

## PULSE

## Adult literacy rates in African and Eastern Mediterranean countries

According to the most recent data available from the World Health Organization, 15 (43%) of 35 African countries and 4 (25%) of 16 Eastern Mediterranean countries had an adult literacy rate of less than 60% (Table 1). Countries with a low gross na-

tional income per capita did not necessarily rank comparatively low in adult literacy (Table 1). This was true when comparing countries within the same region (e.g., Madagascar, the United Republic of Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Africa, and Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic in the Eastern Mediterranean region). It was also true when comparing countries between the 2 regions; for example, Lesotho had an adult literacy rate of 82.2% and a gross national income per capita of \$3410, whereas Morocco had a literacy rate of 52.3% and a gross na-

tional income per capita of \$4360.

Of the 119 countries for which data on adult literacy rates were available, 9 of the 10 countries with the lowest rates were in either Africa (Senegal, Sierra Leone, Benin, Guinea, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso and Mali) or the Eastern Mediterranean region (Afghanistan). The country 10th from the bottom was Bangladesh, with an adult literacy rate of 42.6% and a gross national income per capita of \$2090. — Mark O. Baerlocher MD, Toronto, Ont.

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**Table 1:** Adult literacy rates and gross national income per capita in African and Eastern Mediterranean countries\*

Country	Adult literacy rate, %	Gross national income per capita, \$	Country	Adult literacy rate, %	Gross national income per capita, \$
<b>Africa</b>					
Seychelles	91.8	15 940	Rwanda	64.9	1 320
Equatorial Guinea	87.0	7 580	Malawi	64.1	650
Namibia	85.0	7 910	Burundi	59.3	640
Mauritius	84.4	12 450	Ghana	57.9	2 370
South Africa	82.4	12 120	Togo	53.2	1 550
Lesotho	82.2	3 410	Mauritania	51.2	2 150
Botswana	81.2	10 250	Côte d'Ivoire	48.7	1 490
Swaziland	79.6	5 190	Central African Republic	48.6	1 140
Cape Verde	78.0	6 000	Ethiopia	45.2	1 000
Kenya	73.6	1 170	Senegal	39.3	1 770
Madagascar	70.7	880	Sierra Leone	35.1	780
Algeria	69.9	6 770	Benin	34.7	1 110
United Republic of Tanzania	69.4	730	Guinea	29.5	2 240
Zambia	68.0	2 150	Niger	28.7	800
Cameroon	67.9	2 210	Chad	25.7	1 470
Angola	67.4		Burkina Faso	21.8	1 220
Democratic Republic of the Congo	67.2	720	Mali	19.0	1 000
Uganda	66.8	1 500			
<b>Eastern Mediterranean</b>					
Kuwait	93.3	24 010	Tunisia	74.3	7 900
Jordan	89.9	5 280	Iraq	74.1	NA
Qatar	89.0	NA	Egypt	71.4	4 440
Bahrain	86.5	21 290	Sudan	60.9	2 000
Oman	81.4	14 680	Yemen	53.0	920
Syria	79.6	3 740	Morocco	52.3	4 360
Saudi Arabia	79.4	14 740	Pakistan	49.9	2 350
Iran	77.0	8 050	Afghanistan	28.1	NA

Note: NA = not available.

\*Source: World Health Organization (*World Health Statistics 2007* and *The World Health Report, 2006 Edition*). Data are the most recently available data reported for adult literacy (2004) and gross national income (2005). Gross national income is reported in international dollars.