

## **Gawri Literacy Initiatives: An Indigenous Community in Northern Pakistan Mobilizes to Promote Mother Tongue-based Education.**

**By Muhammad Zaman Sagar**

In Pakistan's remote district of Swat, the medium of instruction and the materials in primary schools are in the majority languages: Urdu and Pashto. When Gawri-speaking children enter school for the first time, they can only understand their mother-tongue, but the government policies will hinder a solid educational foundation from the beginning, making the early days of instruction an unpleasant experience for new schoolchildren.

In 2005, the Gawri Community Development Programme (GCDP), started assessment and mobilization in the community towards mother-tongue based education. In August 2008, the first two MLE pilot schools in Kalam were launched. Initially, the parents were sceptical, but gradually they saw the programme has a positive impact. The children enjoy learning because the contents are in their mother-tongue and according to their own culture. At the end of June 2010, the children completed their two-year pre-schooling and from their achievements so far, we foresee a smooth transition into the public school system.

Community-based initiatives help promote these kinds of programmes. The Forum for Language Initiatives (FLI), a resource centre based in Islamabad, is providing training and consultant help. This programme enabled the community to select teachers from their own villages, and take ownership over their children's education for the first time, without gender restrictions.