

**Gawri literacy initiatives: an indigenous community in Pakistan mobilizes to promote mother tongue-based education**

**Mr. Muhammad Zaman Sagar (Gawri Community Development Program, Pakistan),**

**Some 69 languages** are spoken in Pakistan. The Gawri speaking area of the country straddles the districts of Swat and Upper Dir and includes around 100,000 people.

**Language research** into Gawri began in 1992 and by 2008 there were writers' workshops and other programs to promote the language and awareness of it, within the Gawri community.

**Current pressing issues** affecting the Gawri community include; poverty—there are few jobs and high levels of migration; low levels of education--including few girls schools in mountain areas; lack of official support towards education--'ghost' schools are common and drop-out rates are high; language of instruction in the schools—there is lower performance of children from minority communities compared to native Pashto speakers; and terrorism—230 schools were torched in Swat in 2009.

A survey conducted in 2010 in 3 villages, involving some 2,900 respondents, found that only 25.2% of all respondents and 11% of females had some degree of education.

**Community mobilisation;** In 2005 Drs. Susan and Dennis Malone visited Pakistan's Forum for Language Initiatives (FLI) and shared about MLE programs; FLI arranged meetings with 3 communities, including Gawri. Literacy surveys were then conducted in three Gawri villages. Most of those surveyed favoured mother tongue-based MLE school programs. A local group, the Gawri Community Development Program (GCDP) conducted strong local advocacy and mobilisation of youth and curriculum development work began with the local community. A Multilingual Education committee from all walks of life began to operate as a board for MLE initiatives.

In 2008 a pilot program began in two schools in Kalam valley. By July 2010 31 children had successfully finished two years of MTE pre-primary school, two new schools had opened and there were plans to open two new schools a year.

**Outcomes to date:** There are good results in annual exams based on comprehension and accuracy goals. Current enrollment is 88 children in four schools. The goal is to educate 500 children by 2012. Children and adults like the Gawri MLE schools.

**Challenges;** These include terrorism—schools had to close for several weeks; natural disasters--devastating floods in July 2010 meant many students lost homes and farms and one MLE school was washed away, while the program took on a leadership role in relief work.

**What next?** Language development work is not officially supported in Pakistan, so NGOs and community organisations have to do it. We have the vision and mission, and MLE programs appear to have support from government and other fora.