Limitless Horizons Ixil (LHI), from Guatemala is awarded the 2021 UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize for its programme 'Broadcasting Bilingual Stories: Promoting interactive literacy programming in rural Guatemala'.

Limitless Horizons Ixil is a non-governmental organization that has been working to address gender disparities and improve educational outcomes in Chajul, Guatemala since 2004. Led by local indigenous staff, LHI’s programmes include the Saber Sin Límites (Limitless Knowledge) Community Library, the first and only public library in Chajul.

As part of LHI activities, the programme ‘Broadcasting Bilingual Stories: Promoting interactive literacy programming in rural Guatemala’ aims to promote literacy through distance learning for Maya Ixil youth, at risk of dropping out of school due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
Ms Morrow, shares that 'the inspiration was born out of a clear need in Chajul, where there was no space for learning outside of structured classrooms, no books available in the community, and no culture of literacy or reading'. Today, the Saber Sin Límites Community Library serves approximately 500 members per year, offering a safe environment conducive to learning, literacy programming, academic support, and access to more than 10,000 books.

“When the Saber Sin Límites Community Library was founded in 2010, most of Chajul’s children had never touched a book. Today, we are witnessing the first generation of eager readers and learners in the community who are broadening their worlds through reading. They are more successful in their education and have better job prospects. There are even children who will be avid readers and will go to school through at least high school”. Ms Morrow expresses the inspiring evolution and impact that literacy had on learners.

Ms Katie Morrow, Executive Director and Founder of Limitless Horizons Ixil, shares that when the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Guatemala in March 2020, LHI was forced to shut down the library. With schools also closed, students were left without learning resources and books, and little to no literacy opportunities available. LHI’s remote programming addresses these challenges by delivering culturally responsive programming in Spanish and Ixil (the local Mayan language) through the local radio and television stations. The programme reaches a wider public beyond LHI’s library members, including children, youth and adults who do not attend school, girls and young women who did not have the opportunity to continue their formal education, families in Chajul and the surrounding villages.

The majority of people in Chajul lack access to computers and the Internet, resulting in limited awareness to useful information and learning opportunities. The pandemic exacerbated this disparity, which is why Limitless Horizons Ixil adapted the library programming to include radio and television as a means for distributing literacy and educational content, minimizing learning losses during COVID-19 crisis.

In addition to the remote programming, students would also be engaged through virtual book clubs, including purchasing internet data plans for families’ shared smartphones and through Limitless Horizons Ixil’s book lending programme.

To celebrate International Literacy Day, Limitless Horizons Ixil shares an encouraging message: “We want the world and government leaders to know that by simply providing young learners in vulnerable communities with interactive reading and educational resources—coupled with support, guidance, and role models—small transformations can occur that will have a catalysing impact on future generations”.

This year’s UNESCO International Literacy Prizes will be awarded to six outstanding literacy programmes from Côte d’Ivoire, Egypt, Guatemala, India, Mexico and South Africa on the occasion of International Literacy Day. UNESCO will host a two-day online International Conference on 8 and 9 September. A special session with the Laureates of this year’s Prizes 2021 will be held on 9 September highlighting ‘inclusive distance and digital learning’.

About the project:

- Website (https://limitlesshorizonsixil.org/)
- Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/limitlesshorizonsixil/)
- Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/limitless_horizons_ixil/?hl=en)
- LinkedIn (https://www.linkedin.com/company/limitless-horizons-ixil/)
- YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjkvZjW0NhErkUakFcbkQqA)

Read more:

- UNESCO International Literacy Prizes (https://en.unesco.org/themes/literacy/prizes%20)
- International Literacy Day 2021 (https://en.unesco.org/commemorations/literacyday)
- What UNESCO does for literacy (https://en.unesco.org/themes/literacy-all%20)

UNESCO applies a zero tolerance policy against all forms of harassment
Programme from Guatemala promoting interactive learning wins UNESCO literacy prize