

Bible Translators Join in Fight Against AIDS

✖ A Florida-based ministry known for its Bible translation work has taken aim at addressing one of the world's most pressing humanitarian crises: AIDS.

For the last four years, Wycliffe Bible Translators has been educating African communities about the devastating impact of AIDS, which has orphaned some 14 million children in sub-Saharan Africa alone. So far, teams have translated *Kande's Story*, an AIDS awareness curriculum, into 90 languages in 12 African nations, including Kenya, Mozambique, Zaire, Cameroon and Congo.

"Surprisingly, Bible translation-and the language development that is foundational to it-can be a starting point for solutions to some of the world's most pressing humanitarian issues," said Kathie Watters, coordinator of Wycliffe's AIDS Education Program in Africa.

Watters, a registered nurse and linguist, experienced the devastation of AIDS firsthand. While Watters was working in Cameroon as a Bible translator, her friend and housekeeper died of AIDS. As a result Watters helped develop *Kande's Story*, which tells the true story of a girl whose parents die of AIDS, leaving her to care for a houseful of orphans.

The curriculum, which includes an audio version of *Kande's Story*, uses the story as a springboard for discussing medical facts about HIV/AIDS and Bible study lessons related to sexual purity, compassion and caring for the sick.

Translated in areas where Wycliffe's Bible translation work already is under way, the materials often are the first local-language AIDS education resources the communities have had, Watters said.

She believes literacy is key in fighting HIV/AIDS, which is a leading cause of death in most African nations. According the World Health Organization, roughly 5 percent of the adult population in sub-Saharan Africa is HIV-positive.

"It's the gap in the whole AIDS education [process] that I think Wycliffe is uniquely positioned to fill," Watters told *Charisma*. "Some people say they've heard the information in English or French, but they never really understood it until they heard it in their own language."

Watters said one pastor in the Congo thought he could contract AIDS by touching people with the disease or going into their rooms. "Now, I know I can go there and I won't get AIDS," Watters said the pastor told her. "And I see I should be going there and talking with them and telling them to talk to God about their distress."

In Cameroon, a man said he thought AIDS was just a conspiracy concocted in the West. But after hearing *Kande's Story* in his language, he told Watters he believed AIDS was real and planned to get tested. "And we see that many places," she said.

Watters said AIDS still carries a stigma in Africa, and many Christians are often reluctant to reach out.

"Even in the church, many of those people [with AIDS] are thrown out, rejected," Watters said. "In *Kande's Story*, people see a model of how the people reached out to these children. That's reinforced by the Bible studies, where they see ... how Jesus was compassionate toward lepers-people in that time who were stigmatized by their disease."

After just the first lesson, Watters said a community in Kenya formed what they call the good neighbor society. "They started caring for people with AIDS and prayed with them and read Scripture to them," she said. "Like the church did in *Kande's Story*, they reached out to orphans and helped them."

The AIDS education materials are also being used as part of an adult literacy program in Ethiopia, and there has been talk of broadcasting audio versions of the story on FM stations.

Trans World Radio may adapt *Kande's Story* into a radio broadcast in the Burundian language, Watters said, and there are plans to expand the materials into more nations and languages next year.