

Africa Speaks
Continuation Committee Meeting Notes
Via Skype - 9 April 2018

On 27 March Modupe Ehirim accepted the nomination to serve on the Continuation Committee for the Africa Speaks Conference. With her acceptance, the membership of the initial Committee was complete.

Prior to the meeting a suggested Agenda was reviewed by the Committee and members indicated which items should be given priority.

Priority items were:

Developing a clear definition of our objectives

Choosing a Lusophone member to invite to join the Committee

Responding to Tyndale House Foundation offer to consider a grant request

Some Questions that might be considered:

"What does the Conference mean for my country?" For other countries?

"Who should we be talking to about the Conference proceedings?"

"Should we share the Conference records with them or just the Accord documents?"

The meeting began several minutes late because of problems making connection via Skype. It lasted approximately 90 minutes.

In attendance:

Modupe Ehirim

John Gathuku

Jules Ouoba

Tim Welch

Edward Elliott

The meeting opened with prayer.

Representation from Portuguese-speaking Nations

The Committee discussed representation from Lusophone Africa. On 8 March at the Africa Speaks meetings in Bannockburn, Illinois, Liz Patten from Mozambique was nominated to serve but did not accept. Subsequently she explained that she did not know what would be required, and did not wish to accept if she might not be able to fulfill her duties.

It was decided to ask her to reconsider her decision and to accept a place on the Continuation Committee.

Frequency of Meetings

What are the likely demands of Committee membership on members? The consensus of the Committee was that there will be quarterly meetings with additional meetings as needed. Additional meetings will be needed in these early days in order to meet the demands of the birth of a movement.

Grant Request to Tyndale House Foundation

The Committee discussed the THF suggestion that the Continuation Committee request a grant to design and maintain an Africa Speaks website. The Committee's response was positive. This information will be provided to THF.

Reason for Existence

The majority of this meeting was spent discussing Africa Speaks' reason for existence, our mission. Following are notes from the discussion with an attempt to summarize them at the conclusion.

We should think deeply about financial management in the publishing industry.

We should not provide training, but should provide opportunity for members to work alongside of established publishers such as Tyndale House. This will increase the understanding of what a flourishing African publishing industry might look like.

Africa Speaks has a Mission Statement. Who are like-minded persons or organizations that should be invited to join?

What is the interest of publishers who are part of the Accord? We need to learn the common denominator.

What are all the parts that make up the whole industry? They are not limited to publishers. For example the industry includes distribution. Referring to David Bennett's comments about networks and the role of the Continuation Committee,¹ someone said that participants want to network. Members want to be able to communicate easily with one another.

Someone stated that communications are one of the objectives.

They asked, "What would make us unique?" and suggested that we might provide long-term internships with established publishers. It was noted that MAI, the Lausanne Movement, and Magazine Training International each has a communications platform, but none of them has a long-term commitment to work with individual members. For example, MAI is strong in collaborating and training, but not in long-term mentoring. When David C. Cook was active, they provided long-term mentoring to publishers in Kenya, but they no longer provide this valuable service. Long-term, sustained development is needed.

Looking at established publishers, for example, how can we be of help in their very country?

Publishers that are related to an international publisher are in a very different position than indigenous publishers. Perhaps we should focus on serving indigenous publishers.

¹ "So again, the question is: what is the need of the hour, and what are the expectations of those who asked for a Continuation Committee? Is it a network, a place to develop and share ideas? That requires one kind of leadership—highly relational, low-key, inclusive, non-directive, etc. Or do they see this as a think tank on the way to becoming a new collaborative initiative, like the Africa Study Bible or another research project or publishing venture? Are they looking for someone to lead the charge, to help pull the pieces together and identify the resources?"

(At this point we experienced a typical problem of international communications. We discovered that Tim was offline, and had been for a while. Gathuku reconnected us.)

It was stated that David C Cook worked with CPE. One area of their focus was new writers.

Someone said that the biggest problem in West Africa is distribution. David D Cook also provided some training in this area. MAI's training for writers always includes some input related to distribution.

Someone noted that there appears to be a good distribution network in Latin America that we could learn from.

Experience has been that booksellers do not interact and lack trust in one another, particularly between countries and organizations. A goal of Africa Speaks should be to develop trust.

Another challenge publishers face is finding ways to sell titles in countries other than their own.

Someone said, 'It would be easy to set up a webpage where all the new titles that everyone produces are made known.'

Movement of funds between countries is a major issue. Often missionaries provide a means to obtain dollars.

BitPesa is a company that uses Bitcoin to transfer funds between countries. BitPesa was developed in Kenya and serves, among other countries, Nigeria.

Someone observed that methods of moving goods and funds are improving. Enabling communications between countries and companies may be one of the best things we can do.

We should encourage all signers to share how they distribute books and learn from each other. We can also learn from each other how to transfer funds.

The question was asked, 'How would we classify that objective?'

One response was, 'It is still under communications. The goal is to flourish around the continent. The problem is that a good book gets published in Kenya but no one in Nigeria knows about it.'

Someone said that we should encourage others to join the conversation. Everything seems to be based on communications. We need to talk about challenges and successes.

When we speak of others joining, should we invite delegates to sign who needed to leave Bannockburn early? For example, someone had to catch a flight and wasn't able to sign.

It was stated that the network should grow. Others should be given opportunity to sign.

At this point there was general discussion. The consensus was, let's stop working independently. Let's work together.

Summary

We should focus on long-term solutions, not short-term.

We should refer people to other organizations such as MAI, not duplicate what they are doing.

We should invite others to join Africa Speaks. We will discuss requirements for joining at next meeting.

Our minutes may be posted on the website.

We should ask others for their feedback in response to minutes.

Ask questions of members such as what is their highest priority?

(Ask permission to put their answers on the website.)

Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned with the understanding that the Committee will reconvene after members have opportunity to review and comment on minutes.

The meeting closed with prayer.