

# Oral Bible Storytelling as a Missional Instrument in Discipling Men in Kejom, North West Cameroon

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## **Abstract**

This article investigates why family heads, the *fòyn*, and members of the *kwifòyn* and other priestly societies in Kejom, in the North West Region of Cameroon, are absent from churches. The introduction describes how church leaders have reached out and ministered to these men. The next sections describe the role and function of the *fòyn*, family heads, and the *kwifòyn* and other priestly societies. Based on a comparison of the biblical and African traditional religious view of God and the spirit world, and of the functions of priests and sacrifices in both views, possible points of contact are established which could be used to minister to these men and help them become committed believers in Christ. The last section describes the role of oral Bible storying, as well as other aspects which need attention, in helping someone from an African Traditional Religion background to

become a mature believer. It also describes the actual implementation of an oral Bible storying approach in Kejom.

## **Keywords**

Kejom, Keku, Ketingu, *fòyn*, *kwifòyn*, *əfan*, family heads, point of contact, oral Bible storying

## **1. Introduction**

The research described in this article was carried out in the Kejom community which is located in the North West region of Cameroon. It consists of two villages (Keku and Ketingu) with a population of approximately 40,000.

The need for this research became apparent while visiting churches in Kejom. In all the churches there was an overwhelming majority of women and children; the number of men in attendance in the most extreme case was just one, and in other churches there were just a few. Research revealed that the reason for their absence is their involvement in rituals inspired by African Traditional Religion (ATR). Most of the churches condemn the ATR practices; as a result most men do not attend church.

The purpose of this research was to establish which approaches the churches have used to minister to men and how men have responded. Based on the biblical view of God and the spirit world and the biblical role of priests and sacrifices, I investigated points of contact between the ATR worldview and the biblical worldview.

Finally, I proposed the use of oral Bible storying as an approach to help church leaders to minister more effectively and in a culturally relevant way to men with traditional priestly functions. The implementation of an

actual pilot project using this approach in some quarters of the community is described.

I used the Exploratory, Descriptive, Normative and Action (EDNA) model for this research (Woodbridge 2013, 89), as it falls within the field of practical theology.

During the exploratory phase I investigated what has led to the problem of low church attendance levels amongst men. Although some of the churches in Kejom have been present in the community for over a hundred years, not many men have become believers. This article describes how church leaders of three denominations—the Cameroon Baptist Convention, the Full Gospel church (a Pentecostal denomination), and the Presbyterian church—have tried to reach these men. It also describes events in the history of these three churches that might have contributed to the present situation.

During the descriptive phase I gathered information on what is currently happening. It outlines the ATR worldview, particularly the related authority structure, and the rituals and sacrifices offered to the ancestors of the *fòyn* (paramount chief), ancestors of families, and the gods of the land.

The normative phase describes what I believe could be done to reach out and minister more effectively to men involved in traditional priestly roles. Based on the biblical view of the spirit world and on the OT role of priests and sacrifices, it describes which ATR beliefs could be used as points of contact to help ATR adherents become Christian believers.

The fourth phase includes both research and action. It identifies and describes an approach which might be effective in reaching out to these men. This approach has several aspects: the need for a worldview change, oral Bible storytelling, discipleship, and special attention on the integration of men into the church if they decide to become committed believers. The aspect of oral Bible storying was implemented in some instances in Kejom.

## 2. Ministry to Men Involved in ATR Rituals

### *2.1 Strategies used to reach out to men*

Field research determined the strategies used by pastors of three denominations to minister to men. This information was obtained from questionnaires given to all seventeen pastors of the three denominations in the region. The result of the questionnaire showed that these churches are largely made up of women and children, with women comprising 77 percent of the adult membership. To reach out to men, pastors have mostly used crusades as well as personal invitations to men to attend special church events and regular men's meetings. In some cases, pastors would take part in community activities, such as quarter meetings, and community development meetings, to foster relationships with men in the community.

If a man who received an invitation did attend an event, it would usually be just a one-time attendance, largely because of the church's rejection of ATR rituals. Some pastors indicated they would visit that individual to encourage and pray with him. As a result, some men have become believers, although no specific number was given.

Church leaders offer some teaching concerning involvement in ATR rituals; however, most of the teaching focuses on condemning this involvement without giving clear biblical backing for their teaching. Men from an ATR background perceive this as negative, and as a result usually do not come to church on a regular basis. They are not willing to meet the churches' requirements or to stop their involvement in traditional societies, and some are afraid of the consequences if they give up taking part in ATR rituals. If an individual did show interest, most pastors indicated they would continue to visit him and show friendship. If such an individual came to church regularly, pastors would observe him for some time before giving him a leadership role that corresponded with his gifts.

## *2.2 Factors that have contributed to or hindered growth*

An overview of the history of the spread of Christianity in the South West and North West regions of Cameroon, and in the Kejom area in particular, gives some insight into the factors that contributed to, or hindered, church growth. This information was gathered through literary research and some interviews with older people in the community.

During colonization, the Germans started large plantations in the South West region where many men from the North West were working. The first converts to Christianity from the North West were people who lived in the coastal area of Cameroon; many had worked on the plantations and had attended Christian services during their stay in the camps there (Kimbi 2014, 186). Some of these converts started the Baptist churches in Ketingu and Keku. Later, the Baptist church set up clinics in Ketingu and schools were established in both villages. The Presbyterian church also established a school in Keku.

Mfonyam (2011, 95) describes how the early missionaries of the Presbyterian church denigrated the traditions of the people in the region. In recent years, the church leaders of this denomination have had a more tolerant approach. The Baptist church was initially more tolerant towards ATR rituals, but has begun speaking out against them. The Full Gospel church has always encouraged its members to completely separate themselves from ATR practices.

Most Baptist and Presbyterian churches in Kejom have a men's group; some of these groups struggle with poor attendance. The Full Gospel church does not have a men's ministry in Kejom.

In summary, the various factors that have contributed to church growth are:

- The Baptist and Presbyterian churches began using education and health care as a means to reach people with the gospel.
- Men from the North West who were converted during their stay in the South West started Christian communities when they returned.

The most pronounced obstacles to growth have been:

- The confrontational way the churches have condemned participation in traditional rituals.
- Confusion caused by the different responses of the denominations to participation in ATR rituals.
- A lack of focus on ministering to men.

### **3. The ATR Worldview of the Kejom People**

#### *3.1 The ATR worldview and the authority structure*

During the descriptive phase I gathered information on what is currently happening. It describes the ATR worldview and the authority structure that is closely connected with ATR beliefs. This information was gathered partly through literary research and partly through semi-structured interviews carried out by contacts in the community.

The Kejom ATR worldview includes the belief in the Supreme Being (*Nyìngòṅ*), the gods (*və nyìngòṅ*), the ancestors (*ti 'vəvəti '*), and witchcraft. *Nyìngòṅ* is the creator, but is unavailable to men. *Nyìngòṅ* has great powers and is respected by the Kejom people. However, they believe that he can only intervene through the ancestors and the gods. The *və nyìngòṅ* are especially called on at the beginning of the year. Once a year the *vəpfən* priests (belonging to the *əfen* society) go to all the entrances of their village to perform rituals to the gods. The *və nyìngòṅ* operate more on the level of

the whole village, while the ancestors watch over their particular families. People fear the ancestors more than the *və nyiŋgòŋ*.

The authority structure of Kejom society is tied in with the worldview of the Kejom people. The *fòyn* (paramount chief) is both the physical and spiritual head of the whole *fòyndon* and is responsible for its well-being. The ritual installation of a new *fòyn* is believed to transform him into a sacred being whose personal 'immortality' is asserted through the 'fact' that he is believed to never eat, be ill, or die (Kaberry 1962, 286). The *fòyn* is believed to receive magical power and wisdom from the royal ancestors and his people (Knöpfli 1998, 52).

The *kwi'fòyn* is the most powerful secret society in Kejom, watching over the *fòyn*, advising him and protecting him. It is also a regulatory society, judging cases of witchcraft, as well as other matters. It is the guardian of the Kejom traditions. Although the *fòyn* is considered by his subjects as their spiritual head, in reality the *kwi'fòyn* society is the spiritual head of the village. It has the overall authority over priestly societies. When church leaders condemn ATR practices, or when Christians violate them because of their beliefs, the *kwi'fòyn* can impose sanctions which range from restitution to banning a person from public activities for a time, or even excommunicating a person from the village. Every year the *kwi'fòyn* decides whether or not the annual dance will be held. The annual dance (preceded by the renewal of covenants with the gods) is the most important ritual in Kejom.

At the base of the authority structure is the family head. His overall role is to stand in the gap when there are problems in the family. He is in charge of ceremonies in the family and keeps the family united. Those who are members of the authority structure are respected and have prestige. A man who is not involved in any way and is not a member of a secret society lacks that prestige.

### 3.2 *The functions of priests and sacrifices.*

Priests in Kejom are intermediaries between man and *Nyìngòṅ*, the *və nyìngòṅ*, and the *ti'vəvəti'*; they are in charge of various rituals and ceremonies. The rituals are carried out by the *fòyn*, the *kwi'fòyn*, the *əfən*, and some other priestly societies or family heads. Several of these rituals are performed at specific times, such as the renewal of covenants at the entrances to the village (with the primary aim of protection and in preparation for the annual dance) and during planting season (Maynard 2004, 66). Others are carried out when there is a specific need.

The *kwi'fòyn*, the *əfən*, and the *fòyn* are responsible for the well-being of the whole *fòyndom*. The *fòyn* performs rituals connected to the gods and his ancestors.

Family heads in their priestly role perform various sacrifices and rituals to ensure the well-being of their families. The most important role a family head fulfills is keeping the family united. The most important rituals he performs take place after a funeral and during a death celebration to send the deceased off to the land of the dead (Diduk 2001, 32–33); a death celebration takes place some time after a funeral.

## 4. Points of Contact Between the Biblical and Kejom Worldview

### 4.1 *Point of contact: The biblical view of God and the spirit world*

Certain aspects within the Kejom belief system may be able to function as entry points to present the gospel. Tiénou (1980, §A.1) emphasizes that when Christianity is presented to adherents of ATR, an approach which builds from the known to the unknown is needed. Van Sanders (2004, 1–2, 15) states that it is important to determine if there is any continuity between the gospel and the existing belief system. He calls it point of contact:



“Point of contact theory rests upon a certain degree of continuity between Christianity and the belief systems of non-Christian individuals.” (Van Sanders 2004:15).

The Kejom belief system was examined to establish possible points of contact to present the gospel. The first aspect that needs to be noted is what knowledge of himself God has placed in the Kejom people. All people have a general revelation of God which consists of information or knowledge about God’s character and existence (Rom 1:19-20) (Van Sanders 2004, 10).

The Kejom believe that *Nyingòn* created the world. However, the view of God as the creator is incomplete when people believe that God is not involved in their lives, as is the case in Kejom. The biblical view of God insists that he is alive, still creates, provides for our needs, and is our heavenly Father (Tippett 1987, 81). ATR adherents in Kejom need to know that God cannot be manipulated by ritual or sacrifice; he is not unpredictable like ATR deities or the ancestors. He is a faithful God: impartial, just, loving, holy, righteous, kind, gracious, and merciful. God is also a jealous God, desiring his people’s welfare and therefore not tolerating that they be led into falsehood or submission to other deities. He is the focus of adoration and praise (Steyne 1990, 175–178).

Michael (2013, 83, 85) adds that the teaching of God’s omnipresence should encourage the understanding of God’s presence to bless, comfort, and protect his people in every situation they are passing through and wherever they are. God, in his omniscience, knows and understands everything. These are important attributes for former adherents of ATR to embrace, since they may be tempted in times of trouble to go back to the ancestors or gods.

Tiénou (1980, §C.III.i) states that the concept of God’s holiness is foreign to adherents of ATR. He is not seen as personally righteous and

holy as the Scripture reveals him, or as the God who judges every man by his (God's) standard of righteousness. Michael (2013, 168–171) explains that in ATR there are no stories about the fall. There is no “theological bridge” to connect the story of the fall and salvation in Judeo-Christian faith with salvation in ATR where sin is considered an act against the community and not necessarily against God (Tiénoú 1980, §5.G.VII.i). The NT presents a holistic understanding of salvation. It focuses on the person and work of Jesus Christ as the center of salvation (Acts 4:12) (Michael 2013, 171). People need to be taught that God rewards good and punishes evil. He is prepared to protect those who acknowledge his lordship and trust in him. He is able to deliver them from evildoers, including the spiritual forces that attack them. This he will do through Jesus Christ (Tiénoú 1980, §5.G.VII.i).

#### *4.2 Point of contact: The beliefs concerning the spirit world*

Historically, many missionaries and church leaders have not taken the worldview and religion of Africans seriously out of fear that doing so might weaken the gospel message. However, this approach weakened the impact of Christianity on the African (Van der Walt 1994, 16). A Baptist pastor in Kejom stated that this is still true for some of the Baptist churches. The pastors of these churches call the beliefs concerning the spirit world superstitions. However, adherents of ATR in Kejom say, “There is a spirit world out there.”

The consciousness of the spirit world in Kejom, where ancestral spirits and divinities are believed to mediate between Nyingòṅ and man, can serve as a basis for understanding the biblical view of the spirit world.

The biblical view is that God created a spiritual world. He created angels, some of whom fell when they were led in rebellion against God by Satan (Gehman 2005, 38, 43). Angels and other spiritual beings work

ultimately under God's divine control in spite of the opposition of some of them to God's plan (Michael 2013, 95).

Although the functions of angels are far more extensive than those of the intermediaries in ATR, the main point of contact is that angels are involved in people's lives, as the ATR intermediaries are also believed to be. Michael (2013, 93, 43) points out that the majority of Africans who are familiar with the biblical view of the spirit world see similarities between it and the ATR view. In the ATR view, ancestral spirits and divinities mediate between God and man. The revelation of the biblical God is clouded by the belief in the presence of these divinities and intermediaries.

The point of contact between biblical demons and ATR evil spirits is that both are believed to oppose human beings, although in the biblical view demons also oppose God. It is important for a new believer to realize that Christ is Lord over all of them.

Tiénou (1980, §F.V.iii) emphasizes that the spirits are real, but Christ is Lord over all of them. In Christ, the righteous do not need to fear the spirits. Christ, who is in those who believe in him, "is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4 NIV). Jesus Christ came to set people free from bondage to these spirits. The protection of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit sets Christian believers free from spirit powers.

#### *4.3 Point of contact: Sacrifices, and the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ*

The sacrifices which are carried out in Kejom can be an important point of contact. The men who perform sacrifices and offerings need to understand that these sacrifices are not necessary since the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ made all other sacrifices obsolete.

Michael (2013, 168) states that ATR focuses on salvation, as almost all traditional practices, sacrifices, and other religious experiences stem from the desire for some form of salvation or deliverance from the problems of life. In ATR, the anger of gods is handled by offering sacrifices to appease them. In Christianity, the cross of Christ is the means of taking away the anger of God against sinful humanity (Turaki 2008, 32).

In comparing Christ's sacrifice with sacrifices in ATR, the sacrifice of Jesus has benefits which no other sacrifice offers. The blood Christ shed established a new covenant through which we receive forgiveness of sins, are cleansed of all impurity, are set apart for God, and are assured of a permanent future. Christ's blood, which symbolizes his death, ratified this covenant. As the only mediator of the new covenant, Christ intercedes for us to God and represents God to us (Pali 2014, 156, 161).

#### *4.4 Point of contact: Priesthood*

Some of the priestly functions in ATR in Kejom can be carried over to a biblical worldview. However, biblical priesthood is not only for men, but for every believer. The overarching function of the Kejom priests is to watch over the welfare of the village and the family to protect them from evil and to preserve unity. Men with ATR priestly functions who become Christian believers could continue this watchcare through the priestly functions of prayer and intercession for their community and the world around them.

The biblical priesthood differs in the sense that it is no longer a special priesthood which mediates between individuals and God; rather, each believer has direct access to God himself. Unlike the priesthood in Kejom where only the *əfan*, the *kwi'fòyn*, and the family head have special access to the gods and the ancestors, every single Christian can now "approach the throne of grace with confidence" (Heb 4:16) (Grudem 1988, 101).

For the Christian, “to offer your bodies as living sacrifices” (Rom 12:1) is true worship. The sacrifice of oneself does fit the context of the Kejom priests. One of the functions of the members of the *kwi’fòyn* is to protect the community. As a believer in Christ, protecting the community and family and working for their good requires self-denial and self-sacrifice.

The family head is a peacemaker. This is also one of the roles of the *kwi’fòyn*, which maintains order and guards peace in the village. Any Kejom man who becomes a follower of Christ should be encouraged to continue to fulfil the task of a peacemaker (Rom 12:14). As a believer, he must be committed to pursuing peace and reconciling broken relationships. A Christian should also pursue peace as a witness to the world around them. It would be beneficial for churches to emphasize the importance of this priesthood in order to help men understand that their role as priests continues when they become followers of Christ.

## **5. Towards an Approach of Ministry to Men**

### *5.1 A worldview change is needed*

When someone becomes a committed believer, a worldview change is needed. Our worldview monitors how we respond to changes in the culture. As people are introduced to new ideas, behavior, and products, their fundamental assumptions may be challenged, causing tension in their understanding of reality. After evaluating new ideas, they may change or drop some of their assumptions. Those ideas that fit their culture are accepted, and those that do not are rejected. It is during this process that a worldview change takes place (Hiebert 2002, 15).

The points of contact between ATR and the biblical view of God can play an important role in moving towards a worldview change.

Conversion to Christ must take place at three levels: (1) behavior, (2) rituals, and (3) beliefs and worldview. A change in behavior must include a change in a person's fundamental allegiance so that Christ becomes the Lord of everything in their life.

In Kejom, rituals take place at various times of the year and at moments when a crisis has happened. Since rituals play a central role in creating and renewing religious beliefs, church leaders should be aware of the need for people to express their faith in new living ritual forms (Hiebert 2002, 10–11).

### *5.2 The need for an oral approach*

Although the Kejom community received the NT in the Kejom language in April of 2018, few people know how to read and write in their mother tongue. Some of the pastors whose churches I visited mentioned that up to 70 percent of their members are illiterate (Babila-Boer 2013, 76). Others are literate in English and/or Kejom, but still prefer oral ways of communication.

Church leaders in Kejom have attempted various approaches to reach the men in the community, most of which have not been very successful. It seems a different approach might be needed.

According to Casey (2000, 13), 90 percent of Christian workers worldwide use literary methods, although two-thirds of the world's population are oral learners (Chiang et al. 2005, 3). In the second half of the twentieth century, missionaries started changing their methodologies (Lovejoy 2000, 4). Biblical storytelling emerged as a different methodology where illiteracy was no longer a barrier to spreading the gospel in oral cultures. This proved to be a more effective way to present the gospel message to oral communities (Greer 2011, 38–39).

A contextualized way of reaching men with a priestly function could be through an oral approach using oral Bible storying (OBS). Since Kejom is still chiefly an oral society with a high illiteracy rate, OBS could be helpful in reaching men and others. Many in Kejom still consider storytelling a valuable practice in spite of the fact that storytelling is gradually dying out because of busyness and the use of other oral means of communication (phones, radio and television). Church leaders in other communities have used OBS successfully. Since I was involved with OBS at CABTAL, it seemed worthwhile to try this approach to reach Kejom men (while not excluding other people in the society).

OBS can take place anywhere and at any time. People are visited in their own environment instead of having to go elsewhere. The storytellers can meet people in their homes, in meeting places where people gather, or at any convenient place. People normally will not quickly refuse someone who sits down with them to tell a story.

Effective ministries in oral communities should be sensitive to worldview, use points of contact, and confront barriers to the gospel message. The points of contact that have been established can serve as a basis for the selection of stories.

### *5.3 Effective discipleship*

As already mentioned, the believer's worldview needs to be transformed in the process of spiritual growth. Mbiti (1990, 3) says that it is costly for an African to accept a new religion. Religion is part of their whole system of being. Christianity needs to occupy the whole person, in the same way that ATR does, otherwise many converts will go back to their old beliefs and practices for perhaps six days a week, and definitely when there is a crisis. It is therefore crucial to provide effective discipleship.

Many working with oral communities claim that the best way to disciple oral learners is through oral storytelling. New believers need to grow in understanding about which changes need to be made concerning their involvement in traditional practices. Their primary faith commitment to gods, spirits, and ancestors must be replaced. Church leaders should help believers evaluate the ATR rituals and decide which elements should be replaced or rejected and which ones could be kept (Tippett 1987, 201).

Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiéno (1999, 21–29) describe several steps of an approach which could be used in evaluating a ritual through a process of critical contextualization. Church leaders could help new believers do the following:

- Gather information concerning a particular belief/practice.
- Test the truth of the belief/practice with the truth of Scripture.
- Evaluate the belief/practice in light of biblical understanding, decide whether a change is needed, and determine the probable consequences of such a change.
- Apply the gospel to their lives.

#### *5.4 Integration of new believers*

When a man decides to follow Christ, leaving behind his ATR priestly roles and membership in certain societies, his status in the community changes. Michael (2013, 115, 119, 122) explains that in African society “personhood is a state attained by fulfilling certain community expectations.... It is based on certain personal achievements that are accorded social or community importance.” A subhuman status is ascribed to the uninitiated of a particular cult. In the Kejom society, men who are not involved in any society are often mocked.



The leaders in Kejom society are respected, and the church needs to take this into account. Otherwise these men will find themselves in a void. The effect of cultural voids might be reduced when the churches pay greater attention to the cultural institution people reject when they accept Christianity. The churches need to ask what functions these new believers fulfilled in the society they were part of and what kind of Christian substitutes could replace them (Tippett 1987, 201).

For many men in Kejom, the church is considered a place for women and children. Church leaders need to give attention to how to integrate men who are leadership figures in their extended families and in the community. It will be difficult for them to step into structures where women and children make up three-quarters of the membership and where they themselves have no leadership role and have much to learn.

The men's groups which meet in most churches could play a key role in this process. They could integrate and disciple new believers for some time before integrating them into the church. By new believers starting out in the men's group, other men can help them grow to a certain maturity. Then, when they decide to integrate in the church, it is a conscious, considered decision. The church leaders also need to build biblical leadership skills in these men so that they can be used in the church context, even if means starting with some minor roles.

## **6. Oral Bible Storying in Kejom**

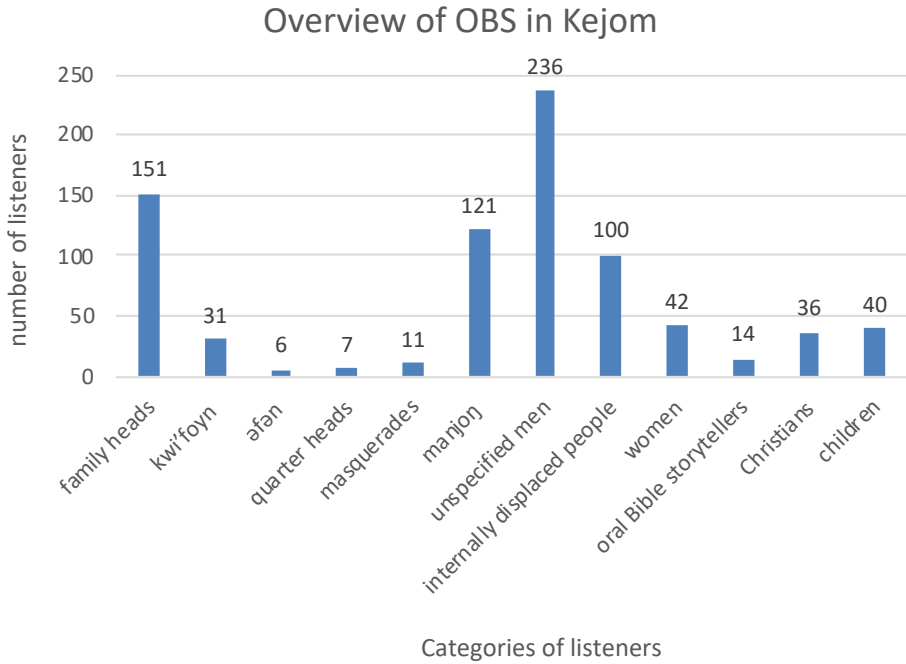
### *6.1 Implementation of oral Bible storytelling*

Implementation of an OBS approach took place in the two Kejom villages. Two Kejom speakers, one from each village, were involved in crafting twenty-three stories during five two-week OBS training courses organized

by CABTAL. Later, several other stories were added that were worldview specific. After four sessions of crafting stories, these two storytellers started to train other Kejom storytellers. They were asked to share the stories with men with priestly functions and note their feedback. Initially, the storytellers did not understand why they needed to focus on only men with priestly functions and thus shared with other groups also. They also had difficulty in keeping a record of those with whom they shared stories and in noting their responses. After the pilot project had gone on for about a year, the training was accelerated to involve more Kejom people and start an implementation phase. However, this did not take off as planned, as a political conflict which had begun in 2016 became increasingly violent and caused serious insecurity in the region. The storytellers in Keku continued to meet a few times; however, due to lack of communication and my inability to go there, I had to discontinue the supervision of the storytellers in Keku.

The storytellers in Ketingu carried on whenever possible, and they began to focus on the target groups (men with priestly functions). They shared stories with a group of men in their quarter, who, after some time, wanted to be trained as storytellers. By then it was clear that the original storytellers had started to 'own' the idea of storytelling. They made frequent visits to a remote quarter that was less affected by the political instability to share stories, and some of the men there decided to become followers of Jesus. Some of the new believers expressed their desire to be trained as storytellers. After finally reconnecting with the two original storytellers/trainers in Ketingu, I gave more direction concerning the order stories could be shared and encouraged the storytellers to revisit the people to whom they had told stories. After some months the storytellers also took the initiative to go to another part of the village that had until then had little contact with storytelling.

**Graph 6.1: Overview of categories of listeners**



The first six categories with whom the storytellers shared their stories were all men that were either involved in priestly functions, the authority structure, or other societies that are involved in ATR practices but do not fulfil a priestly function. It is possible that among the other categories (unspecified men and internally displaced people) there were also men involved in priestly functions and ATR rituals.

## 6.2 *Difficulties encountered*

The biggest obstacle was the insecurity in the region, especially when we started the implementation phase of the OBS project in August 2018. The political crisis in the anglophone region started in 2016. When we started the pilot project in 2017, I could visit the villages without any hindrance. However, from August 2018 onward there was an escalation of violence between the military and separatist forces. It made movement to the region impossible for me, and during certain periods there was little or no communication possible. Due to the insecurity, the implementation went much slower than planned and was not completed at the end of the research.

Due to these difficulties, I was unable to give sufficient guidance concerning which stories to share or when to do more follow-up visits. However, after I was able to communicate more easily with some of the storytellers, they started making additional visits to those with whom they had shared stories.

Especially at the beginning of the pilot project, the target group described in this dissertation was not always focus on by the storytellers. Whenever the storytellers would share with a larger group, this group would be a mixed audience, some of whom had priestly functions and others who did not.

I had to abandon my involvement with the storytellers in Keku due to the insecurity, lack of communication, and lack of follow-up.

The process of crafting and recording stories, back translating them into English, and checking the final versions is a lengthy process which requires finances, much preparation, and input from specialists. Even so, the Kejom project is not the only one of its kind. CABTAL has implemented this approach in twenty-five different languages in the region. Similar projects are also happening in other areas of Cameroon, as well as in other

countries. Once the stories are crafted, the process becomes easier. The stories can be taught to representatives of the different churches who then can go out and share them in as many contexts as they find themselves.

### *6.3 Opportunities*

In spite of the insecurity in the region, there were some very positive developments. The most positive was that the Kejom trainers/storytellers in Ketingu started to 'own' the project. They continued even when there was not much communication and input during the period of escalating insecurity.

After hearing some of the stories, one group of men requested that the storytellers come regularly to share stories that could help them address the problems they were facing. After a while, these men requested to be trained as storytellers themselves. The storytellers in Ketingu handled the training sessions on their own. The newly trained storytellers then started sharing the stories they had learned.

Storytelling in a remote quarter resulted in a church plant where discipling using storytelling is ongoing. Some members of this group were also trained as storytellers. Storytelling was extended to another part of the village that had not been included in the storytelling before. The storytellers are continuing to share the stories there even after the phase of gathering information was concluded.

The insecurity made people more receptive to listen to the stories. Some men who had to flee their quarter testified that the powers in which they had put their trust had disappointed them, and they wanted to put their trust in God instead. People who had witnessed violence, had to leave their homes, and had witnessed sudden death, started to realize that life can end at any time.

## 6.4 Recommendations

The storytellers operated in only four quarters of the village. If the different denominations are willing to adopt this OBS approach in their churches, the impact of storytelling will likely be felt in more churches and in their outreach into the community.

The findings of this research can be taken to church leaders at the denominational level, so that the pastors can see the results of sharing oral Bible stories. Other language groups in the region have similar cultural backgrounds, and the outcome of this research could be applied to them as well.

The priestly role of a believer can be instrumental in the transformation of families, churches, and communities. The leadership and priestly role Kejom men once fulfilled in the traditional authority structure, now practiced as followers of Christ, will be needed to bring reconciliation in their communities and region once the political conflict is resolved.

## 7. Conclusions

This article investigates why men are largely absent in the churches in Kejom in the North West region of Cameroon. It describes the strategies church leaders in Kejom have used to reach men who are involved in ATR rituals. It also describes their beliefs concerning God and the spirit world, as well as the roles of the *fòyn*, the *kwi'fòyn*, the *əfən* society, and family heads—all of whom fulfill priestly functions.

Based on a comparison of the biblical view and the Kejom view of God and the spirit world, points of contact are established which could be used to reach adherents of ATR in Kejom.

When someone from an ATR background becomes a follower of Christ, a worldview change is needed. Effective discipleship is crucial so that Christianity occupies the whole person, in the same way that ATR has done. Many working with oral communities claim that the best way to disciple oral learners is through oral storying. Based on the fact that the Kejom society is an oral society, I propose an oral approach to minister to men with an ATR background.

Church leaders need to give attention to how to integrate men who are leadership figures in their extended families and in the community into the church. One possibility is that the men's groups which meet in most churches could disciple new believers for some time before integrating them into a church. The church leaders could also help build biblical leadership skills in these men so that they can be used in the church context.

Finally, this article describes the implementation of oral Bible storying to reach Kejom men. This approach has been well received; it meets the needs of oral learners, and since the stories are told in their mother tongue, listeners have no difficulty understanding them.

The storytellers who eventually became trainers of other storytellers started to take ownership of the storytelling project. They took the initiative to share stories in other quarters, started a church plant, and trained other men who were interested in becoming storytellers.

Despite the difficulties encountered, this research has nevertheless shown that OBS is an effective means of communicating God's Word to men with priestly functions from an oral society.

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