

# Literacy Links

Diocesan Link Project of Cashel, Ferns & Ossory

In partnership with Bishops' Appeal, Mothers' Union & Feed the Minds



MU literacy group,  
Ethiopia

## Introduction to the Partnership

Cashel, Ferns & Ossory Diocese has a long history of looking beyond itself to partner with others in need of support. In 2016 and 2017 this partnership will once again be forged, to provide literacy and livelihoods training through the Mothers' Union in Ethiopia and through Feed the Minds in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Literacy is a foundation stone of poverty alleviation.

Mothers' Union literacy groups across East and Central Africa have seen 160,000 people benefit in Burundi, Malawi, Sudan and South Sudan since 2000. The Programme in Ethiopia is seeing similar success and needs support to expand to both local villages and refugee camps.

Feed the Minds literacy classes are designed for implementation in conflict zones and are now being tailored to the specific needs of the Democratic Republic of Congo where sexual violence and shame are preventing many women from taking part in their public classes. Members will then join soap making cooperatives.

### A prayer

Disturb us O Lord,  
May those with excess and  
those with less than nothing,  
all come to know enough.  
Amen

### Creed

We believe that God is present  
in the darkness before the  
dawn:

In the waiting and uncertainty,  
where fear and courage join  
hands,

Conflict and caring link arms  
and the sun rises over barbed  
wire.

We believe in a with-us God  
who sits down in our midst to  
share our humanity.

We affirm a faith that takes us  
beyond the safe place:

Into action, into vulnerability  
and into the streets.

We commit ourselves to work  
for change and put ourselves  
on the line;

To bear responsibility, take  
risks, live powerfully and face  
humiliation;

To stand with those on the  
edge;

To choose life and be used by  
the Spirit for God's new  
community of hope,

Amen.

# Literacy, Poverty & Displacement

## DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a country of extraordinary mineral wealth yet, due to decades of misrule and two civil wars, most of the population lives in abject poverty. As many as five million people are thought to have died unnecessarily since the late 1990s. Education is not freely provided. The rights of poor, marginalised and non-literate women are often violated by others with more power.

The town of Fizi in South Kivu continues to receive an influx of refugees from the north where 800,000 are displaced and are fleeing from persistent conflict and violence. An almost total lack of infrastructure; cholera epidemics and minimal state provided education further exacerbates the current situation in Kivu. Poor women and girls carry the heaviest burden of non-literacy in the Fizi District due to gender based inequality, social discrimination, economic exploitation as well the impact of war, trauma and violence

Findings revealed that literacy training is better delivered in a home setting so as to shorten travel distances for women in the evenings as sexual violence is highly prevalent in the area. Similarly, people with disabilities find it easier to travel to a nearby house rather than a distant public venue. Soap making was identified as the most appropriate skill in an unsaturated market, which would provide beneficiaries with a sustainable source of income.

The literacy programme will include knowledge of civic rights, health development, peacebuilding and income generation, through soap making and marketing skills to generate a sustainable increased income.

Over two years, 540 direct beneficiaries will be targeted: 60 women will be trained as literacy facilitators, 420 women will take part in home-based literacy classes (7/class), and 140/420 low-income literacy learners and 60 low-income men selected from the community will take part in soap-making vocational training. Direct beneficiaries are predominantly poor household women and girls (15-45 years old) who dropped out of school due to the impact of war, who have extremely low literacy levels and feel ashamed to attend public literacy classes. This project will also include 10 disabled women who missed out on education due to their vulnerability and lack of transportation options. There will be approximately 2,160 indirect beneficiaries who will benefit from increased household income, increased rights, conflict resolution and better health.

## ETHIOPIA

Within Ethiopia, the Gambella region is both politically and geographically marginalised and faces far higher levels of poverty than the country as a whole. Malaria, TB, water-borne diseases, tribal conflict and flooding are regular features of life. There are also high levels of gender-based violence, with physical violence affecting 50% of women and girls. Nationally, only 35% of adult women have basic literacy and numeracy skills. Within the Anglican Church, the figures go as low as 5%. With the re-emerging civil war in South Sudan, there has been another influx of refugees across the border to Gambella. 205,000 refugees have walked for up to a month from their homes to find safety, significantly impacting an already impoverished community.

Mothers' Union has run literacy programmes since 2000 in Burundi, Malawi, Sudan and South Sudan. To date over 160,000 have benefited. In 2012, a new literacy programme was started in Ethiopia. Three trainers from South Sudan trained the first 24 literacy facilitators who went on to work with the Anuak and Nuer ethnic groups. The aim is to make 2,400 people (90% women) literate over three years. The facilitators run the groups in at least two languages and some work with groups of Sudanese refugees in camps near the border.

The progress of the programme has been astounding. Last year over 650 learners took part in the programme and 25 new literacy groups were set up. To date, a total of 40 facilitators have been trained, with a further 15 currently undergoing training.

The programme equips participants with basic literacy and numeracy skills whilst discussing and planning action on the issues and challenges they face on a daily basis. This means that it is not just literacy that participants gain, they also learn about other issues such as hygiene and nutrition. Participants are also more open to discussing peace and living with other tribes with whom there is conflict.

Family and community relationships in Ethiopia will be transformed as literate learners will be positively engaged in the local community, thus reducing poverty, gender barriers and ignorance, and improving living conditions in the home and in society as a whole.



## Global Statistics on Women, Literacy, Conflict & Poverty

- Women are the largest marginalized and vulnerable group in the world. They are most affected by lack of access to health, education, resources & community participation.
- 1 in every 3 women worldwide has experienced gender based violence.
- 60 million people are internally displaced or refugees, the majority of whom are women
- 100 million people worldwide are homeless, the majority of whom are women, primarily due to lack of land rights.
- Women account for 2/3s of the worlds 774 million illiterate adults.
- Educate a girl to a level of 2nd year in secondary school and she will be 4 times less likely to contract HIV. She will be much more likely to marry later and to have fewer children. These children are 8 times more likely to live past the age of 5. Depending on the length of schooling she will increase her income (through agriculture or small business) by 10% to 25% and will invest 90% of what she earns back into her family as opposed to reinvesting 30-40% if she were a man.

