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## Literacy Year draws to close

As International Literacy Year draws to a close, there is some room for optimism. School enrollment in development countries is up. There are more and more girls gaining access to education. For the first time in history, there are more literate people in the world than illiterate.

But educators are not shouting any hurrahs. There are still about a billion illiterate people in the world. The problems caused by the lack of education facilities in developing countries are enormous. The barriers of apathy, social stereotyping and lack of resources are stubborn and frustrating.

Dr. Jacques Hallak of France, one of the world leaders in education policy, had both good news and a warning when he talked to staff of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) recently about 'training, or human resource development', as it is called.

Hallak, director of the prestigious International Institute for Education Planning (IIEP) in Paris, said that the number of developing countries prepared to invest in primary education for their people is increasing. But he said that some development agencies, need to extend their time frame if they want their education projects to be effective. He said a minimum of ten years was needed to implement meaningful educational change.

CIDA officials explained that all of their educational projects, such as the Eastern Islands university project in Indonesia, are designed with a ten-year horizon.

Hallak said the "top-down", government-decree approach to education wouldn't work unless there was also a massive injection of resources and the "bottom-up" input of the local community.

"If you look at the history of education in Europe and North America," he said, "you will see that it grew out of the local community."

He said the role of donor agencies should go beyond the disbursement of funds and provide strategic intervention - everything from administration and teachers' salaries to provision of materials and incentives.

Look for the "islands of hope," he said. "Find out what works and build on it."

Improving educational opportunities for women is a particular challenge, he said. The first need is to attack the cultural problem of stereotypes - not just among men, but among the women themselves.

Adapting the conditions of schools to women was also important; such as "open door schools" where women are free to come whenever they can and bring their pre-school children if necessary.

"CIDA has established a worldwide reputation among aid agencies for its advanced approach to the integration of women in development, and is a member of a working group that is concerned with improving educational opportunities for women in Africa," says Emil Baran, director of CIDA's education and training sector. "Education of women is an essential step in poverty alleviation, in ending illiteracy and in preserving human rights," he said.

"Don't expect miracles," Hallak concluded. "Think in terms of average human beings. You may have to offer incentives to the men so the women can go to school, or to the mothers so their daughters can go."

