

# **A Holistic Field-Based Training Program: The Birthplace of Multiple Translation Projects in Southeast Tanzania and Ethiopia**

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**BY BARRY FUNNELL, M.A.**  
*The Word for the World*

## **ABSTRACT**

Multiple Bible translation projects have been birthed in Southeast Tanzania and Ethiopia through a field-based training program which offers an accredited diploma in Bible translation. Translators attend formal lectures and do assignments by correspondence while being engaged in their translation work from producing first drafts through to publication.

## **Introduction**

Many varied approaches to training Bible translators have existed over the years and different approaches have been used to initiate pioneer Bible translation projects. Traditionally, expatriates have been trained in linguistics, cross-cultural communication and Bible knowledge. They have then proceeded to take their expert knowledge to the field and translate the Bible through the help of nationals or mother-tongue speakers of the receptor language into which the Bible is being translated.

Various organizations, including *The Word for the World* (WW), have seen the need to take their training program to the field, where it is needed most. That changes the focus from training expatriates to do the work of Bible translation, to training and empowering national mother-tongue translators to do the work of Bible translation. By doing so, powerful national movements of Bible translation are effectively being put in place in Ethiopia and Tanzania. The mother-tongue speaker has always been acknowledged as the expert in his or her mother tongue, and a shift is now taking place to increase the level of training given to national mother-tongue translators in order to make them the experts in the whole process of Bible translation.

The traditional model of one missionary Bible translator initiating and sustaining one "life long" project, is giving way to the cluster approach, where a handful of missionaries initiate and oversee several geographically and linguistically-related languages. This has created a greater need for local church involvement and higher levels of training for nationals to help oversee these projects.

WW, as well as other groups, have moved forward another step by handing their operations over totally into the hands of nationals. This happened in Ethiopia in 2006, where twelve translation projects and WW's training program are being fully overseen by nationals, although some guest lecturers are invited from outside the country, and the whole training program is overseen by WW International's training department. This empowerment of nationals is quite far advanced already in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as well, where a national director (Cesar Massange) is taking over in October 2007, and where nationals have taken the initiative to start translation projects at an astonishing rate.

## **The history behind the holistic field-based training program**

It has been acknowledged that Bible translation is the work of the Church, but in the West we have traditionally interpreted this to mean the work of the expatriate church, in terms of expert ability, personnel and funding. If a person was interested in Bible translation he or she had to go to the US or UK for training. In the last two decades, many training institutions in Africa, as well as in other parts of the world, have started offering courses in Bible Translation. Several institutions in Anglophone Africa like *Pan African Christian College* (PACC) in Kenya offer a B.A. and M.A. course in Bible Translation, as does the *Theological College of Northern Nigeria*. The Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST) recently launched a Ph.D. program in Biblical Translation Studies. South Africa (where the author of this paper did the WW Diploma in Bible Translation in 1988) also has universities that offer M.A. and Ph.D. programs in Bible Translation, such as the *University of Stellenbosch* and *The South African Theological Seminary* (SATS).

WW is a Bible translation organization that was founded in South Africa in the early 1980's by Dr. Veroni Kruger. It originally offered training through *The School of Bible Translation* attached to *Africa School of Missions* in White River, but in the early 1990's WW began to offer its own diploma in Bible

Translation, which has recently been accredited with SATS, as counting two years towards their three-year Bachelor's degree in Theology.

It became a growing passion within WW to train and empower nationals to translate the Bible for their own people, and thus in the mid 1990's WW began offering their diploma course in the field, where WW missionary Bible translators were actively engaged in projects in Zambia, Ethiopia, and later Tanzania and the DRC. WW personnel and church leaders participate in the recruitment of potential mother-tongue translators, who are invited to enroll in the WW Diploma in Bible Translation (DBT). This program provides training for all the different participants involved in the translation process, viz. prospective Bible translators (including mother-tongue translators), testers, reviewers, stylists and church leaders.

The training has also been offered to translators working with other organizations like the various *Bible Societies*, SIL, and *Pioneer Bible Translators* (PBT). Training is offered in a central locality and translators from various teams in the host country or even surrounding countries may travel across borders to attend the training. Usually 30 to 60 students attend the four-week contact modules in each locality, which are currently being offered in Morogoro, Tanzania; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and Kinshasa, DRC. Over 200 students are enrolled for the DBT. Training has also been conducted in Zambia, Slovakia and India.

### **Curriculum and course description**

As mentioned, the DBT is a practical course that is presented over a number of years. It typically consists of intensive contact modules completed in four weeks per year, for four years, as well as practical work and assignments done in the time between modules. The curriculum is as follows:

#### **1. Bible Translation (50 credits)**

- 1.1 Principles of Bible Translation (40 credits)
- 1.2 Bible Translation and Mission (History of Bible Translation) (10 credits)

#### **2. Practical Bible Translation (40 credits)**

- 2.1 The Process of Bible Translation (10 credits)
- 2.2 Language Survey (5 credits)
- 2.3 Translation Practicum (25 credits)

#### **3 Reading and Understanding the Bible (40 credits)**

- 3.1 Biblical Exegesis (20 credits)
- 3.2 Textual Criticism (5 credits)
- 3.3 Literary Studies (5 credits)
- 3.4 Greek and Hebrew (10 credits)

#### **4. Applied Linguistics (60 credits)**

- 4.1 Phonetics and Phonology (12 credits)
- 4.2 Morphology and Syntax (13 credits)
- 4.3 Orthography (5 credits)
- 4.4 Literacy (15 credits)
- 4.5 Semantics (5 credits)
- 4.6 Componential Analysis (5 credits)
- 4.7 Lexicography (5 credits)

#### **5. Language and Community (35 credits)**

- 5.1 Intercultural Communication (20 credits)
- 5.2 Language Acquisition (5 credits)
- 5.3 English (4 credits)
- 5.4 Sociolinguistics (6 credits)

#### **6. Christian Leadership (10 credits)**

#### **7. Applied Computer Skills (5 credits)**

- 7.1 Basic Computer Skills and Maintenance

### **Entrance Requirements**

Prospective students need to be recommended by a local church as being active and in good standing. The church is heavily relied upon to help us select the students. Students should also be

<sup>1</sup>With special emphasis on Discourse Analysis, as an aspect of applied Linguistics.

drawn from a variety of denominations. Thus church engagement right from the beginning of the projects and selection of translators is a necessity. Students should hold a Grade 12 or an equivalent standard of senior schooling and have two years of study at a theological institution approved by WW. These requirements may be waived on the grounds of practical involvement in a Bible translation project or experience in the church.

A calling and a passion for Bible translation are essential, as is fluency in the receptor language and an ability to use it creatively if the student is to be a mother-tongue translator. Otherwise there must be willingness to develop a working knowledge of the receptor language and a love for the receptor language and those who speak it.

For students that do not meet the full entrance requirements or cannot fulfil all the requirements for the DPT, WW may present a certificate course in Bible Translation.

### **Accreditation**

It is desirable for any study program to be recognised internationally and accredited by a recognised institution, so that students who are capable can continue to higher levels of academic achievement; therefore, relevant, previously completed studies will be recognised and study credits given towards the higher level diploma or degree. WW has entered into a formal agreement with SATS, which is an accredited, distance-learning university in Johannesburg. According to them, WW's Diploma in Bible Translation is fully recognized as the equivalent of a SATS diploma in Biblical Studies. Practically this means that the Diploma in Bible Translation will be a 240-credit program on level 5 (1 credit = 10 hours), which is equivalent to two years of university training. This enables WW students that have successfully completed the DBT to continue their studies towards a Bachelor in Theology (B.Th.) three-year degree. Prior studies and relevant experience may be taken into account in qualifying for the B.Th. program. After completing a B.Th. degree, students may enter a Master's degree program, as well as the recently developed Ph.D. program in Bible Translation.

### **Basic Outcomes**

More concern is placed on a student's active involvement and participation in a Bible translation project than merely gaining credits towards the DBT. One of the requirements for continuing in the program is active involvement in a translation project, or evidence that the trainee is passionate about being involved long-term in Bible translation as a project coordinator, exegete or future consultant.

The student is being trained both theoretically and practically through all the phases of translation, from research into his or her language, to making a first draft, to final publication. Teaching nationals to do their own sociolinguistic research to determine prestige dialect, language vitality, and whether a definite need for translation exists, has an added advantage, because nationals have a natural intuition of their own language and they can do research straight after the training in their own home areas, which speeds up the process and saves great expense compared to an expatriate team doing this.

Students are taught a three-week *Introductory Course of Translation Principles* (ICTP) from *Bible Translation: An Introductory Course in Translation Principles*, Third Edition (Revised), Compiled by Katherine Barnwell, Summer Institute of Linguistics, Dallas, 1992 in the first-year level, and they engage in practical translation during the training, usually completing the book of Jonah. Selected exercises from Barnwell's ICTP manual are given as an assignment requirement as well as the review questionnaires. A translation of the Gospel of Mark in the mother tongue with a back translation is another requirement for first year level. If they are engaged as full time translators straight after the ICTP, they do a first draft and back translation of the book they have been assigned to translate by their project leader.

Phonetics, Phonology, Morphology and Syntax are presented early on in the course and the students are taught to do their own linguistic analysis of their language. Style and Discourse, Semantics, Orthography and Lexicography follow later to deepen their theoretical knowledge of language, and help analyze and standardize their language. Intense grammatical analysis and preliminary lexicography are not deemed necessary components before translation begins, as the mother-tongue speaker already has a natural intuition and ability in his or her own language. However, it is desirable as a later outcome of the translation process. Ongoing exegesis and Bible courses, as well as introductory courses in Greek and Hebrew help hone their translation skills.

Studies in Intercultural Communication, and language and society are given to alert the translators to cultural factors, which need to be taken into consideration in translation work.

High value is placed on the concept of on-the-job training, where the student can implement and reinforce on a daily basis what he or she has been taught in the contact modules and what he or she is learning throughout the course work assignments, which are of a very practical nature. A translation project for the whole Bible could take at least eight to ten years. Doing the DBT keeps translators on a learning curve, and continually sharpens their linguistic, translation and Bible skills. Not only should their quality of work improve as their skills are honed, but their competency to become trainers and project leaders in the future will be enhanced.

Once the translators have completed the DBT, it is possible for them to further their studies through SATS, where they can enter into the third year of a B.A. in Theology. Once they complete the B.A. they can go on to a Masters in Bible Translation and a Doctorate program through SATS or other universities.

One of the goals of the training is that once a mother-tongue translator has finished translating the Bible in his or her own language, they will continue in the ministry of Bible translation as an exegete, and/or a project leader and trainer for translators in other Bible translation projects. Hence the wide range of subjects covered in the curriculum. In Malawi, John Kadalinga worked as one of the translators for 10 years to translate the Bible into Sena. After completing the Bible, he moved to the north of Malawi, and has been working as exegete and coordinator of the Lambya Bible translation project for four years. The three Lambya translators have nearly finished the New Testament, and have just finished the formal component of their fourth and final year of the DBT. WW also has a Zambian couple working in Tanzania, Reuben and Doreen Kabwe, who are Bemba mother-tongue speakers. After finishing the DBT, and gaining experience in translation, Reuben is now working as an exegete and project coordinator in several languages in Morogoro, Tanzania, and is currently registered in a B.Th. through SATS.

With years of training and practical experience, nationals can be fully equipped to continue the task of Bible translation not only in their own countries, but also in other parts of the world. With the practical experience that a mother-tongue translator gains from translating his or her own Bible, a growing academic competence gained through the DBT, and further studies through tertiary institutions like SATS, we hope to see a new wave of missionary Bible translators who will train mother-tongue speakers in their own as well as other countries to produce high-quality translations. One of the long-term goals of WW is to train nationals to become country directors and translation consultants.

### **Advantages of a field-based approach**

Offering the training on site, hiring and using local facilities, and bringing in lecturers from outside creates greater national awareness in Bible translation and helps to build a stronger relationship between the Bible agencies and the churches. It raises the profile of Bible translation and brings it closer to home. It gives the impression of importing expertise into the country, rather than giving the impression that one needs to go abroad to get a good education. Each year in Tanzania we have an Open Day, where invited local church leaders attend lectures and meet the students and lecturers, in order to inspire these leaders to support the work of Bible translation in a more informed way.

It is far cheaper to offer training locally, and thus more students can attend the annual training. Churches must participate in helping to fund transport costs of the students to and from the venue. So far, WW has been able to fund the costs of tuition, accommodation, and study materials, etc. for the students who continue to receive this full-study bursary, if they fulfill the in-class examinations and course work assignments of each year.

Flexibility exists within the training program, in that the four-week contact modules are offered in various hired facilities, and thus can move to where the needs are the greatest. This means that the program is not bound to a physical locality with high costs of building maintenance etc., but can move from country to country as needed, or to various locations within a country where the concentration of prospective translators is the greatest.

Training can also be offered at different levels simultaneously. In Tanzania we are currently running four levels all at the same time. This is possible due to the modular nature of the curriculum. In most subjects, the sequence in which the modules are offered are not that important, so students

from the various years of study can all be lectured together in subjects they have not yet done. We have managed to have two classrooms operating simultaneously in Tanzania. We have offered the ICTP for the last three years, as there is an ongoing need to train people at the first-year level, as many projects are starting each year in Tanzania. SIL and Bible Society of Tanzania (BST) are sending us first-year students each year, most of which only receive the ICTP three-week course in Tanzania, but many SIL students in Ethiopia are continuing with the DBT.

Although the training is organized by in-country WW personnel, the lecturers who have been involved in the training have been WW personnel from the host country and from other countries, as well as from other organizations such as PBT, SIL and various Bible colleges. Because of the modular nature of the course, we can attract experts in various fields to give of their time, on a part-time and voluntary basis. They come for a two-to-four week period, teach students representing up to 27 language groups at one time, and then are given the task of marking assignments which the students hand in during the course of the year. We are therefore able to get experts in various fields on a short-term basis who give high-quality training. These lecturers are often Bible translation consultants able to do some consultation work for a week or two before or after the four-week training program.

### Case studies in Ethiopia and Tanzania

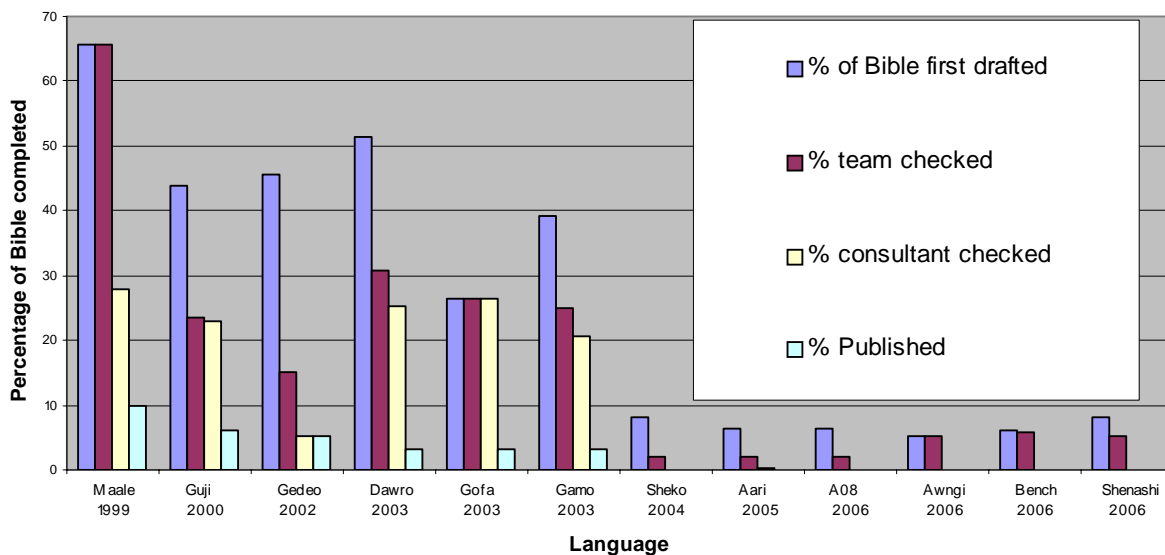
#### Ethiopia

Our training program in Ethiopia was started in 1998. In the first intake of students, the enrolment number was 32, from 13 different languages, and 23 of them graduated in 2003 (four students were from SIL.) Currently 13 of those 23 graduates are involved in different translation projects and six of them are enrolled in SATS for Masters Degrees in Bible Translation.

For the second intake in 2005, the number of students enrolled was 50, from 26 different languages (21 of these students are from SIL). All of them are still attending the class and are now in their third year. From these current students, 34 are currently involved in different translation projects, others are waiting for projects to start in their respective languages and some are reviewers.

The result of our training program in Ethiopia has been the start and continuation of the following projects:

**Status of Bible Translation projects in Ethiopia 2007**



A unique outcome of the holistic field-based approach in Ethiopia is that WW was able to hand over our work fully to nationals in 2006, ten years after we started work there. We have Ethiopian nationals as Director of WW (Ethiopia), Director of Training and Director of Projects in Ethiopia. This was achieved through our program of on-the-job training of nationals in translation, exegetical checking, leadership and management of translation projects, administration of projects, and financial management and fund-raising. Consultants and the former director of Ethiopia, Kobus van Aswegen (now WW's Director for North Africa and India), regularly visit the field to assist the nationals.

## Tanzania

In Tanzania, WW is partnering with PBT in the Morogoro region and in the Southeast of Tanzania. Our first enrolment in the DBT in Morogoro was in 2004. There was an intake of 38 students, from 22 different languages, 17 of which are currently involved in Bible translation projects, and are now in the fourth and final year of study for the DBT.

In 2005 we had a joint training program with SIL and BST, with lecturers from WW, United Bible Society (UBS), SIL and PBT. This was the result of a Forum of Bible Agencies (FOBA) Tanzania meeting in 2004 where it was decided that a full three-week ICTP training program based on Barnwell's book needed to be started in Tanzania. It made sense to teach the ICTP in Tanzania as there are over 100 languages in Tanzania still without any scripture. Formally Tanzanian translators were sent to the English-only ICTP, which was offered in Ruiru, Kenya, but many of them struggled in the program as they were not proficient enough in English. It was decided to offer the ICTP training in English, with Swahili interpretation, and to provide the Swahili version of Barnwell to those students who were not proficient enough in English, as the ICTP Barnwell book had already been translated into Swahili by SIL. A total number of 51 students attended this joint three-week ICTP course in August 2005 (19 from SIL, three from BST, two from PBT, and 27 from WW). The 27 WW students plus one student from SIL and two from PBT went on to complete the 4th week of the first-year level DBT contact module. A concurrent second-year level DBT program was offered where 28 WW students attended. Thus a total of 79 students from 33 different languages attended the 2005 training.

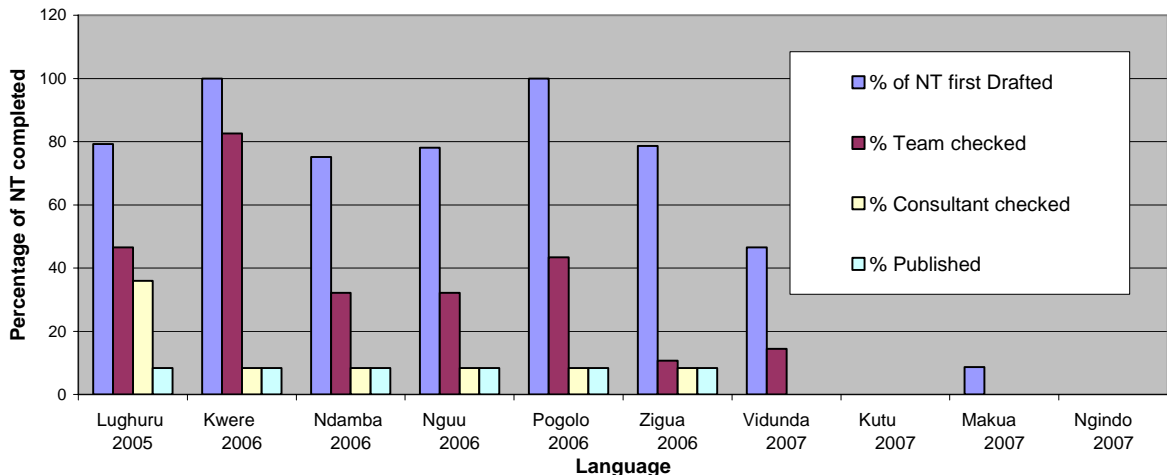
In 2006 another ICTP course with 26 students (13 from SIL, and one from PBT) was offered. There were also 18 students in the second-year level of the DBT (including one SIL, and one PBT student), and 18 in third-year level. Thus a total of 62 students representing 24 different languages were trained in 2006.

In 2007 25 students attended the ICTP (five from SIL; one from PBT and two from BST). There were 11 students in the second-year level of the DBT; 14 in third year level (including one SIL and one PBT student); and 17 in fourth-year level. Thus a total of 67 students representing 27 different languages attended the training in 2007.

In summary, since WW and PBT have been coordinating the joint FOBA/ICTP training program in Morogoro, a total of 98 students have gone through the three-week ICTP course in the last three years: 32 students from SIL; five from BST, 4 from PBT and 57 from WW. A total of 59 students are currently enrolled in the DBT (from first to fourth-year level), and 34 of these are engaged full-time in Bible translation projects. Others are reviewers, and several are prospective translators in projects we hope to start in the near future. Once the 17 fourth-year students have successfully completed their assignments they received in the four-week contact module this year, they will graduate with the DBT, hopefully by the middle of next year.

Currently we have two students from Tanzania enrolled at SATS, one in the B.A. theology program and one in the M.A. in Bible translation program. The direct result of this training program has been the start and continuation of the following WW/PBT projects in Tanzania:

### Status of Bible Translation Projects in Tanzania



Our goal in Tanzania is to hand over the work into the hands of nationals in June 2008, that is, less than 5 years after WW first started its work there.

### **Field-based and on-the-job**

In Tanzania and Ethiopia training on Paratext is done on a workshop basis, where several teams come together to learn about computers, the Paratext program, data entry and archiving. Each student has different skills and levels of expertise, and when they come together to learn, they share information and cross-pollinate ideas and skills. It saves a lot of time and money to train people together on the same tool, rather than to have repeated smaller training sessions. This is the advantage of the cluster approach to translation, where six projects were started at one time in Tanzania and five in Ethiopia in 2006. We were able to offer computer training on Paratext simultaneously to 18 translators in a one-week period.

We also have several exegetes involved in our projects who travel to the various project sites to help with exegetical work, reviewer training, church relationships etc.. Thus they are part of the on-the-job training arm. They help with further computer and Paratext training, and also in the use of handbooks and other tools to improve the quality of the translations. We see these exegetes as translation assistants who are being trained as future consultants themselves. Several of the students who have graduated with the DBT, are or will be either doing B.A. degrees in theology through SATS, with a view to doing the Masters in BT, and also several are registered in the M.A. program itself. Not only are these being trained as future consultants, they are increasingly being encouraged to teach in the four-week formal component when they have reached adequate competency.

We have also done joint consultation sessions with a WW translation consultant on the Gospel of Mark, with six languages participating simultaneously in Tanzania. Dr Funnell, a recognised WW consultant and the author of this paper, along with Rhoda Chamshama and Reuben Kabwe, who are exegetes on these 6 projects, spent every session together with the WW consultant, Rev Du Toit van der Merwe, working together to check all six translations simultaneously. We projected the six different languages onto the wall using the Paratext program with a video projector, so we could all view them simultaneously. Each project had a turn to read two chapters of their translation of Mark, with a back translation, to keep them all engaged.

Each project had a computer to make the necessary changes that were suggested by the consultant, and they also each had a hard copy of Mark to make notes of the changes, which were suggested. We didn't skip over a single verse, but had a back translation given of every verse in Mark's Gospel. It took ten full eight-hour days of work. The end result was that we were able to have all six Gospels of Mark printed a few months later. We were all learning together through the process in a very interactive classroom-type situation; exegetes, consultants and translators were learning from each other to improve the quality of the translation work. This was the first consultation experience for five of the six teams, as the Lughuru project had already had consultancy done on the Gospel of Luke by a UBS consultant. The translators were able to see what the requirements and standards are for their translations to be of the highest quality. The exegetes, who are now preparing Luke for the next group consultation at the end of this year, have reported that the quality of work is greatly improved because of this training/consultant session they had on Mark.

Training of consultants or translation advisors (also called project coordinators or exegetes) is an ongoing focus of the consultants in WW. When they do consultancy on a project, they spend several hours training the exegetes and translation advisors, both academically and practically to improve their quality of work.

### **Conclusion**

"You train for the sake of training!!" was a criticism leveled at WW by a prominent leader in a Bible-translation organization several years ago, but a brief case study on the success of our approach in Tanzania and Ethiopia, as well as some statistics on who we have trained and who is now involved with projects has proved this statement untrue. We have been very purposeful in our training program, and our main aim has been to empower nationals, as we see they are the only possible means through which God can fulfill the Great Commission of making disciples of people from every nation, who do... "not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Mat 4.4)

We, as Bible translation organizations, need to continuously re-think the methods used and the availability of our training programs in Africa (where the current need is one of the greatest) and elsewhere in the world. This is especially relevant in light of the proposed alliance goals of the *Translation Development Group* of the Forum of Bible Agencies International. These goals include the following target dates:

- Initiation of a training and translation program in every language group with a definite need for Bible translation in the world by 2025.
- Completing the NT in every language group of over 100,00 speakers by 2030.
- Having the complete Bible available in all languages by 2050.

The approach of WW is to combine practical and academic training of mother-tongue speakers. We believe following this approach will enable Bible translation agencies that work in close cooperation to achieve these goals by God's grace.