

# **HISTORY**

## **OBOLO LANGUAGE AND BIBLE TRANSLATION ORGANIZATION**

### HISTORY OBOLO LANGUAGE AND BIBLE TRANSLATION ORGANIZATION

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Agwut Obolo  
Andoni Local Government Area  
Rivers State, Nigeria

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## **FORWARD**

At any given time, a book or a magazine is written which gives some meaningful information .

Sire (Catechist) Ene-Awaji Emmanuel Isidore, a foundation member of Obolo Language and Bible Translation Organization has penned down something which will be most useful to the Organization and the Obolo people.

Before the dedication of Obolo Bible, there was that yearning for a fairly comprehensive history of the work of Obolo Language and Bible Translation. Sir (late) Ene-Awaji has fulfilled that yearning. Today, by this write-up, the Obolo people can appreciate the humble beginnings and the people who were behind to enable the achievement of such a great feat. It will not only satisfy the immediate yearning of the people but will also serve as a good foundation on which others can build to produce another work of its kind. While appreciating the author for painstakingly gathering the facts for the production of this work, I have the pleasure to introduce it to readers who will certainly profit from reading it.

Sir (HRH) A. M. Edeh-Ogwuile  
President, OLBTO

## **FOCUS ON OBOLO LANGUAGE AND BIBLE TRANSLATION ORGANIZATION (1984 – 2014)**

### **PREAMBLE**

Language, one of the greatest gifts of God to man, is symbolic for various considerations. Its importance and uniqueness arouse inclination for study, research and documentation. As time progressed, some languages suffered extinction as other super ones or social circumstances swallowed them up. Fortunately,

Obolo language weathered the storm to emerge with the time. In the face of threatening foreign influence and the velocity by which it advances, documentation inevitably demands attention. In response, Bible translation, experience has shown, is a sure panacea.

Moreover, the Bible in a people's language augurs well for better grasp of its message and consequent new lease of life for a refined society. Against this background, Obolo Language and Bible Translation Organization (OLBTO) emerged to be a solution to language documentation and Bible translation as well. Therefore, the present focus on the Organization is an attempt to survey and concisely string together its origins, processes, activities and achievements within its thirty years of existence (1984 – 2014).

## **Obolo: Its Connotations**

The term Obolo is significant as a nucleus to this narrative. Etymologically, it is a noun derived from **bolo**, a verb root denoting being civilized, developed or expanded; being alert or vigilant, awake or quick hearing. Historically, **Obolo** is the name of an outstanding Niger Delta lord who existed about the twelfth century. He was the progenitor of a race of warriors culturally identified as **Ebi Obolo** (Obolo people). Geographically, the name refers to **Ijōn̄ Obolo** (Obolo land) the homeland his people later founded and where his entity, **Ido Obolo** (Obolo nation) is domiciled. It is also a linguistic reference to the language his people speak, **Useṃ Obolo** (Obolo language). In sum, Obolo is a patriarch, a race, a geographical entity and a language. Interestingly, no Niger Delta forebear has his name as founder, homeland, people and language respectively. Though neighbours and colonial records refer to the people, their homeland and their language as Andoni, the linguistic significance of the term Obolo as it affects OLBTO is the main focus here.

## **Obolo Homeland**

Obolo homeland occupies an estimated area of about 360km<sup>2</sup> with a projected population of about 260,000 people. It lies about 4°3'N latitude and 7°30'E longitude falling within the south-eastern flank of the Niger delta, a region rich in oil and gas. Its land mass transverses the chains of islands between the Qua Iboe River in the east and Andoni River in the west. It is bounded by Bonny to the west, Okrika and Ogoni to the north, Ibibio to the North-east and the majestic Atlantic waters to the south. Its proximate position to the sea and location within the Niger delta belt, account for the intricate network of salt-water creeks once teaming with marine life. Obviously, the people's mainstay and basic industry is fishing. Unfortunately, oil pollution is drastic, reducing their income per capita below sustenance level thus crippling their industrial and economic reliance.

## **Political Administration**

Politically, Obolo remains disintegrated as opposed to her cultural integration. The political situation, however, is forced on her by circumstances of the Nigerian politics. The creation of states and subsequent boundary adjustment of the seventies coupled with the presence of oil in its territory adversely affected its political unity. The area became a booty for two States. Eastern Obolo Local Government Area with headquarters at Okoroete is in Akwa Ibom State. Western Obolo, the bigger block, the present Andoni Local Government Area with headquarters at Ngo is in Rivers State. Though administratively separated, they are culturally indivisible.

## **Religion**

Originally, the religion of the people was traditional until the successful advent of Christianity towards the close of the nineteenth century brought radical changes. Today there are over forty denominations with over three hundred congregations in Obolo with Christians accounting for over seventy percent of the population. An important change of remarkable significance is education resulting in the current move to study, develop and document Obolo language and translate the Bible.

## **Linguistic Affinity**

By linguistic classification, Greenburg (1955) categorized Obolo language as a member of the Cross River Two group of the Niger Kordofanian (Benue-Congo) languages. But Kay Williamson (1987) classified it as belonging to the Lower Cross Sub-branch of the Delta Cross Branch of the Eastern Division of the South-Central Niger-Congo languages. Later in 1989, Bendor-Samuel reclassified it under the Western cluster of the Lower-Cross Sub-branch of the Delta Cross main branch of the Cross River block.

Interestingly, statistical provisions clearly mark Obolo out as originating from greater antiquity than its other neighbours of the region. It was one of the four languages early European explorers met in the Niger delta area about six centuries ago, making it unique, a uniqueness arising from its survival in the face of super-ethnic influences to emerge along with time. Its survival inspired awakening at documentation especially at a time Western culture including language seriously threatens every cultural value. It is more threatening when viewed from literary angles. Considering the velocity at which Nigerian culture and foreign values advance, a language without literature or documentation faces prospects of extinction.

### **Early Documentation Attempts**

Like an endangered species needing assistance to survive, Obolo needs literature for survival. As a result, patriotic individuals and groups have in the past endeavoured to put the language into print. Earlier attempts began in the late forties and early fifties when Andoni Progressive Union (APU) produced calendars and almanacs with Obolo inscriptions like **Obolo Etumu Otu Ge** (Obolo speaks with one voice), **Obolo Etip Ijõn mè Ijõn Ge** (Obolo a nation of 21 states), **Mgbantitiĩ Ore Unye** (Unity is power) etc. The late fifties and early sixties witnessed conscientious efforts to produce materials written in Obolo. It was Naaman Ofik of Ikuru Town who took the initiative. He was closely followed by Matthew M. Urang of Asaramaija. These men satisfied their aspirations and the yearnings of others, created awareness and left a spur that challenged many.

As a result, church denominations took up the challenge to translate hymns and prayers into Obolo. The Catholic Church under Catechist I. E. Ene-Awaji took the lead in 1965 followed by the Methodist Church led by M. N. Nfiangh. Others included the Anglican Church handled by Venerable J. I. Oyet and the Christ Army Church spearheaded by Mr. Samuel Sunday. Their efforts climaxed in 1971 and 1972 respectively when the denominations, except the Anglican Church published their hymn and prayer books. In 1982, the Catholic Church added a Catechism to her publications. In its 1977 calendar, Andoni Progressive Union, Abak Branch in the then South-Eastern State, documented names of Obolo weekdays. About the same time, Evangelist Clinton I. Z. Utong translated and distributed tracts and booklets for the London-based Scripture Gift Mission (SGM).

Though these do not conform to any formal orthography or meet linguistic standards, they sparked off enthusiasm and greater desire to advance, popularize and project the language in other spheres. For instance, two musical troupes, Andoni Morning Star Band of Asarama based in Lagos and Ifit Nsabõn Irieẽ Ayama Agana of Ayama Agana produced musical albums that are purely Obolo-based. These pioneering efforts prepared the ground for conscientious and sustained corporate work in the language under the repository of Obolo Language and Bible Translation Organisation (OLBTO).

# **OBOLO LANGUAGE AND BIBLE TRANSLATION ORGANISATION**

Obolo Language and Bible Translation Organisation (OLBTO) is a project of the Obolo people initiated by God as a bipartite project - Literacy Project and Bible Translation Project. It is a voluntary, non-political, non-profit-oriented agency devoid of partisan interest, but constituted to serve God and the people as inscribed on its logo. It has a constitution and is registered with Corporate Affairs Commission. The bulk of its funding amounting to over 99% is borne by Obolo people as God, the Leader of the project, provides. Following is a nutshell account of its humble beginning, administration, progress, achievements and prospects.

## **Formation of Obolo Language Committee (OLC)**

It all began in 1977 at an orientation course for student-teachers held at the then Federal Government Teachers College, Rumuokwuta centre in Port Harcourt. The course, initiated by the Rivers State Government to prepare participants for their one-year teaching practice programme, included indigenous languages of Rivers State with Obolo on the list. Deacon Israel A. Etete, (JP) and late Elder Fred K. M. Uwikor were resource persons for Obolo language. On Wednesday, July 27, 1977, Prof. Kay Williamson of the University of Port Harcourt, one of the organisers, summoned the resource persons and Obolo students on the need to form Obolo language committee under the auspices of Rivers Readers Project, a government agency charged with developing reading materials in the various indigenous languages of Rivers State. Precisely, July 17, 1978, Obolo Language Committee was hatched at an inaugural ceremony at Government Secondary School, Ngo through the instrumentality of Prof. Kay Williamson and the noble efforts of the resource persons. The initial members were some head-teachers and the student-teachers with A. M. Ebirieen-Agana (now H.R.H. (Sir) A. M. Edeh-Ogwuile, KSC) and Catechist (Sir) Isidore E. Ene-Awaji, KSJ as Chairman and Secretary respectively from 1978 – 1983.

## **Emergence of Obolo Bible Translation Committee (OBTC)**

In August 1980, Miss Charity Utong (now Prof. (Mrs.) Charity U. Okujagu), a native of Ilotombi Town, then an undergraduate of the University of Port Harcourt, had a personal encounter with the Lord where she received the commission: “Set in motion the process of translating the Bible into your language, Obolo language.” To actualize this, she initiated a crusade in December 1980 for all Obolo Christians sponsored by Elder Sam Mbata. At the end of that encounter, Obolo Bible Translation Committee was inaugurated with Deacon I.A. Etete, JP as Chairman and Evangelist Clinton I. Z. Utong as Secretary. Members began to meet monthly in Deacon I. A. Etete’s home at Agwut Obolo for prayers and the way forward. People were selected to translate some portions of the Bible but only to quickly realize that they lacked the expertise needed for translation of the Bible. However, with a whet appetite, they remained undaunted.

## **Fusion and Birth of Obolo Language and Bible Translation Committee (OLBTC)**

Since the Language Committee was constituted basically for literature and language development, and the Translation Committee for translation of the Bible into the same language, fusion became apparent. The merger took effect in 1983, under a new name, Obolo Language and Bible Translation Committee (OLBTC) with Sir F. N. Nte, KSC as President and Evangelist C. I. Z. Utong as Secretary while Deacon I.A. Etete became the vice-President. It was formally inaugurated in a grand fashion on April 14<sup>th</sup> 1984. Prof. Kay Williamson of the University of Port Harcourt and of the former Rivers Readers Project, with Dr. Katy Barnwell of Nigeria Bible Translation Trust, Jos were Special Guests. Chief S. F. Isotu-Oko succeeded as Secretary in 1984, and laboured till his demise in 2010. In 1986, Deacon I. A. Etete was appointed Co-ordinator and Treasurer while Mr. O. I. Uneh took over as vice-President.

Later, as events began to unfold, the committee assumed the new name, Obolo Language and Bible Translation Project (OLBTP) which recently metamorphosed into Obolo Language and Bible Translation Organization (OLBTO).

## **Aims and Objectives of Obolo Language and Bible Translation Committee**

The functions of the emergent committee were outlined as follows:

- i. To promote and improve the effective use of Obolo language.
- ii. To produce programmes to aid reading and writing in Obolo language.
- iii. To translate the Bible, textbooks and other books into Obolo;
- iv. To do all such things that is lawful incidental and conducive to the attainment of the aims and objectives or any one of them.

## THE BEGINNING

Two notable events signalled the humble but great beginning of Bible translation and literacy activities in Obolo. They are: the deployment of Mr. Nicolas Faraclas by Prof. Kay Williamson under the auspices of Rivers Readers Project and the arrival of the Aarons from the Nigeria Bible Translation Trust (NBTT), Jos, Plateau State.

### Nicolas Faraclas

A turning point came in 1981 as Prof. Kay Williamson deployed a Californian, Mr. Nicolas Faraclas, a post graduate student of Linguistics at the University of Port Harcourt, to carry out scientific study of Obolo language in partnership with Obolo Language Committee. Mr. Faraclas lived with Deacon and Deaconess Israel A. Etete under their loving care and hospitality at Agwut Obolo. He carried out research touring Obolo east and west noting dialectical varieties. After thorough groundwork, he developed the orthography and published **Reading and Writing Obolo** in 1978. Except for some modifications, his premier work remains the basis for the writing system. He concluded his programme with two publications in 1984 – **A Grammar of Obolo** and **The Phonology of Obolo**. His brief sojourn, perfection in communication in the language, and the publications greatly spurred the people and popularized the committee. In fact, Faraclas left indelible impressions that keep people still faithful and irrevocably committed to the Obolo language course.

### Arrival of the Aarons

To be called, like Prophet Amos, from shepherding of sheep and sycamore dressing to a life of prophesying, or from being a Pharisee as Apostle Paul to become an itinerant Gospel messenger, may be considered as contrary. Equally, to be called from Construction Engineering like Dr. Uche E. Aaron into Bible translation may appear like a disaster. Yet, his call in 1979 while still in USA through Mr. Bernie May was a prelude to the vision Prof. (Mrs.) Charity U. Okujagu had the following year (1980) to organize Bible translation as God's design to establish his rule in Obolo, a thing similar to the visions Peter and Cornelius had simultaneously (Acts. 10) as divine plan to bring salvation to the Gentiles.

Meanwhile, OLBTO had realized it needed the services of some technical experts. Initially, it contacted the Bible Society of Nigeria (BSN) only to quickly withdraw when Evangelist Clinton I. Z. Utong brought news about the arrival of Dr. Uche E. Aaron in Nigeria and his absorption by the Nigeria Bible Translation Trust (NBTT), Jos, Plateau State. Convinced of a better and faster work in the hands of an indigene, OLBTO went after him. NBTT at the time, had the policy of sending its technical crew to work in other language projects rather than their own. Despite that, the management under Dr. John R. Adiva as Director, recognized the will of God for Dr. Aaron to go to Obolo. Dr. Adiva did not hesitate to release him and his Dutch wife, Marianne. In 1983, Rev. Dr. Stephen Niyang, Assistant Director of NBTT, accompanied them from Jos to Agwut Obolo and introduced them to the Committee, Dr. Aaron taking up as Translation Advisor and Marianne as Literacy Advisor respectively. Thus, OLBTO project became an NBTT project.

Dr. Uche E. Aaron is a native speaker of Obolo from Amadaka in Eastern Obolo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, a Construction Engineer by profession and an alumnus of Lawrence Technological University, Southfield, Michigan, USA. Called by God into Bible translation, he bagged his Masters in Linguistics at University of Texas at Arlington, USA. He also holds a Diploma in Theology from All Nations Christian College in England, and a doctorate in Linguistics from University of California at Santa Barbara. In addition, he studied Biblical Hebrew for two years at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Presently he is an SIL Senior Bible Translation Consultant. His wife, Marianne holds a Certificate in Religious Knowledge from Cambridge University, a Bachelors degree in Communication Arts from Dallas Baptist University and a Masters degree in Educational Psychology with emphasis on Language, Culture and Literacy from University of California at Santa Barbara. She underwent many courses in Applied Linguistics and the Teaching of Literacy at Summer Institute of Linguistics of Wycliffe Bible Translators Incorporated in both UK and USA. Presently she is a PhD Researcher with the Institute of Education of University of Reading, UK.

The arrival of the Aarons marked the beginning of a real plunge into translation and literacy business. The couple took residence in Deacon I. A. Etete's home which automatically became their place of abode and office. Six rooms, including parlour and dining apartments were allocated to them free of charge for the eight years they occupied them. In fact, the Committee went on occupying two of the rooms after them for another twelve years till the office complex was completed in 2003. The generosity and hospitality of the Etetes as glaringly demonstrated cannot be quantified.

Radical changes accompanied the arrival of the Aarons. Everything pertaining to translation and literacy, attendant challenges and solutions seemed embodied in the couple. The enormity of what faced the Committee became apparent: administration, funding, equipment, office and accommodation, transport, man-power development, enlightenment etc. The Aarons form a bridge between OLBTO, the people and international communities. In fact, their charismatic disposition, so enchanting, exposes Obolo to the outside world and attracts aids to the Organization.

## TECHNICAL ISSUES

Expectedly, some issues of technical nature needing immediate addressing arose. They were the problems of dialectical varieties, standard orthography, numbering system and, though not technical, sharing the vision.

### Dialect Survey

Dialect is a major issue when writing a language. It is the fact of variations or varieties of the same language spoken in different areas of the same language community. For instance, in Obolo, we have variants for salt as **uchi**, **ukwi**, and **uki**, and for man, **enerieen̄**, **enedien**, **eneriene** and **anedieen**. As a result, people erroneously refer to their own dialect as their language. Thus, the question of which language (dialect) to be used surfaced as each dialect group expressed fear and suspicion over suppression of its dialect.

To overcome the problem, there was intelligibility survey to determine which dialect has the highest mutual intelligibility rate. From the scoreboard using Swaddish Scale, the result is: Ibot Obolo 45%, Iko 25%, Okoroete 70%, Ngo 85%, Unyeada 75% and Ataba 65% respectively. Furthermore, folktales from the various groups were recorded on tape, and transcribed, each exactly in the way it was recorded, and finally this was published as a book, **Ikpa Urøk**, launched on 20<sup>th</sup> July, 1985 at Agwut Obolo. From the records five major dialects of Obolo were deciphered, namely, Ibot Obolo, Okoroete, Ngo, Unyeada and Ataba.

It was also discovered that what is spoken in Iko, comparatively, would better be labeled as a separate language, though the people ethnically are Obolos. Small children there would not be able to use the same Obolo readers, until they would have grown a little to learn Obolo the wider spoken language. The same is true of the Ibenos.

By linguistic principles, dialect with highest mutual intelligibility rate is most qualified for writing a language. However, translation and literacy do not so much follow this criterion. Rather, the various dialects are incorporated towards an enriched standard Obolo for the modern user. For instance, where a term is not found in this dialect but a word for it exists in another, it is adopted for its originality. Again, where a particular item is differently named by dialect group(s), the name in use by the majority applies in writing. For example, in **ofiik** and **amimin** (pole for securing or driving canoe), **uta** and **abakabak** (iguana), **ofiik** and **uta** are preferred. However, it is worth stating that the affected words are not discarded or considered as obsolete or non-Oboloic. They still retain their nature, uniqueness and authenticity as components of Obolo vocabulary deposit; they are in fact synonyms.

Similarly, an item having two different names due to dialectical variation, but has another item of its type that is, perhaps, strange and as a result, no Obolo name for it, the less popular name is transferred to that other item, for example, spear and javelin. Obolo has double names for spear **otunwa** and **otubò** but none for javelin. In such a situation, especially in a Bible passage containing the two, it is difficult to drop one. As a result, **otunwa** is taken for spear and **otubò** for javelin (I Sam. 17:45). In passages they do not appear together, they are used interchangeably (Job 8:18, Judges 5:8). Happily, most Obolo people understand the various challenges and implications involved in writing a language that had had no orthography or literature as far as dialectical varieties are concerned. Sensitive as the matter is, with the logic applied in handling, people are psychologically relaxed.

### Standard Orthography

As earlier stated, Mr. Nicolas Faraclas developed an orthography which, as a matter of policy, must be registered as a standard system of writing Obolo language. Dr. Aaron picked up from here. He reviewed, modified, standardized and had it published by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council in Orthographies of Nigerian Languages Manual VI 2000 edition. The publication accords the language international recognition as member of the world community of languages.

Prior to this, he had organized Reading and Writing Workshop from 21<sup>st</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> August, 1984 to equip translators and others with rudiments of reading and writing the language. Again, Advance Workshop in Obolo Language took place from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> November, 1989 to deepen the knowledge of earlier participants including all members of the Committee and typist, Pastor Friday S. Urang. Experiences at both workshops necessitated review of the orthography and subsequent publication. It also equipped participants not only for translation and literacy works but became for them a strong background that enhanced performance as resource persons and facilitators at future workshops.

## New Counting System

The old counting system in Obolo posed problems in translating larger numbers from the Bible. As a solution, a new counting system was developed. The new system is based on the decimal theory of numbering postulated for Obolo in 1976 by Ephraim S. Etete (now Chief (Hon.) Ephraim S. Etete-Owo). He introduced it to some Obolo students at St. Mary's Teachers Training College, Abak in the then South-Eastern State. The students including F. J. Nte, I. E. Ene-Awaji and C. N. Egweteng, contributed to improve what he posited. They developed a system that made counting up to tens of thousands possible but did not provide names for the basic units.

Apart from improving on the decimal system, OLBTO made counting up to trillion in Obolo possible and accorded names to the various units. For instance, **akop** for ten, **akop iba** for twenty or two tens up to **efit** for one hundred, **obop** for one thousand originally the numerical name for four hundred the highest unit in Obolo. From **obop** (one thousand), one can count up to **efit obop** (hundred thousand), **efie** (one million), **ego** (one billion) and **ngwugwu** (one trillion). The development has not only made translating larger Bible numbers easy but has also made possible newscasting or media programmes in Obolo involving budgets, census or election figures and huge amounts of money.

## Sharing the Vision

Sharing the vision called for enlightenment campaigns which in the main is not a technical matter. It is brought under the heading because of its implication and the wealth of experience our Advisors acquired from other projects to cure our inexperience. As a result, knowing that sensitization is a perfect weapon for projecting an enterprise of this dimension, it was generously applied through enlightenment campaigns led by the Aarons from 1984 to 1987, as a first step to share the vision, rally people to the project and get everyone on board. It spread from community to community, denomination to denomination with charming effects that compelled the entire Obolo nation to echo in unison their Amen. Today OLBTO is a household word especially as Obolo texts are found in every home.

Initially, many people were skeptical. Some openly boldly remarked: "Bible translation into Obolo! It's funny and incredible! We must learn from experience to avoid being perpetual victims of deceit. Are these people not really coming with deceptive motives to enrich themselves at our expense?" However, the doubting masses changed their impression when from 1985 they saw our early publications: an enlarged new edition of **Reading and Writing Obolo, Ikpa Urøk** (a book of folktales in the various dialects), then the translated **Ata Etip Ike Mak Ogebe** (The Gospel according to Mark), **Ibebene** (Genesis) and many other publications that followed. Moreover, the person of Mrs. Marianne Aaron, her communication skill in Obolo with amazing eloquence and fluency made them abandon negative views. More especially, the doggedness of the campaign team irrespective of inclement weather, dangers associated with night trips along rivers and creeks in risky small canoes to reach out to all, drummed home the honest intention and sincerity of purpose that won public admiration and confidence in the mission.

## **ADMINISTRATION**

From inception, OLBTO is blessed with functional administration, dynamic and transparent leadership. Administration is based on practical principles St. Paul laid down in Rom. 12:4-8. People served happily in their chosen or 'imposed' areas. Its many functionaries work in harmony with Executive Committee under the President.

### **The Executive Committee**

The Committee is the policy-making organ with powers of planning and execution. It consists of men and women of various denominations voluntarily giving up their time, money and talents to the Lord. Some were formally delegated to represent their denominations, but most are individuals voluntarily devoting themselves to this work. Membership has always been open to anyone interested in promoting Bible translation and literacy development. People have come and withdrawn at will. Many, however, have made themselves permanent, for example, the President, vice-President, Secretary, Project Co-ordinator, Advisors, Translators, Literacy Co-ordinators, staff and some just as members, like Pa Anthony Ujile, who, though age tells on him, refuses to withdraw. The Committee is headed by the President.

### **The President**

As head of the Organisation, he summons and presides over all meetings including Annual General Meeting (AGM). General administration and functioning of the various arms fall under his jurisdiction. He implements resolutions and recommendations made at AGM, and recruitment of staff approved by the Executive Committee. He is an ex-officio member of any ad-hoc committee constituted and of the Board of Trustees with which he liaises for effective administration of the Organisation. He is the spokesman and mouthpiece in relations with governments and other functionaries and superintends over the Branch Office. Close to him is the vice-President who acts in his absence, prepares the Annual Budget and handles other matters the President assigns to him.

Each December, the President summons an Annual General Meeting (AGM) for appraisal of work done during the year. It is a meeting of all stakeholders involving Obolo people east and west. Here, he presents his annual Report on successes and failures, income and expenditure for the period, the Budget and Proposals for the new year including any envisaged prospects for consideration and approval. Because of distance, ever-increasing transport charges, and in order to involve every stakeholder, the Executive Committee approved two sessions of the same AGM to be held, first in Agwut Obolo for the western zone and at Okoroete for the eastern axis.

Two Presidents have emerged in succession. The first was Sir Fortunatus N. Nte, KSC who held office for twenty three years (1984-2007) when he rested in the Lord. H.R.H. (Sir) A. M. Edeh-Ogwuile, KSC, the incumbent and former chairman of the language committee, succeeded him in 2007. Mr. O. I. Uneh is the vice-President since 1986 till date.

Both Presidents share identical administrative acumen, a feature they vividly depict and transparently exhibit. Through honest, selfless and efficient management skills, they dedicatedly harness both human and other resources to ensure that only goal-oriented programmes are vigorously pursued without distraction. In fact, they achieve great things out of very little upholding the vision and fulfilling the mission with precision and devotion. In 1992, Sir F. N. Nte successfully placed the New Testament in the people's hands as a first step towards their yearning for the word of God in their God-given language. This year (2014), H.R.H. (Sir) A. M. Edeh-Ogwuile meritoriously hands the complete Obolo Bible to them not only in fulfillment of their dream but as enthronement of the word of God, the emblem of his real Presence among the people. To God, the Immortal, the Invisible; the only Wise be the glory both now and forever.

### **5 Co-ordinator and Treasurer**

The Co-ordinator, Deacon Israel A. Etete who is also the Treasurer has supervisory and management powers. He is in-charge of the day to day administrative matters and financial decisions that require a member of the Executive Committee's attention. He is a signatory to the Organisation's account and ensures that all monies belonging to the Organisation is deposited with its bankers. He supervises the payment of salaries and stipends, takes care of equipment and maintenance, stationeries and transport, implementation of approved expenditure and checking of account records. He reports monthly income and expenditure during EXCO meetings and yearly at the Annual General Meeting where stakeholders are fully represented. Before recruitment of any accounting officer, Catechist (Sir) I. E. Ene-Awaji, KSJ was Financial Secretary from 1983 -1988. From 1989 Pastor Z. D Igana was Accounting Officer. He also started and organized the yearly assessment of churches. When he left in the early nineties, he was replaced with Rev. D. O. Abiante whose services were truncated by untimely death in 2008. Presently, Mr. Daniel Z. Daniel is the Accountant.

### **The Secretariat**

The Secretariat is attached to the office of the President. The head of the Secretariat, the General Secretary, takes minutes of all committee meetings and keeps the records of the Organization. He handles all matters relating to correspondences. Again, he assists the President to enhance and lighten his work. At the demise of Chief F. S. Isotu-Oko in 2010 after twenty four years of selfless services, Mr. S. E. Ojoko served as Secretary till 2013. Meanwhile, Mr. Walter Hebron Ntedeng is the Secretary General, assisted by Evangelist Orotele J. Young.

### **Branch Office**

Because Obolo land is divided over two States, it became necessary to establish a Branch Office at Okoroete in Akwa Ibom State. This was founded in 2004. It has its own Executive Committee and is headed by a Chairman, presently Sir Levi L. Uzono, KSC. Other officers include Very Rev. Marcus N. Enene, Secretary and Mr. U. P. Ijente, Associate Project Co-ordinator. Its Executive Committee is subordinate to the President of OLBTO. Though it may take decisions on matters affecting the zone, decisions so taken are referred to the President for ratification. It sources for funds through contacts, collects church assessments from the zone, checks records of sales and makes remittances to the Treasurer at the main office. It sees to the welfare of staff and supervises work at the Branch Office. Its other activities include maintaining contact with churches and communities, selling of Bible and other publications, helping to organize courses and workshops in the local government area, and sending periodic reports to the President.

### **Board of Trustees**

The Board of Trustees is a new development in the Organization, inaugurated in 2013. It comprises seven members who form the core of patrons and patroness, counsellors and supporters. They are people of integrity some of whom are foundation members. Their financial obligations through personal contributions and fund sourcing sustain the Organisation. They are seven, two of whom are signatories to the account – Dr. Okere Iragunima (Chairman), Prof. (Mrs.) Charity U. Okujagu (Secretary), His Grace, Most Rev. Emmanuel E. Nglass, Hon. Adasi E. Ubulom, Hon. Sam Sam Etetegwung, Chief (Hon) Dr. Ephraim S. Etete-Owo and Sir (Engr.) Emiyarei B. Ikuru, KSC.

## **FUNDING AND INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **Funding**

Funding at the beginning of this project was both discouraging and disheartening. As essential as it is, people simply ignored it to place their confidence in the All-sufficient God. In fact, in the early eighties, the budget started from about ten thousand naira per annum and has steadily risen into millions now. By God's grace, today, about 99% of all expenses, including salaries, transportation, and publishing are sustained by contributions from Obolo sources.

Initially, members made voluntary donations of whatever they could afford at each meeting mainly for stationeries. Though this dwindled for a while, it is now activated. As sensitization succeeded through enlightenment campaigns of the eighties, few individuals began to donate at various intervals, some monthly at fixed rates, which rates they continue increasing till date. These were later joined by communities and churches through launching of published materials or fund-raising ceremonies embraced by most of the towns and villages including fishing settlements in Andoni and beyond. As awareness grew and publication of written materials and translated books continued, some elites joined the support team. Soon there was a host of supporters including councils of chiefs from east and west. Those having little offered their widow's mite; those having much have also given much, both in cash and kind while indigent ones contributed their services.

In fact, the mainstay of the project life till date is the annual assessment. Obolo churches asked the committee to assess them according to their numerical strengths and to come around for collection. This has been the most reliable source of income since then. Precisely 2007, the Lord brought in the Local Government Councils as another reliable means. Hon. Albert Jeremiah, transition Chairman of Eastern Obolo Local Government Council, initiated it. His counterpart, Hon. Lucky S. Ayuwu of Andoni Local Government Area followed up, the latter being the most consistent council.

Again, the bulk of income derives from eminent sons and daughters called by God to support the project. Some give regularly, others occasionally. Other sources include launching, and sales of published materials, hiring of plastic chairs, and periodic donations that are special and particular from foreign friends and philanthropists. Our publications are sold at the reach of an average Obolo person at no loss, no gain prices.

### **Equipment**

The earliest equipment was a typewriter brought by Dr. & Mrs. Aaron to the project. In 1984, through donation by an anonymous Christian lady in the US, the Aaron's friend and father in the Lord, Mr. Bernie May, was able to purchase a Sharp laptop computer with printer, together with an inverter for the Aaron's work. The Aarons also acquired a solar panel with accessories for the project. Later a generator was donated.

After the first visit of Rev. Jan Gravendeel (parent-in-law of Dr. Uche Aaron) in 1987, he raised funds through his gospel ministry in the Netherlands. With the funds, the ministry purchased a number of equipment – typewriters, duplicating machine, computer papers, stationeries, speedboat, window blinds etc. and shipped to the committee. In appreciation, Obolo nation crowned Rev. Jan Gravendeel with a chieftaincy title, "Ogwu Uboon Usem Obolo" (King of Obolo Language) in a colourful ceremony on February 28, 1988.

Later on as funds became available little by little, the committee began purchasing more. Two Obolo members of Rivers and Akwa Ibom States Houses of Assembly assisted in this direction by donating a computer set, printer and generator. They are Hon. Sam Sam Etetegwung and Hon. Adasi E. Ubulom. Presently, OLBTO has two sets of computers, a scanner and two printers. Two out of three generators in use were recently burgled while a Lister engine is in a state of disrepair.

### **Transport**

At the time OLBTO was constituted, transport was a major difficulty in Obolo. A few available dug-out canoes powered with outboard motors were expensive especially on charters. During enlightenment campaigns to communities within shorter distances, we either borrowed boats and paddled by ourselves or paid local ferrymen. To far distances, we were constrained to hire the costly motor powered boats. This was the situation Rev. Jan Gravendeel met in 1987. As mentioned earlier, in 1988, Dutch brethren, donated a luxurious speedboat with 48HP Yamaha outboard motor equipped with steering gadgets. Later in 1991, when the boat went out of use, they donated again a 40HP Johnson outboard engine

which was attached to a local boat bought. These contributed immensely to our campaign efforts and brought the reality and seriousness of our mission to bear on the people. Due to lack of spare parts, repairs became difficult, the engine fell out of use again. By this time, our finances and the state of transportation had improved making OLBTO dependent on public facilities. However, the need for a boat to enhance mobility is essential and pressing.

### **Land Acquisition**

After occupying the residence of Deacon & Deaconess I. A. Etete for some decades, with expansion of the ministry and unfolding of prospects, OLBTO decided to acquire a parcel of land for its permanent use. To this effect, Agwut Obolo, the host community, especially the Alama family, generously donated a parcel of their land where the office block, staff quarters and Bible House are standing. Registration of deed and property awaits survey and documentation. However, OLBTO needs more land for expansion and new projects.

### **Office and Accommodation**

From their arrival to their departure (1983-1991), the Aarons were accommodated in the domestic home of the Etetes. Part of the apartments allotted them served as office. Having acquired land, building of an office complex followed. It was dedicated on April 28, 2003. Funds for the building came from Chief (Hon.) E. S. Etete-Owo and primary school teachers spearheaded by Comrade I. E. Otungban which brought the project to window sitting. Contributions from Dutch brethren completed everything that made it ready for dedication and use.

As the Aarons voluntarily retired to return to Obolo to complete work on the Old Testament, OLBTO embarked on building a duplex for staff. The Chiefs Council in Andoni Local Government Area donated three million naira (#3,000,000.00) towards the project in 2007. Thus, the duplex was completed in 2008.

The idea of stocking the Bible when it would arrive led to erection of a warehouse. Its foundation was laid on 18<sup>th</sup> February, 2014. Funds for it were calculated into the cost of printing and transportation of the Bible for which a new phase of launching began. The Andoni and Eastern Obolo Local Government Councils, some communities and Obolo people from different walks of life donated generously. The building is christened **Bible House**.

### **Man-Power Development**

Recruitment and development of manpower are crucial issues to the growth of any organization. Employment of labour without initial capital is a case of disability. As a result, labour has been and still is our problem. In fact, only those called by God endure our service condition. Fortunately, our labour force is dominated by volunteers working on gratis. Only nine are placed on remuneration. By divine provision, individual employee or volunteer is skilful in many things, each using his skills to cover jobs that normally require recruitment of staff. In this way, cost is saved and employment reduced. For instance, when we could not employ a typist early enough, the advisors and translators did the typing.

Nevertheless, people were engaged from time to time as staff or volunteers, some of whom need particular training to enable them function. To make them functional and within the limits of available resources, some were trained locally and a few others outside as translators, literacy personnel and office hands including technical crew for Jesus Film and Faith Comes By Hearing projects.

The first employee in 1985, Pastor Friday S. Urang a typist, is still with OLBTO. Initially trained by Mrs. Aaron to prepare books on the typewriter, he also learned to do so on the computer. Eventually, in 2003, he was sent to Jos for a full-fledged course in publishing using Word for Windows and Publisher. He is the Production Manager diligently computerizing the Bible over and over as chapter by chapter, book by book was being translated, checked, reviewed and corrected as well as all literacy materials and every correspondence etc. He also became an expert in producing books with a computer printer on stencil. For some time, he did these services also for the general public as a way of raising funds for OLBTO. Many churches and organizations had their launching envelopes printed this way by him.

The list included the two translators who attended Introductory Course in Translation Principles (ICTP) at NBTT, Jos, Evangelist C. I. Z. Utong (1983) and Catechist I. E. Ene-Awaji (1984) respectively. After another course, Introduction to Biblical Hebrew at Jos in 1998, they proceeded in 1999 to Israel where they attended Special Academic Programme for Bible Translators at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, to broaden their Biblical Hebrew background for Old Testament

translation. Catechist Ene-Awaji also attended Psalms and Proverbs Workshops (1995 and 2005) in Jos to update knowledge in Biblical poetry.

Another group trained still at NBTT Jos, were those who attended Introductory Course in Applied Linguistics (ICAL) to co-ordinate literacy work, write books, run courses and workshops etc. These included Chief S. F. Isotu-Oko (1986), Mr. Enene N. Enene (1988), Sir E. F. Edubio (1990), Comrade I. E. Otungban (1990) and Mr. S. E. Ojoko (2004). Chief S. F. Isotu-Oko and Catechist I. E. Ene-Awaji attended Primer Construction and Training of Trainers Workshop (2005) during which they wrote Ikpa Obolo Oso Iba Eyi Ayaya (New Primer Two). In 2014, Pastor Charles Urang was added to the number of ICAL graduands from OLBTO.

Finally, primary and some secondary school teachers, head-teachers and some principals, primary school supervisors, writers, resource persons, reviewers, pastors, adult educators etc. received massive training at various local courses and workshops to build the manpower base.

Other rounds of training accompanied introduction of two evangelical programmes: Jesus Film (1999) and Faith Comes By Hearing (2008). Beneficiaries to handle equipment and run the programmes included Ebirieeñ G. Okparawo and Jacob Finebone (trained in Port Harcourt), Pastor Charles Urang and Eunice Uzono (trained in Enugu). Pastor Charles Urang and Ebirieeñ G. Okparawo were later retrained in Jos (2000) with Jacob Finebone for the Jesus Film unit. Nteogwute A. Miller, Cate. Christopher UnyeAwaji and Jonah Atteng were trained in Port Harcourt for Faith Comes By Hearing programme with Pastor Charles Urang as co-ordinator.

## **LITERACY AND BIBLE TRANSLATION DEPARTMENTS**

The two departments of Bible Translation and Literacy give meaning to what OLBTO stands for. Dr. Uche Aaron has lent his expertise to the Bible Translation Department and Mrs. Marianne Aaron to the Literacy Department. The departments are symbiotic for while the Bible contributes codes to make literacy effective, literacy provides the decoding techniques to make the Bible readable. Both co-operated wonderfully well with the Administration to achieve better end-results.

### **Bible Translation**

Under Dr. Uche E. Aaron, the two translators, Evangelist Clinton I. Z. Utong and Catechist (Sir) Isidore E. Ene-Awaji, KSJ, accomplished Bible translation to actualize the people's dream to the glory of God. Evangelist Utong took a leave of absence without pay from the University of Port Harcourt from 1985 to 1988, in order to be available to work with Dr. Aaron in the office in Agwut Obolo, while Catechist Ene-Awaji, a school teacher, gave his time in the afternoons and evenings, as well as during school holidays, for long periods without any compensation.

### **New Testament**

Translation started with the New Testament and took a piecemeal approach. Book after book was translated, then checked with the Translators by Dr. Aaron as well as the Consultant, Dr. Katy Barnwell, after which, they were reviewed and tested. Consequently, many individual books were also published in trial editions so that people could make recommendations for improvement wherever a translation was not clear or faulty.

The first Bible book to be published was the Gospel according to Mark translated by Catechist Ene-Awaji. It was dedicated on February 28, 1987 at Ngo. It became the basis for translation of the other Gospels. In order to provide some background understanding to the New Testament, the book of Genesis was also translated by Evangelist Utong. This was launched at Okoroete in Eastern Obolo on April 23, 1988. Printing was single-handedly sponsored by Dr. Benjamin O. Wilcox.

Other books of the New Testament that were published in trial editions were 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, The Gospel according to Matthew, and the Epistle of James. Some, such as the Epistle of James, had an accompanying simple reading guide, to encourage the reading of a small portion daily. Finally, work on the New Testament was completed in 1991 and after over a year of printing and transportation wholly sponsored by Wycliffe Bible Translators Inc., it was dedicated on 28<sup>th</sup> December, 1992. It was a day of high praise in Obolo, with thousands from all the nooks and corners of the land in attendance. Rev. Jan Gravendeel paid for over three thousand copies for distribution to all

christian congregations in Obolo. Since the dedication of the New Testament, OLBTO took care of its distribution to all Obolo settlements for sale. There have been two large reprints in 2006 and 2010.

The Evangelist Gemeente 't Kruispunt, Rijnsburg, the church the Aarons attend in the Netherland, had been solidly behind Obolo project in prayers and financial support. It sponsored typesetting of New Testament in England by paying salaries of two typesetters for the period and their return tickets to the United States, and the Aarons to Israel for the Hebrew Course from 2004 to 2006 in anticipation of Old Testament translation. Some of these Dutch brethren went the extra mile paying visits to the project to see things for themselves. These included Teun and Anita van de Ree, Robin Vlug, Jan Mimpen and Rutger Koolhas including Ellen van Bakel and Helena Janzen.

## **Reviewers Workshop**

Reviewing is an essential aspect of the translation process. As a result, as translation of The Gospel According to Mark (the first translated book), was nearing completion, Dr. Aaron organized Reviewers Workshop in 1986, precisely 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> June. Forty participants took part to learn the basics of translation review. Many committed themselves faithfully reviewing each book until translation was completed.

## **Old Testament**

After the completion of the New Testament, the Aarons had been recalled to Jos and there was a lack of Bible Translation Consultants in the country causing the work in Obolo to slow down. Nevertheless, translation of the Old Testament was continued by the two Translators in their respective homes. During his Christmas holidays, Dr. Aaron squeezed out some weeks to be in the OLBTO office doing final checking of the Book of Psalms. Earlier on there had been a visit by Dr. Hanni Kuhn of Wycliffe Bible Translators to check the book of Exodus up to chapter 20, as well as a visit by Dr. David Momo from NBTT who checked a larger portion of the book of Psalms. Finally the Psalms were printed and dedicated in 2003 in trial edition. There was a reprint in 2004 and a second edition in 2010.

In 2006, the Aarons voluntarily retired six years prior to their statutory period and returned to Obolo to accomplish translation of the Old Testament. He assigned Evangelist Utong to translate narrative or historical books including Daniel, Jonah, Haggai and Malachi except Joshua and Ruth. Catechist Ene-Awaji took up the poetic or prophetic books including Joshua and Ruth, and all the Deuterocanonicals (Apocrypha) except Daniel, Jonah, Haggai and Malachi.

Both translators worked tirelessly to march the speed at which Dr. Aaron, their Consultant, carried on his checking targeting the 2013 deadline for dedication. Soon the following were checked, reviewed and published in trial editions: Ruth and Esther in a single volume (2007), Proverbs (2008) and Ecclesiastes (2011). Though trial editions are meant to test the accuracy of translations, they also serve as progress report or as evidence of continued commitment on the part of the operators as well as a device to nurse forward the people's expectation and keep their support alive. In other words, the editions held OLBTO and the people together towards achieving their common goal. In 2009, trial edition of the Pentateuch was published as a single volume. Its printing was sponsored by Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) through Andoni Cluster Development Board.

With these productions, zeal mounted on every side with greater optimism and more fervent prayers. December, 2013 was targeted for dedication. By December 2011, the Consultant and translators had given finishing touches to the work after final checking and review.

## **Inter-Testamental Books**

To carry all denominations along, Deuterocanonical Books, otherwise called the **Apocrypha** were translated to make complete Catholic Bible for users. The books include Tobit, Judith, Esther (Greek Version), 1 and 2 Maccabees. Others are 1 and 2 Esdras, Manasseh, Wisdom, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Baruch and Additions to Daniel. Accordingly, considering Catholic population, three thousand copies out of thirty-three thousand initial production are Catholic. It is a feat that clearly portrays the unity between various Christian folds in Obolo. Thanks be to God who united all Obolo Christians for the work of Bible translation irrespective of dogmatic differences.

Rev. Father Jerome A. Etenduk had gone through translated Deuterocanonical materials and contacted the Catholic Bishop of Port Harcourt, Most Rev. Dr. Camillus A. Etokudoh for Imprimatur and Nihil obstat, official Catholic assents. The Bishop appointed Monsignor Barinem Boniko, who after satisfactory consultation with Rev. Fr. Etenduk and Catechist I. E. Ene-Awaji brought from Bishop approval for Experimental Use.

Then the final stage came, Typesetting, to be preceded by serious proof-reading. A team of proof-readers was appointed to work with Dr. Aaron, comprising Mrs. Marianne Aaron, Rev. Fr. Jerome A. Etenduk, Rev. Bright Odimi, Mr. Job Ogbilikana and Catechist I. E. Ene-Awaji. While the rest left for Jos, Rev. Fr. J. A. Etenduk and Rev. Bright Odimi because of their Lenten pastoral engagements, remained in Port Harcourt using e-mail services. It was a Herculean task that lasted twelve weeks ending on May 11, 2012. Each member read individual books serially submitting findings to Dr. Aaron who cross-checked and made corrections where necessary. When he finished with each book, he handed in for typesetting, spent time with the typesetters to ensure accuracy on their part until all the books were completed. Those who handled the typesetting were Mrs. Heidi J. Rosendall and Mr. David Rowbory at the Language Development Facilitators base, Elm House within the Lutheran Quarters in Jos, Plateau State. From here it was taken to US en-route South Korea for printing.

Wycliffe Bible Translators Inc., by its tradition subsidized printing and transportation cost of the Protestant Bible by fifty per cent. The other half and including the Catholic Bible was borne by Obolo people and some external supporters.

## **Statistics of Obolo Bible**

In Akwa Ibom State, Obolo is the first indigenous language to have whole Bible. In Rivers State, it is the second language, after Khana which had theirs in 1968. In the whole of Nigeria as a country, out of the 532 languages, Obolo is the 23<sup>rd</sup> language to have the whole Bible. Wycliffe Global Alliance has it that “in the whole of Africa as a continent, Obolo Bible is the number 184. In the whole world, Obolo Bible is the 515<sup>th</sup> whole Bible printed in a new language.” One other exceptional achievement: The Obolo Catholic Bible is the second one in the whole of the former Eastern Region of Nigeria. That is not all. It is worth noting that while all other Catholic Bibles in Nigeria have the Catholic Deuterocanonical books stacked away as an addendum in between the Old and the New Testaments, the Obolo Catholic Bible has placed these books in their appropriate places following the model of the Jerusalem Bible, the standard Catholic Bible. In this regard, the Obolo Catholic Bible is the first standard Catholic Bible in any indigenous language in Nigeria. This is indeed a “super stride”! Again, as far as the Nigeria Bible Translation Trust (NBTT), our mother organization, is concerned, the Obolo Bible is NBTT’s very first complete Bible. In addition to this, the Obolo Catholic Bible is the first Catholic Bible in the history of NBTT.

## **A Word on Obolo Translation**

Despite modern devices that facilitate translation, it took OLBTO thirty years of glorious handwork to produce Obolo Bible. It is not a word for word but meaning-based translation. Moreover, every language is semantically and syntactically unique. English or other language patterns are contrary to the peculiar nature of Obolo language. As such, one must not expect Obolo texts to correspond or conform in totality with King James Version. Most importantly, our translation is based on the original Hebrew and Greek versions. We also consulted various modern English and American versions including commentaries, dictionaries, exegetical materials, works of scholars and researchers for accuracy and originality. A number of experts and international crew of consultants including Dr. Katy Barnwell of England, Hanni Kuhn from Switzerland and Dr. David Momo a Nigerian from Kogi State had checked, processed and analyzed Obolo Bible authenticating and establishing its perfection in every standard.

## LITERACY

Like sprinters, Bible translation and literacy activities kicked off simultaneously each running parallel with the other but having different distances to cover. The former had its finishing point clearly marked and had successfully attained it. The latter engages in a marathon with no apparent end in view. From our perspective, literacy is like a cord of three strands, namely, courses and workshops, literature production, and mass literacy. It is against this background that one must discuss the achievements of the literacy department so far.

Literacy implies reading and writing across the board normally achieved through formal settings. Because of the enormity of the field to cover, relevant facilities lacking, the literacy unit under Mrs. Marianne Aaron, the Advisor, vigorously pursued these aspects with amazing results. It produced Co-ordinators and resource persons, trained primary school teachers and involved school authorities, and to some extent, influenced the Rivers State government to support literacy in the mother-tongue. It published a number of literature in the form of primers, readers, magazines etc. It brought literacy in Obolo language to the clergy and church workers. The responsibility of evangelization through the Jesus film and Faith Comes By Hearing media rests on its shoulders as well. How does it cope?

### Apprenticeship

Chief Sunday F. Isotu-Oko and Mr. Enene N. Enene were initially trained by Mrs. Marianne Aaron in apprenticeship to organize and teach at courses and workshops aimed at producing more hands to assist in training others. As reported earlier, they later attended ICAL. Thus equipped, they contributed immensely in developing early literacy materials and efficiently organized and co-ordinated the various workshops. Mr. Enene was appointed the first Literacy Co-ordinator, followed by Chief Isotu-Oko and later, Comrade I.E. Otungban. Pastor Charles Urang was also apprenticed to Mrs. Aaron for every other aspect of literacy task. New Literacy Co-ordinators and Resource Persons were appointed in 2012: Catechist I. E. Ene-Awaji (Co-ordinator) Mr. Walter Hebron Ntedeng (Assistant Co-ordinator, Pastor Charles Urang (Senior Resource Person). Other resource persons included Comrade I. E. Otungban, Fubara Jeremiah, and Mrs. Nkakeek Wilcox.

### Courses and Workshops

Reading and Writing Obolo Courses were organized from zone to zone as Obolo was demarcated for that purpose. From 1984 up to the nineties several of such courses and workshops were held. In April 1986, a particular course on teaching Adasi Ikpa Obolo Part 2 was carried out with teachers at the pilot schools, Community Primary School, Agana and Community Primary School, Agwut Obolo. Between 19<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> September, 1988, a workshop involving all primary school teachers was organized. Its highlights were the opening ceremony by Capt. Elechi Amadi (Rtd), Honourable Commissioner for Education in Rivers State. The closing ceremony was witnessed by Dr. Charles E. W. Jenewari, Executive Chairman of Rivers State Schools Management Board. Participants were rewarded with certificates. Mr. A. J. Etenduk was declared Obolo Language Teacher of the Year.

His fascination at the above workshop led the Honourable. Commissioner for Education to plan a State-wide workshop involving the then 26 indigenous languages of Rivers State based on the Obolo pattern. Between 21<sup>st</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> November, 1988, training of resource persons preparatory to the workshop took place at Holy Rosary Secondary School, Port Harcourt. Participants from Obolo included Chief S. F. Isotu-Oko and Catechist I. E. Ene-Awaji (resource persons), Messrs F. Jeremiah, G. Uko, R. Nteija, A. J. Etenduk J. G. David and Miss Adella L. Arawo (participants). A State-wide workshop that lasted 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> December, 1988 followed. In Obolo, while the former resource persons served as organizers, participants served as resource persons.

Another workshop of remarkable size was organized at the auspices of the Local Government Education Authority under the Education Secretary, Deacon Israel A. Etete. It was the first workshop teachers contributed financially to run. It lasted seven days precisely, 7<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> November, 1990 excluding Saturday and Sunday. From 2007 to 2009, a series of three zonal workshops were held to train teachers newly recruited in 2008 and retrain all other teachers on the teaching of Obolo language. Head-teachers and supervisors were not left out. They were joined in the training programmes to enable them supervise teachers. In 2010, The Local Government Education Authority at Ngo under Mr. Samuel G. Dodd, the Education Secretary, permitted OLBTO to supervise teaching Obolo in primary schools. As a result, all the schools had a supervisory visit by OLBTO resource persons to enforce teaching of the language.

In sum, workshops and courses organized by the literacy Department included Reading and Writing Courses, Writers Workshops, Teachers and Teacher Trainers Workshops, Church Leaders Workshops, “Ifufuk Ikpa Mbuban” Courses for pastors and church workers done on zonal basis, Adult Teachers Workshop etc.

Most of the workshops and courses were also conducted in Eastern Obolo. Unfortunately, efforts at teaching Obolo in the schools in that local government area is being thwarted by Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Education. For instance, in 1987 OLBTO sent delegation to the honourable Commissioner for Education in that State on the issue. She only approved teaching the language in principle and not with any textbook. No justifiable or satisfactory reason was given for such a stand. OLBTO brought this before the Minister of Education. Following the Obolo action, other language groups mounted pressure on the use of their dialects in broadcasting. In 1991, the Governor approved eight dialects including Obolo language for radio programmes. He also promised to abide by the national guidelines on the use of vernacular in relation to the National Policy on Education, (Nigerian Chronicle, April 4, 1991). Yet till date, the prospect lies bleak. Moreover, non-Obolo speaking teachers and head-teachers permeate Eastern Obolo primary schools, a situation inimical to our language development policy. Hopefully, moves and contacts at convincing government to reconsider its stand is on-going.

## Literature Development

Our literacy programme is geared towards teaching Obolo in our schools from primary to junior secondary levels. To that effect, feeding the schools with relevant reading and teaching materials is a pre-occupation. Under Mrs. Marianne Aaron, Chief S. F. Isotu-Oko in particular including Mr. Enene N. Enene as earlier noted developed various materials.

Construction of trial editions of readers was the first step. To determine the suitability of texts for primaries one and two grades, Mrs. Aaron tried them at approved pilot schools: Community Primary School, Agana and Community Primary School, Agwut Obolo. Again, for adult literacy, she experimented with Mrs. Evelyn A. Etete who had no literacy. It was all successful. Within some months, she was perfect in reading Obolo texts. Then, quantity production and circulation to schools followed.

Meanwhile, we have published for primary schools: **Adasi Ikpa Obolo** (Primer 1), **Ikpa Obolo Oso Iba** (Primer 2) with new edition and **Gwuñ Ogwu Obolo** for primary three. Catechist (Sir) Ene-Awaji, Pastor Charles Urang and Mr. Walter H. Ntendeng are currently developing and testing materials to produce Readers for senior primary classes. For the junior secondary schools and public readership, **Mbuban Îchaka**, first literary material on literature in Mother-Tongue written by Catechist Ene-Awaji has been published.

Others are supplementary materials including **Ida Obolo Nsabon** (children magazine) in its editions, **Aya Ifuk** (new counting system) in chart and booklet, **Alphabet Chart**, **Nakweñ Inu** by Comrade I. E. Otunban and **Ata Ebi Mkpulu** by Sir F. E. Edubio. For adult literacy: **Ida Obolo** (magazine for adults) in its various volumes, and **Ikpa Urøk** (Book of Folktales). For teachers: **Workshop Guide** by Mr. Enene N. Enene with revised edition and reprints, **Reading and Writing Obolo, Curricula, Schemes of Work** (Primaries 1-3), Teacher’s Notes (**Adasi Ikpa Obolo** and **Ikpa Obolo Oso Iba**), etc. In 2009, Shell Petroleum Development Company sponsored reprinting of **Ikpa Obolo 1 and 2**, **Gwuñ Ogwu Obolo** and **Ida Obolo Eyi Nsabon** through Andoni Cluster Development Board and were distributed free to pupils in all primary schools in Andoni Local Government Area.

Mr. Lawrence L. Ereforokuma is our artist from the beginning since his first year in secondary school, drawing over 90 per cent of pictures in our publications. Ven Rev. J. I. Oyet fascinated by his first work offered him a scholarship for that year. Other artists include Mr. Enene N. Enene, Evangelist Orotele J. Young, Pastor Charles Urang and Catechist I. E. Ene-Awaji.

## SCRIPTURE PROMOTION

### Jesus Film Unit

Scripture Promotion forms part of our literacy initiative. Apart from Scripture in Use programme to help people read and use the Bible for evangelization, in 1999, we produced the Jesus Film in Obolo language as a more dramatic and demonstrative mode of spreading the Gospel. The Project was sponsored by Mr. Bernie May and family of U. S. A.

The film is based on the life of Jesus Christ as St. Luke narrated. Dubbing took place in Agwut Obolo. It would have been in use ten years earlier but some elemental influence delayed arrival of the dubbing team. When finally it arrived, one of the two men took ill immediately and was rushed away for treatment. His colleague, Mr. Michael Ball was left alone to do the dubbing.

The maiden shooting took place in Oyorokoto and had been shown more than once in all the nooks and crannies of Obolo land with great excitement and effect on the viewers. People found it difficult to restrain themselves but wept openly as they watched the brutal crucifixion of our Lord. Apart from the miracles and teachings, the crucifixion is the most touching aspect that led many to give their lives to the Lord.

There were testimonies of deliverance from satanic shackles through watching the film. It aroused great desire and longing to have it for home viewing. This led to having it on VCDs. Presently, it is available in almost every home of the Obolo people. The testimonies and reports brought Miss Sarah Cooking, West African Co-ordinator of Jesus Film to Obolo in 2005. She witnessed a crowd of three thousand viewers, an assessment by a digital instrument, during a warm reception OLBTO accorded her. Meanwhile, the shooting is quite irregular as some volunteers could no longer cope. People mainly now depend on and use the VCDs in their homes and at functions.

### **Faith Comes By Hearing (FCBH)**

Another evangelizing programme is the Faith Comes By Hearing (FCBH) instrument. It is a programme of the Hosanna Ministries and Wycliffe Bible Translators of U. S. A., represented in West Africa by Theovision International of Ghana. It is a dramatized recording of the entire New Testament for listening groups. Mrs. Juliana Rhila, the National Co-ordinator of FCBH and Theovision Nigeria with Dr. and Mrs. Uche Aaron introduced it to OBLTO in 2003. Recording was done in 2004 at OLBTO by Mr. Darwin Adjetey Sowah of Theovision International, Ghana, the team leader, and Mr. Johnson David of Theovision Nigeria.

In 2008, a group of young men got trained in Port Harcourt as promoters of the listening programme. As the promoters began their job, churches responded with zeal. They held interactive sessions with participants, welcoming contributions and questions. Many churches formed listening groups, embraced the programme wholeheartedly and registered for **Proclaimers**, the audio equipment.

Testimonies of renewed lives came from various groups. Some churches adopted the Proclaimers for their Bible reading. Many claimed it was educative as it promotes reading Obolo language. Some testified it made the word of God pierce through their hearts as it sounded clearer and natural. However, the humid condition of our environment negatively affected the equipment thus disrupting the listening groups. Nevertheless, the Obolo audio New Testament is available on flash drives and memory cards. This guarantees listening on laptops, desktop tops, mobile phones and MP3 players, etc. Many use it as caller or ringing tunes. It is down-loadable from the Internet.

## **CHALLENGES**

Several issues, both foreseen and unforeseen, pose challenges to OLBTO. At inception, no feasibility studies concerning any aspect of the task before us was carried out. But simply and sort of blindly, people dabbled into it. Happily, God is satisfying every need at appropriate moments. Hopefully he will provide for current challenges and new prospects still facing the Organization. Some of these are:

### **Lack of Funds**

Funding is both fundamental and pivotal to any organization. OLBTO needs it to execute its programmes and pursue some potentially gigantic projects and to recruit sufficient efficient labour with job satisfaction. We gratefully appreciate our numerous supporters, benefactors and benefactresses with pride still leaning heavily on them for sustained survival of the organization while also appealing to the company of on-lookers to come to our aid.

### **Inadequate Manpower**

The problem of inadequate manpower to service the many departments of the growing Organization is acute. From the beginning, much reliance had been on voluntary labour. Presently, there are only nine full-time employees on salaries below government scale. As a result, there is serious understaffing, underpayment and overworking. The situation calls for adequate compensation, reasonable pay packets and incentives for staff. Sadly, the reverse is the case for want of funds. Moreover, their appointment is not pensionable. Presumably, with dedication of the Bible, cheap and voluntary labour might not be easy again. Secondly, the realities of expansion and continuity call for recruitment of enough staff.

### **Land for Expansion**

A donation of land by our host community is discussed elsewhere. But our future prospects make acquisition of more land imperative. It is hoped that Agwut Obolo community would again demonstrate their generosity through donation of some larger expanse of land that would accommodate, perhaps, a tertiary institution.

### **Eastern Obolo Office**

Another problem facing OLBTO is construction of its branch office at Okoroete in Eastern Obolo. Since its creation, Okoromboko community released an apartment of their Civic Centre for the branch office. As the place is remote, the office was moved to Okoroete. Recently, a parcel of land has been acquired as permanent site. The office when built will reflect permanent presence of OLBTO in the eastern area, strengthen the bond of cultural unity and ethnic integration. It will enhance distribution of published materials and proper co-ordination of OLBTO activities in that zone. It will also foster fund-raising. Meanwhile, OLBTO is short of funds to develop the property.

## **PROSPECTS**

### **Bilingual Education**

Bible translation has come to a logical conclusion but literacy activities must continue. Consequently, we want to observe beyond reading and writing Obolo and issues so related. Our intention is to explore and exploit possibilities of establishing an institution to further the Obolo mandate. To this end, Dr. Uche E. Aaron has come up with a commendable proposal: Obolo Bilingual Education. Based on certain empirical data he gathered, he proposed establishment of a Bilingual Education Institution that would consist of a Primary School, a Secondary School, and finally, a Polytechnic.

The prospects of bilingual education envisaged as a deliberate attempt to bring sanity into our decaying educational system is the task before OLBTO now. The Board of Trustees has given its blessing. It is scheduled to take off during 2014/2015 academic year. To achieve this, workshop will soon commence for subject teachers for the purpose of language engineering to coin Obolo terminologies for mathematics, sciences and arts. Modalities are being worked out. Mrs. Marianne Aaron is undergoing a PhD research programme into the prospects of a full-fledged bilingual education in language of the immediate environment as medium of instruction and English as a subject.

Dr. Aaron recommended the Primary School should start in September, 2014 experimenting with primary one for the first year. Agwut Obolo, the historic location of OLBTO is the ideal location for the schools. The medium of instruction from Basic 1 to 6 would be Obolo while English should be taught as a subject from elementary one. Teaching Obolo as a subject should continue up to the third year of Junior Secondary School. Polytechnic is at the apex of his proposal with a view to diversify enterprises and industries with enormous job opportunities to transform Obolo land. There would be ventures into fish farming, food production and forestry. Campuses of the tripartite institution would be established at strategic locations in Obolo land.

His proposal is a long-term programme. It would provide qualitative education, create employment opportunities, make many of our youths self-reliant. It would hasten not only the academic and economic development of our people but shape the social environment for better.

### **NTI Programme**

Our interest is still strong to continue teaching Obolo related courses at the Nigeria Teachers Institute (NTI) at the local centre close to us, and what is more, to groom the prospective teachers on the methodology of handling Obolo in primary classes. The aim is to make them effective when employed latter as teachers.

### **Entrepreneurship**

To cut down present dependence on charities, OLBTO is also considering a venture into entrepreneurship for internal revenue generation. Fish farming and transportation are immediate possible options.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this write-up is not an x-ray of the Obolo project but a nutshell collection of its humble beginning,, development, achievements, challenges and prospects within its first thirty years of existence. Many who started it have been called by the Lord. May their souls rest in peace. Some, still alive, withdrew at some points while the rest continued the good fight and run the race to the present point and are still strong to continue. The struggle continues. We are specially grateful for each and every small and large scale contribution to the glory of God, the salvation of souls and the projection of Obolo nationality.

The account is a story of stories: the story of success achieved through determination, zeal and hardwork; the story of how Obolo people under a common front translated the Holy Bible into their language; the story of a people bringing in a Golden Age of Literature into their historical annals; the story of faith built on the all-sufficient God for supply of every need; the story of patriots who serve God and their people at the expense of material possessions; the story of men and women who managed little resources to achieve lofty goals; the story of people who do not hoard their resources, intellect and talents but are extravagant for the common good; the story of a people whose priority is God and human salvation; the story of a people who through honesty attract global friendship and support; the story of a people who value unity and equality as harbingers of peace; the story of a people who sacrifice everything for the common good; the story of a people favoured to receive peace and blessing from the Lord; the story of a people destined for welcome at the heavenly gates.

## OBOLO LANGUAGE AND BIBLE TRANSLATION PROJECT (OLBTP)

### APPENDIX A

#### OBOLO LANGUAGE COMMITTEE:

1. Sir A. M. Edeh-Ogwuile (Chairman)
2. Sir I. E. Ene-Awaji (Secretary)
3. Elder I. A. Etete
4. Mr. F. K. M. Uwikor
5. Mr. B. Ikang
6. Mr. G. T. Okaanene
7. Rev. S. F. Ifuyok (Asst. Secretary)
8. Chief J. W. Okuruket
9. Sir. G. J. Ubulom
10. Mr. M. N. Nfiangh
11. Sir. F. N. Nte
12. Miss Kagakemi Mbaba
13. Mr. Finomo
14. Mr. R. S. Mbaba
15. Rev. O. D. Elebe
16. Mr. P. N. D. Ikuru

### APPENDIX B

#### THOSE WHO INAUGURATED BIBLE TRANSLATION CRUSADE 1981

1. Prof. Dr. Charity Okujagu
2. Hon. Erasmus
3. Miss. Salome Opuwari from Okrika
4. Prof. Amenigo
5. Prof. Onofegbara (Preacher)

### APPENDIX C

#### OBOLO BIBLE TRANSLATION COMMITTEE

1. Deacon I. A. Etete (Chairman)
2. Evang. C. I. Z. Utong (Secretary)
3. Dr. Okere Iragunima
4. Professor (Mrs.) Charity Okujagu
5. Felix Nkangwung
6. Ven. J. I. Oyet
7. Bishop Elkana Anson
8. Hon. Erasmus
9. Sunday D. Ossat
10. Pastor Luke Augustine
11. Dr. Felix Nte
12. Mrs. Mercy Adum

### APPENDIX D

## **OBOLO LANGUAGE AND BIBLE TRANSLATION ORGANIZATION**

Sir F. N. Nte (President) 1983-2009  
Late Chief S. F. Isotu-Oko – Secretary 1985-2012  
Cate. M. R. Nte  
Sir L. E. E. Erefiorokuma - Member, 1995-2014  
Ven. J. I. Oyet  
Rev. O. D. Elebe  
Chief. Ataisi Z. Ibaan  
Mr. D. A. Elebe  
Mr. U. P. Ijente  
Bishop Eтуру  
Mr. I. O. Uneh – Vice President 1983-2014  
Dr. Uche E. Aaron – Bible Translation Consultant 1983-2014  
Mrs. Marianne Aaron – Literacy Consultant 1983-2014  
Mrs. N. I. A. Etete – Catering 1983-2014  
Eld. I. A. Etete –Treasurer 1985-2014  
Elder Anthony Ujile – Member 1985-2014  
Pastor Friday S. Urang – 1985-2014  
Miss Adella Arawo – Member 1985-2005  
Atisi A. Etete – Member 1983-2014  
Mrs. Celestinah P. Enente – Member 1987-2014  
Cate. I.E. Ene-Awaji – Translator 1986-2014  
Rev. D. O. Abiante – Auditor 1990-2008  
Sir F. E. Edubio – Member 1991-2012  
Mr. I. E. Otungban – Member 1991-2014  
Mr. B. Ikaan  
Chief B. I. Egopyork – Member  
Mr. Ikpokona I. U. “  
Mr. S. E. Ojoko – Member 1995, and Executive Secretary 2012-2014  
Senior Pastor Zephaniah D. Igana – Accountant 1986-1989  
Mrs. Debora Z. Igana – Typist 1989-1992  
Jacob Fynebone – Salesman 1990-2003  
Ikpokomitop J. Jekky – Salesman 1991-2005  
Pastor Charles A. Urang – Jesus Film Project – 2000-2014  
Evang. Okparawo Ebirieñ - Jesus film Project 2000-2007  
Mrs. Rachel J. Finebone – Account Clerk 2000-2003  
Mr. Elekwachi Garrick – Security 1988-1995  
Chief Frank S. Ali – Driver 1993-1995  
Ikareikan Christian Utong – Deckhand 1995-1996  
Erasmus E. Agara – Deckhand 1993-1995, Head of Church Assessment Collection 2010-2014  
Mr. U. P. Ijente – Member, Associate Project Co-ordinator Eastern Obolo Branch  
Sir. L. Ujono – Chairman Eastern Obolo Branch  
Very Rev. Marcus Enene – Secretary Eastern Obolo Branch  
Mr. Timothy T. Horsfall  
Mrs. Jemima Jonathan  
Evang. C. I. Z. Utong –Translator  
Mrs. Mercy Adum  
Mr. Macaulay Utong  
Pastor Garrick Inomo  
Mr. & Mrs. F. K. M. Uwikor

## **APPENDIX E**

### **DONORS AND FINANCIAL SUPPORTERS**

Andoni Council of Chiefs

Eastern Obolo Council of Chiefs  
Chief E.S. Etete-Owo  
HRH. Chief L. A. Iraron Ede-Obolo I  
Prof. Mrs. Charity Okujagu  
Dr. & Mrs. Okere Iragunima  
Hon. Adasi E. Ubulom  
Hon. Sam Sam Etetegwung  
Dr. & Mrs. Nsan Iragunima  
Dr. & Dr. (Mrs.) A. R. Nte  
Engr. Emiyareyi B. Ikuru  
Mr. Sonye Emmanuel  
Hon. Ebirien-Agana S. Bartimeaus .  
Mrs. Dorathy Umoh  
Dr. Igbemi Arthur  
Mr. Michael Akamute  
Very Rev. Marcus N. Enene  
Eastern Obolo Local Government Council  
Andoni Local Government Council  
Insp. K. B. U. Owor (Rtd.)  
Dr. N. C. Ejituwu  
Prof.. N. E. Dienye  
Bishop Elkana Anson  
H.R.H. Morrison B. Utong  
Arch. U. J. Urombo  
Dr. Benjamin O. Wilcox  
Hon. Prince U. Secundus  
Prof. N.D. Ofiaja  
Most Rev. E.E. Nglass

## **APPENDIX F**

### **CATERERS:**

Mrs. Naomi I. Etete  
Dame Deborah Alamina  
Mrs. Celestina P. Enente  
Mother Immaculate Solomon  
Mrs. Jemima Jonathan  
Mrs. Lovinah F. Urang