

I Meet Two Kinds of People in



Africa

By Glen Schwartz

I recently crisscrossed Africa visiting nine cities in three weeks with another week in Asia on the way home. I keep bumping into two kinds of people in Africa. One kind believes in the capability of the continent to help itself, and the other does not.

In Nairobi I spoke with a driver at the guesthouse where I was staying. As we chatted, I learned that in addition to working as a driver, he is a church planter. (He was actually working as a driver on two twelve-hour shifts back to back at the time we met.) His business card indicated that his title is "bishop". He said he had twenty-three pastors in his care with churches throughout the Nairobi area. His business card also had something on it about a "rehabilitation center." When I asked about that, he said that their churches minister to needy people in the poorer areas of Nairobi. He said, "You know, street children."

I asked where the support comes from for the pastors, the congregations and the rehabilitation center. "It comes from local resources," he said. When I asked how much help comes from overseas, he dismissed the idea of getting assistance from outside Africa.

I went from Nairobi to Lusaka, Zambia and was met at the airport by a well-dressed businessman in a suit and tie. As we chatted on the way into town he told me about a congregation he and his wife started in their home several years ago. They outgrew the living room, then the garage, and now they are meeting in a tent beside the house. The walls of a permanent building are being built around the tent. (The tent will be removed eventually which I found to be creative.) The congregation now has 200 people in

attendance, and they have hired their own full-time pastor and pay him completely from local resources. When I asked how much comes from overseas he also scoffed and said, "None, of course."

I mentioned that there are two kinds of people in Africa. Back at the guesthouse in Nairobi I spoke with several North Americans who were in East Africa on short-term missions. Several said they brought along resources for the projects on which they were working. One woman said she had several suitcases of used clothing to give away in a poor part of the city. Ironically, it was the same community where the bishop's rehabilitation center is located. She also said she brought along some money "just to give away" (her words). I wish I could have introduced her to the Kenyan bishop and the Zambian businessman mentioned above. How I wish those short-termers knew some people like that. But maybe it would take some of their joy away if they found people in Africa standing on their own two feet.

Think about it. Some people believe Africa can do it with local resources and others do not. Both may be looking at or working in the same communities. What strikes me is that it is most often local people who believe that Africa can manage without outside assistance. That idea simply escapes many well-meaning outsiders who feel "called" to Africa. How do you see it? It is worth some reflection. 

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