Women’s Education Brings Greater Dignity

SIL supports minority language communities in their efforts to develop education programs that give all students the opportunity to become fluent readers and writers in their own tongue and also gain fluency in a language of wider communication.

Confidence builder: Mother tongue-based literacy improves women’s confidence and status

The Massalit literacy project in the Sudanese refugee camps of eastern Chad provides young Sudanese refugee women with opportunities to use their intelligence and energy to serve their communities. SIL supports this mother tongue literacy program that opens doors for them to become teachers in their community. Women grow in confidence and leadership during the teacher training workshops and as they teach literacy classes. While the community literacy programs began with predominantly male teachers, the percentage of female teachers has rapidly increased to equal or exceed that of male teachers.

Faiza* attended an Arabic-only school but was not a confident reader of Arabic. She was intrigued by the Massalit literacy materials and bought some books with her own money. She attended literacy classes and was later selected to participate in teacher training. Faiza is now a community literacy teacher.

Nura,* a graduate of the Massalit literacy project, became a community literacy teacher at age 17. When she completed secondary school, she was recruited as a primary school teacher. Today Nura teaches primary school, trains literacy teachers, serves as the first female assistant supervisor in the community literacy program, and is interim secretary of the refugee camp literacy committee.

* pseudonym

Nearly two out of three of the world’s illiterate adults are women. Research shows that girls and women who are educated in languages familiar to them stay in school longer and achieve better results than those who do not get instruction in their mother tongue.

“We were the first students of Massalit [in these camps], now we are the teachers!”

—Nura*
Multilingual education that begins in the mother tongue improves opportunities for educational access and achievement, especially for women and girls, advancing their language, academic, cognitive and socio-cultural development.

Enhanced ability: Mother-Tongue Multilingual Education enhances students’ ability in both the mother tongue and English

The Kom Education Pilot project (KEPP) is a mother-tongue multilingual education project in Cameroon. It uses the students’ primary language, Kom, as the language of instruction while they acquire English, gradually building competency in both languages. SIL International conducted research to evaluate student achievement in the first three grades and found students in the program demonstrated a collective gain in learning efficiency of about 125 percent over their peers in the standard English-only program. The program has raised the expectations of the Ministry of Education, teachers, parents, and communities regarding student ability in both languages. The program has also positively affected the teachers’ instructional practices and the parents’ involvement with their children’s education.

“When a child goes to a mother-tongue school, she continues learning concepts based on knowledge the parents already taught at home. However, if it is a school that is not a mother-tongue school, all that the child had gathered, the ‘container of knowledge’ she carried on her head to school on the first day, is emptied. It is thrown away.”
—CHUO Kain Godfrey, KEPP Coordinator

“Homes have become classrooms where the children teach their siblings (and inadvertently their parents) as they repeat what they learn at school. Parents are impressed as their children “teach” by drawing in the mud or on the outside doors of the house with tiny pieces of leftover chalk. Proud parents frequently comment on how wonderful it is to hear their children using their language for academic purposes.”
—CHUO Kain Godfrey, KEPP Coordinator