



Mother's Union Literacy Project in Ethiopia

There are an estimated 3,000 members in the Mothers' Union Ethiopia and membership has grown rapidly. It is estimated that at least 90% of MU member are illiterate and this figure could be higher as no one really knows.

The area has three main tribes - Nuer, Anyuak and Opo. Opo are the minority—perhaps there are only 5,000 and currently they are still writing the dialect down.

The Anglican Church is the only church in the area that has both Nuer and Anyuak in its congregation. Both of these tribes are also in South Sudan and many are in the Gambella region and in camps because they have come as refugees. The Anglican Church is based on the South Sudanese/Ethiopian border with many of the members being Sudanese refugees living in Ethiopia. For these women, literacy is their biggest need. This has debilitating consequences for the church; when women cannot read they cannot read the bible and their opportunities to assume responsibilities in Church are significantly limited.

Initially 24 facilitators were trained but, because of the high mobility of the population, many of these original facilitators had left the area by late 2013. These have been replaced by community volunteers, who are excited about supporting their local communities. Therefore, 21 new facilitators have now been trained to re-energise the programme with the intention to support the programme in moving forward.

Activities

Activities are based on community-based group training and participatory learning. This builds the confidence of participants as they realise they have lots of knowledge and skills to offer.

The groups are managed by local steering committees and overseen by experienced literacy trainers and Mothers' Union Coordinators.

Literacy trainers have their skills upgraded to enable them to integrate business skills with literacy training. They then train community volunteer facilitators who roll out the programme among the existing post-literacy groups to set up savings groups and practice their business skills. Due to high community illiteracy they are also encouraged to also start new literacy circles

The facilitator is key to a successful group. They don't teach, but instead facilitate discussion. Locally chosen community volunteers train as facilitators. They set up literacy circles of approximately 20 illiterate women and men. The circles discuss a relevant issue first then learn to write key words related to that discussion using synthetic phonics. The circle meets 1-2 times a week for two hours until they become accredited literate (usually 1 year-18 months). During this period the facilitator is further trained in business skills and savings group formation.

Through literacy, business skills and enterprise development are discussed. Once accredited, literate participants will set up their own savings groups and many after approximately 3-6 months will begin lending to each other. In addition, previous literacy circle members who are now accredited literate will also be given the opportunity to set up their own savings groups and learn business skills to ensure greater knowledge sharing and impact in the community as well as sustainability of activities.



Beneficiaries



The groups are open to everyone – regardless of religion, age, gender or tribe. The programme is especially effective in reaching the most marginalised.

Participants are identified by a participatory, community-led process. This prioritises women and disadvantaged people. Examples of criteria can include: widows and elderly community members unable to support their families, people with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, returnees, and minority groups.

The facilitators also benefit from learning transferable skills and in the past some have gained employment or work experience with other NGOs or organisations. They also receive increased status in the community.

Lare (Nuer)

Context: Rural community located between Pilwal and Lare.

This facilitator, Sarah had two circles, an Advanced circle with 20 students and a beginner circle with 17 students. The advanced students can form complex sentences. Each group learns for 3 days/ week. The beginners group couldn't even form letters, 6 months ago and now, they are learning to write and are improving.

The facilitator has been trained by the local Literacy Coordinators; however, she has been a local trainer in the church for 20 years.

Pilwal (Nuer)

Context: Rural community with an established church, the community was evolved to exist around the community.

The facilitator has recently given birth 3 weeks ago and is currently away from her circle. We met some of her learners. Many of the group are literate, reading the bible and applying it to their lives. The group have covered many issues included childcare and prayer.

We also met the Malow facilitator too. The Malow group is very nomadic, some go to the pastures in the summer and the others to the river, which has led to difficulties teaching the learners.

The Malow circle explained that "Literacy builds our knowledge, builds the unity between one another, it also builds our families. Now we give thanks to God and appreciate the Anglican Church".

The learners now wish to preach and teach other people. They gave thanks to the church for the blackboard and materials to learn.

We spoke to the Husbands of the learners in Pilwal, they shared that "Now, she reads the Bible, I am very proud". Their wives now take care of the home, there is a real dignity between them.

When asked what advice they would give to other husbands, "I am very happy to encourage husbands to bring their wives as it will transform the community".

