SIL’s Work in PNG from 1956-2022

SIL-PNG has worked with 404 different language communities since being welcomed to PNG in 1956. Papua New Guinea has an incredible linguistic and cultural diversity with 840 different languages. SIL partners with language communities and organisations in Bible translation, literacy and education, Scripture engagement, capacity building, and research.

This map shows SIL’s current partnerships with 124 language communities. Through 2022, 218 New Testament translations have been completed. We desire to see Papua New Guineans knowing and living God’s Word, leading to changed lives and transformed communities.

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When it comes to literacy and education, the solution that best serves people is often the one that is neither simply 

both/and approach gives speakers of PNG’s languages a chance to do both.

Delivering both/and solutions is not easy. Consider the case of the Seimat language community, isolated at sea in the west of Papua New Guinea. SIL-PNG has come alongside the community for Bible translation, literacy, and education. Despite being one of the most isolated of PNG’s languages, the Seimat people have learned to read their own language and have a New Testament, a picture dictionary, illustrated story books (print and audio), and a website dedicated to the Seimat language—www.kakosimast.com! The website was launched at the beginning of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages as an example of what may be possible for other languages in PNG.

How did this all happen? The Seimat community committed to working together to learn to read and write their language. The parents and teachers learned to read and write Seimat and then taught their children to read and write. The New Testament is now better equipped to learn to read English and succeed in the further education.

SIL-PNG’s Education for Life (EFL) initiative employs another path to strategy: the Bloom book-making tool. Bloom is used to produce single and multi-

language books, talking books, comic books, books for the blind, sign language books, and books with interactive activities. The free Bloom Reader mobile app allows Bloom books to be read off-line, even by users with limited internet access. These materials are designed for individuals and in the classroom setting. A pilot program has run in 30 schools in three provinces. Papua New Guinea is using Bloom to make books that are engaging, inspiring, and powerful.

In 2022, EFL published 10 e-books in 10 PNG languages and produced 514 e-books for the Ministry of Education in English, Tok Pisin, and PNG Sign Language as part of the government’s disability inclusive policy. These both/and solutions have a broad appeal and lead to increased literacy and education.