

Talking Bible Research Project in Eritrea

United Bible Societies



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July 2004

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Acknowledgments

It was a privilege working with the people from Adopt-A-Village, Paul Hoekstra, Audio Scriptures International, Mark Hoekstra and World Mission, Greg Kelly. We pray that this newly-forged partnership will bear fruit in the future.

Appreciation is also due to the Executive Secretary of the Bible Society of Eritrea for his dedication to and leadership in this project. His willingness to co-operate in making this product available to his people is exemplary, as is his passion for the distribution of God's Word.

John Habte did a great job in handling the initial queries and overseeing this project. He has the talent to do much more in terms of the Talking Bible distribution, not only in Eritrea, but also on the continent.

Without the financial support of the Bible Society in New Zealand, this project would not have been possible. A sincere word of gratitude to them for their input.

A word of thanks to my superiors for their ongoing encouragement and belief in this research project.

Executive Summary

The United Bible Societies have, over the years, encouraged national Bible Societies to become involved in distribution of biblical material in formats other than print. Different programmes have been used over the years, but with varying degrees of success.

After being exposed to the existence of the Talking Bible, and seeing the manner in which it operates and how it is packaged, it made perfect sense to test this product for possible usage on the continent. The programme linked to the distribution was also in accordance with the distribution pattern known by Bible Societies.

Eritrea as a country has been isolated for many years and the very high rate of illiteracy and poverty also demanded a different approach to Scripture engagement. Romans 10:14 rings true when it says: “And how can they hear unless someone tells them?”

The Orthodox Church and Roman Catholic Church are well established in Eritrea; the Orthodox Church receives widespread recognition and even support from the Government. In the light of this, we took 115 Talking Bible units for testing and evaluation to Eritrea. People from three villages participated after the Orthodox Church leadership had given their blessing.

Participation exceeded expectation with people turning out in large numbers for the field research. Initially we could not distribute more units since finances were a limiting factor. We were also obliged to distribute a number of sets to dignitaries according to the demands of protocol.

The involvement of the local Priests was encouraging and they assisted as far as possible by answering questions and bringing in faulty units for repairs. They also utilised the Talking Bible in their own ministries.

The research was conducted within a limited time span, but for the product the initial results showed an overwhelming support and a great need. The onus will be on the Bible Society to forge partnerships to bring more of these units to Eritrea. The people are looking forward to being empowered by this tool and to engaging with Scripture in the safety of their own homes with their loved ones.

Technically the unit stood up to the challenge and in time it will become clear whether or not the listening patterns have changed. If the initial reaction is something to go by, the Talking Bible is here to stay and will impact on the lives of people in ways that we cannot even anticipate.

The Talking Bible will assist Bible Societies to minister to the illiterate, the elderly, and the less fortunate in our societies.

The Eritrean Project

In the Midrand declaration of 2000 the United Bible Societies stated: “The world fellowship of national Bible Societies joins together, as United Bible Societies (UBS), for consultation, mutual support and action in their common task of achieving the widest possible, effective and meaningful distribution of the Holy Scriptures in languages and media which meet the needs of people worldwide, in translations that are faithful to the Scripture texts in their original languages, and which communicate the biblical message, at a price people can afford, and helping people interact with the Word of God.

The Bible Societies seek to carry out their task in partnership and co-operation with all Christian churches and with church related organizations” (UBS 2000:1).

In describing its task the Midrand Assembly of the UBS said: “Our task is to achieve the widest possible, effective and meaningful distribution of the Holy Scriptures and of helping people to interact with the Word of God” (UBS, 2000:6).

The Assembly said that the achievement of this goal would be through creating new products that encourage people to understand and engage personally with Scripture; also concentrating on people with special needs and using all formats, including non-print media to help and assist these people. In the same document, the UBS emphasises the need for partnerships to realise this huge task, acknowledging the fact that the UBS and therefore the individual national societies, cannot achieve this on their own.

Viggo Sjøgaard, in a research report compiled in 2000, wrote: “The United Bible Societies have, during the last two decades, expressed increasing concern for people who do not read. About one third of all people in this world are officially termed illiterate, and an increasing number of those who can read choose not to do so. Less than half of all people in the world can today be reached effectively through printed Scriptures. In some African countries, it has been estimated that only 10% can be reached through print media, so various initiatives have been taken to find ways to communicate the Bible through other media.”

The main role players in the church arena are Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Eritrean Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church. In the light of the above-mentioned issues and after a visit to Eritrea to conduct a Media workshop in 2002, it became clear that due to the high illiteracy rate, (an estimated 80 %) and the unique social structure in society, something should be done.

From discussions, it further became clear that the Faith Comes by Hearing (FCBH) programme will not work. The church structure is of such a nature that religious

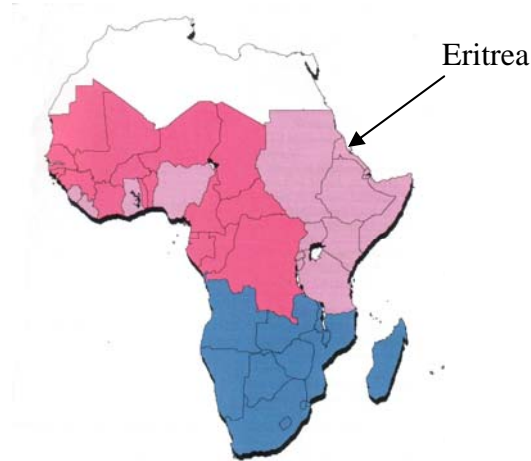
gatherings outside of the normal services are a foreign concept with undercurrents concerning religious activities. Therefore such gatherings may be regarded as suspect.

It was further shown that illiteracy is extremely high in the semi-urban and rural areas, where the communities are poor. These communities are very much involved in their churches and this is where there is a very strong Orthodox Church presence.

With this in mind, it was decided to launch the Talking Bible research project to determine whether this unit can meet the biblical needs of the illiterate and poor communities.

Eritrea – The Country

The Continent of Africa



Eritrea in relation to its neighbours



Eritrea is a small country of only 121,100 sq.km. It is situated to the north of Ethiopia and borders on Sudan, Ethiopia, Djibouti and the Red Sea. It is arid and mountainous with a moderate plateau and hot desert lowlands along the Red Sea Coast.

The population in 2000 was an estimated 3,850,388 people with a population growth rate of 3.86% per annum.

The capital city is Asmara with an estimated population of 460,000 people. The other big town is the harbor town of Massawa.

In Operation World (2001, 240) it is written that there is freedom of religion in Eritrea, but the fine balance between the Muslim and Christian halves of the population compromises that freedom with restrictive policies. Up to now, Bible distribution has not been influenced since the Bible Society has managed to foster very good relationships with the churches and government.

A breakdown of the population along religious line appears as follows:

Religions	Population %	Adherents	Ann.Gr.
Muslim	47.97	1,847,031	+3.5%
Christian	47.43	1,826,239	+4.2%
non-Religious/other	4.00	154,016	+4.9%
Traditional ethnic	0.60	23,102	-4.2%

The breakdown of church affiliation is as follows:

Christians	Denom.	Affil.%	,000	Ann.Gr.
Protestant	10	1.35	52	+7.7%
Independent	3	0.16	6	+14.9%
Catholic	1	3.77	145	+2.9%
Orthodox	1	40.98	1,578	+4.4%
Marginal	1	0.04	2	+9.9%
Unaffiliated		1.13	65	n.a.

The breakdown of the church affiliation into denominations and congregations and members is as follows:

Churches	Congregations.	Members	Affiliates
Eritrean Orthodox	800	933,728	1,578,000
Catholic (Latin/Coptic)	110	84,302	145,000
Ev Ch of Eritrea (Luth)	52	7,343	21,000
Lutheran Ch in Eritrea	21	3,700	8,500
Full Gospel	20	1,600	5,500

Faith Church of Christ	16	1,000	5,000
Assemblies of God	20	2,000	4,000
Kale Heywet (SIM)	15	1,400	3,700
Jehovah's Witnesses	19	941	1,600
Other denominations [7]	53	4,752	10,200
Total Christians [16]	1,126	1,040,800	1,782,500

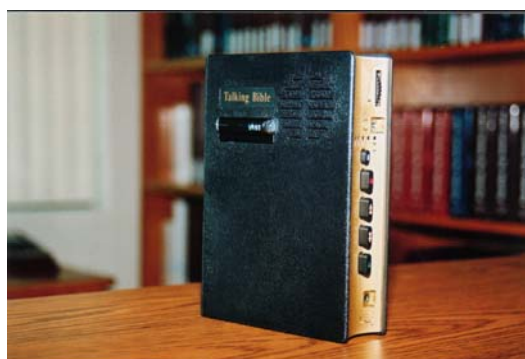
In terms of the research, we decided to work with the largest church, the Eritrean Orthodox Church.

Talking Bible

What is the Talking Bible? By whom is it marketed and on what principles does it function?

Paul Hoekstra, Executive Director of Adopt-A-Village, based in Escondido, California, describes the history of the development of the Talking Bible as follows: “The Talking Bible has been developed by my brother, Mark S. Hoekstra, President of Audio Scriptures International. He began working on the idea after learning of challenges we were facing in India when distributing ‘Bible-listening Kits’ which contained a cassette player and a New Testament on tape in the local language. Mark (Hoekstra) conceptualized and later patented the technology.

The Talking Bible is packaged in a mould that resembles a mission edition Bible (Pew Bible); it is a sealed unit, but plays like a cassette player. It uses one audio cassette which runs at 1/7.5th of the normal speed, which is over 25 hours of listening for the units used in Africa. The Talking Bible operates with either batteries or electricity, using a power adaptor. The Talking Bible has a couple of functions: Fast Forward, Play, Rewind and Stop, with a jack for an external speaker. The counter meter on the front allows you to plot your listening. Each unit is provided with a leaflet indicating where you can find the respective books of the New Testament.



Talking Bible

World Mission, an organization based in Grand Rapids, Michigan, has come on board and is handling the supply of the Talking Bibles to a variety of clients in the United States of America as well as elsewhere in the world.

The Talking Bible has proven itself to be an accessible tool. Non-readers come to view the Talking Bible as credible. The Talking Bible empowers the marginalized to engage in Scripture use. It empowers the women, giving them equal status with the men because they can listen to God's Word without it having to be filtered for them. Many of those who use it have never heard or listened to the whole New Testament. It becomes a companion for the poor and those who cannot read”.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this research were the following.

To determine whether:

1. the Talking Bible unit will function in the harsh conditions in Africa
2. illiterate people will accept this unit as representing the Word of God
3. people will listen voluntarily to the Talking Bible and if spontaneous listening groups are formed
4. the Orthodox Church community will accept the audio recording in the Talking Bible as authoritative and as scripture
5. there are various application possibilities for the unit.

Research Methodology

The research will be implemented in three phases. First of all, the recording of the Tigrinya New Testament must be done. Secondly, the Talking Bible will have to be distributed amongst the Orthodox Church members in three villages around Asmara, one village with no access to electricity. The third phase will be the field research.

It was decided to use a qualitative method of research using questionnaires as well as individual interviews. Because of the way society is structured, it was not possible to do a focus group interview.

The recording of the Tigrinya New Testament was completed in November 2003 and an Orthodox priest, Father Yohannes did the reading. The recording was made in the studios of World Mission in Grand Rapids, USA.



Father Yohannes in the studio

The Talking Bible dedication ceremony took place on Monday, 2 February 2004. The first distribution was done on Sunday morning 1 February 2004 at Wekdeba. That same day more units were distributed at Embaderho. Owing to problems at customs, only a limited number of Talking Bibles could be distributed.

The dedication ceremony



F.L.T.R: Abune Mengisteab, the Roman Catholic Church Bishop of Eritrea, Acting Patriarch of the Orthodox Church, Abune Antonios, and Rev Fessehaye, the General Secretary of the Evangelical Church

Talking Bibles were distributed over a period of a month and on the following dates:

1 February, 13 February, 29 February and 7 March 2004. A summary of the number of Talking Bibles and where and when they were distributed is as follows:

Village	Priests	Members	Church	Total	Date
Wekdeba	1	7	0	8	1/02
	4	25	1	30	13/02
Embaderho	1	7	0	8	1/02
	3	16	1	20	07/03
Adi-Habteslus	1	13	1	15	29/02

The field research was conducted on Saturday, 24 April 2004. Owing to a clash in schedules, the research had to be done a week earlier than was initially agreed upon.

The following people attended the research sessions and were willing to complete the questionnaire and be interviewed:

Village	People Received	People Responded
Wekdeba	35	24
Embaderho	27	15
Adi-Habteslus	14	13

Of the 115 units received for the project, 88 units were distributed in the three villages and 18 were distributed among dignitaries and special needs cases.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was drafted and four young Eritreans helped with the completion of the questionnaire. They were John Habte, Emmanuel Habte, Mosse Abraham and Bereket Tesfamariam. All four were fluent in English and Tigrinya. Habte Negash, Executive Secretary, also assisted with the completion of the questionnaires.



John Habte at Wekdeba



Habte Negash at Adi-Habteslus



Emmanuel Habte at Wekdeba



Bereket Tesfamariam at Wekdeba

The following breakdown reflects the proportion of priests receiving Talking Bibles as opposed to members in relation to the total units distributed in that village. This is relevant since it shows that the ordinary people had access to the Talking Bible.

Village	Priests	Members	Total	Total Dist
Wekdeba	6	18	24	37
Embaderho	3	12	15	27
Adi-Habteslus	1	12	13	14

In Embaderho, there was a fear that the recipients of the Talking Bibles would have to return their units and therefore the turnout for the research session was low.

Personal information

Question 1. Are you?

The following breakdown shows the distribution of the Talking Bibles according to gender and how the gender responded to participate in the field research.

Village	Men Received	Men Responded	Men % Response
Wekdeba	23	19	82,6
Embaderho	23	11	47,8
Adi-Habteslus	12	9	75

Village	Women Received	Women Responded	Women % Response
Wekdeba	12	5	41,6
Embaderho	4	4	100
Adi-Habstelus	2	4	200

In Adi-Habteslus, two women responded on behalf of their husbands who could not attend the session.

Question 2. How old are you?

A comparative analysis of respondents regarding age categories, gender and receiving and responding to the research.

Age group	Men Received	Men Responded	Woman Received	Woman Responded
30-35	3	2	2	1
36 – 40	1	1	2	2
41 – 45	5	3	4	1
46 – 50	3	2	2	2
51 – 55	5	4	2	3
56 – 60	5	2	2	2
61 – 65	8	6	3	1

66 – 70	11	6	1	1
71 – 75	11	7		
76 – 80	3	3		
Above 81	3	3		1

Since the Talking Bible was distributed among heads of households and illiterate people, the age differentiation inclined towards people above 50. 73% of all the respondents were over the age of 50. This figure is significant since it will definitely influence the research and indicate a more “conservative” approach by respondents. These people have been victims of the prolonged war against Ethiopia. They suffered tremendously as a result of the lack of education, the poor economic climate and international isolation that prevailed.

Question 3. Are you?

The majority of interviewees were married. Only one person was divorced and 5 were widows or widowers.

Demographic information

Question 4. How many people stay in your house?

This question elicited response between fewer than 5 people and more than 5 people. 48% of the people responded that there were fewer than 5 people in the household while 40% said there were between 5 and 10 people in the household. 11,5 % said that there were more than 10 people in the household. This is significant, since it shows that the Talking Bible was reaching more people for scripture listening than we anticipated.

Question 5. What do you do for a living?

75% of the interviewees were farmers and the rest either retired, church workers or housewives. In Eritrea, part of the poverty relief programme is to supply the poor people with tracts of land where they can practise subsistence farming. Farmers are therefore among the less fortunate and struggle to make ends meet.

Question 6. Do you have electricity in your house?

Electricity is freely available in certain areas of the country and nearly 73% of the participants had access to electricity. Adi-Hateslus did not have access to electricity, although it is situated not far from Wekdeba.

Literacy level

Question 7&8. Can you read? Can you write?

As part of the research requirement, participants must be illiterate. Interestingly, 42% of the participants claimed that they could read although only 17% said that they could write. Their idea of being able to read was open to interpretation and would also impact on further questions concerning reading the Bible. Nearly 64 % of the participants later admitted that they needed help in reading the Bible or that somebody else had to read to them. This figure is also influenced by the fact that some of the participants experienced visual impairment. It is, however, interesting that reading comes more easily than writing, influencing how people perceive their literacy skills.

Church involvement

Question 9. Do you attend Church on a Sunday?

All of the participants were active members of their congregations and attended church regularly.

Question 10. What is your role in the Church?

Of all the interviewees, 9 (17%) were priests, who have to be able to read and write to be placed in this position and 6 people played a role as elders or nuns, but the majority of the interviewees, 37 (71%) were ordinary members of the church. When setting up the research, we had to guard against priests rather than the ordinary church members gaining access to the Talking Bible. In total, 10 priests received a Talking Bible.

In validating this product, the role of the village priest must never be underestimated. Within the Orthodox Church, they are the gate keepers and if they are not on board, very little distribution will take place. This is why the dedication ceremony was so important and significant since the Patriarch gave his blessing to the project, thereby enabling us to do the research in the Orthodox Church.

Scripture use

Question 11&12. Do you own a Bible? In which language? Do you own a New Testament? In which language?

When asked if the interviewees owned a Bible and or a New Testament, it became clear that there was no shortage of this item. It was significant that only 7 (13%) people did not own a Bible and 3 (6%) a New Testament. This very high percentage of ownership must be attributed to the distribution programme that was undertaken by the Bible Society in the previous years.

Question 13&14 Who reads the Bible to you? How often do you read your Bible/New Testament?

The Scripture reading pattern was also significant since this gave us the opportunity to compare reading to listening to the Talking Bible. We tried to establish what the reading/hearing pattern at home was and in this regard, we excluded listening to scripture being read in church. 36% of the interviewees claimed that they read their Bible on a daily basis. This figure should be compared and interpreted in the light of the number of priests and other church laypeople who participated in the project. 29% of the interviewees were either directly linked to the church in an official capacity or served in an official capacity.

More significant is the figure of 39% of the interviewees who read or who listen to scripture being read to them by somebody close to them. 23% indicated that they read/heard scripture at least 3 times per week. One participant indicated that he rarely read/heard scripture.

Question 15&16. Did you buy your Bible/New Testament? If not, was it a gift? From whom was it a gift?

Nearly 81% of the interviewees said that they did not buy their Bible or New Testament and that it was a gift from the Bible Society (92%). The impact of the distribution by the Bible Society can be seen by this figure.

Question 17. Do you carry your Bible to Church?

Carrying their Bible to church is a near non-existent practise, understandable in the light of the prevailing high level of illiteracy.

Talking Bible listening

Question 18. Did you enjoy listening to the Talking Bible?

It was evident that the Talking Bible was a hit because everybody responded positively when asked if they enjoyed listening to the Talking Bible. This became more apparent on examination of the listening pattern.

Question 19. How often did you listen?

We had asked the participants to listen to the Talking Bible at least 10 minutes per day. What arose from this request was more than we had expected.

More than 71% of the interviewees said that they engaged to listen on a daily basis. The rest said that they listened every second day. When compared to the figure in terms of reading/hearing, it is significant that almost double the number of people engaged in scripture on a daily basis by listening to the Talking Bible.

Question 20. When did you listen?

Considering the age group of the family heads, the listening pattern was somehow unexpected, but fits in with what has emerged so far.

The majority of the people listened at night. Nearly 62% listened after dark, only 31% in the morning and the rest in the afternoon. The observation was made that some people listened in the mornings as well as at night.

This listening pattern will also influence the question concerning a possible power source other than electricity or normal batteries. Unless one uses a rechargeable dry cell battery, solar power cannot be utilised. This poses another challenge to be addressed in future.

Question 21. Where did you listen?

Close to 80% of the interviewees listened indoors to their Talking Bible while only 20% listened outside of their houses.

Listening pattern

Question 22. On average, how many minutes did you listen at a time?

As mentioned earlier, participants were initially asked to listen 10 minutes per day. The rationale behind this question was to establish whether people would take initiative and listen longer if they found the unit appealing, and not simply because it was something new and therefore held their attention. The time span in which the research was conducted does not allow a person to evaluate long-term scripture engagement, but this question will have to be asked during a follow-up session.

Only one person said that he listened for 10 min. per day and that was to preserve the batteries, but 17% said they listened between 10 and 30 minutes. 79% of the interviewees said that they listened longer than 30 minutes per day. This statistic was later confirmed in Question 28 when we asked how many times they had completed listening to the New Testament.

Question 23. How many people joined in to listen with you?

It was apparent from the outset that all the interviewees except one invited more than just their family members to come and listen. 40% of the interviewees said that their groups were between 6 and 10 people daily. 46% of the interviewees said that on average more than 10 people listened at one time; with one person claiming that on average more than 50 people listened.

Question 24. These people were

The sharing factor in terms of inviting people to come in and listen was also very interesting. The Village Priest in Embaderho encouraged his people to invite others to come and listen since they might feel left out because they did not receive a Talking Bible. It was significant that even in the other villages, without prompting, people invited their neighbours and friends to share in the listening.

Close to 52% said that they listened with their family and neighbours while only 23% listened within their family circle. Others did invite friends who were not necessarily neighbours.

Listening outcomes

Question 25. After listening, did you discuss what you heard?

It was significant that spontaneous discussions followed after listening. More than 92% said that they engaged among themselves in discussing what they had listened to. This immediately raises a question concerning hermeneutics and this is a subject that should be researched separately.

Question 26. Whom did you ask for an explanation of what you did not understand?

Half of all the interviewees approached the local village priest or another priest to assist them. One of the village priests testified to this effect. He mentioned that the questions that were asked were difficult and even he himself had to go and find help from other priests. 38% did not ask for help, but the Executive Secretary, as well as John Habte, testified to the number of questions they had to answer when visiting the villages. John Habte, when interviewed, said that the young people asked him a lot of questions. They were listening with their families and when they saw him at the Church they would approach him and ask questions.

Question 27. If you asked someone, were you satisfied with the answer?

In this regard, 90% of the interviewees were satisfied with the answers they received.

Question 28. Is this your listening?

This question again is open for interpretation since the question, rightly, could be asked if people listened simply because they were aware that they were involved in a research project or because it was something new and exciting.

From the field research and observing body language during interviews, researchers noted that the people were really excited and enjoyed listening. Nine people (17%) were on their first cycle of listening and were all in Revelations; 38 (73%) were on their second cycle and 3 people (6%) were in their third cycle of listening. Two older people could not remember.

These statistics relate to question 38a when people were asked how many times batteries were replaced.

Question 29. Should people gather at the Church once a week to listen and discuss as a group?

The concept of scripture-listening groups has been established popularised by the Faith Comes by Hearing programme of Hosanna Ministries. It is working well throughout Africa, but we wanted to test this concept within a more conservative church community.

Over 80% of all the participants said it was a good idea, but this concept will have to be tested among the clergy to establish viability and suitability.

Talking Bible operations

Question 30. Was the Talking Bible easy to operate?

Over 94% said that they could operate the Talking Bible with ease. If the ages of the participants and respondents were taken into account, one must conclude that the unit is user-friendly.

Question 31. When did you receive your Talking Bible?

An overview of the distribution – when and by whom the Talking Bibles were received.

Village	Date	Total
Wekdeba	1/02	8
	13/02	30
Embaderho	1/02	8
	07/03	20
Adi-Habteslus	29/02	15

Technical issues

Question 32. When you received your Talking Bible, was the operation of the machine well explained?

Everyone was satisfied with how Mr Habte Negash and Mr John Habte explained the operation procedures.

Question 33. Did your unit operate without problems?

Nearly 83% indicated that they did not experience any problems whatsoever and 17% (9) indicated that they had experienced problems.

The problems that had arisen:

3 Tapes were faulty – Wekdeba

4 Tapes were faulty – Embaderho

2 Tapes were faulty – Adi-Habteslus

3 units developed problems other than faulty cassettes – one ejected when started to play, one was dropped and one battery wire came loose.

Question 34. If not, how long did you have to wait before it was repaired?

Repairs were done within a couple of days and in two cases, people had to wait for a week. It was required of John Habte to visit the villages regularly; these visits were conducted on Sundays and Public Holidays, since that was the most convenient time to reach the people.

Question 35. What was the problem?

This has been discussed under Question 33.

Question 36. Did your Talking Bible operate on?

It was clear that people preferred using batteries as a power source (54%) since it gave them the freedom to move around with the unit. Although they might have access to electricity, they mainly used it to rewind the tape after listening to a track. Nearly 33% said that they used both batteries and electricity. It was only in Adi-Habteslus that participants did not have access to electricity.

Question 37. Did the original batteries last?

Bear in mind that some of the interviewees used only electricity and others rotated the power source and the listening cycle they were on. It was therefore to be expected that the original batteries would not last. This was confirmed when nearly 70% said that they had to replace the batteries.

Question 38. Who replaced the batteries?

Nearly 83% (43 people) replaced the batteries themselves. In 9 cases, the interviewees said that the Bible Society assisted with the replacement of the batteries. In total, the Bible Society helped 18 people with batteries.

People did not expect the Bible Society to supply them with batteries. Batteries are about 2 Dollars for 4. There are, however, cheaper batteries available at 1 Dollar for

4. Availability of a better type of battery is a problem. Energizer batteries are available, but not freely in the rural areas of Eritrea.

Question 38a. How many times?

16 people reported that they had replaced the batteries at least once while 13 replaced the batteries at least twice; another 6 had to replace the batteries at least three times and 2 replaced their batteries 4 times.

The response to this question should be considered in the light of questions 19 and 22. The amount of listening determines the life of the batteries.

It is, however, significant that people were prepared to purchase batteries themselves, thereby reflecting the value that they attached to the Talking Bible. This was something that became clear when we asked question 43 – The Talking Bible, is it the Bible to you?

Recording issues

Question 39. Was it enjoyable to listen to the reading?

Everybody confirmed that it was pleasant to listen to the reading.

Question 40. Was the voice clear?

This was confirmed by all.

Question 41. Did the reader read well?

Everybody confirmed that it was read correctly.

Question 42. Will you continue to use the Talking Bible?

Everybody confirmed that they would continue to do so.

This response should be followed up during a future visit to establish whether the people indeed continued to use the Talking Bible.

Talking Bible – symbolism and application

Question 43. The Talking Bible, is it the Bible to you?

Everybody said that it was the Bible for them and this was confirmed by the number of people who kissed the Bible, something that they do with the printed copy.

This statistic is significant since it confirms that the appearance (shape) of the Talking Bible reflects the intended symbolism and will help with future usage and acceptability.

Question 44. Would you like to listen to the Old Testament as well?

Everybody confirmed their need for the availability of the Old Testament. This will be considered only when the Talking Bible is available as a digital unit. Currently, it is not cost-effective to develop an analog Old Testament Talking Bible.

Talking Bible – engagement issues

Question 45. While listening to the Talking Bible, did you hear new scripture passages?

The response from the interviewees confirmed that they have been limited to selective reading from the clergy during the years. This is not a new phenomenon, but shows the need that exists to help people interact with the Word of God in the privacy of their own quiet (silent) time.

Nearly 86% of the respondents said that they had heard new scripture passages. Only 7 participants said that they had not heard anything new. This figure should be compared to the number of priests interviewed who confirmed the need for personal engagement with scripture.

Question 46. How does listening to the Talking Bible compare to someone reading aloud?

Nearly 87% of the interviewees preferred listening to the Talking Bible rather than having someone read aloud to them. 7 said it made no difference.

Question 47. Do you prefer listening to the Talking Bible to hearing someone read to you?

Over 94% of the respondents preferred the reading of the Talking Bible, affirming the selection of Father Yohannes as reader.

Talking Bible - testimonies

Question 48. Was it helpful to listen to the Talking Bible?

Everybody agreed that it was helpful to listen to the Talking Bible.

Question 49. If yes, how did you find it helpful?

The list of comments and testimonies.

- 1) Our family can listen to it with us, and it helps us abolish eye weakness.
- 2) For me who cannot read, it enables me to know the Lord.
- 3) Since I cannot read, now I love the opportunity to listen to my Talking Bible.
- 4) Because our eyes are becoming too weak, we have found the solution.
- 5) Great, you feel something when you listen to the Talking Bible.
- 6) We are becoming church lovers and servants when we started hearing this Talking Bible.
- 7) It means so much to me because I am listening to the word of God in my language.
- 8) Since I cannot read, it is helpful. It helps me to know about Christ. We listen to it with own family and neighbours.
- 9) We cannot read so we are listening to it. We are coming together with our family and neighbours for bible listening.
- 10) We become happy as we listen to the Talking Bible. It helps us to come together around God's word with our family and neighbours.
- 11) Since I cannot read, it is helpful.
- 12) We hear it with our family and neighbours. Since I cannot read, this is my opportunity to have a contact with the word of God.
- 13) It has a nice reading. I can remember it well.
- 14) When we listen to the Talking Bible, since we are tired in the day, it is not convenient to read, but listening is good and it refreshes my memories and meditate on the word of God.
- 15) Failing eyesight, but could listen instead of reading.
- 16) In my family those who could not read are now able to listen to the word of God without help.
- 17) Very helpful.
- 18) Very helpful in own life.
- 19) When Talking Bible speaks it helps me to meditate on the idea of God. To lead me to know the truth.
- 20) What was hidden is now revealed. This is solution which for years and years was not clear.
- 21) A lot.
- 22) It tells me the truth about God.
- 23) Because of poor eyesight, I can listen instead of reading; can listen together with family and neighbours.
- 24) Voice is clear, attracts you, and I prefer listening instead of reading. We have TV; this is more attractive than TV.
- 25) Very Good
- 26) Reading gets into your mind, meditating becomes easy.
- 27) It teaches me. It leads you to the truth.
- 28) It's very helpful to our villages, because we can listen to it even at work, also on many occasions like at the funeral services and wedding ceremonies as well.
- 29) It has a teaching of our church orthodox. It is just right.
- 30) It is more believable than listening to someone reading. I get saved through the scriptures. But if someone is reading the Bible to me, sometimes I think that they are wrong.

- 31) The teaching is good for the soul.
- 32) It is helpful in order to escape gossiping with friends and neighbours.
- 33) I get happy; it shows me the way I should follow.
- 34) It is more convenient to listen to the Talking Bible rather than to other people, because people may not be willing to read for you at any time but the Talking Bible are always ready.
- 35) It is better to hear the word of God inside your house than outside.
- 36) More helpful and I can understand it better.
- 37) Hearing is better than seeing.
- 38) It helps me to spend more time with the word of God.
- 39) I can quietly listen and meditate on the passages of the Bible.
- 40) Have problem with reading because of poor eyesight and listening is better, and it allows you to meditate.
- 41) When we are tired of working during the day, it is difficult to read the Bible, so the Talking Bible helps.
- 42) I am listening, what more can you expect? You can't expect more.
- 43) It helps to know what I haven't known before.
- 44) We know what we did not know.
- 45) It refreshes us, it is unique, renews our thoughts and with bad vision we need it.
- 46) It is helping me to build a relationship with God.
- 47) During spare time I enjoy listening to it.
- 48) Can hear a lot of new things.
- 49) It is joyful to hear the word of God while at rest in the house.
- 50) I can even listen while working.
- 51) It satisfies as well as touches you.

Talking Bible – availability and affordability

Question 50. If this Talking Bible were freely available, would you buy one?

Only 1 interviewee said no, but the motivation was clear; “I do not have money.” The rest all said that if it were available they would buy one.

Question 51. If you had to buy a Talking Bible, how much would you be prepared to pay?

The official exchange rate during the field research was 14 Nakfa to a US Dollar.

13% indicated that they could only afford to pay less than a 100 Nakfa; close to 27% indicated that they were willing to pay up to 150 Nakfa for a Talking Bible; 23% indicated that they would pay up to 200 Nakfa and the rest over 200 Nakfa.

Although this response shows that people are prepared to pay for this unit, availability of the necessary resources is questionable. Willingness to pay and actual payment are two different issues and this should be seen in this light.

Question 52. Should the Bible Society make the Talking Bible available to other people?

Everybody agreed it should.

Question 53. In which language?

First of all in Tigrinya and then in the other languages of the country.

Question 54. Any comments?

The list of unedited comments and testimonies.

- 1) It is creating love and co-operation with own neighbours; it helps us to meet with our neighbour. I suggest that all people receive it. As you hear it, it also encourages one to go to church. Work more for the Lord and to pray more.
- 2) Where has this been hidden? When I feel ill I listen to Talking Bible and I feel healed. Therefore I made it a custom to go on listening to my Talking Bible when I feel ill. There is a person living nearby our house who has been sick for the past 3 years, so his testimony is that he feels healing in his body as he listens to the Talking Bible.
- 3) Want to see it in every house. Want to come to Christ
- 4) I am impressed by the Talking Bible, and ask myself where I have been without hearing such a precious word. It tells us about love and respect for each other, so I am encouraged to do so. I am inclined to reconcile people after hearing the Talking Bible. It encourages me to respect the church and God's commandments.
- 5) The only thing to be done, is to pray to the Lord that it could be continued
- 6) May the Lord help you finish your whole mission.
- 7) We are thanking and praising the Lord when we listen to it. I wish for the rest of our people to have it.
- 8) My heart fills with Joy and hope when I listen to it. It encourages me to pray and go to church. It helps me to forgive and reconcile with my neighbours and others.
- 9) I Love God's work. This should have been introduced to us long ago before I get old.
- 10) We are so thankful and grateful, and we also wish to see more of this.
- 11) It helped me to be obedient to the Lord. I am grateful for this opportunity.
- 12) Have to distribute this Talking Bible.
- 13) Besides the church services, it is helping us very much to understand the word of God.
- 14) It helps me to calm down when I am angry. It is helping me to be patient.
- 15) Want to be saved permanently.
- 16) There are a lot of people who are not attending the church, especially the disabled and young people; I suggest that every house should have Talking Bible.
- 17) I have not heard of such a thing up to now; it is wonderful.

- 18) I wish this work could continue, as it gives everyone a better understanding of faith.
- 19) Good for the congregation; will make better members of the church.
- 20) Many people are waiting for it; please bring more.
- 21) God bless your work.
- 22) Now I can know what the truth is; now I can talk boldly about faith.
- 23) We like it very much; we hope we will have it in the Old Testament, and also I hope that others will have it as well. God Bless you.
- 24) I took it to funeral services many times. It comforts those who lost their loved ones.
- 25) It would be better if the Old Testament were available.
- 26) Make one that will use electricity, batteries have to be replaced.
- 27) We are renewed by it; it changes our lifestyle, and one of the children wants to sleep with it.
- 28) It makes new sense of the New Testament to me. All the Priests are asking for it for their churches, ± 500 in the church. The blind are asking for it. After the mass service, people stay to listen to it.

Observations

The following observations were made and should be read in context with the responses to the questionnaires.

- The people relished the fact that they now had access to the New Testament. This became apparent when they started to talk about the TB. Their faces simply lit up.
- The people looked after their TB's. They took good care of them and most of the Talking Bibles were still in the original packing.
- The people were extremely happy with the product, despite the fact that the batteries did not last.
- Especially in Embaderho, people were extremely happy when they realised we had kept our promise and that they did not have to give back the Talking Bibles. There was a rumour that they had to hand it back, which accounted for the low turnout.
- People struggled to express their gratitude – it really opened new avenues for them.
- Women felt empowered by receiving the Talking Bible. They have always had to take a back seat and this was an opportunity to be on equal terms with the men.
- Listening made for good social contact and it really improved the way neighbours saw each other.

- The TB made complete sense in the aural society. They had some really long discussions and not only were the priests invited, but also Habte Negash to provide answers to questions.
- The TB was a perfect complement to their lifestyle.
- Although the questions were short and to the point, people struggled to complete the questionnaire simply because they wanted to talk and share their experiences.
- It is important that there should be a usage demonstrator as well as follow-up. Although it was made clear that the people themselves were responsible for the batteries, the Bible Society had to supply them on occasion.
- Even the village administrators in Wekdeba and Embaderho received units which they are using in their offices.
- The packaging helps to sell the concept of scripture listening in more ways than one.
- On Sundays, the TB was played over the loudspeaker of the church and the whole village could hear. They also used the TB at funerals and carried it to the sick.
- It was seen as a good companion for widows, as they could listen in their own time and for as long as they wanted.
- People were asked to share and they did so gladly. They were not scared to answer questions during the interviews.



Taking care of his Talking Bible

Evaluation

Shortcomings

The following shortcomings concerning the research project should be noted:

The duration span of the research was too limited to research conclusively the sustainability of listening. The listening pattern showed long listening spells, but it could be argued that the product was a novelty and therefore appealed to people. It would be quite interesting to do a follow-up on the number of units still in use in a year's time.

The research period was too short to judge accurately the impact on or changes in lifestyle that may have ensued. Once again, a follow-up should be done in a year's time to judge the effect of the Talking Bible and the impact it made.

Societies will have to designate someone to handle all queries and repairs as they arise. The Talking Bible is, in essence, a mechanical apparatus which can falter and break.

Positive elements

It was apparent that the Talking Bible made sense. It was seen as an empowerment tool and people could use it in the privacy of their surroundings.

That people valued the unit, was abundantly clear both in the manner that they handled their Talking Bibles and in their ongoing willingness to buy new batteries.

Priests testified to the impact the Talking Bible made on their own ministry and how it required them to improve their own skills in terms of reading and exegesis

The chronological listening also worked to the advantage of the listener. Although it has the tools to search and find passages, the Talking Bible is first and foremost for chronological listening. The fact that there was discussion is extremely positive and underscores the empowerment characteristic of this unit.

The appearance of the unit also counted in its favour, especially in the communities where it was researched. The weight, appearance and the resemblance to a printed copy of the Bible were exciting attributes and added value to listening. It was not seen as a gimmick and was therefore acceptable.

We should never underestimate the influence of the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church on the acceptability of the unit. By giving his blessings and being publicly involved in the distribution, he endorsed this product.

Although the Talking Bible is still expensive by African standards, with the help of donors, many people can be reached. Families are large in Africa and because of neighbourliness, the ratio of people listening to one unit exceeds expectations.

Recommendations

- Planning

The importation and distribution of the units will have to be well planned in advance since there will be a great demand once word gets out that the Talking Bible is available. Coordination will have to be precise between the suppliers (World Mission) and the recipients (the local Bible Society).

Since the unit is electronic, authorities must be petitioned to lower importation duties. This unit is designated to be used in one manner only which is a strong argument to this end.

- Leadership

Leadership roles will have to be well defined, especially where decision-making comes into the paradigm. This will also be relevant in reporting and in the general overseeing of the project.

- Partnership

The distribution of the Talking Bible will most likely be a partnership issue; such a partnership should be well documented and roles specified as well as requirements concerning report-backs and other related issues.

- Development of staff

Staff will have to be trained to handle enquiries. As the unit is electronic, a reliable repair back-up plan should be in place. Repair people must be trained in the opening up of the sealed unit as well as in the electronic working of the unit.

It is suggested that one Bible Society staff member be designated as the person to handle the Talking Bible project. His job description should include distribution issues and repair issues as well as reporting and follow-up.

- Church relations

Church leaders must be involved in the planning of the Talking Bible distribution and they must be trained to assist with any problems arising. Most importantly, they must be on board since the Church leaders will be the ones who will have to answer any possible questions.

- Training

Training must be given to the appropriate personnel as well as to the support staff.

- Budget

A proper and realistic budget should be drawn up and in the case of a partnership, it should be spelled out very clearly who is responsible for which expenses. I am convinced that the Talking Bible should be a permanent item on all Societies' yearly budgets.

- Plan for the future

The Talking Bible will not only fulfil a need, but also create a need. Proper planning for future distribution should be ensured since the distribution of the Talking Bible should be an ongoing activity for Societies.

Conclusion

All the research objectives have been met and in conclusion we find that the Talking Bible as scripture engagement tool is eminently suitable for the intended audience as well as other nations in Africa.

This unit must be made available for the elderly and the illiterate, to allow them to engage with scripture in the secure surroundings of their homes and with family. By their engaging with scripture, behavioural change will take place which, in turn, should impact on society and the Church at large.

The analogue model will, for the time being, satisfy the need, but the digital unit will suit the conditions in Africa better since there are fewer moving parts and less can go wrong. We pray that a digital Talking Bible will soon be available at an affordable price.

Ministry and provision of biblical material to the illiterate and elderly people as well as to the visually impaired will be accelerated by the implementation of a Talking Bible distribution strategy. National Bible Societies will have to consider using this product seriously if they wish to comply with the directives from the Midrand World Assembly of 2000.

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Appendix B

Support form the Bishop of the Catholic Church

P. O. Box 244
Tel. 00291-1-12 02 06
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ASMARA - ERITREA

Asmara, 27 April 2004


Bible Society
Asmara
Eritrea

Dear Sir,
Peace in the Risen Lord.

This is to acknowledge receipt a copy of the **Talking Bible** on February 2, 2004. We have repeatedly listened to it and made others to listen to it. We find this method quite useful and practical, especially for the busy worker and those who, because of illiteracy or some physical handicap, cannot read by themselves. It will be very useful also to those who prepare homilies and write pastoral letters. We suggest that large quantities of the **Talking Bible** be shipped into the country so as to make it available at a reasonable price and that it may reach the highest number of our faithful. For your information the Catholic Church in Africa is planning to dedicate the year 2005 as **Year of the Bible**. We are therefore planning to use it as part of our intense Bible Apostolate during the coming year. Finally, we encourage you to continue producing the Talking Bible also in other languages spoken our country. As you may know most of our population is used to oral communication. We would like to express our high appreciation for all the effort the Bible Society is putting into the spread of the Good News. May the Lord bless you and your collaborators.

Sincerely yours

+A. Menghesteab Tesfamariam
Abune Menghesteab Tesfamariam
Catholic Eparch of Asmara, Eritrea



Appendix C

Signing for their Talking Bible

የሌሎች ስም	አድራሻ	ዕድሜ	ቤተክርስቲያን	ገቢዎች		ገቢዎች አድራሻ	አስተሳሰብ		10 ዓመት ገቢዎች የተሰጡ ገቢዎች	
				አዎ	አይደለም		አዎ	አይደለም	አዎ	አይደለም
1. አብነት ገቢዎች	ወንጌል	74	ደ/ቲ/ታ/ታ	✓		6	✓		✓	ደ/ቲ/ታ/ታ
2. ቶማስ ገቢዎች	ወንጌል	75	ደ/ቲ/ታ/ታ	✓		7	✓		✓	ደ/ቲ/ታ/ታ
3. ለገሰ ገቢዎች	ወንጌል	75	ደ/ቲ/ታ/ታ	✓		5		✓	✓	ደ/ቲ/ታ/ታ
4. አላማህ ገቢዎች	ወንጌል	68	ደ/ቲ/ታ/ታ	✓		8		✓	✓	ደ/ቲ/ታ/ታ
5. ዘርገህ ገቢዎች	ወንጌል		ደ/ቲ/ታ/ታ	✓					✓	ደ/ቲ/ታ/ታ
6. ተገቢ ገቢዎች	ወንጌል	77	ደ/ቲ/ታ/ታ	✓			✓		✓	ደ/ቲ/ታ/ታ
7. ተገቢ ገቢዎች	ወንጌል	65	ደ/ቲ/ታ/ታ	✓		13	✓		✓	ደ/ቲ/ታ/ታ
8. ተገቢ ገቢዎች	ወንጌል	64	ደ/ቲ/ታ/ታ	✓		3		✓	✓	ደ/ቲ/ታ/ታ
9.										
10.										