

LOCAL AFRICAN RESOURCES FROM THE WEST IN AFRICA: INTER-WESTERNER RELATIONSHIP AS THE KEY TO 'LOCAL RESOURCES'



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Africa is an aid-dependent continent! “Foreign aid [is] the predominant source of financial resources for much of the continent” (Moyo 2009:25).¹ How then to raise local resources?

Donors often work on certain principles. One is that they want to work directly with nationals. This can maximise misunderstandings; donors preoccupied with fundraising have little opportunity to understand indigenous contexts. Nationals have little understanding of donor contexts. The result is clashing views.

Some say we need middlemen or “brokers” who understand both the “native context” and the “donor context.” Brokers can bend the ears of donors. Unfortunately, he who in Africa can bend the ear of donors in effect takes the role of a donor. “Brokers” face the same issues as

do donors! Hence, it is hard for brokers to develop normal natural relationships with locals. This applies whether brokers are African or foreign.

King Midas was given a wonderful gift; everything he touched turned into gold. At least he thought this gift was wonderful. Then one day he greeted his beautiful, beloved daughter and she became a statue of gold!² There seems to be parallels between King Midas’ gift and donors on the mission or development-field today.

Breaking out of the vicious cycle of donor identity requires attention to inter-Westerner relationships. Jean Johnson points us towards this in her book, *We are not the Hero* (2012).³ Hero mentality is a problem for Westerners. Popular movies depict lone-ranger Westerners catalysing transformation

in poor communities around the world. As a result, smiling natives live happily-ever-after. The desire to be a hero, i.e. to want heaps of praise from “locals,” can make one suspicious of one’s fellow Westerner!

Baptist Dave went to an African village to dig a well. Pentecostal Steve was down the road planning the building of a school classroom. Dave’s people praising Dave (as people do) had him convinced that his was the best strategy and he was the “good” missionary, not like those others. Steve’s people did the same to him. As a result Dave and Steve doubted each other’s credibility. Each wanted to be the hero.

Missionaries not trusting each other spoils their testimony to nationals. It also means that Steve raises funds for Steve’s projects, and Dave raises funds for Dave’s projects. Steve and Dave each look to their own donors. They

will use their separate donor money for each to look after their own African staff who will work on their own side. Steve won't help Dave and Dave won't help Steve because each thinks he is better than the other, is in competition for donors, and wants the praise of Africans.

"Consider others better than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3). A big question; if Steve runs out of money for building his classrooms, should Dave help him out? Usually, in my experience, he won't. The two are competing. If Steve's donors don't cough up enough money for him, Steve should go back and raise more. But what if Dave did help

Steve? Instead of helping him by giving him money, what if he helps him by sending one of his own local "team" to support him? Dave says to Steve, "Why don't I send one of my workers to help you? He could even assist you in getting some materials."

Steve keeps working on his project. But now, strangely, the African man sent by Dave to supply material and workers has authority. Steve can't control the supply that he needs. He helps out where he can. Being freed from trips back to the West to fundraise, Steve has time to learn the local language and engage in Bible teaching. The resources Steve is using for his building project have

become "local resources!" Steve is no longer a donor, and he has time to serve in the church.

A key to the use of local resources in Christian ministry by Westerners in places like Africa is the way that Westerners relate to one another. 

¹ Moyo, Dambisa, 2009. *Dead Aid: Why aid is not working and how there is another way for Africa*. London: Allen Lane, Penguin Books.

² www.hipark.austin.isd.tenet.edu/mythology/midas.html (accessed February 15, 2013)

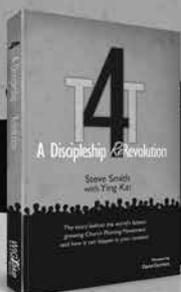
³ Johnson, Jean, 2012. *We are not the Hero; a missionary's guide for sharing Christ, not a culture of dependency*. Oregon: Deep River Books.

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