TRANSLATION PROGRESS IN NIGERIA

Posted on July 19, 2009 by Sue

Category: Minority Language Translation



One of the exciting things about my job is that I regularly get to go to different countries and work with people from various nationalities and cultures, all with the aim of equipping people to translate the Bible into their own language.Â Ten days ago I arrived back from a trip to Nigeria, where I was at a translation checking workshop in the northern city of Jos.Â It was attended by 15 different translation teams, all at different stages in the work: some are just starting out and so are learning what it means to understand a Bible passage and then express the meaning in their own language for the first time! Some also have not finalised how their language is to be written and so need input and advice on orthography issues. Other teams have already completed the New Testament and are now working on Old Testament books.Â In a country with 508 languages, it was really encouraging to see so much Bible translation in progress, and also know that there were other teams who would have liked to be there, but 15 translation teams and their consultants was already a rather big group!

The aim of the workshop was two-fold: for the consultants to help the teams check the accuracy of their translation,Â and at the same time to give an opportunity for trainee consultants (both Nigerian and expat) to gain experience in checking, working alongside more experienced consutants (both Nigerian and expat). It was great to see a number of experienced Nigerian translators, having worked on the New Testament in their own language, now going on to work as consultants with other teams. But the learning process is never one way - those of us who have worked on translation in other countries have knowledge and experience to share, but at the same time have a lot to learn about Nigeria and its hundreds ofÂ languages!



One of the challenges, but also one of the rewarding aspects of being involved in Bible translation is that it takes a whole team of people - each playing their part and making a unique contribution. The amazing thing about being part of the body of Christ is that God wants to use and develop the gifts of each member of the body, as they all work together, respecting each other's gifts and learning from one another. It's never just a question of getting the job of translation done: the way we do it is just as important.Â If the way we work together as a team doesn't honour God, those outside the church are certainly not going to be drawn to hear God's word. To paraphrase St Paul: 'If I could translate into all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.'

I've definitely learned a lot from my visit to Nigeria, working alongside Africans and other expats. It really is a privilege to be a part of what God is doing there, and to be in a country where the church is growing so rapidly. But I am also aware that there is so much more work to be done, and many more consultants and workshops needed to support the existing translation teams and to train more translators to work in languages which still don't have the Scriptures.