

# *Baatonu*

# Literacy Project

Benin, West Africa



# Summary

Of all the factors involved in empowering rural communities in Africa, literacy is the one that most profoundly affects the daily lives of people in these communities in the medium and long term. It is the foundation of sustainable economic and social development. It is therefore an important indicator for measuring a country's human development index. According to the [CIA World Factbook](#), Benin's literacy rate ranks 157th out of 166 countries, and according to UNESCO, the illiteracy rate is 32.9% among the population aged 15 and over.

Despite the efforts made by successive governments through various national literacy programs, much remains to be done to improve and catch up.

With this in mind, Literacy Benin, in collaboration with its partner Literacy and Evangelism International (LEI), has been working for many years to develop strategies and new approaches to alleviate this problem.

LEI is a non-profit organization that empowers the church to share the message of Jesus Christ through the gift of reading. Since 1967, LEI has worked in countries around the world, developing Bible-based reading materials in over 230 languages.

Literacy Benin is LEI's partner in Benin. With over 200 literacy classes and more than 20,000 people literate in more than 5 local languages since 2005, thanks to its Bible-based syllabaries, Literacy Benin is a leader in the field. Indeed, Literacy Benin's mission is to equip churches, ecclesiastical and para-church organizations with teaching materials, in particular biblical textbooks in African languages and books for learning foreign languages such as French and English. Since 2005, Literacy Benin, through the ministry of its president Daniel Awolou, then a missionary with LEI, has been working to eradicate adult and youth illiteracy in rural areas of West Africa and expand rural evangelism by creating, with the support of Literacy & Evangelism International, Bible-based reading materials in over 5 languages. The latest of these is for the Miyobe/Sola people.

The aim of this project is to produce syllabaries with biblical content for the Baatonu people, the majority population in northern Benin and originally from Nigeria.

Thanks to this project, there will be a significant increase in the number of literate people in the Baatonu-speaking community. The project aims to improve the literacy rate among the Baatonu population, especially in rural areas. To achieve this, the project requires a financial contribution of \$14,000 by September 2023. The active phase of the project will end in June 2024.



*Baatonu knights at the GAANI festival in Nikki, northern Benin, one of Benin's great cultural festivals.*

## Problem statement

Baatonu is the language spoken by the Bariba people. They were a conquering people who co-founded the Borgu kingdom in the north-east and centre-west of present-day Benin and Nigeria respectively. In Benin, there are no fewer than 1,040,000 Baatonu speakers (in 2021, according to [Ethnologue.com](https://www.ethnologue.com)). They are concentrated in northeastern Benin, mainly in the regions of Borgou and Alibori. They are also present in large numbers in Nigeria (396,000, according to the [Joshua Project](https://www.joshuaproject.net)), especially in the Kwara and Niger states. They are also found in Togo (28,000) and Burkina-Faso (30,000).

The Bariba are predominantly Muslim (65% [Joshua Project](https://www.joshuaproject.net)). 18% identify themselves as animists and only 16% as Christians. Their Bible has been fully translated since 1996 and is currently being revised. However, the literacy rate among the Bariba varies from 1% to 30% ([Ethnologue.com](https://www.ethnologue.com)). This rate partly explains the percentage of Baribas identifying themselves as Christians, which is only 16%, despite the fact that the Bariba people were one of the first to be evangelized in Benin, and despite the fact that even portions of the Bible in Baatonu have existed since 1953. Given that French, the official language, is not widely spoken (around 10% of Benin's population), the Bariba's illiteracy has been a hindrance to the spread of Christ's message within their community. For more than half a century now, the ability to read the Bible for oneself alone could have thwarted or reduced the spread of Islam among the Baatonu people.

Moreover, latent illiteracy, especially among women in the remote rural areas of the Borgou and Alibori regions, is a factor aggravating the precarious situation in which these communities find themselves. Good hygiene and health practices would have more impact if only a tiny proportion of the population knew how to read and write.

Literacy Benin's mission has always been to promote the message of Jesus Christ through literacy, and thereby build an environment conducive to community development at every level.

## Aims and objectives

The goal and objectives of the program are based on LEI's mission statement, which is to equip the Church to share the Gospel through the gift of literacy. **The aim of the project is to enable the Bariba people to learn to read the Bible in their own language, make disciples, share the Gospel of Christ and strengthen churches through the use of primers.** Providing Baatonu-speaking evangelical churches with Bible-based syllabaries will support their evangelization efforts.

### **Objectives of the Baatonu literacy project:**

The following objectives for the Baatonu literacy project describe the specific, measurable results that will take place by June 2024.

**Long-term objective:** There will be a significant increase in the literacy rate in the Baatonu community.

### **Specific objectives:**

1. By the end of April 2024, Literacy Benin will have helped the Baatonu community build the syllabaries, a series of 90 lessons with biblical content to teach basic reading in the Baatonu language. Literacy Benin will promote and launch the literacy project in June 2024.
2. By July 2024, trained church teachers and leaders will be using LEI materials for evangelism, discipleship and church planting.
3. In the first year of the project, 40 trained teachers will have run 20 literacy classes with 10-25 pupils per class.

Through ongoing engagement activities (surveys, training, courses, graduation celebrations, etc.), the number of engaged students and volunteer teachers will continue to grow each year. Their work will translate into an annual increase in the literacy rate.

Literacy Benin plans to organize audio recording workshops for Book 1 of the Fulani primer as well as the development of the mobile application itself from August 2023. The launch of the application could take place in December 2023, in the presence of our partners.

## Timeline

Activities	Month									
	Oct. 23	Nov. 23	Dec. 23	Jan. 24	Feb. 24	Mar. 24	April. 24	May. 24	June. 24	July. 24
Conducting a survey in Benin	X									
Translate the teacher's guide and other content such as Bible stories, health, hygiene and agriculture.	2 months									
Hire a team for the primers construction workshop			X							
Organize a three-week syllabus building workshop				X						
Complete the desktop publishing and editing (DTP) phases					3 months					
Testing and printing of the primers volume I and II								X		
Launch of primers and teacher training.									X	X

# Project budget

Below is a summary of how Literacy Benin will use the \$14,000 grant to carry out the proposed project for the Bariba people. It should be remembered that the teachers are all volunteers and many other costs associated with the project are covered by the participating churches. The budget items below relate only to the grant funds requested. In-kind project costs are not included.

Designation	Cost	Comments
<b>Design &amp; Publishing Workshop</b>	\$8,000	Lodging, meals and supplies for 8 workers for 21 days. (LEI missionaries will be responsible for their travel to and from the region). The publishing and desktop publishing phase will continue until 3 months after the construction workshop.
<b>Primer printing</b>	\$4,000	2,000 copies of each syllabary will be produced.
<b>Launch, promotion of syllabaries and teacher training.</b>	\$2,000	-
<b>Total</b>	\$14,000	-