

if you knew...

Winter 2009/2010
Literacy & Education Issue

WHY LITERACY MATTERS

Literacy is much more than the basic skills of reading and writing, although those are essential tools for lifelong learning. Literacy is implicit in the right to education recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and is both a right in itself and an instrument for achieving other rights. Nevertheless, there are more than 774 million people in the world that lack basic literacy skills – almost two-thirds of them are women (UNESCO, 2008).

The benefits of literacy for individuals, communities, and nations are numerous and far-reaching. Access to basic education for women in particular is a strategic investment that yields valuable returns for families and society. The following trends have been studied and observed among women with at least basic levels of education in the developing world:

- They tend to begin their families at a later age and have fewer, but healthier, children
- They have lower rates of HIV infection
- They are more likely to seek medical assistance for childhood illnesses, leading to overall improvements in family health
- They have lower rates of infant mortality and improved child survival
- They have higher productivity and earning potential
- They are more likely to send their own children, including daughters, to school
- They are less likely to fall prey to human trafficking and sexual exploitation

“Literacy is about empowerment. It increases awareness and influences the behavior of individuals, families and communities. It improves communication skills, gives access to knowledge and builds the self-confidence and self-esteem needed to make

Did you know?

The United Nations declared 2003-2012 the “Literacy Decade”

“Even the simplest acquisition of literacy can have a profoundly empowering effect personally, socially and politically.”

Dr. Lalage Bown



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Consider an investment with lifelong potential!

For just **\$100**, Samaritan's Purse can provide a woman in the developing world with a year of literacy training. Your monthly gift of **\$25** can give three women this opportunity each year!

To donate or learn more, call 1.800.663.6500 or visit ifcanada.ca



What if she was free from poverty, abuse, exploitation...

Samaritan's Purse Women's Projects

MINISTRY PROFILE: LIBERIA LITERACY & LIVELIHOODS PROGRAM

In the West African nation of Liberia more than half of all children do not attend school and less than half of those who start school reach the fifth grade. As a result, the United Nations reports that the average Liberian adult has received less than three years of education. In addition to illiteracy, access to a reliable food source is a significant challenge as thousands return home after the war and are in the process of resettling and establishing their homes. Samaritan's Purse is attempting to address these two significant needs in rural Liberia through a unique program that integrates a livelihood component, in the form of a small-scale animal husbandry project, into an already successful adult literacy project.

Combining literacy with livelihood skills training is particularly valuable in areas that have been affected by war or other conflict, and in rural communities, according to the UNESCO publication *The Global Literacy Challenge*. In conflict-affected areas, this document says "literacy acquisition can play a significant role in rehabilitation, particularly when linked with peace-building, empowerment and livelihood skills training." And among rural populations, "the inclusion of skills enabling rural people to diversify their livelihoods contributes to reducing vulnerability and poverty."



In order to train Liberian women to use their literacy and numeracy skills to increase their socio-economic status, the Literacy and Livelihoods Program integrates basic business training for micro-entrepreneurs into the literacy curriculum. Using real-life simulations and role-play activities, the women learn to apply their literacy education to their income-generating activities, empowering them to create economic opportunities for themselves. Through local churches, Samaritan's Purse has established five training centers in 2009 that now each host two classes. Over two years, this program will increase the literacy and income generating abilities of 300 rural Liberians.

Each class, referred to as a circle, meets three times a week for two-hour sessions. Prayer, songs, and devotions begin each circle and the class ends with a Bible lesson. The facilitators have designed the curriculum around the interests of each circle. As the women gain literacy, facilitators also teach basic life skills and discuss issues surrounding civil society.

The animal husbandry component of the program yields two main benefits for the participants, providing animals that will serve as both a source of food and income for rural Liberian families. After three months of literacy training, the students replace one of their weekly literacy classes with animal husbandry training classes aimed at preparing them to raise and rear the animals they will later receive. Participants learn about building proper structures for the animals, reproductive health, and basic marketing techniques. And at the conclusion of this portion of the program, beneficiaries are presented with their own 'seed' animal population – either groundhogs, snails, or rabbits. All of these meats are desired by community members and markets, providing solid income opportunities for the women.

Through this project and others like it, Samaritan's Purse is equipping hundreds of women around the world with essential literacy skills and the self-confidence that learning generates. The hard work and dedication demonstrated by the participating women inspires confidence that they will go on to do great things within their families, their communities, and their countries. See ***Dreams Become Reality*** on page 4 to read the impact of this ministry in three Liberian women's lives...



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ILLUMINATING THE REALITY OF ILLITERACY

Illiteracy is both a cause and consequence of poverty, and without a focused effort by governments and organizations around the world, millions of women, children, and men will continue to be trapped in this destructive cycle. Not only does illiteracy obviously hinder learning and productivity, but it has also been found to have a significant negative impact on health – HIV/AIDS infection rates double among young people who do not finish primary school, for example.

In 2006, 75 million school-age children were not in school, and girls accounted for more than half of the out-of-school population (UNESCO, 2008). In some cases, cultural values mean boys get priority over girls when it comes to education. In other situations, girls may be kept home from school to help care for younger siblings or they may be working to help earn money for the family.

One of the objectives outlined in the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals is to promote gender equality and empower women by eliminating gender disparity in education. The first target was to have as many girls as boys in primary and secondary schools by 2005. This target was missed in over 90 countries, and in places like Niger and Burkina Faso in West Africa, only one in three girls receives any schooling at all.

The map below, representing adult literacy rates in the developing world, further confirms that Africa and parts of Central Asia have the most work ahead of them to turn the tide of illiteracy – for women and men, adults and children alike.



WANT TO LEARN MORE? RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
 - "The Global Literacy Challenge" – [2008 report](#)
 - [Literacy homepage](#)
- Tearfund International Learning Zone
 - [Footsteps 16](#) & [Footsteps 62](#) focus on literacy

*Samaritan's Purse Canada is not responsible for the endorsement of information and/or opinions within the recommended resources listed.

DREAMS BECOME REALITY THROUGH LITERACY TRAINING

Mussu Fallah is a village midwife in rural Liberia. Over the years, she received training on medical care for women through various workshops, but despite her training in midwifery, Mussu did not know how to read, write, or keep records. One of the basic motivations behind her desire to become literate was so that she could keep records of births when babies are born in her community.

When she joined the beginner class of the Samaritan's Purse Literacy and Livelihoods Program in her community, Mussu was not able to hold a pencil properly or write a single letter. After three months, however, Mussu is able to hold a pencil well, draw objects, and write letters. She is now also able to explain Bible verses even though she has not been a committed Christian in the past years. Mussu wants to learn even more about being a Christian through the classes, and she frequently says how happy she is to be a part of this program.



Hawa Alpha was an intermediate participant in the Literacy and Livelihoods Program in Liberia's Kolahun District. Hawa was a former Grade 6 student, but she was unable to complete secondary school because of the instability in Liberia and her family's inability to pay school fees. She eagerly enrolled in the adult education class and said that her favorite material was the Bible curriculum, because the Bible discussion has given her a lot of new ideas and helped her to change some of her habits. Hawa often spoke of one topic in particular – Children in God's Eyes – and how it gave her a different outlook on treating her children more responsibly. When asked how she had been treating her children, Hawa answered, "in the most wicked way."

Hawa had always hoped to one day join a formal school again and complete the Grade 12. In September, this dedicated student's dream came true – she travelled to Monrovia and began attending formal school once again. When saying goodbye to her literacy classmates, Hawa said that adult literacy education had significantly impacted her personality and development and she will continue to testify to others of the value of adult education. She also expressed gratitude for the Bible discussions, which have shaped her outlook on life, and encouraged her fellow participants to remain steadfast and committed to learning.



When Kumba Gbollie was a young child, her parents did not see the value of education, particularly for girls. At age seven, they arranged her marriage and Kumba moved into the home of her husband's family to live and work alongside them until she and her husband would move into their own home.

Now at age 33, Kumba has a strong desire to learn, but with young children of her own, she is unable to attend a formal school. She joined the beginner literacy class in her community and hopes to learn to read and write as well as improve her spoken English. She believes this will be a tool to help her "work for money and support [her] family." Perhaps it will also begin to change attitudes in her family and community, and open doors for her own daughters to attend school as Kumba herself was unable to do.

If you would like to learn more about Samaritan's Purse and our work with women in the developing world, or would like to donate, please visit ifcanada.ca or call 1.800.663.6500.



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