

MOBILE RECORDING IN TANZANIA

Rob leads a training in Mwanza for a diverse group of aspiring recording engineers.



Above: Rob and Stephanie teach recording.

Below Left: Getting ready for the class picture.

Below Right: Practice recording of participatory drama.

They were pastors, church musicians, recording engineers, and Bible translators and they had this in common: they all wanted to learn to use the mobile recording gear provided to the Lutheran Church of Tanzania by Lutheran Bible Translators. As I have worked with exactly this type of equipment for nearly 20 years, LBT and the denominational leadership asked me to come to Mwanza, Tanzania and lead a crash course in mobile recording.

I recruited my friend and colleague Stephanie Biggs to co-teach. Stephanie and I have done three prior projects together involving recording technology,

including co-teaching a week-long workshop on a very similar subject in 2022. She has the additional advantages of speaking fluent Swahili and living a two-hour bus ride from Mwanza (it takes me two days to get there by plane!).

I had a challenge in designing the material for the four-day workshop. I knew the Bible translators intended to use the gear for oral Bible translation and oral Bible stories. The church musicians on the other hand intended to record choral material, both to encourage local choirs and to distribute new songs through the region. The studio engineers wanted to expand their skill sets with more complicated recording setups and the ability to flourish outside the studio environment.

The first day, we focused on single microphone recordings of spoken word content. I believed the Bible translators would be most interested in this part of the workshop. We also included content about how to coach

people in delivering good vocal performances of spoken materials. In the late afternoon, Stephanie introduced the idea of “dramatic Scripture reading” where a prompter would coach a reader orally to render a powerful audio Scripture performance. The translators loved this and continued practicing this method in the evening, one saying on the last day he hoped to record the whole Bible this way.

The second day was all about the stereo microphone. I absolutely love this particular microphone and have used only this to record several choir albums. We spent the first part of the day setting up rooms as makeshift recording studios, then each student took a turn at producing groups of other students as they formed impromptu choirs. In the afternoon, we used a similar setup—a stereo microphone in a temporarily treated room—to record a drama. Stephanie

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introduced a participatory drama method in which the students discussed issues in their community and developed a story which would give a Christian answer to the issue.

On the third day, we tried to use every option on the recording box. The device forming the centerpiece of the mobile studio has a detachable top microphone. I have personally recorded numerous projects with just one or both of those microphones. At the same time, the device has four additional tracks which can be recorded simultaneously. So, we created different ensembles with singers, drums, and keyboards and found different ways we could use the tracks to record larger, more complicated ensembles.

On the final day, we introduced a computer into the mix. One of the great things about this mobile studio setup is how much it can do without a computer. You just need a few AA batteries or a power pack. At the same time, it's easy to pull the materials you record into a computer for edits or to add additional audio tracks. You can also record directly into a computer.

Does all of this sound intense and exhausting? I certainly found it so. Even with two of us sharing the teaching duties, I usually felt so tired at the end of the day that most days I fell asleep before dinner was served.

It was worth it because the students responded enthusiastically. One of the sound engineers said he'd been around audio gear for years but had never seen anything like this. Another engineer agreed, saying that he'd worked in a recording studio for twelve years, but still learned new things this week. Martha, a church musician, said she'd been sharing songs of encouragement on social media, just singing a cappella into her phone. Now she had ideas about how to arrange her songs better and upload better quality recordings. A newly hired Bible translator pronounced himself, "all in" for recording oral Bible stories and translations. Several had been inspired in ways beyond what we had taught them, which was great. In response, one of the guys encouraged everyone to be open handed with the knowledge they had gained this week, sharing it with others and serving their communities. They wanted to continue expanding what they could do, especially in the area of processing audio on a computer, and asked how soon Stephanie and I might return.

I left for my next project encouraged. I feel most myself with headphones on my head and the tape rolling. I find teaching challenging and exhausting. Yet, every person I can teach to become a recording engineer expands what can be done. As it says in Matthew 9:38, let's ask the Lord to send more workers into the field.



Top: Demonstrating recording drums using multi-track.

Middle and Bottom: Recording a choir.

ABOUT US

Rob serves as LBT's Scripture Engagement Coordinator and a specialist in Ethnodoxology.

Eshinee is LBT's Innovation Manager, providing a central point of contact for employees seeking innovative strategies, resources, or support.

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