

24:14 Goal



Movement engagements in every unreached people and place by 2025 (48 months)

Use of Outside Funding In Multiplying Disciples and Churches

BY STEVE PARLATO

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I was leading a meeting of about 30 local national church leaders from various different ethnic groups. I asked everyone, "What's the biggest struggle you're facing?" One leader from the Hmong tribe stood up and said their biggest problem was that salaries had been cut and *the ministry of the church was suffering*. He explained that the national denomination office had been sending a salary subsidy each month (received from foreign donor sources) for the leaders of his local church.

"Thank you, teacher," I replied. "Allow me to ask a few questions, to understand how the local church ministry is suffering. I know in your tribe you train up Theological Education by Extension (TEE) small group leaders each year. When the subsidies were coming, how many TEE small group leaders did you train up each year?"

He said, "Two or three new leaders each year."

I continued, "In the year since the subsidy was cut, how many TEE small group leaders have you trained?"

"We have trained two or three leaders."

"Let me see if I understand correctly. You have trained the same number of leaders, with or without subsidy."

"Yes," he agreed.

My second question, "In the typical week when subsidies were given, how much was the weekly church offering?"

He answered an amount. Then I asked, "Since the subsidy was cut, what has been the typical weekly offering?" He said the offering had more than doubled!

"How can that be?" I asked.

He replied, "It's very obvious why: because everyone realized that this church depended on the local members to make it work." They showed their ownership of the church by giving.

"Teacher, please indulge me with one final question. How many people did you baptize each year while receiving the subsidies?"

He answered, "Typically one new baptism a year."

"How many baptisms a year, since you cut the subsidy?" He explained that there were about 10 people baptized during that year. "Oh that's wonderful! What accounts for this significant increase?"

“Oh, that is very easy to explain. Before, when we received the salary, the central denomination specified which villages we were to do outreach and then only in our local area. When the salaries weren’t being given, we could go wherever the Spirit of God led us. We could go visit our relatives and friend connections in other districts and they were much more open to us and the message of Christ.”

This spontaneous interaction illustrates some ways the use of outside funding can undermine kingdom growth and hinder true generational disciple-making and church multiplication.

“So let me re-cap to see if I understand correctly. Since the salary was cut, you have been able to train the same number of small group leaders each year, double the offerings in your church and you are 10 times more effective in evangelism. Can you explain to me how the *ministry of the church has suffered* by not receiving salaries?”

This spontaneous interaction illustrates some ways the use of outside funding can undermine kingdom growth and hinder true generational disciple-making and church multiplication. Though it embarrassed the leader involved, it profoundly impacted many of those present.

Outside funding of local church leaders to carry out the normal operations of a local church undermined the connection between the local members and their local leadership. Outside funding reduced local giving as people did not see the need to give when easier-found money could be had.¹ Local ownership of the church’s ministry life was reduced by the presence of outside donors. Not mentioned in that

1 Stout, Ken (2008). MA Thesis: *Fostering Sustainability & Minimizing Dependency in Mission Finances*. 1-2.

meeting was the additional fact that the pastoral support came with conditions and expectations on the denomination and the local church.

I have observed these and other negative dynamics caused by outside salaries at the local church level in dozens of churches around that country. No one pretends money has no role in ministry and the launching of many churches. However, the source of money and the way money is used will have a profound impact on what happens. Introducing outside funding to local churches for those churches to carry out their basic functions as a church will nearly always undermine movement.

Other movement catalysts around the world have reached similar conclusions, concerning some good ways and some bad ways to use outside money in catalyzing movements. David Hunt, based on his research and close connection to movements in Africa, points out that outside funding can easily introduce foreignness into a ministry. That, in turn, can undermine a movement and local ownership.

If the church receives support, either in the form of support for the *local* church planter or pastor, ... then the model of church carries a foreign element. Foreign funding of church buildings has meant the community received something they could not produce *all by themselves*. For the church to replicate this in the next community, it must wait for additional support from outside.²

A second example comes from Wayne Allen’s doctoral research on the impact of subsidizing national church workers in Indonesia. He concluded that “the growth of the national church plateaued or halted when the mission began to subsidize the national church workers.”³ This presents a sober warning to all who are serious about the multiplication of churches.

2 Hunt, David F. (2009). Doctoral dissertation: *A Revolution in Church Multiplication in East Africa: Transformational Leaders Develop a Self-Sustainable Model of Rapid Church Multiplication*. 114

3 Allen, Wayne. “When the Mission Pays the Pastor.” *Mission Frontiers*, January-February 1999.

Some uses of outside funds nearly always undermine the potential for a movement. These should be avoided:

1. Salaries or salary subsidies for pastors or church leaders so they can carry out the basic functions of a local church (Acts 2:36-42). Such basic functions include but are not limited to evangelism, discipleship and regular worship services.
2. Funding local church buildings, including constructing extensions to the homes of house church leaders to increase the meeting room size.
3. Renting facilities for local churches to meet.
4. Sending church leaders for multiple years of residential Bible school or seminary in another region or another country. Most of those who do this have been trained out of their usefulness in the village pioneer work where they came from, and a large number never return to their unreached area to pioneer new works, but rather seek out paid church staff positions, for which their seminary training prepared them.
5. Activities which a local church has already funded themselves, but a donor wants to see done more quickly or more widely. We have found it much healthier to allow ministries to grow at a rate that local leaders can handle. Funding done to accelerate activities has resulted in short-term gains, but unfortunately, this establishes a pattern of thinking that things can only happen when an outside donor is driving things along.
6. These five funding activities have at times given a short-term boost, but in every case we know of, set down unreproducible patterns, undermined local churches' ownership and responsibility, and created unsustainable patterns in the multiplication of disciples and churches. Put another way, the DNA of these funding efforts runs counter to real multiplication of disciples and churches.

Some uses of outside funds have consistently helped movements start or expand.

Based on interviews with movement leaders and personal experience, here are some uses of outside funding that have proven to help catalyze movements:

1. Training in the core paradigms and practices of disciple and church multiplication. When funding multiplication training, always require a local contribution. For example, a local host church could provide housing and food, and participants could contribute food or funds. Movement leaders should be trained locally and on the job. Short term extension learning, which keeps movement practitioners in their context and actively engaged in ministry, has also proven helpful.
2. Travel money and some incidentals to help area or regional community of practice groups meet on a regular basis for training input, problem solving and encouragement. The cross pollination at these sharpening times has consistently been a boost to seeing movements launch and expand.
3. Low-cost equipment such as small speakers used with SD cards, audio oral Bibles, and printed Scripture or Scripture portions.
4. Simple reproducible entry strategies to establish relationships in unreached areas or communities where there is no prior connection. Movements expand primarily along relational lines but will also need to discover access entry strategies into areas where there is no prior relationship. Connecting with communities in pioneer settings in order to share the gospel may require some funding. Care is needed not to create expensive or complex entry approaches which cannot be reproduced by others. Reproducible entry strategies are those that average local believers and simple churches can copy and utilize in many locations.
5. Disaster relief funds for specified activities *and* for a limited period of time. After a disaster such as famine, tsunami, earthquake, war,

or epidemic, many needs and opportunities arise that can become very fruitful for finding Persons of Peace and establishing new groups and simple churches. Many movements report that the heroic efforts of their members, which were funded largely from local funds and some outside funding, during the COVID-19 pandemic, have led to greater fruitfulness than in previous years.

6. Pioneer settings may present a need to place workers to catalyze movement. One fruitful approach has been one-time funding to send mature movement leaders and their families to establish business start-ups. These not only support the family but have generated profits to help establish other similar pioneer start-ups.
7. Projects that support catalyzing movement, but clearly lie beyond the skill level and/or finances of a local simple church or church network. Some examples would be Bible translation, producing media such as the Jesus film, or creating online media for movements. Effort is still needed to foster initiative and ownership by any local churches that will benefit from such a project.
8. Financial subsidy and travel money for proven *church multipliers, multiplication trainers and regional catalysts*. These three roles are described in the “five levels of leadership” often seen in catalyzing movements. See Steve Addison⁴ and Nathan Shank’s⁵ writings which have developed these concepts. We have found outside funding helpful at these three levels. However, introducing funding for local people to do evangelism and gather a church in their local area (*seed sowers and church-planters*) has consistently been detrimental, as this article’s opening story illustrates.
9. From lessons learned in Bangladesh, Richard Reach⁶ shares that it is essential to establish a local committee for financial accountability when outside foreign funding is used. The outside liaison or donor needs to develop and

maintain close personal relationships with those receiving funds, and to insist on accountability. Accountability needs to be adapted to the local cultural context rather than just exporting strict Western standards of finance, lest the relationships involved derail.

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Movements thrive when local disciples, by the power of the Holy Spirit, spontaneously take the gospel to family, friends, neighbors and coworkers. In order for the kingdom to expand through spontaneous initiative, an outside catalyst needs to allow space for local insiders to pursue God’s mission. Spontaneous multiplication of disciples happens best through the abilities and financial resources of the local church and believers. For that reason, we need to *seriously avoid* uses of outside funding which undermine potential for a movement, and limit funding to uses which have shown potential to help a movement start or expand.

For further reading:

- Corbett, Steve, and Brian Fikkert. *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor and Yourself*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2012.
- Reach, Richard. *Movements that Move: Seven Root Principles Driving Movements*. St Charles, IL: Church Smart Resources, 2016.
- Lupton, Robert D. *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help, And How to Reverse It*. San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2012.
- Saint, Steve. *The Great Omission: Fulfilling Christ’s Commission Completely*. Edmonds, WA: YWAM Publishing, 2001. See chapter 7: “Money Matters More than You Know.”
- Schwartz, Glenn. *When Charity Destroys Dignity: Overcoming Unhealthy Dependency in the Christian Movement*. Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2007.

4 Addison, Steve. *Pioneering Movements: Leadership that Multiplies Disciples and Churches*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2015.

5 Shank, Nathan. “5 Levels of Movement Leadership” *Mission Frontiers*, March-April 2016. 25-27

6 Personal interview, January 2016