One, two, three......26 years of patiently waiting for the New Testament

Count with me 1, 2, 3 ... 26 years. Yes, 26 years is what it has taken Marakwet community to finally hold the New Testament in their hands. In what has been an eventful long journey to translate God’s Word into a language they best understand, today, they consider that a past. They are eagerly reaching for copies. 1, 151 bibles have already been sold among this community of at least 100,000 people. Please pray with us as we believe God for a total transformation of this community.

The Dedication ceremony:
The day began with lots of music, dance and a feast. Celebrations were in order after a long wait.

Coinciding with the International Day for mother language proclaimed by UNESCO to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism, February 21st, 2009 will remain a memorable day. Having taken almost a month to prepare for this occasion, Tot Primary School was a beehive of activities. Women adorned in beautiful traditional regalia, old men, young boys and girls, all gathered to witness this historic event. Some came from the valley, many walked down the mountains. Great was the day that not only did they have their neighbors the Pokoots join them, but also many partners, church leaders, political leaders, friends and Bible Translation and Literacy staff and board members.

This is the doing of the Lord and we can only say “it is marvelous in our sight.”

The Guest of honor, Hon Samuel Poghisio, highlighted that spiritual transformation is the best change.
CALL OF KENYA

It works from within and ultimately transforms everything around. He noted that this New Testament should
transform Marakwet people totally. He urged church leaders to turn all churches in the region into learning
centres in an effort to promote literacy. He further called on the church to work together with the government to
effect development in the region. Hon Linah Jebi Kilimo, the area MP also graced the occasion.

The presiding Bishop, Cornelius Korir who was assisted by Bishop Patrice Chumba, AIC and Bishop Kewasis, ACK
demonstrated religious unity as they sat and dedicated the New Testament together.
This is the doing of the Lord and we can only say– it is marvelous in our sight.

Tracing the history of Marakwet New Testament
A first person recount by one of the pioneers, Mr. Edwin Kiptinness of Marakwet Bible Translation.

I remember that day in August 1962 very well. Never again had I ever felt such excruciating pain. Up the hills
in Tot on a rainy day, I had ended up with a broken leg. Life was never the same for me. With limited movement,
I needed to do something as I recovered. I finally settled down to read through the Bible available in my language
Group. It was a Nandi translation.
I enjoyed the Old Testament stories. Some were so captivating. The Red Sea parting still remains a mystery
to me. Then, I got to the Book of Isaiah and stopped for a while. In the first chapter of Isaiah, I noticed a big
discrepancy. My mother tongue-Endo could not identify with figurative image painted by colours in verse 18. For
some time; I could not get this out of my mind.

“Languages are different”, I thought. Details like colours could bring so much difference in meaning.

Trying to push this aside, I read on until I got to the Book of Corinthians. I had to stop again. The Nandi translation
for ‘foundation’ was ‘Lumeiyot’. This word Lumeiyot in my language means ‘hearing’. “No, something has to be
done! My people should read what they best understand.”

Having begun the journey of reading God’s Word, I was determined to finish. After all, I could not join my fellow
young men in the village escapades before my leg healed. As I read, my life changed. I accepted the Lord as
my savior.

This incident left a mark in my life. Long after my leg healed, translation of scriptures remained a soft spot in
my heart such that when I was asked to become a pastor, my answer was an emphatic no. Instead, I signed
up as a member with the Bible Society of Kenya.
As events would turn out, a linguistic study of my language was conducted in the 1970s. At about the same
time, having settled and began to live in the capital city of Kenya, together with a few Endo-speaking friends, we
began what we dubbed as “Let us go back to Jerusalem”. This was an attempt to re-focus on our rural villages in
Tot.

Bible translation featured often in our discussions. You can tell what a joy it was when in 1983 a Bible
translation project was launched by Bible Translation and Literacy, an organization whose mission still remains to
reach the unreached with God’s word in their language.

I supported the process all through whenever an opportunity presented itself. Some material like land, in other incidences just
assuring the project peoples that yes we could go on amidst many struggles.

Counting twenty six years later, today, as I hold the Marakwet New Testament and look back, I can only thank God. Thus far,
He has brought us.

Thank the Lord with me and all the Marakwet speaking people.

Bishop Kewasis, Bishop Korir and Bishop Chumba
CALL OF KENYA

All this newness of life is from God, who brought us back to himself through what Christ did. And God has given us the task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others.
(2 Cor. 5:18–19 NLT)

From the General Secretary’s desk

No New Testament dedication resembles another. Each is uniquely fresh. Dedication ceremonies usually follow a set programme — music by choirs, speeches and prayers of dedication. That is where the similarities end. The dances are unique to each community, each celebrating in its own style. The message too is unique. Such was the case at the dedication and launching of the Marakwet New Testament in February this year. The Marakwet translation project took about 26 years to complete. During this time the project weathered many challenges, ranging from insecurity, personnel, financial and writing a difficult and complex language.

Top in the list of challenges was the security situation between the Marakwet and their neighbouring communities. For more than ten years, many Marakwet people were forced to stay away from their homes and farms due to constant attacks by their neighbours. Concerned for their lives, BTL relocated its translators from the area.

The unwritten theme at the dedication was “reconciliation”. Many of us were in tears as we watched the Marakwet and Pokot choirs dance side by side. People previously considered enemies were now dancing together to receive God’s Word. The Chief Guest, Hon. Samuel Poghisco himself a Pokot and Marakwet MPs Hon. Jebi Kilimo and Hon. Boaz Kaino joined in the dance. Church denominations previously at loggerheads were reconciled. The Word of God truly being the unifying factor. After labouring for 26 years, God chose not only to reveal himself to his people but also to reconcile them. God chose the time and place when His Word would come to His people. Looking at the beauty of the different churches gathered at the dedication ceremony, only He could take the Glory for such a gathering.

The completion of the translation was in God’s timing and it is now an icon of peace and hope in a community where peace has not been known for such a long time. Our country and world are in need of reconciliation too. Let us allow God’s Word into our heart so that we may be reconciled one to another.

In talking about God’s Word to the children of Israel, Moses said, “...the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.”
Deuteronomy 30:14

Mundara Muturi

Field updates

• Aweer: A bush fire for literacy
Buy a lamp for us!
We want a kerosene lamp for the evening classes! This has been the forthright request by adults in Basuba village, Kiunga Division in Lamu who want to know how to read and write in Af Aweera. Others have opted to learn when it is still daylight due to their failing eyesight. The demand for literacy is so high that the volunteer literacy worker can hardly keep up with the pace. Fifty adults have already registered in Basuba village which has around four hundred adults.
Pandaguo and Jima villages in Witu Division also have a remarkable class of sixty five persons all eager to learn.

• Suba New Testament is coming soon
Bible translation is one sure way by which the Word, which was with God and was God can dwell among a people in darkness. Being the light and life for all men, Translated Scripture is life itself. In order to have it and put it into the hands of native speakers is a special gift. But the process takes time, for the Suba people 17 years to complete the New Testament in Trial Version.

Transforming lives through God’s Word
Bible Translation & Literacy (EA)
We give praise to God who is the way and has led the way till now. We thank the believers, Calvary Church and the seed Company for their sacrificial love, support and prayers through the journey. Since we are not there yet, all of us must not blink an eye but press on until the New Testament is dedicated, God willing in 2010.

Naphthaly Mattah, Suba Project

Open day highlights:
YES, our mother languages can
YES, we can theologize in African languages! This was the re-sounding message during this year’s Open Day. This was the 27th edition of this day since BTL began its operations in Kenya. The guest speaker, Dr. Timothy Wachira, the Vice Chancellor of St. Paul’s University bore an emphatic yes, that indeed African languages are effective vencies of carrying theological enquiry. In his words, people can only sufficiently understand God if that God is explained in a language they understand best. He challenged us to develop a new thinking in African languages which will yield African renderings of who Yahweh is.

Looking back, BTL’s Patron Rev. Professor Watson Omulokoli, a lecturer at Kenyatta University noted that more than ever before, in the prevailing circumstances, people needed to know God, making Bible Translation crucial. In the fiscal year 2007/8, BTL devoted 75% of its funds to this need and the remainder to literacy.

While at it, he pointed that literacy was equally important. Drawing from 2007 national statistics on adult illiteracy, he moaned the quoted figure of seven (7) million in the country was a total shame. A shame that Kenyan churches needed to address. Justifying his statement, he said “I say the church here because historically, the missionary movement has been committed to literacy and education. Most leading schools in Kenya were started by the church.”

He appealed to churches to consider equipping and sending teachers for literacy and education partners and supporters specifically to marginalized communities in Kenya.

RUN FOR THE BIBLELESS
Today, seven small language communities Sabaot, Duruma, Tharaka, Girgama, Pokomo, Digo and Marakwet are no longer Bibleless as it was years before.

They have God’s Word in their language!!!

You can be part of this initiative of placing God’s words in the hands of Bibleless communities.

Come have fun and exercise for a noble cause.

CALL OF KENYA
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CALL OF KENYA, a quarterly publication of Bible Translation and Literacy. East Africa. It seeks to encourage the involvement of the Christian public in the vital ministry of getting God’s WORD to the smaller language groups of Kenya.

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