

Using Foreign Money to Start, Sustain and Speed Up Movements

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Picture this: there was a couple working in a northern province of Cambodia in the late 90s. One day, they shared with other missionaries that they had started many house churches in the area. Their testimony piqued the interest of those missionaries as they too longed for such results. On the one hand, they were elated to hear the good news. On the other, they were curious as to why this couple was so successful when they came in and out of the country and barely spoke the language.

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One day these House Church Movement (HCM) pioneers were waiting alongside the road in town. While waiting, they struck up a conversation with another missionary. As they were chatting, a big truck filled with motorcycles

pulled up alongside of them. Immediately, the couple explained to the missionary that they bought the motorcycles for the house church leaders so they could lighten their load as they spread the gospel to other villages. In the long run, it was a just a short time before the foreign resources bled the life out of the House Church Movement.

Now contrast this story with an account from my friend whom I will call only by her first name, Sarah. Sarah has been working diligently to launch sustainable Disciple Making Movements (DMMs) in Cambodia up to the present day. In one particular situation, Sarah had been visiting a “family of peace” for the purpose of sharing the gospel and making disciples. In this family, a brother and sister in their 20s put their faith and trust in Jesus and it was starting to look like the beginnings of a movement. But as time went along, she ran into a snag when the mother of the family and the older sister asked Sarah for money to buy a motorcycle. Sarah graciously declined to give or borrow the money for this family. From that point on, the mother forbid Sarah from visiting the family ever again.

Bleeding the Life Out of Movements

Wow! Two very different mindsets and methodologies between these two movement catalysts. Sarah was thinking ahead and the other couple was only thinking about the short-term. Sarah worked to sustain and multiply her movement efforts without injecting foreign money and the other couple crippled their movement efforts using foreign money.

Personally, I would rather have potential Persons of Peace reveal the true intentions of their heart or spiritual condition than have them half-heartedly join in a movement effort for Jesus Christ because of mixed motives. Furthermore, Sarah understood that if



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she brought foreign money into the movement at any junction, it would eventually be the very means that killed it. David Garrison, well-known for his descriptive book on Church Planting Movements (CPMs), wrote:

One of the surest ways to cripple a Church Planting Movement is to link church reproduction to foreign resources. Whenever pastors look beyond their own membership and local resources for salaries or buildings, they bleed the life out of their movement.¹

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Why is the Injection of Foreign Funding So Crippling?

Why does the injection of foreign funding bleed the life out of indigenous movements? First, the moment we bring in foreign funds to help at any stage of a locally rooted movement is the very moment that we introduce non-reproducibility and non-scalability into the movement. From that point on, those in the movement will become dependent on outside funds and will stop looking to mobilize those within the movement to support and sustain those aspects. Second, we will fulfill the perception and complaint of the non-believing persons among the Unreached People Groups that foreign money and power are always behind everything to do with Jesus. Third, on the heels of foreign money is always some degree of foreign culture. Even if donors merely enforce accountability measures for the funds, it will inevitably match their systems of reporting, accounting, and appealing to donors. What is more, the recipients will tend to adapt to their donors more so than to their own context and colleagues. Fourth, money that comes from outside instead of from inside the harvest is harmful to the recipients' selfhood, community-image, motivation, determination, unity, self-giving and so much more.

¹ David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God Is Redeeming A Lost World* (WIGTake Resources LLC; 6th Printing edition, 2004).

Why Do We Feel a Need to Inject Foreign Money to Start, Sustain, and Speed Up Movements?

We have been warned and exhorted by people like Garrison that foreign funding can cripple and bleed the life out of movements. So why do we feel a need to inject foreign money into locally rooted movements? I can think of three big reasons why I unwisely used outside funds or was tempted to use outside funds.

First, as an American I am driven like so many others. My culture has taught me that moving things along through my own ingenuity, prowess and weight is worthwhile—even though I continually say that movements are “a move of the Spirit” working through the local people. There were times I wanted to see more progress and thought, “*Ah, if they only had this or that, things would move faster and they wouldn’t struggle so much.*” But every time I moved things along with outside resources, I broke the very rules and rhythms of movements such as simplicity, transferability, local resources, lay leadership, volunteerism and extraordinary prayer. Honestly, sometimes I think our drive to outrun our statistics leads to this sense that we have to artificially inseminate indigenous movements with foreign funding. We have all seen the websites where the numbers increase as we increase our efforts. Might this driven nature of ours actually make us take shortcuts?

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Second, I often felt compassion towards peoples’ plights. I could see that something was hard for them in regard to making disciples or their own family situation. I just wanted to make life and ministry easier for them. Have you watched the *Sheep Among Wolves Volume II* documentary? It seems that the Iranian Jesus-followers wouldn’t think of having foreigners lighten their load.

Suffering has a way of fueling their movement. I fell into the trap of buying two motorcycles for a team of church-planters to share and to use at will because I wanted to make their efforts easier. But this outside intervention made the emerging movement dependent on outside help as everyone on down the generations of multiplication knew where the motorcycles came from and expected the same when it was their turn—there is no such thing as confidentiality in many cultures.

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Third, I was tempted to use funds to accommodate my needs. There was that occasional time that it would be easier to offer a training on CPM or DMM in a centralized location, rather than train in micro-locations where local people didn’t have to travel. You know the drill—save time in my busy schedule and my back from the grueling travel along rugged roads. But in these centralized training cases, there are suddenly costs involved for lodging, food and transportation. Then comes the inevitable question, “Jean, will you subsidize the training?” With this price tag comes modeling without the possibility of reproducibility.

In general, movements tend to start out as grassroots, organic, non-institutional and non-hierarchical structures. But as these movements grow, we desire to track, network and develop leaders and leadership for the movements. It is often at this stage that we want to relax the reproducibility and self-sustaining principles. Outside funding begins to pour in to support top movement leaders. These leaders will spend time in other countries raising funds to support themselves and their movements.

Another reason we desire to get overly involved is that we are used to and we like leading the pack. If we provide funds, we somehow become integral to the movements in other peoples’ countries. It feeds our need to be the pioneers, the frontrunners, the needed and the indispensable. What is often labeled as partnership is really

sponsorship, which has no degree of reciprocity built into it—it's just the wealthy serving in patron roles of the relationships. J. R. Meydan and Ramsay Harris have revealed that the Muslim world has a disproportionately large number of Christian donors seeking partnership in relationship to a disproportionately tiny number of recipients, which means that foreign money can't help but cause crippling effects.²

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I have seen organizations that center their vision and mission around partnering with local leaders in least reached areas of the world to help develop DMMs and CPMs, all the while raising millions of dollars. I know of one group that was lamenting about another group that was coming to their area. They were afraid their Western-funded movement models would undermine all their

hard work in developing movements that were self-sustaining and self-supporting.

Yes, But . . .

You may conclude that minuscule help is not a big deal in the larger scheme of things. Dmmsfrontiermissions.com posted a blog about how members of a short-term missions team gave their boots to new disciple-makers in Bangladesh because they were originally wearing flip flops through monsoon-flooded areas as they visited villages to share the gospel. The visiting team thought this small act of love would be a great blessing but their gift of boots had the opposite effect. The newer disciples of this movement stopped going out and about to share the gospel or find Persons of Peace. They reckoned that only people who owned boots should do that type of ministry.³

One other area that messes us up is the deduction that social-economic help and projects used to gain favor 'get a pass' from being reproducible. But how can this be? If we use non-reproducible compassion services to enter an area and to gain approval, how will the ordinary believers of the second, third, and fourth generation work their way into new areas? I remember the day I helped a church-planter start a business to support himself. He retrieved water from a source and brought it to the village in a truck. Those who paid for his services had the water poured into their cisterns. This livelihood that

² J. R. Meydan and Ramsay Harris, "Are We Nourishing or Choking Young Plants with Funds," *From Seed to Fruit*, ed. J. Dudley Woodberry (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2011), 226.

³ Dmmsfrontiermissions.com, "Money — It Both Helps and Hurts," June 10, 2017.

was supposed to help him to support himself and readily relate to his neighbors actually backfired. His neighbors were jealous that he received a fair equity loan that wasn't available to them. They also concluded that he was a believer in Jesus merely because of the help he received, which weakened his credibility.

Let's Make the Most of It

It is really amazing to think what we could do to reverse misperceptions among the Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus by not funding locally rooted movements.

Buddhists

All Buddhists we interviewed expressed the view that there were foreign funds in the attempt to convert Buddhists to Christianity. Therefore, evangelical expansion in the country has been classified as "unethical conversion." In this way, Buddhist activists have brought the issue to the realm of public debate and have created a Buddhist public hostility to Christianity in general.⁴

Muslims

Muslims assume that the principal methods Christian missionaries intentionally use to lure Muslims away from Islam and into Western Christian culture is by buying them off with gifts and money . . .⁵

Hindus

Foreign funding contributes to India's significant resistance to Jesus, even when given to "reach India." Hindus are deeply aware of this foreign funding . . . Because of the incredible amounts of money involved, Hindus also use a metaphor of the "Christian enterprise" as *missionary or conversion business*.⁶

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4 G. P. V. Somaratna, "Buddhist Perceptions for the Christian Use of Funds in Sri Lanka," *Complexities of Money and Missions in Asia*, ed. Paul De Neui (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2012), 8.

5 J. R. Meydan and Ramsay Harris, "Are We Nourishing or Choking Young Plants with Funds," *From Seed to Fruit*, ed. J. Dudley Woodberry (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2011), 226.

6 Paul Pennington, *Christian Barriers to Jesus* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2017) 184-186.

You see?! We finally have some methods among our global mission realm that have built within its DNA a way to reverse these Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu barriers to Jesus—DMMs and CPMs that are meant to function with "less is more." The surest way to empower movements is to encourage the people of these movements to look to their own people and resources for their needs. Let's make the most of these best practice movement models that we have in our mission toolbox.

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We Need to Believe

We need to believe in God enough to trust Him with these movements around the world.

We need to believe in the people of these movements enough to trust them with the development of their own movements. We need to believe in the DMM and CPM principles and practices enough to let them work.

I would love to talk more with you about this. I wish we talked about this elephant in the room more often. I wish people who have stifled or killed movements because of injecting outside funding would write about it. We need to hear these types of stories too; otherwise, we keep making the same mistakes.

I conclude with this final thought. The greatest missionary ever, the apostle Paul, did not become a donor or financial sponsor of the churches he started. He expected them to be reproducible and locally sustainable. Let's follow in his footsteps. 

