



Ambassador Mesfin Chernet, when reviewing the curriculum materials produced by SIL in the Bench-Maji Zone, shared his thoughts about the progress being made in mother-tongue education.

This is just the beginning of what I hope to see in working together with interested partners. We can bring about positive changes concerning language and culture in the region.

There is a particularly high level of interest in preserving the six mother-tongue languages in the Bench-Maji Zone. The reason for that, I believe, is that in this area the society and the peoples were forgotten for a long time. Now that they have the opportunity to develop their languages, they are very eager to do so.

Upon seeing all of these printed materials for instruction in the mother-tongue in the primary schools, I would like to thank SIL Ethiopia for preparing these books for the Bench-Maji peoples in each language. It is a very good beginning and I think we as a government should continue to develop these kinds of educational resources.



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Ato Filo Wado shared this story after an SIL workshop where he learned how to analyze the grammar of his language, Tsamakko .

I recently discovered that Tsamakko was on a list of “endangered languages.” It was a shock to discover that my language was close to death! And I determined that it must not happen. I came to this conclusion: If you don’t have your language, you cannot adequately describe your identity. In order to have your identity, you need your language. When a language dies, many details about that culture will also be lost; their history and their proverbs will die.

When I began to study about my language, I compared it with a driver’s license. When you have your language, it’s as if you have a license/permission for all these things mentioned above. SIL Ethiopia has helped us to bring our language back to life, [from the brink of death.] They have helped us Tsamakko people by creating a wide open window to the world. We are very thankful to them.

Because we have this “license” now, we view our language as equal to any other. We can stand together [with any other language]. There is no doubt.



SIL is an international, nonprofit, faith-based organization dedicated to supporting those who speak the world’s lesser-known languages. We assist people in developing the necessary skills and capacity to revitalize their languages and preserve their cultural identities. We make our services available to all, regardless of religious belief, political ideology, gender, race or ethnic background.

Language Development is a series of ongoing planned actions that a language community takes to ensure that their language continues to serve their changing needs and goals.

Linguistics is the foundation for our activities in education, literacy and translation. Our field linguists work in partnership with minority language speakers to collect and analyze language and culture data. They also provide quality research and mentor others to produce linguistic descriptions: phonologies, grammars and dictionaries. We also publish research in linguistics and other related fields so that others can benefit from the discoveries that have been made. From 2011-2013, we have been involved in linguistic research in 24 Ethiopian languages, and consulted with five other language communities in producing dictionaries.

Literacy and Multilingual Education

We support communities in their efforts to develop education programs that enable children and adults to become fluent readers and writers in their own mother-tongue. Developing a written literature and using the mother-tongue in education raises the status of the language and sustains it as a means of communication within the community.

Through multilingual education, minority language communities build positive bridges to languages of wider communication. One of our primary activities is supporting communities in their efforts to develop their own mother-tongue education programs. SIL Ethiopia is currently partnering with eleven language communities to develop mother-tongue educational materials that are relevant for their context, including mother-tongue curriculum for grades 1-4 and mother-tongue as a subject.

Language Technology

Another of our important contributions is the research and development of computer software solutions needed to study languages and to publish literature in a wide variety of writing systems. We develop keyboards for Ethiopian languages, as well as support and software training in Flex®, Fieldworks®, PrimerPro®, and Paratext® programs.

Capacity Building

SIL Ethiopia personnel work as technical consultants alongside local communities to conduct language-related workshops. Some of the topics include dictionary making, linguistic discovery, translation principles, narrative and hortatory texts, linguistics, literacy, primer development, and production of mother-tongue materials, both written and oral.

Partnerships

Clearly, the work of language development needs a collaborative effort. SIL Ethiopia is a member of the Ethiopian Multilingual Education Network, and we partner with many other NGOs and governmental organizations such as universities, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

SIL International is an official NGO partner (consultative status) of UNESCO.

