

AFRIGO

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**GOD'S WORD FOR
THE WOLOF**

THE BIBLE SOCIETIES BELONG TO US

**BIBLE TRANSLATION IN MISSIONS
AFRICANS TAKE ON THE TASK**

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BIBLE TRANSLATION

A VITAL TOOL FOR MISSIONS

BY PIERRE BARASSOUNON



Bible translation lies at the heart of missions, bridging cultures and languages to convey the message of salvation. Biblical events like Jesus' incarnation (Jn. 1:18) and the Spirit-filled day of Pentecost (Acts 2) demonstrate God's commitment to making his message comprehensible to all peoples. These events are a powerful call to action for us to translate the Bible into the languages of the nations.

For me, Bible translation is a calling that has allowed me to witness firsthand how lives and communities are transformed when they encounter God's Word in their heart language. In one village, people broke into joyful singing when the Psalms were read in their native tongue for the first time. They exclaimed, "Finally, God speaks our language!" Such moments remind us why this work matters.

Principles of Bible translation

Effective translation is not simply a word-for-word exercise. It requires understanding the sociolinguistic, anthropological, and literary contexts of both the source and target languages.

Equally important is the consideration of the audience. Translators must bear in mind the linguistic and cultural realities of their readers, using expressions and styles that resonate with them, while ensuring that the message remains accurate and accessible.

Bible translation is not a solo endeavour; it demands a well-organized team. From translators to exegetes, linguists, and consultants, each role is vital. These individuals must be deeply rooted in their faith and equipped with an understanding of biblical truths. Continuous training on translation principles is essential to maintaining the highest standards of quality.

Funding is a vital component of any translation project. The process requires administrative support, logistical arrangements, and project management in ensuring progress. This organized effort, grounded in prayer and teamwork, is crucial for success.

**They exclaimed,
"Finally, God
speaks our
language!"**

Impact of Bible translation

The impact of a well-supported translation effort is immeasurable. Across Africa, the availability of the Bible in local languages has transformed the spiritual landscape. Once viewed as a foreign faith, Christianity is now deeply rooted in African cultural contexts. Theological terms have been coined to express biblical truths in ways that resonate with local realities. Psalms are sung to the rhythms of African music, and the Word of God is studied in churches, Bible schools, on farms, and on mobile devices.

Translation enables people to encounter the living God in their own language and culture and equips believers to share the gospel. Yet, the work is far from over. Many unreached people groups await the opportunity to hear God's Word in their heart languages.

If you're part of a local church, consider adopting a translation project or partnering with agencies that specialize in this work. Individuals can support translators through prayer, giving, or by spreading awareness. Together, we can make God's Word, which brings life and salvation, accessible to all.

In this issue of AfriGO, Michel Kenmogne highlights the shift in responsibility for Bible translation from Western to African countries. Bonifacio Paulo shares his journey to a vocation in Bible translation. Our Feature story is about the Wolof Bible translation project and the roles of Senegalese nationals in completing it. Our Training article delves into the professions and qualities required for Bible translation work. Enjoy reading and share with others!

Pierre Barassounon is a Bible translator and exegete who has held leadership positions including heading the Linguistics, Bible Translation and Literacy Department for the Union of Evangelical Churches of Benin. As a translation consultant, he has overseen several projects and has served as SIM's point person for Bible translation and literacy. He trains translators, Bible school students and church leaders across Francophone countries. Currently, he serves as an SIM missionary in Togo with his wife, Noeli.

CALLED: BONIFACIO PAULO



AS TOLD TO NENKINAN NEHEMIAH DESHI

I had my salvation experience when I was in the seminary. In my second year, my interest in Bible translation piqued when a guest missionary from SIL offered a three-year module on “Introduction to Bible Translation”. I saw the importance of my mother language in reading the Bible and today, I serve in the field of Bible translation.

I was born into a non-Christian family in the Nampula Province of Mozambique and I struggled with education. The rural school in my community ended at Grade 2 and for nearly three years, I was out of school. Another school opened nearby offering Grades 3 and 4 and I had to walk 20 to 25 kilometres daily to attend. On some days, I skipped school altogether. After Grade 3, I paused schooling for three years, until the civil war in Mozambique moved us to another community where I enrolled in yet a new school.

After high school, I attended the Church of the Nazarene and went to Eswatini to study for a Bachelor’s degree in Theology at their seminary. When the American missionary, John Isemenger, taught the course on Bible Translation, I tried it out of curiosity, but then I fell in love with it.

I met and married my wife in Eswatini and we returned to Mozambique to pastor a branch of the Church of the Nazarene. Thirteen years after our first encounter, I met John again and he invited me to work with SIL. I worked there from 2007 to 2012, serving as the exegetical advisor for all the projects they managed in Mozambique.

I later relocated with my family to Cape Town to study for a doctorate in Biblical Studies at the University of Stellenbosch. My plan was to return to Nampula and serve in Bible translation. However, while I was in South Africa, SIL stopped operations in Mozambique and I was approached by Wycliffe South Africa, which was responsible for the whole southern Africa region, to serve with them. My wife also furthered her studies and now works with Wycliffe.

We returned to Nampula in 2022 with a burden to serve the church back home. I am now the Director of Translations at Wycliffe South Africa and a consultant. My work involves ensuring that translations fit the contexts and languages of their recipients. What first struck me about translation work was the attention to detail. Hitherto, the only Bible I had was in Portuguese, which I barely understood. Now, I work tirelessly so that more people groups in Mozambique and southern Africa get the Bible in their mother tongues. The gospel is for everyone and we must ensure that all people hear it.

Presently, I am the lead translation consultant for the following languages: Marenje (Mozambique), CD cluster of four languages (Mozambique), Himba (Namibia) and Oluhanda (Angola). We continue to work with our local church and encourage young people to participate in missions.

One challenge in southern Africa is that the Church here has not included Bible translation in its vision and mission. It is still considered a Western enterprise. The belief also exists that no translations are needed because all the major languages have the Bible. Can you imagine depending on another people’s language to read God’s Word? That is the reality for thousands of language communities in Africa. The greatest need in Bible translation is local consultants who carry African realities in their blood. Because most African communities are oral, an African consultant will encourage translating the Bible not for the eye, but for the ear.

PLEASE PRAY FOR

- The Church in Africa to support Bible translation.
- Translation work to begin in languages still waiting for God’s Word.
- God’s grace and sustenance for all translation workers.

BIBLE TRANSLATION AND THE CROSS-CULTURAL ADVANCE OF THE GOSPEL

BY MICHEL KENMOGNE

Recently, the New Testament was translated into the Bakoko language of Cameroon. Upon engaging with the message, one of its speakers said: "It feels special. It's like we are closer to God, because he understands even our sighs. He understands when we don't want to talk in French or in English." When God's Word reaches people in their own languages, it triggers a deeper response.

The end of missions is the gathering of multilingual and multicultural peoples worshipping the Lamb of God. We serve in missions because the vision of Revelation 7:9-10 compels us: "... I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language ... And they were shouting with a great roar, 'Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!'"

A step is taken towards the realization of this vision each time the gospel crosses ethno-cultural barriers with new believers who worship God using their own cultural artifacts. The engagement with languages and the translation of God's Word allows the spread of God's Kingdom.

Theological basis

God created human beings in his image (Gen.1:26-27) and gifted them to use language to express their emotions and thoughts and to relate to others. God speaks to human beings through his Word and expects them to understand him and respond accordingly. For this reason, God's Word is essentially translatable into the variety of the world's languages (Acts.2:1-8). Unlike Islam with a revealed message in a specific language that all proselytes must learn, the Christian faith relies on translation because the Incarnation requires that Jesus be at home in all cultures

Types and processes

For Jesus to be at home with everybody, Bible translation seeks to serve the needs of literate, oral, deaf and blind peoples. Therefore, we have text, oral, sign language and braille translations. Whatever the type of translation, it necessarily involves understanding the source texts of Scripture through exegesis, the functioning of the target languages, and identifying ways to transfer the meaning from one end to the other.

Progress and needs

Africa is the home of 2,221 languages. 295 of these have a full Bible, 508 a New Testament, 1,653 have works in progress, and 187 languages¹ are still to be engaged with Bible translation.² The significant growth of the Church in Africa, as Lamin Sanneh has observed, is essentially the outcome of Bible translation.³ Western missionaries led translation efforts until recently. Just over the past four decades, Western



missionaries in Bible translation have decreased by half, whereas local missionaries have grown by more than 70 per cent.

The shift in the responsibility for Bible translation to Africa comes with significant needs and challenges. We need people with expertise in biblical studies, linguistics, literacy, ethno-arts, and translation to advance this ministry. These people will need to be supported with financial resources, technical equipment, and spiritual and emotional coaching if the knowledge of the glory of God is to cover the continent.

What Christianity for Africa?

Today's Muslim-dominated North Africa was once the home of Christianity. But this faith lacked the deep roots that come through Bible translation and the inculturation of the gospel. Consequently, it could not withstand Islam.

To what extent has the much-celebrated growing African Christianity transformed the worldview, values, beliefs and behaviours of Africans? The answer lies with the Bible agencies and the Church in Africa who have the responsibility to take up this challenge of transformation.

Michel Kenmogne became the Executive Director of SIL International in 2016. Before his appointment, he served as Director of Wycliffe Global Alliance for Francophone Africa. For ten years, he led the Francophone Initiative, a network of various Bible agencies to build vision for Bible translation in theological institutions across Francophone Africa. He is also the Board Chair of IFES and holds a doctorate in African Linguistics. He and his wife, Laure Angèle, have five children and live in Germany.

1. Potential need: 152 languages. Expressed Need: 35 languages. Another 88 languages have "limited or Old Scripture".

2. Progress Bible, SNAPSHOT, November 2024.

3. Lamin Sanneh, "Bible translation and the birth of Christianity as a world religion", Communication made on 14.6.2007 at Horsleys Green, UK.



From left to right:
Genesis, Exodus,
Psalms, Luke-Acts

GOD'S WORD FOR THE WOLOF

BY KATE AZUMAH

Senegalese Mamadou Diop had two Masters degrees and listened to BBC regularly. During a devotional programme on air, a Christian minister described Jesus Christ as the saviour. Mamadou, a Muslim, knew Jesus to be a prophet, but saviour ...? He was intrigued and decided to find out more.

In Dakar, he approached a building with a cross on it and asked the lady receptionist if they had any books on Jesus that he could read. She eventually invited Mamadou to church where he met Gerhard, a German. Gerhard began a Bible study with Mamadou and Mamadou became a Christian. Afterwards, Gerhard introduced Mamadou to Eric Church, pioneer of the Wolof Bible translation project.

Following these connections, Mamadou Diop would spend over 20 years translating the Bible into Wolof until he passed away in August 2021, a few days after putting in his final revisions to the Gospel of Mark.

Wolof Bible Translation Project

Eric Church started the translation project in 1963 with a local Muslim

farmer, Magatte Fall. Since Magatte didn't know the biblical languages, Eric first made base translations into French and from there, they translated into Wolof. Eventually, Magatte's son, Mbengue, took over from his father. He was sent to study Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic and learned to translate directly from the original texts into Wolof.

Mbengue, brilliant and gifted with words, contributed a rich Wolof vocabulary to the translation. However, due to his prior Islamic belief that the Koran should not be translated, he maintained many Hebrew and Greek forms, thereby violating Wolof grammar in his attempt at a more literal translation. When Mbengue died, Eric recommended Mamadou to continue the work with Marilyn Escher, a missionary with WorldVenture who had arrived in 1972.

A translator's preparation

It seems God was preparing Mamadou to become a Bible translator before he became a Christian. While he was a student at the university, he studied Wolof to fulfil a language requirement and took four courses in linguistics. He was teaching high school math when he

joined the project and he combined this with his work as a translator.

Along the line, Mamadou realized he couldn't continue with both teaching and translation work. He tore up the papers that would have allowed him to continue in teaching and became a full-time translator.

In 2005, he successfully completed an intensive first year Biblical Hebrew course at the European Training Programme in Horsleys Green, England. He studied intermediate Hebrew at The Home for Bible Translators in Jerusalem, taught himself Greek, and learned Arabic from a neighbour.

Mamadou's contribution

Mamadou built on Mbengue's work and made the translation more Wolof in its form and grammar. He brought his gifts to bear on the beauty of the Wolof language to make the translation more poetic.

Mamadou's son, S.S. Diop, says that his father would go to his home office every day and sit by his computer from morning to night. He would analyze each verse, read commentaries and make notes. "We, his children, were afraid to interrupt him because he was

so focused. He would come to dinner exhausted but would be at it again the next day. Whenever I heard my father defend his opinion on a verse, I felt so proud. Occasionally, he would call our mother and read a text to her. Then, like a true Wolof, he would say, ‘Oh my God, I can really translate!’ He saw that God was working in him to bring the translation to life.”

After a book was finished, a consultant would meet with the translation team and native speakers to check it by comparing written and oral back translations in French and Wolof to the original texts. According to Marilyn, they use SIL consultants who check every verse, word, punctuation, footnote and section header. It takes about 10 days or longer to check a book. Mamadou was so meticulous with his translation that usually, very few problems needed to be resolved.

Technology for translation

The translation team received their first computer in 1983. The Wolof Bible uses both Roman script and Wolofal or Ajami Wolof, a script based on the Arabic language. When the computer arrived, it facilitated the conversion of documents from the Roman alphabet to the Arabic one. The technology had been pioneered and perfected by missionaries.

SIL and United Bible Societies (UBS) developed the editing software, Paratext, which national translators like Mamadou used in their work.

Other translation resources are the Logos Bible software and Translators Workplace. Typesetters use programmes like InDesign, Publishers, Roundtrip, and Peachtree.

As books of the Bible were completed, aural recordings followed with Mamadou doing the readings. He recorded a third of the Bible before he died. These books were revised but Artificial Intelligence made a way for his voice to be maintained for the revisions. Faith Comes By Hearing (FCBH), another translation organization, was able to clone Mamadou’s family approves, portions that were revised after his death can be recorded in his cloned voice.

Mamadou’s children contribute

The Wolof Bible is now complete and the text is set. When Mamadou died, checks on consistency and readers’ helps such as book introductions and the glossary still needed to be done. Before Mamadou died, he told Marilyn that S.S. Diop was the most linguistically gifted of all his children. After Mamadou’s death, Marilyn heard him interpret a sermon at church and decided to give him a chance at completing outstanding work on the translation. She discovered that he had a real grasp of the language. Mamadou had insisted that his children use proper Wolof in everyday speech and never allowed their mistakes to go unchecked.

I want them to hear Jesus speak to them in Wolof too.

Although S.S. Diop didn’t study the biblical languages, Mamadou had taught him translation principles. He also learned to use the available resources to improve the translation. He did some final readings for the text, modified archaic words, and checked for consistency in parallel passages. He helped to build the front and back matter and gave input for the cover design to reflect Wolof art and not Islamic art. He is also expanding a reader’s guide which his father had started.

Agsila Diop, Mamadou’s daughter and a professional singer, has composed 40 songs from the verses her father translated. She makes videos of these for YouTube at [Agsila Officiel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8vYUw1v1v1v1v1v1v1v1v1).

The Wolof and the Bible

The Wolof, numbering about 7 million, are listed as a least-reached people group in West Africa. S.S. Diop shares, “Senegal’s Wolofs came into contact with Islamic teachers from Mauritania and Algeria from as early as the 11th century. The Mouride sect of Islam originated in Senegal combining traditional beliefs with Islam. Because of the close connection between Islam and Wolof culture, it is very difficult for a Wolof to extract himself from the Islamic teachers and adopt a different worldview.”

Currently, the entire Wolof Bible, a Wolof songbook and calendar, 99 names of God, and portions of the recordings with synchronized text are uploaded at [kaddugyalla.com](https://www.kaddugyalla.com) while the revised print version is yet to be finished. The translation team has received great testimonies about the impact of the translation so far.

S.S. Diop shares their vision for the Wolof Bible: “The Muslim lingers in uncertainty about salvation. We hope that God will use the translation, through his Holy Spirit, to bring many people to know Jesus Christ and his gift of forgiveness and eternal life through his death and resurrection. That was what drew me to become a Christian.”

“My father’s passion was to bring a spirit of “Wolofization” to the translation so it speaks to the hearts of the Wolof people. Now, I am following in his steps. The Islamic leaders of Senegal speak and preach Friday sermons in Wolof, and I want them to hear Jesus speak to them in Wolof too.”



Mamadou Diop doing a recording

COULD YOU BE A BIBLE TRANSLATION WORKER?

BY REV. DR. KENNEDY KWAME OWIREDU

TRANSLATION CONSULTANT, BIBLE SOCIETY OF GHANA

The task of translation is as old as human civilization. Ever since human beings began to communicate in diverse languages and symbols, it became necessary that meaning was conveyed via channels of translation or interpretation. This was the story of the translation of the Hebrew ancient Scriptures into the prevalent Greek of the second and third centuries BCE, known as the Septuagint. Since then, Bible translation has evolved throughout Christian history.

In the ancient Jewish context, only highly-trained reverent scribes were given the responsibility of translating and recopying texts. Jerome, who is acknowledged as the translator of the Latin Vulgate, was a highly-trained scholar in the biblical languages. Later in the 19th century Gold Coast (Ghana), J. Zimmermann and J. Christaller, along with well-trained local translators such as Jakob Nikoi and Thomas Kwatei were instrumental in the making of the Ga and Akuapem-Twi Scriptures. These persons were learned in Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic.

Today, different translation agencies have varied qualifications when recruiting a translation team. For example, the translation team for the Bible Society of Ghana (BSG), which is a member of the United Bible Societies (UBS), is made up of translators, committee of reviewers, Computer-Assisted Publishing Officer (CAPO), and the translation consultant.

Qualities of Bible translators

The work of a translator involves but is not limited to the drafting of text from the source languages (Hebrew and Greek) guided by a UBS approved model text. Translators work in teams and so after drafting, they must review the text as a team and do same with the community of reviewers. Based on these, key qualifications of a Bible translator include:

- **Education:** Translation work covers three basic fields: linguistics, theology and anthropology. A translator is required to have the minimum qualification of a first degree in any of them from a reputable institution. In contemporary times, translation

work involves the use of technology such as a laptop, the appropriate software to host translation projects (e.g. Paratext), among others. A translator must therefore have some basic IT skills.

- **Profession:** Translators are often recruited from professions such as teaching, and church workers such as pastors, ministers, elders, or professions that involve working among the community concerned. Any of these backgrounds is relevant to the work of a Bible translator.
- **Human relations:** Translators need to relate and collaborate with members of the community to discover appropriate language terms for translating key biblical concepts. They also work in teams; therefore, translators need cordial human relation skills, good negotiation skills and tolerance. Each member's views and comments ought to be respected to arrive at a consensus.
- **Spirituality or church standing:** The Bible translator represents the beliefs of the Christian community and should therefore have a good Christian witness. The church community must also recognize the translator as one of them. This is more crucial in sign language translation where the output is in video format. The sign language translator must be someone the Deaf community endorses.

Conclusion

Bible translation is a meticulous, artistic and spiritual work; therefore, translators need prayer support and encouragement. It is an important work for missions and definitely needs the financial support of the Church, so that God's Word will be translated into the thousands of dialects in the world, causing the gospel to reach billions of people in our generation.



Dagaare translation team with consultant, Bible Society of Ghana

PROFESSIONS IN BIBLE TRANSLATION

BY JOHNSTONE NDUNDE

Bible translation involves many stages and intricate processes that need several technical experts. The Bible is the Word of God and regardless of approaches and methodologies employed, it has to meet standards of accuracy, naturalness, and clarity. All translations have to be faithful to the original texts and several professionals play a role depending on the desired output. There are written translations and oral translations. Professions focusing on written translations include language assessment specialists, linguists, anthropologists, literacy specialists, translators, translation consultants, and Scripture engagement specialists who all complement one another.

Before determining a Bible translation need, an **assessment** is done by **specialists**. Working with the local church to determine their interest for the task, the specialists review the language to check for dialectical differences and the most preferred dialect. If a need is determined, **linguists** do further analysis of the language so as to develop the writing system (alphabet), technically known as the orthography. This is done in stages and in each stage, the orthography is tested.

When a working alphabet is in place, a translation team is recruited from the community and the church if a viable church exists. It has been proven that when these recruits are trained in translation principles, interpretation of Scripture (exegesis), the use of computers, and specifically, the translation software, their chances of doing a good job increases tremendously. After recruiting, the drafting process begins. In some cases, it is at this stage that **anthropologists** help translators to understand the worldview, social structures, and culture of the target community so they can appreciate the cultural meanings of key terms, such as 'blood' or 'Holy Spirit', and how these would be translated.

As the language is being developed and Scripture drafting is progressing,



Photo: Namibia Bible Society

simple materials that would help the community to learn to read, called primers, and other simple stories on different subjects are developed by the **literacy specialists**. These are linguists and educationists who understand the basics of learning (pedagogy). This process is essential in helping the community read their language easily and for testing the alphabet. This ensures that by the time the translation is completed, a sizeable group of the community would be fluent in reading their language and more so, the Bible.

Bible **translation consultants** then check whether the translation is accurate, clear, natural and faithful to the text. The checks are done against the Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic languages in order to avoid misinterpretations resulting from cultural or linguistic misunderstandings. Alongside, linguists collect words and make dictionaries through a software developed by SIL known as Flex, so that the

developed language gets a reference for its vocabulary. In most cases, the dictionaries have referents in two or three languages.

Most translations start with the New Testament so that the gospel message reaches communities before translating the Old Testament. Some Bible stories and Bible study materials are produced by the **Scripture engagement specialists** or consultants to assist the language communities to engage with the Scriptures as the process is going on. In most cases, when for instance, the Gospel of Luke is finished, it is dedicated and the community uses it right away. This ensures high early impact, even as translation of the other books is in progress. In some cases, in partnership with the Jesus Film team, the film is done to encourage community engagement with the Scriptures.

All the professionals involved in Bible translation work together towards its impact and sustainability in language communities.

GO! NEWS OF AFRICA'S MOBILIZING CHURCH

12TH TRIENNIAL COMMISSION CONFERENCE HELD IN KENYA

This year's 12th edition of the Commission Conference, organized by the Fellowship of Christian Unions (FOCUS), Kenya, came off at the Kabarak University in Nakuru from 27 December 2024 to 1 January 2025. FOCUS Kenya is the umbrella organization linking Christian students in universities and colleges across Kenya.

The conference, organized every three years since 1988, aims to create awareness of mission issues locally and globally, and to explore opportunities for involvement by bringing together mission practitioners, agencies, churches and students for networking. With an ongoing theme drawn from John 20:21, this year's emphasis was "The Message, The Models and The Motivation." The event brought together 2,707 delegates including 1,852 students and over 100 speakers and facilitators.



Participants at Commission Conference

Conference sessions included Bible expositions, plenaries, panel discussions, seminars, times of prayer, exhibitions and mission simulations. Delegates were taught to appreciate the mission of God and were equipped with skills to meaningfully present the gospel to groups and individuals from diverse

backgrounds convincingly, contextually, and continuously.

Attendees made commitments to serve in areas of need such as prayer initiative groups, short- and long-term missions, Islam ministry, High School ministry, African Traditional Religion, and financial support among others.

RUN FOR THE BIBLELESS 2025

Run For The Bibleless (RFTB) is an annual event organized by Bible Translation and Literacy (BTL), a Christian organization that aims to facilitate sustainable Bible translation, literacy and language development programmes among indigenous language groups in Kenya and beyond.

RFTB focuses on creating awareness and mobilizing resources to support the BTL's work in Bible translation and language development.

This year's event, involving a 10km run and a 5km walk, will take place in Kenya on 15 March 2025 at venues in Nairobi, Eldoret, and Nakuru. For more information, contact +254722209606 or email info@btlkenya.org.

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THE BIBLE SOCIETIES BELONG TO US

For many of us, the Bible Society is where we go to buy a Bible at a good price or find a Bible in our mother tongue. However, the Bible Societies across Africa are involved in more than just printing and selling the Scriptures. Across the world, over 150 Bible Societies are joined into an international organization called United Bible Societies (UBS). One of their biggest tasks is to complete over 1,200 Bible translation projects in the next 20 years.

The Bible Society of Namibia (BSN) is one of more than 50 Bible Societies across Africa. Their latest project is a sign language translation for the deaf of Namibia, which will be recorded as videos. Five trained Namibian deaf people are involved with an interpreter and a theological exegete. Besides two oral Bible translation projects for the Ovahimba and the SAN (**!Kung** and **Ju/Hoansi**) respectively, the BSN also has some “traditional” projects going, including two written translations into the **Oshiwambo** and **Thimbukushu** languages.

In your own country, you may find Bible Society staff and volunteers working in literacy and trauma healing programmes, workshops to prevent gender-based violence, children’s Scripture engagement, and youth camps. Indeed, the societies often find creative ways to combine Scripture engagement with community programmes.

How do they pay for these programmes? The international UBS channels funds through various fundraising initiatives across the globe. Funds are made available for projects of individual Bible Societies based on needs, proposals and reports. Traditionally, a large portion of the funds came from Western countries but these have waned in recent years due to the decline in faithful church attendance in the West. Because of this, the international pot of money has shrunk. At the same time, the needs for Bible



translation, Scripture engagement, and other programmes in Africa have risen significantly as the growing numbers of Christians increase demand for local-language versions and printed copies.

Local Bible Societies are rising to the challenge of fundraising and must keep in mind the preferences of diverse cultures. Dr. Schalk Botha, CEO of the Bible Society of Namibia, explained that it has become a challenge to raise funds: “Since our *Sponsor a Verse* initiative (giving Christian mother-tongue speakers the opportunity to contribute to their own Bible translation) did not attract many donors, we have to look for other creative ways like gala dinners with inspirational speakers.” Events such as soccer tournaments, *Walk-for-Bibles*, and selling food are used in various countries.

It is important for Bible Societies to partner with churches since they serve the different churches in the respective countries. The partnerships make it possible, on the one end, to fundraise for Bible projects; and on the other end, to serve churches with trainings and resources. Dr. Botha commented that

Bible Societies must now be proficient in collecting high-quality photos, impact stories and testimonies to share with potential donors.

Bible translation involves immense costs to cover the needed software and hardware, transport and lodging, and salaries for full-time translators. Where communities can assist Bible Societies with hospitality and accommodation, this can defray expenses tremendously.

Let’s remember that our local Bible translations benefit our whole countries and are a vital resource to mature the Church and disciple Christians. Donations toward printing Bibles in local languages keep the whole cycle functioning. You can find a link to your local Bible Society on the UBS website at <https://unitedbiblesocieties.org> Free online Bibles and resources in mother tongues are available in apps like YouVersion and 5 Fish. The Bible Societies are hard at work so that everyone can engage with God’s Word – let’s support them.

From an interview with Dr. Schalk Botha, CEO of the Bible Society of Namibia.



Representative photo

PEOPLE GROUP:

THE IDAKSAHAK OF ALGERIA AND MALI

The Idaksahak (“Sons of Isaac”) or Dawsahak or Daoussahak are of the Berber peoples, the diverse ethnic groups who lived in North Africa before the Arabs arrived. They moved south in the eighth or ninth century, bringing Islam with them, and now inhabit the northeast part of Mali and a small section of southeast Algeria.

For many years, the Idaksahak performed a Maraboutic function for the Tuareg, carrying out religious duties for their nobility, which meant they were not allowed to take up arms and therefore depended on the Tuareg for protection. They were traditionally herders for the Tuareg, who are also Berber peoples, and there is some intermarriage between the groups. The Idaksahak are now a mix of pastoralists and seasonal nomads, herding goats, cattle and camels over a wide area, with some living in towns.

This part of Africa has been prone to outbreaks of violence in recent years, and the Idaksahak have joined with the Tuareg in cattle theft and plunder against the Fulani tribes, who have retaliated in kind. The conflicts are complicated and have gone on for generations, involving a variety of groups. The problems only worsen with decreasing lands for grazing livestock.

The Idaksahak have been Sunni Muslims for over 1,000 years and remain unreachable. There are no Scriptures at all in their language, Tadaksahak (Dausahaq), besides some Bible stories and messages recorded by the Global Recordings Network. SIL produced a grammar in 1997, though there are no plans in place to begin work on Bible translation. Their level of literacy is very low and schooling is only available in towns. There are few, if any Christians.

AT A GLANCE

- Most men are bilingual in Tadaksahak and French, but the women and children are often monolingual, with no access to outside ideas.
- Like many Muslim tribes, to be Idaksahak is to be Muslim.
- The Idaksahak have been part of several armed uprisings against the Malian government.

PLEASE PRAY FOR

- Workers to live among the Idaksahak, learn their language, and be accepted by them.
- A movement of Christ among the people and protection for those who become Christians.
- Translation of the Bible into their language and the ability to read it.
- Exposure to Christianity for Idaksahak living in towns.

Sources: Joshua Project, Wikipedia, *A Grammar of Tadaksahak*, *Northern Songhay Language of Mali*, 1997.



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