

Children in Congo want to learn to read!

In the northwest part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, there is an area about the size of Wales or Ohio where most people there speak one language, it is called Ngbaka. There are roughly 1 ½ million speakers of Ngbaka. The whole Bible is available in Ngbaka as are some books but when children start school, they are expected to learn everything in Lingala, a trade language spoken in part of DRC. Recently, an international researcher did a survey in the area and found that virtually none of the children in the villages (as opposed to those in a couple of big towns) spoke Lingala when they started school. As a result, the dropout rate is very high, 90% in some schools do not reach class 6, and the children tend to learn to repeat sentences that they do not understand. Girls in particular are very likely to drop out of school at an early stage.

The evangelical church there has enthusiastically accepted the translated Ngbaka Bible, but the literacy rate in churches is very low - in any language. This affected their ability to study and apply God's Word.

Last year, the Provincial Government education authorities asked that Ngbaka should be introduced in the first 3 classes of the Primary schools. This was trialed very successfully in the 90's but stopped due to the civil war, so some books were already available. Unfortunately, the education authorities had no funds for either book printing or for teacher training. They did assign 5 inspectors to help with the programme.

It was possible to find some funds to help the programme start, and the head teachers and the class 1 teachers of 50 schools were trained in August 2019 after a very official opening ceremony. At present 50 schools with approximately 50 children in each class started the programme in September 2019. The schools are mainly church schools, with a small number of Government schools. There is little difference between the schools and they all basically follow the same programme.

In class 1, the children study the following subjects – all in Ngbaka:

- Reading (which includes the teacher reading aloud to the class)
- Writing
- Arithmetic
- Health
- Religion – Bible stories and memory verses
- Singing
- (Many of the subjects also involve art)

In class 2 the children study the same subjects but add:

Oral Lingala

In class 3 the children study the same subjects but add

Written Lingala – reading and writing

Agriculture – book in Ngbaka.

Oral French

From class 4 the children will use the same books as are used throughout DRC but with the addition of one book in Ngbaka for each year

Class 4 – Geography

Class 5 – History

Class 6 – Politics

There are 700 schools that would benefit from this programme. We would like to add 50 more schools each year. The cost of running this programme includes:

- Printing books – for the teachers, school heads and the children

- Chalk

- Teacher training – accommodation and transport expenses

- Supervision of the schools – salaries for 2 men and transport for them and for the inspectors

- Administration of the programme

It costs roughly £300 or \$400 per school for a year, which works out at £6 or \$7 a child for a whole year of education. We hope that individuals or groups of people may be willing to “adopt” a school. The head teacher of the adopted school will write a thank you letter – in French! A good school in a village where the children are receiving a useful education and where they are able to read the Bible from an early age, will make a difference to both the Evangelical church and in fact the whole village.

Margaret Hill