

LITERACY STUDENT STORIES

SARAH TUYIZERE

Note: Sarah's story was recorded by her teacher, Claudine, as a part of a project for International Literacy Month. During a public Literacy Day celebration this summer, Claudine read the narration and Sarah herself read her story aloud to the crowd.

“It is impossible to develop yourself without knowing how to read and write! I've learned from experience that knowing how to read is the pillar of all development.”



- Sarah

Sarah Tuyizere was born into a family of market vendors, and has been selling fruit and vegetables for as long as she can remember. Now in her late 20s, Sarah has her own market stall, working with her husband to sell produce and support their family of four. But Sarah's lifetime of selling experience came at the expense of her education- and her business suffered for it.

Sarah remembers her upbringing with a mix of fondness and regret:

Most of the time, when I went with my mother to the market, she came back home happy because I was the one who brought luck to her business, attracting lots of shoppers. I was cute, sweet child; I knew how to call over customers. That's why I ended up stopping elementary school even before I had learned the essentials- my parents saw that I had a real knack for selling.

Sarah kept working at the market, and when she got older, she opened her own market stall. She truly thought everything was going well until she got married and her husband opened a little shop for her.

That was when I realized the value of knowing how to read and write. We all know that in a business, there must be an element of trust with customers and a system of allowing people to buy on credit. If you were to come and buy produce on credit, I would take note of the products you took, and when you paid, I would give you a notebook and you would check off that you had made the payment. People saw how I was working and eventually realized that I didn't know how to read and write. So then some people would just start writing down whatever products they wanted. Sometimes when I gave them the notebook, they would check themselves off as having paid the loan. I would have disagreements with customers, money would leak out, and I was working at a loss- and yet I knew I was able to run a good business.

This situation brought conflict at home. Sarah's husband thought she had a big ego and was mismanaging their business. The truth came out when her brother had a look at the business notebook.

A customer who actually took 10kg of rice would write down only 5kg of rice. I was shocked and couldn't account for it. People made a habit of it. They talked about me behind my back and I felt ashamed. Everyone had assumed that I knew how to read and write, but I couldn't. I felt angry at a level you can't understand.

At that time, there were actually literacy classes happening right outside her door, through Azizi Life's Adult Literacy Program. But for a while, Sarah refused to enroll because she didn't want anyone to see that she was illiterate and laugh at her.

Sarah can't stop talking about how essential literacy is.

What can I tell you? Do you know that I used to be looked down on as irresponsible? At my child's school, they send home report cards. When my child brought it to be signed, I checked it. She said "Why don't you sign it?" I signed without knowing what I was doing. After that, I figured out where I was supposed to sign in my child's notebooks after supposedly helping her with her homework and checking her work. I used to just sign without being able to check. A dark cloud hung over my head.

Finally, Sarah had had enough.

This is how I finally made my decision to join the literacy class: I figured that people might laugh at me for the six months of our studies, but they would not laugh at me year after year for the rest of my life. I attended the classes with a lot of determination and didn't let anyone discourage me. I made the choice to study and now I can read and write. Even though my first business failed, I am now running another small business, and I am confident that after a while I will have a big shop. I've got the will power and now all obstacles have been cleared.

Sarah's story ends with thanks for Azizi Life's literacy program.

I can't say enough about it! I thank everyone who contributed to this process so that I could become a woman of vision and who fulfills her responsibilities and is determined to develop herself. I know that others in my community who have the same problem I had. I encourage them to join Adult Literacy class so they can learn to write and read. There is no good life without literacy! May the Lord help you in the challenging work of bringing change to people's lives.

"I thank everyone who contributed to this process so that I could become a woman of vision and who fulfills her responsibilities and is determined to develop herself."

- Sarah



Sarah Tuyizere (wearing pink and blue) in her literacy class



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