

JAARS SPEEDING THE WORD TRANSCRIPT

Speaker
Bill Mayes

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Interviewer
Arthur Lightbody

Primary Topic(s)
Information Technology, Internet Connection in Africa

Other Topics
Need for IT Help

Location Discussed
Africa

People Group (if named)
N/A

Announcer:

Welcome to *Speeding the Word*, coming to you from the JAARS Center in Waxhaw, North Carolina, where JAARS speeds Bible translation for all people. And now our host Arthur Lightbody.

Lightbody:

We are talking today with Wycliffe Bible translator, Bill Mayes. Now you have this title Africa Area Service Coordinator. Is that correct?

Mayes:

Yes, that is correct. I am working with linking Wycliffe and its organizations across Africa to support organizations like JAARS and Wycliffe Associates.

Lightbody:

And you are here at JAARS now. You recently made a trip to Africa. We'll hear about that a little bit later. When we talk about service, technology, transportation—what are these areas? Can you tell us about those?

Mayes:

In the area of [service] technology, it is getting networks, putting out power systems or maybe wireless systems; transportation is land, air, water—anything that is needed for the group out there. Vernacular media—that's putting things into the languages of the people so they can hear, see and experience them in their own language [mother tongue]. And logistics is the building of facilities and perhaps [including] emergency equipment, things like that.

Lightbody:

We talk about these things a lot at JAARS. What does coordinating these areas mean to you?

Mayes:

My specialty is Information Technology (IT). A lot of the things that the regional directors have asked me to focus on is IT technology. We are looking at the area of internet connectivity as perhaps the most important area of focus out of all those services mentioned.

Lightbody:

You just returned from Africa. On this trip you were surveying needs and seeing what kind of help could be used. Let's talk about something fairly basic to IT. I don't know all these things you talk about, but I use a computer. Do our Wycliffe folks and our national partners scattered across Africa [basically] have computers?

Mayes:

Yes they do. Our language workers use software that is designed to help them be effective. That's in a stand-alone mode or in small work groups. That software is available free for download on our Web site: www.sil.org. We also have/use fonts that are specialized for our work. And we have fonts that are specialized for our work. We have Web-based systems that work internally with our group globally. That is very helpful as well.

Lightbody:

How do they get on? When they are in those Western African countries are they on operating systems—can they click on the Internet? Can they get on SIL's Web sites, etc. and get help?

Mayes:

In certain areas they have very high-speed internet. But in a country like Guinea-Bissau the people have to drive 50 miles to get to the nearest Internet café, and then that café is hooked to satellite which is going to be a slower speed. They have very frustrating experiences using the Internet.

Lightbody:

I think you mentioned at a meeting the other day that there are great possibilities that one [their computer] will pick up a virus too.

Mayes:

That is right. I was at the Internet café computer for maybe half a minute before I saw my first virus message.

Lightbody:

What is your response to that situation? How do you help the workers, the Bible translators and local partners?

Mayes:

Unfortunately they don't have too many choices, but they have to be careful about some of the security risks of operating in/with that type of situation. You have to be worried about username and password—how that could be recorded and used by somebody else.

There are other security risks you have when you are keying information into a computer that is attached to an Internet café. We try to counsel our people, and we also say if you are able to get things from an Internet café, say using your own laptop, you should be sure to use virus software to clean up your computer.

Lightbody:

What are some of the answers today—to go over there and say we're going to help you get good Internet connectivity?

Mayes:

For many of them, they need funding to be able to support the higher cost of Internet. When we were in Nairobi, the price of Internet was 10 times what I would have to pay here in the U.S. Where is that money going to come from? Most people do not have that kind of money in their budgets. I've been working with the regional directors to establish a fund with JAARS—going out and raising funds to help support these people who are working in high-priced Internet regions.

Lightbody:

It is good to know, and it is good for our listeners to know for whatever missions they are interested in that there is a cost to doing these things. Now let's look at the [question] "Why do I need Internet?" What is the purpose of Internet for a Bible translator?

Mayes:

This could be a rather long answer, but I'll try to get to the most significant points: accessing some of the technical resources that are available. They might want to store some of their material on some of our Web sites. There are technical resources, like downloading the latest updates to the operating system. You might want to voice-chat with someone or type-chat with somebody. There are ways remote experts can attach to your computer and help you through a problem. Sometimes people just get stuck, and they need someone to help them.

Lightbody:

I have a friend working in Africa, and he can't be there all the time because of the

medical needs of his son. Through Internet technology he is able to work with his partner, who speaks the local language, and they are doing the translation together. He is sitting in his office in Dallas, and his friend is sitting in an office over in Africa. It is incredible.

While you were there, did you hear stories of some of the results of the Bible translation that is taking place?

Mayes:

Yes, I did. I was glad to see listening groups set up in areas where translation is taking place. Groups would be able to gather around for like a half hour and just ask questions about what they have heard in their own local language—it is kind of life changing. I asked people, “Do you think what you are doing is a good idea?” [And they replied,] “Absolutely—this is a significant program!”

Lightbody:

Bill, let’s go back to when you and your wife Dorie served in Kenya. Can you tell us how people appreciated what you were doing?

Mayes:

When we were in Nairobi we had very poor Internet access. It was a real frustration for us the whole time we were there, yet we were trying to work towards having some better service, and it just took a number of steps to get that to happen. But when it did, people were really quite pleased.

In February of this year they turned it on, [and] people were there for a prayer-of-dedication service. They were really pleased about that. The service really improved their access to Internet systems, which is critical for their work at the Kenya Bible Translation Center in Nairobi.

People have also expressed their appreciation also in Uganda. They saw the container come in, and they were wondering how all this would be put together. They told us, “It was just waiting for men like you to come and make our dream a reality. There are no better words to say thank you for your work, time and energy you put together to make our dream come true.”

They were really excited to see the fact they could communicate with their family [and] friends from faraway places.

Lightbody:

Bill, it was good to learn why connectivity is so important. Communications in the hard sense of the word—communicating with each other to get work done is so important.

Mayes:

If you are an IT professional, you should seriously consider coming over to Africa and taking up one of the roles there. I think it would change your life, and you would have a fantastic experience. We’ve got lots of openings in Africa.

Lightbody:

Thank you, Bill. This is Arthur Lightbody. I hope you enjoyed listening to today’s Speeding the Word program. To contact us, call 1-800-890-0628 and make your selection from the options given. I’d like to be able to talk to you personally and to hear your comments. When you hear the recording, punch in my direct line: 6048. I’d love to be able to tell you more about Bible translation. If you have a desire to serve the Lord, there might be a place for you in the Bible translation movement. Also, I’d like to send you a great DVD called “Contagious.” Please call and ask

me for it. It is a dramatic story about something that is contagious, God's Word. JAARS Vernacular Media Services helps spread God's Word orally in many ways. "Contagious" is a great eight-minute video for home or church. Please visit our Web site—that is www.jaars.org. Better yet, come see us in Waxhaw, North Carolina.

Announcer:

We hope you have enjoyed *Speeding the Word*. We'd love to hear from you. If you are interested in finding out more about JAARS, or Bible translation, give us a call at: 1-800-890-0628, or look us up on the Web at jaars.org.