

IT IS YOURS – A GIFT TO CHANGE LIVES

by Sandi Roach

There is an old saying that has come into play in my life over the past year, “Necessity is the mother of invention.” I serve in Africa, one of the neediest places on earth, and for the most part I find that there are constant needs that can never be fully met by human means. Finances are only a small part of the solution, and when those finances are no longer available, where does that leave projects and programs that have been started? This is a problem that I have faced, and one where I have failed to effectively create church ownership. Globally, our organization has initiated of over 1,000 new programs, but ongoing funding to complete those projects and the ability to offer new programs is becoming a genuine concern.

I could see the handwriting on the wall a little over a year ago, and when asked “what’s next” made no promises about the future. Secretly I feared some of those programs would never reach completion, which pushed me into thinking outside the box. God has taken me step-by-step on a journey to meet this challenge.

Having served globally with different organizations for the past 20 years, I have learned that I will never be a local, no matter how long I stay in a country. Although I may be respected, there is always the danger that the people will desire the things of the West and not recognize the uniqueness and beauty of the culture God has given them. Western involvement often comes with an assumption of ongoing finances and programs that benefit the Westerners. In the case of Bible translation, which is the area that I currently serve in, our organization promotes ownership by the church for each project. Realistically, how does this happen?

About two years ago, God led me to establish a leadership training program to take the basic instruction out of the hands of foreigners and put the training into the hands of the nationals, the native people. It was a multi-phased program to develop people at different levels that were needed to host events. This was a start, and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo there is now a team of four key leaders and 10 trained facilitators to carry out the work. As methodologies improve, I have returned and presented updated information to the group to better equip them and keep them on track with how things are being done elsewhere in the world. This, however, hasn’t stopped emails and messages coming in from those who have ongoing projects to see when the US will sponsor more events. Somewhere along the line, there was a gap in who owns the projects. The ownership needed to be with the church from the outset, but how could a foreigner present this?

After several months of prayer and deliberation, I felt that the Lord led me to a new approach of presenting the translation methodology to pastors only, and not begin the work with translators. The result was a training event rather than a translation workshop.

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The curriculum consists of 58.5 hours of instruction on numerous topics to give a group of pastors from different denominations the ability to “own” the translation of their language. This training was first presented to the national leadership team that I mentioned above so that after the pilot program they would be able to do all the instruction and there would be virtually no foreign involvement. This was a trust issue on my part, but after two years of developing the leadership team, I felt confident, that with prayer, they would succeed.

The pilot program ran in June of 2018, with four pastors from different denominations from each of three new languages. They received instruction on building a network of engaged churches, evaluating and recruiting translators, problem solving locations for optimum output, housing, meals, translation Sundays, funding and supplies. They were also introduced to several educational theories that were behind the methodology and were tasked with setting goals, planning for six months, and reporting their progress. They did practice teaching, dramatized how to approach churches that were “cold contacts” as well as created rubrics to evaluate the translations that were produced. Each pastor was given two chapters to translate during their time at the training session so that they could relate the challenges to the translators they would be recruiting as well as firmly establish the methodology in a practical way. The surprise to me was that all the pastors desired to continue as translators while they were building their translation units. At the end of the program, each pastor completed a debrief. All reported that they felt that they were well equipped to carry on the work with the support of the national leadership team. They knew it was their work and that they were responsible for all aspects of its success and relevance to their communities. God had done a miracle! This work is scheduled to be replicated for the hundreds of remaining languages of DRC and potentially in other areas of Africa. To God be the glory! The gift has been received, opened and is now being used.