Goal
Reduction of the adult illiteracy rate to at least half its 1990 level, with emphasis on female literacy.

Result
Although the illiteracy rate has decreased over the decade from 25 per cent to 20 per cent, the number of illiterate people has remained the same, in part due to population growth. The rate fell in all regions, with the largest declines in sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia and Pacific.

... but
The absolute number of illiterate people has stayed close to 900 million throughout the 1990s, with the majority found in the South Asia and East Asia and Pacific regions. The number of illiterates in South Asia has increased by nearly 40 million, despite a decrease in the rate of illiteracy.

Issue
The simplest measure of literacy is whether a person can read and write—with understanding—a simple statement related to daily life. Nearly 900 million people 15 years and older have not attained this most basic level of education.

Half the world’s illiterates in South Asia
Percentage of illiterate people 15 years and older, 2000

- South Asia: 47%
- East Asia/Pacific: 21%
- Sub-Saharan Africa: 15%
- Middle East/North Africa: 10%
- Latin America/Caribbean: 9%
- CEE/CIS: 7%
- Industrialized countries: 2%
- Other: 3%


Mother’s education, child survival and development

Relationship between mother’s education and under-five mortality and moderate and severe under weight

- Under-five mortality rate per 1,000 births
- Per cent under weight

Literacy, 2000
Percentage of persons, 15 years and older, who can read and write

- 0-59%
- 60-89%
- 90-100%
- No data