



## **Republic of Namibia**

### **Statement**

**By**

**Dr Richard Nchabi Kamwi, MP  
Minister of Health and Social Services**

**At the Occasion of International & National  
Literacy Day**

**Eenhana, Ohangwena Region**

**8 September 2010**

**P**rogramme Director

**Y**our Highness, the Queen of Oukwanyama, Meekulu  
Martha Mwadinomho

**H**on. Governor, Ohangwena Region, Cde. Usko Nghaamwa

**Y**our Worship, the Mayor of Eenhana, Cde. Julia Shikongo

**H**on. Councillors of Different Constituencies in Ohangwena  
Region present

**O**hangwena NAMPOL Regional Commander,  
Commissioner Armas Shivute

**C**hief Executive Officer of Eenhana, Mr. Walde Ndevashiya

**T**he Undersecretary for Lifelong Learning, Ms. Claudia  
Tjikuua

**U**NESCO Representative from Windhoek Cluster Office

**T**he Director of Adult Education, Mr. Beans Ngatjizeko

**O**hangwena Education Regional Director, Ms. Sanet  
Steenkamp

**O**hangwena Chief Regional Education Officer,

**H**eadmen of the Ohangwena Region present

**T**he retired Director of the Directorate of Adult Education,  
Ms. Canner Kalimba

**T**he Senior Educators and Education Officers present

**O**fficials from Ministries and various Government  
Organizations, **U**N Agencies and NGOs present

**O**fficials from Adult Learners' Week 2010 Preparatory  
Committee

**M**embers of the Media

Adult learners

Distinguished invited guests and friends and colleagues from industry, and government,

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am truly honoured to stand before all of you to deliver the keynote address for this celebration of an International Literacy Day and Adult Learners' Week under this very important theme **“Quality Literacy for Participation, Empowerment and Improved Health”**. Such a celebration is indeed a sign and a token to re-affirm our commitment as a nation to be a country free of illiteracy.

On occasions such as this one, when we celebrate success and achievement, it is worth recalling that the right to education has long been proclaimed as a fundamental human right. It is enshrined in the charters of the United Nations and of UNESCO and in the Constitutions of many countries. It is one of the main preoccupations of bilateral and multilateral development, and it has been promoted at international meetings, such as the *Education for All Conference* held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, the *Dakar World Education Forum of 2000* and the series of *UNESCO International Conferences on Adult Education (CONFINTEA)*.

The education of adult and out-of-school youth must be recognised as an enforceable human right. Adult Education should be regarded as the invisible glue or a very strong bridge between Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for Health and Education, as Health targets can

only be achieved if Namibians are able to read and write. The achievements of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) goals, such as:

**EFA Goal III:** Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes;

**MDGs I, II, III, IV, V, and VI:** Provide concrete, numerical benchmarks for eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and empower women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal mortality, and combating HIV / AIDS, malaria and other diseases. Education is indeed the fundamental principle for human empowerment.

**W**e are still facing many challenges in achieving the MDGs. For example, although Namibia is regarded as a lower middle-income country with an average per capita income of US\$ 3 000, our Gini-coefficient (which measures the degree of inequality in a society) is still at 0.6, and although this is an improvement on our previous position of 0.7, it is still one of the highest in the world. I understand that our net primary school-enrolment rate stands at around 92% and although this seems to be impressive, meeting the MDG target of 99% is still a challenge.

**H**owever, we seem to be doing very well with respect to gender parity in education. The ratio of females to every 100 males in primary education stands at 98, in secondary

education at 117, and in tertiary education at 88. The target to have gender parity in education has been achieved in secondary education; it is likely to be achieved for primary education, and it will possibly be achieved in tertiary education.

**A**s my colleague Hon. Dr. Abraham Iyambo indicated at the launch of the literacy week on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2010 “...to achieve the **MDGs**, **EFA** and the **national development** goals requires inter-ministerial collaboration and active participation of the civil society at all levels...” Participation in adult basic education is essential to ensure that the programmes take into account the specific needs of marginalized groups, encourage development of active citizenship, improve health and livelihoods, and gender equality. Active participation influences opinions and contributes to the quality of public policies and programmes. Furthermore, empowerment is an effective model for achieving personal and social change. I indeed concur with him and would emphasize the strong inter-ministerial collaboration and active participation of all.

**M**y intent today is to share the importance of this happy gathering with you: that the nations of the world, including Namibia, have given their collective support for this important initiative which will provide an international framework for mobilizing efforts to spread the benefits of literacy as crudely as possible in the years ahead.

We are gathered here today not only to raise awareness on the need to create more opportunities for adults to learn, but to celebrate the efforts and achievements of the thousands of Namibians who have found the courage to ‘take that first step back’.

International Literacy Day and Adult Learners’ Week are used as mobilization initiatives in many countries, including Namibia. On behalf of the Government of Namibia, and indeed on behalf of my Ministry and the Ministry of Education, I am proud to inform the Namibians that:

- Every year, during the first week of September (1-8 September), we celebrate our success and rekindle our passion and love for learning.
- We reflect on challenges that face our sectors and to recognize that by working together, we can strive for a quality literacy programme.
- The first week of September is put aside every year to encourage one another to further our education and to celebrate the achievements of those who have already taken up the challenge of lifelong learning.

The country theme for this year’s Adult Learners’ Week and International Literacy Day is **Quality Literacy for Participation, Empowerment and Improved Health** which echoes the call of the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012) and highlights how adult education enables people to

recognize their full potential and to participate in the shaping up of an equitable and democratic society.

**Q**ue concept or the phrase **Quality Literacy** refers to the teaching and learning materials used in adult basic education programmes. The term **adult basic education** is commonly used to mean not only **literacy** and **numeracy** skills acquisition, but also the **acquisition of social and life skills**, and that is the scope that **Quality Literacy** almost always reflects across the world, especially in the developing countries. Such programmes are being contextualized in Namibia's National Literacy Programme.

**Q**uality has been defined by many theorists. Some definitions are given below:

- Fitness for use (Juran)
- Compliance with specified requirements (Crosby)
- Freedom from defects, imperfections or contamination.
- Degree of excellence
- Customer satisfaction
- Delighting customers
- The totality of characteristics of an entity that bears on its ability to satisfy stated and implied needs (ISO 8402:1994)

**T**he theme espoused for this year "**Quality Literacy for participation, empowerment and Improved Health**" seeks on empowering and enabling the Namibian community in functional adult literacy in the absence of formal schooling.

The theme further dissects the special effects of functional literacy whereas it zooms in the gains going beyond the obvious benefits of reading and writing and extending to other areas of everyday functioning, such as self-concept, family relations, social participation, health and participation in development intervention programmes for Namibia to become a industrialized based economy as visualized in Vision 2030.

More than halfway through the **UN Literacy Decade launched in 2003**, one in five young people and adults aged 15 years and over does not possess the most elementary skills required to **read a street sign, a child's book, a map, a newspaper, names on a voting ballot or instructions on a medicine bottle.** In a world increasingly driven by knowledge and technology, two in every three of the world's **759 million** illiterate adults are women. We are far from the goal of halving the number of illiterate persons around the world by 2015. Even though literacy rates have risen, the absolute number of illiterates has increased in some parts of our country due to population growth. This represents a genuine threat to human development and unequal access to education and all other essential services.

This year's International Literacy Day puts the spotlight on the connections between **literacy and health and the influential role that literacy plays in empowering women.** Today's gravest health concerns cannot be adequately addressed unless literacy finds a central place in public health policies and strategies. An illiterate person is simply

more vulnerable to ill-health and less likely to seek medical help for themselves, their family or their community. Nearly ten million children die before reaching age five, most often of preventable infectious diseases, and it is children of the poor who are less likely to be treated for serious illness. The risk of contracting malaria – which **claims over one million lives each year** – has increased significantly amongst illiterate populations, with literacy levels having a direct impact on health-seeking behaviours.

**W**omen with post-primary education are five times more likely than illiterate women to know facts about HIV and AIDS. This is why the Millennium Development Goals directly or indirectly related to health - eradicating extreme poverty, promoting gender equality, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, and combating HIV and malaria - cannot be reached without a literacy dimension.

**L**iteracy is about **empowerment**. It increases awareness and influences the behaviour of individuals, families and communities. It improves communication skills, gives access to knowledge and builds the self-confidence and self-esteem needed to make decisions. A woman or a girl who participates in a literacy programme will have better knowledge of health and family planning. She will more likely adopt preventive health measures for herself and for her children; she will more easily seek medical help and make use of the available medical services; and finally, she will be able to follow medical instructions more easily to

ensure adequate treatment for herself or close-of-kin. In short, literacy is a powerful, yet too often overlooked remedy to health threats, with the potential to promote better nutrition, disease prevention and treatment. These innovative and successful literacy practices show that when health is at stake, literacy has a major role to play.

This year, we are ending our Adult Learners' Week with the celebration of International Literacy Day when we remember those who are struggling to obtain the basic educational tools that are the first steps on the pathway to lifelong learning. This year, International Literacy Day is placing a special focus on the highly influential role that literacy plays in empowering women and health, which is also the thematic emphasis of the 2009-2010 of the United Nations Literacy Decade. This relationship brings benefits to all age groups: early childhood, school children, adolescents and adults. Therefore, on this day, we need to **take stock of our achievements** in the provision of basic literacy and post literacy programmes:

- Since the launch of the basic literacy and post-literacy programmes, 575 739 adult and out-of-school youth enrolled with the Ministry of Education led-programmes
- Current (2010) 27 398 adult and out-of-school youths are enrolled in both basic and post literacy programmes; 65% of those are women.
- National literacy rate is currently estimated to be 85%; this might be an underestimation of literacy in

Namibia, and thus, a survey in the assessment of literacy is of essential importance to provide the actual rate.

- **A** total of 223 Family Literacy Centres across Namibia were established in rural schools to assist parents and care givers of Grade One learners. These centres are expanded each year as per regional ratio.
- **T**o sustain literacy skills and to provide for learning throughout life, 62 Community Libraries and Community Learning and Development Centres have been established throughout the regions, 18 centres have internet connection.

**T**he Government of Namibia is actively engaged in encouraging all Ministries to adopt policies that explicitly tackle literacy and build on the valuable work often led by civil society. But this is just the cusp of change. It is essential for all Ministries to show greater leadership and to increase spending on literacy, and for donors to give it a higher profile in their aid portfolio. There is an urgent need to scale up youth and adult learning programmes, to improve their quality, and to develop a rich literate environment where individuals of all ages are encouraged to sustain and use their newly acquired skills.

**T**he challenge ahead is our collective responsibility.

**I** thank you for your attention.