

Literacy Policy

Literacy has been at the heart of the work of Feed the Minds throughout its history and is also acknowledged in the Millennium Development Goals as an essential aspect of the commitment to Education For All.

The written word is increasingly important throughout the world, yet literacy levels remain low across much of the Global South. This is due to weaknesses in the formal education system including a lack of trained facilitators, together with the neglect of adult literacy in national development plans.

Feed the Minds recognises the right of all individuals to literacy. By literacy we mean more than just the skills of reading, writing and numeracy; we see literacy as a tool for transformation under a broad definition which embraces IT and other media resources. Through our work in the Global South we have seen the difference that literacy can make to the material and spiritual quality of people's lives. We have seen that literacy enables people to have more influence and control over their own lives as a result of their newly acquired skills and also their increased self-confidence and higher status associated with being literate. Examples include:

- women in India securing loans for income generating activities in self-help groups
- ex-combatants in Sierra Leone combining literacy and vocational skills to establish their own businesses
- young women in Iran learning IT skills and joining the digital society
- people in Cameroon voting in local and national elections
- workers in Pakistan demanding employment rights
- men and women in Sudan and Uganda adopting leadership roles in churches and NGOs.

Literacy for All

Feed the Minds is committed to Literacy for All.

Adult literacy is an essential part of building strong communities as adults are more likely to vote and engage in democratic decision-making if they are literate. Literate adults, for example, are more able to read up-to-date health information; literate mothers are more likely to ensure their children attend school and take up further education opportunities; literate people of all ages are more likely to join the digital society and take advantage of technological innovations.

Family Literacy is an exciting way of developing literacy skills as well as strengthening family links and encouraging reading and writing to become everyday activities in the home.

Literacy Linked to People's Lives

Feed the Minds sees literacy as much more than learning the alphabet, copying from a blackboard or completing activities in a school primer. Literacy, for us, does not happen in isolation but must be linked to people's lives.

We support projects that use literacy to bring about meaningful changes in people's lives, for example where people are empowered to:

- read printed materials which they come across in their daily lives; perhaps community notices, local newspapers, voting papers, the Bible or study materials
- write in ways which are useful to them, whether this is letters, lists, newspaper articles, booklets, their own life story or minutes from meetings
- use numbers for weighing and measuring, for their personal finance and income generation activities, or in understanding figures and statistics they come across in newspapers or health leaflets.

Literacy Strengthening All Programmes

All projects supported by Feed the Minds have a commitment both to social action and literacy, in its broadest sense. Literacy can strengthen programmes in civic education, peacebuilding, faith

sharing, theological education, health and vocational training. Therefore, we ask all partners to explain how they use text and printed materials and how their project can support the development of literacy skills.

For example:

- A health awareness or civic education project can consider the complexity and language used in written materials, ensuring good use of pictures and simple sentence construction. In workshops written materials can be read aloud slowly with difficult key words being identified and explained
- A theological education project could consider the level of literacy of the participants and provide additional support for those who might struggle with the written materials as well as ensuring that these materials are adapted to the needs and literacy abilities of participants
- An indigenous publishing project might improve access to written materials and encourage local creativity particularly in local languages.

Approaches to Teaching Literacy

Feed the Minds does not promote any one approach to literacy, however, we favour participatory approaches to teaching whereby learners are actively involved in the learning process and are therefore encouraged to influence the topics to discuss, read and write about.

Where literacy is school-based, it would be appropriate to link closely to the school curriculum, perhaps through some use of primers. However, we strongly advise against entirely primer-based approaches as this tends to lead to passive learning and does not encourage people to use literacy in their own lives. We also advise against using school/child oriented literacy materials in adult literacy provision, because adults have very different needs and interests from children.

Where literacy is linked with vocational training or health education, a Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) approach might be more appropriate. However, where literacy is linked with community development then the REFLECT¹, or the New Literacy Studies² approaches have many merits.

We expect our partners to consider different approaches and in turn to select one that is most relevant to the type of project and their particular local context and culture.

Literacy in Local and National Languages

Feed the Minds recognises the importance of local people selecting the language(s) in which they learn to read and write. Usually, we would encourage literacy teaching to begin in local languages, enabling people to experience their mother tongue in written form. However, at intermediate and advanced levels, literacy learners often wish to concentrate on the language which will increase their chances of reading national newspapers or gaining employment.

Literacy Facilitators

Feed the Minds considers the selection, training and support of literacy facilitators to be an essential part of any literacy project. Literacy facilitators are role models and should represent the local community. Where the literacy learners are primarily women, at least half of literacy facilitators should be women, with a high proportion from the local community.

Conclusion

Feed the Minds is committed to supporting literacy across all of our projects: both those which focus strongly on literacy and those in which the primary goal of the project could be civic education, peacebuilding, theological education, health awareness or vocational training.

¹ **REFLECT** uses participatory activities to identify community problems. The REFLECT circle then works on identifying solutions to their challenges whilst also undertaking literacy activities linked to the issues.

² **New Literacy Studies** surveys the ways in which written materials are used in a community and uses this as the basis for the literacy programme.