

LAKA NT dedication report

31 March 2023

Introduction

A large delegation, led by the Executive Director of ATALTRAB and accompanied by members of the Board and representatives of various partner organizations (SIL Chad, United Bible Society of Chad and Every Home for Christ), made a special trip to Bessao on 31st March 2023, with the express goal of taking part in the dedication of the Laka New Testament. The journey and the dedication event itself went smoothly, under God's blessing and protection. This report will briefly describe the activities which took place and outline actions that may be taken in the future.

1. Journey of delegation to Bessao

Leaving Moundou early on the morning of 31st March 2023, the ATALTRAB delegation, made up of members of the Board, administrative staff and representatives of partner organizations (Seed Company, SIL Chad, United Bible Society), arrived in Bessao, a town roughly 110km away where the dedication was due to be held, at 9.00am. This delay was due to the state of disrepair of the road. Once they had arrived, they were welcomed by the head of the district then they joined the rest of those who had gathered. We praise the Lord for safeguarding and protecting the vehicles and members of the different groups who made the journey to Bessao.

2. Laka New Testament dedication ceremony

The dedication ceremony took place on 31st March 2023 at the evangelical church of Bessao, and was held under the tall trees because of the huge number of guests and speakers. Among those attending were senior leadership figures from the Province of East Logone, the region of Mont de Lam and the district of Bessao; the Field Coordinator for The Seed Company, the project's funding partner; members of the Board and administrative staff of ATALTRAB; the first Director of ATALTRAB; representatives of partner organizations (SIL Chad, United Bible Society, Every Home for Christ, "Operation Christmas Child"); pastors from churches of various denominations (both Protestant and Catholic) and their respective choirs; district heads and key people in the Laka community; and Laka speakers from Ndjamena, Moundou, Doba, Sarh, Baibokoum, Goré etc, as well as those from the diaspora, in particular from Cameroon and Mali.

The main highlights of this ceremony were:

- o Opening prayer
- o Song written for the occasion performed by the Women's Gospel choir
- o Welcome given by the mayor of Bessao
- o Address by the Chair of the Organizing Committee for the dedication
- o Address by Mr. Jean Baptiste Laokolé, Chair of the Laka Bible Translation Committee
- o Address by Mbaindigabé Ngakordjé Caleb, Translation Project Coordinator
- o Address by Laoukoura Sa-Ndoudjinang, Vice-President of APROCULA
- o Address by Ndonam Caleb, Director of ATALTRAB
- o Speeches by technical and funding partners: Donny Cortimila, Field Coordinator for The Seed Company, and Caroline Tyler, outgoing Director of SIL Chad
- o Keynote address for the dedication, by the Governor of East Logone Province
- o Message for the occasion delivered by Pastor Gadmadji Daniel
- o Blessing of the Holy Scriptures by a team of six pastors
- o Reading of the New Testament by Laka speakers

- o Presentation of certificates of recognition to the translators and partners
- o Launch of sales of the New Testament, which brought the dedication ceremony to a close.

It is worth noting that the ceremony took place in a good-natured atmosphere in front of the crowd who'd made the journey from Bessao. The enjoyment experienced by all those present, of seeing the Word of God available in their heart language of Laka, was incalculable. This joy was expressed through songs accompanied by balafons, drums and flutes, through dance, through cries of "youyou", and so on. An historic first for the Laka people.

3. Speeches and testimonies

All the presenters delivered their speeches as planned. Each one was pleased with the outcome and were suitably struck by the enthusiasm which dominated the celebration of the Word of God's Word becoming available in Laka.

Here are some of the main points from their speeches:

1. The project coordinator, Mbaindigabé Ngakordjé Caleb, stated in his speech: "We have no words to express the great joy we feel at this moment. But we declare our joy by taking inspiration from the words of the song of ascents found in Psalm 126:3 – "The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy". Indeed, who would have believed we would get to this point? Who would have believed that the Word of God, the word of life would be translated into our language? Who would have believed that the Laka people would be honored in this way? Yes! The Lord has done great things for us. We were like those who dreamed, but God has come among us in these days.

The marvelous things God has done throughout this project are too numerous to mention. The powerful hand of God has been upon us and we are here today with the fruit of our hard work! We give thanks to God... We would also like to testify to the blessings that Bible translation has brought to the Laka community. Specifically, the Laka people, who were previously overlooked by others, are now listed in the record of world languages having God's Word, by God's grace and through the translation project. Besides the New Testament in hard copy, we also have:

- The digital version
- The recorded version (in LBD). This is truly a blessing from God.

We are deeply grateful to our technical, financial and spiritual partners who have supported us through the whole process, among them:

- o BTL (Kenya) for their financial and spiritual support at the start of the project
- o The Seed Company (USA) for the rest of the funding right up until the completion of the project and the celebration of the fruit
- o SIL Chad for their significant technical support
- o ATALTRAB for their support and commitment. We would like to point out that the project has been completed through the vision of the Directors, each of whom has given their best. Mrs Dianbé Narabé Rachel started it off and Ndonam Caleb completed it. Through them we acknowledge all the leadership and services of ATALTRAB. Thank you for their collaboration, advice and thoroughness in the work.
- o The Board of Directors of ATALTRAB, for their leadership
- o The churches in general for their prayer support

In particular we want to express our gratitude to our esteemed translation consultants, notably Antje, Jackie Hainaut, Jeff and Jenni (SIL), Professors Edward Kitoko, Meme Dingadie, Elie Sikamosi, Dianda, Goma of DRC, the consultant Dinguemrebeye Roger from Chad, and others, for their sacrifice and the high quality checking they've done of the product that we can enjoy today.

2. The translator Dobé Celestin, in speaking about lessons learned during the implementation phase of the project, reflected that: "The ministry of Bible translation is a high calling and filled with blessings, but it is also fraught with hardships, battles and attacks; however, it is only through patience, perseverance and courage, underpinned by dependence on and intimacy with God, that the translator can get to the end. We are happy with where we've reached and praise the Lord, while also asking him to richly bless all our funding partners, without whom the project would not have been completed."
3. The Executive Director of ATALTRAB said in his speech: "For us, the translation of the New Testament into Laka is a project approved by the Lord. This project was relaunched in faith, because, like the Mango New Testament translation project, it was started at a turbulent time for ATALTRAB; indeed, it was during a period of financial crisis! We have no need to go back over that time in detail because God, the Commander of this mission, by his abundant grace was pleased to open the floodgates to fund this project to completion! It is interesting to remind ourselves here that in starting this project ATALTRAB thus demonstrated two of its foundational values, the first being "Trust God to accomplish what is humanly impossible", and the second, "Strategic partnership and service in a spirit of humility and interdependence."

I would also like to express the thanks of ATALTRAB to all our stakeholders for their contribution to the completion of this project, be it moral, spiritual, material, or financial.

Through me, the leadership of ATALTRAB takes this opportunity to congratulate and thank our heroic translators for their commitment, determination and the sacrifice of time given to serve their community, in giving themselves over into God's hands as his instrument to use in achieving this result. As it is written in Luke 1:76 – 79: "You will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God...to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.", so each of them has played their part so that the Laka people should be enlightened. May they be richly blessed!

What can I say about our funding partners, without whom we would not have this beautiful gift? We lack the words to give appropriate recognition to all they've invested which has led to the fruit we're celebrating today. Failing these words, I simply say a huge THANK YOU with a heart full of gratitude.

I hope that the Laka New Testament will not only have a significant impact on the Laka community and the communities around them, to transform lives for God's glory, but that it will also, I'm sure, bring greater unity and cohesion between Laka speakers, on the one hand, and between the Laka people and their neighbouring communities on the other.

Laka people! Huge thanks for the effort each one of you agreed to put in to make God's Word available in your heart language! May God bless you even more and

equip you to continue this momentum so that before too long you will have the whole Bible in Laka!

As the author of Hebrews states in 6:10: “God is not unjust; He will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continue to help them.”

4. Sale and distribution of the New Testament

We are still waiting for a detailed account from the committee overseeing the sales, but we can report that out of the 90 boxes of New Testaments we received, 40 have been sold. The translation committee has made plans for a van to sell copies after the dedication in Ndjamena, in the other regions and in Cameroon, to reach the speakers living there who yearn to receive the Scriptures in their language.

5. Difficulties and challenges

Sometime after the New Testament dedication, the Mont de Lam region experienced conflict which caused disturbances among the local population. In Bessao and the surrounding districts, there were lethal attacks between armed cattle herders and farmers, leading to several fatalities and serious injuries. This situation adversely affects arrangements for selling the New Testament. We should also mention various social situations among mission families and team members (such as deaths and illnesses). Please pray for peace and justice in Chad!

6. Outlook

Following the dedication of the New Testament, the translation committee intends to work doubly hard to sell the stock of New Testaments, as well as mobilize and heighten the awareness of the Laka community to increase their efforts to start the Old Testament translation project. To that end, a tour to different towns, called “Laka New Testament sales van”, has been planned. After that, the following activities will take place, funds permitting:

- ✓ Organize training for church workers and God’s servants in how to use the New Testament. In fact, since the New Testament includes an introduction, footnotes, cross-references, a glossary, maps etc, it is important, if not essential to teach users how to handle these with ease.
- ✓ Revitalize the existing literacy centers and create others as needed to teach the Laka how to read and write, in order to increase the numbers using the available Scriptures.
- ✓ Find and train new translators in the basic principles of translation so they can be ready for the Old Testament translation project.
- ✓ Launch the Old Testament project by drafting several books, such as Genesis, Joshua, Jonah, Habakkuk, Ruth, Haggai, and so on, and engage with partners regarding funding for the project.

Conclusion

We want to give thanks to the Lord Almighty for all the above and acknowledge his great goodness in coming alongside the Laka community in particular and the whole Christian community, in making the Scriptures available in their heart language. We rejoice, therefore, with the Laka people and cry out for God’s favor, so that by his Holy Spirit, this Word finds room in the heart of whoever reads it, and they may thus be transformed, to the glory of God.

Compiled in Moundou, 5 May 2023
Mission Head
Ndonam Caleb, Executive Director of ATALTRAB

Translated from French by Lorraine Doust, SIL

[Link to photos](#)