

# Raising LOCAL Resources

by Glenn Schwartz

## Spirituality and Personal Economics

The complexity of the physical world fascinates me. There is much of it that is beyond our understanding. Like the physical world we admire and enjoy but do not fully understand, there are some parts of the economic world that are also beyond our understanding. For example, who can say that what he or she knows about global economics is complete? Or who can say that what we prescribe will work at all times and in every place? The world of economics is far more complex than that.

While we may not have all the answers, there are principles in both economics and church planting that can help us both inform and transform the world in which we live. Whether we look at economic issues—or the challenge of the missionary task—two things pertain: 1) God's rules are important, and 2) He blesses those who follow them.

A few examples are in order. Things like *greed and corruption* break God's laws and have the potential to affect millions of people in places where they are practiced. *Unfair trade practices* allow some to become wealthy, while others become victims and suffer the effects of poverty. *Unwise use of time, money and other resources* can ruin the lives of those who make the decisions as well as those affected by them, such as children of alcoholic parents. *Unwise decision-making* can squander the resources of individuals, churches, governments and other institutions. One could add *lack of motivation, loss of dignity and broken human relationships* to the list of contributing factors.

Notice the italicized words in the previous paragraph. Each one has both the origin and solution in the realm of the spiritual. My first observation



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is that unless those spiritual issues are addressed, we should not be surprised that things like poverty and unhealthy dependency develop. A second observation is that if these are essentially spiritual issues, then simply providing charitable handouts is not a substitute for long-term transformation. A third observation—and this is very important—is that not all who suffer economic hardship do so of their own making. This means that those of us who are able, should stand ready to help those who are in need—to go to bat for them, if necessary—when they are unable to do so for themselves.

Spiritual transformation represents good news with long-lasting potential. Years ago in West Africa, a group called Faith and Farm introduced improved agricultural techniques to local farmers. They taught Biblical principles regarding the resources God put within their reach. Faith and Farm trainers knew that the mastery of better agricultural techniques could lead to farmers becoming more successful, but they were interested in more than just economic improvement. Their goal was to help believers learn how to use their wealth to provide for their families, help their neighbors and support their local churches. In other words, they taught that Christian stewardship should be built into the earning process.

God wants our spirituality to connect with the rest of our life, including both personal economics and that of the society around us. When done appropriately, what follows is transformation of a wholesome and long-lasting nature. Those who practice Biblical principles not only become better off personally, they become the hands and feet of Christ in the world in which they are called to serve.

There are many places in Scripture where spirituality and economics come together. One of the best examples is in 1 Chronicles 29, where King David is praying a public prayer before his people. (This was on the occasion of raising funds for building the Temple.) First, he draws attention to God's glory and greatness (verses 10–13). That puts God into perspective. Second, he reminds us of who we are in comparison by asking, "Who am I and who are my people that we should be allowed to give to God?" (verse 14). That puts us, as human beings, into perspective. Third, he says that everything we have comes from God's hand, and we are only giving back some of what He has already given to us (verse 14). That puts our possessions into perspective.

If we are to understand how personal economics and spirituality fit together, then a Biblical view of our possessions is a good place to begin. But when we begin to go down that road, it has the potential to affect how we work, give, share and worship. And that is real transformation, not just economic improvement. f