



8 September 2014 – Imagine having to visit a doctor, yet being unable to find his office, imagine travelling to visit family, yet not finding the train... all because you cannot read the signs around you.

Around the world for millions of people, young and old, this is an everyday reality. Of the 774 million adults (15 years and older) who still cannot read or write, [two-thirds of them are women](#)

The 2013/14 [Education For All Global Monitoring Report](#) shows that despite gains since 1998, more than 60% of adult women in Arab states, south and west Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa are still illiterate.

[Literacy](#) is a fundamental right for all, a tool of personal empowerment and a means for social and human development. Irina Bokova, director-general of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco), [said that](#) "newly literate women have a positive ripple effect on all development indicators".

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon also stresses the transformative effect on both a family and the wider community when a woman is literate.

“Literate women are more likely to send their children, especially their girls, to school,” he said. “By acquiring literacy, women become more economically self-reliant and more actively engaged in their country’s social, political and cultural life. All evidence shows that investment in literacy for women yields high development dividends.”

Technology increases illiterate women’s interest in learning



UNESCO’s experience in the West African country of Senegal shows that mobile phones, computers, internet and TV make literacy courses much more attractive for illiterate women.

“We have demonstrated that technology increases illiterate women’s interest in learning new skills and helps build their confidence, as they are able to read and write their own messages and use the keyboard to correct their own sentences,” says Ann Therese Ndong-Jatta, Director of UNESCO’s Regional Office in Dakar.

“We now have literacy classes where women have made the transition to using mobile phones and computers. It has become an attraction, which has pooled a lot of interest,” she adds.

UNESCO Dakar has been running the [PAJEF literacy project](#) , “Re-write the future” in Senegal since 2011. The two-year project aims to educate 10,000 girls and women aged between 15 to 55 in the seven regions. In Senegal, only 39 % of women aged 15 years and over are literate, compared to 62% of men.

Literacy classes are taking place face-to-face for some beneficiaries, but the majority of women learn through DVDs, online and mobile applications and television programmes.

But why is technology so important for women to engage?

One answer given by PAJEF learners is that technology empowers them and gives a sense of freedom. Most women no longer need help to write text messages and compose numbers on

their mobile phones. And online and mobile applications as well as literacy classes on TV allow them to access literacy courses and learn when they like.

The number of illiterate adults in Africa has increased by 37% since 1990, mainly due to population growth, according to the [Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2013/14](#) . By 2015, it is projected that 26% of all illiterate adults will live in sub-Saharan Africa, up from 15% in 1990.