MORE URGENT THAN THE BIBLE...

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Category: Bible Translation

I thoroughly enjoy the Good Intentions are not Enough blog, which takes a hard look at issues related to overseas aid and development. Though it is not an overtly Christian blog, many of the things that it has to say are relevant to mission work such as Bible translation and language development. I was struck by the latest post which talks about what motivates people to give to disaster relief:

> *Essentially this is how it works, people are far more likey to donate to events that are:*
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> - ***Rapid onset*** *â€“ A landslide, earthquake, tsunami â€“ Â rather than disasters that are much slower such as prolonged draught, desertification, or rising sea levels.*
> - ***Vivid images*** *â€“ Scenes that the media can play over and over again that pull at donors heart strings â€“ disasters that are far from the public eye or in areas with very limited coverage may not get as many donations. Think of the flooding in Pakistan last year as an example.*
> - ***Perceived â€œinnocenceâ€*** *â€“ Part of how much we give appears to be related to whether or not we think that people are somehow responsible for the disaster. This is often civil conflict, but interestingly enough also the Gulf oil spill. Organizations reportedly had a hard time raising funds because people didnâ€™t want to pay to clean up a disaster caused by the oil companies.*

From my own experience, I would be tempted to add a fourth bullet point and that is something along the lines of the "feelgood factor", people want to know that the money they are giving is having an almost instant impact. They are much less interested in funding long term infrastructure or education projects. Crisis prevention is not as sexy as crisis response.

Of course, Bible translation and language development work does not tick any of these boxes. It is not a response to a crisis with vivid images and the sense of accomplishing something instantly - far from it.

So, why do I think people should give to support Bible translation and langauge development work?Â There is a long list, but let me highlight a few key points.

- The Bible provides a narrative that helps people to make sense of suffering and difficulty. It does not solve the immediate problems caused by crises, but it does give people a long term answer to how to deal with them and live through them. It was written by and for people who lived through war, famine, oppression and all the rest. It isn't a book about nice comfortable suburban living.
- The Japanese and New Zealand earthquakes are unusual in that they have hit rich and well developed countries. Most disasters in the world hit in out of the way, hidden areas. Although

earthquakes and the like are dramatic, far more people suffer from the long, slow-burn crises of hunger, HIV, war and poverty. One of the most effective ways of addressing endemic crises is through education and very often, the only education offered in these marginalised areas is through agencies like Wycliffe who are working with the minority peoples.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that we should not give in crisis situations; far from it. There is an old saying:

> *Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.*

The point is not that we should never give people fish. Sometimes people are too hungry and tired to learn - they need to be given fish so that they can build up their strength. However, people don't learn to fish, they will never have the wherewithal to change their situation.

If you would be interested in supporting some of Wycliffe's work, you can find more information here, you can also make donations through any online shopping you do at no cost to yourself.