



# Literacy in the Maldives

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## **LITERACY IN THE MALDIVES**

### **Background**

The Literacy and Neo Literacy Programme, conducted in the Maldives which seeks to create an educated citizenry through achieving universal literacy for adults stems from a growing awareness on the part of the planners that no meaningful development can take place without the informed, intelligent and meaningful participation of the masses who are seen not only as the beneficiaries but also as the agents of the process of change. With the belief that basic education of the masses is a necessary precondition for development, the effort has been sustained meaningfully. Before launching the programme which began on 1 January 1980 the goals and parameters of the programme were conceived and delineated at various forums and then the outlines of the programme were developed. The country got a head start because of the high literacy rate estimated at 70% and comparable participation rates at the primary level through a network of the traditional indigenous institutions.

It is necessary to add that quality of education was considered to be of crucial importance both for primary and adult education programmes. It was felt that unless the right kind of education of an acceptable quality was imported, it was not possible to achieve the goals the Government had set for itself. It is in this context that the programme of Basic Education of which the literacy and Neo-Literacy Programme forms a key component was conceived and planned.

To effectively implement a national programme for literacy a nationwide six year programme of functional literacy was formulated and announced by the President on 1st January 1980. The first phase addressed itself to eradication of illiteracy, behavior of adults and encourage them to play an active part in the development and transformation of society, by providing them with new knowledge, skills and values. Before the launching of the programme a nation wide survey was conducted to identify illiterates by name and address.

### **Programme Implementation**

The programme was initially implemented under a six-year plan. Quantitative year wise targets were fixed for each atoll; resource persons (all of whom were voluntary) were identified; and orientation of the resource persons was undertaken, which covered the conceptual work frame of the programme, the teaching method, etc.

Literacy classes which earmarked the beginning of a decade for educational development in the Republic of Maldives, was launched on 24th February 1980 in the midst of fanfare, with the President himself teaching the first lesson of literacy, broadcast on national radio and TV throughout the Republic. Nationwide cooperation was received and a euphoric atmosphere created in the drive to wipe out illiteracy. songs were broadcast, slogans, posters and billboards were displayed in cinemas, on houses and public places and transmitted through other media. Some of these slogans are reproduced below:

*Attaining the set of competencies in the basic education curriculum is a basic need and self fulfillment for all.*

*Whatever may be the situation, let us consider the acquisition of knowledge a pleasure. In the same way let us consider teaching a pleasure too. Let us teach others.*

*Our fellow country men who haven't attained the set of competencies of Asaasee Thauleem are eagerly wanting our services. Why don't we volunteer and provide them with our services.*

*To make life easier and happier let us attain the competencies of Asaasee Thauleem. Learn from the cradle to the grave.*

The programme has the individuals as well as the community as target groups. For the individual the areas to covered included:

- to make up for the missed educational opportunities
- to improve self development
- to create love and respect for work
- to improve social development

In 1980, 19,215 learners and 1,482 volunteer teachers were registered. Cabinet Ministers were included amongst the voluntary teachers as well as other senior civil servants, teachers and students.

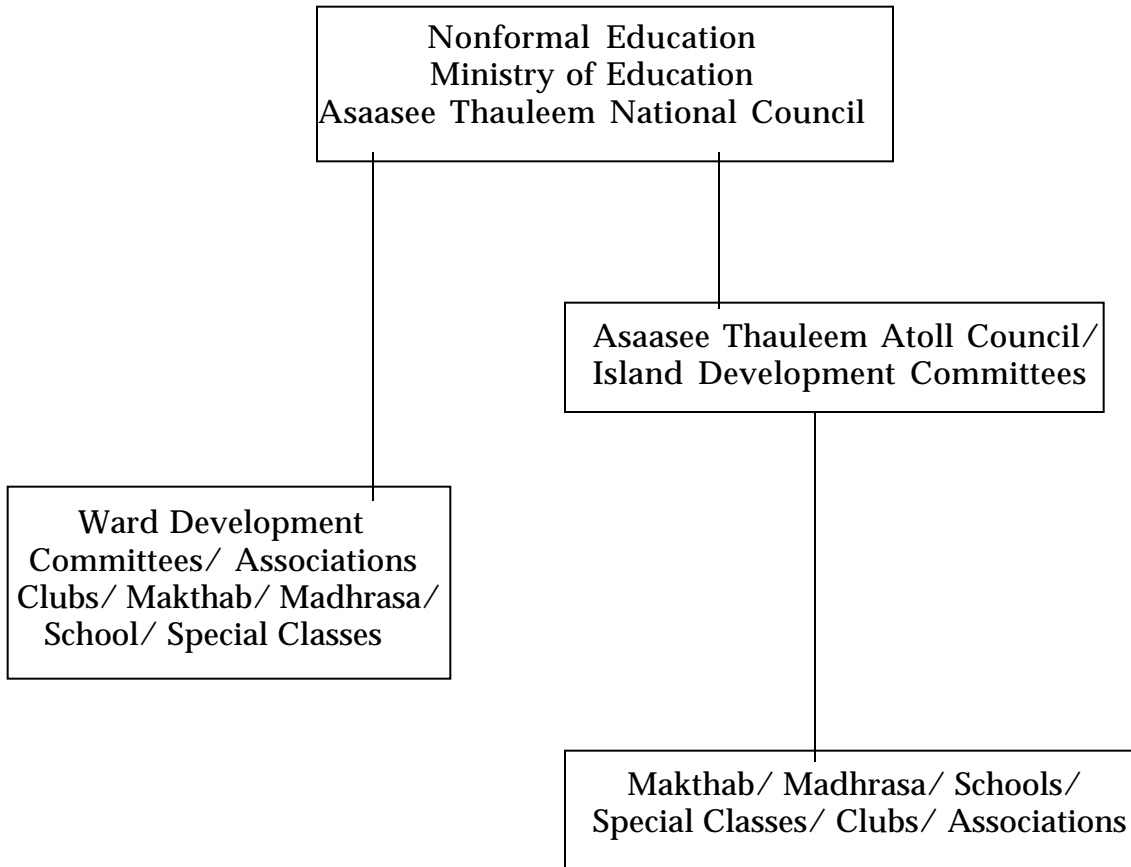
It was planned that the programme would be covered by illiterates in 15 months and by neoliterates in 10 months. A curriculum was formulated, books and other materials were prepared and made available.

School teachers, volunteer social workers, and government servants were identified as key contact points for implementing the programme.

Classes could be held in the evenings and on holidays. Workplaces as factories and resorts where a large number of workers reside, could be suitable places for literacy training, as outlined in the programme.

The administrative structure for organizing, managing and monitoring the programme was visualized as follows:

### ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



After the completion of two years of its activity, a National Asaasee Thauleem (Basic Education) Council was formed with a total of 22 members drawn from the most concerned sectors of the Government, media personnel, representatives from the 4 wards of Male' and four representatives from the Atolls. The President was the Chairman of this Council. This body was the overall supervising and managing council of the literacy programme.

Later National Asaasee Thauleem Council was changed to a literacy Advisory Committee and has now come to be chaired by the Minister of Education or his Deputy.

In addition, a similar council in each Atoll was also formed,

comprising the Island Chief of all inhabited islands of the Atoll together with a selected number of the prominent persons and voluntary groups. The council is called the Atoll Level Asaasee Thauleem (Basic Education Council).

### **Networthy Issues**

The experience gained during the first two years led to the identification of certain problem areas and deficiencies. It was often found that the reporting figures were much higher than the actual number of participants completing the course. The whole programme being undertaken on a voluntary basis without a framework of binding regulations led to a certain neglect on the part of administrators and participants.

A full time officer was made responsible for the implementation of the programme. A yearly function is held in Male' to give away certificates for the achievements of the programme. Each year a trophy is awarded to the Atoll with the highest achievement and cash prizes given to the islands with outstanding performance. The criteria for the awards/ prizes are as follows:

- the number of illiterates (among those who have already been noted down as illiterates) joining in the classes
- the number of illiterates (from those noted down who attained literacy)
- the number of participants of the functional literacy programme
- the number of participants who passed all subjects under the functional literacy programme
- learner's attendance
- volunteer teachers' attendance
- other efforts
- other reports

While the programme was started on the sole initiative of the Maldivian Government and at first was fully funded by it, subsequently international cooperation brought in funds and resources to further strengthen and enrich the programme. This mainly included token financial support for equipment and development of materials, orientation and study visits of key personnel to similar projects, and training of field personnel for which manuals were also developed.

A notable point is that the enrollment figures indicate a predominance of women participants. This is because men are out fishing for the whole day

and when they return in the evening they are too tired to work. Sometimes they have to stay overnight in another island.

according to the government survey when the programme started, there were 19,215 illiterates. Today, the number of illiterates stands below 2,000. Initially, there were 1,482 volunteers to help eradicate illiteracy. Although in absolute terms the number may not seem very large, nevertheless, in Maldives, where the population is small, it is a fairly sizable number. Furthermore, when one considers the fact that the illiterates are spread in small numbers on isolated islands, it becomes a formidable achievement, particularly in view of the limitations of resources, manpower and materials. One of the important lessons to be learnt from these experiences is the importance of political commitment, which has made available the resources, the organizational structure, the manpower and the materials for this venture.

### **Important Phases of the Programme**

When the programme was launched in January 1980, it was a six-year programme. The achievements made during the six-year cycle is as follows:

|      |    |        |
|------|----|--------|
| 1980 | -- | 81.66% |
| 1981 | -- | 83.47% |
| 1982 | -- | 86.66% |
| 1986 | -- | 93.25% |

In 1986, a comprehensive review was undertaken, after which atoll-wise eradication of illiteracy was as follows:

|      |    |   |
|------|----|---|
| 1987 | -- | Gaaf Alif, Kaafu, Alif North, Alif, Vaavu, Meemu, Laamu |
| 1988 | -- | Haa Dhaal, Shaviyani, Laamu, Noonu, Faafu               |
| 1989 | -- | Raa, Baa, Lhaviyani, Dhaalu, Thaa                       |
| 1990 | -- | Gaaf-Alifu, Gaafu-Dhaalu, Gnaviyani, Seenu              |

The following achievement is recorded during this four-year period:

|      |    |        |
|------|----|--------|
| 1989 | -- | 95.40% |
| 1990 | -- | 98.19% |

By the end of 1990, there were 2,014 illiterates, many of them fishermen and many who are not motivated towards learning. It was taken as an extremely challenging task to make this group a literate one. Atolls were listed by order of the least achievement in terms of illiteracy and each year an atoll or two atolls are being now chosen for more intensive literacy teachings. The year and the atolls are as follows:

|      |    |                                |
|------|----|--------------------------------|
| 1992 | -  | Laamu Atoll                    |
| 1993 | -  | Noonu Atoll                    |
| 1994 | -  | Shaviyani Atoll                |
| 1995 | -  | Dhaalu Atoll                   |
| 1996 | -- | Gaafu Alifu Atoll/ Kaafu Atoll |
| 1997 | -  | Meemu/ Faafu                   |

More people have become literate through these intensive efforts. The present literacy rate is 98.59%. It may be noted that the literacy rate of women in the Maldives is higher than that of the men's. Of the 98.59% the literacy rate for women is 99.10% while that for men is 98.14%.

### **Future Direction**

Now that a near 100% literacy rate has been achieved, the important questions are a) Where do we go from here, and, b) What are the new demands on us. It is obvious by looking at the various components and dimensions of the programme that at the time of its initial conception, the Government was fully aware of the challenges that lay ahead. Literacy is an enabling skill and neo-literates have to be given sufficient reading material of relevance and interest to them to save them from relapsing into illiteracy. Moreover, literacy is not an end in itself but one means of educating the population to accelerate social development. This implies the expansion of nonformal educational programmes for adult education in the fields of social education, culture, religion, health and nutrition, child care, population education, agriculture, fishing, income generating skills, vocational training, entertainment, etc. If this wide spectrum of subjects, skills and themes is coupled with appropriate levels of reading and training, it augurs with the need for a wide variety of programmes which would involve the publication of books and arrangement for small skill-training workshops with trainers. This then becomes a self-growing venture - the greater the increase in educational provision, the greater the requirement for it will be in the future.

Since the provision of reading materials is very crucial for the sustenance of the literacy rate, Nonformal Education Centre (NFEC) responsible for literacy in the country, is producing a number of materials for neo-literates in collaboration with Asian/ Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU). In order to prevent children and youth from getting into the illiterate category, provision of basic education is strengthened. To

complement to the formal primary and middle-school education which is being almost universalized, Nonformal education classes are organized by NFCE. This is a condensed education programme (CEP) allowing out-of-school youth and school drop-outs to continue their education, thus contributing to the sustainment of the high literacy rate. The condensed Education Programme is the next stepping stone for those acquiring Literacy.