



Guiding Principles from the Global People Conversation

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Introduction

Recent decades have seen profound changes in the global church. As the church has grown and matured, its people are getting involved in God’s mission in new and different ways. In many contexts, they are eager to directly participate and are willing to work with a wide variety of partners. These changes and opportunities have raised important questions and increased creative thinking and efforts in the global Bible translation movement. Many organisations in the Wycliffe Global Alliance are increasingly reassessing their People Stream² efforts, aware that long-held models and concepts may no longer fit with current and future realities.

Today, Alliance organisations are much more diverse than in the past. Some continue as sending organisations, focusing on finding the needed personnel for partner organisations involved in Bible translation. However, many of these “sending” organisations are also directly involved

¹ This document follows in the tradition of [Alliance philosophy and principle papers](#) which offer the history and thinking of the Alliance as it develops.

² The People Stream is one of seven Streams of Participation recognized in the Wycliffe Global Alliance as means by which Alliance organisations may participate in the Bible translation movement. The People Stream focuses on the finding, development, and placement of people in roles in the Bible translation movement. [Participation Streams - Wycliffe Global Alliance](#).



Bogota, Colombia. Photos: Jim Killam

in translation projects. Today, Alliance organisations include church denominations, movements and organisations engaging in all facets of Bible translation, including various aspects of training. The wider range of options for involvement brings new opportunities and greater complexity, including a significant increase in potential partners for all of these organisations.

In an ongoing effort to discuss these realities, the Alliance held five Global People Conversations in 2023. Four of these Conversations were regional, held in Germany, Colombia, Malaysia and Kenya, with a total of 120 participants (including Alliance leaders and several guests from other organisations) representing 75 organisations and nearly as many countries. The fifth Conversation, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, included several representatives from each regional meeting and most of the Alliance Leadership Team.

The Conversation's GUIDING QUESTION was: In light of the big shifts the church in general and the Bible translation movement in particular have seen in the past decades, how can Alliance organisations best participate in the Bible translation movement through the People Stream?

Participants explored contexts in which people are serving, and considered new means of involvement. As they engaged in the Conversations, they developed creative ideas, committed to further exploration and gained a greater understanding and appreciation of varying perspectives.

Background and Context

Many influences contributed to the thinking in the 2023 Conversations, including:

- the 2018 Alliance missiological consultation, [People Serving in God's Mission](#), which was an earlier step toward looking at the "people" questions differently;
- the [Alliance Principles of Community](#);
- the [Bible Translation Programs Philosophy](#);
- thoughts that emerged from the 2017-2018 consultations on [The Alliance: An Alliance Missiological Exploration of its Relationship with the Church in God's Mission](#); and



Holzhausen, Germany. Photos: Elisabeth Berg

- eight TED-like video presentations coming from the Alliance organisations.³

Participants at the fifth People Conversation noted that, in the past, when leaders talked about people’s involvement in Bible translation, the discussion often focused on pragmatic questions regarding “programs and systems” or “restructuring of organisations and processes”.

“Recruitment and retention”, “human resources”, and the church as a “resource” were common “mobilisation” topics. At the 2023 People Conversations, however, the discussions focused on the centrality of the church in God’s mission, the essential nature of relationships, prayer and collaboration. Participants also acknowledged the need for significant change in our approaches and perspectives.

In recognition of the beauty, complexity and interconnectedness of how God is carrying out his mission in the world today, the final 2023 People Conversation presented the gathered information, input, wisdom and musings collected in the four regional conversations. As a metaphor, we used an ecosystem—where living things not only live and interact with each other, but depend on each other to thrive. This perspective encouraged participants to find new ways of grappling with global, cultural, organisational, geopolitical and numerous other intricate and multi-faceted aspects of the People discussion. It also helped participants identify opportunities that flow naturally from collaboration and interconnectedness, thinking beyond transactional relationships.

An ecosystem is more than its structures and environments. It’s the way living organisms contribute to life as they interact with one another in those structures or environments. The ecosystem conversations spoke to the reality of our human imperfections and inadequacies but recognized what is possible when we contribute what we can while also embracing the contributions of others. Thinking about the Bible translation movement as an ecosystem soon led to considering the larger ecosystem of the church, and God’s kingdom and mission. With this broader view, the possibilities and opportunities grow. The ecosystem metaphor leads to a greater understanding of the organic, dynamic, diverse and shifting nature of what it means to be a part of God’s mission and the Bible translation movement today and into the future. The Bible translation

3 See Appendix for an index with links to the videos.



Nairobi, Kenya. Photos: Daisy Kilel

ecosystem relates to, connects with and is embedded in the larger ecosystem of the church and God's mission. We desire to steward our part in this ecosystem well, so today's and tomorrow's generations will find joy and fulfilment in participating in this ministry of Bible translation. This can only be done as the Body of Christ living and working together, and seeking to discern his path forward.

With the church embracing its central role in Bible translation ministries, the best contributions of Bible translation organisations will also need to adapt and change. A pastor who participated in the People Conversation stated, "Don't take the church to the field. Come back to the church and broaden our vision." The implication was to not just take people from the church but to engage with the whole church for greater involvement. This was elaborated on elsewhere in discussions of moving from a mission/church dichotomy to a community mentality.

Alliance Values as Reflected in the People Stream

Six core themes emerged from the four regional discussions. These captured the pressing concerns of the participants and helped shape the conversation in Johannesburg: church, generations, people, technology, collaboration and practical needs (what people are needed where). As these core themes were explored from the wider ecosystem perspective and in light of Alliance values, the following principles emerged.

Big Picture

- The Alliance acknowledges Bible translation as a significant, but not all-encompassing, part of God's mission of redemption, restoration and transformation.
- We are honoured to participate in God's mission. Therefore, we recognise the importance of, and do our best (through God's strength) to conduct our lives with: humility, grace, compassion, trust and love so we might value, honour and treat with dignity all those with whom we serve.
- We acknowledge the increasing and God-given diversity and complexity in people, cultures and contexts and seek to find common ground in shared vision and values.
- We give ongoing attention to the need for all people groups to have access to God's Word in a language and formats they can clearly understand. We also recognize that the needs,



Left: Johannesburg, South Africa. Right: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Photos: Phil Prior, Siew Wah Ng

qualifications and means for serving in this ministry will continue to change according to context, opportunities and circumstances.

- We are committed to time in the Word, in prayer and listening to God and each other so that we might understand and discern how he desires us to participate.
- As we gain understanding of the mission belonging to God and through the ecosystem perspective, we can turn away from the “scarcity mentality” that there are not enough people, finances and other resources. This also includes turning away from the idea that any one (or more) organisation “own(s)” any given region or project.
- We are willing to grow in our understanding of what it means to participate in God’s mission and our understanding of God as owner of all things.
- In particular, we approach our work and life with ongoing curiosity and creativity. Continuing to explore the metaphors of ecosystem and journey is one way to help us better understand and respond to complex realities.

Church

- We see Bible translation as a church-centric ministry. The church, ideally, is “in charge” under God’s direction. It is not merely a “resource”.
- We welcome the leadership and involvement of the church worldwide: global, regional and local. We desire thriving relationships with and within the church.
- We recognize the church and mission (including the Bible translation movement) as being part of one ecosystem.
- As we look toward the future of people serving in God’s mission through Bible translation-related ministries, we want to explore that future with the church.
- We embrace and seek to learn more about how all generations can learn of the needs and opportunities in Bible translation-related ministries. We desire to learn from each generation.

Constructs

- We are committed to moving past unnecessary barriers that have often existed between mission organisations and churches and within organisations’ often departmentalised and compartmentalised structures.



Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Photo: Siew Wah Ng

- Rather than recruitment for the sake of recruitment, we desire to see people find their place in God's mission.
- Rather than retention for the sake of retention, we seek to see people thriving and flourishing as they have a positive impact.
- We want to create and maintain infrastructures and processes that serve well, and willingly and courageously release those that constrain or exclude.

Collaboration

- We are knit together through Christ in prayer, love and generosity of spirit.
- We recognize that collaboration is not a goal in and of itself, but a way of being and of demonstrating the unity of believers as we journey together.
- We embrace collaboration as a way of being, not just doing. The metaphor of the ecosystem can provide a perspective that emphasises a relational way of living (including our work), rather than merely a transactional way of working.
- We are committed to generously sharing our God-given resources, talents, ideas and understanding.
- We are committed to listening to and learning from each other.
- With a goal of more people being involved and able to work together, we seek ways to bring



Left: Nairobi, Kenya. Right: Holzhausen, Germany. Photos: Daisly Kilel, Elisabeth Berg

clarity, simplify processes and remove barriers that might hinder involvement and collaboration.

- We are committed to modelling interdependence, collaboration and diversity, seeking open, honest and respectful relationships.

Communication

- We are committed to ongoing listening and seeking to understand a wide variety of voices.
- We seek to communicate clearly. Yet, we do not want to oversimplify. We seek to bring clarity to complexity so that all can share and understand what is being communicated—often in contexts where people are interacting in something other than their first languages.
- We will nurture a culture and space for describing and sharing needs and resources.
- We honour and respect our past and those who have gone before us, while also trying to learn from their successes and failures. We look to the future with humility and hope.
- We are committed to ongoing conversations that will bring people together, bring reconciliation, nurture new and creative efforts, increase understanding and aid communication.
- We will guard our messaging vocabulary, avoiding terms that give the impression of undue ownership, power and control. In our desire to develop true relationships and honour others, we will also avoid competitive, military and industrial thinking and language that can be harmful and dehumanising.
- We seek to use technology well and wisely through a wide range of media.

Change

- We embrace the reality that there will continue to be changes in needs, qualifications and who is involved in the Bible translation movement. We seek to be flexible, adaptable and open in keeping with God's leading.
- We recognize change in many regions including greater fluidity in people movement (migration, etc.), increased education levels and growth or changes in the church.
- We recognize that fewer people may be able to (or need to) commit to a lifetime on the "field", or even to living away from their home area full-time, but that God is opening many



Johannesburg, South Africa. Photo: Phil Prior

creative options for service and for participating in his mission, including Bible translation-related ministries.

- Rather than thinking in terms of “receivers and senders” we embrace the idea that all who participate are both givers and receivers through the generosity and grace of God.
- Rather than thinking in exclusive terms of experts and training, we seek to learn from the experience and expertise of many, recognizing all have something to contribute. We learn from each other as we journey together.

Taking the Conversation Forward / Looking Ahead

The participants of the Johannesburg Conversation recognized the reality of widespread change—in the world, in the church, in Bible translation needs and approaches, and in their own organisations and contexts. There is greater diversity and ongoing change in who is involved in ministry and in ways of working.

“How can Alliance Organisations best participate in the Bible translation movement through the People Stream?” The Global People Conversations did not find answers to this original guiding question in new campaigns or novel ideas for how to “do recruitment” (though these continue to be valuable pursuits for many Alliance organisations in their own contexts). It was agreed that the next steps involve exploring new ways of being, not just doing – i.e. of being together, with the church, and with local communities. And it was agreed that ecosystem thinking is helpful because it highlights opportunities and interdependence. Only through relationships will there be a way forward. Though contexts may be changing, complex and sometimes challenging, the constant that provides the greatest encouragement and energy is God’s faithfulness in his mission.

APPENDIX

INDEX TO THE TED-LIKE PRESENTATIONS

1	Africa: BTL Kenya	Leveraging Technology to Optimise Work Continuity	Catherine Waisiko, BTL Human Resources Manager	https://vimeo.com/786185948
2	Africa: Wycliffe Africa	Wycliffe Africa	Paul Kihiro, Wycliffe Africa, Programme Coordinator	https://vimeo.com/782018994
3	Americas: ALEM	Working Hand in Hand	Jessé Fogaça, Translator with ALEM (working in Timor- Leste)	https://vimeo.com/781998122
4	Americas: Wycliffe USA	The People Stream in Wy- cliffe USA	José Antonio de Dios, Execu- tive Vice President of People and Culture, Wycliffe USA	https://vimeo.com/782003676
5	Asia-Pacific: Kartidaya Indonesia	Recruitment and Sending	Budi Santoso, Executive Director, Yayasan Kartidaya	https://vimeo.com/782016293
6	Asia-Pacific: Wycliffe Taiwan	Roads from Past to Future	Dr. Albert Fung, Executive Director, Wycliffe Taiwan	https://vimeo.com/782021185
7	Europe: Wycliffe France	Church and Teamwork	Stewart Johnson, Executive Director, Wycliffe France (living in UK)	https://vimeo.com/782025164
8	Europe: Wycliffe Netherlands	How to Stay Relevant in the Bible Translation Movement	Bram van Grootheest, Executive Director, Wycliffe Netherlands	https://vimeo.com/782028000