
SPARKING HOPE THROUGH LITERACY

Charlotte's Story

IN THE MOUNTAINOUS volcanic Musanze district in the Northern Province of Rwanda lives a community of farmers experiencing a transformation that only God could orchestrate. It's all because of a literacy program operated by Canadian Baptist Ministries' (CBM) local church partner, the Association of Baptist Churches of Rwanda (AEBR).

Within this community lives Charlotte, 35, married and mother to four children. Charlotte's family are potato farmers—one of Rwanda's most important cash crops for local business and for exporting to neighbouring countries. Charlotte and her husband are also illiterate, which contributed to their poverty. Not being able to read and write made other livelihood opportunities difficult to pursue.

"Being illiterate was not only frustrating, but it made me feel ashamed too. That made me isolated and feel inconsiderable in society. My sociability with others was limited," Charlotte shares. *"I had a thirst to know how to read, write and count . . . I was young—35 years old—but felt worthless. I was thinking many times to start a business but those barriers were there to make me feel incapable. I wanted to help in Sunday school ministry in my church*



by Alicia Jung,
Canadian Baptist Ministries

*Proud graduates from the
literacy program.*

Photo courtesy CBM

but I didn't try . . . as I was considering myself incapable."

Education was not a priority in the region when Rwanda was reeling from the impacts of the 1994 genocide. The aftermath of the violence eroded family relationships, societal relationships, and fuelled civil conflict. Illiteracy is often handed down generationally as well. Illiterate parents often need their children to stay home from school to help in the home and on the fields, and this is largely skewed toward girls and women.

For girls living in poverty, the situation is particularly difficult. Their families rely on them to care for siblings, to earn money as domestic workers, or to do chores around the home while parents look for work daily. School is often out of the picture.

Having survived a countrywide genocide and living amidst ongoing conflict and fighting, Charlotte and her family did what they could—selling potatoes to make a living, putting food on the table and a roof over their heads. After years of hard labour, Charlotte was able to pay off their debts and eventually own the house and land they lived on. But God had even bigger plans.

Imagine Charlotte's excitement and that of the other women and men like her in the community, when the AEBR introduced the Nyange literacy class in Musanze. Charlotte's internal motivation to become literate may have been her fuel, but once she began classes, she was as inspired by the content as she was by those who taught it. The local leaders, pastor

and project manager would visit the class, encouraging those who were learning to read and write for the first time.

The possibility of becoming literate was a dream that Charlotte never could have imagined, but she was even more touched by the commitment, love and prayers she received from the teachers of her class. With encouragement, regular attendance and hard work, Charlotte achieved her life-long goal of reading, writing and even counting. Today, she is a proud graduate of the Nyange literacy class.

"Today, I no longer feel ashamed. I'm excited when people say that I'm no longer illiterate. I'm ready now to start some of the things that I feared in the past. I used to feel more limited and isolated due to my illiteracy, but becoming literate is the best thing that I'm happy about. I feel open now to be used in any community and church activity. I will work hard to help my children to be educated. Myself, I dream to be an entrepreneur. Knowing how to read, write and count will open more doors in the future which will make my family's life and mine to be better."

Charlotte is an inspiration to her family, church and community, and is among the wave of individuals that are leading a hopeful transformation towards a better life for the community in Musanze. ■

INSPIRED GOOD STRATEGIC GIVING 2021

Baptist Women invites you to step into the stories of women like Charlotte through raising funds to support this literacy project—the first of our strategic giving projects for 2021. Women like Charlotte dream of one day learning a trade, getting a better job, even reading the Bible and teaching others to read. Because of initiatives like these, they are each closer to realizing their dreams. And upon the successful completion of their literacy classes, each student receives a Bible and is mentored by leaders who help them read the Word.

The potential for literate women to take leadership roles in their churches and communities continues to grow as the program also teaches topics such as governance of savings and loan groups, and the development of effective self-help groups.

Do join us in raising funds and in prayer support for all of CBM's ongoing literacy projects in Rwanda through the AEBR—that many more like Charlotte can achieve literacy, and that the essential need for literacy programs globally will be met with generosity and enthusiasm.