

This work is licensed under a
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-
NoDerivs 3.0 Licence.

To view a copy of the licence please see:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

(832)

(a) UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI
(b) Institute for Development Studies
Working papers

ON LITERACY CONTENT

BY
NGUGI WA MIRII

Working Paper No. 340

INSTITUTE FOR DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

P.O. BOX 30197

NAIROBI, Kenya.

APRIL, 1979



Views expressed in this paper are those of the author. They should not be interpreted as reflecting the views of the Institute for Development Studies or of the University of Nairobi.

This paper has protection under the Copyright Act, Cap.130 of the Laws of Kenya.

RN 322257

IDS



095409

ON LITERACY CONTENT

By

NGUGI WA MIRII

Working Paper No. 340.

ABSTRACT

In this paper, the word literacy means three different but interrelated concepts: literacy as acquisition of skills in reading and writing, i.e. coding and decoding information; literacy as part of man's communicative skills in production of wealth, i.e. the use of the language codes in the struggles of man against nature and in society and, lastly, literacy content as part of education to mould a certain consciousness about man's struggles against nature and in society. In pre-colonial Kenya, many forms of communication were accessible to all. With the coming of colonialism and capitalism, these pre-colonial forms of communication were suppressed and new literacy skills were introduced to limited segments of the Kenyan population.

It is argued that literacy content must reflect the everyday material reality of peasants and workers. The present content is irrelevant since it is based on the assumption that the poor are ignorant and thus to blame for their poverty. This is because literacy programmes are funded and designed by foreign agencies whose interests are totally different from the people who are affected by illiteracy i.e. peasants and workers.

The Kamirithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre is presented as an example of a literacy programme whose content was designed by its participants and where a participatory style of teaching is practised. The Kamirithu experience shows that with relevant programme content, adults can become literate within three months or less and the problem of drop-outs is eliminated.

ON LITERACY CONTENT^{1/}

In this paper the word literacy means three different but interrelated concepts: literacy as acquisition of skills in reading and writing i.e., coding and decoding information; literacy as part of man's communicative skills in production of wealth, i.e. the use of the language codes in the struggles of man against nature and in society; and lastly, literacy content as part of education to mould a certain consciousness about man's struggles against nature and in society.

Educational content, be it in formal or in organised non-formal educational programmes, necessarily reflects the ideas of the ruling class. This means that the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force.¹

Since, as Martin Carnoy has argued in his book Education as Cultural Imperialism, schools are the main means of transferring culture and values and of channeling children into various social roles, it means in practice that such schools transfer the culture and values of the ruling class.² In other words, schools help maintain the social order desired by the ruling class. The common schools for instance is the institution that developed within capitalistic economic and social structures to prepare individuals to assume various servicing roles in those structures. Those who, on the whole, readily exhibit qualities considered most desirable by the capitalist economy and society - verbal ability, mechanical awareness of mechanical time, docility, and the internalized responsiveness to material rewards as opposed to the all-round development of the individual - are deemed to perform best in such schools. On the whole, schools reward best those who in capitalist societies exhibit qualities and values most desirable from the stand-point of capitalistic economic structures. The schools curriculum reflects the prevailing mode of production and is structured to fit its needs.

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Workshop on National Languages and Literacy in Kenya, organized by Department of Linguistics and African Languages, University of Nairobi, 24th March, 1979.

2. Martin Carnoy, Education as Cultural Imperialism, (New York: Mckay, 1974), p.8

It is therefore not possible to discuss any educational content without seeing it in the context of the socio-economic structure which gives rise to it and which in turn it reflects. This is particularly true in the field of Adult Literacy. Literacy curriculum as part of organised formal educational programmes arises from the prevailing mode of production and reflects the same.

In discussing the relevant literacy content we must therefore take into consideration the social relations created in the production of material wealth. Under capitalism this is of course the division of labour in production or the division of people in social classes with a dominant class controlling the means of production and dominated class selling its labour

The capitalist mode of production also exists on the basis of division of mental and manual labour, and thus, results in the class that controls mental labour exploiting the manual labour of the other class. The manual labour of the dominated class is exploited through suppression of its mental labour by the dominating class. Let us expand this further. When a class is not allowed to exercise its ideas (minds) at any level - economic, political, social, administrative, etc - its mental labour is suppressed. Their minds are suppressed in an attempt to keep them in a state in which their manual labour can be continually exploited without their consent.

The suppression of mind of the dominated class can be through the denial of literacy skills. This has in fact been the case in capitalist countries and those countries dominated by imperialism. It is not accidental that illiteracy has been highest among the working class in Europe, America and Japan and among peasantry and the working class in the Third World. In talking about literacy skills or so called 'adult' literacy we are in fact talking about education of the peasantry and the working class. But suppression of the same mental labour of the dominated class can take the form of provision of literacy skills, through a content detrimental to their interests as a class or to their total development. Hence, provision of literacy or not, the content of literacy programmes and even the methods are not void of the class struggle. As noted by the participants of the International Symposium

for literacy which met in Persepolis, Iran, from 3rd to 8th September 1975: literacy is first and foremost a political matter, whether one is talking about its availability, its content, or its methods.³

In this paper our concern is with the questions of relevant literacy content in Kenya - that is the message or the knowledge which is imparted in the process of teaching and learning literacy skills among adults in Kenya. But since, as we have observed above, illiteracy affects mostly the peasantry and the working class, we shall in effect, be discussing the educational content offered to peasants and workers in Kenya.

Kenya's mode of production is capitalism, but it is a capitalism which is an extension of Euro-American imperialism. This has given rise to the normal divisions of labour under capitalism i.e. the division of society into two categories of the exploiters and the exploited and the division of physical and mental labour with the dominating class of exploiters suppressing the minds of the dominated class of the exploited to facilitate the continued expropriation of the product of their labour. The category of the exploiters consists of the following classes: international bourgeoisie (foreign heads and owners of foreign companies e.g. Firestone, General Motors, B.A.T., Bata, Metal Box; foreign experts; etc.); the comprador bourgeoisie (Kenya Directors of foreign companies, Kenyan share holders in such companies, in a word Kenya direct guardians and service men for foreign nations and their interests); the National bourgeoisie (Kenyan owners of Kenyan industries based on Kenyan capital); and the upper stratum of the petty bourgeoisie (traders, University lecturers, etc.). These classes reside in towns and are not affected by lack of literacy skills. They have them or else they are able to buy them. The category of the exploited consists of the peasants and workers with the lower stratum of the petty bourgeois and the lumpen proletariat. Of these classes that constitute the category of exploited, the peasantry is the largest class and resides in the rural area. This category is the one affected by lack of literacy skills. It is clear from this brief analysis that the problems of illiteracy are mostly in rural areas.

What are the historical roots of the present position as sketched above? In other words, how has it come about that illiteracy is found

3. Persepoli Report: International Symposium for Literacy, Iran, 3-8 September, 1975.

mainly in the rural areas among the peasantry? The pre-colonial Kenyan economy was broadly communal with emerging feudalism in some areas. For example, the mbari.⁴ unit was an emerging feudal system and the various Kenyan peoples had developed forms of education and patterns of communication appropriate to that level of the struggles against both nature and man. Pre-colonial Kenya had its own forms of communication such as songs, dances, poems, and stories for different age groups and seasons. People communicated verbally and visually through the form of colours and even body marks. These highly developed forms of communication were accessible to every body. thus reflecting the communal organisation and control of the production of their wealth. They had also developed forms of writing; for example, among the Aagikuyu the Gicandi artists had developed a form of writing very close to Egyptian hieroglyphics with which they recorded their poems. Also, among the Swahili people, the Arabic script had been in use for generations. However, given the class nature of pre-colonial Kenyan societies and the level of development of their productive forces, such formal literacy skills were confined to small groups of people. In other words, the low level of the development of productive forces under both the communal and feudal systems had not allowed for widespread use of formal skills in literacy.

With the coming of British imperialism in Kenya and the consequent introduction of the capitalistic mode of production, there arose the need for slightly wider provision of formal literacy skills to facilitate the passing on of orders in the exploitation of Kenyan labour by British capital. For instance, during the process of colonization the colonists introduced the pass or Kipande system. Invariably one needed formal literacy skills to read this. The missionaries needed catechists to spread the gospel of docility. Literacy skills were required to best carry out the orders of the colonial masters. This was true of milk clerks, cooks, waiters, court clerks, prison warders, tax collectors and other functionaries of the colonial system.

4. Mbari. means clan in English.

Two processes in the area of communication. First the colonists suppressed the pre-colonial forms of communication and literacy skills which had been developed by the Kenyan peoples. Secondly they made sure that the new formal literacy skills they introduced were limited to only those sections of Kenyan people whose services as middle men were needed. John Anderson in his book, The Struggle for School, has pointed out that the colonists were particularly interested in possibilities for training a better skilled labour force, and inculcating in the indigenous population a proper respect for the European imperialist interpretation of law order.⁵ By suppressing the pre-colonial forms of communication and by limiting literacy skills to only a few, the colonists were suppressing the minds of the peasantry and the emerging working class with a view to their continued exploitation and oppression.

Kenyan were not slow in learning the secrets of the colonists material success - theft, plunder, murder and brutal suppression of the Kenyan mind. They revolted in opposition to the oppression. Mau Mau was the highest expression of this struggle. At every stage of the struggle from Koitalel to Kimathi, Kenyan were trying to regain control of both their physical and mental labour as well as their national, natural resources to educate the people. They composed revolutionary songs and dances for instant Muthirigu. They also developed content the one taught in colonialist schools and this new content was taught in Karing'a Schools. There was also a publication called the Mau Mau High Command Newspaper an anti-imperialist content. In addition, pamphlets were distributed to inform the people about the struggle. Also, Kimathi, the leader of The Mau Mau struggle, organised a theatre movement called Gicamuat Karunaini in Nyeri.

We can therefore conclude that illiteracy is a direct product of imperialism in its colonial stage and the struggle for literacy in the past always ^{tack} the correct form of the struggle against imperialism.

5. John Anderson, The Struggle for the School London: Longman, 1970).

Today the struggle for adequate provision of literacy, the struggle for relevant content, and the struggle for correct methods and approach, can only be meaningful in the context of the continuing anti-imperialist struggles of the Kenyan people.

Today, Kenya is a neo-colony. This means that the Kenyan economy continues to be exploited by the international bourgeoisie through the more subtle methods of an alliance with a comprador bourgeoisie; the exploitation of the labour of the peasantry and the working class by these forces continues. Therefore, the same imperialist need for the suppression of the mind of the peasant and worker population continues today in two forms.

First is the continued denial of literacy and communicative skills to peasant and workers albeit under different forms and guises. Today, after sixteen whole years of independence, over 80% of the adult population cannot read and write. The children of the same percentage of the population (meaning the peasants and workers) face a similar fate. For instance, although education is supposed to be free from standard one to standard six, the possible positive effects of these are negated by the policy governing pre-school education which is increasingly becoming the ladder to success in the primary section. Gakuru⁶ has found that pre-school attendance is an important determinant in selecting primary school entrants. Primary school headmasters give priority to children with nursery school experience. In fact some primary school headmasters select children on the basis of the type of pre-school attended. The children of workers and peasants are virtually excluded from this pre-primary education which has become very highly commercialized and a source of quick income for nursery school barons. The Daily Nation columnist Miriam Kihiga recently wrote of her experiences in finding a nursery school for her child,⁷ At the first nursery school she enquired she was told flatly that the fee would be 300/- a month

6. O.N. Gakuru Pre-Primary Education and Access to Educational Opportunities in Nairobi, Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi, WP NO. 321 (June 1977).

7. Daily Nation, July 12th, 1978, p.13

per child. At another she was asked whether she could afford 500/- monthly fee per child. Elsewhere the headmistress offered to give her a 50/- discount on the first down payment, which came to well over 800/-. There are other nursery schools whose fees are as high as 1,000/- and above a month. So even if primary education was free, the roots of that education is surely, beyond the reach of the workers and the peasants, since they cannot afford such fees. Some of the schools age children of the peasants and workers go to primary schools and subsequently drop out because of building funds, school uniforms, watchmen fee and fee for school activities.* All these children plus C.P.E. drop outs (who relapse into illiteracy after sometime) will add to adults who cannot read and write.

The irony is that the parents of these children are those of the labouring forces which produce wealth in farms and industries which goes to finance literacy among comprador bourgeoisie and their foreign allies.

Secondly, where there is provision for literacy programmes, the literacy content leads to the same end as non provision if not slightly worse i.e. the suppression of the mental labour or the minds of the peasants and the workers. The present literacy content is irrelevant to the needs of the rural poor since it is based on the assumption that the poor are to blame for their poverty. Thus, the present literacy content tends to oppress the peasants and workers.

How irrelevant and oppressive is the present literacy content?

Most of the Kenya literacy programmes are run by foreign agencies and church based organisations with foreign funding, although they try to link their activities with the Ministry of Housing and Social Services, Division of Adult Education. We can break the interest groups into the following:

* I am aware that since this paper was written building funds have been abolished. This is likely to make matters worse for schools which cater the rural poor. Since the needs for the expanded building programme will now be met through harambee financial efforts, schools without rich parents will not expand. It is virtually impossible for all schools to attract the same amount of harambee money. Therefore, we are bound to see even greater differentiation in facilities/different categories of schools in different provinces.

1. The Division of Adult Education Ministry of Housing and Social Services. It is supposed to run the national literacy programme but it has had very little money with which to organise literacy classes and produce materials. As a result, it uses discarded children's primary school books, like the Highway Arithmetics by E. Carey Francis and Dorothy Kirk, the New Oxford English Courses. It also uses current primary school texts like Kenya Primary Mathematics prepared by Kenya Institute of Education (K.I.E.) or Tuthome, Kikuyu Book 1, by Fred K. Kago, published by Longman group of publishers. Apart from the fact that some of these books are out of date even for children, the content in all of them was prepared with children in mind. This is clear in the type of visual illustrations and examples in the books. In fact, I shall not dwell on the content in the above books because the material was obviously not aimed at adults. These are probably being used because of lack of adequate alternatives. In addition to the above materials, the Division of Adult Education has produced a few follow-up reading texts for new literates for instance Ukulima wa pamba, Kilimo ni mali, Ukulima wa Pyrethrum (Gikuyu) Uchumi wa Ng'ombe, etc. Otherwise, the Division tends to lend its name and blessings to other organisations and agencies with interests in adult literacy programmes. The materials produced by these institutions, which are mostly foreign agencies, tends to bear the name of the Division of Adult Education to give them some kind of national legitimacy.

2. Church based organisations. Most churches e.g. the American Baptist Church, Salvation Army, Methodist Church, etc., fund and operate literacy programmes for their followers. The reading materials developed by these churches are mainly religious the two most important church-based organisations are the Catholic Secretariat and the National Christian Council of Kenya (N.C.C.K.). The Catholic Secretariat runs literacy programmes in the dioceses of Nairobi, Nakuru, Eldoret, Kitui and Ngong'. On the whole they have not produced primers, but they have developed pictorial material inspired by Freire's Psycho-Social approach) which are used in their literacy programmes. The personnel actually running the Catholic Secretariat Community Development Office which organises literacy programmes are foreigners e.g. the Marynol sisters from America.

The N.C.C.K. which groups together a number of non-Catholic Churches has a department called Adult Basic Education (A.B.E.) Although this department is supposed to produce literacy materials, they have for the most part lent their name to works produced by foreign based organisations like Intermedia (a group of American churches, Afrolit (A Society Literacy Promotion Agency in Africa financed by American churches and other foreign bodies). The current Executive secretary General of Afrolit in Nairobi, who is an American National, is the N.C.C.K.'s Adult Basic Education consultant.

3. Foreign Agencies. Most foreign agencies tend to work through church organisations or the Ministry of Social Services. However, much of the literacy materials currently in use have been written by them or produced under their strong guidance and patronage. In addition to Afrolit and intermedia, the two most significant organisations are the United Nations Development Programme (U.N.D.P.) which ran the Kenya Functional literacy Programme and the Food Agricultural Organisation (F.A.O.) which has been running the Programme for Better Family Living.

The U.N.D.P.'s Kenya Functional Literacy Programme produced books like: Hesabu - Maongezi Kwa Mwalimu, Kukuza mboga, Udongo, Matumizi ya vifaa kamili Mpango wa Afya, Jamii katika hali jema and many others. All of these were published by Foundations Books. Although this particular programme seems to be fading away, some of its materials are still being used.

The F.A.O.'s Programme for Better Family Living undertook an experimental Integrated Functional Educational programme*. Under this programme, a lot of literature mainly in Kikamba and Kiswahili was produced. Some of the titles are Nuru ua Nyumbani, Nguma ya Musyi Book One: Some Kikamba, imanyisyei Kiswahili, Nguma ua Musyi Book 2: Imanyisyei Kusoma and Nuru ya Kusoma na Kutunza Jamaa: Kiswahili - Kitabu cha 1.

The aims of these various interest groups and their approach to literacy are reflected in the current literacy content produced under their tutelage. The main themes are inspired by a bourgeois ideology and set a bourgeois style of life as the universal norm to be aspired to by Kenya peasants and workers. Their approach seems to imply that if the peasants and workers (or would be literates) would only shed their ignorance about this good life, they would surely attain it.

The following themes will be found in virtually all the primers and follow-up materials currently in circulation.

A. FAMILY PLANNING

In most primers, you will see a woman getting advice from a doctor on how to use pills or how to space children. In others, you see a peasant woman in the midst of a crowd of starving children with torn clothes. The woman who is equally poorly dressed is wondering what to do with this crowd of children. This picture is often contrasted with that of a healthy looking mother with one or two well dressed and well fed children. The impression is deliberately given that having many children is the cause of the poverty of

*This same programme is now operating under a new name - Rural Services Coordinating and Training Unit (R.S.C.T.U.).

peasants and workers. If only Kenyan peasants would have the good sense to limit the number of children they have to one or two, they would attain the Kingdom of the rich. In other words, it is their own fault that they are poor. Thus, the whole question of exploitation of peasants and workers is deliberately left out. This is in complete ideological conformity with the position of family planning organisations, often funded and run by imperialist countries, whose target group is the urban and rural poor. The population crisis is often a cover-up for the crisis of imperialism and the bourgeois organisation of wealth. It is a cover-up for the real causes of poverty which is exploitation.

B. BETTER FARMING METHODS

Most primers carry the message of better farming methods. In fact, a universally found picture is that of a well dressed farmer with grade cows whose udders are bursting with milk. This is contrasted with another picture of a peasant with too many "native" cows who are all scraggy and near death. The assumption here is that the illiterate peasants are poor because they do not know modern methods of farming. This once again ignores the real problem of the peasantry which is lack of land and the exploitation of the rural areas by the towns. The content on farming also ignores the accumulated knowledge of peasant farming practices which are equally advanced and which are often better suited to their environment which they know best. The same primers tend to recommend farming equipment and other production materials such as fertilizers which are not only expensive but also only obtainable from foreign firms. Again, the ideological position articulated in such a literacy primer is in conformity with the economic needs of foreign firms; the so called modern methods of farming depend on foreign technology.

C. NUTRITION AND HEALTH

The need to eat nutritious food and the means to achieve health and strength is also emphasised a great deal in many primers. There are often pictures of nutritious foods like fish, fillet steak, bread with butter and jam, vegetables, bottled milk, eggs and various kinds of fruits. Once again the impression is given that the rural and urban poor do not eat well because of their ignorance. Yet, the problem of the rural and urban poor is not the how but whether they will have any food at all. The fact is that peasants of all nationalities have developed a body of knowledge about nutritious foods. In fact, before imperialism enslaved Kenyan nationalities, Kenyan people used to eat very balanced diets evolved over a long period of

time. For instance, the Luo nationality, used many different types of cooking pots for the different types of dishes they used to cook. The problem today is whether ^aLuo peasant can even afford a single dish.

The same applies to questions of health. Once again we often see in the primers a picture of a baby suffering from malnutrition contrasted with another who is healthy looking. We are given the impression that the poor child is in that condition because of the parents' ignorance about good foods, hospitals and doctors. This is again a cover-up for the real causes of ill-health and malnutrition among the rural and urban poor. Thus, once the ideological position articulated in the primer is that of the exploiting classes i.e. the poor are to blame for the conditions in which they live.

D. RELIGION

The church oriented literacy programmes are even worse in that they articulate an ideological position which explains poverty in terms of god, sin and salvation. The central message is that Jesus is the Saviour, believe in him and you will be blessed with plenty. If belief in the bible does not remove the oppressor, how then are the basic needs, food, clothing and shelter for the rural and urban poor going to be met? Once again the literacy programme is used to mystify the real causes of poverty.

It is clear from our discussion of the current literacy content that it is irrelevant to the needs of peasants and workers because it sets out to mask their real problems. These literacy programmes articulate a world view which is in conformity with the bourgeois world outlook and which merely serves the interests of imperialism. It is clear then why so many foreign agencies are interested in literacy programmes. We have shown that the content of such programmes is usually designed by foreign consultants in their offices in Nairobi or New York. Often these experts do not have the slightest knowledge of the culture of the various nationalities for whom they are writing these primers. Also it is clear from the content of these primers that the authors are not simply interested in literacy as a skill to code and decode information; there is a strong ideological bias or orientation which meets the needs of imperialism and its allies. As we said at the beginning of this paper literacy is knowledge of symbols representing thought, and thus part of the wider communication between human beings in the labour process. It reflects the ideology of the educational system of a given country at a given time in history. In Kenya today, both

illiteracy and literacy serves the same ends: to blunt the consciousness of the workers and peasants about the nature of imperialism and its class allies. Illiteracy achieves this by denying peasants and workers coded information, and literacy does the same by giving them an ideological content irrelevant to their struggles for food, shelter and clothing.

The existing literacy material are irrelevant to the present struggles of workers and peasants. Their purpose is in fact to mystify the social reality of the peasants and workers. The high rate of drop-outs from most literacy programmes should be a lesson: a literacy programme can only be successful if it strives for a content relevant to the real needs of peasants and workers struggles. This is the major reason why literacy programmes have not been a success in Third World countries under imperialism.

TOWARDS A RELEVANT CONTENT

In Kenya we must first oppose the current dependency on foreign experts and foreign agencies. The existing pattern is to invite 'instant' experts from imperialist countries: (usually the united states, West Germany, Britain or UNESCO experts from these same countries) to write the literacy primers. They cite their many years of experience in the Third World countries. Some claim ten years, others thirty years and the like. What they do not tell us is the nature of their achievement in the countries of their sojourn. Often these experts have no understanding of the cultural background of the people for whom they are writing the primers. Furthermore, in most cases they do not even know the languages of the people. the argument that we need these consultants because funds come from foreign donor agencies is immaterial. These donor agencies represent the interests of their respective member governments. Ninety per cent of these monies return to the respective countries in one form or another: one of which is the engagement of these instant experts. It is time we realise that foreign agencies and foreign experts cannot draw up literacy programmes relevant to the national interests of Kenya.

Only patriotic Kenyans can draw up a programme which is relevant to the needs and struggles of Kenyans. These Kenyans can draw up a relevant and successful literacy programme if they ^{involve} the classes most affected by illiteracy in the planning and running of such programmes. By so doing, the peasants and the workers will identify with the programme, and claim responsibility for its development and expansion. Through this participation, they will make their con-

erns, needs and aspirations the foundation stone of the programme: it will present a world view which correctly reflects their material reality. If Kenyans who are organising these programmes are to meet these ideals, they must themselves be completely steeped in the cultures carried by the languages of the various nationalities in Kenya and particularly the language and culture of the nationality of the community in which they are working. Such Kenyans must realize that relevant content in any educational system is that which reflects man's everyday material reality.

I shall now draw upon the experiences of the peoples' literacy project at Kamirithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre to illustrate certain aspects of my thesis.

KAMIRITHU LITERACY PROJECT: BACKGROUND

Kamirithu is one of the five sub-locations of Limuru Division in Kiambu District. It is about 32 kilometres from Nairobi on the Nakuru-Naivasha Road. According to the 1969 Kenya population census, there were 7,879 people in Kamirithu. The current population is estimated to be 10,660 with growth rate of 1.48% per year.

The majority of the residents are originally from Limuru, but there have been waves of immigrants from Nyeri, Murang'a, Kirinyaga, Embu and other areas of Kenya primarily Rift Valley and Nyanza seeking work in industries and agricultural plantations.

The industrial and commercial sectors of the Limuru economy are not large. The dominant industry is shoe making which is wholly controlled by Bata Shoe Company. The company is foreign owned with some Kenya share holders on the Board of Directors. It has existed since 1940 and employs about 2,000 workers. A recent addition to foreign owned industrial enterprises in Limuru is a pipe making company called Nile Investment which employs about 230 workers. There is also the timber industry which is mostly foreign owned and which employs varying numbers of workers ranging from about five workers in small timber yards to about 700 in big timber yards. There are also two foreign banks, a chemical firm, a salts processing plant, a British American Tobacco owned chicken processing plant and various commercial shops for distributing clothes, foods and other commodities. These employ quite a few people. Uplands Bacon factory which is also foreign owned is an old factory which employs people and also buys pigs from Kenyan farmers. So there is a sizeable industrial working class in Limuru employed in the foreign owned industrial sector and the Kenya owned commercial distributive sector.

The agricultural sector of Limuru economy also absorbs a sizeable rural working class. These are mostly employed on the large tea and coffee plantations located in the former white highlands owned by foreign firms like Brooke Bond and by a few Kenyan landlords. Peasant holdings ranging from half an acre to ten acres grow anything from cash crops like pyrethrum to food crops like maize, beans, potatoes, fruits, vegetables etc., also provide employment.

Otherwise, unemployment and landlessness is the lot of the majority of Limuru people including Kamirithu residents.

Land demarcation was completed in 1958. At that time the colonial administration said that peasants with less than four acres of land could not build houses on that land; they were told to contribute a plot of 100 feet by 100 feet to a common site. These sites form the present Limuru Division Villages, a continuation of the emergency villages. The majority of peasants have less than four acres of land; rich peasants with between four and ten acres of land were and still are very few. The landless peasants go on reproducing themselves through birth, immigration, as stated above, and through sale of peasant land to richer people.

Buying and selling of land in Limuru Division is a common phenomenon. It is controlled by the Land Board which usually meets once a fortnight on Fridays. The role of the Land Board is to examine the ownership and to decide whether the land should be sold or whether it shall be charged against a bank loan as security. Normally no cases of sale are refused. A number of land holdings belonging to peasants have ended up being sold by banks as a result of inability to repay loans. The people in Limuru are very poor because of low salaries, landlessness, unemployment, and the villages are very crowded. At Kamirithu village ^{there are an average of six people for} every $\frac{1}{4}$ acre. The majority of the landless families have built their houses on public paths which divide the individual 100 feet by 100 feet plots. These families with houses on foot paths are essentially squatter communities in Kamirithu village; each is made up of about 15 families and each family has six members. Thus, we have more than 2,00 people who are poverty ridden in Kamirithu. They provide a reservoir of labour for landlords especially during harvest season for coffee.

The living conditions at Kamirithu are appalling. For instance, there is one squatter community consisting of 10 families with a total population of 66 people living in the most dehumanising conditions on a $\frac{3}{4}$ acre ^{piece of land.} There are no sanitation facilities, no street lighting and no

medical facilities in this village of more than ten thousand people. Kamirithu is not an exception. It is typical of Limuru as a whole.

When Kamirithu village was extended from the old emergency village in the late fifties, the only social need foreseen by the colonial authorities was that of a recreation centre where residents of the village could meet for social activities. A four acre plot was set aside for this and a building was put up by the village people. It became a Youth Centre where young men and women met to dance. After independence, carpentry classes were started under the management of Limuru Area Council. When these councils were abolished around 1973, the carpentry classes ceased. It was after this that the villagers came together to find ways of rescuing the centre and giving it new life. After several meetings, a management committee was chosen. This committee changed the name of the place from the Youth Centre to Kamirithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre. The Committee also appointed several sub-committees to deal with various projects for the centre. These committees included a cultural committee charged with the responsibility of organising people's culture at the Centre and an Education Committee to organise community education.

I was elected chairman of the Education Committee which otherwise consisted of peasants and workers from Kamirithu. After several meetings, we decided to start with literacy as a necessary part of community education.

Given a community such as Kamirithu, how do we begin to define its needs? As we have seen above, a great deal of literature on literacy tends to be written by outsiders in two senses: they are often complete outsiders to the community and they also come from another class. These outsiders assume and define the community's needs as seen from the needs of another class, not as seen by the members of the community.

The Education Sub-committee met weekly to plan the Kamirithu Literacy Project. After a number of meetings, it was agreed that the Kamirithu community's needs and problems, their everyday life, in a phrase their experience of history, would be the best literacy content. After discussions and review meetings of the problems affecting peasants and workers at Kamirithu, the following were identified as major community issues: lack of land, unemployment, low wages and inhuman working conditions in factories, lack of water, lack of firewood, lack of sufficient food for the family, lack of good housing, lack of hospital and health facilities in the village, poor transport and means of communication, problems of marketing agricultural produce, inflation, and lack of meaningful cultural alternatives. During these review meetings, other questions arose: Why is there poverty? What are the causes of poverty? Why is it that there are some people who eat, drink, clothe and shelter well while others go without food, without clothes, without houses? What can we do about these problems? How do we eradicate poverty and the roots of that poverty? All these problems were discussed in terms of the three historical stages of the people of Kamirithu: pre-colonial, colonial and post independence. During the discussions we reviewed the role of peasants and workers throughout the three historical phases.

The Education Committee spent four months discussing the Kamirithu community problems. We also discussed the best ways of presenting

these problems to other members of the Kamirithu Community. We decided to ^{code} them in the form of posters, songs, stories and role plays. These formed the bases of Kamirithu literacy content.

I would like to emphasize that some ^{members} of this committee could not read or write. In other words, ^{literacy} is not a prerequisite to designing the appropriate teaching content of a literacy programmes. The participatory method used in the development of these materials was later transferred to the classroom; group discussions, group criticism and self criticism was the teaching and learning method. Often the teacher and the learner changed roles, so that the teacher became the learner. In other words, the teacher was not necessarily an authority on content he was only a technician in literacy symbols. Thus, both in the development of teaching material and in the process of learning, the Kamirithu project rejected the teacher dependency approach which assumes that peasants and workers lack know-how in matters that deeply affect their lives. The Kamirithu project rejected the often assumed ignorance of workers and peasants and instead tried to build on the existing knowledge and the accumulated experience of peasants and workers.

This whole approach to literacy, i.e. discussion and collective involvement, presupposes the use of a language understood by all. Language is the most important instrument of human intercourses in labour. Language carries the accumulated experience of a people over the years. We cannot utilize this fund of knowledge and experience carried by that language unless we teach that language. At Karimithu we took the view that the language spoken by peasants and workers was primary and must be the basis of any successful literacy and community development programme. To use a language other than the one spoken by the people is to exclude such a people from participation in their own development. So at Kamirithu we used one of the many Kenyan national languages (i.e. the languages of the many Kenyan nationalities) Kikuyu.

The process of surveying the community problems and the development of materials took six months from January to June, 1976. After this, four literacy classes were opened in July: One literacy class

for men and three classes for women. During the recruitment of literacy participants, more than 100 illiterate peasants and workers wanted to join the programme but we did not have enough desks and room for all of them. In addition, we experienced difficulties in recruiting an adequate number of literacy teachers with the correct orientation towards the discussion method of teaching literacy. In fact for the few that we eventually got, I had to hold a two week workshop on the relevant approach to literacy. That is why the first in-take was 55 participants.

After six months of very enjoyable discussions 45 participants were able to read and write. In fact it was not really after six months but after 224 hours spread over six months. Another 224 hours again spread over the next six months saw the participants brushing up their literacy skills. In the middle of July 1977, they were writing letters to me and posting them at Limuru post office to prove to themselves that they could now communicate in the written symbols. Others were writing stories or brief sketches of their lives. On the whole, we can say that with a relevant content adults can become literate within three months or less.

SUMMARY OF THE KAMIRITHU LITERACY PROJECT

What can we learn from the Kamirithu experience? I had no control groups to measure the results of the programme against. However, in the face of high drop-out and rates, there has been considerable debate about motivation in adult literacy programmes. At Kamirithu motivation remained high and there were virtually no drop-outs except for a few necessitated by change of place or residence. This is despite the fact that most of the participants had to give up portions of their precious work time to come to the classes on time. It is interesting to note that despite the political pressures on Kamirithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre in 1977 and 1978, as a result of removal of the licence to perform the play Ngaahika Ndeenda and the subsequent detention of one of the authors, the literacy project continued strong.

Why was motivation so high? First, we have already noted the participation of peasants and workers in the preparation of teaching materials and learning methods.

Second, and more importantly the literacy programme was part of community development in education and culture. In other words, the literacy project was not isolated from other community needs. It was part of a struggle by the peasants and workers of Kamirithu to develop their village. Some of these literacy participants were involved in other cultural and educational activities at the Centre. The most important of these was the development of community theatre which resulted in the writing and production of the play, Ngaahika Ndeenda. Although the responsibility for writing the play was given to two authors, the other members of the community discussed and improved the script. They designed and constructed an open air theatre with a seating capacity of more than 2,000 people. While these other educational and cultural activities were, like the literacy project, full programmes of the Centre they also contributed for follow-up material for literacy learners.

There were no external agencies and foreign experts involved at Kamirithu despite various offers of sending. People at Kamirithu can identify with programmes for the Centre because they know that the result^{are}/from their own efforts.

CONCLUSION

There are no conclusions to this important discussion on relevant literacy content. Discussion on the nature of relevant knowledge will continue for as long as people continue struggling for food, clothing and shelter. These struggles of man should form the content of any educational programme including literacy. Knowledge that emerges from concrete problems is fundamental to the development of a people. In Kenya today, one of these problems is the struggle of the Kenyan people against imperialism and its allies. In other words, I am convinced that no literacy programme for rural development can be successful unless it is an integral part of an anti-imperialist struggle and part and parcel of the patriotic affirmation of national interests. I am also convinced that problems of illiteracy and literacy cannot be solved outside the solution of other contradictions in society. In Kenya total literacy cannot be attained outside the total economic and political transformation of the society. But these are issues which go beyond the scope of this paper.

At this point in time, the Kamirithu experience is the closest to the type of literacy content emphasised in this paper. For this reason, I hope that it forms the basis of better work elsewhere in Kenya. However, more work remains to be done at Kamirithu before an adequate literacy model emerges and can be put at the disposal of the entire nation.