# Production Guide

## Introduction

This document guides a partner in the trial and production of a local, contextualised production of Cursed to Bless. It helps the producer, director, and translator. It explains the resource’s purpose and background, outlines the suggested production process. It distils what we have learnt producing this drama elsewhere. It’s designed to be used together with the production pack. This process may feel overwhelming. The Cursed to Bless team is keen to support you in this process through direct, personal conversations as well as this guide. We hope you will share your experience with us so we can keep improving this resource.

To get started, read through the rest of the introduction, and then read through ‘The Process’.

The production pack is a set of resources that can help you produce a local version of Cursed to Bless. It includes:

* This *Production Guide*: the starting point and overall map to guide you through producing Cursed to Bless.
* *Cursed to Bless Overview*: explains the drama and how it works to a broad audience without prior knowledge of the resource. It is a helpful resource to distribute to potential team members.
* *Understanding Cursed to Bless*: a more detailed explanation, aimed at potential members of the production team.
* *Theological and Educational Framework*: documents the theological and educational framework. Has a summary of each episode, with its main educational point, passages covered, learning outcomes, etc.
* *Scripts*: the drama’s scripts in English, ready to be translated.
* *Annotated script*: [TODO]
* *Translation Guide*: guides the translator and producer through translating the scripts.
* *Trial guide and surveys*: explains how to run a trial.
* *Cost and Effort Guide*: guides you through the Effort and Cost Estimates spreadsheet.
* *Recording Guide*: guides the director and producer through planning and recording the acted episodes.
* *Effort and Cost Estimates spreadsheet*: notes the tasks involved, who needs to do them, estimated times, as well as an estimated cost. It is aimed to help in fund raising for the employment of local team members. See ‘Cost and Effort Estimates spreadsheet’ below for more details.
* Information flyers for church leaders and members: These can be translated, printed, and distributed to a wider audience to promote Cursed to Bless.
* *Director’s Summaries*: Summarise key details of each episode to help the director plan the recording.
* *Special effects* audio tracks: Professionally produced tracks, timed to the scripts. (Available in the future)
* *Rollout Guide*: outlines how to promote, use, and roll out the resource once it’s produced.

These resources have been developed and refined in our Myanmar production.

You can edit, adapt, and translate most of the resources to suit your local needs. We have released this material under a Creative Commons license (see each document for details). You are free to create a new document from a set of sections across these documents, if that helps you in your own context.

## The process

Below is our suggested general process to produce the series. It offers a high level ‘map’, noting the roles involved and pointing to specific documents relevant in each step. Naturally, this is flexible and you may need to adjust it for your own context.

### 1. Learn about the project and the production process

Roles: producer

Actions: - Read through this *Production Guide*, particularly The Process and *Why produce Cursed to Bless locally?*, to understand the reasons and process to produce the series locally. - Read *Understanding Cursed to Bless* to understand the purpose, setting, and characters of the series. - Read the *Theological and Educational Framework* to understand the goals of the series, and ensure you agree with them. Please let us know if you have questions you’d like to discuss. - Discuss your questions with us.

### 2. Recruit and brief a translator

Roles: producer, translator

Actions: - Read the *Translation Guide*, and provide it to the potential translator. - Provide these documents to the translator, so they understand the format and goals: - *Understanding Cursed to Bless* - *Theological and Educational Framework* - *Translation Guide* - Discuss the project with them, to ensure the translator understands the unique needs of this project. - You may need to discuss payment for the translation work.

### 3. Translate the first two scripts

Roles: producer, translator

Actions: - Provide us with local names for the characters, so we can give you scripts with these names. - Provide the scripts to the translator. - Translate the series introduction and episode 1, following the *Translation Guide*.

Notes: - It might be tempted to translate the whole series. In general, we think it’s wider to translate the first two first, as a trial of the translation process. Nevertheless, we understand there will be times when it’s much simpler to translate the whole series (e.g. the producer is translating the scripts and they already understand well the outcome).

### 4. Run a ‘dramatised reading’ trial to learn about its applicability and start raising awareness

Roles: producer, actors

Actions: - Follow the *Trial Guide* to perform a dramatised reading of these two first episodes and gather initial feedback. - Run multiple trials, if practical and helpful. - Review the feedback, reflect on how Cursed to Bless might fit with your needs and context. Consider what adaptations you might need to make. - Discuss the trial feedback and your reflections with us. Together, we can address the questions, concerns, and adaptations raised. You can then decide whether to continue the production or not.

### 5. Recruit and audition the roles in the production team

Roles: producer, director, actors, audio technician

Actions: - Read the Roles section in this *Production Guide* to understand each role, and start a list of likely people that might help with each. - Recruit the director first, if practical, and include them in recruiting actors. - Share *Understanding Cursed to Bless* with team members, to help them understand the project. - Read the Cost and Effort Guide and use the spreadsheet noted to plan.

### 6. Record the first two scripts

Roles: producer, director, actors, audio technician

Actions: - Read through the *Recording Guide*. - Provide the following documents to the director, and discuss the process with them. (Optional if you’re playing the director role). - *Recording Guide* - Director’s Summaries - Prepare for the recording session according to the guide. - Record the series introduction and episode 1, following the guide. - Note how long each recording took, reflect on how you’d like to do things better. The recording of these two episodes is a learning experience that you’ll apply when recording the whole series.

### 7. Run a trial with the produced episodes

Roles: producer

Actions: - Follow the *Trial Guide* to get more detailed feedback, now that you have two produced episodes that a group can follow [in detail]. - Run multiple trials, if practical and helpful. - Review the feedback, and consider what improvements you might need to make (e.g. actor roles, recording equipment and location, etc). - Discuss the trial feedback and your reflections with us. Together, we can address the questions, concerns, and adaptations raised. You can then decide whether to continue the production or not.

### 8. Translate and record the whole series

Roles: producer, translator, director, actors, audio technician

Actions: - Implement the adaptations that your reflections and the trial surfaced, communicating with the team members (e.g. translator, director). - Translate the remaining scripts, following the *Translation Guide*. - Follow the *Recording Guide* to record each of the remaining episodes. Schedule the recordings mindful of what you learnt with the first two episodes. - You might decide to re-produce the first two episodes, depending on the trial. This is worth doing to ensure the episodes are consistent.

### 9. Upload the audio to the cursedtobless.com website

Roles: producer, audio technician

Actions: - Produce distribution version of the episodes (e.g. lower fidelity MP3 audio files). - Provide these to us, so we can upload them. We would also seek to add these to other platforms (e.g. GRN’s 5fish app).

### 10. Promote the drama

Roles: producer

Actions: - Use the promotional materials included in the *Production Pack* to promote the drama.

### 1. Train group leaders

As you promote the drama and people want to use the resource, you will need to train the person who will be leading the small group (e.g. a church leader).

Roles: producer

Actions: - Train the people that will be leading the small groups. We hope to develop a guide for this soon. - You may want to train others who can train the small group leaders, as the demand for the resource grows.

### 12. Produce lesson apps (Optional)

The lesson apps can be installed on mobile phones and used offline, and include the audio and interactive questions that provide feedback. They are a slightly more formal way of learning compared to the simple audio. They require a basic smartphone as a minimum (e.g. Android Go with 1Gb RAM). We are still developing this area.

Roles: producer

Actions: - Discuss with us how this concept might help in your ministry. - Use the *Rollout Guide* to produce lesson apps. - Recruit someone with IT skills, if the audio technician is unable to produce the apps.

### 13. Develop conference (Optional)

The conference is a ‘next step’ for those who have completed the Cursed to Bless series. It consolidates and deepens their understanding of biblical theology and offers a chance to assess, recognise and celebrate their learning together with others. We are still developing this area.

Roles: producer

Actions: - Discuss with us how this concept might help in your ministry. - Use the *Rollout Guide* to organise the conferences.

## Why produce Cursed to Bless locally?

Producing a contextualised version of the drama in your local language would make the drama much more effective. Cursed to Bless relies on the power of drama to reach the audience’s hearts and deeply-held worldviews, and this is best done in the audience’s “heart language”.

However, we do not have the language, culture, and network knowledge of the various contexts we’d like to help. So rather than produce an English series, we have invested in developing a toolkit to help partners produce a local version. We have already translated and produced a version in the Mizo language, aiming to serve Christians in Myanmar and Eastern India. This guide distils all the lessons and refinements we’ve made through that production, so you can benefit from them.

We recommend you run a small trial to inform your decision. This resource is likely a new format to you and the local audience, so it’s best to experience it in a small way before deciding.

Below are our responses to common concerns:

* I don’t have much time: We understand, this is why we’ve created the production pack. We believe that most of the work can be outsourced to local qualified people. The remaining oversight work can be a fruitful discipleship ministry, as you discuss the theological truths that the scripts cover.
* I don’t know drama or media production: The project does require some audio skills, but it doesn’t have to be the producer. Audio is an easy and cheap medium to work with. Free audio software can be learnt, and supporting documentation is available. New, AI-powered tools can reduce the effort involved in media editing significantly.
* I don’t know how long this would take or how much it will cost: The effort and cost estimates spreadsheet is a helpful guide on the tasks to be done, and how long each might take. You can review and adapt this to your context. Running a small trial can help you test these estimates.
* I don’t know people who could do this work: Running a small trial can raise awareness and attract qualified and motivated team members. Audio is a much easier medium to edit and produce. Actors have the script in front of them, with no costume or movement to worry about, and mistakes can be easily edited out.
* Local people would not have the time to commit to this: Audio production takes much less time than video. The estimates can give everyone a clearer sense of the time commitments. We hope that raising some funds for a local production would create a dependable work that team members are freed to commit to. You can commit to producing the first two episodes first, and then review how viable it is to produce the whole series.
* I don’t have funding to pay local team members: We would like to work together with partners to raise funds for each context. We think that having a local team identified together with our experience in Myanmar would be strong arguments to raise a small amount.
* I might just wait for an English production: We’ve designed this resource to be contextualised in a particular language and culture, because drama has its greatest impact when the audience experience it in their heart language from characters that they identify with.

## Roles Needed

The following are the main roles in the production team:

* Producer: Is theologically trained, living locally, and knows the culture and language (e.g. a church leader or missionary). This person would oversee development, without needing to do most of the work. They recruit the key roles, supervise the script translation and review, and liaises with the Cursed to Bless team. Strong English ability would be required to read this guide and review the translations. They work with and guide the translator and director in the contextualising and adaption process, which involves wisdom and judgement.
* Translator: Needs good knowledge of English and the local language, as well as medium to high literacy skills. They would work closely with the producer in the adaptation of the scripts. A leadership trainee being discipled/trained by the producer has proven a good person to translate, with the added benefit of learning more deeply the ideas of this resource.
* Director: Recruits the actors, directs the episodes, and oversees the editing. They play a critical role in interpreting the scripts and lead the recording sessions. They need a strong knowledge of the local language and culture, and the ability to coach people in acting: listen carefully, watch expressions and emotion, and give feedback in a sensitive way. This role could be played by the same person as the translator above or perhaps the producer, but not necessarily. The ability to understand, communicate with, and guide the actors is more important. Some acting experience would be highly valuable.
* Audio technician: Assists the director during recordings by setting up and operating the audio equipment and laptop, monitoring audio levels, etc. A musician or someone with general computer/technical skills can learn to play this role. Depending on their skill levels, this role might do the audio editing rather than the director. It’s wise for the director to avoid playing this role as well as guiding the actors.
* Voice Actors: Previous acting experience is not strictly required, but actors need to be able to read the script with expression. They will have the scripts in front of them when recording, without a live audience, which allows for multiple takes and later editing. See *Characters* below for further details. Some actors may be able to act a minor role with a different voice to their ‘main’ character.

## Running a Trial

There are good reasons to trial Cursed to Bless in your context before deciding whether to commit to a local production. Overall, Cursed to Bless is a novel format. Experiencing it concretely will help evaluate it. A trial is a low risk, low cost way of testing the work involved, the skills required, and its effectiveness. If the trial makes it clear Cursed to Bless would not work in your context, you have just saved yourself a lot of work. On the other hand, if it does show promise, it would avoid missing out on a helpful resource, and give you the confidence to commit to it.

A trial is a way of asking “Is this resource worth investing more in?” Try to avoid focusing too much on cosmetic details about the production, especially in early trials. Below are more specific reasons:

* Grow in your understanding of how it works.
* Let your target audience experience the resource concretely, leading to much better feedback.
* Raise awareness of the project in general, which is likely to attract people interested in joining the team (whom you might not identify otherwise).
* Identify ways that the scripts and/or format need to be adapted for your context.
* Review the script’s translation and improve it, so that it’s ready for the final recording. For example, some phrases might be a ‘correct’ translation of the original, but might be awkward to speak aloud by the actors, or might sound unnatural.
* Assess the effort and time involved, which can help you adapt the estimates in our spreadsheet.
* Identify people that have the skills and commitment to help in a full production.

Below are options to run a trial, in increasing order of both workload and authenticity:

* Listen through the English audio lesson online, in a small group. This is an older pilot and so does not include elements we’ve added later, like the host and Bible expert interview. It is the least work, and it’s immediately available. However, it would not be as ‘authentic’ a trial. It requires English knowledge in the trial audience.
* Do a dramatic reading in a small group in English: gather a group of people that can read the scripts, assign a character to each, and simply read through the first two scripts. This requires no recording (although you could record it using a mobile phone for your own review later). The special effect lines can simply be read by a designated reader (e.g. the ‘Host’). This involves little work and could cover the whole series, but requires English knowledge. You could have designated ‘listeners’ who give feedback at the end.
* Study the scripts, and then narrate each episode as a story in the local language, reading out the questions and other teaching segments as needed. This could potentially be done with the whole series in a small group, allowing it to do its work. It requires no voice actors nor a full translation of the text. However, it depends on you telling the story well. Specifically, much of the power comes from listening to the dialogue between the friends, and this would not project as well with a single narrator.
* Translate the series introduction and episode one, and do a dramatic reading of these. This would test the ability of voice actors. It would also be a good way to review the translations before recording. It is probably the best ‘value for effort’ option, although it does not test the benefit of going through the whole series, an important element of this resource. You could translate the short version of the scripts, to reduce the workload further.
* Produce the series introduction and episode one from translated episodes, recorded by actors and edited. This can be a ‘rough’ production, without special effects. You could produce the short version of the scripts. This is a good next step after a dramatic reading.

We suggest you iterate through a few trials, starting with an easy option and increasing in authenticity. For example, you could start with reading the English scripts with a few stakeholders for feedback, do dramatic readings of the first two translated scripts, and then produce rough audio versions of these scripts.

A trial guide and survey is included in the production pack, which can be translated to the local language.

## Frequently Asked Questions

Below are responses to common questions about producing a local version. See the overview document for more general questions about the project.

Can I change the names of the characters?

Yes, please use names that would seem natural and authentic to your own audience. You do not need to use biblical names. You can send your choice of names to us, who can then replace these names into the English scripts, to make your translation easier.

Can I adapt the scripts? How much?

Yes. We expect production partners will tweak the scripts to their own local context. It is important that the audience perceives the drama as authentic for this resource to be helpful. Note the ‘Translator Notes’ in the script, these are points where we expect some adapting might be required.

We would expect the overall characters and story would stay essentially the same, so as to maintain the teaching goals. Please consult he Series Outline document to ensure you’re keeping to the learning goals.

We include consulting about the script translation as part of our help to partners.

Should we translate all the scripts first, or produce each episode completely?

We suggest you translate the first two scripts first (the series introduction and episode 1). This is a cheap, simple first step that will help you shape the project and start finding the right people for the latter stages. The scripts can be used to trial the drama with dramatic readings as well as select and train the actors. You can then translate the rest of the scripts. The full scripts will help the audio technicians and actors to understand the drama. Any errors in the script are much easier to fix before audio production starts.

A simple, unedited recording of a dramatic reading rehearsal can play as a trial audio, but should not replace a fully produced and edited episode.

## References and Other Resources

The following are helpful resources that informed this resource. You don’t need to read these to produce Cursed to Bless, but they offer extra background.

“How to Design and Produce a Radio Serial Drama for Social Development: A Program Manager’s Guide [1998] | CCP.” Accessed May 16, 2014. http://ccp.jhu.edu/documents/How%20to%20Design%20Prod%20Radio%20Serial%20Drama%20SocDevelop%20.pdf.

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