MAY YOU BECOME SALT

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How do you translate "you are the salt of the earth" in a language where "may you become salt" is a curse?
Category: Madagascar

Sometimes working on Bible translation is like striding out along a hilltop path on a beautiful summerâ€™s day with clear skies and fantastic views. At other times it is more like wading through sticky mud in the pouring rain. During our recent translation workshop in Madagascar I experienced some of the former, but definitely more of the latter! In many ways it was a real struggle as I worked with the Tandroy team, checking their translation of Matthewâ€™s gospel. We were all battling with the extreme heat and humidity, which didnâ€™t help our concentration, but there were also some difficult discussions as we tried to reach a consensus on certain verses. We want all the churches (whether Catholic or Protestant) to use this translation, so itâ€™s really important that all the members of the team are in agreement on the final text.

But even when everyone agrees, you always come across translation problems that have to be solved. One of these involved Matthew 5.13 : how do you translate 'You are the salt of the earth' when salt has negative connotations and it is taboo to bring salt into parts of a Tandroy village, especially near the cattle enclosure? The Tandroy even have a curse which says: 'May you become salt!' (*Manjary sira!*) So translating this verse was challenging. The commentaries don't even address this issue. To simply say 'You are the salt of the earth':Â *Inareo ty sira ty tane toy*Â is seen as a negative thing, so would not be faithful to the meaning of the original. The solution we found was to say: *Inareo ty sira* ***mampatave*** *ty tane toy.* (You are the salt which **brings flavour** to the world). This way, the positive impact of the salt can be immediately recognised.

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