

Translation update: cluster projects

Vision 2025 requires “. . . an attitude that says we are ready to be servants of Him. . . we are ready to change in whatever way He wants us to change . . . so nations will have the Word sooner than later. . .”. Quoting John Watters from a 2000 issue of SIL’s Intercom newsletter, Wycliffe missionary Steven Whitacre described the essence how to accomplish Vision 2025.

Understanding that Vision 2025 requires new thinking and creativity, translation teams developed cluster projects – new initiatives built on partnership, vision building and training. Cluster projects are not “cookie-cutter type” approaches, he said; rather, they serve as guides for new translation projects.

Partnerships are the key to building cluster projects. This includes partnering with local churches – which see the benefit of people having God’s Word in their heart language– and organizations wanting to see Bible translation occur. Part of establishing partnerships revolves around vision building, especially important for churches that don’t see the value of Bible translation. Vision building increases awareness, encouraging them to join the mission.

One church leader in Mozambique, after learning of the cluster projects, said to Whitacre, “You [missionaries] want to do this for us, but it is us who should want this. We’re going to take it from here.” And another partnership for the cluster project came into effect.

As cluster projects can contain five, 10 or 20 language groups partnering with only one Wycliffe missionary, training is essential. Many workshops, both traditional and cluster (in which all involved language groups participate together), teach mother-tongue translators through an array of methods. These workshops can last one to six weeks, and the participants evolve together as they learn how their languages work.

During one such workshop, Whitacre remarked to a Makonde speaker, “The verbs in Makonde are really complex.” The native speaker, who had studied Portuguese, replied, “I didn’t know Makonde had verbs.”

Workshops benefit native translators because they provide encouragement. When they all struggle together, they realize it’s normal, which helps them continue forward, rather than succumbing to discouragement.

“One of the most exciting things is to see the light come on for these groups of people,” said Whitacre, who works with the Makonde language group in Mozambique, Africa.

While cluster projects are not applicable in all situations, they are vital to help accelerate the pace of bringing God’s Word to every tribe, tongue and nation.

Update on the Mbeya cluster project

When 30 church leaders representing nine languages requested Bible translation assistance, the Uganda-Tanzania branch stepped up to help. Using a workshop-style approach, the branch trained 50 mother-tongue translators in seven workshops.

Through this cluster approach, compiling workshops produced 10,000 words in 10 languages (another language joined the cluster project; it already had a Bible translation, but wanted a dictionary and new alphabet). Phonology workshops produced ten alphabets, and grammar workshops produced a reference grammar in all 10 languages.

And, praise God, all nine languages without the Bible were able to translate the first two chapters of Ruth through an introductory course in translation principles. *Information on the Mbeya project gathered from Wycliffe’s April 2005 “The Intercessor”*

