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The Impact of Literacy

BASIC FACTS ABOUT LITERACY

- Literacy is the ability to read, write, compute, and use technology at a level that enables an individual to reach his or her full potential as a parent, employee, and community member.
- There are **759 million** adults—approximately 16 percent of the world's population—who have only basic or below basic literacy levels in their native languages.
- **Two-thirds** of the world's lowest literate adults are women.
- In the U.S., **63 million** adults — **29 percent** of the country's adult population — over age 16 don't read well enough to understand a newspaper story written at the eighth grade level.
- An additional **30 million** — **14 percent** of the country's adult population — can only read at a fifth grade level or lower.
- **Forty-three percent** of adults with the lowest literacy rates in the United States live in poverty.
- The United States ranks **fifth** on adult literacy skills when compared to other industrialized nations.
- Adult low literacy can be connected to almost every socio-economic issue in the United States:
 - More than **65 percent** of all state and federal corrections inmates can be classified as low literate.
 - Low health literacy costs between **\$106 billion** and **\$236 billion** each year in the U.S.
 - **Seventy-seven million Americans** have only a 2-in-3 chance of correctly reading an over-the-counter drug label or understanding their child's vaccination chart.
 - Low literacy's effects cost the U.S. **\$225 billion** or more each year in non-productivity in the workforce, crime, and loss of tax revenue due to unemployment.
- Globally, illiteracy can be linked to:
 - Gender abuse, including female infanticide and female circumcision
 - Extreme poverty (earning less than \$1/day)
 - High infant mortality and the spread of HIV/Aids, malaria, and other preventable infectious diseases

Last updated February 10, 2011



