

BOOKS AND REVIEWS

Illiteracy and the Red Cross. — *The Red Cross World, League of Red Cross Societies, Geneva, No. 3, 1966.*

Unesco estimates that more than 700 million people, nearly one-third of the adults in the world, are illiterate. This is believed to be a minimum figure. It is probably greatly understated.

Mass illiteracy is most prevalent in countries where Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are youngest, in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The urgent need for literacy is recognised by governments. Already they are making very great efforts to increase the number of primary schools so as to wipe out illiteracy at the source, or to reduce it as far as they can, in the next generation.

However, an immediate need is for literate citizens now. It is during the next twenty years the greatest strides forward must be made and these strides must be taken by the people who are already adults.

Unesco's latest approach to the literacy problem is to link literacy with economic and social development, so that it becomes a form of functional education, with strong motivation and quick rewards.

In the present economic and financial circumstances, it seems logical to provide first for the instruction of those who can use literacy to the best advantage for the development of their country. The initial effort should be directed at the active element of the population and should lead on the pre-service or in-service vocational training.

The League has proposed to Societies whose governments are cooperating with Unesco in pilot literacy campaigns that Red Cross should provide low cost primers in mass lots which promote the cause of better health practices.

The Society would provide to the Unesco literacy expert the health points to be stressed. The expert would see that the books were written and illustrated to meet local comprehension and in keeping with latest literacy methods. The prototype booklet would then be re-produced in quantity by mimeograph or other low-cost duplicating methods. The text and illustrations would stress that the suggestions come from the local Red Cross Society. In cases where local reproduction of the books is impossible or difficult, the League would ask Youth Sections of more developed Societies to take on the printing of the books as an inter-

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national project. It would be suggested that a special study of the involved country as well as the illiteracy problem in general be studied by the youth members during the project.

Red Cross involvement in literacy campaigns offers the organisation unique opportunities to approach vast segments of their populations that were hitherto almost unapproachable.

Housewives represent, also, a prime target. Illiterate women need to learn as soon as possible basic health, sanitation, nutrition, and other measures. Thus, what they learn is almost as important as the learning process itself.

