THE BIBLE AND HUNGER

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Category: Theology and Purpose of Translation

This is part three of my series on why we should bother translating the Bible for people who are poor and suffering.

I can see why it would seem crazy to set about translating the Bible for people who are suffering from starvation and war. People in those sorts of situations have urgent needs and as Christians we should be moved to help them, but as I pointed out yesterday, this doesn't mean that we shouldn't seek to bring the Gospel to them. Evangelism and social action go hand in hand.

However, simply addressing peoples' needs in the short term does not normally solve their problems. As the old saying goes; give a man a fish and you feed him for a day: teach him to fish and you feed him for a lifetime. I believe that the Gospel, or in this specific case, Bible translation are part of the process of 'teaching people to fish'. To illustrate this, let me quote from a letter which I wrote to some Wycliffe supporters six months ago.

> *As you read this letter, you will probably be aware of some of the catastrophes that have taken place in the world over the past year, be they floods in Pakistan, fires in Russia and Australia, or landslides in China. Indeed, you may have responded financially to alleviate the suffering.*
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> *When we consider such events, the work of Bible translation may seem to be irrelevant at worst, or secondary at best. Surely getting relief to the needy is where we should be concentrating our efforts and our funding?*
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> *Actually, I believe that the need for Bible translation becomes even more urgent in the context of these disasters, and all the others that have happened and are yet to occur. After all, it is in the Bible that we find how Job lost everything and screamed at God for an explanation, how the Israelites were put to the sword, how God led His people through famine, sickness and genocide. Without the Bible people cannot even begin to have a framework within which to place their own desperate situations and lives.*
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> *When we read the Bible we meet within its pages people Â who are marginalised through poverty, social structuring, illness or illiteracy. The very people for whom Jesus came, in fact. And the people groups with whom Wycliffe works most often; the weakest, poorest and neediest. So we find ourselves working at opening up the Bible to those in most need of it, such as the Deaf, the illiterate and the poverty stricken.*
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> *Right now, Wycliffe workers are involved in projects to translate the Good News into the mother tongue of many hundreds of people groups, in whatever way they can best understand it, because we believe that God will use His word to speak into their deepest needs.*

The Bible gives people a framework to understand their situation and tools with which to address it, as this video shows.

But translation does more than this. A Bible translation project is typically linked to literacy work and in the long term, literacy is one of the best ways of transforming poor communities. As I wrote a few months ago, Women who can read have babies who live longer.

Once again, let me emphasise that I am not saying that we should not meet peoples' needs in the short term. We need to feed the hungry, but we need to do more than that.