

AFRIGO

Encouraging the African Church in world mission

Volume 8, Issue 1

WWW.AFRIGO.ORG

KNOW THEIR CULTURE

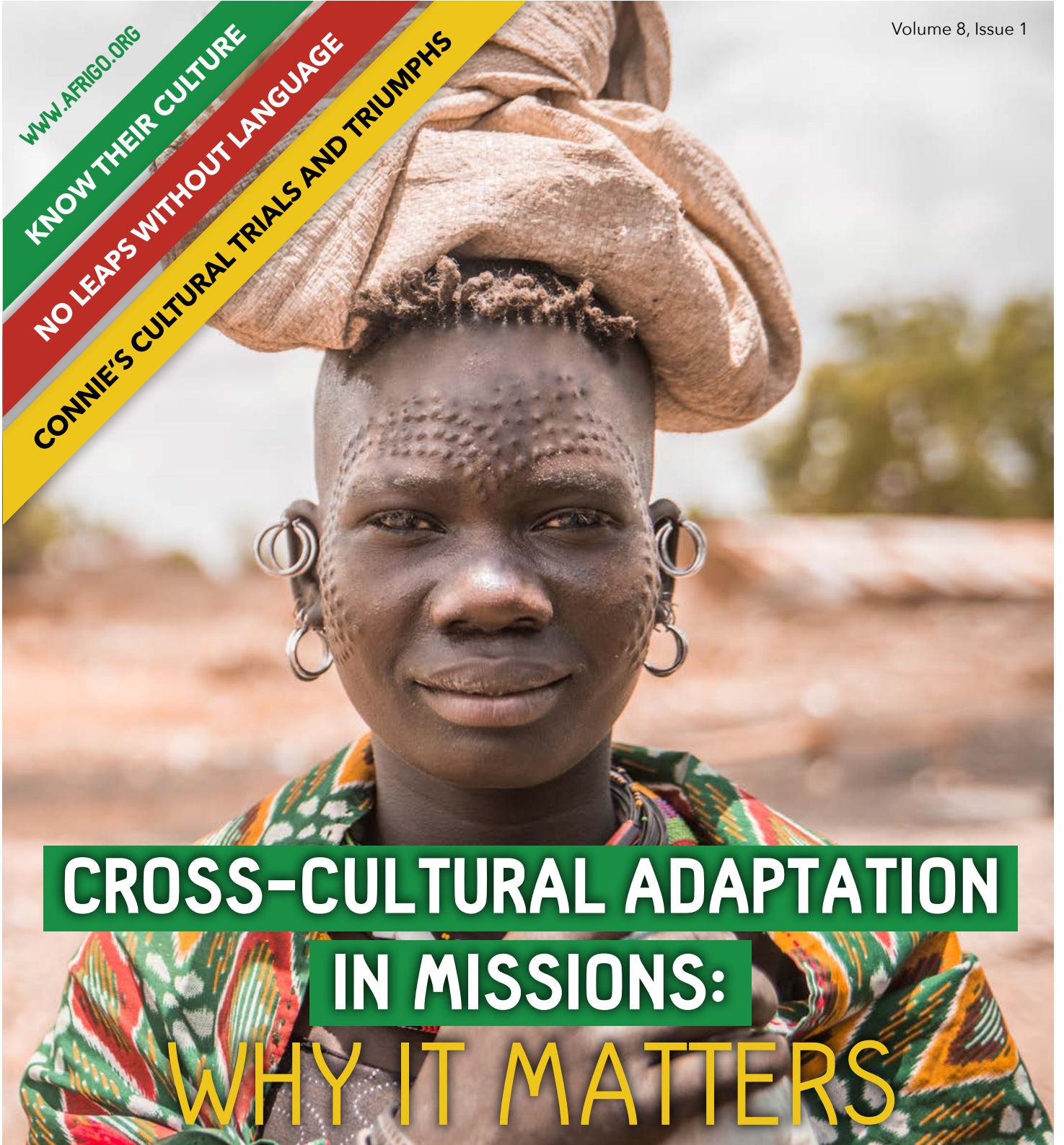
NO LEAPS WITHOUT LANGUAGE

CONNIE'S CULTURAL TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS

CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION

IN MISSIONS:

WHY IT MATTERS



CONTENTS



03 KNOW THEIR CULTURE

Dr. Chinedu Oranye knows firsthand what an "anti-cultural" Gospel can do in Egypt. He argues for why cultural adaptation is crucial in missions.

04 CALLED: FRIDAYS OR SUNDAYS

While up in the sky in an airplane, Ibrahim Bakari* felt hungry for something more than food. His search led him to the Persian Gulf as a missionary.

05 A CONFLUENCE OF CULTURES

At the centre of the Gospel and missionary work is a confluence of cultures. Emmanuel Akawu draws from Jesus' example and missionary experiences to explain how this works.

06 CONNIE'S CULTURAL TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS

All Connie's fantasies about missionary life dissipated the moment she faced the strangeness of Mozambican culture. How has she survived 23 years so far?

09 NO LEAPS WITHOUT LANGUAGE

Language learning brings breakthroughs in understanding culture, but it is not as automatic as you might think. African missionaries share advice and tips for learning a new language.

11 THE DOORS A BUSINESS CAN OPEN

Missionaries are working in a whole new style among some people groups in Tanzania. Business seminars and a maize milling machine are opening doors for evangelism and church planting.

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AFRIGO is a publication aimed at raising awareness, mobilizing, training and inspiring churches and individuals in Africa towards global mission.

Managing Editor: Kate Azumah

Design: Pilgrim Communications

Cover photo: AIM Stories.

The views expressed in the various features in this magazine are not necessarily those of the publisher.

Stock photos are occasionally used. Pseudonyms are used when there are security concerns.



KNOW THEIR CULTURE

BY CHINEDU ORANYE

“For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more...I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.” (1 Cor. 9:19, 22)

I recently shared my conversion story with a group in the Arab world, and I was surprised that some did not receive my story well. Why? Because in seeking to show how Christ had transformed me, I had gone into details about my old, sinful lifestyle. Given the shame culture of this region, such a graphic illustration of my pre-conversion life made people very uncomfortable. So, though I meant to showcase God’s power in redemption, I ended up showcasing shame, and this did not go down well. I was reminded of a very important lesson in cross-cultural communication.

One of the most effective ways of communicating any message is through incarnation. When we incarnate, we identify with the audience, and build bridges of acceptance and communication in the process. Seeking to deliver a treasured asset without first investing in understanding your audience can easily convey the wrong message. Jesus is our perfect example. He did not just “identify” with humanity; He lived in the flesh among us, thereby giving us a practical example of the possibilities before us as God’s creatures.

Cross-cultural communication seeks to convey God’s love and truth in such a way that the recipient is able to embrace and accept the message, without the noise of a “cultural clash.” As expected, every message is encased in a culture, and whenever we carry God’s Word to a new culture or community, we must be aware of this reality. We are cultural beings, and we always operate within a cultural milieu. Nobody exists outside a culture, and those who claim to be non-cultural are actually expressing “non-culturality” as their culture. Culture is not wrong, but it can distort and confuse truth.

Knowing the recipient’s culture is a powerful first step in communicating Christ to them.

Knowing that we all carry our cultural baggage, we need to do two things assiduously. Firstly, we must consciously work to identify the priorities and values of the new culture where we plan to bring the Gospel. Knowledge is life, and ignorance is death. Knowing the recipient’s culture is a powerful first step in communicating Christ to them. Secondly, we must seek to present Christ within the acceptable “cultural language” that the host community can understand. This will require that we “extract” our culture from the Gospel and begin to internalize the new culture as ours, so that it becomes increasingly natural to communicate the Gospel in the new culture without struggling.

In 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, we see Paul’s ethos for ministry. He was a master at cross-cultural adaptation. He knew how to adjust his lifestyle and message to fit different audiences. His chief aim was always this motivation: “that I might win the more...that I might by all means save some.”

In this edition, you will read about Constance Mohapi Arão, a South African missionary to Mozambique, who experienced the initial shocks of a different culture, but learnt to adapt over the years. The Perspectives article by Emmanuel Akawu gives insight on the interplay of different cultures at the center of mission work. You will also read from African missionaries, tips and practices for language learning—a key skill in understanding culture.

May this edition of AfriGO inspire and equip you for effective cross-cultural adaptation in missions.

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CALLER: IBRAHIM BAKARI

FRIDAYS OR SUNDAYS: MISSIONS IN THE PERSIAN GULF

AS TOLD TO MERCY KAMBURA



What does personality have to do with evangelism? I've always been a man of the people, easily adaptable and sociable. This has become one of my greatest assets in reaching people in a far land, with a language and a culture I barely understand. I serve in the Persian Gulf as an officer on a ship and also as a missionary.

The first time the Gulf called and I answered, I was in search of greener pastures financially. An employment opportunity came, and I grabbed it. On the plane, my heart felt deeply hungry for something higher than what I was chasing. I didn't know what it was. Later, like the boy Samuel, I recognized that the "thing" was God.

My family background blends cultures from Kenya, Ghana, and Tanzania. Despite my dad having been a Muslim and my knowledge of a few things about Islam and the Arabic culture, I still got many shocks when I arrived. Sunday was no longer a day of worship; I couldn't just put on my Sunday best and strut to church. Nowadays, Friday is the new Sunday.

The weather is unforgiving, and sandstorms are still a nightmare for me. Winter is freezing, and the humidity in summer is stifling. It's not home for me, just as the earth wasn't home for Jesus. But I stay because the vision is to bring more people to Christ.

Finding and preaching Christ

After my spiritual hunger experience on the plane, I could feel my heart's restlessness, so I searched religious books. Like a well-hidden treasure, I found Christ between the pages of my Bible.

Excited by this news, I shared it with my sister, who introduced me to missionaries. One day, I attended a

Bible study at a church where I learned about a ministry that sends Africans as missionaries. I was recruited and accepted, and they anointed me for service abroad. I returned to the Gulf.

Serving in the Gulf means being a living example of 'wise as a serpent and gentle as a dove.' I cannot hold a mega crusade as we do back home, and freedom is as limited as the sunshine in winter. There are a lot of cameras, surveillance, and informers too. Although I'm called to preach to everyone, my interaction with the opposite gender is simply curtailed.

I did research and made inquiries from the people who had served in this region before I arrived. This helped me know what to expect and buffered my culture shock.

Because we're primarily stationed in camps, reaching out to other nationalities has become easy. The different languages make it sound like a mini tower of Babel, but I'm determined to preach Christ despite the communication barrier.

Mission strategy

To be effective in serving in such a place, you must understand why you're here in the first place. Be prepared in your heart and understand your calling. You're first a servant.

Before leaving your country, get a fact file of the nation you're going to. Don't just go because you hear there are opportunities; your purpose is the Gospel; let that drive you. As Africans, may we re-awaken to the favour God has granted us; the freedom we enjoy in our countries is a huge blessing.

The work is plenty, but the workers are few. Where are the missionaries today? We're losing people in the world. Let's pray for the world, but most importantly, let us also GO.

The weather is unforgiving, and sandstorms are still a nightmare for me.

A CONFLUENCE OF CULTURES

BY EMMANUEL AKAWU

A missionary family once lived among a Muslim people group for some 21 years. When they first arrived, they couldn't differentiate between the names of people, places, animals, and foods. Everything was strange, yet, they had a mandate to put God's Word into the hands of this people group for their own salvation, and for them to carry it to the rest of their people. How were they to proceed?

A tale of cultures

Any attempt to plant churches among unreached people faces the reality of the missionary's culture, the recipient culture, and biblical standards for culture. Whilst the missionary must be careful to avoid exporting his culture, he also has the responsibility to plant local churches that are relevant within the context of the recipient culture, and at the same time, biblically sound.

This means honouring the local culture yet encouraging conviction and transformation where the culture departs from biblical standards. How successfully this goes depends on how well the missionary has shed off his own culture (for Christ's sake), how much he has been transformed by biblical values, and how deeply he has studied and humbly accepted the recipient culture.

Christ's model

Reflecting on our Lord Jesus, He came from heaven where He had the nature of God and knew all things, yet He took on the nature of humanity and placed Himself within a specific culture—Jewish culture of 2000 years ago. Born

as a baby, He who knew all things had to learn a language and a vocation, and submit to and obey earthly authorities (Jn. 1:14; Lk. 2:46, 51-52). He varied His message presentation to suit His audience by using parables and analogies that resonated with them (Matt. 4:19; 13:13). He was sensitive to the government of the day vis-a-vis God's Kingdom (Mk. 12:17). Following in Jesus' steps, Paul declared his willingness to become all things to all men so that by all means, he may lead some to Christ (1 Cor. 9:22).

The absence of adaptation could be responsible for the presence of the Gospel among many peoples in Africa but with little or no transformation, whilst many more reject the message altogether and are therefore still unreached. May I further suggest that many remain unreached because the Church has not discovered or taken time to contextualize the Gospel in ways that resonate with

the redemptive analogies in their cultures? The Word of God, when clearly understood, has the power and potential to redeem and transform any life.

No shortcuts

The missionary family devoted the first eight months to learning the culture and language of the Muslim people group. They attended the few indigenous churches around to listen to sermons and pleaded that there be no interpreters for their sake. They visited markets, archives, building sites, farms, fishing sites, bus stations, and listened to the local radio. They gathered available Christian materials about the people,

witnessed rites of passage ceremonies, and much more. Their approach was to pick up the sounds, gestures, and the structure of the language. Despite the absence of a formal language school or language teachers, in no time, they spoke the local language and understood proverbs and parables.

Learning the language and culture of a people enables an understanding of their worldviews, behavioural patterns and experiences. These remove barriers, foster effective communication, and facilitate the planting of contextualized assemblies of God's people.

Today, many in Africa and around the world await the precious message of God's redemption from sin. According to Joshua Project, approximately 17,428 unique people groups share our world, yet over 7,400 of them are still unreached!

The Gospel brings hope, peace, deliverance, victory, and more, with historical evidence of many traditions and cultures that have experienced the transformation it brings. However, this is no guarantee that people who newly hear it will readily embrace it merely by copying what has worked elsewhere. The nature and efficacy of the Gospel require an adaptation to enable it settle well and accomplish its intended purpose.



Emmanuel Akawu was a CAPRO partner in the 1990s before becoming a full-time staff. He has served in several positions and places, mostly in Nigeria and Malawi. He was the National Coordinator for CAPRO Malawi

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The Gospel brings hope, peace, deliverance, victory, and more.

CROSSING FROM SOUTH AFRICA TO MOZAMBIQUE



CONNIE'S CULTURAL TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS

The dead woman had been a member of the church during her life. All seemed well at the burial until a local woman approached the pastor's wife, Connie. Referring to the dead body, the woman whispered, "Look at our sister; she hasn't bathed in a long time. We should give her a bath, don't you think so?" Connie agreed, and the woman continued, "We are boiling water and herbs for the traditional cleansing. You will be the first to bathe her."

Connie reveals, "I nearly fainted; more so when I remembered she had died from cholera!" As the pastor's wife, Connie didn't expect to have anything to do with the corpse. Back home in South Africa, undertakers handled everything.

Constance (Connie) Mohapi Arão and her husband are missionaries in one of the squatter communities around Nampula, a town in Northern Mozambique. She

had taken cross-cultural training at mission school, but once on the field, all her fantasies about missionary life dissipated as she faced one cultural hiccup after another. She did not imagine her transition into another African culture could be so frustrating!

Learning language is the key

"My first challenge was the language; I couldn't speak it. I dreaded going out because I'd have to speak it to buy

items at the shops and to interact with people. I resorted to smiling a lot when I didn't understand anything they said. I smiled my way out of bathing the corpse too, and politely passed the task to someone else."

"To learn the language, I spent time with the people and listened to them. I carried a small book to record words and sentences in Portuguese, and practiced speaking it often. You cannot learn a language any other way;

you must speak it, even if you sound ridiculous in the attempt."

After 23 years in the field, Connie's fluency in Portuguese is now about 90 per cent. Between the demands of mission work and raising a family, she couldn't master the local language, Makhua as much, but she understands some of it. Connie says her breakthrough with the culture came after she learnt the language.

A conflict of cultures

Settling in a new culture is challenging. The differences in Connie's original culture and her new culture were glaring and confusing. One difference was when she got invited for meals. "They would lead me to sit at the table, and then everyone would disappear for the next hour. It was puzzling. In South Africa, the host serves you the food and sits with you as you eat. Here, vanishing from sight is a way of honouring guests, so they can enjoy their meals in private."

Another disappointment was their cold response when she gave them gifts. In her Batswana culture, people

Her breakthrough with the culture came after she learnt the language.

would shower the giver with three expressive “thank you’s”, open the gift in the giver’s presence and say another “thank you” afterwards. “I could not understand why these people would say only one unfeeling “thank you”, hide the gift away, and look at it after you’re gone.” Connie attempted to teach them from the Scriptures to be more demonstrative with their gratitude. Later, she recognized that they showed appreciation in their unique way and she needn’t force them to be like her Batswana people. “Our cultures may be different, but each is valid; neither is superior to the other,” she says.

Beneath the surface

It’s easy to assume that culture comprises only the outward elements visible to the observer. Some of Connie’s experiences reveal the hidden mindsets and worldviews that account for people’s behaviours and responses to the Gospel.

Connie and her husband are not only concerned for the souls of those they have been called to love and live among. Poverty is common in their community, so they try to meet the felt needs of the people as well. James* is a church member they supported, until Connie’s husband decided to share some ideas to make him more self-sufficient and independent. James’ response unveiled a sad mentality: “I don’t have to be empowered. My job is to pray for God to bless you so that you will keep helping me.” Connie attributes this attitude to low self-esteem and an element in the local religion that normalizes begging. James is not the only one with this



Moises and Connie Arão

belief. The girls are taught early to “buy soap for themselves”—find a man to provide their needs—and often end up with more children whom they are further burdened to care for.

“There are stories and influences behind a person’s behaviour, and this has taught me not to be judgemental. Sometimes, people know no better than how they have been raised.” Connie advises missionaries to go down to the people and know who they are at a deep level; otherwise, their Christian response will be superficial. “People may come to the Lord alright but still be affected by their brokenness.”

A long road

Connie has seen many missionaries come to her community and expect change overnight. It doesn’t help when mission agencies put pressure on them to perform within two years. Connie

says it can take at least five years to build trust and convince the people to open up. “You need to be humble and respect them. The best missionary is the one who is like a child and who listens.”

One of Connie’s biggest lessons is that structured manuals don’t work—at least not in the culture she has been called to. She used to outline her teachings and then would go and deliver. By her next visit, her “students” wouldn’t remember a thing. She confesses that as an energetic go-getter, their slow pace exhausted her patience. Now, she employs a more effective method. “Pray for them, depend on the Holy Spirit, and just go and listen. As I listen to them, God leads me to share what will speak to their situations.”

Rosa* was once a character who, immediately after attending church service, would go drinking with her Bible in hand. Today, she’s transformed. She’s a respected member of the community, and helps Connie with teaching the other women. James is also doing better than before.

Another point of transformation is the local culture of initiation for girls. The church doesn’t support some of the things the community teaches because it makes the girls sexually promiscuous. They responded by organizing a Christian alternative where mature women in the church teach the younger girls about hygiene and sexual purity as they transition into womanhood.

A missionary’s motivation

Despite the difficulties of ministering in a different culture, Connie loves the people. She wants them to make it to heaven, and also experience God’s victory while on earth. “I pray for them a lot. I ask God to open their eyes to see how they are made in His image and to understand His Word.” People like Rosa and James are not the only ones who are changing. Connie is changing too, as she immerses herself in their lives to understand and reach them—just like Jesus did.



Connie has discipled women into leadership

PRAY FOR:

More local people to support Connie and her husband, and to continue their work.



LANGUAGE LEARNING AND CULTURE

When a group of Kenyans and Malagasies were sent to a third country to serve as missionaries, it was a lot harder to communicate than they imagined. One team member already knew the trade language, and most had five or six other languages under their belts. Some thought they would just “pick up” the local language as they went, but it didn’t happen that way!

The locals expected them to understand immediately. “They think we are the ones who should know their languages quickly because we are African,” said Naissa*, from Madagascar. Some team members spoke a language similar to the native language, and the locals assumed they’d understand easily, but team member Deborah* lamented, “Unfortunately for me, this was not the case!”

Learning a new language can be humiliating, something the team members discovered early. Deborah said, “I was unprepared for all the time I would need to spend in the community looking silly and embarrassing myself with my poor language.” One must begin like

a child, which can be hard when you already have education and professional training, and are well-regarded back at home. It is even more difficult when the locals can’t understand why it is so hard for you to learn a language as simple as theirs.

Members of the team used different methods to learn, based on what was available and how they had learned languages before. Sarah* said, “Listening and speaking is what I use a lot.” Deborah found that “Sitting once a week with a teammate who speaks the language helped me move forward a little better.” Naissa* has a different approach: “Learn only a few words that are very important in communication and then you’re off! Do a language bath with people who speak the native language every day before going far into theory.”

We asked the team for some tips:

- “Utilize the available materials for the language.” (There may be recordings or grammar apps.)
- “Sitting with and listening to conversations by locals helped in getting more familiar with how the language is spoken.”

- “I attend language concentration weeks done by our team and listen to local radio stations.”
- “With Scripture available in the local language, I sometimes read from it or listen to it.”

Every member of the team advised that time spent in the community is vital for language learning and practice. However, one member shared her difficulty: “I am from a culture where we do not approach people in random contexts but are usually ‘paired’ with others through natural settings such as a classroom, a small group, a shared compound, etc.” She overcame that barrier by using a language helper.

Language helpers are a valuable asset, and all of the team used them in some way. It is best to have a trained helper. If your helper isn’t trained, you will have to guide him or her in how best to help you. See the listed resources for guidelines on some of the programmes used often.

Above all, heed Deborah’s advice: “It’s okay if it seems uncomfortable or embarrassing. It is part of the process. The heart of learning a new language is finding the balance between setting for

yourself goals that are both small enough to be achievable and uncomfortable enough to push you forward!”

The reward? Understanding the heart of the people you have been sent to minister to. There are no shortcuts!

There are many ways to learn a language, and one very organized method is the Growing Participator Approach (GPA). With a trained language helper, learn useful words while doing them (actions) and putting them together. Many people find this approach practical. This website explains and provides free guides: <https://www.growingparticipation.com>.

Wycliffe Bible Translators has a short article on the GPA and language lessons: <https://bit.ly/3ZAgNMB>

Language180.com is a practical site with ideas on how to learn language, and guidelines on how to set up your language lessons.

Online software/websites: These are generally available only for the major languages and can be expensive. Formal classes may also be offered in your home country or in a larger city in your target country.

Culture shock

Can an African experience culture shock? Absolutely. Culture shock is when a person is unable to cope well in unfamiliar surroundings. Reactions vary from anger with the host culture, to withdrawal, grief and loneliness and sometimes spiritual depression.

When entering a new culture, it is important to cultivate relationships, both with those from a familiar culture and those from the foreign culture. “Bridge” people are those who can help you adapt to the new ways of doing



Photo: AIM Stories

and thinking, and advise on tricky situations. Your bridge person may be in your organization, a sponsoring church, or in a helpful neighbour.

The most important characteristic in entering a new culture? Humility. “Your way” may not be the right one. Sit back and learn. Consider the example of Christ, who lived with those He had come to minister to, treating them with compassion.

The hidden foreigner

When you go to serve in a new place the locals may not recognize you as a foreigner just by looking at you. Is this a good thing, a bad thing? Neither and both. Perhaps people may get annoyed with you when you can’t speak the language. Or you will be frustrated because they won’t use the trade language! You might get a better bargain at the market, or move more easily through the community. Whether good or bad, see how God can use it for your ministry and relationships.

Reverse culture shock

When you return home from the field, it is a time of joy! But it is also often surprisingly difficult. If you were away for less than a year, you may find that people almost didn’t notice you were gone. And they expect the “you” they knew, not the new “you” you have become through your experiences.

What are some things you may struggle with? On a practical level, currency conversion and change in prices may be confusing. If you have ministered in a village setting and have now returned to a large city, the noise and the choices can be overwhelming.

On a deeper level, there may be the loss of relationships or people may have moved on without you. They’ve had experiences that you did not share in. The family may have resentment because you were not present to support them through a difficult time. Your peers may have good-paying jobs and acquired things which you wish you had. Your sacrifice may not be appreciated, and people may not be very interested in the work and the struggles of your ministry. You may also be faced with some life decisions or the need to recuperate from a difficult ministry time.

What to do? Enjoy the good and make time for quiet when you are able. Celebrate the reunions and call on trusted spiritual friends to pray with you and listen. Take advantage of opportunities to share, but keep explanations brief unless more is asked. More than anything else, wait at the feet of the Father who will fill you, comfort you, and be your steadfast rock in this time of transition and change. Remember, He who has called you is faithful (1 Thess. 5:24).



GO! NEWS OF AFRICA'S MOBILIZING CHURCH

NEW ARABIC CHRISTIAN DIGITAL LIBRARY LAUNCHES

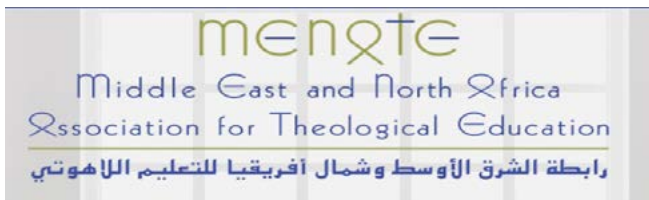
A first ever digital library in Arabic opened in May 2022. The library aims to provide fully searchable, academic, licensed, and professionally delivered theological resources in Arabic. These will greatly serve pastors and theological schools committed to training men and women for ministry. They also anticipate the e-Library to be an invaluable resource for Arab Christians around the world.

In the first phase of its launch, the 17-member schools

of MENATE (Middle East and North Africa Association for Theological Education), Arabic publishers, and key leaders in theological education were invited for a trial of the library. The purpose was to get schools and publishers familiar with the online environment and to solicit their input for improving the platform. Then 125 users from across the region accessed the e-Library and provided positive feedback.

Dr. Magdi Gendi of Egypt first envisaged the library as a foundational resource for online theological education in the region. Through his advocacy, it is becoming a reality today, led by MENATE.

In addition to the 190 books and the one theological journal available online at the time of the launch, they hope to digitize an additional 600 books in 2023. Visit the e-Library: <https://menate.almanhal.com>.



THE "SOAK EGYPT" PRAYER APP IS READY

A revival is brewing across North Africa, and Soak Egypt is enlisting individuals, teams, and churches who will adopt a village, town or city for persistent prayer at least once a week. The prayer app for this initiative is now available on both Google Play Store (for Android) and the AppStore (for Apple).

☀ Visit soakegypt.org or download the link below to join the global prayer movement for Egypt. Hundreds of people have signed up already. Don't be left out!

☀ Android: <https://bit.ly/3ZOXq2E>

☀ Apple: <https://apple.co/3JF7qFR>



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Join us every third Friday of the month for engaging mission interviews with those at the forefront of African missions. We'll be live on Facebook and YouTube.

☀ <https://bit.ly/3qiYXxz>



Missions conference in Zambia

In February 2023, 300 pastors, church leaders, and churchgoers attended a missions conference at the Nkana East Chapel of Kitwe Chapels in Zambia. The theme was, "The practical missional church nurtures and facilitates senders and goers." The speaker, Pastor Conrad Mbewe, reminded attendees of the words of missionary to India, sometimes called the father of modern missions, William Carey. He said to a man who supported him from England: "I will go down into the pit, if you will hold the ropes." He also shared about Apostle Paul, who despite being in prison, lived with joy because the church in Philippi was his partner. Questions about financial support were answered with the confidence that the Church is universal, not just within Africa. Victor Mushimbami, a Zambian missionary serving in Tanzania, reports that the young pastors working with new churches were greatly encouraged.



THE DOORS A BUSINESS CAN OPEN

BY FURAHA KENGELA



Lucy and her milling machine

Lucy Pius Mwiru

When Lucy decided to go to Oman as a housemaid, the goal was to eventually become economically stable and serve others, but things didn't go as planned. The wages weren't as much as she had been promised, and the job was traumatizing. "I was severely abused; constantly beaten and scolded while I worked," she reveals. Lucy couldn't take it any longer, so she opted to return home, wait, and seek God's will for her life. She was at the point of total surrender.

Lucy continued trusting God for a way out of her misery, and direction on how she could be a blessing to others. "It was an answer to prayer when I received an invitation to a mission seminar," she recalls. The opportunity to go for mission training was announced at the seminar. Only one slot was available, and it required a Christian who was passionate about missions and was from the Warangi tribe. The chances of her being chosen were very slim because she was not from the church that was hosting the seminar, but God knew her enthusiasm and desire to learn and do mission work, and she was chosen. "After graduating from the East Africa School of Mission in Dar es Salaam, my call was to work as an open missionary among the Alagwa tribe found in the Kondoa District in the Dodoma region of central Tanzania."

In the village where Lucy went to serve, there was a great demand among farmers for maize milling machines. She knew that starting a milling business would meet this need and open doors for her to easily build relationships and interact with the Alagwa quickly, and so she did. Providing this service made it easier for her to share the Good News of Christ with many different people on a daily basis. It also facilitated constant follow-ups. The business provides not only her daily needs but supports the livelihoods of others in her village.

Julius and Roswita Malongo

Fish farming, raising chickens, and gardening paved the way for Julius and his wife to do mission work among the Wandengereko and Wangindo tribes found in the Mkuranga district within the Pwani region of Tanzania.

To begin, they socialized with the people by participating in different community activities and ceremonies without revealing they were missionaries. Julius shares, "Taking such baby steps established a mutual foundation. We decided to teach farming skills to help them overcome the economic challenges they were constantly facing." He organized groups of people and arranged seminars to equip them with entrepreneurial knowledge. Julius and his wife wanted to empower them to start their own businesses and dispel any speculations about having a money-making agenda. Doing ministry through farming fostered a good reputation and trust among the tribes. This had not always been the case though. Things started changing after Julius attended mission training and returned with a whole new perspective on mission work.

In addition to the business initiative, they now mobilize new believers to reach out to others. In 2018, they opened a church called, "A Visitors Church." Julius teaches about missions, and offers training in entrepreneurship. "My goal had always been to reach Muslims but this was a challenge for me," he says. Today, Julius has found favour among the Wandengereko, Wangindo, and Wamwera people. The few young men he has trained for mission work now meet every Saturday to discuss business and mobilization work in neighbouring villages.



Julius and Roswita Malongo

The people have realized different economic opportunities in the area and have recovered financially on many levels. The business provides for Julius and Roswita's daily needs, and they are currently planning a new beekeeping project. "The people know me as a pastor and a farmer. We have been a blessing to one another through this ministry, and we seek to do more to win many others into God's Kingdom," he concludes.



PEOPLE GROUPS: THE NORTH SENTINELESE

The Sentinelese people live on North Sentinel Island, which is part of India and lies south in the Indian Ocean in the Andaman archipelago. The nearest island is less than 30 km away, but they are over 1200 km from the Indian subcontinent.

They are one of six Aboriginal tribes in the area, but their exact population is unknown because no one has seen more than a few of them since the early 1990s. Estimates range from 40 to 500 people, living on an island which is only 59 square km. It is covered by dense jungle, which even satellite photography cannot penetrate.

The North Sentinelese are considered unreachable because it is illegal to have contact with them. In 1867, a merchant ship lodged on the rocks. The 106 survivors were attacked by the locals, but managed to hold out until they were rescued. Ten years later, the British administrator of the islands landed there and kidnapped six people. The two oldest quickly died of disease, and the four young people were given gifts and returned to North Sentinel. Since that time, the North Sentinelese have been hostile to outsiders.

The exception was Indian anthropologist Triloknath Pandit, who spent 24 years making sporadic visits. In 1991, a member of his team, a woman named Dr. Madhumala Chattopadhyay,

led a group who made personal contact. Soon after, the Indian government banned all contact with the islanders based on past violent history and concerns that they could be infected and wiped out by disease. It was also obvious that the North Sentinelese had no desire for visitors on their island.

Today, a 4.8 km buffer zone surrounds their island, enforced by patrols of the Indian navy. Their language is unknown, though it is thought to be related to the languages of Melanesia, Papua New Guinea, and Tasmania.

In 2018, John Allen Chau, a missionary from the USA, tried to make personal contact with the North Sentinelese, convinced that God had called him to reach them with the Gospel. He was killed shortly after he landed on the island, and his body was never recovered. He had spent many years preparing to go, and there has been a lively debate as to whether he followed the right path. He wrote this in his journal the day before he was killed by the North Sentinelese: *"To you Lord I give all the glory of whatever happens."*

What should be our response to groups such as the North Sentinelese, who seem completely unreachable? God knows about them, and our prayers do not go unheard. Continue to lift them up, faithfully and with hope.

AT A GLANCE

- Anthropologists believe that the North Sentinelese may have inhabited their island for thousands of years. They are hunter-gatherers; there is no evidence of agriculture.
- Although they live only 50 km from a modern airport, they use stone-age technology and have no contact at all with the outside world.

PRAY

- For a way to reach the North Sentinelese and other groups like them around the world, in a way that is God-honouring, respectful of laws, and sensitive to the risk of disease.
- That God will send dreams and visions of Jesus, and that Christians will pray for them without fail.

Sources: <https://bit.ly/405xIXi> • <https://bit.ly/40B7Wun> • Real Life Lore <https://bit.ly/3YMATSH>



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