

Radio Literacy and Life Skills for Out-of-School Youth in Somalia

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Abstract

In countries emerging from long-term conflict, attention is frequently tightly focused on reconstructing primary education and on getting school-aged children into school. The needs of young men and women who have missed out on education during the conflict are frequently neglected. This paper identifies a number of the difficulties faced by organizations trying to address these needs, including the problems of working with different political entities and groups involved in the conflict and their differing, often opposing, educational aims. It then looks in detail at one innovative radio-based approach which has been developed for teaching literacy and life skills in Somalia. It reflects on the experiences of those involved in this programme and reports a number of benefits and implications for those considering using radio-based approaches in areas of conflict.

Somalia a Failed State

Classified as a Least Developed Country, Somalia is one of the poorest countries in the World. It has the lowest GNP and adult literacy rate and the highest infant mortality rates in the Horn of Africa. Sixteen years of on-going civil war have devastated an already weak economy, its social infrastructure and education system. In its strategy for aid to Somalia for 2002-2007, the European Commission (EC) reported that “most of the country remains structurally food insecure, internal displacement is widespread and development has virtually ground to a halt”. (European Commission 2002)

Although divided into six major clans (Dir, Isaaq, Hawiye, Darod, Rahanwein and Digil) with many sub clans and hundreds of lineages, the Somali people are one of the most culturally, linguistically and religiously homogenous groups in the World (Lewis 1998). However, since 1991, Somalia has lacked a functioning and recognised government and is now regarded by many authorities as being a failed state which has dissolved into three political entities, Somaliland in the North West, Puntland in the North East and Southern and Central Somalia. Somaliland was established in 1991 and claims unilateral independence from the rest of Somalia. Puntland was established as a self-governing region in 1998 but still regards itself as being part of a federal Somalia. Between 1998 and 2006 there have been various UN sponsored attempts to develop governments in the South and Central Region

and as a result the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was established in November 2004. After a considerable spell in Nairobi, then Jowhar and lastly Baidoa, it was only with external military support from Ethiopia in late 2006 that the TFG was able to establish itself in the capital, Mogadishu, and in most of the major cities and towns.

Neither the Somaliland or Puntland governments nor the TFG have any major source of income other than taxes on imports and exports, the export of livestock to the Gulf being the major source of income for Somalia as a whole. However for over a decade even this has been severely affected by a ban imposed by a number of Gulf countries on the import of livestock from Somalia. Within the very limited budgets that the governments of Somaliland and Puntland have, very little money is allocated for education.

Education in Somalia and the Missing Generation

Prior to the outbreak of civil war in 1990 Somalia already had very low levels of primary school enrolment and completion. However, while problems with the education system already existed, the conflict greatly exacerbated them. Across the country almost every school and educational facility was either destroyed or damaged. Equipment, materials and books were burned and looted. Millions of men, women and children fled from their homes, especially from the cities where people from different clans had been living together. They moved to the historical home areas of their clans and either stayed with relatives or settled in IDP (internally displaced persons) camps. Others fled into refugee camps in Kenya and Ethiopia. The better educated amongst them, including many teachers, were later able to leave the refugee camps and move to Europe, North America and Australia.

As the fighting continued, Somalia—especially the central and southern parts—became a jigsaw of small fiefdoms with different warlords in control. They levied taxes through ‘check points,’ but their funds were used for weapons and paying their militias, not for rebuilding schools or paying teachers. With no central government or administration, there was no budget for education, no salaries for teachers, no funds for repairing schools. During the early 1990s few, if any, school aged children had access to education of any form.

Increasingly from the mid-1990s onwards, international donors started to provide some limited support through UN agencies and international NGOs for education. The focus was almost entirely on the EFA goals of improving enrolment and retention in primary schools. There have been some successes. The 2005/2006 UNICEF Primary School Survey reported an overall increase of 45,444 children enrolled in primary schools in Somalia over the previous year. However this still reflects a Gross Enrolment Rate of only 27.9% of school age children (22.1% for girls) and the proportion of girls in schools has fallen in both Puntland and the South and Central Region. (UNICEF 2006)

One recurring problem has been the limited response from the donor community to appeals for programmes in Somalia, with education being particularly under funded. For example, only 27% of the Somalia Consolidated Appeal (CAP) for 2005 was met (UNOCHA 2005). With limited funds available for education, the proportion of children enrolled in

primary schools has consistently remained at between 20-25 % of school aged children. Throughout the 1990s in large areas of Somalia, especially in the villages and rural regions, there were simply no schools or education of any type. Even today in many areas of the country there are no primary schools.

It is clear that if only one quarter of school-aged children are currently enrolled in schools then three quarters are not in school. What many observers tend to forget is that in Somalia (and in most other countries experiencing prolonged conflict), three quarters of school-aged children miss out on education each and every year. In Somalia this has been ongoing for more than a decade. As a consequence, over the past sixteen years millions of school aged children in Somalia have never had the opportunity to attend school. Over three quarters of children who should have started school between 1990 and 2000 are now too old for primary schooling, the majority of them are in their late teens or early twenties. There is a generation of young people in Somalia who have missed out on education altogether, many of them have been militias, others are in IDP camps. Many are now married with families to support. Within the already limited donor support for education in Somalia this missing generation of young people has received scant support.

Difficulties in Providing External Support for Education in a Failed State

Donors, UN agencies and NGOs supporting education in countries in conflict such as Somalia face additional difficulties to those working in more stable countries. Since there is often no recognized government, the donors and agencies are unable to directly fund Ministries of Education or state institutions because of the need to remain neutral in the conflict. However, remaining neutral in a conflict situation, admirable as it may seem, can present difficulties for organisations intending to support education. For example, one of the underlying causes of the civil war in Southern Sudan was the Northern Government's policy of 'Arabization' of the curriculum. The Muslim Government in the North wanted Arabic to be the medium of instruction in all schools. The mainly Christian Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA) in the South rejected this and wanted English and local languages to be the mediums of instruction. Donors and agencies were, therefore, faced with a choice—support local languages or English, and be accused of supporting the rebels, or support Arabic and so help to maintain the status quo, and be accused of supporting the government. Some donors reacted by refusing to provide any funding for education, suggesting for instance that providing support for education would only prolong the war. (Brophy 2003a)

UN agencies such as UNESCO seem to have particular problems in working with the authorities or governments of the different political entities in Somalia. For example, in a project to prepare textbooks for primary schools UNESCO was unable to officially recognise the existence of the Republic of Somaliland. Although the Government had declared Somaliland as independent, it was not recognised by any UN member state and so UNESCO faced a dilemma. If textbooks referred to Somaliland and its capital of Hargeisa, the Governments and authorities in Puntland and South Somalia would refuse to accept or

distribute the textbooks. If UNESCO did not refer to Somaliland and Hargeisa, the Government in Somaliland would refuse to allow schools to use them. Initially UNESCO produced text books based on the old borders of Somalia with Mogadishu as the capital. The result was that thousands of the text books were rejected by the Government of Somaliland and were left in warehouses, in some cases for up to three years, while school children in Somaliland had no text books. There were similar problems in renovating buildings and in training teachers in the disputed area which lies between Somaliland and Puntland. The Government of Puntland insisted that reconstruction and supplies could only be managed from the Puntland side of the border, while the Government of Somaliland similarly insisted that the work could only be done from the Somaliland side. Once again the result was that, even though funding was available, little if any of it reached the schools.

A further difficulty arose when donors, finding they were unable to work directly with Ministries, used international NGOs to manage and implement their aid programmes. In most countries, but especially in areas of conflict, NGOs tend to work in specific areas and locations. They rarely cover the whole country. In Somalia, donors unable to fund Ministries of Education directly contracted NGOs to support education and schools in particular locations or zones. There are benefits to this approach: the NGOs are established and have experience of working with the authorities and the communities in that particular zone. Also, as international NGOs are registered with their own governments, their spending can be monitored and accounts externally audited. But there are also problems with the NGOs' zonal approach. In the case of Somalia, the NGO's zone often reflected the territory of a particular clan or sub-clan. Different NGOs worked inside these specific clan areas and so over time could be seen as helping to reinforce the distinctions between clans. And while there were repeated attempts to harmonise or coordinate the inputs provided by the different NGOs, organisations tended to be defensive about their delivery methods and possessive about their materials. One factor regarding NGOs' competence to deliver education projects lay in the qualifications and experience of their expatriate staff. In a conflict situation such as Somalia, staff had to be protected. Expatriates almost always lived in isolated compounds with armed guards and high security walls and ventured out to visit primary schools in four-wheel drives with armed escorts. When conflict broke out, the expatriates were evacuated to Kenya, often remaining there for periods of three to six months, while their project activities and often the funding were put on hold or reduced to a minimum.

Finally international NGOs and UN agencies, whose funding came from western governments and donors, were obliged to reflect the priorities for education of their governments and donors. Those priorities were clearly Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). For education this resulted in a narrow focus on enrolment and retention in formal primary school education. With minimum budgets for education, what was available went towards supporting formal primary schools. Adult literacy and education for over age young people was largely ignored as something to be considered only after the formal school system had been re-established.

When non-formal programmes were developed for adults and over-age young people

in Somalia, they were almost always developed as Accelerated Basic Education (ABE) programmes, normally full time courses which offered either entry into formal primary schooling or provided a fast track, full time course linked to the formal curriculum and offering primary school equivalence. However, the majority of young men and women in Somalia who had missed out on primary schooling were unable to commit to full-time schooling. Many of the young women in their late teens and early twenties were married with children or working either in the home or, in rural areas, tending sheep and goats. Young men were in the militias or working. They perceived primary schools as being designed for children not for grown men where desks and benches could seat seven and eight year olds but not full grown men and women.

By the end of the 1990s a number of NGOs began to consider the possibility of supporting a variety of flexible and alternative approaches to education (FAE). These could offer greater flexibility in terms of providing education at the nearest convenient place to the learner's home. Hence students needed to travel shorter distances and so their labour could be available for more time. The provision of lessons at flexible times, in shifts or for shorter duration also further reduced costs. Beyond the household, at the community or national level, using existing community settings as alternative places for education could eliminate the high direct costs of building new schools, at least in the short to medium term". (Bekalo et al. 2003)

Distance Learning Approach as an Appropriate Delivery Method in a Conflict Situation

In the mid-nineties the Africa Educational Trust (AET), a small UK based NGO, began working with the Ministry of Education in Somaliland. In consultation with the Ministries in Somaliland and Puntland in 1996, AET launched the first of a number of non-formal FAE education programmes, the Somalia Educational Incentives for Girls and Young Men (SEIGYM), a literacy and livelihoods programme for young men and women which used a vouchers approach. This project has been reported elsewhere (see Oxenham et al. 2002). Other projects followed including the Women's Village Education Project (WOVE) for women in rural areas and the Community Police Education Project (COPE) for young ex-militia men being recruited into the police. These programmes, while successful in themselves, were limited in their scope and geographic coverage. The largest, SEIGYM, had approximately 1,500 beneficiaries a year. SEIGYM covered towns and larger villages in Somaliland and Puntland but not the South. WOVE had around a thousand beneficiaries a year and was operating in 50 villages but only in Somaliland, the area with the least security problems. COPE also only operated in Somaliland and served around 700 beneficiaries a year. Given the hundreds of thousands of young over aged men and women who needed access to literacy or some form of education both in the north and the south, it was clear a different approach was needed, one which offered access to a much greater number of young people.

There were a number of features about Somalia which suggested radio as an appropriate strategy. As noted the people are largely homogeneous in background, religion, culture and language. Lewis noted that Somalis “are true radio enthusiasts with an apparent insatiable appetite for broadcasts” (Lewis 1993). The BBC Somali Service has been broadcasting to Somalia and the region since 1957 and has a long established reputation in Somalia. It has a Somalia Unit in London headquarters, which is staffed by Somalis and is experienced in producing and broadcasting in the Somali language. These broadcasts cover all parts of Somalia including Somaliland, Puntland and South and Central Somalia. The broadcasts can be heard in rural areas on the short wave band and in the larger areas in both short wave and FM band. Radio broadcasts through the BBC offered a unique opportunity for providing access to literacy across the different entities and to both urban and rural areas.

However, radio broadcasts alone were unlikely to be sufficient, especially for teaching literacy in a strongly oral society where there was very limited access to written materials. The planners at AET and the BBC World Service Trust felt that there was a need for a more structured approach. Although there was a shortage of trained teachers across Somalia, especially in rural areas, the Project Team considered that high quality, well structured written materials linked with radio broadcasts could be used by local tutors who had completed primary school (and perhaps also had secondary education) to deliver the course successfully. Distance teaching approaches offer major rewards in areas of conflict and with displaced populations (Brophy 2003b). While formal classroom based teaching would be frequently interrupted, especially when girls had to travel to school, small locally based tutorial groups (taught by tutors from the local area) could continue. If classes were taught outside of normal schools hours, then existing facilities could be used. Where there were no existing school facilities, the community could provide them through community based organisations. The timing of broadcasts and classes could be planned to suit the daily habits and work patterns of young adults and did not have to be tied to a formal primary school curriculum. The content of the course could be designed to suit their needs and avoid the stigma associated with adults following a curriculum and text books designed for young children.

Literacy for Overage Young People

By definition distance learning materials are produced at a distance from the learner. They may be delivered locally but, in contrast to the situation with formal teaching in stable education systems, distance teaching programmes are suitable for areas in conflict where one cannot rely on qualified teachers being able to improvise or adapt materials to suit the needs of their students. In developing distance teaching materials for teaching literacy in Somalia, there was a need to ensure that the materials met the needs of the overage learners, were relevant to their interests, and were set at a suitable level for them to be able to understand and use. To help achieve this, AET undertook an extensive Participatory Impact Assessment (PIA), which was carried out over a four month period From September to December 2001.

The aim of the study was to consult as wide a range of potential stakeholders as possible on what the aims and objectives of the programme should be, who its main beneficiaries should be, and what criteria should be used to assess the progress and outcomes of the programme. The methods used included focus group meetings, group discussions, one to one interviews and a household survey. Over two hundred and sixty stakeholders from Somaliland, Puntland, and the South were consulted. A wide range of stakeholders were involved—illiterate men and women living in both rural and urban areas, disabled men and women, members of disadvantaged minority groups (Sab), former members of militia groups, male and female workers with local community organisations and women’s groups, young men and women who had recently completed literacy courses, heads of households, local literacy and adult education teachers and health care trainers, workers with local human rights and conflict resolution organizations, staff of UN agencies and international NGO working in relief, development and human rights, officials of the local ministries of education, senior academics at a local university, local medical and hospital staff, editors of Somali language newspapers, BBC staff resident or temporarily working in Somalia, Somali exiles with specialist qualifications in Somalia language, literacy, culture, health, environment and human rights, European academics with specialist knowledge of Somalia, its language and culture, specialists in literacy, education, the environment, health and nutrition .

The stakeholders stressed the importance of the learners being able to ‘use the radio to learn to read and write your home language’. Some noted that the main beneficiaries should be ‘girls left behind in homes’. However others argued that beneficiaries should include ‘everybody who did not get into school, male or female whoever he or she is’ (AET 2002). Members of a number of local training organizations felt that the programmes should not be aimed at children in school because ‘it doesn’t match the school curriculum’. Asked what they considered to be good indicators of success of a programme of this type, stakeholders suggested, ‘The number of people who pass an exam at the end of the course and get a certificate’, or ‘The number of people who have gathered together in groups and have listened to the programmes.’ There was some disagreement over whether this meant they had listened to every programme or just ‘now and again’. It was suggested that any evaluation should ask people from the target group how many programmes they had listened to.

A major focus of the PIA was to determine what the main themes and areas of content of a literacy programme for young men and women in Somalia should be. Three main areas were initially identified: health and nutrition, the environment (to include livestock and agriculture), and human rights. The stakeholders were then asked to identify themes or ideas for each of these three areas about which it would be important for newly literate young people to be able to read and understand. Although different groups of stakeholders emphasised different ideas, eight themes for which there was general agreement were developed for each area. These were:

Health and Nutrition

- (i) Breast feeding, (ii) smoking and Qhat (a local drug), (iii) sanitation and hygiene,

(iv) infectious diseases and vaccination, (v) Malaria (vi) nutrition, diet, anemia and birth spacing, (vii) TB (viii) medicines.

Environment

(i) Trees, (ii) wildlife and fish, (iii) land degradation, (iv) conservation and improved farming techniques, (v) enclosures and land rights, (vi) water, (vii) livestock (viii) crops.

Human Rights

(i) Clan, (ii) Rights to food and health, (iii) physical safety, (iv) women's rights, (v) voting and leadership, (vi) disability rights, (vii) rights to work, property and movement (viii) children's rights.

As well as identifying themes within each general area, stakeholders were also asked to identify key words within each theme that would be important for the learners to understand. Between five and six key words were identified for each of the twenty four themes, a total of one hundred and thirty three key words.

Changing Approaches to Suit Local Needs and Conditions

Although AET had experience of implementing literacy and non-formal programmes in Somalia, its experience was based on the use of traditional face-to-face teaching. In previous projects the teachers or trainers were paid, and normal school classrooms were used out of school hours and at a time that suited learners. In other instances community organisations allowed their premises to be used. The new project would be on a much larger scale and donors were unlikely to support salaries. The tutors would be local volunteers and the community would be expected to provide the premises.

The new project intended to use radio broadcasts as the spine around which the course would be built. However, the local partners in Somalia and the community generally only had experience of traditional classroom, face-to-face teaching. Instead of teachers, AET had to introduce and train people in the new role of group facilitators or distance teaching tutors who could use and follow a radio course teaching literacy.

The BBC (at least the Somali service) was used to producing and broadcasting news, current affairs, health information programmes. It was not used to developing radio programmes linked with student texts and teachers guides. The Somali Service had to revise and develop new ways of working with education partners. The BBC retained editorial control of broadcast materials but accepted that written materials would be produced by the partner and would directly link to the BBC broadcast. It was agreed that rather than produce radio programmes to match the written texts, the programmes would be produced first and the text then developed to match the broadcasts. This was a new experience for the authors and placed severe pressure on working to deadlines.

In Somalia itself, the different ministries and local authorities, under pressure from UN agencies and international NGOs, developed education policies and strategies which

were based on achieving EFA and the MDGs. Their focus was on increasing primary school enrolment and retention and on primary school equivalency, even if the learners were over-age. They wanted harmonisation and standardisation of courses and all basic education courses, formal and non-formal, to conform to the primary school curriculum. The feedback that AET received from young people, however, was that they did not want, nor were they willing, to attend 'full-time' classes. They were primarily interested in becoming literate and in gaining skills related to their everyday lives, rather than following a traditional primary school curriculum. For many of them the major aim was to become literate and thus avoid the stigma of being illiterate. To help overcome or avoid a potential conflict, it was agreed with the authorities that the course would be a 'Literacy and Life Skills' programme, rather than a basic education programme. As such it did not have to focus on achieving equivalency in the nine subjects of the primary school curriculum. Authorities accepted that for these over-age young people literacy and life skills would be worthy achievements in themselves.

Outputs and Outcomes to Date with Evidence from External Evaluations

The pilot phase of the Somali Distance Education for Literacy or SOMDEL Programme was launched in August 2001 with the first broadcasts starting in 2002. It became known locally as 'Macallinka Raddiya' or Radio Teacher and used a three-way distance teaching approach involving fifty weekly radio programmes broadcast on the BBC World Service, study packs of printed materials (including students texts and teachers guides) and weekly, community-based, face-to-face tutorial sessions. Although the radio programmes were broadcasts one day a week, the tutors taught from two to six sessions per week.

10,908 people enrolled in 351 classes throughout Somaliland, Puntland and South and Central Somalia which were regularly monitored by local AET staff. After twelve months a standardised literacy examination was set in all classes. 9,607 of the learners (88%) passed the examination and were awarded literacy certificates. In Somaliland these were issued jointly by the Ministry of Education and AET. In addition to those enrolled on the course audience surveys estimated that a quarter of a million people in Somalia and neighbouring regions in Ethiopia and Northern Kenya listened to the broadcasts and gained new knowledge about health, nutrition, the environment and human rights.

In 2003 an external evaluation of the SOMDEL Pilot Programme was conducted by Alicia Fentiman. She noted that the majority (70%) of SOMDEL learners were female and that in many cases the course offered the only access to literacy, numeracy and life skills to over-age females. She also noted that 594 (6%) of the learners were disabled. Her report concluded:

'SOMDEL has a lot of promise to deliver literacy, numeracy and life skills to thousands of disadvantaged people. SOMDEL is a flexible and adaptable approach to literacy and empowerment and in the long term it is hoped that SOMDEL will assist in the alleviation of poverty through access to basic education for all'. (Fentiman 2003)

A second phase of the project was launched in February 2004. During this phase a

second level, one-year course, was developed. The Level 2 course was aimed at people who had already gained basic literacy, either through the Level 1 SOMDEL course or through other literacy programmes. It focused on developing literacy in what have been described as 'real literacy tasks' (Rogers 1999); activities which are common in everyday life in Somalia, for example, reading and writing letters and reading instructions and labels. These were identified through a second participatory impact assessment conducted in 2004.

To date there have been three intakes into the new phase of the programme, one new intake into Level 1 and two intakes at Level 2, a total of 25,000 learners. 6,877 people (62% female) started on the first intake of the Level 2 course in February 2004. 6,448 passed the final examination. A further 11,673 started the Level 1 course in April 2005 and 10,664 (91%) sat and passed the final examination. A little over 6,000 students enrolled for the second intake of the Level 2 course in August 2006 and are currently still studying. The floods in 2006 and the fighting between Ethiopian, TFG forces and the Islamic Courts militias have had some affect on attendance in the Southern and Central Regions but not in Somaliland or Puntland. An external evaluation carried out in 2006 by Felicity Thomas reported that 'the programme has been extremely successful in meeting its aims and objectives'. (Thomas 2006) She ascribed the main reasons for the success as being the emphasis on close community collaborations and consultation, AET's ability and experience in adapting educational programmes to suit the needs of disadvantaged groups (particularly women), the high level of access to radio in Somalia and the popularity and prestige of the BBC, the educational quality and entertainment value of the broadcast, access to regular tutorial classes and course materials, the level of inter-regional co-operation and learning amongst the Somalia partner organisations.

In her evaluation Thomas conducted interviews with a number of individual students who had completed the SOMDEL course. These included men who had previously worked on cargo boats but, after completing SOMDEL, had secured better paid administrative posts at the port; women who had been given money by relatives to set up shops (because their relatives felt they now had the skills to run a business since they had become literate and numerate); and shop keepers and water sellers who had previously been unable to keep accounts but since completing SOMDEL were able to write down names and amounts owed so that as one young shop keeper noted 'no one is cheating me now' (Ibid.).

Problems Still to be Faced

The SOMDEL Programme has been running for over five years. It depends on support from the local community as the tutors are volunteers. They receive a radio, students and teachers guides and a small per diem when they attend training sessions, but they do not receive salaries. Initially they were happy to be involved with this new project, especially since it had the high status of being broadcast on the BBC. Many saw it as a way of being accepted within their community as a teacher and each year the tutors receive a certificate

acknowledging their contribution and experience. However, other international NGOs pay salaries to those teaching non-formal classes and, as many SOMDEL tutors are working for a fourth year, some of them feel that they have made their voluntary contribution and should start to receive salaries. Internationally the payment of teachers' salaries in countries in conflict is a major issue for donors. With up to 500 tutors working on the SOMDEL project at one time it will be extremely difficult to persuade donors to pay salaries to tutors. However, it will be equally difficult to continue with the programme year after year if the tutors do not eventually receive salaries.

One benefit for the tutors of the SOMDEL programme is that they each receive a radio to receive the broadcasts but are also able to use them at home. One drawback for the project is that the batteries need replacing more frequently than originally planned. A number of solar powered and 'wind-up' radios have been obtained and in trials they offer better reception and avoid the need for the replacement of batteries. However current models are expensive and do not contain a cassette player nor can they be easily connected to external cassette players. In feedback from the pilot phase, the tutors stressed the importance of being able to record the radio broadcasts and replay them. As a result, radio cassette players were purchased for the second intake of students. It is not clear yet whether the benefit of not needing batteries for the wind-up radios outweighs the inability to record and replay broadcasts.

The external evaluations noted the very high proportion of young women on the SOMDEL Programme and indeed increasing access to literacy and life skills for young women was one of the aims of the project. However both evaluators have noted a need to encourage more young men to enrol on the programme. From the evaluation reports there appear to be two difficulties affecting the enrolment of young men: (i) the timing of the radio broadcasts and lessons, which better suit the daily work habits of young women, and (ii) a belief amongst people in the community that formal education (which, given the option, is preferred) is for boys and non-formal education programmes are for girls and young women. In an attempt to increase the enrolment of young men the complete set of fifty Level 1 radio broadcasts have been produced on CD. During 2007 the use of CD players and small solar chargers is being piloted with a number of classes targeted at young men.

By August 2007 both the Level 1 and Level 2 programmes will both have been broadcast twice. The Level 1 materials were produced in 2001 and 2002. As an international broadcaster with high standards and professionalism, the BBC World Service is reluctant to continue to broadcast the same programmes time after time, especially since over a quarter of a million general public are listening. They would like to produce a completely new series of broadcasts. From the teaching point of view, however, the current materials have worked well and, while both the broadcast and written materials could be revised and improved, the educators on the course team feel less urgency about the need to produce a completely new set of broadcasts. The recording of the broadcasts onto CD has offered a partial and short term solution but if SOMDEL is to continue then a strategy for updating broadcasts needs to be developed.

Some Implications of SOMDEL for Work in Other Countries

The benefits of distance teaching approaches in areas of conflict and for displaced populations have been reported on elsewhere. (Brophy 2003a and 2003b) SOMDEL has been successful in reaching over 30,000 young people who had missed out on education and its radio based approach to literacy has been specifically referred to in the Report of the Africa Commission. From experience gained from SOMDEL a number of implications and issues can be identified:

Distance teaching based around radio broadcasts can and does offer a viable means of reaching young people in conflict areas who have missed out on normal schooling. This approach can be particularly good in rural areas and in providing access to girls and young women.

Radio literacy broadcasts for young adults provide an opportunity to improve understanding in key life skills areas such as health, nutrition, environment and human rights, not just for those enrolled on the course but also for many thousands of others who can listen to the broadcasts.

Radio approaches to literacy are of particular benefit in countries such as Somalia where a single language is used across the country. It is not of such benefit in countries such as South Sudan where there are many local languages in use.

Teachers and tutors are generally more familiar with conventional classroom teaching than with the use of distance teaching approaches therefore there is tendency for teachers to revert to what they feel most familiar with. It is important that teachers and tutors receive both initial and ongoing training in the idea and use of distance teaching methods.

It is important to study the lifestyles and work habits of the target beneficiaries in order to identify when they are most likely to be able to listen to broadcasts and attend classes. The timing and locations which suit young women are not necessarily those that suit young men.

The SOMDEL programme found that local communities are likely to be highly supportive of radio based literacy and life skills programmes and that, in the medium term, teachers are willing to work on a voluntary basis. However, it is difficult to maintain programmes over the long term if they rely solely on volunteers.

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