

Avoiding and Overcoming Unhealthy Dependency in the Christian Movement

Glenn Schwartz

ETHIOPIA MISSION NETWORK
April 2010

My experience:

- I lived and worked in Central Africa as a missionary during the 1960s - Zambia/Zimbabwe.
- During the 1970s I lived and worked in Pasadena, California in missionary training - Fuller SWM
- Since 1983 - seminars and consultations on issues related to dependency and self-reliance

“You can’t understand missiology apart from biography” – Alan R. Tippett

Dependency in Christian Mission Activity

**We have been having a problem
with it for some time . . .**

My conclusion . . .

**The road to dependency is
paved with good intentions . . .**

What do I mean by unhealthy dependency?

Unhealthy dependency results from doing for people what they could do for themselves . . .

. . . if their dignity and initiative were respected.

If you make people think they are poor they may begin to believe you.

TWO OBJECTIVES FOR THIS PRESENTATION:

- To show that unhealthy dependency can be avoided from the beginning
- To show that unhealthy dependency can be overcome where it already exists

Beginning caution . . .

Be careful not to assume that people have nothing to give back to God.

Consider the Macedonians . . .

2 Corinthians 8

The assumptions with which we begin will most likely determine whether dependency develops.

Assumption:

We might **assume** that people are poor because they appear to us to be poor.

Let's take a look at this assumption . . .

For example:

Women in Chad

A Turban Wearer in Chad

A woman wanting a Bible in Mozambique

An Evangelism Project in West Africa

A Businessman and a Bishop in Africa

Avoiding dependency from the beginning . . .

Uganda - 1901

The Dani People in Irian Jaya

The New Guinea Bible Church

EBM Church in Ukraine

An Indigenous Mission Society in India

What about overcoming dependency where it already exists?

- **A church of women and children in South Africa**
 - 1. Teach the women how to care for their families.**
 - 2. Teach the women how to evangelize their husbands.**
 - 3. Teach them how to make something with their hands so they can earn a living.**
 - 4. Teach them to give something back to God in thanksgiving – in other words, tithing.**

Result: \$2,000,000 – Plus - in the collection

What about overcoming dependency where it already exists?

- **A church of women and children in South Africa**

\$2,000,000 – Plus - in the collection

- **Ethiopia 1938 – 1943**

100 -10,000 in 5 years

- **China 1951 - 1980**

1,000,000 to 50,000,000 in 30 years

- **East Africa 1970s**

200,000 KS sent overseas

A few observations on the dependency syndrome . . .

Observation 1.

Westerners often use money to solve problems – even when money might not be the best solution.

Therefore, outside money has become an important part of how WE plant churches.

A Nigerian can show us another way . . .

Observation 2.

The newly discovered interest in missions in England, North America and Korea is fueling the dependency problem.

- **When people give themselves, sometimes it is only for short-term missions.**

- **Sometimes people want to give money . . . but not themselves.**

Consider the case of a well-to-do ophthalmologist . . .

Observation 3.

No one should use what I am saying about dependency to avoid helping the poor.

Jesus reserved some of his harshest criticism for those who offended the poor.

The challenge is to learn how to help the poor without causing long-term dependency.

See the WMA web site or

When Charity Destroys Dignity for:

Searching for Meaningful Ways to Help the Poor

Observation 5.

THIS MENTALITY MASQUERADES IN VERY ATTRACTIVE CLOTHING.

- **WESTERN FUNDERS ARE OPENING OFFICES ON THE DOORSTEPS OF ALREADY DEPENDENT CHURCHES.**
- **FREQUENTLY - TERMS LIKE “INTER-DEPENDENCE - OR “PARTNERSHIP” ARE USED TO JUSTIFY OUTSIDE FUNDING.**

How about “local – local” interdependence . . .

How does one test a partnership?

**Ask how many directions
resources flow . . .**

**If resources flow in only one direction -
then it might better be
called “sponsorship”.**

A FEW LESSONS WE HAVE LEARNED ABOUT THE DEPENDENCY SYNDROME.

1. THIS BATTLE IS SPIRITUAL

- IT IS NOT AGAINST FLESH AND BLOOD –
EPHESIANS 6:12**
- OUR GOSPEL IS ADEQUATE TO BRING
DOWN STRONGHOLDS – 2 COR 10:4**

2. SELF-RELIANCE HAS LITTLE TO DO WITH POVERTY AND WEALTH.

THE MACEDONIANS – OUT OF EXTREME POVERTY AND SEVERE TRIAL – BEGGED FOR THE PRIVILEGE OF GIVING.

In both Tanzania and Malawi, church leaders said that the poorer synods were more likely to fully support their pastors than wealthy ones.

**3. MANY TRANSITIONS TOWARD
HEALTHY SELF-RELIANCE INCLUDE
A DIRECT REVELATION FROM THE
LORD.**

**At least five non-white South Africans
testify to this . . .**

Don't Chase Buffalos

4. IT IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE FOR WESTERNERS TO ACCEPT THAT OUR “COMPASSION” MIGHT BE AT THE ROOT OF THE DEPENDENCY PROBLEM.

Westerners get a good feeling from helping others – even if, in the long-run, the consequences are harmful.

“Developing countries which develop are not in the best interest of the West.”

- TIME MAGAZINE -

5. “OWNERSHIP” MUST PRECEDE STEWARDSHIP TEACHING.

Outside ownership destroys local imagination and local initiative.

An illustration from an aid organization in Southern Africa . . .

6. It is necessary to distinguish between those who are **poor and those who are simply **dependent**.**

“If Christians in Africa gave just 2% of their income, they could pay all of their expenses.”

- Dr. DAVID BARRETT -

7. AN OBSERVATION . . .

The last thing Satan wants is Spirit-filled believers joyfully standing on their own two feet – excitedly sharing their faith with others.

A FEW SUGGESTIONS REGARDING SHORT-TERM MISSIONS

- 1. Everyone – including the leaders - should consider themselves learners – not teachers.**
- 2. Drill humility into everyone – including the leaders.**
- 3. Never allow anyone on the team to be in charge of any part of the project. Remember - people built buildings before you got there, and they will build them after you leave.**

Short-term suggestions (continued)

4. **Don't give the impression that your wealth is the key to solving every problem in another culture.**
5. **Remember that a short-term trip is not a substitute for long-term missionaries committed to learning language and culture.**
6. **There are two dangers to be avoided:**
 - A. **Not staying long enough to learn language and culture**
 - B. **Staying so long that the church becomes dependent on the missionary**

Short-term suggestions (continued)

7. Be careful about the motivation for short-term mission trips.

Consider the following announcement in a church bulletin:

[Our congregation] is sponsoring a women's only mission trip to beautiful Guadalajara, Mexico! We'll spend the week of June 11-18 in Guadalajara (also known as the shopping capitol of Mexico!), where we will have the incredible opportunity to minister to, pray for, and teach women in a vibrant church community.

And this trip isn't a "rough-roach-in-your-bed" kind of experience either – we'll be housed in nice clean hotel rooms, eat lots of salsa, and have plenty of time to shop! Our hope is to take at least fifteen women (including teenage daughters) on this Mexican Ministry Outreach . . . we trust that God will expand our hearts for Him as He expands our ministry to the women of Guadalajara.

If you're remotely interested in this great commission adventure – or if you're just in the mood for Mexico after all this winter weather – call for more details about this fantastic outreach opportunity.

Now you see why I call attention to the issue of motivation.

Remember:

Short-term mission trips can be beneficial for both those who go and those on the receiving end.

However, precautionary measures should to be built into the process.

**See the WMA web site or
*When Charity Destroys Dignity:***

Maximizing the Benefits of Short-Term Missions

What Triggers The Move Toward Self-Reliance?

1. Through a direct revelation from the Lord
2. Through divine intervention
3. Through sound teaching of those who sow the Gospel seed

What Triggers the Move - Continued

4. Through sound teaching and practices promoted by committed and astute local church leaders
5. Through a one-sided plan initiated by missionaries or other outsiders who created the problem of dependency in the first place
6. When outside funding is arbitrarily cut off

What Triggers the Move - Continued

- 7. Through wide-spread and genuine spiritual renewal**
- 8. Through serious restructuring of the institutions inherited from the past**
- 9. Through a positive shift in attitude that occurs among missionaries**

SO WHAT SHOULD WESTERNERS DO WITH ALL THE MONEY WE HAVE?

- 1. Ask where it came from. This raises the question of economic justice.**
- 2. Support the missionaries God calls out of your congregation.**
- 3. Invest in cross-cultural training for the missionaries you support.**

- 4. Invest in mobilization efforts – especially where the Gospel has already been preached.**

- 5. Invest in ministries which do not have a natural constituency.**
 - Radio broadcasting**

 - Ministries of mercy**

 - Bible Translation, etc**

Even in these, be careful not to do for people what they can and should do for themselves.

- 6. Help refugees in a way that preserves dignity.**
- 7. Invest in preventive health projects which help to relieve the root causes of sickness and poverty.**
- 8. Invest in breaking the cycle of dependency, not creating it.**
 - Revolving Loan Funds**
 - Employment Projects**
 - Literacy Projects**

- 9. Be careful about helping where the church exists and should be standing on its own two feet.**

- 10. Outreach in one's own community should not be ignored in favor of more attractive projects at a distance - which often have greater appeal.**

That's all folks . . .

**Glenn J. Schwartz, Executive Director
World Mission Associates
600-C Eden Road
Lancaster, PA 17601 USA
Phone: (717) 299-1427
Fax: (717) 299-2943**

www.wmausa.org

GlennSchwartz@msn.com