. All of these factors have predisposed Zimbabwe towards a capitalist path of development, despite government rhetoric to the contrary. Almost all of its policies have reflected a desire to satisfy the needs of the rural majority (which fought the war of liberation) without sacrificing its economic advantage within the world economy.²⁷

²⁴ Quoted in R. H. Dave et al., *Learning Strategies for Post-literacy and Continuing Education in Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania and the United Kingdom* (Hamburg: Unesco Institute for Education, 1985), p. 211.

²⁵ See Y. Kassam, "Formal, Non-formal and Informal Modes of Learning: A Glimpse of the Tanzanian Experience," *International Review of Education* 28 (1982): 263–67.

²⁶ Bhola, "The Tanzanian Mass Literacy Campaign," p. 155.

²⁷ Ibbo Mandaza, "Introduction: The Political Economy of Transition," *Zimbabwe: The Political Economy of Transition, 1980–1986*, ed. Ibbo Mandaza (Dakar: Conference of Directors of Economic

Preindependence Zimbabwean (Rhodesian) blacks received more education than blacks in any of the other five countries considered. At independence, 70 percent had attended school, though only 13 percent finished primary education and though the government's expenditure on black education was about half that spent on the much smaller white minority.²⁸ Given the limitations placed by Lancaster House on other forms of structural reallocation, it is not surprising that the extension of educational opportunity became a central part of the Zimbabwe African National Union-Popular Front (ZANU-Pf) government's promises to the black majority. Elementary education was declared free at independence, and universal primary education was achieved by 1982. The educational vote has consistently taken up more than one-quarter of the government's total budget. Great strides have been made toward the expansion of secondary and higher education.

So great has been the focus on the formal educational sector that the government has been accused of neglecting nonformal education, particularly for the rapidly multiplying body of unemployed school-leavers. The Zimbabwean economy, though perhaps the most buoyant of all three countries, has still been following the regional trend of increasing inflation and declining growth. In its bid for economic stability, the government appears to be neglecting the black rural sector. The provision of formal education seems to have been provided by the Zimbabwean government to satisfy initial postindependence demands, acting as quick fix for the rural majority, whose more radical economic aspirations could not be met.

In 1983, Mugabe announced a national literacy campaign, to be led by the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs. In the media and speeches at the beginning of the campaign, government leaders assigned to literacy an important role in the maintenance of the country's postindependence revolutionary momentum for socialist transformation.²⁹ Materials for the campaign were developed, literacy experts trained, and an organizational structure beginning at the village level established, all with the help of experts from Tanzania and Nicaragua. The campaign appeared to have all the benefits of financial support, careful government planning, and political support for popular mobilization.

and Social Development Research Institutes in Africa, 1986), pp. 1–20. See also C. Sylvester, *Zimbabwe: The Terrain of Contradictory Development* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1991).

²⁸ See Mandaza ed., p. 325.

²⁹ H. S. Bhola, "Adult Literacy for Development in Zimbabwe: The Third Phase of the Revolution Examined" (n. 7 above), pp. 99–101.

But the results of the campaign were disappointing. In September 1985, only 378,000 learners—one-fifth of the total 2.5 million learners eligible—had been mobilized in the literacy campaign.³⁰ Bhola suggests that the campaign appeared to be suffering from a lack of continued support at the national level. Mugabe has never spoken about literacy or its importance since his launching of the campaign, and no attempt has been made to use well-developed party structures to motivate participation. The 1986 Five-Year Development Plan paid little attention to literacy. The orientation of the national educational system retreated to manpower development for the formal economic sector.³¹

A Comparative Analysis Using Bhola's Model

In reviewing Bhola's analysis of the literacy activities of Botswana, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe, it is clear that not only has Tanzania made the greatest effort toward the achievement of universal adult literacy, its efforts have also met with the greatest quantitative success. In spite of a relatively low GNP and declining growth rate, an 85 percent rate of literacy was achieved through the fullest mobilization of society. Bhola argues that success was the result of literacy policies being made an integral part of the country's independence and given top priority in a development strategy that aimed at fundamental structural change.

Bhola notes that Botswana, currently the country with the highest GNP per capita of the three countries considered, has devoted very little of its budget to literacy. Its development policy has always remained unobtrusively liberal, as has its political system, and its choice of literacy strategy reflects the government's reformist approach. The outcomes of this strategy, Bhola concludes, are necessarily moderate and unacceptably slow.

Zimbabwe, under Mugabe's leadership, has professed a socialist path of development, but, as Bhola points out, has actually followed a mixed development strategy. Thus, although the country's expansion of formal educational opportunities has been described as an "educational miracle," the results in this regard arise more from gradual reforms of old structures than from more radical structural transformations. There are a growing number of school-leavers without employment, and the government has failed to reallocate land and resources to the rural poor. In its literacy work, Zimbabwe, with the third highest rate of illiteracy in the SADCC region, has shown no real political will to mobilize the population. Bhola suggests that this reflects a low level of governmental commitment to a

³⁰ I. Grainger, *Literacy Participation in Zimbabwe* (Harare: University of Zimbabwe, 1986), p. 67, "The Literacy Campaign in Zimbabwe," *Journal of Social Development in Africa* 2 (1987): 49–58.

³¹ Bhola, "Adult Literacy for Development in Zimbabwe" (n. 7 above), p. 17. See also B. Raftopoulos, "Human Resources Development and the Problems of Labour Utilization," in Mandaza, ed.

TABLE 1
A POLITICAL MODEL BASED ON BHOLA FOR ASSESSING NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES AND
STRATEGIES FOR ERADICATING ILLITERACY

Attitude toward Socio-economic Change	Developmental Model	Approach to Literacy	Countries Positioned along Spectrum
Gradualist	Motivational: individual is seen as chief agent of change and growth within society	Project	Malawi Zambia
Reformist	Planned development: some state intervention is necessary to ensure growth with efficiency and a degree of social harmony	Program	Botswana Zimbabwe
Revolutionary	Structural change: political, social and economic structures must be radically altered in order to provide equal opportunity for all and equitable distribution of societal wealth	Campaign	Tanzania China Cuba

SOURCE.—This table is a modified and expanded version of H. S. Bhola's own graphic representation of his model. For Bhola's original model, see "Adult Literacy for Development in Zimbabwe: The Third Phase of the Revolution Examined," in *Culture and Development in Africa*, ed. Stephen H. Arnold and Andre Nitecki (New York: Africa World Press, 1990), p. 100.

development strategy that focuses on popular participation and rural development.

To illustrate Bhola's analysis of the literacy efforts and achievements of Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and Zambia, I have developed table 1. Bhola's work comparing literacy efforts and national development strategies in a variety of countries has led him to elaborate three distinct models; projects, program, and campaign. The central factor in Bhola's analysis of literacy strategies and their effectiveness is national political commitment.

The notion of "national political will or commitment" has become an integral part of the prescriptive package that makes up the discourse on international development.³² Even those writing on the Left tend to conclude that "recognition must be maintained that the scale and effect of any literacy effort depends on the level of political commitment at

³² For a discussion of the negative role which the notion of "political will" or "political commitment" has played in international development discourse, see E. J. Clay and B. B. Schaffer, "Towards Responsibility: Public Policy in Concept and Practice," in their book *Room for Manoeuvre: An Exploration of Public Policy in Agriculture and Rural Development* (London: Heineman, 1984), pp. 142–90.

national level.”³³ Following S. Amin, however, I contend that the importance assigned to national political will systematically underestimates significant trends in the capitalist world economy.³⁴

A Critical Reassessment: The Tanzanian Case

The past 2 decades have witnessed the growth of a body of literature that seeks to understand educational change in the Third World using a political economy approach,³⁵ world systems theory,³⁶ and theories of neocolonialism and underdevelopment.³⁷ More recently, “critical theory” has been adapted to the study of education and development.³⁸ It has expanded the early critical discourse with insights into the use of education as a form of state legitimation³⁹ and by insisting local struggles and resistance have played and can play a role in shaping educational and social change.⁴⁰

Only recently have these critical approaches been brought to bear specifically on the issues of literacy and on the role of literacy in Southern Africa. While the emerging literature offers nothing similar in scope and synthesis to Bhola’s comparative model, a flood of critical single-country studies⁴¹ and the recent work by M. Carnoy and J. Samoff on education in socialist transition states have substantially extended our understanding of literacy in Southern Africa.⁴²

³³ L. Limage, “Prospects for Adult Literacy in a Period of Economic Austerity,” *Comparative Education* 24 (1988): 72.

³⁴ S. Amin, *Delinking: Towards a Polycentric World* (London: Zed Press, 1990), p. ix.

³⁵ See R. Youngman, “The Political Economy of Literacy in the Third World,” *Convergence* 23 (1990): 5–12.

³⁶ R. Arno, “Comparative Education and World Systems Analysis,” *Comparative Education Review* 24 (1980): 48–62.

³⁷ P. Altbach, “Servitude of the Mind? Education, Dependency and Neo-colonialism,” *Teachers College Record* 79 (1977): 187–203.

³⁸ “Critical theory” draws from the work of the Frankfurt School of social philosophers. It has two main streams: on the one hand, analysis of the crisis of legitimation in modern capitalism (as put forward in the words of Jürgen Habermas), and, on the other, a consideration of the interplay of ideology, culture and individual consciousness that highlights resistance and struggle.

³⁹ H. Weiler, “The Political Economy of Education and Development,” *Prospects* 14 (1984): 467–77; M. Ginsburg et al., “National and World-System Explanations of Educational Reform,” *Comparative Education Review* 34 (1990): 474–99.

⁴⁰ See, e.g., H. A. Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education: A Pedagogy for the Opposition* (New York: Bergin & Garvey, 1983); M. Carnoy, “Education for Alternative Development,” *Comparative Education Review* 26, no. 2 (June 1982): 160–77; and P. Parjuli, “Politics of Knowledge, Models of Development and Literacy,” *Prospects* 20 (1990): 289–300.

⁴¹ R. Carr-Hill, A. Kweka, M. Rusimbi, R. Chagelele, *The Functioning and Effects of the Tanzanian Literacy Program*, Research Report no. 93 (Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning, 1991); K. P. Dzimbo, “The Transition State and the Dialectics of Educational Transformation in the Third World: The Case of Zimbabwe,” *International Studies in the Sociology of Education* 1 (1991): 43–58; S. Gaborone, J. Mutanyatta, and F. Youngman, “The Botswana National Literacy Programme: Progress and Prospects,” *Prospects* 8 (1988): 351–62.

⁴² M. Carnoy, and J. Samoff, *Education and Social Transition in the Third World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990).

Critical studies focusing on the remarkable success of the Tanzanian literacy strategy, especially as associated with the country's socialist development path, challenge Bhola's national political model (and his enthusiasm for national political commitment) by pointing to the complex set of national and international factors that shape educational reform. They also question the long-term outcomes of mass literacy strategies, providing detailed research into the uneven and contradictory outcomes of Tanzania's campaign. In the critical reassessment, education remains an unfulfilled promise: there has been "no revolution by education."⁴³

There are three main issues raised in critical reassessments of the Tanzanian experience. The first is the salience of international/external factors in shaping the timing and focus of educational reforms.⁴⁴ The second is the contradictory aims of state policy and action. Tensions between Tanzania's socialist goals and the emergence of a state bureaucratic elite, as well as between centralized planning and the goal of mass participation, are apparent from the earliest days of the literacy effort.⁴⁵ The third is the play of education in the consolidation of local elites and the emergence of regional disparities.⁴⁶ These trends are supported by disarming evidence from a recent International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) study, showing that efforts to increase literacy levels in Tanzania have produced extremely uneven consequences for learners and their communities.⁴⁷

International Factors

Tanzania's rejection of Western-style modernization and its choice of a socialist development path occurred in a period when the country's leadership had come into conflict with Western foreign policy. It faced substantially reduced levels of foreign aid and was disillusioned with the World Bank-influenced policy of manpower planning and higher level human resources development that it had adopted at independence. The Arusha Declaration was a first attempt to analyze the causes of the country's slow development and remedy them: it eschewed dependency and proposed "self-reliance" in economic, cultural, and political spheres.

⁴³ J. Samoff, "The Durability of Modernization" (paper presented at the International Conference on Development and Underdevelopment in Africa, Unesco, Paris, November 25–27, 1987), p. 1.

⁴⁴ See J. Unsicker, "Tanzania's Literacy Campaigns in Historical-Structural Perspective," in Arnove and Graff, eds. (n. 4 above), pp. 219–373; and R. Stites and L. Semali, "Adult Literacy for Social Equality or Economic Growth? Changing Agendas for Mass Literacy in China and Tanzania," *Comparative Education Review* 35 (1991): 44–75.

⁴⁵ J. Samoff, "Educational Reform in Tanzania: Schools, Skills, and Social Transformation," in *Education: From Poverty to Liberty*, ed. B. Nasson and J. Samuels (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1990), pp. 132–40.

⁴⁶ See J. Samoff, "School Expansion in Tanzania: Private Initiatives and Public Policy," *Comparative Education Review* 31 (1987): 333–60, and "The Politics of Privatization in Tanzania," *International Journal of Educational Development* 10 (1990): 1–15.

⁴⁷ Carr-Hill et al., p. 1.

Ironically, although the literacy campaign was a central component of Tanzania's strategy of self-reliance, external actors played a key role in its inception. The availability and interest of Swedish aid and Scandinavian expertise greatly affected the initiation of the campaign.⁴⁸ The momentum of the Tanzanian component of the Unesco Experimental World Literacy Program also had an impact—leading to the choice of largely work-oriented materials for the campaign.⁴⁹

During the 1970s and 1980s, Tanzania's continued dependence on the world market for both energy supplies and technology in a period of declining terms of trade and rising oil prices led the country to become increasingly integrated into and dependent on the world system. A series of droughts and the financial drain of the war with Uganda combined with a decline in agricultural production (both of export and domestic food crops) to produce a near crisis by the end of the 1970s. As Tanzania's economic decline intensified, the literacy campaign was increasingly valuable in legitimating the Tanzanian government externally. After the international climate of opinion about the role of education and development shifted to a focus on meeting basic needs in the mid-1970s, Tanzania's literacy campaign helped to create and sustain very high levels of foreign aid.⁵⁰ This aid in turn generated a profoundly undemocratic power base for a group within the government, contributing to a level of dependency that (in the midst of the world economic crisis of the mid-1980s) allowed foreign donors to pressure Tanzania into a development policy centered around free enterprise and austerity.⁵¹

National Level Contradictions

The literacy campaign in Tanzania was also closely linked to a period characterized by what J. Unsicker has called "frontal attack socialism." Abandoning voluntary measures, the government proposed using a number of strategies for mobilizing the country's limited resources to meet the basic needs of the rural majority. These measures included state intervention in agricultural production (via marketing boards and parastatals), forced villagization (through which 91 percent of the rural population was relocated into cooperative villages intended to facilitate the extension

⁴⁸ Swedish aid provided flexible support for the literacy campaign and from 1970 became the sole source of the Department of Adult Education's development fund. See Unsicker, p. 239.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 232–35. See, for comparison, J. O. Agrell, I. Fagerlind, and I. Gustafsson, *Education and Training in Botswana: The Impact of Swedish Assistance* (Stockholm: Swedish International Development Agency, 1982).

⁵⁰ By 1985, Tanzania was the third largest recipient in Sub-Saharan Africa of bilateral aid from Western countries, with close to 15 percent of its GNP supported by outside financing. See G. Urch, "The Role of Education in Restructuring Socialism: The Tanzanian Case," *Educational Studies* 15 (1989): 219. Samoff notes that foreign sources have provided the major share of development funding for Tanzanian education since independence. See Samoff, "School Expansion in Tanzania," p. 137.

⁵¹ Unsicker, p. 243.

of social services to the rural majority),⁵² and the launching of a national literacy campaign that focused overwhelmingly on functional literacy—that is, literacy intended to enhance agricultural productivity. In each of these measures, the tension between centralized planning and the goal of mass participation was apparent. The outcome was the consolidation of the power of a new bureaucracy and the centralization of decision making within local arms of the governing party, Tanzanian African National Union (TANU)—not, Unsicker argues, the empowerment of the rural majority.⁵³

The national literacy campaign in particular was a top-down measure, which, as later evaluators would note, never assessed or addressed the local needs of the learners. It focused entirely on enhancing productivity and integrating learners into the national political system.⁵⁴ Although some evaluations have found that new literates were empowered,⁵⁵ others cite incidents of coercion and point out that the literacy campaign both in its method of implementation and its content showed little interest in conscientization or the creation of communal participation.⁵⁶

Any impact that the extension of literacy might have had on societal transformation was limited by the government's emphasis on the formal educational system. Many studies of formal schooling have suggested that despite Tanzania's socialist development path, learning continues to be viewed instrumentally by the majority of Tanzanians as preparation for success in a hierarchical and competitive market system. Schooling, although populist in orientation (most resources have focused on primary education), has increasingly played a key role in social stratification both within and between regions.⁵⁷ J. Samoff concludes, "nonformal education, by providing a second and distinctly less prestigious and less desirable track, has tended to reinforce rather than reduce societal inequalities."⁵⁸

⁵² Urch, p. 216.

⁵³ Unsicker, p. 228.

⁵⁴ See Carr-Hill et al. (n. 41 above), pp. 20–22. Only one of the primers used had a "political" content. It focused on TANU, the construction of a centralized political system, and the integration of the masses into the new political culture.

⁵⁵ Unsicker (n. 44 above), p. 241, notes some of these positive evaluations. See also Kassam (n. 25 above).

⁵⁶ Especially interesting is M. Von Freyhold's informal evaluation, described in Unsicker, p. 241.

⁵⁷ According to Samoff, the populist orientation of education has made the role of school success even more important in determining life chances in Tanzania. The limited expansion of postprimary education meant that a decreasing number of those who entered school could proceed to the next level throughout the seventies and eighties (the transition to secondary school was about 2 percent in 1982). Increasing popular demand and the development of a growing number of private secondary level schools in more prosperous areas has led to marked regional differentiation in schooling. See Samoff, "Educational Reform in Tanzania" (n. 43 above), "School Expansion in Tanzania" (n. 44 above), and "The Politics of Privatization" (n. 44 above); and H. Mosha, "Twenty Years After Education for Self Reliance: A Critical Review," *International Journal of Educational Development* 10 (1988): 59–67.

⁵⁸ J. Samoff, "Socialist Education?" *Comparative Education Review* 35 (1991): 1–22, quote on 20.

Local Impact

Tanzania has seen a steady decline in literacy work since the 1980s. Worsening economic conditions have affected both national resources for literacy programs and the ability of individuals to spend time learning. The impact of the structural adjustment program in Tanzania has shifted attention away from the political to the economic, not surprisingly diminishing national commitment to achieving social equity through education.⁵⁹ Recent studies have found that the majority of literacy classes are no longer functioning effectively and suggest that there has been considerable inflation of literacy figures by local literacy workers for at least a decade.

It is in this context that the IIEP carried out a comparative study of the impact of literacy in four Tanzanian villages. The study remarkably concludes that literacy is achieved and maintained in those communities that are economically prosperous,⁶⁰ and found that people from the two most economically impoverished villages in which research was conducted (Bugurini and Ugwachanya) could repeat government rhetoric about the importance of literacy, but "when discussions began about development, their aspirations, and the problems they faced, it was discovered that their literacy skills were not put into practice. We came to realize that the benefits of literacy had been drummed into their heads by the literacy campaigners . . . the majority of people in Bugurini . . . felt that literacy skills in general could do nothing to change their present circumstances."⁶¹

In Ugwachanya, interviews with literate adults suggested that literacy was not related to development, while rich peasants appeared to view literacy as a direct cause of their prosperity.⁶² Even in those communities experiencing economic growth, literacy use was still highly stratified according to the economic position and educational levels of villagers—"The poor knew a lot of things about agriculture and commerce but they had no material resources to effect changes in their social development."⁶³ In poorer communities, even the community leaders who were past graduates of early literacy classes were not enthusiastic about the continuation of literacy programs.⁶⁴ The IIEP findings also support the conclusion of R. Stites and L. Semali's study of Tanzanian and Chinese literacy efforts: "Participating in the economic reward system seems important to retaining literacy skills."⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Stites and Semali, p. 71 (n. 44 above).

⁶⁰ Carr-Hill et al., p. 327.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 77.

⁶² Ibid., p. 129.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 110.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 149.

⁶⁵ Stites and Semali, p. 71.

When positive, the perceptions of literacy and of “development” expressed in the majority of the IIEP interviews were functional—relating both concepts closely to agricultural productivity or the accumulation of wealth, rather than to social transformation or any type of social equality. The higher the level of a respondent’s education, the more instrumental her or his view of literacy. And although 57 percent of the literacy learners in the four villages were women, there was almost no mention in any of the interviews of gender inequality as an issue blocking development, nor did any of the literacy programs deal with everyday problems related to the family, such as alcoholism, poverty, and youth unemployment.

If the findings of the IIEP study are correct, then the economic crisis seems to only heighten contradictions that are inherent to the goal of making national social transformations through education. Literacy—at least as Tanzanians have come to understand and utilize it—is only functional where market-oriented economic growth occurs. Even then, it is more likely found and used by those whose participation in the economic reward system is greatest. Tanzania is thus caught in a bind. Integration into the international world market thwarts the government’s attempts to develop an alternative socioeconomic context within which literacy might be truly empowering. At the same time it restricts Tanzania’s ability to provide market rewards for literacy.

Literacy Efforts in Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Botswana Reconsidered

The findings from the Tanzanian case highlight several problems in Bhola’s comparative analysis of literacy efforts in Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Botswana:

1. Bhola’s model underestimates the importance of international factors in both shaping and limiting national efforts at literacy. International aid played a substantial role in the development and continuation of the Tanzanian literacy campaign, while the increased vulnerability of Tanzania to the world market economy conditioned and ultimately undermined its ability to move away from an educational system linked to the rewards of a hierarchical market economy. The literacy campaign began in the spirit of self-reliance but ended as a conduit for securing external legitimation.

2. Related to this is an overestimation of the ability of the state to act in the best interests of its own citizens. Even though Tanzania risked international disapprobation for its commitment to achieving social equity through structural reform, governmental efforts were shaped by the desire to consolidate power and the need to reproduce the model of accumulation and social relations on which its own existence rests.

3. Finally, the Tanzanian example prompts the question, Why view literacy as a priority, as a necessary or necessarily empowering skill, partic-

ularly during a period of economic crisis? Although literacy is utilized where there is an ongoing level of economic development, there is little evidence of a causal relationship between literacy and economic growth. In the context of a market economy, it reinforces rather than eliminates social inequalities.

Awareness of these problems should allow us to move our comparison of the Zimbabwean, Tanzanian, and Botswanan literacy efforts to a more critical level. It suggests that we look first at the way in which these countries have been inserted into the world economic system, second at national level choices and responses to this insertion, and finally to the probable and potential meanings of literacy in the lives of African people.

Although the emergence of a capitalist world system has been traced back as far as the sixteenth century,⁶⁶ the final integration of African countries into this system has only taken place in the last half-century. Countries like Tanzania, Botswana, and Zimbabwe all became independent after years of colonial "development" that ensured both the establishment of a market economy, internally, and patterns of production that focus on primary commodity export.

In differing degrees, all three countries have remained trapped by an essential dependency on the world market, both for trade and for technology. This has played into the timing, choice, and effectiveness of their literacy strategies. Tanzania, for example, was the country least integrated into the accumulation patterns of the world system—but it has become perhaps the most integrated, relying extensively on international aid.⁶⁷ Thus, although Tanzania chose an alternative development path and a campaign strategy appropriate for a situation of extreme underdevelopment (in terms of industrialization and levels of societal wealth), this strategy was initially conditioned by the world system (through financial and technical support) and ultimately constrained by it.

Botswana offers a different sort of example: a country that from independence chose a capitalist development path. That this path has been relatively unproblematic has been ensured both by the constitutional democratic form of the Botswanan state (whose transition to independence was gradual and nonviolent) and by the discovery of diamonds and development of cattle farming, which allowed for a relatively advantageous insertion into the world economy.

Ironically, prosperity and stability have meant that the Botswanan state has not needed to develop a radical development strategy or consoli-

⁶⁶ I. Wallerstein, "The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System," in *Toward a Just World Order*, ed. R. Falk et al. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1982).

⁶⁷ External overseas development assistance in Tanzania is 38.5 dollars per capita, or about 32 percent of its GNP in 1989. See World Bank, *World Development Report* (Washington: World Bank, 1991), p. 242.

date its legitimacy through radical educational reforms. Rather, it has focused its efforts on a minimal redistribution of wealth through the gradual extension of social services, providing a safety net for the rural majority.⁶⁸ A literacy campaign has not emerged, nor has it been encouraged by international donors—who nonetheless provide a high level of support for the national literacy program. Again, insertion into the international economy has conditioned the country's literacy strategy.

Zimbabwe is perhaps the most interesting case: a latecomer to independence, it emerged with both the highest level of capitalist industrial development and the strongest tradition of peasant resistance. On the one hand, Zimbabwe is the country in southern Africa most likely to successfully insert itself into the world economy on the basis of industrialization and a strong production base in the agricultural and mining sectors. On the other, it is the state with the most need to legitimate itself vis-à-vis its own, highly politicized rural population (whose demands for land reallocation remain unmet). The country has followed an apparently contradictory development path, rhetorically socialist but, in fact, largely capitalist in orientation. In the words of one observer: "The economic philosophy proposes planning and socialism whilst the practice inhibits or humanizes capitalism, adds a little state enterprise, and provides social services, adding up to a national capitalism, but without the scale of productive capacity needed to sustain it."⁶⁹

Zimbabwe's literacy strategy reflects this state of affairs—it has launched a "campaign" that is perhaps even less effective than Botswana's more modest "program" and has focused its energies almost entirely on the extension of formal education. Its educational policies are directed at further integration into the world system; as the then-minister of education, Fay Chung, commented in a seminar on basic education, "Zimbabweans have to compete on an equal basis with people from the rest of the world, and this is not possible if we are more poorly educated than our competitors."⁷⁰ Considered to be a model of effective educational development, Zimbabwe has received substantial financial and technical support from international donors.⁷¹

What becomes apparent in comparing these three examples is that inclusion in the world economic system—even when it shows its most

⁶⁸ Gaborone et al. (n. 41 above), p. 352.

⁶⁹ C. Stoneman and L. Cliff, *Zimbabwe: Politics, Economics and Society* (London: Pinter, 1989), p. 121.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Zimbabwe Ministry of Education and Culture, *Conference Documents*, Conference on Basic Education for All, Ministry of Education and Culture, Harare, 1991, June 12–14, 1991. See also Fay Chung, "Education, Revolution or Reform?" in *Zimbabwe's Prospects: Issues of Race, Class, State and Capital in Southern Africa*, ed. C. Stoneman (London: Macmillan, 1988), quote on p. 12.

⁷¹ See B. J. Dhorsey, M. Matshazi, and L. Nyagwa, *A Review of Education and Training in Zimbabwe* (Zimbabwe: Canadian International Development Agency, with the Ministry of Education and Culture, 1991).

positive face and holds out the hope of “development”—uniformly provides a disincentive for radical national programs of literacy. This disincentive is, as the Tanzanian evidence suggests, increasingly reproduced at local levels in the lives of literacy learners. Ironically, the states least committed to self-reliant development may end up with the most highly literate populations due to their greater success in the world economy.

Changes in the World System and the Future of Literacy

Since the 1960s, a series of economic crises has necessitated changes in worldwide patterns of production and accumulation. Declining levels of profitability within monopoly capitalism have led to the restructuring of the world economy into a new form of global capitalism. New technologies have allowed for the shift of production away from earlier forms of manufacturing and the separation of production from both management and the control of financial capital. A new international division of labor has emerged.⁷²

The overall impact of this restructuring on the Third World has been increasing economic differentiation and stratification both within and between regions, the emergence of a crippling debt crisis, and the consequent reorganization of national economies along lines of economic austerity. Those regions that have not industrialized are increasingly marginalized, and the disparities between the elites employed in the small “modern” sector of their economies and the vast majority of the rural and urban poor is growing.⁷³ Sub-Saharan Africa now suffers under a debt load that is roughly 70 percent of regional GNP; it is also faced with decreases in foreign investment and a decline in both the prices and levels of commodity exports. The prospects for economic growth are not good and have come to depend increasingly on declining inputs from international assistance.⁷⁴

Nonetheless, remedies for the economic crisis have been advanced. The World Bank continues to favor a process of economic adjustment to the world capitalist system.⁷⁵ This is in spite of evidence from African

⁷² For an overview of these trends, see R. Ross and K. Trachte, *Global Capitalism: The New Leviathan* (New York: SUNY Press, 1990).

⁷³ Amin (n. 34 above).

⁷⁴ T. Shaw, “Dependent Development in the New International Division of Labour: Prospects for Africa’s Political Economy,” in *World Politics: Power, Interdependence and Dependence*, ed. D. Haglund and M. Hawes (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990), p. 334. See also his earlier paper, “Africa in the 1990s: From Economic Crisis to Structural Readjustment” (mimeograph of a paper prepared for Unesco, in the Unesco library, Paris, March 1989).

⁷⁵ The main components of structural adjustment are as follows: (1) the institution of sound macroeconomic policies, such as limited public spending, the imposition of user fees for public services, firm control of public borrowing and the creation of competitive exchange rates through devaluing of currency; (2) measures to promote microeconomic efficiency, such as freeing up prices, lifting market regulations, and protecting property rights; (3) liberal trade (reduction of protection for domestic industry; opening up to imports and foreign investment); (4) limited social investments

countries that structural adjustment programs are failing to enhance productivity and are harming the already disadvantaged.⁷⁶ Because the World Bank is a major creditor and coordinator of international donors, its proposals have held the most sway with African states: over 30 countries have adopted structural adjustment programs, including even relatively more prosperous states such as Zimbabwe. Not surprisingly, given the level of economic decline and the increased conditionalities attached to international loans and assistance, there has been a nearly uniform shift from a political to an economic orientation in the policies of African states. This is nowhere more apparent than in the education sector, where the emphasis has increasingly returned to issues of efficiency. The financing of education is so tenuous that many states have reintroduced school fees and charges (Tanzania has introduced fees at secondary level, Zimbabwe at primary and secondary levels), while primary enrollments and completions have seriously declined. State-led reform and innovation in adult education thus seems unlikely.

The second option is a move toward greater self-reliance—through the gearing of local production and accumulation to local needs and decreased involvement in and reliance on the world market. This strategy makes a great deal of common sense, and is supported by both intergovernmental organizations (the Organization of Africa Unity, the Economic Commission for Africa) and nongovernmental groups (like AALAE) within Africa.⁷⁷ Yet it is difficult to imagine how self-reliance will come about, particularly given the centrifugal force of world capitalism and past evidence of the facilitating role that the African state has played between local needs and international interests. If the argument presented here is correct, inclusion in a contracting world economy is structurally inhibiting the ability of African states to look beyond economics for a logic of social/human development.

Yet, contrary to this bleak analysis, the rise of new social movements within Southern Africa over the last 2 years offers considerable hope for change. Pressure is coming from two quite different directions.⁷⁸ The first arises out of the contradictions that previous educational strategies have produced. Opposition to current government policy is growing in the universities and among the educated middle classes, whose economic

in areas of high return, such as education and health. See "Survey: The IMF and the World Bank," *Economist* (October 12, 1991), p. 40.

⁷⁶ Tanzania is a prime example of this latter trend. For a further discussion, see H. Stein and W. Nafziger, "Structural Adjustment, Human Needs and the World Bank Agenda," *Journal of Modern Africa Studies* 29 (1991): 173–89.

⁷⁷ P. Wangoola, *MIIJO: On the African Crisis, People's Popular Participation and the Indigenous NGO's in Africa's Recovery and Development* (Nairobi: African Association for Literacy and Adult Education, n.d.). See also Shaw, "Dependent Development" and "Africa in the 1990s."

⁷⁸ For this breakdown of forces for change, I am indebted to T. Shaw.

well-being has been threatened by structural adjustment programs. In Zimbabwe and Botswana, rising numbers of unemployed school-leavers are also making their voices heard. Such opposition will not be easily satisfied by mere political reforms, despite external attempts to frame recent discontent as a popular struggle for constitutional democracy.⁷⁹ The second is the dramatic growth of the informal economy parallel to the formal one and outside of state and international control. This unregulated space may prefigure new forms of economic self-reliance.

There is also a great deal of enthusiasm, even optimism, about the role that nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) can play in moving the region toward self-reliance.⁸⁰ Over the past few years, such groups have burgeoned everywhere in the countries of the South. They are mobilizing around a wide variety of concerns and are organized differently, but such movements have three things in common: they do not seek state power (as did earlier national revolutionary movements), women play a key role in their activities, and their methods of struggle are usually nonviolent. Through their activities, these groups are rewriting standard notions of political struggle, creating what Andre Gunder Frank and Marta Fuentes have called a movement for "civil democracy."⁸¹

The emergence of nongovernmental organizations and social movements in sub-Saharan Africa has been described by Paul Wangoola, of the African Association of Literacy and Adult Education. "As the neo-colonial state decays and abandons its responsibilities to the people on the directives of the [International Monetary Fund] and the World Bank, the people have had to respond by organizing themselves for survival and self-preservation, while figuring out long-term solutions. This explains the rapid growth of peasant and workers associations, welfare organizations, mutual aid societies, harambee groups and the indigenous African development organizations and NGO's."⁸² These groups are not only involved in localized experiments in self-reliance but have also become popular pressure groups for change nationally and internationally.

Nongovernmental organizations and social movements in the countries of the South are presently working through the question of how to return the decision-making processes of a single world economy back to

⁷⁹ The World Bank now views the move to constitutional democracies as an essential condition for modernization and has imposed new related conditionalities on its loans and aid. It is playing a key role in the "pro-democracy" movement sweeping across Africa. Ironically, the World Bank holds up Botswana as a prime example of a successful African state. For a further examination of the issue of democracy in Africa, see S. Decalo, "The Prospects and Constraints of Democratization in Africa," *African Affairs* 91 (1992): 7–35.

⁸⁰ See Shaw, "Dependent Development," and "Africa in the 1990s."

⁸¹ Andre Gunder Frank and Marta Fuentes, "Civil Democracy: Social Movements in Recent World History," in *Transforming the Revolution*, ed. S. Amin, G. Arrighi, A. G. Frank, and I. Wallerstein (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990).

⁸² Wangoola, p. 22.

the people. It is within this context that a new generation of definitions and aspirations for literacy is already emerging.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to present a critical framework for analyzing and evaluating literacy efforts and outcomes in southern Africa. A comparison of the Tanzanian, Zimbabwean, and Botswanan literacy experiences suggests that we should be careful not to conclude what we assume: that literacy must be a priority in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Nonetheless, my purpose has not been to promote skepticism about the importance of literacy or the need and desirability of comparative analyses. Rather, I have tried to question the use of comparative analysis to provide universal precepts or technical solutions for the problems of illiteracy in Africa. The Tanzanian case in particular illustrates the fact that, when national literacy efforts are viewed in a historical and world system framework, few general rules of a positive, linear nature about the impact of literacy or the most efficient ways of achieving it can be deduced. Illiteracy is a fundamental manifestation of the unequal relationships integral to capitalism, and no amount of social engineering can alter this.

To question and place past literacy efforts within the framework of a fundamentally exploitative and dynamic world economy is thus only the starting point for redefining literacy in terms of a set of values that challenge the capitalist world system. While comparative and theoretical work has an important role to play in this project (providing what J. Galtung calls "openings for potential realities to be discovered"), the true challenge to world capitalism must come about through the reforging of societal relationships.⁸³ Decisions about social organization and societal priorities in Africa need to be—and are being—reclaimed by the people they most affect. Defining the role that literacy has to play in the achievement of these aspirations is an integral part of this larger political struggle.

⁸³ J. Galtung, *True Worlds: A Transnational Perspective* (New York: Free Press, 1980), p. 29.