
Konkomba Faith Comes By Hearing Project - what we have learned¹

by the Konkomba team
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The Konkomba Faith Comes By Hearing (FCBH) project is entering its fourth year and now has 1,132 listening groups throughout 11 districts. The majority of these are held in churches, but we have begun 63 in literacy groups and will expand this to several hundred in 2002. We are expecting to start 600+ new groups in 2002.

The majority of the listening groups have now listened to the entire New Testament, and all but 10 have started to listen through a second time. Saying they have listened through the New Testament once does not imply that they have heard the New Testament only one time because most listen to each section repeatedly before moving on. It is normal for a group to listen to a section of Scripture three to four times as they hear and discuss the New Testament. I would like to share what has been learned from the project that has Africa-wide significance.

Syncretism

In every village we visited that has been holding FCBH groups, people openly confessed that before the cassettes² of the New Testament in Konkomba had come, they regularly participated in traditional practices: going to soothsayers and fetish priests, offering sacrifices and participating in village fetish dances, ceremonies, and sacrifices. Most said they did not see this as being wrong, and others said that they were afraid of death, sickness, or rejection by family if they stopped.

It was when they heard the cassettes that they saw clearly that they could not be a Christian and practice these things. It seemed to be quite a surprise to them; they became convinced that if they did not change, they would not go to heaven. They also saw that Jesus had the power to protect them if they put their confidence in Him, yet there would be persecution, and they needed to be prepared to suffer and die for Christ. It was the testimony of the people that they

¹ This article is a revision of: Konkomba team, 2002. "Konkomba—Faith Comes By Hearing Project—What We Have Learned Team Report." *Scripture in Use Today* 5:15-21.

² Back in 2002, FCBH programs used albums of cassettes rather than the Proclaimer digital audio players. See <http://www.faithcomesbyhearing.com> for more details.

had stopped these traditional practices and that God had protected them, blessed them, and that peace and joy had come.

The Scriptures

The people normally do not quote a Scripture verse, but quote by chapter since these references are on the cassette. Below are a selection of the Scriptures that I heard repeatedly in the 30+ villages I visited personally over the past two years.

- Matthew 5: Being the salt of the earth, forgiveness, adultery and fornication are wrong.
- Matthew 10: Do not fear him who can kill the body but fear him who can cast body and soul into hell, and that a man's enemies will be of his own house and they will even deliver you up to death. This causes people to be aware that death is possible, but that they should commit themselves to Christ even if it means death.
- Matthew 25: The story of the ten virgins. This is one of the most popular Scriptures and many report coming to Christ and repenting after hearing this story. Their testimony is that this has caused them to make sure that they are prepared and fully committed to Christ before He returns.
- Luke 8: The story of the storm on the lake and of the demoniac has great impact because they clearly show Christ's power over nature and over legions of demons. There was no battle but simply a word from Christ and the man was delivered. It also impacts them because they can see someone that, to them, has no value, having greater value than 2,000 pigs. This shows the value Christ places on one man's soul.
- John 3:16: The point that seems to stand out is that Christ came for the world and so this includes them. Many, after hearing this chapter, both listening from inside and outside the church, make a decision for Christ.
- Acts: This book is mentioned as a whole because of both the miracles and the suffering of Paul and the apostles. It seems to give hope and confidence, yet shows a commitment to stay faithful despite persecution and suffering. It amazes them to see the disciples singing in prison and rejoicing when beaten.
- Galatians 5: This seems to be one of the Scriptures of greatest impact, as Paul makes it very clear that those who practice witchcraft, idolatry, drunkenness, sexual immorality, and hatred will not enter into the Kingdom of God. This shocks them and causes repentance, and they then refer to the rest of the chapter as their guide for how to live. Their testimony is that, after listening to this section, many gave up their traditional practices, burned the fetishes and became committed believers. Many said that before this they thought you only had to go to church to be saved.
- Revelation: This book is mentioned as a whole, often in reference to the need to be fully committed to Christ and prepared. Trouble is coming and for those who are not fully committed to Christ and prepared, this will be horrible.

What is obvious is that as the cassettes are being heard in the church or village, listeners are joining the group at different stages in the listening and are repenting upon hearing different Scripture but with the same message. The resounding message is that you cannot serve two masters, that simply going to church is not enough and that you must be fully committed to Christ and be prepared to suffer and die for Him. Christ has the power to heal, deliver, protect, and they have permission to ask, and when they do, God answers and provides.

Hearing in the mother tongue

It was very obvious that this has had a great impact and some of the first reactions of the people were surprise. They were surprised that:

- Jesus spoke Konkomba;
- Jesus could address them directly;
- Jesus did not need a translator to talk to them and that they did not need a translator to talk to God;
- pastors and leaders had not been making things up, but that the stories they had told them were really in the Bible;

Konkomba reactions

These are normal reactions from around the world, but some other reactions and understandings came from the Konkomba project that we had not fully realized before:

The distrust of the non-reader for the reader

There seems to be an inherent distrust by the non-reader of the reader, a feeling that the reader is making things up to manipulate people, or is leaving things out. This deep distrust causes people not to take action on what has been heard, even if it is true, because of their lack of confidence. It also deeply frustrates pastors and leaders. They see that no matter what they tell people, they discount it as something the pastors have made up. There seems to be a feeling of “you are one of us and come from us, so where did you get this?”

People are surprised that the stories and messages the pastor was preaching were actually there and true. The cassettes seem to separate the person from the message and are impersonal and to be believed as clearly the Word of God. The fact that they listen chapter by chapter gives listeners confidence that they have heard all and that nothing has been left out. Most literate church leaders are not reading in Konkomba because many of them learned to read in Twi or English in the school system. Many do not read well in English. Reading a foreign language to them and then translating into Konkomba increases people’s distrust. They often think that the message is not accurately translated.

Literate leaders use this ability to manipulate. It seems that in many cases the people's lack of trust is well founded, and examples were found in some villages where leaders in the church who could read intentionally avoided Scriptures that had to do with sexual and other sins so that they could continue to abuse the people or practice such sins. In one village the only readers were two young men who had conspired together to not read any Scripture about sexual sin because they were using their position to have sexual relations with the women in the church. When the cassettes came in Konkomba, all were able to hear the whole of Scripture, and their sin was exposed and they quickly repented and now have stopped this practice.

Christianity and Jesus are foreigners

Because the majority of leaders learned to read in Twi or English, even though the Konkomba Bible was available, most could not read it, and so they continued to use Twi and English in church. This made people in the village see Christianity as foreign and not for them, and so they abused those who came to church because they were looking to a foreign God and were rejecting their culture.

One of the very clear things that happened when the cassettes came was that Jesus and Christianity were seen to be Konkomba since the message came in Konkomba. This stopped the abuse and accusation that the people were seeking something foreign and were no longer Konkomba. "The message is in Konkomba so it is for us" is the new response of the people and elders.

Orality of Culture

We know that in most cultures, the whole history of the people is kept and passed on orally. All religion, culture and history have come to them orally. So when the Scriptures come to them in an oral form, there is no wall, and the message is communicated in a way that is normal and easy for them to receive. Often when the Scriptures are read, it is coming to them through a literate way of thinking that is difficult for them to understand. But when Scripture comes orally they respond to it spontaneously.

The Audio Drama recordings seem to best fit these cultures because as they listen to the drama they become a part of the story. We have found that oral people cannot separate themselves from the story, unlike literate people, and so join in the story. They, often without thinking, become whatever player in the story they most identify with and join this person in the story. You will find them responding in their minds to the event and questions of Jesus as if directed to them, and often they are healed and delivered or come to Christ as they cry out with the person in the story.

One of the other effects that was surprising was the reaction of women to hearing a woman's voice on the cassette. It seems that when they hear a woman on the cassette, they then feel they are a part of the Scriptures and feel free to ask questions or make comments about what has been heard.

The question of whether Jesus is for the Konkomba is gone when they hear Him speak in Konkomba, and they, without thought, picture Him and the others as Konkomba people. Because there are no visuals, people picture Christ in their own mind as they see Him. They know the voice on the tape is not Jesus but there is a voice behind that voice that they say speaks directly to their hearts as they listen. It is that voice, the voice of Jesus, that convicts them of their sin, gives them hope, and answers their prayers. There is no question upon hearing the cassettes that Jesus speaks their language, that he understands Konkomba, hears their prayers, and is not a stranger among them.

Literacy

One of the most important things that FCBH is doing is promoting literacy. Once people hear Scripture in their own language and see that they can understand it, many immediately want to learn to read, and interest in literacy explodes. Another benefit is that church leaders are motivated to learn to read Konkomba. The leaders in the church are often literate but not in Konkomba and so they have continued to use Twi or English because this is what they can read and so are often resistant to the Konkomba Bible. But when it is heard, they find they can buy a Konkomba Bible and by following along they begin to learn how to read in their own language. Since most of those who are literate will never return to a literacy class to learn to read Konkomba, this is important and has brought about acceptance of the Konkomba Bible and its use in the church.

The cassettes are proving to be a good tool in the literacy groups, as they attract people to the group and create an interest to learn to read what they have heard. They also allow the leader of the literacy group to bring the gospel to unreached villages in non-threatening ways with cassettes that tell about Christ and not them personally. Many will come to a literacy group where as they would not go to the church. The literacy group meets in a public place and is open to all.

Church Planting and Evangelism

One of the best results of FCBH is that as people listen through the New Testament in Konkomba, they become disciples and not just church attendees. They know the message and have heard clearly Christ's call to take this message to others, and they begin telling friends and family the same stories that they have heard.

One of the interesting things is that the cassettes become a tool for evangelism and church planting as members take them throughout the community, playing them for families, the elders and for others in unreached villages. One of the main ways they reach out is by taking the cassettes to funerals and playing them for the people who are sitting and mourning for the family. The people like this and often those from other villages will ask if the cassettes can be brought to them so that they can listen. This is a beginning of a church plant, as they will take the cassettes to them weekly, allowing them to listen and will answer their questions. Over time as this village listens and discusses what they have heard, they experience healings, deliverance, and answers to prayers, then put their faith in Christ, and a church is formed.

Signs and Wonders

This seems to be a normal experience from hearing cassettes. The people see and hear Jesus and His disciples healing, casting out demons and performing miracles and, without thought, they join in the story, call out to Christ and join in the experience. These miracles are often what break down the walls and cause people to come to Christ. The miracles do not seem to have denominational boundaries and happen in all churches. Often the people have been looking to the fetishes, soothsayers, and to sacrifices offered for healing or relief from problems, but without any effect. Once they put their trust in Christ, they are healed, delivered, and receive help. There is a stark difference between their gods and Christ and His ability to help them.