THE IMPACT OF MISSION

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Would people miss us - would they even notice - if we were not there.
Category: Observations

Over the past two days, I've posted links to articles about languages. The first one looked at the benefits of learning to read and write in your own language rather than in a colonial one and the second article considered the importance of the knowledge that is encoded in minority languages.

The thing is, the sort of Bible translation work that Sue and I have been involved in for a number of decades plays into both of these issues. Most projects which focus on minority language Bible translation, also have an associated mother-tongue literacy campaign. Sometimes this literacy work is purely on a local level, but in other situation it can develop into a bigger strategy in association with the regional or national government. Higher levels of literacy and the associated benefits of lower child mortality, and higher income are one of the regular spin-offs from Bible translation work. Likewise, in promoting the documentation and preservation of minority languages, Bible translation work plays a role in maintaining the knowledge which is only available in that language.

These may not be the central purposes of Bible translation ministry, but they are valuable and very important spin-offs. Work, which focuses on minority and marginalised communities not only brings the good news of the gospel, it also contributes to wider human flourishing.

I would go on to argue that this should be the impact of all Christian mission. While the relief of suffering, or peace and justice may not be our direct focus, these things should be impacted by our presence as emissaries of Jesus. In short, the world should be a better place because of our presence in it. Mission is not simply about getting people into heaven, it also involves living a kingdom life that will impact society for the better.

This is not simply some statement about exotic mission in other parts of the world, it is true also about the mission of the church in the UK. To put it simply, our villages, estates and towns should be better places because of the presence of our churches. OK, a small church is probably not going to transform a whole city, but it should still have some sort of impact beyond being a group of people who gather two or three times a week for meetings. We should be serving the communities in which we find ourselves.

A crucial question for churches and for mission agencies is whether people would miss us - or whether they would even notice - if we were not there. If the answer is no, then we have some serious thinking and reorientation to do.