



# RAISING LOCAL RESOURCES

When God Is In It ...

GLENN SCHWARTZ, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WORLD MISSION ASSOCIATES

Several years ago, someone gave me a small sign for my desk that reads “When God is in it, it is fun to watch.” I have since concluded that when God is in it, you may find yourself running just to keep up. That is where I feel like I am right now.

For the past 25 years or so I have been traveling to various parts of the world raising awareness about the problem of unhealthy dependency in the Christian movement. Most of this has been done in East, Central and Southern Africa. But I have also done it in West Africa, the former Soviet Union, Latin America, Asia as well as North America and Europe. I must admit that there were some times when I wondered whether anyone was listening and especially whether anyone was willing to change.

I am not wondering about those things right now. I am watching in amazement at how many people are not only listening, but are taking seriously the challenge of overcoming unhealthy dependency. In the past few years, two Ph.D.-level dissertations have been done on unhealthy dependency. At least two more doctoral dissertations are researching one or another of the issues related to healthy sustainability. Several others done by African church leaders made the issue of local sustainability a major part of their Ph.D.-level research.

In addition, a number of recent books show that not only in the Christian movement, but also in aid, government and secular circles this issue is being given attention. See the list at the end of this article.

But what is happening in East Africa and elsewhere is even more of a reason

to feel encouraged. In Uganda, Zambia, the former Soviet Union and Cambodia there are pastors and missionaries who are conducting seminars, writing articles and speaking out about unhealthy dependency in the Christian movement.

Several pastors in Uganda have been responding to invitations to conduct self-reliance seminars not only in their own country, but Kenya, Burundi, Tanzania, Zambia and Sierra Leone. Some are conducting seminars in Malawi and Mozambique. If you want to hear from African church leaders about avoiding or overcoming unhealthy dependency, these people can help. Most encouraging, they are not waiting for someone from outside their countries to provide the airfare to get to the places where they are invited. Surely that is cause for rejoicing. One Ugandan pastor taught self-reliance principles for a week in Kenya and almost immediately saw the fruits of his labor. The people in the diocese which he visited decided to collect enough money to purchase a vehicle for their bishop. Imagine what would happen if that kind of thing became widespread across Africa, Asia and Latin America!

In order to encourage each other, church leaders in East Africa are gathering to discuss how self-reliance principles can be promoted effectively. Their first consultation will be held in Nairobi in November. In addition to those from East Africa, participants are expected from England, USA, Cambodia, Nepal and possibly India. In subsequent issues of this column you will learn more about what is being called a Global Self-Reliance Network.

Several things characterize those who

are participating in the formation of this self-reliance movement. One is the acknowledgement that unhealthy dependency has been unchallenged long enough. In other words, “business as usual” is no longer an option. Second, they can point to places where they see things changing. They have agreed that there is little value in continuing to “plead poverty” (their term) while ignoring the resources God has put close at hand. If that revolutionary idea spreads throughout Africa and elsewhere, we should all brace ourselves for change unlike anything we have seen before. We know it can be done; and when it happens, people in many places may find themselves running just to keep up.

Remember, we do not deal with the problem as an end in itself, but so that the Church can overcome it and become involved in Christ’s Great Commission. That is what it is all about. Be sure to check out these important books. f

Corbett, Steve and Brian Fokkert. *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor ... and Yourself*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009.

Lupton, Robert D. *Compassion, Justice and the Christian Life: Rethinking Ministry to the Poor*. Ventura: Gospel Light Publications, 2007.

Moyo, Dambisa. *Dead Aid*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2009.

Greer, Peter and Phil Smith. *The Poor Will be Glad: Joining the Revolution to Lift the World out of Poverty*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009 (To be released in November 2009)

Little, Christopher. *Mission in the Way of Paul*. New York: Peter Lang Publishers, 2005.

Schwartz, Glenn. *When Charity Destroys Dignity: Overcoming Unhealthy Dependency in the Christian Movement*. Lancaster: World Mission Associates, 2007.