

The Church Is Moving in Tanzania

By Seth Hinz

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Hopeful and Encouraging Progress

In northern Tanzania, we are witnessing the Church progress in ways that are hopeful and encouraging. Pastors and evangelists travel from village to village, gathering people to sing, pray, and hear the Gospel. For many years now this task has been guided by the desire to have every village learn to listen to God's Word.

And in many places, people do listen. They join in. They embrace the message with openness. But even so, something was still missing. Local leaders started to see that the words were in Swahili that people could catch and somewhat follow, but that the message was not always getting to the heart. People heard it, but deep understanding often remained distant. So, the Church began to ask an important question: How can we help people do more than just hear the Gospel? How can we help them really get it? The answer, it also turned out, was closer Than many thought.



Tanzania map [public domain via PAT maps]

Translating Scripture Into “Heart” Languages

In public life throughout Tanzania, Swahili is a *lingua franca*. But, at home and in community life, many of its members use a different language, one they first learned, trust most deeply, and use in their prayers and conversations, the only one that shapes them. That understanding altered the course of the work.

Lingua franca [noun]

Any mutually understood language used for communication between people who have different native tongues, often referred to as a ‘common’ or ‘trade’ language.



While many people in Tanzania speak and understand Swahili, but it isn't their heart language. Scripture holds more meaning and has more details when it's translated into the native languages of the community groups.

Church leaders started working with Lutheran Bible Translators (LBT) to translate Scripture into these heart languages. Translation work is currently taking place among the Taturu, Kara, Sumbwa, Kerewe, and Sukuma. Each community has its own language, its own leaders, and its own sense of calling as God's Word has taken root.

This is not a task coming in from outside and imposed on the project. The Church in Tanzania is guiding and leading it, shaping it and furthering it.



Leaders from multiple language communities gathered recently, meeting near Lake Victoria to learn how to share Bible stories in their own languages. They practiced together, were attentive to one another, and sought to make each story as faithful to Scripture as it was plain to their people.

Community members are involved in the translation and literacy process.

The Results

Participants left better equipped to lead their own communities. They went back to their villages prepared to offer Scripture in a way their communities could actually understand. And now, they are training others to follow in their footsteps, which broadens the mission, amplifies the response, and strengthens the mission.

Pastors, church leaders, and community members are equipped and understand what it takes for the message to be heard and to be shared. Leaders such as Pastor Frank Mdindi are helping drive this work among the Taturu and others are training new interpreters and storytellers coming from other communities. They are not waiting for the solutions to arrive. They are ready to lead now and into the future to ensure the work can last.



Community involvement in the translation process and literacy efforts leads to a sustainable project.

The point isn't just to complete a translation and finish the work and go away. The aim is to see every church prepared to use Scripture, to teach Scripture, and to communicate it for generations. It's already showing us the way forward here as churches steadily integrate Scripture into worship and home life.

Communities are not only hearing the Word; they are also interpreting it, living it, and making it their own. The mission is advancing because the Church is paving the way, and that's something to celebrate together.

In Tanzania, the Church is delivering God's Word to people in the language that speaks most to them. It is happening village by village and language by language as we journey on this road together.

The work of Bible translation and Scripture engagement isn't slowing down — it is growing even stronger!

Help support the translation projects at LBT!

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[Learn more about LBT's work in Tanzania](#)

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Tanzania: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Tanzania>

Tanzania map: https://ian.macky.net/pat/map/tz/tz_blu.gif
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Swahili: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Swahili-language>

LBT: <https://lbt.org/>

Taturu: <https://lbt.org/program/datoga-taturu-bible-translation/>

Kara: <https://lbt.org/program/kara-bible-translation/>

Sumbwa: <https://lbt.org/program/sumbwa-bible-translation/>

Kerewe: <https://lbt.org/program/kerewe-bible-translation/>

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