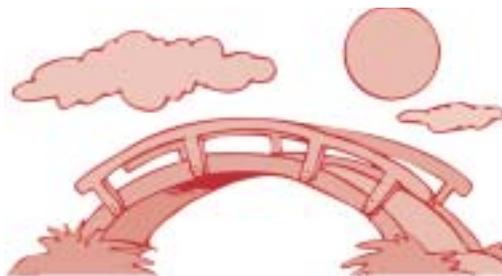




MALAWI



BRIDGING THE GAPS

Willie Kanthenga (wkanthenga@yahoo.com), news editor for Trans World Radio Blantyre FM, and a freelance writer, describes this year's efforts to improve Bible distribution in Malawi.

The Bible Society of Malawi (BSM) has jacked up efforts to ensure that the country's population of 11 million has access to God's Word. BSM is working on strate-

gies to bridge its Bible distribution gaps. meant that Bibles are out of stock for a prolonged time, as the printer has other priorities.

For instance, last year—says Kamwana Muyaya, associate director of programs for BSM—the Society placed an order for 85,000 Chichewa Bibles. The order was supposed to be delivered in February, but was not fulfilled until June. At present there is no easy solution to this challenge. BSM

plans to create its own website and put the Bible on the Internet, which will allow electronic access to the Scriptures, but this will only help a small minority.

A second problem is inefficient distribution. Bookshops are found in cities and towns, rarely accessed by the rural people who make up about 80 percent of Malawi's population. It is not all that easy to distribute Bibles to every corner of the country. The Bible

Society is situated in southern Malawi, and doubles as the only depot for distribution of Scriptures in the country. Before the end of this year, however, BSM plans to establish depots to facilitate Scripture distribution in Lilongwe and Mzuzu, cities respectively situated in the central and northern regions of the nation.

In addition, Muyaya reports that churches will be encouraged to order Bibles from BSM depots to resell to their members. At present, most Christians must buy Bibles from street vendors—sometimes, at inflated prices.

A third challenge for BSM is Malawi's low rate of literacy, which stands at 40 percent (1999 statistics), coupled with a declining reading culture. To reach Malawians, BSM is producing 30-minute radio broadcasts featuring the dramatized narration of the Scriptures. They target people who do not read the Holy Bible due to illiteracy, poor eyesight, busy schedules or even

indifference. The programs are broadcast in English and Chichewa, the country's official languages. Sometimes radio stations are reluctant to broadcast the programs because BSM only makes them available but does not sponsor them. However, many listeners find the programs edifying.

“God's Word does not return empty, but accomplishes His purposes' (Isa. 55:11). Even when we are able to distribute only small quantities of Bibles and Scripture portions,” says Muyaya, “the impact on communities and individuals is significant.” And, with BSM's new strategies, “there is hope that things will change for the better,” he adds. ❖

Even small quantities of the Bible have a significant impact.

gies to bridge its Bible distribution gaps.

The Bible Society has projected its Bible sales at 149,000 this year, yet its own research shows that it has the capacity to sell 250,000 Bibles per year. The gap can be attributed to several factors.

First, there is the untimely delivery of Bible orders. BSM contracts a South African printer to reprint Bibles as Malawi does not have established printers to do the work. But, this has sometimes