This study analyses the progress of literacy and non-formal education in China supported by an in-depth description of one example of a best practice, a successful experiment and a major programme in the delivery of literacy and non-formal education services. After defining the concepts, the objectives, contents and methodologies of literacy and non-formal education in China, the case study provides an overview of the programme since 1990, spelling out its targets and objectives in support of the EFA goals. This overview highlights the decrease in number and percentage of illiterates among total population, the continuous increase of enrollment rate and retention rate of school-aged rural children as well as maximum reduction of newly emerging illiterates; and efforts which had been made to eliminate illiteracy among women and minority nationality inhabited areas.

Part Three describes the measures and action employed to promote literacy education. This includes an explanation of the Government policies to guarantee equal access to education; the formulation of an overall plan and strategy to reach the objectives of literacy education; the transition from traditional literacy education top functional literacy education and the active participation and cooperation from all social sectors and non-governmental organizations.

Part Four gives China's concrete experiences, through best practices, a successful programme and an experiment in employing grassroots approaches in the rural areas; in reaching farmers, and in the methodologies used in teaching the disadvantaged groups. It also describes how universities and research institutes participated in the rural education; how full-time and part-time teachers played a crucial role; how NGOs were mobilized to participate as well and how funds were raised for rural non-formal education through various channels.

Part Five presents lessons learned in the role of literacy and non-formal education in promoting a coordinated development of China’s environment, population, economy and society. It assesses the impact of literacy on these other development areas in the context of follow-up to major international sector conferences such as Copenhagen, Beijing, and Rio de Janeiro.

Part Six presents the future prospects in terms of proposed lines of action to further promote the development of literacy and non-formal education in the forthcoming decade 2001-2010. The paper includes a case study of a technical training programme ran by Dingzhou county in Hebei province; an experimental study of a new system of literacy education for adults in Qingtian County in Zhejiang Province, and a girls' education programme in China.