
♦ Munyaku wa nsona ♦



Cidimu cia 3 Musangu

Ngondo 199

Literacy and Adult Education in the DR of Congo:*

ALLEY TO AWARENESS

By Herman Kronenberg

Much happiness can be found there

„I never thought I could learn it!“ I have heard this statement - spoken with many different accents - so very often during my time as responsible of a rural parish in the heart of Democratic Congo, where, as part of my pastoral work, I undertook the task of organizing a literacy programme for adults. That was twelve years ago, and since 1991, this programme has become my main activity. In our diocese of Mbuji-Mayi there is presently a group of approximately 4,000 people - mainly women - who take part in the Literacy for Adults course three times a week, at one of the seventy centres available. Much happiness can be found there, and inevitably the recurring, astonished declaration: „I never thought I could learn it!“ can be heard repeatedly. We have since expanded our territory to three additional dioceses, namely Kananga, Mueka and Kabinda, and with the progression of the Literacy for Adults course, the same remark: „We never thought we could learn it!“ is continuously audible.

Belonging and being recognized, is important

‘Newcomers’ into the world of the written word, are able to recount their stories

In Mbuji-Mayi, progress is so advanced that an own monthly bulletin is issued by the literacy group. This bulletin is targeted at a much larger public than the ‘new alphabetarians’ but the first inside page belongs to them entirely. Here, these ‘newcomers’ into the world of the written word, are able to recount their stories. And it is certainly amusing to read these tales. It is of course true that very often the same things are repeated, and with similar words, but the names show that it is always a different person, someone striving to express his/her joy and thankfulness: „I was blind, but now I can see“. „I was ignorant, now I am learning“. „I didn’t count, now I belong“. „I don’t know how other people see it“ - one woman recently wrote - „but being able to read is now just as important to me as my daily bread“. Again and again - in practically every letter - the genuine amazement shines through „I didn’t know that I could learn it, but look at me now!“

**original text in Dutch*

Of course this joy does not stop at the pure techniques of reading and writing. These people are fully aware that a new world is opening up for them, a world in which they were always present, but in which they had lived - up till now - as strangers, rejected and oppressed. Even if they have not realized it themselves, during the course of their studies, from the very beginning to the end, a process of awareness has been created. Each word and sentence applied in the practice of reading and writing draws emphasised attention to the daily reality of a growing misanthropical tendency which, according to different sources and for several reasons, is beginning in Africa.

To understand „more“ from the continually repeated statement, the words „I didn't know that I could learn it“ contain a very special social meaning. They express the functional character of literacy, and the brand new skills they imply, for daily life. Perhaps through this, people become better equipped to survive. Additionally they are reminded that society is in fact our common working ground, our duty, for which we can, and must, work together to make co-existence in society worthwhile.

The long road to development and liberation

Admittedly, a worthwhile society never appears as a gift falling from Heaven. The people themselves, through their own strength, must strive to create it. The literacy programme in Kasayi was developed out of an intense anger that the people in the Congo, and in so many other African countries, were completely unequipped for this task. They have been intentionally kept backward. In Africa, illiteracy has been used as a political tool for the suppression of the masses. Illiteracy is not only ignorance, it is also a social weakness and a lack of social responsibility. It is a brick wall against which development programmes very often collide, but to no avail.

Education appears to be the first and foremost resource to overcome on the one hand, poverty and insufficiency, and on the other hand, dictatorship and suppression. But this is an almost hopelessly long road. A literacy course is only a very meagre beginning. Even when, in the post-literacy phase, the working field has been extended - e.g. more men attend the French course - and the people have learnt new skills, the question can be raised „What does it help if only a limited number of people, and everybody exclusively for himself, are able to benefit from it“? The real work actually begins after the final course: To systematically educate large sections of the population towards a combined re-development of society. But I say this with all modesty. First of all, we are no further than a few dissipated campaigns, and secondly we don't know at all whether our endeavours - in all that we do - will ever reach the expected results. We have absolutely no guarantee whatsoever whether these people will ever really be in a position to self-determine or to improve their lot. With our task of awareness-building we can only create the best possible conditions.

One of these conditions is: Informing the people. For this reason, the literacy working group in Mbujimayi has created the monthly paper *Munyaku wa nsona**, spreading not only information, but also helping to put this information to use. With a distribution of 2,000 copies the paper has a comparatively minimum influence on society as such. However, limited though it may be, it has a certain influence. It is to be hoped that *Munyaku* will not remain the only one of its kind. There are more than enough opportunities in the country for additional daily papers and

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**Munyaku wa nsona: String made from blades of grass (used to bind grass bundles). These words recall an old song, in which all people are invited to help so that the Munyaku can bind everything and everyone together. Those understanding the Ciluba language recognise immediately two important things: first of all unity and identity, and secondly, all are invited to give their support in this cause. Since its two-year existence, Munyaku still receives many contributions from its own followers. Munyaku is the paper of the ordinary people.*



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S U M M A R Y R É S U M É R E S U M E N

El Padre Herman Kronenberg resume sus experiencias en la Diócesis de Mbuji-Mayi (República Democrática del Congo) donde inició hace doce años la alfabetización de adultos. Ya se extendieron estos cursos a otras tres diócesis; más de 4.000 personas, especialmente mujeres, participan. Tres veces a la semana los grupos se reúnen para aprender a escribir y leer. Con frecuencia los alumnos constatan que „nunca pensé que pude aprenderlo“. Los alfabetizados envían continuamente sus pequeños cuentos a un boletín que acompaña el proceso. Un resultado fundamental de los cursos es la creciente consciencia de la situación personal y de la sociedad. Analfabetismo en la República Democrática del Congo siempre ha sido un instrumento político de opresión. El trabajo entonces empieza después de la mera alfabetización: una educación permanente hacia el desarrollo y la liberación.

Le Père Herman Kronenberg présente ici son expérience dans le diocèse de Mbuji-Mayi (République Démocratique du Congo - RDC) où il y a douze ans il avait commencé une alphabétisation des adultes. Ces cours se sont étendus à trois autres diocèses. Aujourd'hui plus de 4000 personnes y participent, surtout des femmes. Trois fois par semaine les groupes se réunissent pour apprendre à lire et à écrire. Souvent les apprenants avouent : „ Je n'avais jamais pensé que je pourrais apprendre“. Les alphabétisés envoient continuellement leurs „petites histoires“ à un bulletin qui accompagne le processus. Un résultat fondamental des cours est la conscience accrue de leur situation personnelle et communautaire. L'analphabétisme en RDC a toujours été un instrument politique d'oppression. Avec cette première alphabétisation commence alors une éducation permanente vers le développement et la libération.