**Sustaining Literacy in Africa: Developing a Literate Environment**

by Peter Easton

UNESCO, 2014

*Review by Ian Cheffy, SIL International*

This is not a particularly easy read, not least because of the unfamiliarity of some of the terms which he uses which are drawn from economics (although he does a good job of explaining them to the uninitiated) but I think that it makes really important reading for adult educators working in Africa, and perhaps in other less developed parts of the world.

His central argument is around the concept of supply and demand i.e. that literate environments develop most successfully where there is a demand for literacy in some aspect of community life (economics, politics, religion, culture etc) being met by a supply - which he defines not so much in terms of literate people but rather of mechanisms for people to acquire literacy and to maintain their literacy practices. His focus is on how literate environments can be developed within society (rather than how people can be "motivated" to learn to read and write); he defines a literate environment as one "that both supports and impels the acquisition and use of literate skills".

I've found the book really useful in focusing on the enabling conditions for the development of literacy rather than on the internal programme aspects of pedagogy, materials etc. or on motivation for literacy at individual level (which is one of my favourite topics). As for pedagogy, he gives strong support to Alan Roger's "literacy second" argument and to methodologies in which learning and application alternate, but his focus is on surrounding conditions for literacy. He also argues strongly for the need for educationalists and development practitioners to work together more - at every level, from the grassroots local (most of all) to international institutions like UNESCO and the UNDP as well.

I agree with his argument and it really makes we wonder how to carry this forward in the literacy programmes where I have some kind of consultant role.

I should add that Peter Easton has worked in development in Africa since the 1960s. I've not come across him before (he's from the US) but it's obvious from this book that he knows what he is talking about.