CLIMATE CHANGE AND MISSION

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Mission agencies need to think through the impact of climate change on their work.
Category: Observations

Yesterday, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its sixth assessment report. The content of the report has been widely covered in the media, so I won't go into details here. You can see the full report and some videos about how it was produced by following this link.

The evidence for climate change is irrefutable. This summer we've seen unprecedented temperatures in Canada, the US and Siberia. As I write, fires are out of control in Greece and California, while parts of Europe have been hit by devastating floods. However, it is in parts of the world that are less reported on that the impact is most severe. Southern Madagascar, is in the grip of a long term drought which is causing hunger and starvation and to which there is no obvious solution.

The context that we are living in must prompt some rethinking from those who are involved in Christian mission. Historically, mission agencies have responded to educational, medical and other needs by adding appropriate social activities alongside their evangelistic work. It is inevitable, that agencies will need to consider how to respond to the various problems that climate change will throw up over the coming years and decades. Some people will respond that we shouldn't allow ourselves to be distracted from our task of reaching the unreached by thinking about climate change. However, it is very often the most unreached who are most deeply impacted by the changes that we are seeing. Very often groups are unreached by the gospel because they are found in remote, marginal areas - the very places that are most impacted by climate change. If our gospel message is to have any credibility, it must also be backed up by appropriate care for their physical wellbeing - and that means that we will need to take the impact of climate change on board in our thinking.

Another issue that agencies will have to address (I've commented on this previously) is their addiction to travel. Yes, cross-cultural missionaries need to travel to and from their fields of service and this almost certainly involves air travel. However, there is much less need for mission conferences and meetings which involve large numbers of people travelling to get together for a few days. We cannot say that we care for the poorest people in the world, if we continue to be a part of the problem which is disrupting their lives.

Whether we like it or not, climate change must be one of the factors that we take into account as we plan for the future of mission work.