



Literacy by Listening

Overview

Bible Society Australia is supporting the Bible Society of Myanmar in running a mother tongue literacy program for the Sgaw Karen ethnic group.

The Need

The population of Myanmar is about 54 million, with between 80% – 89% practicing Buddhism. Christians constitute around 6.2% of the population. The government recognises 135 different ethnic groups and estimates that there are about 200 spoken languages in Myanmar.

While literacy rates across the country have improved dramatically in recent decades, there are still many people who need access to an education in literacy. To date, the government has not encouraged literacy development for ethnic minority groups in their respective mother languages. The Sgaw Karen ethnic group have the largest Christian population among the ethnic minorities, and the biggest population. Surprisingly, there are many non-literate Karen communities, particularly in remote areas.



54m
population in Myanmar

6.2%
of the population are Christian

53%
of the Sgaw Karen are Christian

45%
of the Sgaw Karen are non-literate

"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."

James 1:5, NIV

Goals

The goal of this project is to help 2,250 Sgaw Karen people in remote areas learn to read, write and count. Eradicating illiteracy will help the people to be able to claim their basic human rights, access Scripture for themselves and gain the knowledge of the Gospel.

In 2024, the goal is to reach 2,250 adults among the Sgaw Karen people in rural areas, through 150 classes.

January – March will see the education of 150 facilitators, printing textbooks and storybooks, and for the first time, two workshops on developing a Sgaw Karen fluency level with a literacy specialist. April – June will build awareness of the course in the target areas, as well as book distribution; July – September will be the learning period, and October – December will be the presentation of certificates of completion. The last three months will also see work done on the new Sgaw Karen fluency level, with typing, editing and field testing.

Impact

The literacy program, utilising Bible-based books, not only builds students' literacy skills but also fosters spiritual growth in the knowledge of God. The Karen people are anticipated to genuinely experience God's love through these materials.

This literacy program is enriching Karen literature with biblical teachings and also helps the Karen people understand the value of their language, growing the community's appreciation for it, and giving perspective on how precious it is.

The wider community has expressed gratitude for the literacy program, recognising its benefits. Given that Christians are a minority, this program stands as a highly effective method for evangelism, having a significant impact in the community.

Testimonies

"Because of civil war, I have no chance to study about my own language. Because of this program, I can read, write and speak my language with confidence. I feel so glad and blessed that I can read and write my own language and I also taught my parents how to read, write and sing. I thank God for giving me this opportunity to learn." — Kyaw*, 16 years old

"Although I am Karen, I cannot speak and read Karen well. Whenever I think about that I feel so shy ... God knows my feeling and HE open the door for me to learn Karen language ... Because of this class, I can read and write our mother language. Now I can know the meaning and pronunciation exactly and deeply. Whatever I learn from this class I will share to our next generation. I am deeply thankful to God for giving me this opportunity ..." — Wah*, from a Karen village

Prayer Needs

- Pray for the country's leaders and authorities as they navigate worsening political instability.
- Please pray for the safety and well-being of both students and teachers in the literacy program in the midst of civil unrest.
- Please pray that this project will play a vital role in bringing the Gospel to those searching for truth.
- Please pray for many of the Christian Karen people, who lack the opportunity to worship and study freely due to the ongoing war.

*Name changed for security reasons.