

CENTRAL AFRICAN ASSOCIATION FOR BIBLE TRANSLATION AND LITERACY
Association Centrafricaine pour la Traduction de la Bible et l'Alphabetisation-ACATBA
Report #C08

SURVEY

Our survey showed that many Christians in the Central African Republic identified ACATBA as a Christian organization with significant impact. It was number 12 on this list in terms of the frequency listed.

ABSTRACT

ACATBA is a country-specific organization in the CAR supported by many local denominations and formally affiliated with Wycliffe Bible Translators, which for two decades has worked to support Bible translation and community development through literacy in a wide variety of local languages.

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

ACATBA was founded on 18th September 1993 after a Constitutive Assembly that gathered together about 14 evangelical denominations in CAR. The initiative came from the first director of SIL in CAR, Mr. Paul MEIER who gathered some leaders of Protestant and evangelical churches. These different denominations saw the necessity of evangelism and discipleship using the Word of God translated in local languages (mother languages) of people in CAR. CAR has two national languages, Sango and French, but some people are not fluent either in French or Sango. ACATBA is a member of Wycliffe International for Bible Translation. Besides that, ACATBA also promotes literacy to help people to read the translated Word of God in their own languages.

Wycliffe is a Christian organization based in the USA that was created in 1933-1934. Mr. William Cameron Townsend is the founder of this organization. He received from the Lord a special vision to translate the Scriptures into the language of people seen as a minority in the Society. While earlier Bible societies (such as the American Bible Society) created in the 19th century, focused on linguistic groups that have more than 100,000 persons, Townsend's interest was towards groups with fewer speakers who were obliged to read the Scriptures through other languages instead of their own. Townsend considered this an obstacle for the proclamation of the Gospel according to the Great Commission in Matthew 28. He invested his life for the translation of the Bible for these languages considered "small" because our Lord Jesus Christ has a particular interest for those perceived as "little ones" (Matthew 10:42). According to his vision, Townsend started his ministry in Mexico. He trained people who were able to translate the Word of God in minority languages. The ministry expanded until it reached Africa where the soil was fertile for such ministry when one looks at thousands of languages spoken in Africa.

At the end of the consultation, a board was appointed as well as the director, the secretary, and the treasurer of the newly formed organization. Later the organization received the legal authorization from the Central African government as a Christian Association on 16 May 1994.

Only later on, 15th January 2003 was ACATBA recognized as a Non Profit Organization (NGO) by the ministry of home affairs under the decree N° 139/MI.MDI.CAB.SG.DGAT.DAPA.SAP.

MISSION/VISION

The mission/vision of ACATBA is to promote the translation of the Scriptures in local/mother languages and literacy. The aim is to help Christians in CAR to grow spiritually, physically and socially for the glory of God. Thus, ACATBA is working in partnership with churches, helping them to fulfill the Great Commission through Bible Translation, Literacy and Community Development. The Literacy program helps people beyond the reading of the Scripture. ACATBA believes that only by reading the Bible in the language that is familiar to them that people may apply the Word of God in their lives and then grow spiritually and materially.

ACATBA is a nationwide organization targeting men, women, and children. The mission of ACATBA is Bible Translation, Literacy and Helping the utilization of the mother languages in reading the Bible. In CAR, there are many illiterate people. ACATBA impact is great in this area, helping people to read the Bible, but also to read any other documents in their languages.

ORGANIZATION & BOARD STRUCTURE & LEADERSHIP

According to the statutes, ACATBA has three different bodies:

1. The General Assembly made of full members, affiliated members and honorable members (denominations, individuals, local and regional committees).
2. The Board: is made of 9 members elected by the General Assembly for three years. It is the organ of conception and decision under the responsibility of the General Assembly. To be a member of the Board, a person must: be a Christian from one of the evangelical denominations, have a clear vision for the Bible Translation in local/mother languages, have an interest in literacy and Community Development. He must be a member of ACATBA for at least two years. A Christian testimony, as well as a recommendation from the local church, is very important. A denomination cannot send two members at the same time in the Board. Each member of the board signs the Statement of Faith as prescribed bylaws.
3. The Direction: it is the executive organ of the decision made by the General Assembly. It oversees the spiritual condition of the organization and the staff, follows the implementation of different programs, and represents ACATBA to outsiders.

IMPACT/SUCCESS/ASSESSMENT

The specific impact of ACATBA is to develop the oral language into a written one. In CAR, many languages are spoken but not written. ACATBA with its expertise contributes to creating the alphabet and finally to make the oral language become written. Although the aim is first for the spreading of the Gospel, a written language contributes to the culture in general and prevents the extinction of certain minor languages. When a language becomes written, ACATBA partners with the United Bible Society for the printing and diffusion of the Bible in local languages.

ACATBA helped Campus Crusade to translate the Jesus film in local languages. ACATBA in partnership with SIL conducts linguistic research.

ACATBA favored the unity of the Church in CAR. The board of ACATBA, for example, is made of people from different denominations. They find a place where they come to know each other and work together in spite of their doctrinal differences sometimes. The General Assembly also is a place where denominations and other Christian organizations meet each other, know each other, and can partner beyond the ACATBA mission.

Those working with ACATBA are testifying how the ministry has transformed their lives. Pygmies who are treated as slaves, and the least among all, are able to preach the Word because of the ministry of ACATBA in their villages. Their language, *Aka* is in the process of becoming a written language. Some portions of the Scriptures have been translated into *Aka*, including the Gospel of Luke.

ACATBA has translated the Gospel of Luke into eight local languages (Beka, Gbaya, Gbeya, Ngbubu, Kaba, etc.). 20 Pygmies leaders have been trained, 312 Pygmies attended the literacy training. 2097 persons attended the literacy program among Gbaya people with about 120 classes. The New Testament in Gbaya was dedicated in 2006.

BOARD & STAFF RECRUITMENT & SELECTION

Directors and departments are responsible for recruiting new staff. Candidates are selected according to their spiritual maturity and their professional capacity. There is a special committee in charge of recruitment. The first step is the identification of the need (position), elaboration of the job description, and the profile of the future candidate. The second step is the publication of the job offer that specified the conditions for the position. Finally, potential candidates are selected for an interview by a panel of people from ACATBA to make sure that what is written in the file corresponds to the profile of the candidate. ACATBA requires a recommendation from the local church. Those who are working with ACATBA agree to work under pressure and hard conditions because of the situation in some villages.

FINANCES AND RESOURCES

ACATBA financial resources come from:

1. Membership contributions
2. Gifts and legacy from friends of ACATBA
3. Subsidies from national and international organizations with the same vision and mission.
4. Central African Government through tax exemptions and land acquisition.
5. Any activity that complies with the law that governs NGO in CAR.

PARTNERSHIP

ACATBA works in partnership with international organizations like Wycliffe International and the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). These two organizations bring their expertise (documents, equipment, etc.). Locally, ACATBA collaborates with missionary organizations,

evangelical and Protestant denominations, the United Bible Society, Campus Crusade, Scripture Union, Emmaus Biblical Courses, and the Central African Government.

ACATBA maintains a special partnership with Wycliffe International to which it has belonged as a member since 2006.

STAKEHOLDERS

Internationally ACATBA has partners in USA, England, Switzerland, Netherlands, etc. They support ACATBA spiritually with their prayers, according to their resources, they provide financial, human resources. The financial support is mainly directed towards translation program (50-70%). They also send experts in translation or linguistics to help ACATBA local team working in translation program. But because of the current crisis in CAR, expatriates are gone. Some of them are teaching Translation courses at Bangui Evangelical School of Theology in the Translation Program.

Being a National organization, ACATBA belongs to the churches and Christian organizations in CAR.

PRINTING AND ELECTRONIC MEDIA

ACATBA is printing portion of the Scriptures when the translation is completed. This is done in collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education and the National Institute of Linguistics. These two institutions adopt what ACATBA produces. The ACATBA contribution is also in the phonetics area. The internet is used in the office on a permanent basis. But up to now, the electronic media is not well used for the translation program in the village

SWOT: STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THREATS

Strengths

ACATBA's expertise is in Bible Translation, especially for those who are treated as a minority in the society in CAR. The literacy program has changed the lives of thousands in the country. Men and Women are now able to read the Bible in their own language, but also to read any other documents. They also can write. ACATBA is bringing change in community development. It is working with Pygmies, for example, those who are considered as the least of the society. Pygmies are able to read, to write, etc.

Weaknesses

The lack of resources (finances and equipment) prevents ACATBA to fulfill the vision/mission. Needs are there, but human and financial resources are very limited.

Opportunities

As a Christian organization, the opportunity for ACATBA is the freedom given by the government to minister anywhere in the country. The government appreciates what ACATBA is doing. As an NGO, ACATBA benefits from tax exemptions in certain cases. People from the minority languages are open to collaborating with ACATBA for the promotion of their language, sometimes on a voluntary basis.

Threats

CAR has about 60 tribal languages apart from the national language Sango. According to the statistics, the literacy rate in CAR is about 51%. The lack of security in the country in the last ten years has undermined the work of ACATBA. Some programs are interrupted because of unrest in the country and especially in the villages where people are working with the local population. The displacement of the population disrupts the continuity of literacy classes.

FUTURE

ACATBA has a strategic plan that was developed in 2009. It concerns mainly translation and literacy programs in local languages. Thus, ACATBA is training professional translators at the university level to achieve the goal. ACATBA provided training for translators who completed the translation of the Bible in their own languages.

The strategic plan will be revised soon. ACATBA pursues a holistic transformation of the community through the Word of God read in the local languages. Sociolinguistic researchers have identified about 40 groups that need the Scriptures in their own languages.

ACATBA also wants to empower the staff because the needs are increasing. Staff need to be prepared for the new challenges in the world that is changing rapidly. Those who are coming to ACATBA with a degree earned from school or university are not directly qualified. They need to be trained and introduced to the ethos of ACATBA.

To provide financial and human resources, ACATBA is now looking for the contribution of churches. The partnership with the government will be reinforced because the work of ACATBA is helping the population.

REPORT PREPARATION INFORMATION

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POST-CONFLICT INTERVIEW REPORT

08/12/15

Mr. Bertin Oundagnon, the current Director of ACATBA, reports that the conflict in Bangui has greatly affected the ministry of ACATBA. The organization's offices were looted, and the director and other employees were attacked. The loss of equipment, including motorbikes, impeded their ability to work. Translation programs had to be suspended, and some staff left the country during the conflict. Although the majority of the staff have returned now, they no longer travel regularly to villages, as they did in the past. Instead, ACATBA reorganized to bring most of their staff from occupied regions to Bangui.

During the crisis, ACATBA's communication with their external partners was limited, and they had to rely more heavily on local funding than usual.

Because of how closely ACATBA has worked with different groups throughout CAR for translation and ministry, they are now in a unique position to help victims of the violence. ACATBA has begun working with the Bayaas Pygmies to provide healthcare and humanitarian aid. This is one of the groups that the government did not help at all in the wake of the conflict.

The director believes that the primary reason the staff has remained motivated during the crisis is their dedication to their mission of salvation and discipleship for the people of Central African Republic. He says that the staff were very encouraged from phone calls of encouragement from their partners in other countries.

The director says that when he was forced to open the office and the safe for the Selekas, he believes that God gave him courage in that situation, and protected him from violence. He says that at that time he reminded God of his promise never to forsake Christians who take courage in God.

Going forward, ACATBA wants to pick up the ministry they have been doing with people groups throughout CAR, bringing them humanitarian aid now as well.