

literacy rate of 50 percent. Literacy rates among women are shamefully low, as low as 7, 9 and 18 percent in some ECOWAS countries. In some ECOWAS countries female adult literacy is as low as 30 percent that of male adults. Considering the fact that women are the teachers in our homes, and the all-important discovery that the education of females is a strategic imperative for development, this situation poses the most critical obstacle to human development and learning. Figures for primary school enrolment are also very low for many ECOWAS countries as they are for African countries generally. While there are some success stories, the general case is disappointing. We are told that in some West African countries less than 30 percent of school aged children are attending school. In Liberia, for example, 42 per cent of school aged children are estimated to be in school. These rates fall even lower when disaggregated for girls. Dropout rates are also high so that secondary school enrolment is a small fraction of primary school enrolment. Then there is the question of the educational content and the pedagogic methods utilized. All of these need overhauling to make them relevant and capable of unlocking the potential of learners for creativity and innovation, two important pre-requisites for personal and national regeneration.

#### *Special Educational Needs*

In addition to these sub-regional and regional problems about human development and learning, there are additional problems experienced by war-torn societies like Liberia and Sierra Leone that are trying to cope with a population of young people who have missed many years of schooling due to war. The need for accelerated educational and training programs, trauma counselling, and other special services are urgent and imperative. In Liberia, for example, a stunning statistic to come out the West African Examinations Council showed that over 75 percent of Liberian secondary school candidates failed the examinations for 1998-1999. The fact is that long before the civil war, the quality of the Liberian educational system had been on the decline. Qualified teachers were leaving the system for greener pastures while unqualified teachers were used as replacements. About 65 percent of primary and secondary school pupils are today being taught by unqualified teachers.

#### *Some Immediate, Underlying and Structural Causes*

Among the causes of low enrolment and lack of access are the unavailability of schools, high cost of sending children to school and the lack of desirable opportunities for vocational training. Cultural and religious practices and conditions of poverty are also impediments to full utilization of educational opportunities in some cases. While some of these problems such as the paucity of schools exists throughout West Africa, they have been exacerbated by war in countries like

Liberia and Sierra Leone. In many other part of Africa systematic or sustained social and economic marginalization and poor educational policy prescriptions have constituted structural causes retarding progress in human development and learning.

### **Protection of Children**

#### *Definition and Identity of Child*