



# Translation Quality and Scripture Impact for “Last Mile” Bible Translations

24:14 Goal: Movement engagements in every unreached people and place by 2025 (32 months)

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All people deserve to have the Word of God in their heart language. Today, we are closer than ever before to seeing the Bible translated into every language, but key barriers remain. Over 20% of the world is still waiting for the Bible in their heart language (6,600+ languages).

“Last mile” is used to describe the short final segment of delivery of services or items to customers. Last mile logistics are usually the most complicated and expensive aspects of completing the service or delivery. This same dynamic occurs in completing the task of translating the Bible into every language.

Why do so many last mile languages remain Bible-less? One reason is that many of them are spoken mainly in areas hostile to the Gospel. In the past—and even until recently—translation teams often located in a place and worked together there for years. Today, however, outside translators seeking to do translation in politically restricted and/or hostile regions often cannot even gain access to these areas. Translators who do have access are often faced with working in secret, moving from one location to another, and keeping their work hidden from friends, family, and the community. Often, due to death threats and persecution, translators wait until the work is completed to disclose it, covertly taking the finished product to partners to print and share with others. In recent years, numerous kidnappings and/or killings of translators in these types of areas have been reported.

One challenge faced in these circumstances is ensuring the translators receive the mentoring, assistance, and funding they need. However, traditional patterns of

translation assistance and measurement are neither practical nor possible. Those of us assisting from the outside must adjust to the new realities. We need to recognize that these men and women risking their lives deserve our best efforts and servant-hearted support instead of asking them to fit into our previous patterns and paradigms of translation.

At the same time, nobody involved wants a haphazard and poor-quality translation of the Word of God. How then can we assure quality and accountability for the outside supporters while not endangering the lives of those who are at the last mile, translating in these restricted areas?

The RUN<sup>1</sup> family of Church Planting Movements (CPMs)<sup>2</sup> has pioneered a method that has produced quality translations while also giving the measurements and outcomes that meet the needs of outside supporters. RUN is part of the 24:14 coalition of CPMs and CPM advocates, which represent 1,983+ CPMs and 114+ million disciples in these movements.<sup>3</sup> Leaders of 24:14 have studied and endorsed this translation process and are actively working to help other CPMs follow this model. The **Translation Quality and Scripture Impact Assurance Process** for hostile areas is:

1 RUN is Reaching Unreached Nations—see more at [www.runministries.org](http://www.runministries.org)

2 A CPM has 4+ generations of churches planting churches (parent churches planting children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren churches—with multiple branches of the family tree). This usually means a minimum of 100 churches and 1,500 baptized disciples.

3 [www.2414now.net/about-us/](http://www.2414now.net/about-us/)

## Translation Quality and Scripture Impact Assurance Process

### Translation Quality

- 1) Language Selection:** The leadership of a Bible-less CPM or family of related CPMs discerns through prayer and counsel with other 24:14 members that a translation of the Bible in a certain language(s) is warranted. After extensive prayer and discussion, the language(s) is selected based on the following criteria:
- commitment of the leaders to complete the translation process and make the best possible effort of distributing and using the translated Scriptures;
  - current capacity of the CPM and outside partners able to assist the process;
  - security for the translators, which is more feasible with a larger group of believers such as in CPMs;
  - existence of other language-related movements in the same or different countries;
  - available trainings, translation tools, and resource texts (that is, the texts from which the new translations will be made); and
  - the need and possibility of translation into 2 or more closely related languages or major dialects of a mega-language.
- 2) Translation Team Qualification and Recruitment:** For each language, an initial group of 25 to 30 full-time, mother-tongue bilingual, literate speakers are pre-qualified by their local church leaders.
- 3) Translation Team Training/Preparation:** A 24:14 Translation Mentor(s) begins training the translation team. Self-learning tools and other helpful resources are also provided to help teams address gaps and find opportunities for further learning.
- 4) Initial Translation Drafting Begins:** Once qualified by their local church leaders and the 24:14 Translation Mentor(s), the translation team works full-time collaboratively to define key words and produce quality drafts of Scripture. Each initial draft is reviewed by the Translation Mentor according to the *24:14 Translation Guidelines*.
- 5) Checking/Editing of Texts:** Scripture portions are peer-checked, local-church checked, and then sent to the Translation Mentor(s) for review. Once approved as an initial draft, the text is community tested through an approved set of questions to help determine clarity, naturalness, accuracy, and acceptability. Adjustments are made and tested again. In total in each language, an average of 500 people are expected to be involved in this process.
- 6) Ongoing Coaching from Translation Quality Advisor:** A series of web-based and offline tools are used to help ensure the accuracy, clarity, naturalness, and acceptability of Scripture. Concurrently with and throughout the checking process, each language coordinator who leads a translation team has frequent access to full-time Translation Mentors who, in turn, have remote access to Translation Quality Advisors.
- 7) Movement Church Leadership Evaluation:** Once the texts have been assessed, evaluated, edited, and checked by the local church network and the community, and approved by the Translation Mentor(s), the drafts are forwarded for final evaluation by the larger movement leadership in the CPM.

### Scripture Engagement and Impact

- A) Commitment:** completion, distribution, and use of the Scriptures is critical.
- B) Capacity:** Priority is given to CPMs because they have greater maturity and capacity to complete the translation and effectively use it.
- C) Bridging:** Obviously, producing a translation that can be a bridge to help translation in other related languages or major dialects will increase potential Scripture Impact.
- D) Translation Team Discipleship:** The initial Scripture impact begins to happen with those on the translation team as they learn and apply God's Word more deeply in their lives.
- E) Discipleship:** A second avenue of Scripture impact is in the lives of the believers helping at this stage who are deepened in their understanding and application of Scripture by testing and using biblical passages in discipleship processes.
- F) Evangelism:** A third avenue of Scripture impact comes by asking local nonbelievers to help in checking whether these translated passages are understandable. This is an effective way of sharing the gospel with family and friends. Often, it is during this time asking nonbelievers to participate (with caution) that the heart of the nonbeliever is softened and turned toward the Gospel. Some come to faith just reading the Word of God.
- G) Distribution:** The next phase is to distribute the Word of God for ongoing discipleship and evangelism. Depending on the circumstances of the local churches, distribution may be through print-on-demand and/or digitally through microSD cards, audio devices, Bluetooth, and/or off-internet local Wi-Fi devices such as Lightstream.
- H) Fruit Measurement:** We know the Word of God will not return void, so measuring the impact in lives is a critical and often overlooked aspect of Scripture translation and use. Measurement of the increase in both quantity (number of new churches and disciples) and quality (discipleship metrics of transformed lives and communities) is the necessary final piece in measuring Scripture impact.
- I) Ownership:** By involving at least several hundred people in translating and checking the translation, the community has a strong sense of ownership which will only increase their respect for and use of the Bible.

In conclusion, many of the languages included in the last mile in Bible translation involve some difficulties and dangers that we cannot overcome with the traditional translation processes that God has used so effectively in the past and continues to use today. The inability of outside translators to gain access and the persecution and dangers faced from opponents of the Gospel mean that the Bible will not be translated into these languages unless we find new pathways.

It is exactly these high-persecution areas that most desperately need the Bible in their own language. Church history tells us that the Bible in a heart language is not necessary for initial evangelism and discipleship. However, the Bible in a heart language is one crucial factor for surviving and enduring persecution. One example is the long-standing survival of the church in Egypt and Ethiopia compared to the rapid demise of the church in North Africa after the assault of Islam. A primary reason for this is that Egypt and Ethiopia had the Bible in local languages, while the church of North Africa had the Bible in Latin, spoken only by the elites.

God is not surprised by these challenges. God in His wisdom has used existing trade language Bible translations to begin multiplying disciples and churches in many of these last mile Bible-less languages. Disciples are positioned inside these language communities and are willing to face life-threatening risks in translation because they deeply yearn to provide the Bible to both the believers and the lost in their own heart language. Additionally, God has allowed us to live in a day when we can strengthen and support those who risk so much by training and using the latest technological breakthroughs for translation.

As has been seen above, this seven-step translation process not only assures a quality translation but also assures scriptural impact during and after the translation process. As we observe how the Holy Spirit has already used this process, we can trust and work and pray to see many more translations done, until in our generation there are no more Bible-less languages. God is giving us the opportunity to see the world full of His glory, but it is a day that challenges us to trust and rely on Him as never before! 🌍

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