TEAM WORK IN MADAGASCAR

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A couple of days ago I got back from Southern Madagascar where I spent two weeks working with a translation team helping them check their translation of Luke's Gospel for accuracy so that it can be made ready for publication in the next few months. We certainly had our work cut out in order to reach the end of Luke, resolving all the issues that came up along the way, but with God's help and by working long days we made it, finishing around 6.30 pm on Saturday evening!



People often ask how I can check a translation when I don't speak the language, so I think it's helpful if I say something about the translation process. First of all, one of the translators studies the passage in the original language, also taking a look at different versions in Malagasy and French, to get an overall understanding of the passage in its context. S/he will look up any specific exegetical problems in commentaries and translation helps before making a first draft translation in the language. This first draft will then go to the rest of the team for their comments and suggestions. When the team are agreed on the amended draft, the translated text will then be tested in the community to see what people understand. Of course the translators are already familiar with the Biblical text and know what they intended the translation to mean, but reading the text aloud to members of the language community and asking what they have understood can help reveal expressions which are not clear to the hearer, as well as any unintended ambiguities. It is also an opportunity for people to offer suggestions of words or phrases which may improve the translation.Â When any changes have been incorporated into the text it is then translated word for word into French so that the translation consultant (in this case, me) can see how it has been translated and can ask questions of the translators based on that.

So we went through Luke, reading section by section. I raised questions when I thought the translation was missing some element of meaning from the original text, and the team made suggestions for improvements. At times it was frustrating with 10 people sitting around the table, each wanting to have their say! But there are definite advantages to working with a broad teamÂ - the resultant synergy means that we ended up with a much better translation than any one or two members of the team could have produced on their own.Â Sometimes I would suggest a way of restructuring a verse to make it clearer, one of the translators would come up with a different option and we would finally settle on a third expression which was even better! Yet there was more than synergy at work among the team - we had been specifically asking God's Spirit to help us make his Word clear, and our prayers were certainly answered!

It was a very busy time and I came home exhausted - it was getting towards the hottest time of year in Toliara -Â and I'm sure the rest of the team returned to their regular duties fairly tired too. There were definitely some lighter moments when we enjoyed a joke or teasing one another. Yet it was also a special time of being challenged and amazed by God's word once again as we worked together on finalising the text. What a privilege to be involved in Bible translation!