

Africa Speaks
Continuation Committee Meeting Notes
Via Skype – 11 July 2018

In attendance:

Modupe Ehirim

John Gathuku

Jules Ouoba

Tim Welch

Liz Patten

Edward Elliott

Karen Perlman

The meeting began with personal thoughts regarding Africa Speaks. Following is a summary.

In the 15th chapter of his letter to the Romans, St. Paul wrote, “we wait patiently for God’s promises to be fulfilled.” My mind went to the Scriptures that gave birth to our vision for Christian books being made available where they are not easy to obtain.

Moses, a man raised in Africa, adopted by an African princess -you remember the story- wrote words that spoke to me those years ago: “Remember how the Lord your God led you through the wilderness for these 40 years, humbling you and testing you...to find out whether or not you would obey his commands.”

40 years ago. When was that?

That was 1978---If my memory is correct, that is the year that we committed to distribution of Christian books where things can be difficult. We didn’t do much then. It was just a vision. But here we are 40 years later embarked with a Community of Africans

and yes, even some Westerners, on a spiritual journey taking on the most difficult of visions. Taking on an impossible task.

Do you remember what Hudson Taylor said? It's on our website. We used it at the conference. "I have found there are three stages to every great work of God: first it is impossible, then it is difficult, then it is done." Are we to the difficult stage yet? Are we still at impossible?

But listen! There are the not the important questions! The important question is, "ARE WE ATTEMPTING A GREAT WORK OF GOD?"

There were many scriptures given by the Lord 40-some years ago. Habakkuk wrote one of them. In the original Living Bible paraphrased by Dr. Kenneth Taylor, (Mark's father, Jeremy's grandfather), I read 'the Lord said to me, "Write an answer on a billboard, large and clear, so that anyone can read it at a glance and rush to tell the others. But these things I plan won't happen right away. Slowly, steadily, surely, the time approaches when the vision will be fulfilled. If it seems slow, do not despair, for these things will surely come to pass. Just be patient. **They will not be overdue a single day!**"

I was encouraged by these passages from long ago. I rededicated myself to the work of Africa Speaks. Perhaps it will be my role for a while to stay on the Committee, perhaps not. That's not the important thing. The important thing is that we - each of us who has been chosen for this role of leadership - live our lives in a way that pleases the Lord, and that we remain faithful and patient, expecting him to do the impossible. And believing with all our hearts that sometime soon the impossible will become difficult, and then, to our delight, it will be done!

There was a general time of prayer.

A call to critical focus

The ConCom conversation began by discussing our purpose as Africa Speaks. Among other things the committee reviewed the answers from the Africa Speaks Community to questions 3 and 4 and how we can best respond to the visions of Africa Speaks members. (3. How do you foresee Africa Speaks' benefit to your country at large? 4. What is your greatest need as a publisher/bookseller that Africa Speaks can meet?)

MAI and Africa Speaks Cooperation

Following our last meeting, at the request of the Committee, Gathuku met with Rose Birenge, the African Chairperson of MAI. Training is a high priority of the Africa Speaks Community.

The ConCom said that we should work together with MAI. We need to make MAI trainings known, and Africa Speaks can provide personnel for their different training events.

There is a need for training focused on distribution. It was agreed that there is a real gap when it comes to distribution, as well as in getting churches involved with publishing and investing in publishing. We also need to focus on the business side of things.

Someone asked, is there a difference between providing training and cooperating? Discussion followed.

Reading the notes from Rose, it seems that we should just bridge our needs with what MAI is already doing well.

We should make MAI's free trainings known in the Africa Speaks community.

MAI is really involved in formation and training. MAI and MTI are complimentary. MAI is the publishing side of things, and MTI is taking care of magazines.

There's a gap in distribution and training is needed in that area, especially in bookshops. If Africa Speaks can do something in this area, that that would really help create the flourishing industry.

I remember someone saying that if a great book is published in Kenya, we may never see it in Nigeria.

People want to publish, and they need to have funds, but even those who have funds, can publish, but don't know what to do with it after. I think Africa Speaks should look more at the business side of publishing.

Someone added, if I remember right, I think that's what someone said at Trinity as well.

Rolf Garborg has been invited to go to Kenya to inspire, train and do some hands-on work there, which is specifically in distribution. Should we be encouraging Foundations to give funds towards strengthening distribution training, etc.?

A question was asked. What's the criteria that we would use to determine who we would lend to? The Committee did not seem enthusiastic about seeking funding.

Change in Agenda

One item on the agenda we received related to cooperative efforts between MTI, MAI and others who provide training in Africa. MAI and MTI hope to have a conversation regarding cooperative training efforts, possibly involving Africa Speaks. It seemed wise to postpone additional discussion on that subject until after they have their conversation.

How Will People Join Africa Speaks?

A number of people who were not at our March meeting have shown interest in being part of the Africa Speaks Community. We left last meeting thinking we could use the Lausanne Covenant as the theological basis for Africa Speaks. Are we to the place of having firm

guidelines for people to join? At last meeting it was suggested that we all look over the Lausanne covenant and then see if we all agree to use that.

Someone said, I think the Lausanne covenant is great and served its purpose for the conference, but I think it's very long and not sure that's necessary for Africa Speaks. I think it's a long document for our purposes and wonder if we can take a part of it or create a statement of faith out of it and use that.

Another member agreed. Perhaps we can take out highlights to put on the site and then if people want to read the full document, we can have it available for them to read in its entirety.

At least two members of the ConCom have used the Lausanne Covenant in their work. One member said, We've used it, and while it can be long, the statement of faith part seemed to cover the basics. I understand what is being said about it being long, but I hesitate on pulling out parts as that would require a lot of theological time that none of us really have strength in.

Discussion continued. Since the document isn't something that would need to be read often, I think it's okay to keep it as is because we know that all the information has been covered well.

Between our meetings contact was made with David Bennett who works with Lausanne and asked him if others use this document and if it would be okay for us to use. His response was that there are many organizations around the world that use it and we don't need their permission to use it.

The comment was made, I understand the question, what parts of it would we use? It seems that if we don't use this document fully, we would need to spend a lot of time researching theology.

I would say if that's the feedback you got back from David, then it probably means that most people who would want to join AS would likely be familiar with the covenant and so maybe we should just move on and use the document.

We polled Committee member who hadn't spoken to the subject.

Lausanne is based on general principles that have been worked out and there's also an underlying unity that's been created through it.

Another strength to using the Covenant is that the Covenant is available in multiple languages

A member sent everyone a simple statement of faith and then said, I think the thing with the Lausanne Covenant is that it's very focused on worldwide evangelism. But it's not really our focus. It's one of our goals certainly, but it's very tailored to the purpose of the conference that was held in Lausanne. I'm not opposed to it; if everyone wants to go with it, I'll go with it; I'm just not sure that it fits us.

Someone said that document that was just sent to us is along the lines of what they were thinking.

The document was from the Evangelical Alliance, a group of different denominations that subscribe to the same basis of faith and who work together. It was formed back in the 1840's. It gives them a unified and strengthened voice despite their denominations.

Question: Does Association of Evangelicals in Africa have a statement of faith?

Response: The AEA is a grouping of evangelical churches. Right now, they are going through financial obstacles. They have organized different structures such as schools in Nairobi and Bangui. They have a confession of faith, and it's the Lausanne statement of faith.

A question was raised. Do we want to make sure, before we're done here, that we have decided how people can join the AS Community? If so, I have a suggestion.

Everyone: Yes

If we're not sure we want to use the Lausanne statement long-term, perhaps our Community could say something such as "we agree with the Lausanne Covenant and are working on a statement of faith"

The conversation continued:

I would think that the Lausanne statement is the most widely accepted and credible association on the continent. I think our issue is not with the content in the Covenant, but more on the length of it. So, we wouldn't want our members to think that we disagree with any part of the Lausanne covenant.

I think we should go with the Lausanne Covenant.

It feels like we have consensus. Am I correct?

You're correct.

What else should be required of those who wish to join the Africa Speaks Community?

The discussion continued:

Classify ourselves into the different areas of publishing. Maybe we create a limit to those who are already in the business and not just "interested?"

Since coming from the conference at Trinity, I've been looking for people to invite into the Community and it's been difficult for me to find those people. And I thought perhaps AS would exist to bring those interested, provide training for them and help them achieve some of the goals.

I think that is consistent with the question that was asked a while ago on FB, "If a person is just starting out in the publishing business, what online resource would you recommend for them?"

I also hear the concern of having someone who just says they're interested but haven't taken any steps into publishing, editing, selling, something. You could end up getting a lot of people who end up just being "friends" in a large group.

Is there room for members and associate members?

Could we have levels, so that people can choose where they are, and the website would be as such that they would have access to the level that they are in?

If they sign the Accord, would that be a limiter?

We're probably not going to get too many people who are just "interested." There are some churches that are interested in being part of something. And we would want them to jump on board and get inspired and learn. And so perhaps those are the associate member levels.

When I signed the Accord, I was not signing on behalf of Tyndale House Foundation. I was signing as an individual even though I'm not publishing in Africa. What if the board of a ministry asked for permission to sign the Accord even though they may never publish anything in Africa? What do we do with those kinds of groups?

I see both sides and that the publishers and others who are active in the industry would be the more prominent members, but it should be open to everyone. There are church leaders and just people that he knows that really enjoy reading and there's no reason that those people shouldn't be able to join. That could be enriching to us and join us by praying for us. And there are also people who give of their resources to promote publishing even though they are not personally involved.

We're at the preliminary stages; one possibility is welcoming anyone who wishes to join and then over a period creating levels of memberships for people to identify with.

My thoughts were in terms of the people who would have access to documents such as the minutes. Should people who are not actively in the industry be able to access documents like that? Maybe the website can solve that, maybe we can retain a certain type of commitment to joining.

Maybe the designers of the website can construct it so there is a way for all signers of the covenant to access parts of the website and then other parts of the website for those that are at a different level of member.

The Accord itself defines the type of people who can be part of the Accord. What if we require that members who join the Community must fill out information such as we did on the Portfolio page and we would add them to the Portfolio page, and they would sign the

Accord. And then associate members can join the community but not sign the Accord and not fill out information for the Portfolio.

At this point it was asked, who would be interested in writing up something that would explain how people can join the Community and what the difference is between being a member and being an associate? Perhaps francophone Committee members can work on this together, and that way we can have it both in English and French. They agreed to do this for Africa Speaks.

Someone asked, is this something we need to have a meeting to review and discuss once it's done, or can we do that over email?

Consensus: Email

Prayer was offered as the meeting continued

LittWorld 2018

At the request of the Committee, Gathuku met with Rose Birenge. The information she provided regarding the work of MAI in Africa was the basis for the next part of our meeting.

Rose gave us a snapshot of where MAI has been and what they're planning for the future. She gave a list of about five major projects that are already planned by MAI, which is very helpful for us in deciding how we are going to define ourselves.

Someone said, I looked at the MAI notes, and what would be interesting to know is how high is the current reach of MAI? How many people are they connected to that we would want to connect to?

Discussion followed:

It seems that they have about 50 active trainers. I do not know that anyone knows how many Christian publishers there are to be reached in Africa. I think by the MAI Ghana meeting, we will have defined our goals for AS. And we can all work together to bring Christian publishers to one location. [Note: MAI is planning a Mini LittWorld in Ghana in 2019.)

I think we should have a conversation with Rose

It seems that we can wait until John Maust and Rose discuss further, but we can certainly communicate with Rose that we would be happy to contribute in helping MAI's Mini LittWorld in Ghana to be successful.

LittWorld 2018 in Singapore is coming up and Rose has suggested that the committee members attend to see what it looks like. I think that kind of interaction with MAI would be beneficial. I'm not sure how many of us were planning on attending.

(Tim and Jules are going. John is not sure. Neither Liz nor Modupe are going.)

That would be very good, because then we can get a sideline meeting with MAI to discuss how we can partner together.

It may be possible that one of the Foundations that were at Africa Speaks would be willing to provide funds for someone to attend if they cannot.

Africa Speaks Website

A question was asked, Is planning the website something we should have a sub-committee do, rather than having all six of us work on it?

Discussion:

I think a sub-committee is a good idea. If we as a whole agree on what we want the website to do, then the sub-committee can be the ones who work on making that happen.

I also think that would be good. I'm not sure if we have people in the AS community that are tech-savvy, but if we do, I think it would be good to have them be involved in the sub-committee.

(No one on the Committee has expertise in this area.)

Someone mentioned BRCK and Erik Hersman in Nairobi. Erik is the son of Russ Hersman who is the Chief Operating Officer of Wycliffe. He grew up in Sudan and Kenya. Kenya is his home. He's a senior TED Talk Fellow. He has expertise.

Someone said, I read a book called, "The Next Africa" and they speak of Erik a lot in the book. Apparently, he's a well-known, African, Christian, IT guy.

I think once we know what we want on the website, then we can determine what level of expertise we'll need in developing the website.

I believe we already have a lot of those answers from the questions we sent out. Would someone be willing to compile that information into a list of priorities to review at the next meeting? Is that the next step?

We all agree, but we're waiting for someone to volunteer

A volunteer was found.

All: Thank you very much.

Are there other things we should discuss further, or should we choose a date for the next meeting and close in prayer?

Someone replied, I just want to be clear, does Africa Speaks need a completely new site or can we use the existing one?

I think it's a more technical question than I originally realized. In the beginning, I thought, let's build on what we have. But then, when we wrote to Johnathan Pulos, he noted that our current website is limited and not the best platform. It seems we should consider starting over and creating a new website.

Is there anything else we should cover?

I'm not sure we summarized what the take-aways were from the questions we had sent out. Did we find any patterns that we should consider for ongoing conversations? For instance, several people talked about creating a database for publishers in Africa. There are certain things that resounded from several people in their responses?

I agree with what you're saying, and it seemed to me that they wanted a database of information. It also seemed that there was a desire for training. Maybe we can incorporate things to do to meet that need and discuss that in our next meeting.

Regarding Johnathan Pulos, he's committed to serving the international church with his skills. Would it be appropriate for us to use our website budget to compensate him at this point or are we not there yet?

Maybe we can get there once we determine our needs for the website and handle that in the next meeting.

Can you clarify for me, I thought THF had already approved a grant for website building.

Yes- that's right. When the foundation gives money, they must give it to a US organization technically set up as what the tax people call, a 501(c)3. Since we are not a 50(c)3 organization, they cannot give money to Africa Speaks. However they can fund THF "Program Expenses." In that case they would pay an individual or organization directly to do the work for the website that they approved.

Date of next meeting

General discussion and agreement on August 15th, at 8:00 AM CST.

If someone has something on their hearts to share for devotions at our next meeting, please let us know.

Gathuku ended the meeting in prayer.

Meeting ended at 10:33 am.

Action Items:

Two members will work on creating a document that explains how people can join the Africa Speaks Community and the difference between being a member and an associate. A list of priorities for the website will be developed based on the answers to our questions that Modupe compiled.

Next Meeting will be held 15 August 2018 at 13:00 GMT