Scripture Engagement
and the Mobilisation of Local Resources in Africa

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Benin, 2020

One of the greatest challenges for Bible translation organisations in Africa at the beginning of the 21st century is the mobilisation of local resources. In the current global economic climate, local contributions are of great importance and there are many ways to encourage communities to contribute. This new economic environment does not spare Bible translation organisations struggling to find a good formula for mobilising local resources. This article addresses the issue based on the results of research work I carried out on the Biblical Institute of Gaounga, showing the need to adapt mobilisation strategies to the rural context of Gaounga and the villages covered by the research. Here we share some ideas for effective mobilisation of local resources.

One of the challenges in the development of an organisation is the ability of its leaders to mobilise the resources necessary for its operation. Very often it is "poverty" that constitutes, in Africa, a serious handicap to the mobilisation of resources.

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The challenge of poverty

Poverty in its essence is a plague. In fact, it destroys the legitimate aspirations of thousands of people by limiting their ability to take an active part in the development of their communities. According to the United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the world community needs to pay greater attention to the needs of the rural poor, as the majority of the poor will continue to live in rural areas until at least 2035. This reality also concerns the Lokpa communities, located in the North-West of Benin, in the villages covered by our research work. There are five categories of poverty: material poverty, physical poverty, isolation, vulnerability and lack of power.

A poor person can also be defined as: *"One who lives in a set of disadvantages"*. For example, a family is poor when its members are physically weak, isolated, vulnerable and powerless. The other very important aspect is spiritual poverty. With Rubin Pohor, we believe that *"We must fight against poverty to restore the dignity of the human being!"*

To do this successfully, we need to take a holistic approach. That is, take into account all the principles of resource mobilisation and the context of each given community. The former UN

Secretary-General Kofi Annan said that "a sustainable solution to urban as well as rural poverty requires that people in rural areas be given better opportunities to earn a living." Achieving these noble goals requires the participation of all stakeholders. We therefore propose that organisations work in collaboration with churches in a win-win partnership. It is not a question of these organisations abandoning their fundamental objectives; but of devoting part of their time to thinking about development with their counterparts in the churches; for poverty is not inevitable.

IFAD's Rural Poverty Report (2001) states that reducing rural poverty will require encouraging the production of staple foods essential for the livelihoods of the rural poor and increasing the share of resources allocated to them. It is therefore necessary that Bible translation organisations not only expect to be supported by churches and communities, but also seek to contribute to the improvement of the conditions of church and community members by acting as consciousness-raisers, facilitators who connect churches and village development groups with other community development structures that build the capacity of communities by helping them to value their talents. In this way, the Bible translation organisation, in addition to its traditional activities, can take an interest in what is happening in churches or communities and facilitate the search for solutions to the challenges of poverty. According to M. Al-Sultan, *"The fundamental partnership is with the poor themselves. They are the ones with the necessary talents, skills and knowledge."*

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All human societies have a part of their population that lives with more difficult material conditions than others. But we believe that it is ignorance or misunderstanding of the exploitable opportunities and resources around them that keeps people in poverty. A frank collaboration of stakeholders will certainly be beneficial. Bible translation organisations, churches and language communities must unite their efforts in a win-win partnership dynamic. This partnership will generate resources and thus contribute to reducing the scourge of poverty. We call for a synergy of action between para-church organisations and local churches, without forgetting the language communities. For the implementation of this idea, we suggest:

- The organisation of capacity building seminars for leaders and members of churches or village groups.

- Facilitation of partnerships between churches, village groups and existing development structures.

- Stakeholders' search for development opportunities

- Adapting the principles of resource mobilisation to the realities of the population.

Indeed, in most African countries, the poor live mainly in rural areas and depend for their survival on agriculture and related trade, services and processing activities. This implies that most of the income of the rural poor comes from agriculture-related activities. In this context, organisations have everything to gain by facilitating the development of these activities and adapting their mobilisation strategy to the realities of church members. Do not reduce resource mobilisation to fundraising. Instead of money, people can contribute food, animals, etc. In addition to individual donations, organisations can and should encourage churches to develop small income generating projects (IGPs) in the areas of agriculture and livestock.

Do not reduce resource mobilisation to fundraising

Here is an example of food contribution (bags of maize),
at the Assemblies of God church in the village of Ogola in northern Togo.

In the field of animal husbandry, we can have a project called "the golden goat": a local church buys a small goat and raises it. From this goat will be born little ones that will grow up, and periodically the church sells the biggest animal of its flock and supports the organisation with the proceeds of this sale.

In the field of agriculture, a local church may have a field for mission. The "mission field" project consists of encouraging the faithful of a local church to work on a plot of land and the harvest will be sold to support the organisations.

Moreover, the spiritual poverty highlighted above is very important. Indeed, it also affects, to some extent, people's contribution to the development of the church. The poor in spirit are those who have difficulties in their relationship with God and who need spiritual rather than

material help. If it is true that poverty can be a factor that handicaps the mobilisation of resources, it is also true that those who have problems in their relationship with God find it difficult to understand why they have to give in order to advance God's work. Para-church organisations must therefore equip pastors to deal with this situation.

About generosity

The biblical foundation of fundraising and stewardship begins with the donor's need to give. Giving is an expression of God's grace. One of the principles in terms of giving is that *"God wants you to give what you have and not what you don't have."* (2 Corinthians 8:9). Generosity is a gift in proportion to our wealth.

For this reason, we encourage organisations to work in building the capacity of local churches through projects thought up and designed with them. The list of projects remains open to the spirit of creativity of the leaders. It is also necessary to mobilise a minimum of human resources. Hence the importance of a network of friends. Organisations need to develop a network of friends because we concur with Bodin J (1576) that *"there is no wealth but men"*. That is to say, the more people an organisation gains for its cause, the greater its wealth. In the same vein, we agree with A. de Saint-Exupéry (1939) that: *"The greatness of a profession is above all to unite men; it is only a true luxury and it is that of human relations"*. In other words, in order to achieve their fundamental goals, para-church organisations (Bible translation organisations) must first and foremost place emphasis on human relationships. In terms of sustainable resource mobilisation strategies, the involvement of the local community is paramount.

Generally speaking, poverty is an excuse for the people in the rural areas of our countries to shirk the need to take charge of their own lives by relying first on their own means. But if we pay attention, we can see that our localities, often wrongly or rightly described as poor, are full of resource opportunities that are just waiting to be properly channelled through an adapted participatory approach, in which people become truly involved by relying first on their own strengths. In other words, local people must take their own development destiny into their own hands. They need to be helped by adapting

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mobilisation strategies to local realities. But since translation work absorbs translators so much that they lack the time to get involved in the communities, one might ask how can what we say become reality?

The Importance of the Scripture Engagement department in translation

Scripture Engagement (SE) is a key focus of Bible translation. It is of great importance because of the place it occupies in the translation process. It is at the beginning, during and after the translation. Indeed, before any work of translation of the Bible into local languages, it is necessary and indispensable to work to make the language communities aware of the

importance and usefulness of their languages in order to mobilise them around the work of translation, which should be the very emanation of the will of the population. Together with the community, we look for answers to important concerns such as: How do people plan to use the translation? Which books are the priorities? In what form: audio, radio, printed book...?

Also, during the actual translation process, SE work is needed to facilitate the progressive distribution of the translation products: *"If the meal is ready and people are hungry, don't leave it in the freezer and tell them to come back in 5 years!"*

Even at the end of the translation, SE continues with activities that are part of the implementation of programmes that encourage communities to consume the finished product (the NT or the entire Bible).

It is clear from the above that SE is of great support to the work of translation, of which it is an integral part. We interact with both the translators and the community to prepare the community to accept and interact with the translated Bible in their language. In fact, Scripture Engagement specialists help language communities to

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consider and plan for access to the Scriptures in the languages and media that best serve them, depending on the context. But can this classic role of SE be expanded to take into account some of the challenges faced by language communities?

Awareness raising of the Akébou community to contribute to the translation project (Translation Forum 2019 in Kougnonhou, Togo)

We believe that in terms of mobilising local resources, the proximity of SE to communities is a real asset that should not be overlooked. The picture above is that of the participants in a forum organized by the project for the translation of the Bible into Akébou, a Togolese language. Following a presentation that we, as SE specialists, gave on this occasion, a pastor deliberately launched an appeal for funds to support the project. This spontaneous reaction made it possible to collect more than 200,000 F CFA ($345) on the spot.

In addition, SE workers can organise workshops for churches and communities such as "Helping Interpreters", "Healing from Trauma" and others, asking for financial contributions. We are accustomed to seeking external funding for the organisation of such workshops; but in the current context, we must be daring. In the face of the funding challenge, we must be creative and take into account our contexts.

This experiment worked with the Kabyes this year. There was talk of organising a workshop "Helping the interpreters", but most of those involved in the Kabye project thought that this was not possible due to lack of funding. The SE worker proposed that invitations be sent to the churches specifying that each participant must bring 7,000 F CFA ($12) as a contribution. Many people did not believe in the success of such an initiative. But praise be to God, the participants were numerous, and their contributions were sufficient for the organisation and success of this workshop!

Given their proximity to churches and language communities, SE workers can collaborate with the community development field to facilitate activities such as: organising capacity building seminars for church or village group leaders and members, facilitating partnerships between churches, village groups and existing development structures, and facilitating the search for development opportunities by stakeholders.

In SIL Togo-Benin, we organised a workshop on participatory approaches in early 2019. In this case we did not ask for a contribution from the participants. In fact, this idea of having participants contribute financially cannot be systematic; but it must be done tactfully and judiciously.

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It is also a way of creating the culture of contributing to the work of translating the Bible into the local language. In reality, it is all about priority and value.

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Through our awareness raising and the development of activities that meet people's needs, they will put us in their priorities.

Conclusion

Scripture Engagement is transversal in a translation project. It is at the beginning, during and after the translation. As a key area of focus and given its place in the translation process, it can help language communities to consider and plan for access to the Scriptures in the languages and media that best serve them, depending on the context. Without abandoning these core activities, this traditional role of SE could be expanded to take into account some of the challenges faced by language communities. To this end, collaboration between the area of Scripture Engagement and other areas such as Community Development is necessary and beneficial.

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We also need to be creative in generating local contributions. In terms of mobilising local resources, each locality has its own realities, and these must be considered in order to bring the components together strategically in a collaboration that enables each other to support the work of Bible translation into local languages. No one is so poor that they cannot support Bible translation.

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This article was translated into English from the French original.

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