NEWS FROM ANTSIRABE

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Category: Madagascar

I thought I'd had a long journey from Southampton to Antsirabe in central Madagascar. I left home at 5 am on Saturday, flew via Paris to Antananarivo where I stayed the night in a hotel and continued by winding, mountainous road to Antsirabe on Sunday, arriving after dark. That was until I met some of the participants who have come to the Translation Workshop and learned that 5 of them had to walk 3 days through the forest to the nearest road to get a bush taxi to come here!

Twenty-four people from 5 different Malagasy language groups have come to learn about translation. Among them are several priests and pastors, but also farmers and one housewife, and three men who are representatives of local 'kings'. As you can imagine, there is quite a range of ages and abilities, from Doctorates to those who have had very little schooling. So pitching the teaching at the right level is a bit of a challenge. I thought I was just teaching the first session yesterday on translation principles and the qualities that make for a good translation, but I ended up teaching half the day, adapting our materials to the needs of the group as we went along! I even found myself 'ad-libbing' and responding to lots of questions and comments. It's great to see so many of the group keen to join in discussions and share their ideas as well as taking in what is being taught.

The enthusiasm of one of the priests is quite inspiring - he is 60 years old, but quite a live wire. As a priest, it has been his experience that the official Malagasy language doesn't really communicate well in his area, and so he is so grateful to be here. He just wishes he could have learned this stuff years ago and been able translate the Bible into his own language, but didn't know it was an option. I'm looking forward to getting to know more of the participants and hearing about their situations. I hope the enthusiasm will spread as we start to actually do some translation.

It's not only the participants who are a very varied group, our team of consultants is very diverse too. There are 2 from Norway (who have worked here for more than 20 years), and the rest of us are from England, Ireland, Holland, South Africa and the US, so let's hope we all do well on the cross-cultural communication!!

Well, I've had several late nights so far as we've had to spend evenings preparing the programme for the next day, so I think I really need to get some sleep and try and write some more soon.