The Changing Nature of Christian Missions in the Twenty-First Century

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International Christian missions have changed dramatically over the last 200 years and especially in the last few decades. Undertaking an international mission in the nineteenth and for much of the twentieth centuries entailed very high start-up costs. In consequence, those who served as missionaries to Africa, India, China, etc., committed to life-long, vocational service in a limited location.

Contemporary would-be missionaries, however, have many more options. While vocational missionaries continue to work internationally in large numbers, advances in medicine, travel, and communication technology, as well as economic development in the target countries, now make missionary work possible on a temporary or part-time basis. Rather than pack their belongings in their coffins, as the early missionaries famously did, contemporary missionaries may serve internationally for as little as a week or two. Further, the success of the early missionaries both in converting their target populations to Christianity and in educating them has created increasingly sophisticated recipients of future missionary work.

As an organizational psychologist and executive director of one of these twenty-first-century missions, who has also organized two small conferences for independent missions, I (Carrie) and Ugandan pastor and African program director for that same mission, Frank Tweheyo, explore the difference between the traditional and the new kind of mission; point out potential pitfalls and opportunities for these occasional missionaries who operate without an established infrastructure; and make some predictions for future development of this kind of work.

Traditional missions

Prior to the 1820 discovery of quinine and its efficacy against malaria, natives of the Global North did not survive long in the Global South. Diara *et al* observe that, "The average life expectancy of missionaries in Central Africa as a result of mosquito plague was 8 years and in West Africa 2 years. Some died within 3 months of arriving." Missionaries packed their belongings in coffins on the entirely reasonable expectation

that they would not return. This reality was even reflected in early nineteenth century romantic literature: In *Jane Eyre,* Jane's cousin, St. John, who is leaving for missionary work in India, asks Jane to marry him. One of the factors in Jane's decision is her recognition that she would certainly die in India. Jane ultimately refuses St. John's offer because she does not love him, but her fears about the inevitability of death in the mission field come true: The book ends with her dying cousin looking forward to heaven.

Even without the probability of premature death, international missionary work in the nineteenth century posed so many start-up costs that undertaking it at all required a long-term if not life-long commitment. Travel between home and the mission fields was expensive, time-consuming, and bore its own dangers. Trips home were infrequent. Missionaries had to adapt to innumerable changes to daily life, from strange foods and clothing to new modes of transport, and without the goods and services available to them in Europe or the United States. Further, they were living amid people who spoke very local and undocumented languages – in Uganda, for instance, there are 52 local languages – and whose cultural expectations were extremely different than those of Westerners. Although the missionaries tended to disparage rather than learn the local customs, they still had to learn the local language. In addition, missionaries usually sent their children to boarding school in their home countries and might spend most of their lives separated from them.

As the infrastructure of economically-developing countries was missing in the international mission field, early missionary work involved far more than proselytizing, taking on a more all-inclusive pastoral and development work. Arguably the first international development agencies, missionaries built and operated schools and hospitals, provided medical care, established orphanages, created alphabets for local languages, and taught agricultural techniques and skills like carpentry or sewing.

In consequence of these many costs, those willing or able to take on the huge commitment of mission work were extraordinary and rare, and as noted above, many of those who did undertake it died prematurely. In consequence, in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century, international Protestant missionaries numbered only in the hundreds.

With the development of quinine as a treatment for malaria, the numbers of missionaries grew, but slowly: "By 1900, even after a second burst of Protestant missions, there were only 15,000 European and American Protestant missionaries throughout the world" (Pierson 1992). The success of quinine was followed by

innumerable other advances that greatly diminished the missionary's traditional burdens of living in a foreign country: the development of vaccines against yellow fever and other diseases; less expensive, dangerous, and time-consuming international travel; the blossoming social and economic infrastructure of many developing countries; and the growing use of English as a universal second language, as well the educated people in developing countries learning the language of the European power that colonized them. As a result, the number of missionaries working internationally grew significantly, with approximately 40,000 Protestant career missionaries from the United States alone working internationally today (Pierson).

The New, Independent Missionary

In addition to allowing for the growth in the numbers of career missionaries, development has made possible the new missionary, whose needs are more those of a tourist than of a full-time resident. The Internet and the growing prevalence of ATMs have had a huge impact on mundane but vital issues like finding accommodations, getting visas and local currency, and staying in touch with local hosts and coordinators. The ready availability of bottled water prevents a big impediment to visiting developing countries – illness due to contaminated water. Mobile phones and internet cafes also make it possible to stay in touch with family at home and other team members in country.

On a less technical level, another important change lowering barriers to missionary or development work comes from simplification of the U.S. laws governing tax-exempt status. Becoming certified as a tax-exempt charity allows volunteer missionaries to deduct trip expenses from their taxes as well as to receive donations to cover those expenses from other people. Tax-exempt status also provides the organization with a degree of credibility and legitimacy not extended to organizations without that status. Prior to 2014, the application for tax-exempt status (IRS Form 1023) comprised a 26-page form that required the help of a specialized attorney to fill out, and which the IRS took nine months on average to approve. Possibly in response to the large number of Americans eager to provide aid following the devastating 2010 Haitian earthquake, the National Taxpayer Advocate petitioned the Internal Revenue Service for a simplified process. The new Form 1023 EZ, introduced in 2014, is only three pages long and can be approved by the IRS in a few weeks. Further, the application fee for the EZ form is less than half that of the full 1023 ($275 versus $600). This simplification allowed many smaller organizations to apply for tax-exempt status in their own right: The number of

religious and charitable organizations granted tax-exempt status more than doubled between 2013 (45,289) and 2014 (100,032).[1]

The success of the early missionaries also lowered the cost of mission work by eliminating the need for proselytizing in countries that are now predominantly Christian. "In 1800, perhaps 1 percent of Protestant Christians lived in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. By 1900, this number had grown to 10 percent. Today, at least 67 percent of all active Protestant Christians live in countries once considered foreign mission fields. And the church is still growing rapidly, even explosively, in many areas—Korea, sub-Saharan Africa, Singapore, and the Peoples' Republic of China (Pierson)." Many traditional areas for proselytizing now have higher church attendance and more national evangelists than do the United States and Europe.

As with development aid, as the intended recipients of religious support become less needy, better educated, and more sophisticated, they also become less interested in efforts to "help" them in ways that are naïve, culturally insensitive, or patronizing. For example, the African and Indian Christians we work with have a knowledge of the Bible that surpasses that of the American Christians we know. Nonetheless, the diminished need for Westerners to provide basic Christian education internationally can expand rather than limit opportunities, as the common knowledge shared between Western and national Christians provides a base for a more exciting and productive exchange. In addition, the respect and deference shown to Christian workers in these countries makes work there easier and more rewarding. And the very high regard with which the Bible is held there makes Bible-based programs readily accepted.

As a result of these changes, international missionary work is becoming increasingly accessible to nearly anyone who feels the call to perform it. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Campus Crusade for Christ (now called "Cru"), Youth with a Mission (YWAM) and other organizations have long provided the infrastructure for people who are not career missionaries to undertake short-term international missions that may last only a few years, a summer, or a few weeks. Many congregations sponsor even shorter "mission trips" in which a team of congregants, which might include young teens, visit another country to build houses for the poor, conduct puppet-shows, or play with children in orphanages for a week or two at a time.

Increasingly, however, Christian volunteers are also forming independent organizations that operate without the infrastructure provided by a denomination, congregation, or para-church organization. These "new" missionaries often focus on a specific social issue, people group, methodology, doctrinal point, or spiritual practice. Unlike the

traditional mission, with its provision of both proselytizing as well as a full range of pastoral and developmental services, these new missionaries offer specialized, almost proprietary programs. Examples of these include groups that organize Bible-studying soccer leagues for African boys; build and support a Christian school in Africa or a Bible college in India; conduct international visits to preach on the gifts of the Holy Spirit; produce and distribute recordings of the Bible in local languages; train and empower women leaders; provide support to family members who are caring for orphaned relatives; train caregivers of abused, traumatized, or orphaned children; train clergy in how to help traumatized parishioners; and train clergy in biblically-based gender equality. (The last three examples are from our organization, Empower International Ministries.)

Unlike traditional missionaries, the people involved in such independent missions are neither trained vocational missionaries nor residential with the people they serve. Their work may not even be tied to a particular locale or country. The new, independent missionaries visit their chosen "mission field" for short periods of time but otherwise live in their own homes and work their own jobs in their own country. Except for the aspect of foreign engagement, such mission involvement resembles typical volunteer work in being occasional and unpaid.

Professional versus amateur

These emergent small-scale, specialized, and independent missionary efforts are directly analogous to the phenomenon observed by Allison Schnable in her 2021 book on international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). Schnable calls the rising tide of volunteers who engage in small-scale development efforts in developing countries "amateurs without borders" and labels the organizations they create "grassroot INGOs."[1] Examples of grassroot INGOs include a project in a developing country to provide clean water, solar energy, vocational training of some kind, scholarships, a market for art or crafts, a school, an orphanage, or sanitary products so that girls can attend school.

[1] Schnable identifies such groups in the United States from the U.S. tax rolls of 501c3 organizations. "501c3" refers to the section of the tax code that governs charitable organizations with tax-exempt status, i.e., those who give to these organizations may deduct their donations on their income tax return. These organizations include religious organizations, but also other kinds of charities such as animal welfare groups, educational, literary, or scientific foundations, family foundations, and more. Schnable purposefully excluded groups whose purpose is purely religious without providing some type of physical aid.

Schnable's use of the term "amateur" does not suggest that these volunteers are unskilled or unprofessional in the service they provide – they may, in fact, be water quality engineers, educators, businesspeople, doctors or nurses by profession. Rather, they are amateurs in the sense that they are not part of one of the big, professionalized development agencies such as World Vision or the Peace Corp. Similarly, the new, independent missionaries may be trained ministers, but they are also amateurs in that they are not vocational, full-time missionaries who are part of a formal missionary sending agency or denomination.

Note that the root of the word "amateur" is *amor*, love: Amateurs do the work because they love the work, and this is an apt description. Unfortunately, "amateur" has the connotation of incompetence, which is not intended in Schnable's usage (although she writes that the professional aid agencies do regard amateurs that way). For that reason, we use the term "independent" rather than "amateur" when possible.

The strong parallels between the amateur or independent aid worker and the independent missionary are not coincidental. While some secular agencies are clearly not religious, and some missionary efforts are clearly not development projects, a great many of the grassroots mission organizations provide development aid, and a great many of the grassroots development organizations are religiously-motivated. Kenyan-American Dr. Susan Njemanze's GraceWorks, for instance, which helps families in Kenya caring for orphaned children, is listed in Schnable's book as a grassroots INGO. GraceWorks, however, is also deeply tied to and supported by the American congregation Dr. Njemanze attends, which features GraceWorks as the centerpiece of its missions program. Indeed, some of the now secular aid agencies, like ChildFund (originally Christian Children's Fund) originated as religious organizations. Citing Smith (1990, 50), Schnable notes that at one period for which data were available, "two-thirds of all private overseas aid was administered by church-association organizations (161)." Further, in a 2018 *Atlantic* article, Saba Imtiaz captures a "new" generation of missionaries whose focus has shifted from proselytizing to "tangible social projects" – i.e., grassroots INGO work (Imtiaz, 2018).

Schnable's important distinction between professional and amateur allows us to appreciate the degree to which economic, technical, and religious developments have made available to ordinary people the structural support or infrastructure that used to be provided only by the professionals. In consequence, today's full-time, vocational, and residential missions are increasingly focused on parts of the world in which that infrastructure is *not* available due to social and governmental restrictions. For example,

Muslim countries, China, and India either refuse Christian proselytizing or place restrictions on the activities of Christians within their borders. Like nineteenth century missions, gaining access to these countries is too time-consuming and dangerous to be undertaken unless the missionary is planning on staying long-term.[2] Similarly, missionaries translating the Bible into local languages may also be residential and long-term, as acquiring the special knowledge required to translate is time consuming. Otherwise, the trend in missions, as in NGOS, is that of increasing numbers of relatively short-term missionaries for whom the work is not career-long. Although it is difficult to compare these numbers, there seem to be many more of this new kind of missionary than the 40,000 American *career* missionaries Pierson reports.[3] Including short-term missions, Johnson and Zurlo reported 440,000 foreign (as opposed to national) missionaries in 2000.

Even that larger number, however, cannot encompass the many small short-term mission teams, sent out to perform unskilled tasks like building houses in Mexico or visiting an orphanage in Malawi. Of course, it is not meaningful to call a thirteen-year-old American playing with Mexican orphans an "international missionary," and that probably applies to the children's adult counterparts as well. The existence of these mission teams composed of very casual workers does illustrate, however, how far the cost of working internationally has fallen, and how far the concept of "missionary work" is being stretched. Motives for sending these casual missionaries also differ from those of traditional missionaries, with congregations and other agencies sponsoring such teams less for the good they do internationally than for the development of the individual members of the team. Not inconsequentially, sending out these casual missionaries also enhances the NGOs or congregation that sends them. Many agencies

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[2] Such restrictions have also led to a new strategy of supporting nationals to proselytize within their own countries rather than sending in foreign Westerners. One organization seeking to promote mission work by native Christians rather than by Westerners is the Return Mandate, whose website states that this strategy of supporting nationals, "familiar with local customs, language, and history is the next wave in global discipleship." This organization's name refers to "return on investment", as it suggests that supporting national missionaries is economically most sensible: "For a fraction of the cost, time, and domestic infrastructure, native missionaries can be trained, commissioned, and empowered as disciples who make disciples and build self-sustaining churches (The Return Mandate)." This approach, however, is also being implemented on a grassroots level, with individual congregation missions committee adopting this strategy as well.

[3] For one thing, in recent years the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints alone has 50,000 – 60,000 short-term missionaries in the field at any time.

organize such trips to enhance the participants' attachment to the cause, including encouraging donations.

Thus, putting a number on international missionaries today is a difficult if not impossible undertaking. Even counting the number of independent agencies is fraught. No central reporting agency exists, and the closest thing to one, the U.S. Internal Revenue Service, offers limited usefulness. The IRS has lists of organizations granted tax-exempt status but has no way of tracking how many of them are actually operating, as those with annual incomes of less than $25,000 a year do not have to file a tax return. In addition, many independent missions function out of their congregation's missions budget (Thompson 2022) and so are invisible to the IRS. No doubt many independent missionaries as well as volunteers in grassroot INGOs just pay for their own programs without bothering with tax-deductibility at all. This is especially true given the change in the standard deduction that resulted in many people no longer claiming the charitable exemption.

Professional vs. independent - the importance of personal relationships

Schnable notes that amateur was opposed to professional agencies depend heavily on personal relationships, both with their national partners and with their supporters at home. This distinction, however, is almost tautological, as the definition of "professional" includes "impersonal," and bringing too much of the personal into a formal work environment is considered, well, unprofessional. Schnable attributes the independent agencies' dependence on personal relationships to the personal preference of the Westerners, and she is no doubt correct. However, even without this preference, independent agents without an established relationship with a sending agency, NGO headquarters, or religious denomination, have little choice but to depend on personal relationships, as they have no other way to operate. How else would someone without a professional affiliation, wanting to do good in a foreign country, even get started? Further, since independent missionaries or aid workers typically do not live in the country they serve, any project that continues in the Westerners' absence requires the involvement of nationals of the recipient country. Just as with the difficulty of getting started in the first place without a personal connection, for amateurs to continue an ongoing program without personal relationships with a national partner on the ground would be extremely difficult.

For the independent agency, personal relationships act in the place of the established infrastructure of professional organizations, with their offices, housing, and transportation; fundraising/marketing, grant writing, public relations, and lobbying units; well-established and enforced organizational boundaries and mission statements; and Human Resource departments with their ability to vet potential missionaries/aid workers and set professional requirements for paid field personnel and support staff.

Based on our experience, we consider here four types of interpersonal relationships that come into play in non-professional agencies, all of which can be fraught: Relationships with national agency partners; Relationships with the recipients; Relationships with agency financial supporters; and Relationships with American volunteers.

Relationships with national agency partners

As Schnable points out, the initial connection between nascent independent international worker and national partner is typically established when an American meets the national of the foreign country while the national is visiting the United States for school, church work, or to attend a conference, or when the American is abroad on a mission trip. Common interests are established, or the Westerners learn of a need that they can fill, and the project develops from there.

While the interactions between independent missionary and national partners are one of the most rewarding parts of these international partnerships, establishing a successful partnership is also one of the most difficult aspects of this work. Professional agencies have far more experience navigating this sea of potential partners and/or recipients than amateurs who must learn whom to trust the hard way.

Chances are that amateur agencies will end up with equally-amateur national partners. For missionaries, these are likely to be local clergy. As non-professionals agents themselves, national partners may never have had experience or training in budgeting and accounting, or in handling sums of money that may seem small to the Americans but huge to someone from a developing country. Turning over financial management to national partners requires explicit discussion of what will be expected of them, and on dimensions that the Americans do not even know are issues. For instance, if a national partner brings the missionary's business to a local hotel or caterer, both the business and the partner expects that the business will give the partner a commission or "cut." The Americans involved, however, may find this common practice objectionable. In addition, most pastors have a very pastoral orientation and concern for their people, an orientation they will expect the Americans to share. That is, national pastors may expect

missionaries to not only preach the gospel but also to support congregational building projects, give cows to widows, pay school fees, pray with the sick, provide bags of rice to orphanages, etc. Providing such support may be exactly the goal of the independent mission, but those with a broader focus must resist the resource-draining temptation to fix all local problems.

From the perspective of the national partner, the Westerner's attitude toward money may be equally perplexing. Westerners and Africans, for example, have very different understandings about sharing.[4] Africans are a very relational people, and they view each other in terms of family. Because they are collectivist (not individualistic) in nature and culture, the nationals view the missionaries in terms of family, and as family, they expect the missionaries to contribute to various family causes. If not understood, it may be looked at as if nationals are beggars of sorts, but they thrive in collectivist strength, each part of the family bringing the little they can to help the bigger cause (death, burial, bride price etc.). The nationals, in turn, may perceive the Westerners' reluctance to contribute as uncaring, insensitive, or selfish.

We also want to note the confusion and disappointment caused by visitors who promise ongoing relationships with nationals only to never return, or who offer financial support or propose projects that never materialize.

Relationships with recipients

Poor countries have a lot of students desperate for school fees, people looking to Americans to give them a job or the certificate that they believe will lead to a job, people who believe that Americans have a million dollars in their handbags, people who want to immigrate to the U.S, people who need help with medical bills, and outright con artists. Professional organizations long ago found ways of dealing with desperate people through strong boundaries, bureaucracy, and strict enforcement of rules. Independent organizations often stumble, however, especially in the beginning, with being too trusting and boundaryless when confronted with truly needy people whose needs are nonetheless off-mission.

Language issues also add to the confusion. Does, "It's okay" mean "yes" or "no"? When Americans say someone "should" do something, they often mean it as wishful thinking: "As the school's librarian, you should have a Kindle." People in other

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[4] We strongly recommend a book called *African Friends and Money Matters,* which lays out many of these cultural differences.

countries, however, hear that as promising to bring them a Kindle. When asked for financial support or to fund a proposed program, the American response is usually to ask, “What does it cost?” While the American means the question as part of determining whether the request is reasonable, a Ugandan usually hears, “What does it cost?” as agreement to the request, as in “Yes, I will pay for it. How much do I give you?” And in keeping with African expectations about family, an American agreeing to “help” a young person with school fees may find the recipient takes this not as a commitment to contribute a fixed sum of money toward this term’s tuition, but as a pledge to pay for tuition, fees, pens and paper, housing, food, uniforms, books, field trips, and piano lessons – and not just for this upcoming term, but through senior school, university, and maybe medical school or a master’s degree as well.

I (Tweheyo) suggest that missionaries should politely learn to say a decisive no, or to learn to understand questions and phraseology of requests if relationships are to continue and work to thrive. As a Ugandan, I also must note that in historical missionary work, Africans and other developing nations were so much on the receiving end. This cripples development of innovation, etc. Empowering nationals includes not only “teaching them how to fish,” but supporting them in “owning their own fishpond.”

Relationships with supporters

Although professional development agencies appeal to the general public to support their programs, for most of them the bulk of support comes from government and foundation grants. Career missionaries usually receive their support through a “sending” agency, which collects and manages the donations given on the missionaries’ behalf, or from denominations. For independent organizations, financial support comes much less formally from personal friends, family members, colleagues and from the volunteers themselves. For example, for four of the five organizations Schnable presents as case studies, virtually all the donors were known by at least one person on the organization’s board. Independent organizations, being relatively small and limited in scope, generally do not have the resources or the broad appeal to apply for support beyond the founders’ personal networks. This is especially true when the project is one undertaken by a congregation and paid for through the church budget. In these cases, virtually no one outside of that congregation may participate in or contribute to the project.

As an example of the limitations of being an independent organization run by volunteers, consider GraceWorks, the agency referred to earlier. Its founder, Dr. Susan Njemanze is Kenyan by birth but has lived in the United States for 45 years. She founded GraceWorks in her home village to address the needs of children left parentless by the AID epidemic. GraceWorks provides school fees, medical care, and after-school programs for the children, as well as training and support for the extended family members who took these children into their homes.

As GraceWorks provides an important material service, it would be eligible for U.S. government grants. However, government grants come with significant restrictions and administrative and reporting requirements. Few amateur organizations have the time, experience, or, frankly, motivation to meet these requirements. The independent audit required by most granting agencies alone costs several thousand dollars. A private foundation might be less demanding than the government agencies, but most of them will not make a grant that exceeds a certain percentage of the applicant's operating budget. I do not know GraceWork's budget, but as Schnable reports that the median grassroots INGO has an annual budget of less than $25,000 (p. 2), the biggest grant for which most such organizations might apply might not come to much more than the audit would cost them. Many foundations are not interested in funding small projects, and again, it is not worth the agency's time to apply for them.

Suppose that rather than apply for funding from the government or a foundation, Dr. Njemanze decided to launch a marketing campaign to appeal to the public for support. Here is where the importance of personal contact becomes apparent: There are literally thousands of projects around the world to aid poor children. When choosing to support one, donors are likely to choose either a professional agency like ChildFund or World Vision; the project operating out of their own congregation's mission department; or one operated by a friend, family member, colleague, or the family member of the friend, etc.[5] Not only can independent agencies not compete with the professional organizations (with a development staff, accounting department, and an advertising agency), they cannot compete with propinquity.

Personal relationships as a source of support are doubly important for independent missions whose services are wholly spiritual. While faith-based organizations are eligible for government grants, to do so they have to offer a tangible, non-religious good

[5] And do not think that hiring a development professional will generate new donors. In both Dr. Njemanze's experience and mine, the first thing a development consultant does is ask their clients to make a list of everyone they know, then cheer them on to ask for their friends' money themselves.

or service. A group of Christian dentists, for example, would be eligible to apply for a government grant to deliver dental services in a poor country. If the same group visits that same country to pray or lead Bible studies, however, it would not be eligible. Our organization equips leaders to become cultural change agents in their own culture, providing seminars on gender equality and family relationships based on love and mutual respect; on dealing with the needs of abused, orphaned children; and on healing from trauma. These training are highly impactful and in great demand. However, part of what makes our programs successful is because we are teaching from the Bible, which Christians in Africa, India, and Haiti take very seriously. So, no matter how pro-social our impact, no government grants for us.

Another problem with generating broad support for religiously-based programs comes from the deep cultural bifurcation currently experienced in Western Christianity. Once more using our ministry as an example, conservative Christians like that we teach the Bible. However, we use the Bible to teach gender equality, about which conservatives are suspicious. Liberal Christians like that we are helping women, but we are using the Bible to do it…about which liberals are suspicious.

Knowing the importance of personal relationships in generating support for independent missions has huge practical importance, as it can save a lot of wasted effort. For instance, throughout the history of Empower, enthusiastic supporters have made many suggestions for generating support. Years ago, before Instagram, Twitter, etc., someone suggested that we should start a text chain that would go viral, with everyone forwarding our texts to their friends, and everyone texting us $5. (Carrie's daughter told her that we were not cool enough for that.) As each new social media platform became hot, including podcasting, we were advised to try it. [6]

Empower should be part of World Vision, one person urged me (Carrie), but WV is too big for you to approach them directly, she said, so you should join Women of Vision. As it happened, WoV was headquartered nearby, so I joined. I made some wonderful friends, but no one in the WoV leadership were interested in our ministry either. For the problem in working with World Vision and other professional agencies is not that they

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[6] When I (Carrie) received a flyer advertising a training event on podcasting featuring Adam Carolla, I signed up. The venue was held in an improv theatre that held maybe 300 people – nearly all of them men in their 30s and 40s. Never before have I been to an event where there was a long line for the men's room, and nobody but me in the ladies'. While I came hoping for technical advice, the event offered mostly advice on finding sponsors, and penis jokes. Adam Carolla knows his audience.

are ″too big″ to approach directly. The problem is, as Schnable points out, the professional agencies are just not interested in working with amateurs.

Empower should be part of the charity fundraising campaign for government employees, a board member suggested. We went through a substantial process to become part of that and had booths in several fundraising fairs, only to run into the limits of propinquity, or maybe the cool factor, again. When pressed to contribute to charity by their employer, government employees tend donate to the United Way, to an organization that their colleagues were excited about, or to a charity that did something cool, like protect wildlife. Events we attended had at least one such charity, whose booth featured a rescued bird of prey or a wild burro. Missionary work tends to be non-visual – how do we compete with a bald eagle?

We appreciate all this advice and the interest of the people who gave it. We tried all, or nearly all, of the things suggested, but the only people who ever followed or replied to the appeals were people we already knew and who were already following and giving. The truth is most that missions or grassroots INGOs really are *not* cool enough to generate broad interest. Nobody is searching the Internet in search of good causes anyway. Letting friends, family, colleagues, and church community know what the mission is doing is a far more effective way to broaden interest and support than the more impersonal tools available to the professionals.

Relationships with volunteers

The people who sacrifice their time, money, energy, and comfort to serve in independent missions or aid agencies are the most wonderful people on earth. However, these organizations lack the infrastructure (but also the bureaucracy) for working with volunteers. Here are a few observations about the ironies and pitfalls of volunteer relations.

First, for most amateur missions, not only are the missionaries themselves typically serving without pay, but they may also be contributing a lot of their own money to the project as well. This creates an interesting dynamic. Earlier, I cited Schnable in noting that the root of the word "amateur" is *amor*, love: Amateurs do the work because they love the work. However, ironically for amateur/volunteer organizations, people who are willing to make significant personal sacrifices to do work they love may also be quite unwilling to do work that they do not love. This is particularly true for the subject matter experts. This means that independent missions, like the professionals, will

probably have to pay people to perform the skilled but mundane tasks, like accounting, filing tax returns, and website maintenance.

Another problem in voluntary organizations lies in the difficulties of managing or firing a volunteer. Some of people who want to work for charities have their own agenda and are in search of a platform from which to promote their cause. Professional development or mission sending agencies screen potential employees or volunteers rigorously, and if they take on people whose motives or skills do not fit well with that of the organization, they have procedures for managing or removing them. Professional agencies also have rules and explicit lines of authority, which prevents mavericks from going their own way within the agency's program.

Blocked from participation with the professional agency, the alternative is to become an independent agent. Not everyone has the skills or the time to create their own infrastructure, however. If they can attach themselves to an independent organization with a related cause, however, they can promote their own platform as well as have someone else to manage the mundane parts of running an organization. If the agency has tax-exempt status, it will be particularly attractive.

Mavericks can bring innovation and new perspectives to a mission, but they are just as likely to cause dissent, alienate donors and national partners, or to pull the agency off-mission. Amateur organizations do have an advantage in removing these people relative to professional agencies, which must tread carefully in terminating an employee for fear of lawsuits. "Firing" a volunteer, however, can still be a confusing and painful, especially for leaders inexperienced in human relations issues, and even more so if the volunteer is a friend or a member of the same congregation.[7]

A final aspect of the professional/amateur divide is the difficulty independent agencies working far from home have in recruiting young volunteers, who often cannot afford the travel or the time off work, or who may have young families they cannot leave for weeks at a time.

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[7] We noted above Schnable's observation that professional NGOs are not interested in suggestions or offers of labor from amateurs, probably because for them, an amateur agency is just another maverick volunteer.

Push versus pull orientation

At the heart of many of the issues stemming from the independent mission's dependence on personal relationships is the question of whether the agency focuses on supply or demand. Earlier we mentioned that the increasing sophistication of international agencies' intended recipients challenges the professionals' traditional "push," or supply-focused orientation. A push organization is one that provides its intended recipients with what the organization believes the recipients need.

Early nineteenth century proselytizing missions constitute a clear example of "push" or supply-focused agencies. Preaching the Gospel to people who have had no prior exposure to Christianity involved persuading the intended recipients to accept an offered good – in this case, salvation - that they were unaware that they needed. The missionaries had to motivate people to accept a religious practice that was radically different from their own and that moreover implicitly put many aspects of the converts' lives under the regulation of the missionaries. To run up the cost of not accepting this new order, some missionaries motivated compliance not with promises of the blessings of salvation, but with threats of damnation and hell should they not accept it.

Moreover, early international missions usually went hand-in-glove with European colonization and were often extensions of the state church of the colonial power. These "benefactors" not only wanted to save the souls of the peoples being proselytized, but they also wanted to "civilize" them and thereby make them better producers of the resources the colonizers wanted, and better consumers of the goods the colonizers wanted to sell them. Basically this made both the colonizers and the missionaries more concerned with what they wanted the indigenous people to have than with what those people themselves wanted (Ogunbado, 2012).

We do not mean any disrespect to the early missionaries, who literally risked their lives to be of benefit to the people they served. Protestant missionaries provided an important voice in decrying abuses by the colonial powers (Woodberry 2012). Nonetheless, the goods, services, and care they provided were often part of the colonial powers' efforts to co-opt the people whose land, culture, and labor were being conscripted. As much as secular colonizers might have claimed to be the benefactors of those they colonized, the main purpose for colonizing was to extract resources from the colony. Acquiring these resources: the gold, diamonds, coltan, or rubber or other crops, or building the roads, digging the canals, or making the bricks necessary to extract these resources, required the labor of the local men. The local men, however, were not aware

that they needed work. They were, after all, in their own communities and had their own customary work. Like the missionary using threats of hell to convince local people to accept salvation, the colonists had to come up with an incentive to motivate the local men to work for them. Some colonial powers solved this problem by imposing a head tax on all men, which was payable only in a currency available only through working for the colonists. Other colonial powers, like the Belgians under King Leopold in Congo or Christopher Columbus on Hispaniola, made no pretense of beneficence but cut off the hands of reluctant workers.

Formal NGOS themselves are arguably all "push" organizations. While not as self-serving as colonizers and often as self-sacrificing as missionaries, NGOs are none-the-less very much supply-driven organizations. As "professional development agencies," NGOs almost by definition come with the assumption that they, as professionals from a more educated and economically-advanced society, have something to offer that is superior to what their intended recipients already have. Further, gaining support for their programs through grant writing, government contracts, and sponsorships requires pre-determination of what the support will buy. This determines that professional agencies will have strong positions, if not on what they believe their recipients need, at least on what the agency will provide. In addition, some NGOs are arms of political action groups whose interest goes beyond benefiting their recipients to advancing a broader political agenda, such as the education of girls, LGBTQ+ rights or promoting environmental safeguards.

When Helping Hurts, or at Least Misses the Mark

For "push" organizations the agency's most important relationship is with the sending agency, sponsors, denomination, government entity, or ideology that supports them, rather than with the indigenous people they nominally serve. For example, Krause (2014) writes that, despite their good intentions, the actual work of employees of NGOs is driven by the need to be on the look-out for "good projects" – i.e., new programs that will meet the demands of possible funders.

Unfortunately, Westerner's ideas about what people in developing countries need may not jibe with those peoples' actual needs or desires. For example, while it was probably true that people in less-developed countries benefitted from a great many of things offered them by early missionaries, colonizers, and aid agencies, this largesse came with

a tendency to treat the recipient's culture as defective. Such cultural snobbery results in inefficiencies and even harm.[8]

One early example of the inefficiency of disregarding native social practices is that in Africa and India, British colonizers, intent on increasing agricultural yields, came into communities, rounded up all the men, and required them to attend demonstrations of their "superior" European farming techniques. In these regions, however, women do the farming. Training men in European agricultural techniques, however superior these techniques, was a waste of time (Boserup 1970).

As a Ugandan, I (Tweheyo) experience many aspects of the hazards of foreigners implementing programs from an assumption of cultural superiority. Africans traditionally had an informal yet strong system of oral learning, often based on discussion of proverbs, that was used to disseminate and propagate information from one generation to the next. In contrast to this participatory learning, the colonial powers substituted lectures and rote recitation. This eroded the learner's psychological capacities by rendering them passive. Students participated only at the receiving end, by cramming work and essays simply to pass exams. They were not taught to think things through and contribute to the overall studying process.

Further, the colonial powers determined the curriculum without consulting the African stakeholders, which resulted in discouragement and in some instances elimination of innovation and execution. It rather encouraged general knowledge enough for communication and delegation but not aimed at the overall transformation process.

Further, African proverbs, storytelling capabilities, games, clothing, music and art, instruments of cultivation and war/defense, among many, were never encouraged and improved upon but dismissed in favor of the Western (colonial) alternatives. The African innovative spirit was killed, and Africans remained on the receiving, begging end, a phenomenon that has continued even after independence and into the twenty-first century.

Another contributing failure of the colonizers was blanketing everything African as "Animist," demonic, and pagan. African names were stereotyped as diabolical, and in English colonies, only English names were considered appropriately Christian. Hence, names like Tweheyo (which depicts dedication to God), or Kyomugisha, a person

[8] Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert's important book, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor…and Yourself* provides numerous examples of the consequences of providing the wrong solution to other people's problems.

blessed by God, were discarded, or relegated to the periphery in favor of names like Stanley, Livingstone, and Lawrence. These were referred to as Christian names, even though many are neither biblical nor even saint names. Africans were systematically stripped of their Africanness. Even the knowledge of God that the Africans had, however limited, and often misused, was totally ignored and labeled diabolical, and "Western Christianity" was introduced instead, totally obscuring the natives' knowledge. This has contributed to a phenomenon where African Christianity is neither African nor Western but verges on syncretism (Galgalo, 2012; Badiako, 1996).

Another example of the syncretism potential of "push" missions comes from Western Christianity's own incorporation of the traditional gender division of labor into its theology, which it then exported to the mission field. While prior to the Industrial Revolution traditional rural societies throughout the world shared many patriarchal practices, these practices were economically rather than religiously motivated (Miles 2006) – at least, until they were incorporated into the monotheistic religions. For example, as Burundian pastor Yvette Inamahoro Ndayirukiye (2006) writes, prior to colonization women occupied important roles in traditional African religions. Eager to remove women from these positions of authority (and according to Ndayirukiye, to persuade them that their true religious role was serving as housekeepers for the Europeans), missionaries preached on women's sinfulness and on an interpretation of the Bible as teaching male dominance and female submission. One aspect of this was teaching that Woman was cursed by God following the humans' disobedience recorded in Genesis 3. This teaching was common in Western Christianity and can be found even today in conservative American churches, but few Europeans or Americans understand the meaning of a curse in traditional religions, in which cursing is widely practiced. Teaching that all women are sinful and disvalued by God was and still is far too effective in putting them in their place in Africa. This syncretistic justification for male dominance continues to be widespread in Africa, instilling a sense of shame in women for simply being women, justifying their mistreatment and neglect, and damaging family relationships.

Supply-driven organizations and impact

Any organization spending other people's money must be accountable for how they use that money. If the government or a foundation is giving an NGO millions of dollars, they want to know how the money is spent, and that it is having an impact on its intended recipients. The need to demonstrate impact becomes problematic, however, when the agency is driven more by what it wants to offer than by what its recipients

need. An easy way for any agency to demonstrate impact, however, is to cite the number of people who participate in its programs. Most people in poor countries, however, do not get paid if they miss work and will not attend programs that are not meaningful to them. To motivate people to attend their program, in some countries NGOs provide participants with a per diem stipend – i.e., they pay nationals to attend their programs. Journalist Ann Jones, who spent time in Afghanistan following the U.S. invasion of that country following 9/11 attacks, wrote about how she witnessed the same Afghans go from one NGO-sponsored program to another, receiving training in whatever it was the NGOs thought they should know, or doing whatever craft the NGOs thought would be of benefit to them, and collecting per diem. While not in the same league as threatening disinterested participants with hell, NGOs paying participants to attend programs creates expectations that are difficult for amateur agencies to manage.

Pull

As the intended recipients of aid become better educated and more sophisticated, they also become less patient with the ham-handed interference and judgments of foreigners. And while African and Indian Christians speak frankly about the need to change the harmful aspects of their traditional cultures, they are becoming more discerning about which aspects are truly harmful versus which were simply not to European or American tastes. For instance, because African traditional religions used drums to summon the spirits (along with everyone else, it should be noted), the missionaries forbad their use. As seen in Tweheyo's statement above, people in developing countries are becoming more aware of what they are losing with the imposition of foreign culture on their own institutions and more cognizant of "owning the fishpond." They are also becoming more skeptical of Western Christianity as they witness its growing losses and dysfunction and are sometimes repelled by NGOs that attempt to implement programs that violate the traditional sexual morality of developing countries. As they become less interested in the opinions of Westerners, many churches have reclaimed the use of drums and dancing in worship services.

In consequence, we believe that the organizations that succeed in the future will be more focused on the needs of the people they seek to serve. These "pull" organizations will be focused on demand rather than supply, striving to provide the services that their national partners say they need rather than the things the agency wants to give them. Better yet are projects that seek work collaboratively in true partnership, with each side learning from the other.

Independent missions, which often begin at the invitation of a national, are more likely to be "pull" oriented. However, even personal contact is not sufficient to sustain a program if it is not meeting a local need. Consider the example of two American women who formed a non-profit to raise money for a Ugandan pastor who was building a school in a rural area. The parties had a disagreement and broke off their partnership, but the women still wanted to build a school in Africa. Even though they knew other Africans and went as far as Burundi and Rwanda trying to find a site for a school, they were not successful in finding a new partner. It is not that Africa does not need schools, but in most countries, schools must conform to exacting government standards. No one needed a school that the government would not accept. The original national partner understood those requirements, but the Americans were unaware of them, and no one took them up on their offer.

Also, too many independent missionaries seem to believe that they were invited internationally to talk at people. While conferences full of speakers and sermons might sensitize people to an issue, simple declamation without cultural context or a leave-behind piece results in an enthusiastic audience that a week later cannot explain what they learned or remember exactly why they were so excited.[9]

A collaborative model of program building

Early in my work with Empower, I (Carrie) was asked how we got away with telling people that their culture is wrong. My answer is, we do not. In contrast to "push" organizations, pull organizations like Empower go only where they are invited and do not give opinions on cultural matters unless asked. We also eschew the far-too-typical model mentioned above of Westerner missionaries coming to tell people what to do.

Contrast Empower's demand-oriented approach with the colonial, supply-oriented model critiqued above. As people come for the Empower seminar, they are put in gender-balanced groups averaging five participants each and given introductory discussion questions. These questions aim to break the ice, but also help the participants to "own" the training from the outset. The discussions include everyone, and the secretary of the group will report the findings from the group to the plenary session. This model is also aimed at taking participants from the known to the unknown.

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[9] Frankly, inviting a Westerner to come to speak at a conference is an easy way for nationals to co-opt the Westerner's financial support. Indeed, the American women in the example were saddened to learn that their original partner viewed them as mostly a source of funding.

Discussion questions include: What are the burdens of men in your culture? Burdens of women in your culture? What customary practices do you see interfering with Christian marriage? How is modernity or Western influence affecting marriage today?

This group study method continues for the rest of the seminar, with participants passing through the study guide in small groups with a limited supervision of facilitators and reporting to the plenary. It is only then that the facilitator(s) come(s) in to debrief a particular study by enriching it and adding missing links. Otherwise, by the all-inclusive participation in the seminars, people contribute to their own cultural and personal transformation with limited influence from the facilitator.

The Empower model is being used in about 13 countries in Africa, in India, in Haiti and the US. It is used in different institutional, educational, ecclesiastical, and cultural settings, and in all of these, tangible testimonies of transformation, such as harmony between husband and wives, employers and employees, and parents and children have been realized. Proper understanding of the Bible with regard to self and interpersonal relationships promises to be a vanguard for cultural and community transformation across Africa and beyond.

This participatory model, in which participants teach each other what they conclude from each Bible study, and make their own cultural applications, is unusual in Africa. As new as it is to them, however, participants love this approach. In early days, we American facilitators would circulate around the groups while they were working, only to have the participants refuse to give us eye contact. If they were speaking in English before we approached, they would switch to their local language. Obviously, they did not want to be interrupted. We have a hard time getting them to leave their small groups and come back when the time for group study ends. We treat these leaders with respect, and they thank us for it. In return, we learn enormously from them, and feed what we learn from them back into the study guide.

In addition, because the biblical material is so counter-cultural, allowing participants to come to their own conclusions is critical to their accepting it. NGOs and governments are pushing hard to raise the status of women in the countries in which we work, but as our partners note, what governments or NGOs achieve is often superficial. Furthermore, efforts to improve the status of women without addressing the burdens on men can engender resentment. Empowering leaders to become cultural change agents in their own culture offers hope of the positive, meaningful, and lasting transformation that is the true hope of missionary work.

The future of international missions

Obviously, except in regions that make it difficult for missions to work freely, the traditional nineteenth century model of mission as vocational, residential, and lifelong will continue to dwindle. But then, what else from the nineteenth century persists in an age that offers instantaneous virtual access to any place in the globe?

As technology and economic development continue to break down international barriers, more and more Americans will flock to the traditional mission fields, but we suspect that only those that meet a real need will prosper. And eventually, truly effective international missions and aid agencies will fade away as the solutions they develop with the nationals become indigenized.

Indeed, as Philip Jenkins (2007) points out, the future of Christianity lies in the global south, not in the increasingly secular West. Even poor countries are becoming richer, and the "non-Christian past" of the traditional mission field is rapidly receding into the past. Whenever Empower goes into a new area, we tell leaders there that we in the West are counting on them to keep Christianity safe, to sort out true religion from bad culture, whether theirs or ours, and to eventually bring it back to us.

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