

Walking together towards a common goal: Scripture Use and partnering with churches in eastern DRC

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Abstract

This article is a description of a partnership between SIL and area churches demonstrating how the denominational leadership of a war-torn multilingual area has embraced mother tongue ministry and taken responsibility for Bible translation projects.

Walking together

“I heard about an organization which translates the Bible into local languages and I asked them to come and help us” said a regional church bishop of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). He is a former leader of a church denomination that now oversees Bible translation projects in five languages. There are four church denominations in the country which have formal agreements with SIL for doing Bible translation, literacy, and Scripture Use, as well as linguistics. The initiative has come from both sides, the churches themselves as well as SIL.

As soon as the 4th translation program began, this church denomination (which now oversees 5 projects out of about 20 potential ones), created a translation and literacy department. Their desire was to be more effective within their denomination as well as in relating to other churches from within a church structure as opposed to from an outside organization. This would also give a high profile to the translation and literacy work being done by them.

Each translation project is led by an interdenominational committee. To strengthen the interdenominational aspect in strategic issues concerning setting up and managing projects, key church leaders are now engaged in the process of finding appropriate regional structures for Bible translation and literacy in DRC. Outside partners such as SIL and UBS will relate to these regional committees and to the managing denomination, as well as to the respective domains within the translation projects in technical, training, and consulting capacities.

Key partners in this process are training institutions, as well as all church denominations involved in Bible translation. One such training institution is the Institut Superior Theologique de Bunia (ISTB). Dr. Katho, the principal of ISTB, wants to see authentic transformation and new life in the church of DRC. He is launching a new translation degree program which will begin shortly in support of these efforts. Options

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for teaching Scripture Use are being explored for all students at ISTB through its missiology department and a newly established research center for the revival of the church.

In a country that has been declining over the past 40 years since independence and particularly because of war over the last ten years, creative and practical approaches are needed in maintaining and expanding Bible translation. In addition to developing new structures through administrative meetings involving all interested partners, Scripture Use (SU) seminars have become a major tool. They offer a venue for the Congolese church leaders and other interested people to learn anew why the Scriptures are necessary and why they are important in local languages, as well as how they relate to the day-to-day life in the current situation of DRC. As we continue our human efforts, we wait for God to touch the hearts and lives of the Congolese. We wait for the right moment and the right people to be in place to take our hand and walk with us.

Talking together

Using the Results Based Management¹ approach, we recently began fleshing out a model for Scripture Use in DRC. As we continue to refine these directions, together with all involved in Bible translation work in DRC, we ask, “What are your questions? What issues are you concerned about?” We talk together about church leaders, those already on the field and those in training. We talk together about what issues men, women, students, young people, and children are facing today in DRC. We talk together about the problem of AIDS and the possibility of an AIDS-free generation. We talk together about the family situation in a world with un-Biblical values. We talk together about the trauma of war and the hope of rebuilding the nation. In talking together, we have developed a preliminary Impact statement, Outcome statement, and Output statement for Scripture Use in DRC:

SU Impact statement (still being developed):

Through knowing God and living a life of worship to God in every aspect of life, rooted in the love of God and His Word, living a life of fellowship across tribal and social boundaries, of true and honest discipleship, of service and of being involved in missions, contextualizing the Scriptures into Africa of today and putting the Scriptures above culture, traditions as well as the <Zeitgeist>, the church in DRC is becoming <salt and light> in society in DRC and beyond its borders.

SU Outcome statement (still being developed):

- All Christians, as well as many others, know how to read and write and are regularly, corporately and individually, reading the Scriptures available to them (where possible also in the mother tongue).
- Materials and curricula for training children in schools as well as in Sunday school, as well as for training leaders and women, are in place and being used in training institutions as well as in the activities of the churches and schools.
- Use of Scripture and quality of Bible teaching continues to improve.
- Through the regular use of the Word of God in all aspects of believers’ and churches’ life, in oral and written form, in any language available and, where possible, in the mother tongue, individual

¹ Editors note: Results Based Management (RBM) is a system developed by international development agencies to guide community development projects. It uses common words such as “Impact” “Output” and “Outcome” with specialized meanings. For instance, “Outputs” are not the products (books printed, etc) of an activity, but rather refer to the changes in knowledge, attitudes or human conditions that can be directly produced by the project activities. This focus on explicitly working toward identified, desirable human change is the essence of RBM. (John E. Stark)

lives and churches are transformed and continue to be vibrantly transformed in their beliefs and in very practical ways as well.

- Churches know how to and continue to contextualize the Scriptures and put the Bible above culture, traditions as well as the <Zeitgeist>, seeking to find answers to their questions in every area of life and belief, teach their findings and put changes into practice.

SU Output statement (still being developed):

- Team of trained trainers of trainers among the lay people as well as the church leadership (literacy, all subjects pertaining to Scripture Use including contextualization).
- Materials and curriculum in place for training leaders, women and children (schools and Sunday schools).
- Regular training schools/seminars in place regionally as well as through churches.
- Printing and distribution systems in place regionally as well as through churches

Training together

Four years into this ministry, in 2004, God called me to step aside personally and attend Crossroads Discipleship Training School (CDTS) with YWAM in Uganda. I experienced a time of powerful transformation of my personal life with God which had a decisive impact on my “SU worldview”. SU seminars were revamped and refocused to share the insights God had placed on my heart during my time with YWAM.

The SU seminars we hold in DRC are multifaceted. Staff and participants for these seminars are always interdenominational, from different people groups or even nations, and from a variety of churches, projects, and organizations. The seminars may take place upon the request of a church leader either in connection with an existing translation project or in order to build vision for beginning a new translation project. But they are not limited in scope to those who are involved in or would like to be involved in translation work. They can be held in one language group or for more than one people group. In lives that are permeated by war, conflict resolution and reconciliation are often necessary before a community is willing to consider beginning or continuing a translation project.

Biblical training is a major focus at each seminar. Training is given for future local SU staff as well as top leaders in all aspects of SU teaching. These leaders can then multiply the teaching into any area of church work for which they are responsible. Local SU staff are trained to become facilitators across denominations in areas of their gifting and capacities.

The Biblical topics taught at these seminars vary according to situation but often include: key subjects from the SU manual, reading God’s Word and hearing His voice, the Father-heart of God, the person and work of Jesus, the person and work of the Holy Spirit, sin and forgiveness, God’s heart for His church and for the lost, prayer, worship, intercession, spiritual warfare, discipleship, leadership and servant leadership, Biblical Worldview, problems and finding solutions in God’s Word, contextualization, using traditional music and communication styles for God, and various subjects dealing with language. While the main emphasis is always on knowing God and making Him known, training might also be given in using materials on AIDS, on trauma healing, on the Biblical view of women, or on effectively teaching children and youth. As we train together, we also look towards developing and producing the training materials needed to encourage a sustainable SU program in the future.

Serving together

Our common goal is for lives and societies to be transformed through knowing God and making Him known, through reading and understanding His Word, and through putting His Word into practice. One pastor from DRC commented, “I have learned one thing. God’s Word is powerful and brings life... We have been leading the church through administration instead of leading it with God’s Word and letting God’s Word speak for itself.” As we continue walking, talking, and training together towards a common goal we listen for God’s heartbeat. Together, we are serving Him “...for he wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth (1 Tim 2:4).”

(After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!” Rev.7:9, 10) ■