
How does translation project funding affect Scripture Use?¹

Thoughts on the relationship between the financing of translation projects and the use of the scriptures in Burkina Faso

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In planning a translation program, one important question is the funding of the translation activities. I would like to explore the relationship between the funding of the translation project and the use of the Scriptures in the context of the translation projects in Burkina Faso. Does one indeed influence the other, and if so, how can we structure the financing of the translation program so that the use of the Scripture is promoted?

1. One view

Some have asserted that local people will not use the translation if they do not contribute financially to the translation program. Almost always, the expected contribution is the payment of the national translators' salaries. Is there indeed a link between the payment of the national translators' salaries and the use of the translation?

A look at the translation programs in Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso shows that the link is not very clear. In one translation program where the church paid at least part of the translators' salaries, the translation is, nevertheless, not widely used. In other cases, where the church contributed very little or nothing, the translations are very widely used.

My sample is very small, consisting only of those projects in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Côte d'Ivoire that are advanced enough to have published translation. Therefore, my conclusion must be tentative. I, nevertheless, tentatively conclude that the source of the financing of the translation team does not always have an impact on the use of the translation, either positively or negatively.

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2. The relationship between funding and Scripture use

What, then, can we say about funding of the translation effort and the use of the Scriptures? Is there never a link between funding and use?

I believe there is often a link. However, in some translation programs, the link is very weak or nonexistent. Furthermore, when there is a strong link, it is often complex, being related to other issues and factors. Here are some of these complexities.

2.1. Funding and partnership

The financing of the translation effort includes partnership with the local community and/or churches. Decisions regarding financing need to be made in the context of true partnership.

The focus of the negotiation process with the church and/or community should be partnership, not finances. The financing of the project should be a manifestation of partnership—not a goal of partnership. True partnership involves each partner having a sense of responsibility for the project. Furthermore, local funding of the translation project does not guarantee either use or adequate partnership between expatriate organizations and the local community and/or church.

Failure to act in true partnership in finances can have serious consequences. It is possible to substitute money for partnership. I have seen situations where the local church contributed to the translators' salaries, but the control of the translation project remained entirely in the hands of the expatriate team. One can easily imagine how such a situation could have a very negative impact on the use of the translation.

This means that we should not come into the negotiating process with a lot of nonnegotiable points, certainly not with an unbending position as to what the local churches should contribute to the project. On the other hand, true partnership almost always has financial manifestations. It is right and good that the financial aspects of the translation project be a subject of open discussion among those involved. The financing of the translation should not be regarded as an unwanted or unfortunate aspect of partnership.

If the contribution of the local church or community to the translation effort is part of true partnership, then it will have a positive impact on the project. If not, it may have a negative impact.

2.2. Funding as sign

Experience shows that when translation programs are brought in from the outside and are run without local involvement, there is a risk that the translation will not be used. This same phenomenon has been noted by many others concerning development activities.

It seems, then, that the real issue for translation projects is having a sense of responsibility at the local level. Cash contributions may be a way of measuring whether potential local partners have a sense of responsibility for the project. That is, churches may say they want a translation, but their degree of willingness or unwillingness to contribute toward the translation effort can

show the depth of their interest. In this way, the financial question becomes a sign of something more fundamental.

However, signs of interest and commitment are many and varied. We should not neglect the other commitments of the church and/or community. Is the church willing to free qualified people for the translation effort? Do church leaders take the time to be actively involved in the organization of the translation effort? Does the church follow through on decisions made by the translation committee? These actions show local ownership of the project just as surely as do cash contributions. Furthermore, these activities may be more important to the long-term use of the Scriptures than cash contributions.

In my limited experience, the true measure of the church's commitment is often manifested by its willingness or unwillingness to free its most qualified people for translation (no matter who pays them). This is an area where we may need to request that churches do a lot more.

3. An alternate view

I would like here to make some alternative suggestions concerning local financing of translation activities.

3.1. Negotiate

In planning the needs of the translation program, the churches and the local community should be involved wherever possible. We should refrain from coming to that process with nonnegotiable points of view on funding. We should ask the local community how the needs of the project can be met, what they can contribute, and what form their contribution should take. We can then state our preferences and desires. On this basis, true negotiations can take place.

3.2. Treat the whole

We need to treat the financial, material, and personnel needs of the project as a whole. We need to explicitly recognize all of the contributions of all of the sources of support in the project, including the support of the expatriate team.

Others in Burkina Faso and I have been involved in situations where local church leaders expressed their appreciation of our explaining the sources of funding, including that of the expatriate team. They say that this gives them the understanding that they need in order to make decisions about project resources.

Our tendency is to treat only one aspect of project needs—that of translators' salaries. Worse, we act as if this were the only aspect of financial partnership. More than once I have read or heard from expatriate colleagues that the local churches are paying all of the project expenses. Of course, the local churches are not paying for the support of advisors and consultants or the publication of the translation—to mention just the largest project costs toward which the local churches are not contributing.

I wonder why we often pick out the national translators' salaries as the part of the project that local sources should cover. There does not seem to be any theoretical reason. There are many

other project expenses including the publication of the translation and consultant expenses that we do not ask churches to cover, so the preference for asking for translators' salaries is not based on an objection to outside money. Could it be simply because the translators' salaries would be an additional financial burden for the expatriates involved or that the expatriates do not want the task of managing employment relationships?

Whatever the reason for past practice, we would do better to treat all of the project's material and financial needs as a whole.

3.3. Recognize in-kind donations

Part of treating project needs as a whole is the recognition of in-kind donations from the church and/or community. We should give prominence to in-kind donations. These can be included in agreements and accounted for in project reports.

In Burkina Faso, churches and communities are more able to contribute in-kind than in cash. Cash-poor individuals and even churches in famine areas can contribute in many of these ways. Here are some examples:

1. The functioning (travel, housing, food) of the translation committee's meetings and training sessions.
2. The functioning (travel, housing, food) of the revisors' meetings and training sessions.
3. Travel, housing, and food for courses offered by expatriate organizations.
4. A place for the translation office.
5. Food for the translators; for example, a certain amount of grain every year from every congregation.
6. Housing and food for visiting translation consultants.
7. The distribution and sale of the translation.
8. Freeing qualified people for the translation.

We need to avoid the situation where "contribution" means "cash contribution," and where other kinds of contributions are not explicitly recognized.

3.4. Build in sustainability

One general principle of funding is that one-time activities can be funded from the outside, but that activities that must continue long-term should be funded from within the community.

Funding ongoing activities from the outside can interfere with those activities continuing after the funding ends.

The actual translation work is not an ongoing activity; therefore, outside financing is not negative in terms of sustainability. It may, therefore, be better to ask the church to fund the

ongoing aspects of the translation program such as literacy in the churches, distribution and sales of the translation, and the production of church literature. If these can be funded entirely by the church, then prospects for the long-term use of the Scriptures are greatly enhanced. This cannot be said of funding translators' salaries.

3.5. Don't forget efficiency

The efficiency of the translation program is also a consideration in choosing how it should be financed. This is a question of stewardship.

It is possible to spend a lot of money in order to save a little. For example, why should we limit ourselves to what the local church can do for translators' salaries if more qualified translators are available? Is it worth tying up qualified expatriate personnel for long periods of time if hiring more qualified translators could speed up the process? This is especially true if the expatriate translator is a consultant or has consultant potential. (This point is not meant to address situations where it is strategically desirable that the project advance more slowly.)

As for the financing of the translation team, efficiency should not become a fetish. It needs to be kept in the context of good stewardship of all our resources (money, consultants, facilities, and so forth).

However, in some cases speeding up the translation can even have a positive impact on Scripture use. Slow developing translation programs sometimes result in loss of interest on the part of the churches.

4. Conclusion

We need to enlarge our thinking about the contribution of the church to the translation effort. Casting that contribution principally in terms of cash contributions to the translators' salaries limits options and may even have a negative impact on the use of the translation. Adopting a more complex partnership approach to finances will result in better partnership and may, therefore, positively affect the use of the Scriptures.

Addendum: Miscellaneous factors

The following are some factors that may affect what the church can contribute to the translation program.

4.1. The economic situation

The economic situation is not uniform in Africa, including Burkina Faso. There are situations where the church has great difficulty in contributing cash to the translation program. We have had one case in Burkina Faso where church members were fainting in the church literacy classes because of hunger caused by drought and famine. Is it legitimate to ask the church for significant amounts of cash in such a case?

4.2. The church situation

Like the economic situation, the church situation is not uniform. In some areas, the churches are young and have few Christians. In other places, the church is well established with relatively large numbers of believers.

4.3. Church leaders versus the grass roots

Occasionally, one finds situations where the leaders of the church (denomination) do not have the same interests as the grass roots. In Burkina Faso, this situation is most often found where the local language in question does not have any representation in the denominational leadership. In such a case, the church leaders may prefer that the members of the local language community in question use a translation in a trade language, while the members of the language community desire a translation in their own language.

4.4. Minority languages

In some cases, the language may be a very small minority of the denomination. Most of the members of the denomination may not have any interest in the translation, making it difficult to get money from the denomination.