

Literacy for Leaders



An initiative to empower South Sudanese women through literacy and leadership development.

Written on behalf of the Malala Fund by Julia Bragg- December 18th, 2024

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Bill and Melinda Gates
Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
500 Fifth Avenue North
Seattle, WA 98109
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Dear Mr. and Mrs. Bill Gates,

It is with great pleasure that I submit to you this grant proposal on behalf of the Malala Fund's new project, *Literacy for Leaders*, a literacy and leadership program led by college-students for South Sudanese women struggling with illiteracy, poverty, and lack of opportunity. The purpose of this proposal is to convey the dire need for proper literacy education in South Sudan to offer equal opportunity and knowledge to underrepresented women in South Sudan. I will outline the plan for an 8-week literacy program as well as the application process for students and fundraising school materials. Offering the chance to connect with American college students, practice leadership skills, and gain reading and writing skills will thus improve the lives of women living in South Sudan. For this program to be properly implemented, we are requesting a grant of \$30,000 to make it happen.

In this proposal, I will emphasize my qualifications as someone with experience in teaching writing skills, acting as a leader in my role, and passion for creating a world where everyone can read and write. Having gained a bachelor's degree in English with a focus in Professional Writing, I have developed a nuanced understanding of writing's social implications, the necessity of literacy for communication, and the opportunities it can offer. Working as a tutor for 2 years in my university's Writing Center has given me a background in tutoring writing as well as students with learning differences, teaching English as a second language, and adhering tutoring strategies to specific student needs. The *Literacy for Leaders* program will offer South Sudanese women a glimpse of hope amid an economic crisis and remaining COVID-19 impacts, allowing them to effectively get educated and enlightened in the world of literature.

This program will also have a developmental impact on the student teachers as they will integrate into a new culture, meet new people, and understand the beautiful impact they aim to create. By participating in fundraising efforts and leading the program, they will gain effective leadership and communication skills while broadening their global perspective, achieving multiple valuable outcomes simultaneously.

Please reach out if you have any questions or ideas about my proposed program at my email Juliabragg@umass.edu.

Thank you for reading,
Julia Bragg

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1. Statement of Problem

With a literacy rate of just 8% for women in South Sudan, the country is currently experiencing an illiteracy crisis, directly hindering societal development, human growth, access to opportunities, and effective communication. Historically, women have been at the forefront of experiencing a life without education. In economically weak countries such as South Sudan, their opportunities become even more significantly minute, contributing to a society riddled with lost opportunities and a lack of enrichment for women. Not being able to read and write directly invades one's ability to express their feelings, communicate, and encounter the beautiful art of literature.



Illiteracy stunts vital emotional, social, and behavioral growth, contributing to a sense of isolation and lack of overall personal development. Illiteracy also contributes to a weak economy, where economic growth is expected to contract by -4.1 percent (World Bank, 2021).

Literacy should be granted to every person as a right of their innate individuality regardless of financial situation, gender, and background. According to UNESCO, this educational gap limits their ability to engage in leadership roles and economic activities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality. Furthermore, the demand for English proficiency has grown significantly, as it serves as the language of instruction and commerce in South Sudan (UNESCO, 2005).

Regardless of education, women in South Sudan are already facing a plethora of hardships and inequalities: They have minimal decision-making power, few land rights, and a lack of accessible resources. As a group that's constantly being underscored and underestimated, granting them proper education is simply a right for fairness and equal opportunity that Malala Fund aims to incorporate into their community.

The Malala Fund's goal is to make a world where every woman can read and write. Their current priorities are supporting education for refugee and displaced children, as well as promoting digital literacy in underserved communities. They also focus on advocacy efforts that aim to eliminate gender disparities in education, combat child marriage, and empower women economically. I aim to confront these hardships head-on by creating a program that focuses on offering solutions to their lack of opportunity, access, and education. Currently, South Sudan has the third lowest literacy rate in the entire world with "more than 70 percent of South Sudanese are younger than 30 and half can neither read nor write" (USAID, 2024).

Due to their previous and ongoing economic issues such as the 2013 civil war, flooding, and humanitarian crises, education has been put at the back of their society out of pure force, unfortunately stemming from the lack of political power and resources. These events have significantly contributed to this statistic, with more and more women out of school each year. The COVID-19 Pandemic resulted in over 2.4 million people being out of school in 2020(Care

International, 2020). Due to the current economic crisis, hope for these women lies in the hands of us, requiring support by implementing literacy programs such as *Literacy for Leaders*.

2. Statement of Request

We respectfully request \$30,000 in funding to implement the *Literacy for Leaders* program, an initiative designed to empower South Sudanese women through English literacy and leadership training. This 8-week program addresses critical barriers faced by women in South Sudan, where limited access to education and leadership opportunities perpetuates cycles of poverty and inequality.



Since “literacy skills are fundamental to informed decision-making, active participation in local, national, and global social life, and to establishing a sense of personal competence and

autonomy (Thengal 2013),” implementing this program will offer Sudanese women important experiences and a necessary skill set. This program recognizes that the ability to read and write in English is not only essential for academic success but also for economic growth, employment opportunities, and civic engagement.

By offer women English literacy skills, the *Literacy for Leaders* program will create new opportunities for participants, laying the foundation for personal growth and community leadership. English literacy will enable them to access higher education, improve employment prospects, and more effectively participate in public life, while leadership training will ensure they can advocate for themselves and others, contributing to the empowerment of their communities.

Investing in literacy and leadership education has a powerful, positive return on investment for individuals, families, and communities. The *Literacy for Leaders* program offers several key benefits:

Economic Empowerment and Increased Earnings Potential:

- Literacy significantly increases earning potential. A World Bank report found that each year of education boosts wages by up to 10%” (World Bank, 2021). By providing English literacy skills, the program will enable women to access better job opportunities, leading to higher incomes and economic mobility for themselves and their families.
- Additionally, Carnevale et al. (2001) found that reading and writing skills in English raise wage rates significantly, reinforcing the long-term economic benefits this program will provide.

Long-Term Economic Growth:

- Women's literacy is linked to sustained national economic growth. As the UNESCO Institute for Statistics notes, higher literacy rates contribute to improved productivity, reduced poverty, and enhanced economic performance. The impact of this program will be felt across communities, where women will intend to use their skills to start businesses, create jobs, and invest in local development.

Breaking the Cycle of Poverty:

- Educated women invest in future children's education, creating a positive, intergenerational cycle of learning and economic progress. By empowering women, we are directly addressing the root causes of poverty and creating a brighter future for generations to come.

Social Impact and Gender Equity:

- Educating women promotes gender equality and strengthens social cohesion. Women with leadership training are more likely to participate in governance and policymaking, helping to ensure that their communities are resilient and inclusive. This program is not only about individual empowerment—it is about creating stronger, but more cohesive communities also that benefit everyone.

Effect on Community Development:

- Women's leadership and literacy have a positive effect on their communities. This positive impact where one woman's education can uplift an entire community can generate long-term sustainable development. Leading by example creates a

positive impact on smaller communities, inspiring the uneducated to participate in education and look for those who are literate.

Through this initiative, I aim to achieve measurable outcomes: improved literacy levels, enhanced leadership capabilities, and the development of role models who can inspire and mentor others. My long-term vision is to establish a program that can be replicated across South Sudan, contributing to the country's socio-economic recovery and long-term development.

3. Scope of Work

The program's duration will be 8 weeks, and the core elements and goals of the program include:

1. **Literacy Program:** A comprehensive literacy curriculum will be implemented, focusing on reading comprehension, writing and grammar skills, and building vocabulary. These elements will be taught through daily class meetings, where mentors will collaborate with students to create an engaging and supportive learning environment. The literacy program will be structured in a way that builds upon participants' existing knowledge and gradually enhances their skills, giving them a solid foundation for future success.
2. **Leadership Skills and Confidence Building:** In addition to literacy, the program will emphasize the development of leadership skills and confidence. Mentors will guide participants through activities that focus on public speaking, team-building exercises, and conflict resolution, all of which can be taught alongside literacy instruction. Mentors will also assign participants leadership roles, such as leading group discussions and giving presentations, to help them develop their public speaking abilities and build their self-confidence.

3. Cultural Exchange: The program will include presentations and public speaking practices that foster mutual respect and understanding. Participants will engage in a cultural exchange, where community members will have the opportunity to share their traditions, and stories with the group. This will not only promote cross-cultural understanding but also help both mentors and participants appreciate the rich diversity of their respective backgrounds.



4. Small Group Mentorship: To ensure a deeper connection between mentors and participants, each mentor will be assigned a small group of South Sudanese women. This personalized mentorship will allow mentors to offer more focused guidance, create an open space for storytelling, and provide one-on-one support. Regular check-ins will be

scheduled to assess participants' progress, provide feedback, and address any challenges they may encounter.

5. Sustained Communication: After the program's completion, there is a plan to maintain communication between mentors and participants through letter writing or other forms of outreach. This continued connection will help to foster lasting relationships and ensure that participants feel supported even after they have completed the program.

Considering the linguistic diversity of the participants, the program will also focus on bilingual empowerment. While the primary goal is to teach English literacy since it is one of South Sudan's official languages, we will respect the participants' native languages by incorporating Arabic into the curriculum.

Mentors will receive basic Arabic training to facilitate better communication during lessons, even if they are not fluent. Additionally, multilingual materials will be created, providing Arabic instructions alongside English exercises to help participants make connections between the two languages. Bilingual assistants will support mentors during the program to ensure a smooth transition and encourage communication.

4. Description of Measure of Project Success

Literacy education is a driving factor in the success, development, and economic growth of a country. For the people in South Sudan, their high illiteracy rate is contributing to their low GDP, poverty, and poor health outcomes. This project aims to address these challenges head on to improve literacy rate while empowering communities, resulting in an improved economic state with an increased sense of hope.

Since education and literacy is a driving factor of economic growth and success, the high illiteracy rate in South Sudan results in a limited availability of a skilled workforce, hindering

individuals' success but also overall economic development. Literacy and economic productivity are directly related, and it was found that "A 1% rise in literacy scores is associated with a 2.5% increase in labor productivity and a 1.5% increase in GDP" (Ziegler 1996). Due to Sudan's current lack of educational resources, the growth is being restricted. To further to contribute to lack of economic growth, about "73 per cent of the South Sudanese workforce is not working and close to 14 per cent is unpaid" (Shimeles & Verdier-Chouchane 2016). Many Sudanese people are currently relying on subsistence work like growing crops or raising livestock, due to the lack of education and opportunities in a job that would contribute largely to sales and trade, thus improving the economy.

Illiteracy is something that passes down through generations, creating a cycle of missed opportunities and contributes to ongoing poverty rates. South Sudan's low school attendance rate puts "the future generation in South Sudan hostage to ignorance and low human development" (Shimeles & Verdier-Chouchane 2016).

Since proper education drives opportunities, it also drives income. It was found that "someone with a primary level of schooling earns 36.5 per cent (188 per cent for a university graduate) more than someone with no education" (Shimeles & Verdier-Chouchane 2016). This figure emphasizes the transformative potential of literacy and education to improve individual lives, increase Sudan's GDP, and reduce generational illiteracy and poverty.

A study from the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) found that "'Participants in adult literacy programs often experience improved job retention and progression over time. Employers also report that improved literacy correlates with better teamwork and communication skills, which enhances workplace productivity" (Ziegler 1996).

Success during this program will be measured by short-term observations that will lay a foundation for long-term development. We aim to achieve a basic improvement of literacy scores across the program's participants. We will track this by offering a pre-program literacy test prior to the program and a post-program literacy test to compare results. Student mentors and tutors will work to evaluate participant's progress and communicate improvements. By enhancing these literacy skills, the vision is to see their skills develop, increase employability, and income potential. The goal of equipping our participants with proper education and tools to enter the workforce or pursue new opportunities will attempt to reduce unpaid labor and dependence on international aid. The hope is to allow this to improve economic stability and overall national growth.

Ultimately, this project aims to create a lasting impact. By addressing illiteracy, we can unlock South Sudan's potential, empowering individuals to achieve economic independence, reducing poverty, and fostering sustainable development for years to come.

5. Description of Available Facilities

The program will use classrooms and mentors to create a conducive learning environment. *Literacy for Leaders* will take place in school buildings with classrooms intended to serve small groups. Smaller groups will allow for every participant's voice to be heard and create a sense of community. These areas will be set up to promote interaction and teamwork, with desks arranged to support group discussions and collaboration during class tasks. The configuration guarantees participants feel involved and engaged throughout their educational experience.

Each participant will receive learning resources, notebooks, and textbooks. These resources will be supplied by the mentor's fundraiser prior to the program. To promote

inclusivity and accessibility, these resources will include instructions in both English and Arabic, assisting participants in making connections between their native language and English. Mentors will also have access to important teaching materials such as whiteboards, markers, and printed teaching guides, fostering a well-resourced and energetic classroom environment.

Mentors will have a designated workspace to plan lessons, assess participants' development, and work together on future activities. These work areas will offer them the tools necessary to uphold organization and efficiency. Casual meetups will be encouraged to facilitate cultural exchange. These spaces will serve as a friendly environment for storytelling, group discussions, and presentations. This setting will promote open communication and aid in nurturing mutual comprehension between mentors and participants.

To aid effective communication and ensure participants are supported, bilingual assistants fluent in Arabic and English will be available during lessons and activities. These assistants will offer translation services and help eliminate any language difficulties, ensuring that both mentors and participants can fully participate in the program. The program will also collaborate closely with local leaders and community organizations to improve available facilities. Libraries and community centers will be furnished with donated books, language tools, and other educational resources provided through partnerships with publishers and nonprofits, guaranteeing that participants have access to tools they need to succeed.

By utilizing these resources and facilities, the program will create an inclusive and enriching environment that empowers South Sudanese women to enhance both literacy and leadership abilities, ultimately fostering personal and community transformation.

6. Qualifications of Personnel

My background in the humanities has inspired me to design this proposed literacy and leadership program, Literacy for Leaders, which aims to equip South Sudanese women with both the foundational skills of literacy and the tools to become confident leaders. The program will consist of several key elements designed to ensure its success, including teacher/mentor selection, fundraising, community involvement, and tailored training.

As someone with 3 years of tutoring, writing, and editing experience, I believe that I would be highly qualified to lead the grant proposal writing process and oversee the specifics of my proposed literacy program. My English BA program focuses heavily on literacy's importance in our communities, highlighting specifically the communication skills and critical thinking that are created from our sense of literacy. Within my coursework, I have developed a deep understanding of the English language, its complex conventions, and writing's impact on our society, therefore equipping me with a widened perspective on how to create a literacy curriculum for those lacking reading and writing skills. Outside my coursework, I have worked as a columnist for the Massachusetts Daily Collegian where I write articles about community issues, social interaction, technology, and mental health, giving me experience in professional writing in the journalism sector and writing for a range of audiences. My background in journalism would allow me to market and circulate this program to interested college students by posting on social media accounts, writing articles, and holding discussions to explain the importance of this project.

Furthermore, my work as a tutor at the University of Massachusetts Amherst Writing Center has equipped me with a nuanced and expanded skill set of how to mentor and aid students with their sense of literacy. Within the Center, I work with students of different backgrounds,

learning disabilities, and ESL students, therefore qualifying me to oversee education for South Sudanese girls who are not familiar with the English language. I am well-versed in taking a collaborative approach to learning and am passionate about making an impact on a community lacking in literacy.

The program's teachers/mentors will be college students majoring in the humanities and social sciences. To ensure that these mentors are qualified and passionate about the mission of the program, a selective application process will be put in place. Applicants will submit a reflective essay that addresses their interest in literacy education, the cultural importance of literacy, and their ideas for supporting the South Sudanese community. In addition, they will participate in an interview where they will discuss their experiences with leadership or adaptability in unfamiliar environments. Preference will be given to applicants with prior experience in mentoring, tutoring, or other roles that demonstrate their ability to offer educated support to South Sudanese women. This selection process ensures that only the most committed and capable mentors are chosen for the program.

To help fund the program, selected mentors will be tasked with creating detailed fundraising proposals that outline specific budget goals, strategies, and resource allocation. In collaboration with organizations like the Malala Fund, mentors will organize fundraising events such as book fairs and sponsorship drive with local businesses and bookstores, directing a portion of proceeds to support the program. Furthermore, partnerships with book publishers and educational nonprofits will be sought to secure donated books and supplies, ensuring that the program has the necessary resources to make a meaningful impact.

I will work closely with mentors to finalize the fundraising logistics. This early involvement in fundraising will also give students a sense of ownership and responsibility,

fostering deeper engagement in the program, contributing to the two-sided outcomes for both participants and mentors in this program.

Before the program begins, the selected students will undergo comprehensive training to ensure they are fully prepared to teach and mentor effectively. They will work alongside teachers, professors, and librarians to develop a deeper understanding of teaching English as a second language, mentoring techniques, and how to navigate the complexities of adapting to a new environment. This training will also include a focus on the cultural nuances of South Sudan, helping mentors to understand the community's traditions and needs, ensuring the program is culturally sensitive and relevant.

7. Budget

The proposed budget of \$30,000 is divided up into personnel costs, program materials, facilities and logistics, events and outreach, and administrative costs.

Personnel Costs

Item	Description	Estimated Cost
Mentor Stipends	Compensation for student mentors	\$10,000
Community Support	Local coordinators	\$3,500
Language Translators	Translators for program sessions	\$2,500
Subtotal		\$16,000

Program Materials

Item	Description	Estimated Cost
Training supplies	Materials for mentors	\$1,200
Translation resources	Bilingual dictionaries and language guides	\$800
Subtotal		\$2,000

Facilities and Logistics

Item	Description	Estimated Cost
Facilities	Classrooms and training spaces	\$2,000
Transportation	Travel expenses	\$2,500
Accommodation	Housing and living costs	\$2,000
Subtotal		\$6,500

Events and Outreach

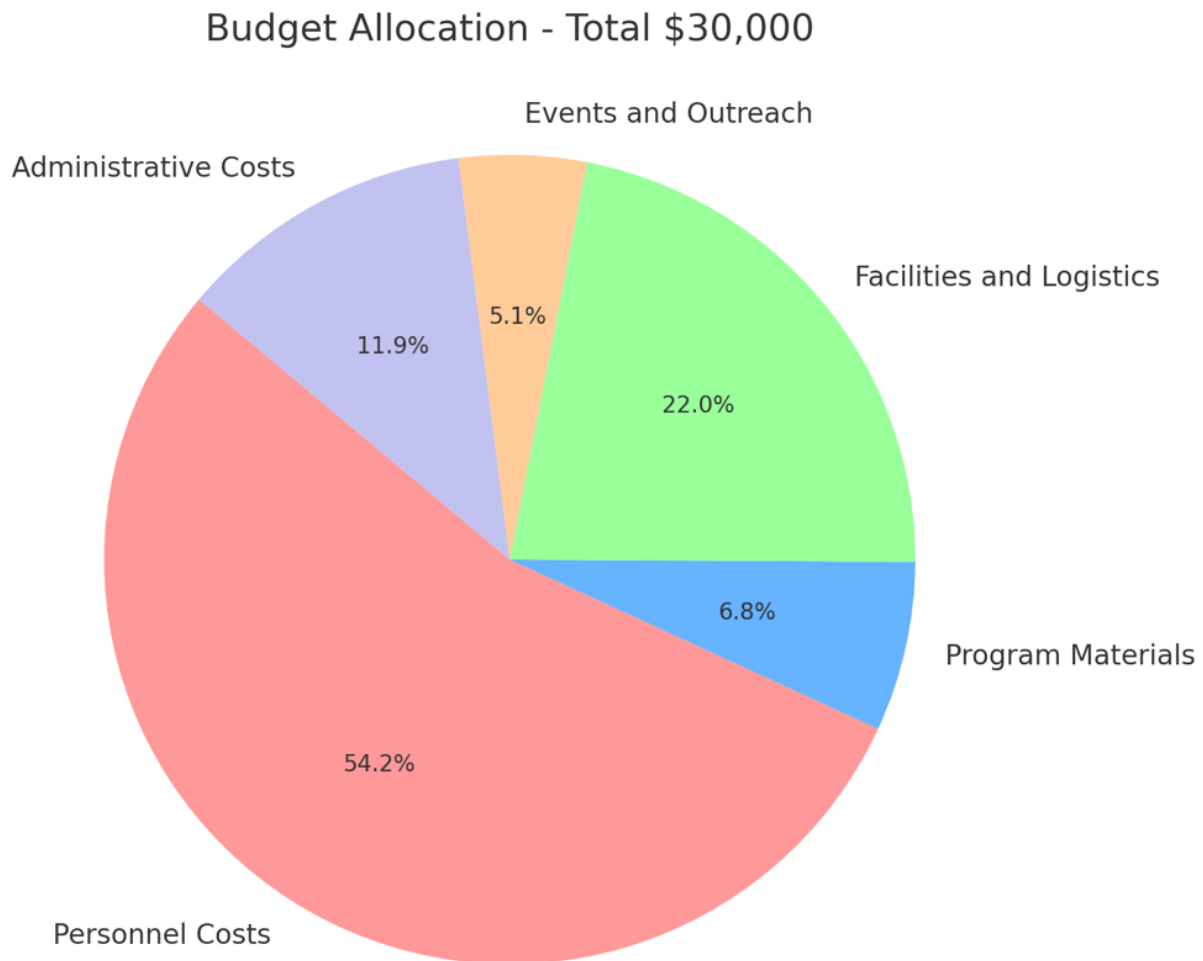
Item	Description	Estimated Cost
Book fairs	Community literacy event with local libraries	\$500
Sponsorship outreach	Marketing costs	\$500
Community engagement	Recruitment of mentors	\$500
Subtotal		\$1,500

Administrative Costs

Item	Description	Estimated Costs
Program Coordination	Management of program	\$2,000
Monitoring and Evaluation	Impact assessment and reporting	\$1,000
Communication Expenses	Communicative tools	\$500
Subtotal		\$3,500

Budget Summary

Category	Total Costs
Personnel Costs	\$16,000
Program Materials	\$2,000
Facilities and Logistics	\$6,500
Events and Outreach	\$2,500
Administrative Costs	\$3,500
TOTAL BUDGET	\$30,000



8. Summary

My proposed *Literacy for Leaders* program is a transformative solution to the current ongoing literacy crisis in South Sudan where only 8% of women can read and write. My outlined initiative encapsulates the dire need for literacy education for South Sudanese social and emotional development as well as economic growth. The barriers of illiteracy, poverty, and gender inequality will be addressed head on by equipping South Sudanese women English literacy skills and leadership training throughout the course of the program. The goal of this

program is to offer education that empowers South Sudanese women, encouraging them to be leaders and promote positive social change in their communities. Providing these women with resources and opportunities aims to create an improved society with more secure employment, broader and more accessible opportunities, and the ability to advocate for themselves with proper communicative and leadership skills.

The requested \$30,000 in funding will allow the Malala Fund to implement this program and provide the necessary resources, mentors, and support to uplift this hopeful yet struggling population. Literacy is a human right, not a privilege, supporting the Malala Fund's mission to create a world where every woman has the opportunity to read, write, and thrive in their community.

Literacy for Leaders is a step in breaking the cycle of poverty, promoting gender equality in education, and lay the groundwork for a promising future for South Sudanese women and their communities.

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