

EGLISE ANGLICANE DU BURUNDI

EAB PRESS Extra

CELEBRATING 8 YEARS OF LITERACY AND DEVELOPMENT IN BURUNDI

In September 2008 a celebration was held in Bujumbura by the Province of the Anglican Church of Burundi to mark 8 years of the Mothers' Union Literacy and Development Programme.

The programme operates in all the dioceses through a network of trainers and facilitators who operate a system of literacy circles for learners. There are currently 737 circles operating. It is an inclusive programme that is available to all regardless of gender, ethnicity, or religion. Since the start of the programme about 26,000 individuals, 75% of whom are women, are now able to read and write to a standard that is nationally recognized by the Government's literacy programme and accredited by the Ministry of Education.



Literacy circle

The celebration was an occasion to acknowledge the achievements of the programme in a country where 67% of the population is illiterate. A number of personal stories were shared. One widow told how she had become literate after her husband's death and now has the courage to cope with being HIV positive. The programme empowered her to overcome abuse, misunderstanding, and a sense of inferiority. Through the formation of an association she is encouraging and supporting others living with HIV and AIDS. She is also now challenging others to be tested for the virus and persuading families to send their children to school so that they too can become literate and numerate.

During a recent period of evaluation of the programme, several men spoke of some of the changes that have occurred in their families. They told how they are now helping their wives with domestic activities such as the cultivation of their land. Men are also involving their wives in the making of decisions. One woman told how she inherited land from her father when he decided to divide it equally between his 3 sons and 2 daughters.

A volunteer facilitator who is a prisoner and working with a literacy circle in the prison among her fellow women prisoners, some of whom have babies and children with them, told how women were becoming literate and able to read and write letters for other prisoners. She shared how some heard of God's love and forgiveness for the first time. She also told of their need for practical signs of Christian love in the form of soap, clothes, and especially blankets because of the cold nights.

The programme is a catalyst for family and community empowerment and transformation. One of its main objectives is sustainable development and poverty reduction. Throughout the dioceses numerous associations have been formed. These are able to address local issues and share resources to the benefit of all. They also engage in income-generating projects that not only provide income for families but also bring people together where once there had been hatred and division. The programme therefore is not only providing literacy and numeracy skills but is far-reaching as a tool for conflict resolution, reconciliation, and unity.



Association with goats