WHAT DOES A BIBLE TRANSLATION TEAM LOOK LIKE?

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Category: Minority Language Translation

If you read the introduction to an major English translation of the Bible, you will get a picture of the team that worked to produce it. In all likelihood, the team will be large and it will certainly be liberally spread with famous names, Doctors, Professors and even Distinguished Professors (whatever they are). Translation teams are panels of experts, academics and researchers with with years of experience behind them. If they are working in English that is...

In minority languages around the world translation teams look very different. Few of the names are famous and the team will be doing well if it has someone qualified to Master's level to oversee the academic side of things. Pastors, school teachers and farmers take time away from their work to sit down and to wrestle with the text of Scripture, searching for the best way to express it in their language. The occasional workshop or consultant visit gives them the opportunity for outside input, to compare what they are doing with translators in related languages.

In some places, translation teams are invisible. The prevailing religious or political culture means that they can never talk openly about what they are doing. Even their families may not know what they are doing. As if dealing with Greek verbs wasn't bad enough, they do their work in the shadow of the late night knock on the door from the authorities.

The translations done by minority language teams are not as highly polished and refined as those done by the high-powered teams working in English. How could they be? They don't have the resources. But they produce the best translations they can in the language. In fact, they probably produce the *only* translation that will ever be produced in the language. While there is no shortage of money to gather together a bunch of high-flying academics to produce yet more translations in English, resources for minority Bible translation are limited.

I will be forever grateful to the teams who pulled together the NIV, the NLT, the ESV and what-have you, but I stand in awe of the small groups of believers across the world, who at great personal cost are working to make the Bible available to their own people in their own language.