

STEP¹ (Strengthening Tokples (Vernacular) Education in Papua New Guinea):

Assisting, establishing and expanding community-based literacy programmes in PNG
A video presentation by SIL and BTA representatives

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Abstract:

The STEP Course (Strengthening Tokples Education in Papua New Guinea) is one of the successful training courses in PNG which was originally sponsored by AusAID. STEP is designed for non-formal education focusing on community-based programmes. The programme aims to train experienced TPPS (Tok Ples Preparatory School) teachers to improve and expand their vernacular literacy programmes through awareness campaigns, training other teachers and producing original vernacular materials for their schools. Since 1994, men and women from 94 languages have attended and graduated from the STEP Course. So STEP is making difference in community-based education in PNG.

PNG is one of the most linguistically and culturally diverse nations in the world. There are 821 living languages and cultures within its borders. These are valuable and precious resources. It is through language that culture and community relationships are established. It is through language that history is passed from generation to generation. It is through language that we learn. It is through language and culture that identity is developed. Research also shows that children and adults learn to read and write best in the language that they know. Once they have learned these skills they can then transfer them to other languages. SIL and BTA as organisations are committed to, and see the importance of, community languages.

In addition to these assignments SIL also served the government and other organisations in the country in various ways. SIL does this with a clear separation of focus when needed. For example, SIL personnel have worked long term with the

¹ The revised STEP Course video presentation (Strengthening Tokples Education in Papua New Guinea (PNG), formerly called Supervisors' Tokples Education Programme) was originally written and designed by SIL-PNG members Glenys Waters and Michael Jones. It was presented to a review team from Canberra representing AusAID's NGO's Cooperative Programme (Australian Agency for International Development Non-Government Organisation). The visit took place in November 2002, at SIL-Australia, Kangaroo Ground, Australia. During 1994-2002, AusAID's NGO Cooperative Programme partially funded 6-8 participants through nine of the cohorts of graduates. The STEP Course is a non-formal literacy and vernacular language education course. The video describes the STEP course's content and outcomes. It concludes with comments about sustainability, commitment, and perseverance made by William Edoni, SIL's Director's Assistant for Public Relations and chairman of PNG-BTA, through the illustration of one of its graduates and mentors, Selby Otire.

National Department of Education in Elementary Curriculum Development, with the National Literacy Awareness Secretariat, and with several Provincial Education Departments in the area of vernacular literacy. One of our members has also served on an AusAID research team, and others on AusAID funded vernacular literacy consultancies and training programmes.

Between 1999-2002 SIL had assisted the government to assist 103 language groups develop their own alphabets. This orthography subcontract was held under the Elementary Teacher Education Project (ETESP). We have also run alphabet development training courses for government officers and elementary trainers.

Over the years SIL has run numerous vernacular literacy training programs at the national level in support of vernacular literacy and more recently to support the elementary reform. It also runs workshops at the regional level and the community levels. Many of these workshops focus on teacher training, literacy materials development and production, and writers' workshops. Whatever organisations SIL works with, it fits its practices to their philosophical stances.

The STEP program is just one part of the training that SIL, along with Bible Translation (BTA) of PNG, offers communities. Since it was partially funded by AusAID (Australian Agency for International Development) a separation of focus was maintained. STEP formerly stood for Supervisors Tokples Education Programme, but since 2003 it means Strengthening Tokples Education in Papua New Guinea.

SIL in cooperation with BTA began the STEP programme in 1994 and AusAID had partially funded each intake until 2003. SIL donors and other NGOs have funded the rest. The focus of the program is to train Papua New Guinean men and women to work as literacy trainers and supervisors in their language communities, supporting the development of literacy classes for adults and children. Men and women participants are selected by their communities and participate in the two year STEP program.

The program consists of five one-month residential modules. In between modules participants return to their communities and do their village assignments. The content of the course is arranged around five major topics.

Participants are taught how to develop a one-year curriculum for a vernacular prep school based on their own culture. They are shown how to develop a cultural calendar and use this as a tool for organising relevant themes and learning events, and for developing relevant instructional materials.

A good starting place for literacy and numeracy education is with the known. Working in the local language means that the acquisition of skills and abilities is most effective. These can then be transferred to other languages. The STEP course encourages the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy in the local language and promotes the need for literacy use to become a valued part of PNG's oral cultures.

Participants are taught the principles and practices of teaching literacy and numeracy and how to teach these things to others in their own training programs in the villages.

Running writers' workshops and teaching others to develop literature in the community language is another key focus of the course. Participants begin to learn about this by first doing it themselves, then teaching others to do it. Materials production strategies that are appropriate to the context are taught so that the people are able to continue to produce materials long after the course is finished. The use of silk-screens is taught and some participants learn basic computing skills. In the early stages, many of the books and charts are hand made.

A variety of materials are produced in a variety of ways for a variety of audiences. Trainers are encouraged to help their communities develop programmes for children, women, men and out of school youth.

Leadership and management is a key focus of the course with strong emphasis on accountability, integrity, excellence, and capacity and vision building. Participants are also trained to run community awareness campaigns, to do the needed public relations work involved in non-formal language development programmes, to build motivation and to foster teamwork and commitment in the village communities.

Community health issues are discussed in the health awareness program and participants develop educational materials concerning each of these issues. The course also encourages personal development in the areas of reading fluency, improving ability in English and typing or computing.

A variety of teaching practices are modeled in the course and participants are encouraged to adopt those that are culturally appropriate in their own training programmes. A big emphasis is placed on learning together and learning from each other using a variety of activities.

The STEP course underwent a curriculum review and from the 10th cohort onward starting in 2003, it changed the meaning of its acronym to Strengthening Tokples Education in Papua New Guinea. The curriculum now is based on the following core values.

- Integrity and Quality in Life and Work
- Leadership & Management
- Building Vision and Capacity
- Strategic partnership with others
- Excellence in Training/Teaching
- Vernacular Literacy

Between the modules, participants return to their villages and work on their village assignments with periodic visits from their mentors. They do such things as:

- conduct awareness presentations in the villages,
- conduct a writers workshop and produce the booklets developed,

- complete their cultural calendar with the help of community elders,
- assess the literacy needs,
- check the stories that have been developed with the communities,
- conduct trial literacy classes,
- trial the materials that have been developed, and
- conduct a teacher training workshop.

While there are many materials produced as a result of the STEP course for instructional purposes, this is not the main focus of the course. The main focus is on building knowledge and capacity in the participants for them to be able to continue to assist their communities in language development programmes.

However the course has had other outcomes. Through the process of running these courses many Papua New Guinean staff have been trained to the mentor level, to staff level and to the Principal level. This happens quite naturally. Currently there are several participants with huge potential for further professional development.

STEP graduates have been very active in supporting non-formal literacy programmes in their communities and have also assisted with elementary training programmes. Because of the quality of the training they have had they have been able to pass on their curriculum and materials development knowledge and abilities to others. Some graduates have been officially accepted into the elementary system.

Some graduates have worked for many years with community-based Tokples prep school programmes and continue to do so. Others have been 'replaced' by elementary teachers and so have turned their attention to the literacy needs of adults and out of school youth in their communities.

Each STEP participant produces a minimum of 40 titles of literacy materials for their communities during the course. With 126 graduates, through 2002, that means at least 5,040 books have been developed so far.

STEP graduates have also trained the following number of people as part of their village assignments as of 2002.

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| • Prep Skul Teachers Trained | 1,483 |
| • Teachers In-serviced | 881 |
| • <u>Children Taught in these Classes</u> | <u>21,262</u> |
| • Adult Literacy Teachers Trained | 680 |
| • Adult Teachers In-serviced | 269 |
| • Adult Participants attending class | 7,505 |

William Edoni, the SIL Director's Assistant of Public Relations and Bible Translation Association (BTA) of PNG chairman, comments that the exciting thing about STEP is that the programme is not just about books, papers and curricula. STEP impacts participants' lives by building into them the capacity to be involved in development and to be willing to sustain whatever development they have started. This is real

development, not just hot air. It is about people applying what they have learned in their lives and then teaching others.

Selby Otire, one of the graduates, continues to run the programme in his and surrounding language areas. He makes sure that whatever literacy work they have started is not left to die. He continues to move it on. He does this despite the daunting variables that confront him as a rural person in Papua New Guinea.

For example, to introduce literacy into an oral culture and maintain it is a two sided problem. On the one side there is the literate person bringing literacy into an oral society. Change has numerous problems associated with it. On the other side, there is the peoples' desire to receive literacy, grabbing at it, but if it is not sustained it is easy for that culture to slide back into old habits. This in turn raises the question what sustains literacy?

- Finance - Those who are doing literacy may expect to be paid or supported by the community in concrete ways. If people feel their work is not valued, they would lose interest.
- Vision - People who have a vision for literacy will persevere through difficulties but those who do not have the vision lose interest easily and give up and quit. Women can be a powerful influence here. And women don't catch the vision also they can bring the whole programme to a standstill.
- Ability to find solutions - There may be a lack of creativity on the part of the people involved in village literacy work to find alternative means to sustain the programme.

And there are many more variables that people like Selby grapples with in order to keep programmes alive.

As a Papua New Guinean it is easy for a person like William to analyse situations from his comfortable office and give answers to problems from a distance. But when you are involved in the rough and tumble of everyday living in the village situation it can be very difficult to maintain and sustain those programmes. It takes a person with a high level of integrity, responsibility, commitment, and vision to carry on in the face of all these things. William sees Selby struggling and yet determined not to throw in the towel because he is a man who has that vision, integrity and responsibility. And Selby is saying I can't turn my back on my people. That sheer determination motivates others to carry on doing what they are doing to make their people literate. But it has also excited people from neighboring languages to seek Selby's assistance to help them develop similar programmes in their own communities.

STEP is a programme that seeks out people with integrity and good character. STEP is about vision building, motivating, and empowering creative people to go back to their villages to vision build, motivate and empower others, so together, they could develop their communities. And that is what guarantees and encourages sustainable development.