

Africa

Mali Focus – part 2

Claire Bedot, Francophone Communications Officer, went to Mali in March with professional photographer Joaquim Dassonville. The stories and photos that follow reflect the work of a dynamic and forward-thinking Bible Society

Translation tested in the village square

Interview with Schadrac Keita, main translator of the Boomu Bible

When did translation work on the Boomu Bible start?

I'm delighted that you're taking such an interest in our translation project, which started officially on May 9, 1989. The first goal was to translate the Old Testament (which was completed in December 1998), then to produce a new translation of the New Testament. We are still working on this.

How many translators are there?

At the start of the Old Testament project, there were three of us in the translation team: Rose Nickel, a Canadian missionary who went back to Canada in 1997; Marc Dackouo, a local

pastor, and myself, Schadrac Keita, who finished the work on the Old Testament. We are now working together on the New Testament.

Which Churches are involved in this project?

In Mali, the main Churches supporting this work are the Christian Evangelical Churches of Mali (ECEM), especially those in the Buwatu region – the Districts of Sanékuy, Tominian, Mankoïna and Zamana. In Burkina Faso, where Boomu is also widely spoken, support comes mainly from the Protestant Churches of the Christian Alliance of Burkina Faso, in particular those in Djibasso, Nouna and Solenso.

main French versions of the Bible and some English versions. We don't often refer to the original Hebrew or Greek.

For the Old Testament we used a SIL software program. For the New Testament we have been working with Paratext. We have also benefited from training sessions held in various African countries, organised either by the UBS or SIL.

Do you refer to translations in other languages and get inspired by the work of other translators?

We referred to the translation of some Old Testament Books which were produced by the Bowmans in Sanékuy, and by my father, Benjamin Keita (who, along with the Tylers, also translated the New Testament that was published in 1980). These manuscripts in Boomu comprise the Books of Psalms, Genesis and Isaiah. We have also used the Bambara Bible translation since the start of the project.

As we are currently working on the New Testament, we have on our desk two Protestant versions of the Boomu New Testament (from 1953 and 1980) and one Catholic version. ☞



Professor Schadrac Keita, the main translator of the Boomu Bible [photo: BS Mali/Jacques Dembélé WR423/1 MAL08DJ-399]

What tools and resources do you use in your work (reference materials, software, training, etc.)?

Our main tools are the UBS Translators' Handbooks, reference books, dictionaries and commentaries, the

Who is funding this project?

The UBS, through the Bible Society of Mali, funds 50 per cent of the project; the other 50 per cent comes from the ECEM churches in Buwatun, where they speak Boomu.

Elsewhere, the Christian Missionary Alliance (CMA) contributed to the project in its initial phases. We also received donations from Switzerland through Marc Dackouo, who was then a student at the Emmaus Bible Institute, and from the CMA churches in the Netherlands – I was at the Free University in Amsterdam.

How do you organise your work? How do you divide it between you as a team?

We are committed to this project on a full-time basis. With the Old Testament, all three of us worked together at the same table, on the same texts. First we would read the commentaries and introductions on a given Book, to get an idea of the geographical, historical and social context, for example. Then, once we were familiar with the environment of



Pastor Marc Dackouo, second translator of the Boomu Bible [photo: BS Mali/Jacques Dembélé WR423/1 MAL08DJ-400]

the text, we would take turns and read the entire Book out loud, chapter by chapter.

After this reading process – which was often laborious but was an effective way of ensuring that each team member understood the text as a whole – we would share out the different Bible versions, taking three or four each. Then we would start the actual translation, from the first chapter to the last, from the first verse to the last. We were careful to keep each section of

text within its context. Each section would raise some kind of discussion – sometimes concerning one simple sentence, sometimes a more complicated one, sometimes a block of text – and the debates were often heated! Finally we would agree on a translation in Boomu, which two of us would write down by hand in our exercise books, while the third team member typed it straight onto the computer. During the whole time we worked on the Old Testament we had to manage with one computer, which we took turns to use.

We tackled all aspects of the translation work together: exegesis, expression in the target language, vocabulary, cultural considerations, idiomatic expressions, etc. Nevertheless, each of us had our own area of expertise. So when certain aspects needed more in-depth treatment, one of us would take responsibility, according to our expertise, and then share the result of this work with the rest of the team.

We found this working method to be the most efficient



A dwelling in Parana village, San region [photo: UBS/Joaquim Dassonville WR423/1 MAL08DJ-175]



A young girl in Sanewuy village [photo: UBS/Joaquim Dassonville WR423/1 MAL08DJ-163]

for the progress of the translation. On the other hand, some days the tension got so high it was hard to sit there face to face, and we felt the pressure of being constantly called upon, no matter how important the subject matter for discussion! Of course, in translation, everything is important. So we had to get used to it and, through prayer, find our own way of dealing with our differences. Many tears were shed before the Almighty.

Who are the proofreaders and how many are there? Do you have any other ways of getting feedback from Boomu speakers?

Each time we finish a draft, we discuss it, correct it three or four times and then print it out. This text is photocopied and distributed to the members of the checking committee – the revisers. There are about 20 of them:

pastors, lay readers, young and old, men and women. At the same time as they receive the text, copies are also distributed to about 100 other people who act as advisors. These people are not invited to attend the working meetings with the revisers: instead, they send their written comments to the translation office.

After this stage, we go through the suggested corrections in minute detail, before deciding whether to incorporate them in

the text or not.

The new version is then tested among the general public, at special meetings which we set up in the villages throughout the Boo region: everyone is invited by the town crier or minstrel to come to the village square. Men and women, young and old, Christians and non-Christians come out of their homes to listen to the reading, which will be done by those villagers who can read, taking it in turns. These public readings allow us to assess the fluidity of our translation: for example, the choice of certain words and expressions, as well as the difficulty in understanding certain new concepts.

After these meetings, we include a few more corrections, usually minor ones. The amended version we produce is then submitted to the Translation Consultant during our meetings with him. On the basis of his

comments, a final version of the text is produced.

I would like to emphasise that we have organised ourselves in such a way that several Books are in progress at the same time, but they are at different stages. By alternating our work between the office and trips to the villages, as well as meetings with the revisers and the Translation Consultant, we allow ourselves some fresh air and have the reassurance of staying in constant contact with the future users of our work.

You are currently working on the New Testament. Where have you got to?

The New Testament project has been plagued with problems. It was started in October 2003 and had been planned to last two years. We had estimated, from our experience of working on the Old Testament, that this would be entirely feasible. However, we were hit by financial problems and the two translators were now living in different villages, thus reducing our time together. So we had to change our working methods and adjust the schedule accordingly.

Today, all the drafts have been finalised. The checking and testing stages have been planned to take place this year. So, almost 20 years after work started on this Bible, the end is in sight. This experience has been uplifting, deeply spiritual, and, at the same time, a huge challenge! We can't wait to see the fruit of our labour, to hold it in our hands and see it being used throughout the Boo community.

This report relates to project 81400. (WR 423/1 - 07/08.08) [4 photos]

‘They only understand Boomu’

When we asked Siméon Keita, pastor of Sanékuy village and President of the Boomu Bible Translation Committee, why this translation is so important, he replied without hesitating:

“70 per cent of the inhabitants of the Buwatun region only understand Boomu – they don’t speak Bamanankan [Bambara] or French!”

“The churches are currently using the Old Testament that was published in 1999, and the old translation of the New Testament produced by the first missionaries. This is far from ideal, so we can’t wait for the launch of the whole Bible!”

*This report relates to project 81400.
(WR 423/2 - 07/08.08)[6 photos]*



A woman selling dried fish at Yangasso market [photo: UBS/Joaquim Dassonville WR423/1 MAL08DJ-267]



(Above) The cart park in Yangasso on market day [photo: UBS/Joaquim Dassonville WR423/1 MAL08DJ-250] (Right) A woman carrying gourds to Yangasso on market day [photo: UBS/Joaquim Dassonville WR423/1 MAL08DJ-254]



Literacy classes that change people's lives completely

MALI — It is a Wednesday afternoon in the districts of Titibougou and Sotuba, on the outskirts of Bamako. Pastor Moussa Kienta from the Mission for Evangelism and Church Planting (MECP) awaits the team from the United Bible Societies (UBS) to take them to visit some of the literacy classes which are held as part of the *Alpha* project.

The alleys wind their way haphazardly between the makeshift houses: this is Bamako's 'new town', where new arrivals from other parts of Mali set up home. No urban planning rules apply here! Suddenly, the deteriorating track becomes incredibly steep. The driver tightens his grip on the steering wheel of the 4x4 to stop it veering off the dusty road full of potholes and bumps. Local children catch sight of the passengers and run after the vehicle shouting 'Toubabou!' ('White man!').

Shy smiles

The car finally comes to a halt near the MECP church, a building made of mud bricks painted yellow, with a straw roof, bright blue doors and flowering shrubs in front of it. About 20 metres away, a straw-covered awning has been erected, and a group of men, women and children are sitting in the shade it provides. The visitors are



The church of the Mission for Evangelism and Church Planting [photo: UBS/Joaquim Dassonville WR423/3 MAL08DJ-384]

greeted with shy smiles that are nevertheless full of warmth. The older children sit together on a bench and follow the lesson attentively. The younger ones play in silence nearby.

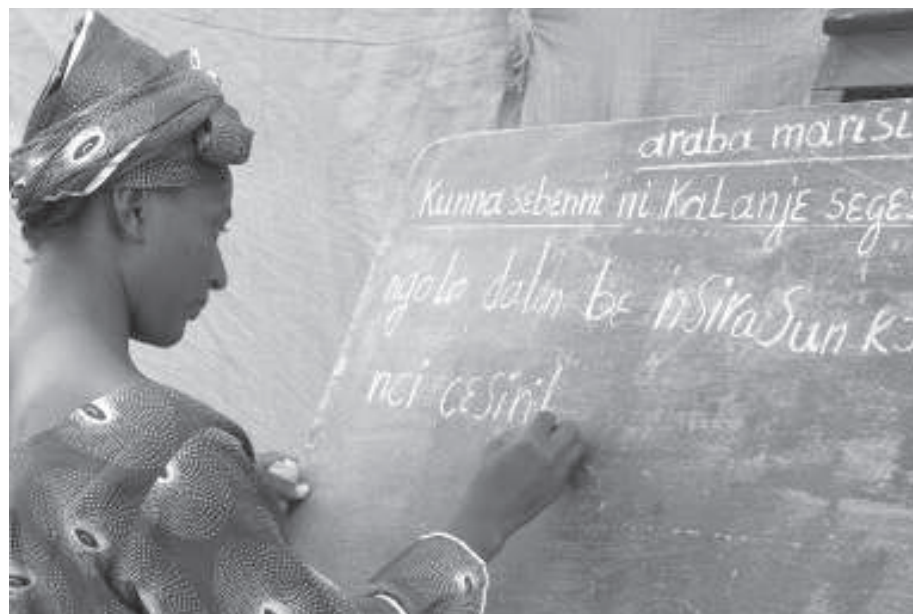
A young woman in a blue dress writes a sentence on the blackboard, then hands the chalk to the next young woman who does the same, until the blackboard is full. Others then go forward to read what has been written. In Titibougou, the lessons have been taking place on three afternoons a week for the last eight months and the pupils – 11 women and three men – have already reached a good level of reading and writing. They write with care and read with confidence, rarely stumbling

over words.

Motivated

They are clearly happy to have an audience of outsiders. One young woman takes the long ruler handed to her by the teacher and turns towards the team to attract their attention. Then, with a beaming smile, she proceeds to read all the sentences on the blackboard.

"These people are highly motivated," says Mr Kienta. "They are determined to learn to read and write!"



A student at a Bambara literacy lesson [photo: UBS/Joaquim Dassonville WR423/3 MAL08DJ-365]



Pupils at a Bambara literacy lesson
[photo: UBS/Joaquim Dassonville
WR423/3 MAL08DJ-371]

There is a mixture of people living in these new districts of the capital, so Bambara is not everyone's first language, but since it is the language spoken by most people in Bamako, the lessons are in Bambara."

Most of the women here work as maids. Being able to read and write will enable them to seek better employment, with a higher salary, because they will be more independent. They will also be able to do simple things like following recipes, and they will no longer be cheated at the market.

Self-esteem

"In fact, the literacy lessons are changing the day-to-day lives of these women," Mr Kienta continues. "For example, until now, whenever they needed medication, the pharmacist would indicate by notches on a piece of

paper how many times a day they needed to take the medicine. Now, the doctor explains when and how the medicine should be taken and they make a note of it themselves. These may be simple things, but the overall impact is great: people's daily lives are being changed completely! Their self-esteem also improves very much. They take more responsibility and are better equipped to work things out for themselves rather than accepting blindly what others tell them as they had to previously.

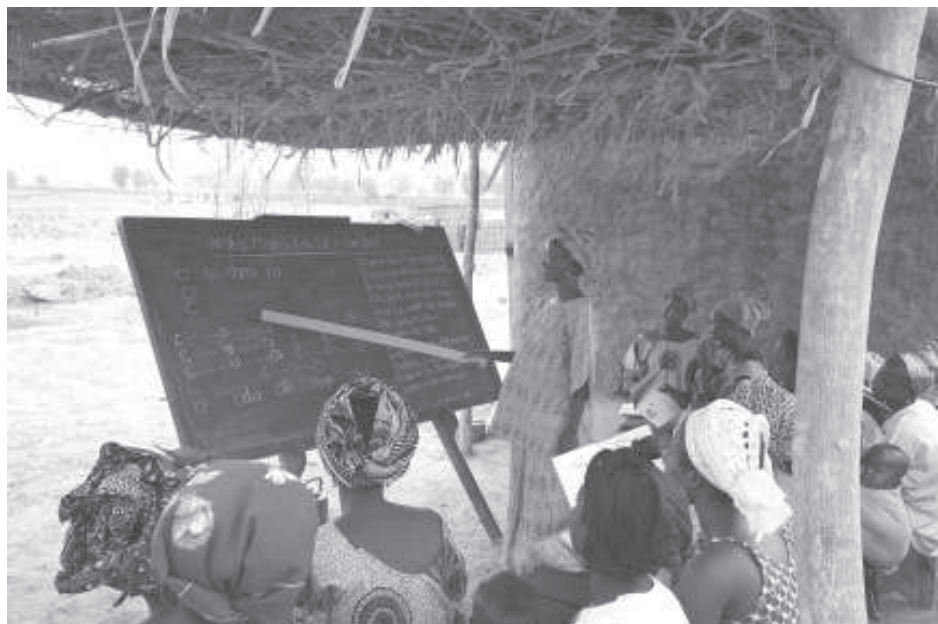
'I can read Bambara'

"At the bank, literate people can read the documents they are given, which means they have better access to the facilities on offer and, most importantly, they can no longer be deceived. Now, when someone gives them a document in French, they can say, 'No, please give me this document in Bambara, I can read Bambara.'

"Also, when a woman can write, she can send messages to her husband, or other people, without involving a third party. This kind of thing also changes people's day-to-day living, allowing them greater privacy."

Word of inspiration

As the team prepares to leave the Titibougou class, someone brings out a notebook. "This is our visitors' book," Mr Kienta tells them. "People write their name and address and also a word of inspiration for the students. You can't imagine what an encouragement this kind of visit is for these people!"



A literacy class in Sotuba district [photo: UBS/Joaquim Dassonville WR423/2 MAL08DJ-390]



Children playing in Sotuba district [photo: UBS/Joaquim Dassonville WR423/3 MAL08DJ-392]

Another literacy class has been started by the MECP near the church in Sotuba, about ten minutes' drive from Titibougou. Here, too, in this larger class, the students are nearly all women, many of whom have their babies on their backs.

"There's a daytime group and an evening group," explains Mr Kienta. "There are mostly women in the daytime classes, and the tendency is the opposite in the evening classes. When husbands notice their wives learning to read and write while they remain illiterate, they decide to sign up for the classes too! There are 44 people here in the evening classes. We hope to be able to continue these lessons on a long-term basis, in view of the obvious interest."

Transformed their teaching

These classes have been running for several years, but the teachers have only received Bible Society training for the past year. This has totally transformed their teaching methods, which are now more structured and get the writing lessons started from the outset.

"The course book we used to use was problematic because its Christian content was very direct," confides Mr Kienta. "For example, it said, 'Jesus is God', which is a shocking statement for a Muslim to read, and so there was an immediate barrier. The Bible Society teaching books which you see here use a much more gradual approach in their presentation of the Gospel. As a result, the non-Christians do not reject them and instead follow the lessons with interest.

"Even though we're pleased that several women from this group have come to know the

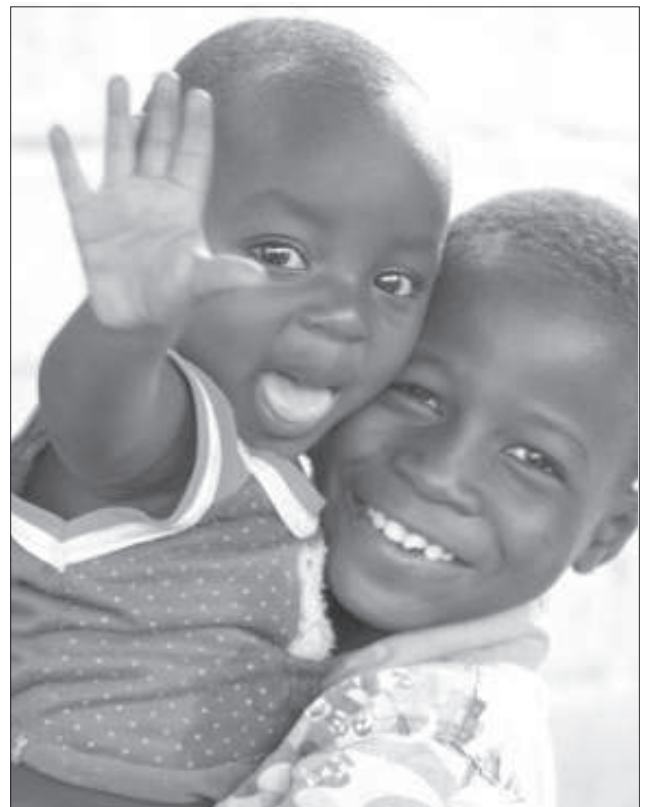
Lord, our main aim is to teach them to read and write; then they hear the Gospel message. We do not try to convert them! The classes bring them into contact with Christianity, they hear the message and perhaps later they might come to church or ask for more information.

Follow the sermon

"As for the Christians, they are delighted at the thought of being able to read the Bible very soon, and follow the sermon at church in their own Bible. They have all expressed their wish to have a Bible!

"I work at the chamber of commerce, where I teach rural folk to read and write. The problem for newly-literate people is that there is often a lack of reading material to allow them to practise their newly-acquired skills. But this is not a problem for the Christians here, because they have the Bible! And that means they will always have something to read!"

This report relates to project 81405. (WR 423/3 - 07/08.08)[10 photos]



Young children whose mothers are at a literacy class [photo: UBS/Joaquim Dassonville WR423/2 MAL08DJ-378]

Mali's deforestation

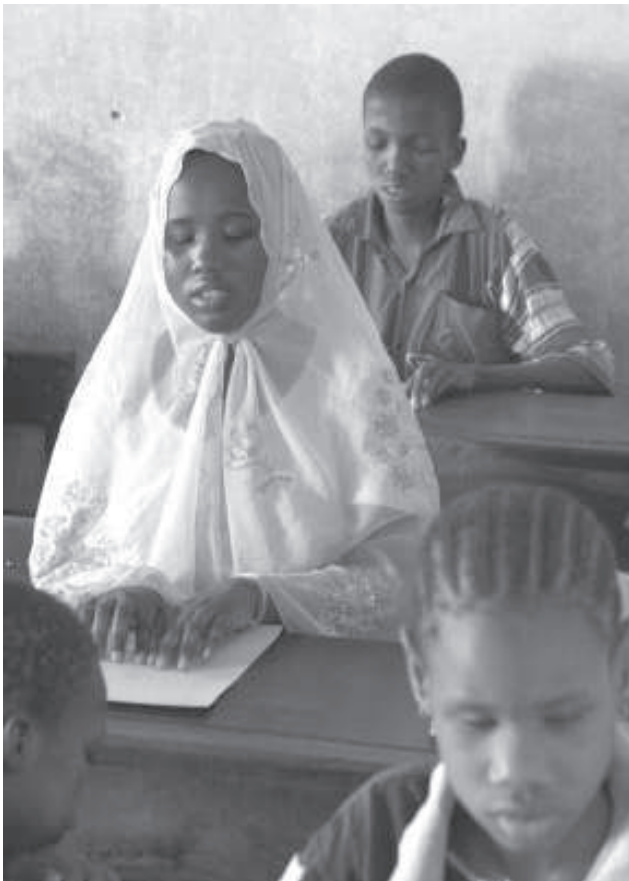
There are numerous piles of wood stacked up along the roadsides in Mali – that is, in the areas where all the trees have not yet been cut down. After agriculture, the sale of wood and charcoal is the main source of income for the villagers. As the UBS team travels through deserted areas, Jacques Dembélé, General Secretary of the Bible Society in Mali, often comments, “Twenty years ago, this place was a forest.”

The forest of Faya, an hour's journey east of Bamako, has been declared a 'protected' zone, but this measure seems to have come too late – and seems futile in a country where deforestation has been so widespread that the desert is taking over inescapably.

Wood, mostly in the form of charcoal, is the main fuel used in Mali. On our journey we pass many lorries laden with branches or sacks of charcoal, on their way to the capital city, Bamako. (WR 423/4 - 07/08.08)[1 photo]



A place full of life and hope



Pupils at the Malian Union for the Blind [photo: UBS/Joaquim Dassonville WR423/5 MAL08DJ-300]

The Malian Union for the Blind (MUB) centre on the outskirts of Bamako seems almost crushed under the heat of the day as we go through the large entrance gate and see the long building with green shutters. We soon discover, though, that this place is full of life and full of pupils at work. Lassana Kamissoko, General Secretary of the MUB, tells us he's delighted to receive Bible Society visitors.

The MUB's tasks are many and varied, he explains. As far as the children are concerned, the MUB focuses on preventing blindness – by making special lenses for them – and on their education up to secondary school leaving age. As regards the adults, the organisation strives to eliminate begging by giving them jobs and allowing them to stay within their communities.

All visually impaired

We soon begin the classroom visits. In the younger classes, all the children are blind or visually impaired. They are sent from all over Mali by their families in an attempt to save them from a future of begging. In the pre-school class, the children – most of whom have either been abandoned or hidden by their families – look lifeless.



Using an arithmetic board at the Malian Union for the Blind [photo: UBS/ Joaquim Dassonville WR423/5 MAL08DJ-296]

This is a bridging year to prepare them for school.

The contrast between this class and the first class of primary age is striking. Once they finish the bridging year, the children follow a normal school timetable. They learn to read and write Braille, to do sums, and also grammar. With the older children, the visitors come across English lessons and biology lessons. At this second stage of education, where there are almost 140 pupils, the classes are 'mixed', meaning that sighted pupils learn alongside those who are visually impaired. Some of the visually impaired pupils will go on to study at university.

Suddenly, shouts and laughter fill the air: it's break time. Some of the children who have difficulty finding their way

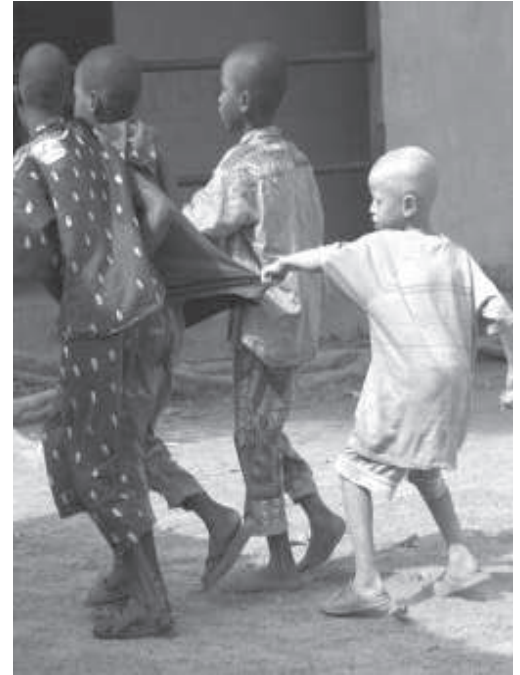
"We are delighted that we'll soon have the Bible in Braille. . . I am a Muslim, but I think it's very important that the children have access to the Bible."

around hang on to their friends' sleeves so as not to be left out of the games. In one area, a climbing frame gives them the opportunity to conquer their fears and develop their sense of balance. Mr Kamissoko tells us that there used to be other games and sporting equipment here, such as a toboggan, but that they didn't have the funds to replace them when they broke.

Extremely poor

This place is extremely poor. It does receive funds from the government and from humanitarian organisations, but not nearly enough. One year of lessons and accommodation costs 30,000 francs CFA (US\$72), which most families cannot afford to pay.

On the walls of one of the buildings, a large colourful fresco shows the Malian singing duo Amadou and Mariam (see 'Sunday in Bamako', *World Report* 422/21). Amadou and Mariam are both blind and both former pupils of the MUB, where they met in 1977. Today they are well known internationally as World Music artists. What an inspiration they are and what hope they



Young pupils at the Malian Union for the Blind [photo: UBS/Joaquim Dassonville WR423/5 MAL08DJ-318]

bring to the young pupils of this Bamako school!

The visitors spend a few minutes in the library. Titi Ganamé, the librarian, explains how much these visually impaired pupils love reading. They are very inquisitive and come here to read all sorts of books, some for pleasure, some as part of their studies.

"We are delighted that we'll soon have the Bible in Braille," he says. "I am a Muslim, but I think it's very important that the children have access to the Bible. There are children here from different religious backgrounds, and they should all receive religious education. It's essential for their development."

Jacques Dembélé, General Secretary of the Bible Society in Mali (BSM), explains that the project set up by the BSM in partnership with the MUB will be partly focused on this room. The current library, which is very cramped, will be extended to allow them to hold Bible reading and listening sessions

there. The Christian children will be able to invite their friends along.

“The children will enjoy these sessions and will be eager to discover the Bible in Braille,” Mr Kamissoko emphasises. “And it won’t just be the Christian children, either!”

During the last part of the visit, we are shown the workshops. Here, they give practical training to visually impaired adults, who are often illiterate, to save them from a life of begging.

In one large room, we see them weaving floorcloths on looms. In another room we are shown a device that makes good-quality chalk (the more traditional method having produced unsatisfactory results).

We get the impression that this place is teeming with ideas. Elisabeth Sanou, who heads the women’s committee of the MUB and is also a BSM volunteer, confirms this. “We are always striving to adapt to the market, depending on the opportunities that arise or the doors that close.”



Cotton reels used to weave floorcloths at the Malian Union for the Blind [photo: UBS/Joaquim Dassonville WR423/5 MAL08DJ-320]

As we leave the MUB, Mr Dembélé explains the second stage of the BSM program.

“There are an estimated 1.6 million visually impaired people in Mali, 300,000 of whom are blind,” he tells us. “Every year, hundreds of Malians lose their sight. The second stage of our project aims to teach those children and adults who are losing their sight to read and write Braille. We plan to begin by consolidating the training of the Braille train-

ers themselves – who are part of the group we call ‘social teachers’ – before offering literacy classes in Braille to those who are blind or visually impaired.

“As in other areas of the BSM’s ministry, these lessons will be used both in the development of the Church – we have already identified more than 70 Christian beneficiaries – and of our country.”

This report relates to project 81402. (WR 423/5 - 07/08.08) [10 photos]

Mosques from Libya

There is much talk in the Malian press of the enormous new mosque in Ségou, which was given to the town as a gift from Libya, and whose presence is being felt all over the country. In Bamako, the capital, imposing buildings (like the new complex for government officials, on the left bank of the



Niger) are being built with funds that come directly from Libya. Likewise in a large number of Mali’s villages, identical mosques are springing up from the ground like mushrooms.

(WR423/6 -07/08.08) [MAL08DJ-173]

Bible Society in Mali looks to the future with three significant projects

Jacques Dembélé, General Secretary of the Bible Society in Mali (BSM), explains why he is particularly keen on the three projects launched recently by the BSM.

“There are three projects that stand out for us at the moment in this country where the need is so great: firstly, the *Listening to the Word* project; secondly our collaborative venture with the Malian Union for the Blind (MUB); and finally our literacy project, known as *Alpha*.

Listening to the Word

“In a Muslim country where it’s not easy to spread the Gospel, and where the oral tradition plays such a dominant role in society, we must engage with our audience by respecting their culture and going beyond the written word. The plan is to train church members to convey the Bible



Jacques Dembélé, General Secretary of the Bible Society in Mali [photo: UBS/Joaquim Dassonville WR423/7 MAL08DJ-352]



A pupil at the Malian Union for the Blind reads a Braille text [photo: UBS/Joaquim Dassonville WR423/7 MAL08DJ-289]

message in a simple way, using traditional methods of communication based on storytelling, singing and dancing. This is not an easy task, and the most important aspect of this project – as indeed for our ministry among the visually impaired and our literacy project – is the training.

Train young people

“You saw for yourselves the enthusiasm of those young people in the churches involved in the *Listening to the Word* project, both in Bamako and in the Ségou region [see *World Report* 422/22-26]. We want to develop these talents a little further! Gradually, we plan to train young people from churches all over the country, creating a network of people who can in turn take on the responsibility of training others. I don’t have the time to train everybody, after all!

“To date, all the Protestant denominations are represented in the *Listening to the Word* project, and we hope to include the Catholics soon, too. This wide participation of the Churches will determine the future of the project: those who take part will tell others in their communities about it, ☞



The translators of the Dogon Bible with Translation Consultant Youssouf Dembélé (centre) [photo: UBS/Joaquim Dassonville WR423/7 MAL08DJ-359]

because they can see for themselves what a great impact it has on society.

“We would like this to be a permanent ministry. Our aim is for the Church to take over the project and see it through to fruition. The Church is very young, and our communities are full of children. We must therefore look to the future and train the Church appropriately.

Ministry among visually impaired

“The second of our most recent initiatives is our ministry among the visually impaired, which we manage jointly with the MUB. There are a worrying number of blind and partially sighted people in Mali, and we must open God’s Word for them all, children and adults alike. Many people don’t know about the MUB centres like the one we visited in Bamako [see ‘A place full of life and hope’ on page 10].

“We carried out a survey among the churches recently and identified about 70 people, aged seven to 70, who are blind or partially sighted. We plan to direct them to one of the four MUB centres – in Bamako,

Sikasso, Ségou or Kayes – where they will be able to gain a basic education. Learning Braille will give them access to God’s Word as well as contributing to their social development.

“Then we will help the MUB to train people to teach Braille and organise Bible reading and listening sessions in their localities, so that the children who study there will have access to the Word of God. This is also part of our plan to build for the future.

Literacy program

“The third area of focus is our literacy program. As you have already witnessed, one of our main goals is to help those who cannot read. The demand for new literacy classes is on the increase: we have received 13 requests in the last few months!

“The literacy rate is really very low, but nine of Mali’s 11 languages have already been transcribed. We must help people learn to read and write these languages, otherwise the new Bible translations that are in progress will be a waste of time.

“To date, we have the whole Bible in Bamanankan and the New Testament in Boomu,

Dogon, Khassonké [see *Latest News* #483], Mamanra [Minianka], Tamasheg and Peulh. We look forward to having the whole Bible in Boomu [see ‘Translation tested in the village square’, page 4] and Dogon [see photo of the translation team opposite] in 2010.

“Only a small minority of children are lucky enough to go to school in Mali [see *WR* 422/27]. The government is currently encouraging independent organisations that are involved in education to increase their efforts to improve the literacy rate, especially in rural areas. They need to change people’s way of thinking, so that parents realise that sending their children to school is an investment, because later in life the child will be able to support them.

Raise awareness

“The BSM is trying to raise awareness of the benefits of literacy at all levels of society. In the past it was inconceivable that someone like Mrs Kamaté [see *World Report* 422/28], an older woman who already has ‘one foot in the grave’, should learn to read. Her testimony is incredible. She is a role model for young women, and inspires them to want to learn to read for themselves. They say to themselves: ‘Hey, if this old lady can learn to read and write, why shouldn’t I? I’ve got a long future ahead of me, and life would be so much better with these new skills!’ As we say in Boomu, ‘nun nè yi bè a’arana bè a’ be’: ‘someone who has learnt nothing is nothing’.”

This report relates to projects 81401, 81402 and 81405. (WR 423/7 - 07/08.08)[3 photos]