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Church-centric Bible translation as a Model of Community service in Seaman Communities

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Abstract

This community service program examines the process of Bible translation into the Seaman language (hereafter referred to as "Seaman") using a Church-centric Bible translation approach that places the local church and community as active participants in the translation process. The Seaman community is a coastal group facing serious challenges, including the endangerment of their mother tongue, low literacy levels, and the marginalization of cultural and religious identity. This program was implemented through collaboration between a theological institution, a Bible translation foundation, a local church, and Seaman families who still possess competence in the indigenous language. The method employed a participatory and contextual approach, involving intergenerational speakers as well as ongoing spiritual and community accompaniment. The results indicate that Bible translation functions not only as a means of Christian faith proclamation but also as a medium for language preservation, strengthening community identity, and empowering the local church in contextual mission. Furthermore, the process created spaces for interfaith dialogue within families and the wider community. This program demonstrates that Church-centric Bible translation can serve as a holistic, transformative, and relevant model of community service for indigenous and minority language communities.

Keywords: bible translation; church-centric bible translation; community empowerment; community service; seaman community

Abstrak

Program pengabdian masyarakat ini mengkaji proses penerjemahan Alkitab ke dalam bahasa Seaman (selanjutnya disebut "Seaman") dengan menggunakan pendekatan penerjemahan Alkitab yang berpusat pada gereja, yang menempatkan gereja lokal dan komunitas sebagai peserta aktif dalam proses penerjemahan. Komunitas Seaman adalah kelompok pesisir yang menghadapi tantangan serius, meliputi terancamnya bahasa ibu mereka, rendahnya tingkat literasi, serta terpinggirkannya identitas budaya dan keagamaan. Program ini dilaksanakan melalui kolaborasi antara lembaga teologi, yayasan penerjemahan Alkitab, gereja lokal, dan keluarga-keluarga Seaman yang masih memiliki kompetensi dalam bahasa asli tersebut. Metode yang digunakan menerapkan pendekatan partisipatif dan kontekstual, dengan melibatkan penutur antargenerasi serta pendampingan spiritual dan komunitas yang berkelanjutan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerjemahan Alkitab tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai sarana proklamasi iman Kristen, tetapi juga sebagai media pelestarian bahasa, penguatan identitas komunitas, dan pemberdayaan gereja lokal dalam misi kontekstual. Lebih lanjut, proses ini menciptakan ruang dialog antaragama dalam keluarga dan komunitas yang lebih luas. Program ini membuktikan bahwa penerjemahan Alkitab yang berpusat pada gereja dapat menjadi model pengabdian masyarakat yang holistik, transformatif, dan relevan bagi komunitas bahasa asli dan bahasa minoritas.

Kata Kunci: penerjemahan Alkitab; penerjemahan Alkitab berpusat gereja; pemberdayaan komunitas; pengabdian masyarakat; komunitas Seaman



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INTRODUCTION

The Seaman community refers to coastal indigenous groups that have historically lived in a close and interdependent relationship with the sea, which functions as their living space, primary source of livelihood, and a central element in the formation of their socio-cultural identity. However, within contemporary social dynamics, Seaman communities often occupy a marginalized position socially, economically, and culturally. Processes of modernization, population mobility, and the dominance of majority cultures and languages have increasingly contributed to the marginalization of Seaman identity in both public and religious spheres. Traditionally, the Seaman people have lived a nomadic life on kajang-roofed boats and are primarily found in the waters of the Riau Islands, with the largest concentration around Batam and its surrounding maritime areas, including the Malacca Strait, the Philip Strait, and the South China Sea.¹

One of the most fundamental challenges faced by the Seaman community is the gradual loss of their mother tongue. Limited language documentation, low levels of literacy, and the dominance of majority languages in education, administration, and religious practices have led to a declining use of the Seaman language, particularly among younger generations. The loss of the mother tongue is not merely a linguistic issue; it also entails the erosion of collective memory, cultural values, ways of life, and expressions of faith transmitted across generations within the community. As noted by Edo Galih, language functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a formative element of identity, a cultural bridge, and a means of emotional bonding in both social and spiritual relationships. Within the framework of mission theology, the mother tongue, often referred to as the heart language, plays a strategic role in communicating the Gospel in ways that are more deeply understood and contextually meaningful to local communities.²

In the context of religious life, the absence of faith texts in the mother tongue further accelerates the process of spiritual alienation. Expressions of faith conveyed through foreign languages often do not fully touch the inner experience and context of community life. As a result, religious practices have the potential to become something foreign and detached from

¹ Atik Rahmawati, "The Life of the Sea Tribe in Batam: A Development Policy Phenomenon on Bertam Island, Batam City," *Share Social Work Journal* 4, no. 1 (2014): 1.

² Edo Galih Permadi, "The Politics of Language in the Japanese Occupation," *Avatara* 3, no. 3 (2015): 591.

everyday cultural realities. This condition shows that there is an urgent need for a devotional approach that not only focuses on the spiritual aspect but also pays attention to the cultural and social dimensions as a whole.

In response to these contextual conditions, Bible translation into the Seaman language is conceptualized as a holistic and transformative form of community service. This activity not only seeks to present biblical texts in a language that can be deeply understood by the community, but also serves as a means of preserving the Seaman language, strengthening cultural identity, and empowering local communities. In this process, Bible translation becomes a meeting point between faith, language, and the everyday life of the Seaman community. Furthermore, language revitalization may be understood as an effort to renew and sustain the function of a language, both through the development of new expressive forms and through the re-strengthening of languages that have experienced a decline in usage. Such efforts aim to ensure that minority languages continue to be used sustainably by their native-speaking communities.³

The approach used in this activity is *Church-centric Bible translation*, which is a model of Bible translation that places the local church and community as the main subjects in the entire translation process. In contrast to institutional or external approaches, this model emphasizes the active involvement of congregations, families, and local language speakers as the main actors, while the accompanying institution plays the role of facilitator and partner. Thus, the church becomes not only the recipient of translations but also a center of learning, reflection, and the preservation of the language and faith of the community. This endeavor moves beyond mere linguistic conversion, serving as a comprehensive community development initiative that bolsters cultural identity and empowers the Seaman, who have a long history as skilled seafarers in the Nusantara region.⁴

A number of studies have discussed Bible translation as an integral element of contextual mission and evangelistic engagement. Jear Niklas Dominggus Karniatu Nenohai emphasizes that Bible translation brings God's Word into the language, culture, and lived

³ Awaliyah Ainun Inun and Awaliyah Ainun Niswah, "Revitalisasi Bahasa Minoritas di Indonesia," *ETNOLINGUAL*, 2022.

⁴ Karl Anderbeck, "The Malayic-speaking Orang Laut Dialects and directions for research," *Wacana: Journal of The Humanities in Indonesia*, 2012, 265–66.

experience of a community, so that the Gospel may be fully understood and practiced.⁵ Subsequently, The function of translating the Bible into the home tongue as a transformative contextual mission approach is then examined by Rubin Adi Abraham.⁶ Riyono further suggests that the use of the mother tongue in Bible translation significantly deepens the spiritual experience of the community, as it fosters a closer relationship between the reader and the Word, allowing Scripture to be encountered not only intellectually but also emotionally within everyday religious life.⁷

Based on a review of various literature and previous research, it can be seen that the study of Bible translation generally places translation as a linguistic process,⁸ a contextual mission strategy,^{9,10} or a means of preserving language and culture.^{11,12} A number of studies have also confirmed the role of mother tongues in deepening the understanding and acceptance of the gospel in a local context. However, most of these studies still position local communities and churches as recipients of translations, rather than as the main subjects in the overall service process. This process involves a "fusion horizon" hermeneutic, where traditional biblical heparand this literature review? This aligns with the broader understanding that Bible translation should engage in a reciprocal, constructive dialogue between biblical texts and the actual beliefs and cultural contexts of the community, ultimately fostering a liberating and humanizing theological experience ritage is reproduced and reinterpreted in light of new contextual dynamics, transforming raw materials into meaningful contemporary

⁵ Jear Niklas Dominggus Karniatu Nenohai, "Penerjemahan sebagai Media Pekabaran Injil Middelkoop Ditinjau dari Perspektif Hermeneutika Hans Georg Gadamer," *GEMA TEOLOGIKA: Jurnal Teologi Kontekstual dan Filsafat Keilahian*, 2018.

⁶ Rubin Adi Abraham, "Penerjemahan Alkitab ke Bahasa Ibu: Strategi Misi Kontekstual dan Transformasi Spiritualitas Jemaat," *Kharisma: Jurnal Ilmiah Teologi*, 2025.

⁷ Sigit Triyono, "Spiritualitas 'Bahasa Ibu,'" 2021.

⁸ John Barton, *The word: on the translation of the Bible*, Random House, 2022.

⁹ Chinelo Ezenwa, *Bible Translations And Literary Responses: Re-reading Missionary Interventions In Africa Through Local Perspectives. Diss*, The University of Western Ontario, Canada, 2021.

¹⁰ Ngole David Kome, "Bible Translation as Mission: Towards an Assessment of the Use of Translated Scriptures and Their Missional Impact in Bakossi, Southwest Cameroon," South African Theological Seminary, 2021.

¹¹ Tshitangoni C. Rabali, "Bible translations for the minorities' languages today: A biblical theological exploration," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 2021.

¹² Margaret Hill and Harriet Hill, *Translating the Bible into action: How the Bible can be relevant in all languages and cultures*, Langham Publishing, 2022.

experiences rather than presenting finished doctrines.¹³

This paper contributes to the discussion on Bible translation by presenting Church-centric Bible translation as a community service approach rooted in local church participation and community engagement. This approach is intentionally designed to not only produce a translated text but also to strengthen the spiritual aspect of the community. The article highlights the importance of involving local churches and communities, specifically the Seaman community, as key actors in the Bible translation process. This involvement serves as a space for spiritual formation, contextual discipleship, and ongoing evangelism. The paper also offers a new perspective on Bible translation, viewing it as a praxis of church spirituality in a postmodern world. This includes elements such as community involvement, cross-generational relationships, and dialogue of faith, which are integral to devotional activities.

Accordingly, this article examines the practice of Bible translation within the Seaman community by integrating translation activities with discipleship and church spirituality within a contextual community service framework. The significance of this activity lies in its capacity to respond to three interrelated challenges faced by the Seaman community: the endangerment of the mother tongue, the weakening of cultural identity transmission, and limited access to contextual expressions of faith. Through the direct involvement of local churches and community members, this community service activity seeks to foster a stronger sense of ownership of both language and faith, while also creating spaces for dialogue, reconciliation, and cross-generational learning.

Based on this background, the objectives of this community service activity are (1) to facilitate the process of translating the Bible into the language of the Seaman through a Church-centric approach; (2) to empower the Seaman community and the local church as active participants in language preservation and faith inheritance; and (3) to develop a contextual, participatory, and sustainable community service model for indigenous communities and linguistic minority groups. Therefore, this article is expected to make a practical and reflective contribution to the development of community service practices that are grounded in theology, language, and culture.

¹³ Ebenhaizer I Nuban Timo and Bobby Kurnia Putrawan, "The Bible In Contextual Theological Work In Indonesia," *QUAERENS: Journal of Theology and Christianity Studies*, 2021, 6.

METHODS

This community service activity uses a participatory and contextual approach, placing the Seamen community as an active partner in the process of Bible translation. The activity was carried out through a collaboration between Real Theological Seminary Batam, Bahtraku Indonesia Foundation, local churches (GPIB), and Seaman families who still have mother tongue competencies.

The church-centric approach is realized by involving the church as a space of social and spiritual legitimacy, so that the translation process is not seen as an external project, but as part of the church's vocation to serve the people and preserve the heritage of faith and culture.

This community service activity employed a participatory, contextual, and church-centric methodology that positioned the local church and the Seaman community as the primary agents throughout the Bible translation process. The methodological framework was adapted from Oral Bible Translation (OBT) practices and the quality assurance principles of Open Bible Stories (OBS), which emphasize clarity, accuracy, naturalness, and ecclesial approval. The entire process was implemented in a phased and iterative manner, allowing continuous refinement through communal participation and theological reflection.

The first phase focused on relationship building and community engagement. At this stage, the service team prioritized establishing trust-based relationships with key stakeholders, including local church leaders, Seaman families, and intergenerational speakers of the mother tongue. This relational approach was considered foundational to ensuring cultural legitimacy, communal ownership, and long-term sustainability of the translation process. Informal dialogues, family visits, and church-based gatherings were conducted to introduce the vision of Church-centric Bible translation, explore community expectations, and identify individuals willing to participate actively in the translation work.

Following the establishment of relational trust, the second phase involved introducing oral bible translation and strengthening community capacity. Participants were guided to understand translation not merely as a technical linguistic task, but as a communal and spiritual practice. Training sessions emphasized oral Scripture engagement, storytelling, attentive listening, and shared meaning-making rather than text-centered literacy. Participants

were also familiarized with OBS narratives as source materials, enabling them to engage with biblical content in an accessible and culturally resonant manner. This phase aimed to equip participants with basic conceptual and practical competencies before entering the translation process.

The third phase consisted of individual study and exploration of meaning. Each participant independently listened to and reflected on the source Bible story or Scripture passage. This stage allowed translators to internalize the narrative, discern theological meaning, and connect the biblical message with their lived experiences. Individual understanding developed during this phase later became the basis for collective discussion and evaluation in group settings.

In the fourth phase, participants engaged in collaborative retelling and drafting in the target language. Bible stories were retold orally in the Seaman language and recorded for further discussion. Through collective dialogue, an initial draft was produced and refined. Revisions were made collaboratively to ensure that the translation met four core quality principles derived from OBS, namely that the translation was clear and understandable, accurate and trustworthy in meaning, natural and appealing in expression, and appropriate and approved within the ecclesial context.

The fifth phase involved a language community check, which extended the evaluation process beyond the core translation team. Wider community members who were native speakers of the Seaman language were invited to participate, even though they were not directly involved in drafting the translation. This stage aimed to assess the clarity of meaning, ease of comprehension, and cultural naturalness of the translated stories. Feedback was gathered through guided listening sessions and structured translation questions, and the translation team incorporated necessary revisions based on community responses.

After revisions from the community check, the process proceeded to the sixth phase, namely Church Check and theological validation. This phase consisted of two complementary components. First, an Individual Church Leader Check was conducted, during which church leaders compared the source text with the translated version to evaluate theological accuracy and faithfulness to the biblical message. Second, a Church Ministry Check was carried out by using the translated stories in teaching, discipleship, and communal worship contexts.

Observations and feedback from these ecclesial settings were used to assess how well the translation was understood, received, and appropriated within the life of the church. Further revisions were made to ensure doctrinal integrity and ecclesial acceptance.

The final phase involved integrated revision and validation. Feedback from both the language community and church checks was discussed collaboratively by the translation team. Revisions were finalized through communal consensus to ensure that the translated texts fulfilled all four OBS quality criteria and genuinely reflected the linguistic, cultural, and spiritual realities of the Seaman community. Through this iterative process, Bible translation functioned not only as a textual outcome, but as an ongoing practice of communal learning, discipleship, and contextual mission.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the context of communities experiencing language threats, limited access to education, and spiritual marginalization, *Church-centric Bible translation* is an urgent and relevant approach. Bible translation can no longer be understood as a technical project that is done by an outside party and left to the church, but rather as a process that needs to be lived together by the church and the community itself. When the church is involved as a center of translation, learning, and mentoring, the Word of God does not come as a foreign text, but as a voice that speaks from within the language and life experiences of the people.

The urgency of this approach becomes even more evident when the church is confronted with the realities of communities such as the Seaman, where the mother tongue is slowly fading and the inheritance of faith is taking place fragile. In such situations, *Church-centric Bible translation* serves not only to present the Bible in the local language, but also to restore the relationship between faith, language, and everyday life. The translation process becomes a space for faith education, discipleship, and spiritual strengthening that takes place naturally through community involvement, dialogue, and the practice of living together.

The urgency of *Church-centric Bible translation* as described above finds its practical form in the implementation of this community service activity. This activity was not born from institutional planning alone, but departed from the personal experience of community service implementers who have a mixed blood background of Marine, Malay, and Chinese.

This background forms an emotional, cultural, and spiritual closeness to the Seaman community, as well as fostering sensitivity to the threat of language and the fragility of the inheritance of faith in the community.

The longing for the presence of the Bible in the language of the Seaman has long grown as part of the journey of faith and personal identity, but it only found its way when collaboration was built between theological institutions, Bible translation foundations, and local churches. This collaboration allows these personal longings to be processed into structured and responsible acts of service, without letting go of their relational roots with the community. Within the framework of Church-centric Bible translation, personal experience is not positioned as a mere individual witness, but as a relational capital that strengthens the involvement of the church and community as the main subject in the translation process.

Thus, the implementation of this activity illustrates how theological urgency and contextual needs converge in the praxis of community service, grounded in relationships, collaboration, and the church's calling to present the Word of God in ways that are relevant to the lived realities of the Seaman community.

Field Challenges

The main challenge in the implementation of this activity is the difficulty of finding speakers of the Seaman language who meet the technical criteria for Bible translation. Many community members still use the Seaman language in their daily lives, but no longer have adequate language competence for the translation process that requires accuracy of meaning, consistency of terms, and theological reflection. In addition, economic limitations are a real obstacle, because most of the community members work as fishermen who have to go to sea to meet their daily needs.

Geographical challenges also complicate the implementation of activities. The Seaman community is scattered across the islands with limited access to transportation, making it difficult to gather speakers in one location in a sustainable manner. On the other hand, the technical requirements of translation set by the accompanying institution demand consistency of presence, time commitment, and the ability to work collaboratively, which is not easy to meet in the context of coastal life that depends on weather and seasons.

After various cross-island efforts did not yield optimal results, this activity experienced a turning point when the focus was directed to the Seaman community on Kubung Island. On this island, the Marine Tribes still have strong kinship ties and it is relatively easy to gather at a certain time. A core family and extended family-based approach allows for a more flexible, participatory, and sustainable work environment.

The involvement of families across generations, from parents to younger family members, is a major force in the translation process. Interestingly, this activity also involves family members with different religious backgrounds. This interfaith engagement is not an obstacle, but rather opens up a space for honest and mutual respect. The process of translating the Bible thus serves not only as a linguistic work, but also as a space for encounter, identity negotiation, and reconciliation of relationships within the family and community.

Results and Impact of Service

One of the tangible results of this activity is the beginning of the documentation of the Seaman language through the process of Bible translation. Every term, expression, and sentence structure produced is part of the effort to preserve the language that has been almost undocumented in writing. This process helps increase community awareness of the value of mother tongue as an important part of their cultural identity.

In addition, the community's active involvement in the translation process re-fosters a sense of pride in the identity of the Seaman. Languages that were previously considered less valuable are now seen as a heritage worth preserving and passing on to the next generation. Thus, this community service activity contributes to strengthening the social and cultural identity of the community in a sustainable manner.

In the ecclesiastical dimension, this activity encourages the local church to play a role as a center for translation and contextual faith formation. The church is no longer just a place of worship, but also a space of learning, reflection, and active participation of the congregation in God's mission. The congregation is involved not as passive recipients, but as the main actors in the process of translation and proclamation of faith. In addition, this translation activity is also related to mission activities that are educational in line with

Pasaribu's opinion.¹⁴ As a form of mission activity that is locality inculturation.

The *Church-centric approach of Bible translation* reinforces the church's awareness of its call to be present in a relevant context in the local cultural context. Through direct involvement in the process of Bible translation, the church is invited to understand that mission does not always begin with a large-scale program or institutional approach, but rather with a faithful and sustained presence in the daily life of the community, including in the language and cultural symbols in which they live. Within this framework, the church does not function as an external actor, but as part of a community that walks together in the process of learning, mentoring, and the meaning of faith.

This approach is also inseparable from pentecostal spirituality which emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit as the main driver of the church's mission. This spirit encourages the church to see Bible translation not solely as a cultural conservation effort, but as a vibrant and dynamic mission movement. Local language is understood as a space for God's presence that works contextually, while the translation process becomes a means of preaching the gospel that touches the concrete reality of the community. Thus, *Church-centric Bible translation* serves as an intersection between cultural preservation and mission dynamics, where the Christian faith is proclaimed and lived contextually under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Spiritually, the process of translating the Bible becomes a transformative space for living witness. Interfaith dialogue in the family opens up opportunities for deeper and more personal reflection of faith. For some community members, involvement in this process is a means of restoring relationships, deepening faith, and renewing spiritual commitment. As Fredy Simanjuntak stated, the pentecostal missionary movement is not only about spreading Christian teachings, but also about reflecting the love of Christ in real action. Spiritual gifts are given as tools to strengthen the church, glorify God, and serve others.¹⁵ Furthermore, Fredy et al emphasized that the mission is the participation of God and the church in the world which is also mandatory-estafetitic through discipleship in accordance with the message of the great mandate of the Lord Jesus Christ which is expressed in the four

¹⁴ Jabes Pasaribu et al., "Misi Dan Pelayanan Kesehatan Serta Pendidikan Di Desa Air Gelubi," *Real Coster : Jurnal Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat*, 2025.

¹⁵ Fredy Simanjuntak, "Examining the Spirituality of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement in the Portrait of Megachurches in Indonesia," *DIEGESIS: Journal of Charismatic Theology* 6, no. 2 (December 6, 2023): 100, <https://ojs.sttrealbatam.ac.id/index.php/diegesis/article/view/484>.

imperative verbs; go, become, baptize, and teach.¹⁶

In addition to focusing on translating the Bible into the Seaman's language, this community service activity is also directed to develop a pattern of discipleship that is sustainable and contextual. The translation process is not understood as the ultimate goal, but rather as a medium of spiritual formation that involves personal relationships, life coaching, and active community involvement in ministry.

Aspects of discipleship such as relational mentoring, learning relevant to the context of community life, direct involvement in ministry, and sending towards greater responsibility are organically integrated in all stages of translation activities. Thus, this activity not only produces outputs in the form of Bible texts in the local language, but also forms a pattern of discipleship that fosters maturity of faith, a sense of belonging to the church and community, and a readiness to continue the ministry in the midst of the Seaman.

Some aspects of discipleship used in this activity refer to the thoughts of Candra Gunawan Marisi in his work *Christ-centered discipleship*. The discipleship framework emphasizes the importance of personal relationships, contextual learning, life examples, active involvement in ministry, and the mission to multiplication as the core of the Christian discipleship process.¹⁷ This framework is then contextualized in community service activities through Bible translation in the Seaman community, so that the principles of Christ-centered discipleship are not only conceptually understood, but are practiced in the process of mentoring, serving, and spiritual formation of the community.

In addition to departing from the framework of Christ-centered discipleship, this Community service activity is also in line with the idea of spirituality put forward by Fredy Simanjuntak, who emphasizes the importance of church spirituality in a contemporary world that is responsive to the realities of the times. In a world characterized by the fragmentation of meaning, the acceleration of life, and the crisis of social relations, the church cannot withdraw

¹⁶ Fredy Simanjuntak et al., "Refleksi konseptual misi Yesus melalui keramahan gereja di Indonesia," *KURIOS*, 2021.

¹⁷ Candra Gunawan Marisi, Upa Silaen, and Fredy Simanjuntak, "Pemuridan yang Berpusat pada Yesus bagi Generasi Z dalam Menghadapi Tantangan Relativisme," *Jurnal EFATA: Jurnal Teologi dan Pelayanan*, 2024.

Table 1. Series of community service Activities

Stages of Activity	Activity Description	Partners Involved	Location	Implementation Time	Output/Yield	Impact or Success Indicators
Identify Needs	Exploring the language, culture, and faith needs of the Seaman community through relational approaches and early communication with local families and churches	Seaman community, Local Church (GPIB), STT Real Batam	Kubung Island and surrounding coastal areas	Early stages of activity	Mapping community needs and potential language speakers	Identification of language threats and the need for Bible translation
Coordination and Licensing	Coordination with local church leaders and companion institutions to obtain permits and support for the implementation of activities	Local Church (GPIB), STT Real Batam, Bahtraku Indonesia Foundation	Batam and Kubung Island	Early implementation	Authorized permission and endorsement from the church and partners	The establishment of ecclesiastical and institutional legitimacy
Identify Speakers of the Language	Search and selection of Sea Tribal language speakers who meet the technical criteria for translation	Seaman Family, Bahtraku Indonesia Foundation	Several coastal islands, the focus of Kubung Island	Early–intermediate stage	List of active language speakers	Finding a language speaker who is willing and able to engage
Community Engagement	Gathering of intergenerational and extended families to engage in the translation process in a participatory manner	Seamans, Local Church	Kubung Island	Intermediate level	Family-based translation team	Increased participation and sense of belonging
Translation Process	Implementation of Bible translation collaboratively with technical and pastoral assistance	Translation Team, Bahtraku Indonesia Foundation, Local Church	Kubung Island	Core stage	Draft translation of the Bible in the Seaman language	The composition of the initial contextual translated text
Mentoring and Reflection	Spiritual accompaniment, interfaith dialogue, and reflection together during the translation process	Local Churches, Seaman Families	Kubung Island	Running in parallel	More open and reflective relationships	

into private piety alone, but is called to be actively and relevant in answering concrete human needs.¹⁸

This community-based Bible translation activity represents a form of spirituality that works in the midst of reality, not outside of reality. The Church is invited to respond seriously to the situation of the life of the Seaman community who face language threats, cultural marginalization, and socio-economic vulnerability. Through faithful and sustained involvement, the spirituality of the church is manifested not as an abstract discourse, but as a praxis that touches the daily lives of the people.

Furthermore, this approach builds a direction of spirituality that critically challenges the tendency of modernity's individualism, the subordination of humanity to mechanization, and the dominance of economic interests that often ignore the social, aesthetic, and ecological dimensions of life. In the context of this community service, the spirituality of the church is directed to restore relationships—between human beings and their neighbors, between faith and culture, and between communities and their environment. The local language and the life of coastal communities are understood as meaningful spiritual spaces, where God works and expresses His will.

Thus, community service activities through Bible translation not only function as an effort to preserve language or strengthen faith internally, but also as a constructive and transformative practice of church spirituality in the midst of the postmodern world. The Church takes part in making a positive contribution to the world today by building a spirituality that is communal, contextual, and oriented towards the restoration of life as a whole.

Theological Reflection and Community Service Learning

From a theological perspective, the translation of the Bible in this community service activity can be understood as an act of incarnation, in which the Word of God "becomes flesh" in the language, culture, and concrete life of the Seaman community. This process confirms that God is pleased to reveal Himself in the mother tongue and the local reality of

¹⁸ Fredy Simanjuntak, Linus Baito, and Welko Henro Marpaung, "Dari pandang gurun hingga ke belantara posmodernisme: Refleksi perjalanan spiritualitas gereja," *KURIOS*, 2022.

His people.

In addition, the dynamics that occurred during the activity showed that the Holy Spirit was the main actor in community service. Interfaith openness, relationship building, and community perseverance in facing various limitations cannot be separated from the work of the Holy Spirit who leads and unifies.

An important lesson from this activity is that *Church-centric Bible translation* can be a holistic, contextual, and sustainable model of theological community service. This model not only produces translation products, but also forms communities, strengthens local churches, and brings about real social-spiritual transformation.



Figure 1. Bible Translation Training Activities

CONCLUSION

Community service activities through the translation of the Bible into the Seaman language with a *Church-centric Bible translation* approach is an ongoing process and has not been completely completed. This article is not intended to report the final results of a complete Bible translation, but rather to document the initial stages, implementation dynamics, and learnings that arise in the ongoing translation process.

Key findings from this activity suggest that Bible translation in the context of the Seaman community is not a purely technical work, but a complex social, cultural, and spiritual process. Various limitations such as the difficulty of finding speakers of the language who meet the technical criteria, the economic conditions of the fishing community, and geographical challenges are factors that significantly affect the rhythm and sustainability of activities. Nevertheless, the involvement of local churches and Marine tribes as the main subjects of translation shows strong potential for the creation of a more community-rooted and sustainable process.

Although the results achieved at this stage are still partial, this activity has opened up important space for the preservation of the Marine Tribal language, strengthening awareness of community identity, and the formation of interfaith relationships and dialogue within the family. This process also confirms that *the Church-centric approach of Bible translation* is relevant as a model of community service that places process, relationships, and shared learning as integral parts of the purpose of service itself.

As such, the main value of these activities lies not only in the expected final output, but in the ongoing process that is being built, which is expected to continue to evolve and have a long-term impact on the Seaman community and the local church.

Limitations of the Community Service Activity

This community service activity has several limitations. The Bible translation process was conducted without the sustained involvement of formally trained biblical scholars or professional exegetes as core members of the translation team. While guidance was provided by theological institutions and translation facilitators, the translation work relied primarily on local church leaders and community members who possessed mother-tongue competence,

contextual knowledge of Seaman life, and active participation in communal spiritual formation. Consequently, the translation process prioritized spiritual discernment, functional comprehension, and communal meaning-making within the life of the church rather than exhaustive academic exegesis or historical-critical analysis. The translated materials should therefore be understood as contextual, community-oriented draft translations intended to support oral Scripture engagement, discipleship, and ongoing spiritual formation, rather than as finalized or academically definitive biblical texts.

In addition, the oral and participatory methodology, which aligns with the spiritual and cultural practices of the Seaman community, presents challenges related to terminological consistency and textual standardization. Quality assurance relied primarily on language community checks and church checks within the framework of oral Bible translation and Open Bible Stories, emphasizing clarity, naturalness, theological appropriateness, and ecclesial discernment. As this article documents an ongoing process, the findings reflect the early and intermediate stages of Church-centric Bible translation, and the long-term linguistic, theological, and ecclesial impacts of this spiritually grounded approach remain beyond the scope of the present study. Nevertheless, these limitations reflect the distinctive character of Church-centric Bible translation as a community service model that places spiritual formation, communal participation, and contextual faith practice at the center of the translation process.

Advice and Thanks

Based on the results and discussion of this community service activity, several suggestions can be submitted as follows:

For Local Churches

The church is expected to continue to develop its role as a center of faith and cultural learning by encouraging the involvement of the congregation in Bible translation and local language preservation activities. The Church needs to see Bible translation not just as a project, but as an integral part of a contextual mission call.

For Christian Theological and Educational Institutions

Theological educational institutions are encouraged to include the practice of *Church-centric Bible translation* as part of their curriculum or community service activities, so that

students and faculty can be directly involved in contextual ministry that has a real impact on the community.

For Bible Translation Agencies

Companion institutions are expected to further develop a flexible and sensitive approach to the socio-economic realities of communities, especially coastal and indigenous communities, without neglecting translation quality standards.

For Research and Further Community Service

This activity can be further developed through advanced research or community service that evaluates the long-term impact of Bible translation on language inheritance, the formation of faith identity of younger generations, and interfaith relationships in the community.

For the Development of Socio-Cultural Policies

The results of this activity are expected to be a reference for stakeholders in formulating policies for the preservation of the language and culture of indigenous communities through a community-based approach and local institutions.

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