
UNIT 15 READING MATERIAL FOR NEO-LITERATES AND SEMI-LITERATES

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15.0 INTRODUCTION

Design of Unit 15 touches upon the special needs of semi-literate and neo-literate adults in relation to 'appropriate' reading material for them. The unit also provides a context to the issues related to creation of reading material for them. Further it will lead you to develop a critical perspective on mainstream reading materials. This Unit thus focuses on the following two main issues.

- a) Issues related to the availability of reading material for neo-literate and semi-literate adults; and
- b) Content and style of the reading material for neo-literate and semi-literate adults.

15.1 OBJECTIVES

It is expected that after reading Unit 15, you will be able to:

- Reflect on your role as an adult educator in the process of creating or developing materials for neo-literate and semi-literate adults;
- Examine existing material available for neo-literate and semi-literate adults; and
- Develop an understanding of the principles of writing for adult readers.

15.2 NEO-LITERATES AND SEMI-LITERATES

Neo-literate is an adult or an adolescent who did not or could not make use of the available educational opportunities on time, and who at a later stage acquired the skills of literacy through formal or non-formal approaches. Majority of neo-literates are economically poor and live in rural areas or urban slums. A large number of adult women who became literate after participating in the Total Literacy Campaigns since the 1990s are neo-literates. Neo-literates have fragile levels of literacy. In the absence of 'appropriate' reading material for them, they can easily relapse into illiteracy.

Semi-literate is that adult or adolescent who has low levels of literacy skills. School drop-outs or those who have studied up to the 5th standard but do not have mastery over the literacy skills constitute this category of learners. Here too the lack of practice for them in reading and writing over time can easily lead to the loss of their literacy skills.

Do it Yourself and for Yourself

What image comes to mind when you think of a neo-literate or a semi-literate person? Write down your ideas in not more than 2-3 minutes.

When this activity was done with a set of students, these were the words that they identified: *ignorant, rural, poor, dirty, superstitious, lazy, lacking in ambition.*

Do any phrases in the list above match with the one's you have written? If they do, read the text below.

It is true that a majority of non-literate or newly literate persons are poor and probably live in rural areas. And many of them will be women. However, the reality is that most people with low levels of literacy have vast experiential knowledge and information on several subjects. The only difference is that this is oral knowledge. Often they are unable to articulate themselves clearly or with confidence.

It is important to understand that poverty, non-availability of schools, or the poor quality of education provided, results in a large proportion of our country's population not having access to schooling and education. Women and girls are often denied access to education. These material and structural causes for illiteracy cannot become the basis for attributing negative traits to newly literate persons. Adopting such an approach would amount to adopting a 'blame the victim' approach. Being aware of and challenging such biases becomes critical for it is our perceptions of the neo-literate and semi-literate that will determine the content, style and language of material that we create for them.

Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Space given below the question is for writing your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under "Answers to Check Your Progress".

1) In a town or city, who you think are neo-literates or semi-literates? What knowledge or information do they have? Or, would you consider them ignorant?

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15.2.1 Categories of Adult Learners

The Adult and Continuing Education Department of the Government of India has divided adult learners into three categories according to their levels of literacy and numeracy.

- **Level I** includes those who have the ability to read and write words / sentences using most frequent letters and vowel signs; read and write numbers up to 50; write one's own name.
- **Level II** includes those who have the ability to read and write words and sentences, almost all the letters, all vowel signs and some conjunct letters; read and write numbers and do simple addition and subtraction up to 100; write names of family members and one's address.
- **Level III** includes those who can read and comprehend a small passage (usually text / newspaper headings, road signs, etc; compute simple problems of multiplication and division involving numbers up to 100; apply skills of writing and numeracy in day to day activities. i.e. writing letters, filling forms, etc.

Do it for yourself

- 1) What according to you is the kind of material that neo-literate and semi-literate adults would like to read? Make a list of all such material.
- 2) What is the kind of material that you like to read? You may have more than one favourite, so make a list of everything that you like to read. This list does not refer to material that you read as part of your work, for example teaching-learning material, curricula, primers, etc. In your list include material that you enjoy reading.

What do you find?

- i) Is there a difference in the two lists?
- ii) Is the second list longer than the first?
- iii) Is there more variety in the type of material in the second list?
- iv) Does the first list include reading material that is more functional in nature?

Reflect

If the answer to all or most of the questions is "Yes", there is a need to reflect and understand the divide between "us" and "them". Read on to understand this divide and identify the reasons for its existence.

15.2.2 Neo-literate and Semi-literate Adults: Content and Style of their Reading Material

Material that is specially created for neo and semi-literate readership is usually exceedingly dull, and preaches worthy messages which are deemed necessary (by 'us') for the poor ('them') to help them improve their lives. There is also a tendency to tell readers about the way things 'should' be. Cleanliness, hygiene, family planning, and vaccination are often the part of subject matter of such publications. The image of rural people as being ignorant, dirty and lazy is often reinforced. Women's issues are seldom discussed, and women are almost always portrayed within the stereotyped context of performing household tasks, or being part of the scenery instead of central to the plot itself.

Compare this material with what 'we', the educated, like to read. We are literally spoiled for choice. Far more information is available than we can possibly read and digest. We are curious to hear about news from the wider world and about current events. And we like to read for entertainment novels, romance, thrillers and science fiction; we regard access to enjoyable and useful reading matter as an inalienable right.

Why then should readers in rural areas have such a limited range of reading material available to them? Why is 'their' need different from 'ours'? Why is their right to literacy and education not complemented by an equally important right to regular access to enjoyable and informative reading material? We need to reflect on these questions.

The divide between what adult readers want and what is provided for them, and the underlying notions of 'doing good' and 'bettering people's lives', is reflected in most of the titles of reading material published for neo-literate and semi-literate readers. It is therefore essential to make available to such readers a rich variety of reading material which meets their needs of information and entertainment as well. This means respecting and recognizing the right of adults to learn.

15.2.3 Some Statistics about Adult Learners

The Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2007) highlights the grim situation of education in various countries of South and West Asia. The report states:

"781 million adults (one in five worldwide) lack minimum literacy levels. Two-thirds are women. Literacy rates remain low in South and West Asia... Without concerted efforts to expand adult literacy programmes, by 2015 the global number of adult illiterates will have dropped only by 100 million. Governments must also focus on building literate environments".

The National Readership Study (NRS) is the largest annual study conducted to understand reading habits and availability of reading material in the country. The 2006 NRS data highlights the gap between urban and rural India in terms of availability of reading material. The study data reveals that there are 359 million people who can read and understand one or the other language but do not read any publication. Of this 359 million, 68 per cent read Hindi. It is not just affordability that is a constraint.

The NRS 2006 has – for the first time in India – attempted to capture the topics that interest readers across different strata of society. Apart from News and Politics, Sports is the topic of interest among readers. This is followed by Films and TV Serials. While the level of interest among urban audiences is higher than among rural audiences, urban and rural up-market readers exhibit very similar patterns.

Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Space given below the question is for writing your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to Check Your Progress”.

2) What according to you are the main reasons for neo-literates’ or semi-literates’ inability to read material that is available?. List five reasons.

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15.3 ROLE OF ADULT EDUCATORS IN BRIDGING THE INFORMATION GAP

It is quite clear that the large number of neo-literate and semi literate readers in rural areas have very little access to different sources of information. Libraries, in addition to other resources, form a major source of information. However, libraries in rural areas are not well equipped to cater to the information needs of neo-literate and semi literate readers. Lack of vision and adequate human and financial resources are some of the reasons for the present status of rural libraries. While some efforts have been made by NGOs in recent years to start libraries in rural areas, these efforts are very limited and inadequate. In several places reading material is provided only once in the year. Most publications available address issues of health, child care, fertility control and employment. Few efforts are made to encourage and develop a culture of reading. Women rarely access reading material in libraries. In most places it is only men and boys who visit libraries regularly.

The role of adult educators and those working on issues of education is extremely critical in bridging this information gap. Efforts need to be made to provide informative and interesting reading material to neo-literate and semi-literate readers. With this background, it is also important to look at the issue of gender in relation to reading material for readers with low levels of literacy.

Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Space given below the question is for writing your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to Check Your Progress”.

3) What do you understand by gender? How do you come across gender issues in your work as an adult educator? Write three gender sensitive points that you keep in mind while writing any material for neo literates.

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15.3.1 Issues of Gender in Literacy Materials

Before looking at gender in materials, it is necessary to look at and question our own understanding of this issue.

Box 15.1: What is Gender?

- Gender is a socio-cultural concept. It varies greatly across contexts. Gender roles are specific to societies, and are fluid and constantly changing.
- Gender relations give the impression that they are permanent and based on naturally drawn sexually different roles. However, their main aim is to establish and maintain social order. In the process they have created unequal power relations between men and women and have denied women equity in matters of rights / space / freedom / choices.

Critical aspects of gender are that:

- It assigns different and unequal roles and attributes of “masculine” and “feminine” to men and women.
- In practice, it categorizes these ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ roles and attributes as ‘natural’ differences, this makes unequal relations seem normal.
- Gender is revealed to be a construction, rather than a given, if we shift the perspective from gender as difference to gender as concretely experienced dominance, then gender changes from what seems normal to what calls for questioning.
- Gender relations are not static; they vary across cultures and time. They are dynamic and recreate new ways in which masculinity and femininity are constructed and communicated in a particular context or period.

- Since gender is an evolving concept it is open to re-examination and change. Gender relations are not sacrosanct, in fact existing gender relations need to be questioned.

As people involved in the area of adult education, we come across gender relations in our own lives. In our work, at educational institutions, schools, etc we witness gender at play. This is also true for materials – textbooks, magazines, newsletters, teaching-learning material, etc. Therefore, it is extremely important for us to analyze material, including visuals, keeping in view certain points from a gender perspective.

- Gender does not mean a mere inclusion of women in materials. Illustrations that include women or articles / stories / chapters with women cannot address the issue of gender in materials.
- Often material reinforces and strengthens existing stereotypes. The manner in which men and women are represented, roles assigned, norms followed, needs to be questioned in order to address the issue of gender in materials.
- Gender does not work in isolation. It is closely linked to other issues of caste, class, religion, rural-urban backgrounds and other identities.
- Role reversals need to be avoided. Stories, articles and images showing girls going to school, boys drawing water from wells or women in the public domain and men doing household work are too simplistic in nature. These do not enable readers to question the complex nature of gender relations.

While reading publications – mainstream or those developed by NGOs — you need to remember to analyze these from a gender perspective. Similarly, while watching plays, films, television programmes, look out for gender stereotypes or places where gender norms have been questioned or challenged. This analysis should also inform our writing.

Box 15.2: Gender Depiction in Illustrations

Illustrations in books tend to:

- Represent problematic situations — example a situation of gender discrimination where a girl is shown doing house work and a boy is going to school.
- Represent an ideal situation — example, an illustration might have women working in the factory and men drawing water from well.

However, if you put on your gender lenses, you will see that both illustrations are problematic.

In the first example boys and girls are shown in stereotypical roles, girls/women are mainly passive and they are not in decision making roles. In the second example there is a simplistic role reversal and an ideal situation is presented without actually questioning other issues such as control over resources and power.

Illustrations tell us a lot about the perspective of the writers of the book. Division of labour and roles according to the biological sex of a person need to be questioned, not reinforced. The illustrations make these differences seen as natural and normal. This does not enable the learner to reflect, analyze and question the issues from a perspective that is sensitive to gender. While positive examples should be presented, they should be placed in a certain context that also highlights reality.

Do it Yourself and Reflect

Select a story that includes some women characters and read it once just like that and read it again with your gender lenses on.

Where do you see gender in the story? What are the words used to describe the gender roles and gender-based division of labour in everyday activities? Is the difference in these words only a matter of language or is language also biased in terms of gender? Reflect upon the above questions and write your response to them.

Some Tips for Further Reflection

- 1) In order to write articles and stories for adults, make list of the places from where you are likely to get information.
- 2) How many places do you have on your list?

It is possible to collect information from a range of sources. These include primary as well as secondary sources of information. Primary sources could include – schools, hospitals, education and health centres, offices in the area (government, non- government), railway station, bus-stands, panchayat offices, events in the area, shops, public places, markets, etc. Local people can also provide information on local history, events, and incidents and could also be a source of information for old stories and culture. Secondary sources would include – newspapers, books, magazines, NGO publications and other publications. Libraries, internet, encyclopedia and reference books also provide us information on a range of issues.

It is important to authenticate the source from where we are accessing information. On the one hand it is important to distinguish between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’, what gets told as news may not necessarily be true, so it is important for us to collect facts from a range of people and use these as the basis for writing. On the other hand, it is also important to check information that we access from secondary sources. Websites, publications should have references for the information provided. Wrong information or presentations of facts that have not been authenticated will lead us to providing incorrect information to readers.

Do and Assess Yourself

Select a paragraph from an article in Hindi or the local language (Gujarati, Marathi, Oriya, Tamil, Telugu, etc) from a newspaper and read each sentence and circle the words that are not part of your everyday language.

How many circles do you have in the paragraph? Can you think of simpler words for the words that you have circled?

Reflect

It is important to be sensitive to the needs of neo-literates and semi-literates, in terms of the language used. It requires a conscious effort to write in a way that is appropriate for this readership. All our formal school education has rewarded writing in ways (for instance in formalized Hindi) which neither allows us to express ourselves in an uninhibited way or is the style easy or enjoyable for those who are reading.

15.3.2 Issues of Language in Literacy Materials

While writing it is important to write in the way that we speak and use 'bol chaal ki bhashaa' i. e. colloquial language. For example, while writing in Hindi, we should avoid formal and difficult words as Hindi is not the language of self-expression and communication in most 'Hindi speaking states'. Mainstream Hindi is also an iconic symbol of power and the powerful. While a wide range of reading material in Hindi is available, it is usually written in a style that is incomprehensible and intimidating. Stories, poems and other literature are not available to a large number of adult readers with low levels of literacy as the language used is too formal and difficult.

Do and Reflect

Ask five people you know to list the languages that they can speak, read or understand. Make a list of these and reflect on the following.

- How many languages are there in your list?
- According to you, how many of these are, in fact, languages?
- How would you classify the remaining?
- On what basis have you made this distinction?

Very often we do not give enough importance to certain languages. There is a distinction made between 'language' and 'dialect', and languages are given more importance than dialects. Dialects are often referred to as 'dehati bhasha', there is a connotation of it being 'separate' and 'lower'. What we need to question is whether this distinction between language and dialect is real or a politically created division.

To understand this we need to first question our own understanding of language. The following definitions of 'language' are considered significant by most people.

- It is a medium of expression.
- It implies listening, explaining and understanding.
- It involves thinking. We 'think' in language.
- Language is a source of identity. It plays an important role in making us feel 'same' or 'different'.
- It is also a medium for the creation of an image.
- It is a source of motivation for some.
- It is a means of bringing people together by binding them with a sense of belongingness. However, this also happens only if there is sensitivity in the language and the way that it is used.
- Just as a language can bring people together, it can also be a medium of discrimination.

15.3.3 Language and Communication

One of the functions of language is communication - speaking, listening, and understanding each other. While listening it is also important to be able to comprehend. Interpretation of language plays an important role in communication. It is necessary that not only one point-of-view gets heard, and that all parties get

a voice in any discourse. Effective communication is achieved by presenting different sets of ideas, and the analysis skills to look at them critically. We are mere facilitators to help people, we cannot impose ideas; change normally takes a lot more time and discussion. The use of language and of folk media is critical. Music - the tone, music beats, words - is associated with people's lives so they like it more than serious songs - e. g. Baul music of Bengal, Nachari of Mithila, etc.

The politics of language: Language is also not static. We add our values and view points to every image. This is what language also does. Every generation adds new words, new perspectives, new thoughts, etc, to an existing language. The synthesis of the words used for Dalits over a period of time illustrates this point very clearly. The educationist and reformer Jyotiba Phule spoke of education for the 'ati-Shudra' and writers like Munshi Premchand, Mahadevi Varma, etc, used the word 'chamar'. Some people may consider the use of such language insulting for the marginalised community. Others have used it purposely to make a point. Gandhiji changed the language and made a political statement by referring to the Dalits as Harijan - 'Hari' refers to 'god' and 'jan' refers to the fact that 'all are equal'. B. R. Ambedkar renamed the Harijans as 'Dalit'. Dalit is a political word that indicates the real situation - it has the connotation of oppression as well as the pride of a separate identity - unlike Harijan, which is still accepting the caste structure and is ignoring the reality. Thus, we see the movement in the use of language in Shudra → Harijan → Dalit, depending on the politics of language at different points of time.

It is also extremely important that we recognise the richness and diversity of language in varying cultural contexts. For instance, among women in Banda district of UP, there is rich vocabulary of Bundelkhandi words that are used to describe an ear-ring, whereas in Hindi there may be only two or three words.

There is a power play among languages. Hindi has emerged as a powerful language among all Indian languages. We often speak of other languages that we use as an afterthought. This shows how languages other than Hindi (in North India especially) face inhibition in public forums, where they may be considered inferior and 'dehati' in comparison with a mainstream language. People from marginalised communities do not speak with confidence in public spaces because they feel inhibited.

The other important aspect in the politics of language is the script. The question is - is it important for a language to have a script in order to be recognized? Is it possible for a single language to be written in different scripts? Is it possible to write numerous languages in a single script?

As we develop an understanding on language and power, it is important for us to keep the following issues in mind while writing:

- It is possible and desirable to write in the local language(s) while writing for adults. Since people's life worlds, experiences and imagery are best expressed in the local language, using this can be a powerful means of communication.
- Language, both written and oral, constructs, defines and represents our reality. Language is political and there are clear hierarchies. Written languages are

- considered high on the evolutionary ladder, oral languages are considered mere dialects. There is a need to question and challenge this belief.
- Written material often gives out the message that marginalised communities need to be ‘civilized’. This needs to be critiqued. Our language and writing should not reinforce these stereotypes.
- It is correct to say that the less ‘pure’ a language is, the more beautiful and richer it is.
- Grammar is the mere ‘making meaning’ out of the language construction that society makes. Grammar does not determine what meaningful language is and what is not.
- While writing in the local language, there is always a concern, which language to use? One should always use the language that is understood by the majority and not what is described as ‘pure’ language.

Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Space given below the question is for writing your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to Check Your Progress”.

4) How would you decide the language of your publication? In case you choose an oral language, how would you write in the publication?

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15.4 WRITING FOR NEO-LITERATES

Writing for neo-literates requires a thorough preparation on the part of the writers or those who produce the materials for neo-literates.

Preparation: Before producing material for neo literates and people with low levels of literacy it is important that we have:

- A clear idea of the target audience and their levels of literacy
- Clarity on objectives of the type of material being produced - for example, curriculum, teaching- learning material, direct reading material like a magazine or a newsletter, etc.

- Understand the needs of our target audience so that there is no information overload or lack of data.
- Decide on the language in which the publication will be produced. This should be based on an assessment of the language(s) understood by the majority of readers.
- If possible read and analyse existing publications available for the target audience to have clarity on their needs.
- Field test written material in order to get feedback from readers on its content, language and style. Feedback should be incorporated in the final version of material being produced.

Writing: While writing the material considering the following points will make the writing more effective:

- Writing needs to have a peg. Articles written around events, incidents and issues that are topical are easy to relate to, even if they are outside the immediate concern of readers.
- Articles should not be written in an essay style.
- Writing needs to be simple, not simplistic. Complex issues should be kept alive.
- Struggles, contradictions, dilemmas should be kept alive while writing.
- The content should be diverse. A publication (magazine, newspaper or newsletter) should include news, information, stories, articles on everyday things, popular history, culture and entertainment.
- Avoid using explicit definitions when introducing new words. Instead, weave the definition of the word, concept or idea around a sentence.
- Articles need to raise questions without telling people how things should be.
- Articles need to provide new information, but there should not be an information overload. Use statistics and data judiciously. Percentages and ratios need to be explained.
- Use short paragraphs and link each paragraph to the previous one.
- The beginning of each article needs to be interesting. It needs to highlight the seriousness of the issue or provide new information. Long introductions are never effective.
- While raising questions during writing, do not leave too many questions unanswered.
- Do not give messages or morals at the end of articles or stories.
- Headings should be interesting, appropriate and creative. Catchy headings generate interest. Use sub-headings for providing more clarity.
- It is better if the sentences do not have more than 14-20 words and one page does not have more than 270-300 words. The point size of the text (for Hindi text if using Kruti fonts) should be between 18-20 and the leading should be 22.

- Use illustrations and photographs in articles and stories. Illustrations should not be alien to the readers and their context. They should not reinforce stereotypes. Photographs should be clear and of good quality.
- Use at least one big or two medium sized visuals on each page.
- Do not place visuals in square or rectangular boxes. Text can be wrapped around visuals or even super-imposed.
- Use good quality paper for printing. You may not use expensive or glossy paper, but use paper that prints well and that also enables you to print good quality photographs and visuals.
- Use colour selectively.

Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Space given below the question is for writing your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to Check Your Progress”.

5) Are the following statements correct or incorrect?

i) Since the neo-literates do not have specially prepared reading material available for them, they would be interested in reading anything that is provided to them.

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ii) It is important to have a balance of serious issues and lighter, entertaining pieces in a publication for neo-literates.

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iii) Since we will be engaged in the task of producing publications for rural readers, cheap, subsidised paper that is not good in quality can be used. After all they may not have seen good quality paper ever in a reading material.

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iv) Visuals and photographs make the publication attractive and provide relief to readers from the heaviness of text.

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15.5 FEEDBACK OF ADULT LEARNERS ON MATERIALS PRODUCED FOR ADULT LEARNING

Writing articles for neo-literate and semi-literate adults is a specialized task. As we have seen issues of perspective, language and style become very important while writing for this constituency. At the same time it is important for us to understand the needs of readers and to get feedback from them. The information we get back from readers enables us to understand them and their needs better and to modify our writing accordingly.

Feedback can be sought in various ways. In feedback sessions we can:

- Ask readers to read the article/story whilst we take note of where they are stopping to see what they find difficult and what they are comfortable with.
- Ask readers to do a ranking of items that they liked after giving them a range of pieces to read.
- Divide readers into small groups and ask one group to read and explain to the other group the meaning of a particular article or story.
- Conduct a debate on an issue from an article between two groups of readers. The arguments that they use will be an indication of what the article / writing has communicated.
- Design a questionnaire to ask readers what they liked and disliked about a publication and what suggestions they could make for improving it. However, there is a danger here that readers will only tell us what they think we want to hear. It may be difficult to evoke spontaneous responses from them.
- Conduct in-depth interviews to understand readers' reading habits, time spent on reading, what they like, what they enjoy and what they find difficult.

Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Space given below the question is for writing your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under "Answers to Check Your Progress".

6) Why is feedback important? How would you get feedback from a group of learners with multiple levels of literacy?

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15.6 LET US SUM UP

We have reached the end of Unit 15. The Unit may have helped you as an adult educator to explore your own perceptions of neo-literate and semi-literate readers. The way in which these readers have been constructed was questioned in the Unit. Adults with low levels of literacy are neither children, nor are they ignorant. Being aware of this will help us determine the nature and content of our publications for them.

As adults who have a rich life experience, just like all of us, it is also important to provide neo-literate and semi-literate readers access to a wide range of information and also entertainment. We have seen that material that has limited content will not sustain the interest of readers. Therefore, from current affairs to stories, jokes and humorous pieces — the content needs to be rich and diverse.

Gender and language are not just conceptual ideas, but issues that are very significant and integral to material being produced. We have seen that gender issues cannot be addressed by just including women and girls in what we write. It is important for us to analyse everything from a gender perspective. Again, gender is closely linked to other social issues and identities, and therefore cannot be addressed in isolation.

Language of material being produced not only needs to be simple, but there is also a conscious effort required to write in a way that is appropriate for this readership. Issues of local and 'mainstream' language also need to be challenged and addressed in our publications. Writing in the local language(s) gives material a distinct identity and generates greater interest among readers.

It is important for us to prepare ourselves before producing material. Understanding our target audience, their needs and strengths and limitations of existing material will be useful steps. Language, sentence length, word length and formats will make our material effective and attractive for readers. Lastly, feedback will deepen our understanding of readership and will help us make appropriate changes in our material. All these are essential factors that will make our material popular and will help us meet our objectives.

15.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) In a city or town neo-literates and semi-literates could include: domestic help, gardeners, drivers, plumbers, electricians, mechanics, hawkers, security guards, etc.

In towns and villages, besides some of the above, farmers, tailors, petty shopkeepers, daily wage earners, women and even NGO activists could be part of this category.

None of the above can be considered ignorant. They have information, skills and knowledge on a range of issues, including specialized activities. While some of them may have basic literacy and numeracy skills, their knowledge of calculations, weights, measures may be sharp and precise.

- 2) The main reasons for the inability of readers with low levels of literacy in reading material are:

- non availability of reading material,
 - absence of material that is interesting and that does not tell readers about the way things should be,
 - limited subject matter of publications where only development messages are provided,
 - difficult language and style,
 - lack of entertainment.
- 3) Gender exists everywhere. In our everyday lives, whatever we do in our families, in schools and colleges, on the road, in our interactions with people, in our work- everything is informed by our understanding of gender.

While writing a piece, the three main things to keep in mind would be:

- Gender is not equivalent to woman. The mere inclusion of women or girls does not mean adding a gender perspective to writing.
 - Gender is integrated with other social issues. Therefore while writing we cannot just write about the situation of a woman without analyzing other issues that maybe part of her identity – example, her caste or religious identity and how that is linked to her identity as a woman.
 - Struggles and negotiations will make the writing richer, they should be kept alive. Success story models where change seems to take place overnight, should be avoided.
- 4) In order to choose the language, we should look at the language spoken or understood by the majority in the area. This may not be the mainstream or standard language, but a language that may not have got recognition or may be an oral language.

In order to write in this language, you can choose any script. But you will have to write and standardize spellings in order to use them regularly in your publication.

- 5) i) Incorrect. It is very important to provide ‘appropriate’ reading material to people with low levels of literacy. Neo-literates and semi-literates are a very specialized constituency. Providing just anything will not sustain their interest in reading.
- ii) Correct. Just as we like to read material that provides us information, and is entertaining, neo-literates and semi-literates also like to read a balance of serious issues as well as lighter pieces.
- iii) Incorrect. Publications printed on good quality paper will attract readers, retain their interest in reading and will help them store the publication for longer.
- iv) Correct. For neo-literates and semi literates, visuals and photos are very important and should be included in all publications.
- 6) Yes, feedback from readers is extremely important. It will enable us to understand the learner and his/her needs better. At the same time we will be able to incorporate changes in our publications, based on the feedback, and thereby make them more effective and interesting for our target audience.

15.8 REFERENCES

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