



JOY, JOY, JOY! The Bible Has Come Alive to the Budu and Komo People!



Paul and Laurel Morgan serve with Wycliffe Bible Translators in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo where they work alongside Congolese translators to help more Congolese have access to God's Word in their own languages. In February, they got to witness the fruit of the labor of so many people. This story is written by Paul as he recounts the events of that special week.

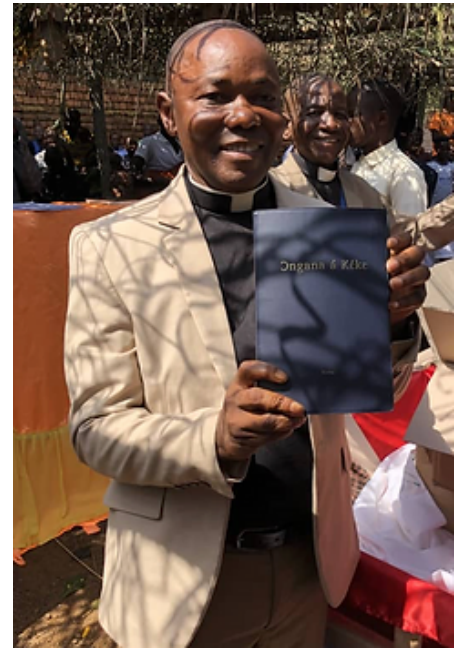
On February 3rd, 7th and 9th, 2023, the **Komo, Budu Koya, and Budu Nita** peoples dedicated their **three separate translations!** This celebration week began with the dedication of **the Komo New Testament (NT)** in Katinga, Democratic Republic of Congo. The village of Katinga sits atop a gentle hill on the western outskirts of Lubutu, a small town near the geographical center for the Komo people. At Lubutu, three roads intersect. One road stretches off into the vast forests to the southeast, running alongside the Maiko National Park (home to spectacular faunae like Grauer's gorilla, okapi, and the Congo peafowl). To the southwest, another road eventually rejoins the Lualaba River, one of the great sources of the Congo River, which before Stanley's 1877 expedition, was incorrectly believed to be a source of the Nile. To the northwest of Lubutu, a pot-

hole riddled road bounces vehicles into the junction town of Kisangani. And the Komo people stretch out in all these directions.



The wives of translators, Mr. Adubuli and Mr. Hemedi

On that bright morning of the dedication, people from all walks of life gathered together to receive the NT in their language. There were pastors and priests, politicians and officials, doctors, teachers and farmers. Across from me, a well-known militia leader's wife sat, dressed from head to toe in earthen-toned cloth woven from tree bark. The day was full of songs sung in Komo, and at least three times, the whole assembly broke into spontaneous traditional dance. The pounding of feet from the young kids



Rev Amisi, Komo Translator

to the white-haired reverend pastors raised a cloud of dust under the shade of the palm branches – **a community overcome with joy!**

Rev. Amisi, the director of the Komo project, preached that day in Komo. In an overview of the NT, he pointed out that God has always communicated with his people, and communicated in their mother tongue. Afterwards, another translator, Thonny Adubuli, read a letter that had been sent by the Thomas', the missionary family who had pioneered linguistic analysis and translation in the 1980's. What a day! What a celebration!

When the dust had settled and everyone had long since headed home, I sat down on the veranda of the old translation office to enjoy the sunset. Neighborhood kids were back at their favorite pastime of soccer, and an elderly man was strolling up the road. He was dressed simply in a blue polo shirt, and seeing me alone, he came to join me on the veranda. As we conversed, I learned that this dear man was Papa Katinga, the son of the chief for whom the village was named. He had been a close collaborator on the Komo project from the beginning and had served as a literacy worker. From his 78-year-old perspective, he recounted stories of early missionaries of WEC, then SIL, and then the devastating years of war in the late 1990's and early 2000's. Listening to him, I felt an enormous gratitude to God for the countless contributions of so many faithful people to make this NT dedication possible. In fact, ***at all three of the dedication ceremonies, the assembly stood for a minute of silence, remembering all the different people who longed to see this day but could not be present.*** translators, literacy workers, pastors, missionaries, chiefs, and many others.



Dancing in Katinga

Papa Katinga also pointed out that so much work still remains for the Komo people. Later that night, in a conversation with the pastor who supervises that region for the CECCA 16 denomination, he told me that one of their church districts is only accessible on foot, a 60 kilometer walk through the forest! What courageous faith! So how will this wonderful translation reach out to all the different corners of the vast region where the Komo speakers live? In a very real sense, the work has only just begun!

The following day, our delegation headed northwest at sunrise towards Kisangani. At several different points, the imposing bamboo and towering trees opened into a view of the Lualaba river, and local fishermen and kids held out their catch of the day to the passing traffic. By late afternoon, we were rolling into the bustling city of Kisangani. Located down in the Congo Basin, this sweltering city forms a great intersection of people and rivers. On the next day, the dark before dawn found most of us already outside, having fled the heat of the house and eager to climb out of that river valley. The road snaked eastwards, gradually rising, and during the day, we met again the Tshopo and the Lindi rivers that we had left behind in Kisangani that morning. All day, the traffic was fairly light, with the exception of convoys of Somalian fuel tankers. It is a marvel how they manage on those roads with that weight!

We spent the night in Nia Nia, where we would turn to the North. The seventy kilometers north of Nia Nia feel like a historical snapshot of the California Gold Rush of the 1840's. Nameless, rough mining towns have been birthed overnight, known simply by their mileage markers: 25, 47 and 51. The road winds through these mineral rich hills and then descends toward Wamba, the home of the Budu Koya.



The governor receives NT in Wamba

Entering Wamba, we crossed a short bridge and saw a small memorial to the Catholic Bishop Wittebols and other missionaries who were killed by Simba rebels on November 26, 1964, another poignant reminder of the sacrifice of prior generations. The Budu are one people group with several different dialects. In this particular week of dedications, two dialects of Budu began to distribute their separate translations of the NT and Genesis: the Budu Nita, west of the Nepoko River, and the Budu Koya to the east. The festivities began in **Wamba with the Budu Koya**.

These dedications were massive celebrations with much

support from the entire society. All of the Budu chiefs were present at both ceremonies, as was the governor of the province. The governor's father, the eldest among the Budu chiefs, only spoke for a brief moment. He said that he felt like Simeon in Luke's Gospel, that he could depart in peace because he had seen what he had been longing for, **the Scriptures in the language of his ancestors**. One striking image from the celebrations was all of the Budu chiefs, lifting the



The Budu chiefs carry the Scriptures on a tipoi

Scriptures on their traditional *tipoi*, the chief's very own litter (chariot with human wheels), on which he traditionally would have been carried by servants.



In Wamba, I watched a young Catholic nun as she saw the Bible in her own language for the first time. She was glowing as she mouthed the words that she read. And when she reached the end of the sentence, a smile spread across her face, proud that she could understand it.

The **Budu Nita celebration** took place two days later in **Ibambi**, which was C. T. Studd's home and final resting place in 1931, and where Dr. Helen Roseveare later pioneered a hospital in 1953. In Ibambi, Rev. Anzabati was the preacher for the NT dedication ceremony. When I had seen him in Wamba, earlier that week, he looked tired and unshaven. I asked this 68 year-old pastor, translator and translation consultant how old he had been when he began working with the Budu translation team. He was 36 years old! Little did I know that his unshaven look was part of his costume preparation for preaching at the Budu Nita celebration. That day in Ibambi, he wore the traditional tree-bark clothing and also his reverend's collar. He told the crowd that there are so many good aspects in their culture, for which they should be thankful, but it is those elements that do not honor the Gospel that need to change!



Rev. Anzabati

The governor then spoke and declared that he would love to see all the kids learning to read in their mother tongue in school. Dr. Bettina Gottschlich Modibale, who has worked with these people since 1987, also addressed the crowds in Budu. It was something to marvel at for both Budu ceremonies: **the pastor, the governor and the missionary, all addressing the crowds in their mother tongue!** Truly from all the speeches, the hope was palpable, the hope that the arrival of the Scriptures would constitute a turning point and **an opportunity for transformation in all of society.**



Dr. Bettina Gottschlich Modibale



Dancing at the Budu Nita celebration in Ibambi

Of all the songs that were sung, my favorite was perhaps the most simple. Before the sermon in Wamba, an old pastor was asked to lead the assembly in singing a familiar Budu hymn. His voice rang out clear, accompanied by a rhythm on a wooden block:

***Ikeni, Ikeni boboni!
Yeso, Mwana ɛ Mongo,
Ajaba ku bubomu!***

***Come, Come today!
Jesus, the Son of God,
Will wash you completely!***

Amen. Amen. Let the Komo and Budu people continue to come to Jesus!

Renewing Hope is blessed to support Paul and Laurel Morgan
as they play a vital role in the lives of the Congolese
through Bible translation.

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