

## **RANA Project: Dealing with the core issues in Mother tongue literacy**

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*"In rana ta fito, tafin hannu ba ya tare ta," - When the sun shines, no hand can hide the glow!*

Alhaji Nuhu Abdulkadir, *Kauran Katsina*

Reading and Numeracy skills among children aged 6-8 in Katsina and Zamfara States North Western Nigeria; has been challenged by a UNICEF study which espoused that about 50% of primary 5 pupils (Grade 6) in Zamfara State could not identify the right orientation to position a reader and 73.5 per cent cannot read one word in a short sentence. Faced by these abysmal figures, and with the resolve to improve mother-tongue reading; key stakeholders reached a consensus to deal with this problem from its root. An initiative to promote reading in mother tongue (Hausa language) from primaries 1-3 was accepted as a novel solution that could transform the quality of education in the States. Studies have shown that when an early grade child learns to read in the mother tongue, school attendance as well as transition to reading in English improves significantly. Lack of teacher's professional development and materials for teaching and learning in Hausa language were some of the core issues identified for the poor reading capacity. Other barriers identified include; low community awareness and participation, and weak policy environment that supports early grade teaching and learning in Hausa language. Speaking passionately about these factors, key speakers at the RANA program launch did not mince words in noting the time to act is now. Energized with passion for children education particularly the girl child, Her Excellency, Hajiya Asmau Abdul'azeez Yari Abubakar the Wife of the Executive Governor of Zamfara State, stressed that education is a fundamental precursor to modernization and civilization! Thus, only the educated are able to match the fast speed of change in the modern world. Citing herself as an example, she said early grade reading positioned her for later successes in her education and influenced her quality of life.

The RANA team was particularly fascinated by one of the decorated reading champion Alhaji Nuhu Abdulkadir, the Kauran Katsina and District Head of Rimi; who expressed his opinion through a proverb; *"In rana ta fito, tafin hannu ba ya tare ta,"* meaning that *"when the sun shines, no hand can hide the glow."* He used this proverb to explain his perception of the RANA project; explaining that communities in Katsina State have long yearned to learn reading in Hausa language, and behold, like a glowing sun, it has finally come and no hand can hide it. He cited examples of developed nations such as China, Japan, Germany and so forth, who learned to read in their mother tongue before learning a second language. Adding that time has come for young girls and boys in Katsina State to develop quality skills in reading, and not allow any barrier to stop them from attaining their life goals.



*My ability to read fluently was the substance of early grade reading, and my husband who was once a teacher is able to lead the state because he learned to read and write from basic education. Therefore, I urge families and communities in the State to join hands with the government to promote reading in primary schools.*

*Her Excellency, Hajiya Asmau Abdul'azeez Yari Abubakar the Wife of the Executive Governor of Zamfara State*

Having declared their commitment to promoting early grade reading in Hausa language, 10 key dignitaries accepted and were installed as Reading Champions for Katsina and Zamfara. In their acceptance speeches, they all declared their total support for reading; noting that this is the first time they will see education challenges being addressed from the root cause. Thus, expressing confidence that this intervention will result in great outcomes. They also committed that the States will be willing to scale up the successes of the RANA intervention to all primary schools.

The Reading and Numeracy Activity (RANA) project is implemented by Family Health International (FHI360) in partnership with the Government and communities of these two States is funded by the United Nation's Children Fund (UNICEF). The RANA project team is composed of FHI360, Federation of Muslim Women's Associations of Nigeria (FOMWAN), Achieving Health Nigeria Initiative (AHNi) and HRG. The three-year pilot project aims to improve reading and numeracy in about 100 schools (public and integrated Quranic schools) was launched in two focus states.