

Dependency: When Good Intentions Aren't Enough

(Glenn M. Penner, Communications Officer, The Voice of the Martyrs - April 25, 2002)

Terms Defined

Dependency: most often used to describe those in society who are unable to care for themselves. As used in this paper, it refers to a state where Christians as individuals or as a congregation have allowed themselves to become reliant on another outside group or individual for financial and material means and, sometimes, administrative guidance, and are not, therefore, functioning in an indigenous manner, as defined below. The assumption by the dependent is that they cannot accomplish what God is calling them to do without foreign assistance, nor should they be expected to.

Indigenous: those things that are owned and controlled by the people of which they are a part. An indigenous church may be identified as one that is 1) self-imaged, 2) self-functioning, 3) self-determining, 4) self-supporting, 5) self-propagating, and 6) self-giving. This is not to say that such a congregation may not find itself in need of assistance from time to time, but ordinarily, it could function as defined here without regular outside intervention. When such assistance is necessary, ideally, it would come from local sources or from those from as close of geographical proximity as possible.

Paternalistic: an unhealthy parental role in a relationship assumed when one party believes that he/she must take care of a weaker party who would do themselves and others harm if left to themselves.

Identification and Formulation of the Principles and Issues Involved

Merely stating that The Voice of the Martyrs believes in equipping without creating dependency and that we will maintain and promote the persecuted church's ability to be self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating and resist any programs or ministry that would detract from this does not guarantee that we will do it. The fact that such a statement exists in our Core Values is an admission that we have failed to do this in the past and that this remains a concern. Often we inherit situations that we did not create. But this does not mean that we must settle for the status quo or excuse ourselves and continue engaging in activities that we know are detrimental. As servants of the Persecuted Church, we have no business adding to the suffering of our brothers and sisters by maintaining or creating dependency that will only hinder their witness and even threaten their very existence.

³ *Galatians 6:2 with its admonition to "bear one another's burden and thus fulfill the law of Christ" is often pointed to a proof text to support the financing of national workers. This is illegitimate. The "burdens" that Paul is speaking of in this context are moral lapses, temptations, and guilt, not financial needs (which appears nowhere in the context). But even if one wanted to rip this verse from its context, one would then have to answer Paul's equally forceful admonition to all that we should bear our own load (6:5).*

How is dependency evidenced?

Dependency is probably most clearly evidenced when we see individuals, organizations, or congregations consistently relying on others to meet their needs rather than on God and the resources that He has already provided or has promised to provide. A church cannot be both indigenous and dependent as the following chart demonstrates:

A church that is indigenous is:	A church that is dependent is:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Self-imagined <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It views itself as the Body of Christ in its local situation, independent of the mission. 2. Self-functioning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is capable of carrying on all of the normal functions of a church – worship, Christian education, evangelism, care, etc. 3. Self-determining <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It can and does make its own decisions 4. Self-supporting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It carries its own financial responsibilities and finances its own service projects. 5. Self-propagating <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sees itself as responsible for carrying out the Great Commission. 6. Self-giving <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knows the social needs of its community and endeavors to meet those needs with what means that it has. Individuals in the church recognize and participate in financially supporting the ministries of the church. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mission-imagined <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It views itself essentially as an extension of the foreign mission/denomination. 2. Semiautonomous-functioning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It functions autonomously within guidelines from the outside and subject to watchful scrutiny and correction. Looks to the outside for funding for programs that it assumes are necessary because of the example of their founders. Worship styles, evangelistic methods, programming tends to imitate that of the West. 3. Unable to make most decisions without the go ahead of the mission or an outside entity. Outside entity dictates how funding is to be used. 4. Outside-supported <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is on permanent life support from outside sources. Does not believe that they will ever be able to accomplish what God wants it to do without outside funding. The outside source designates how the funds will be used. 5. Directed-propagation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church plans outreaches based on means that will appeal to outside supporters. Outsiders dictate how the funds are to be used (local missionaries and evangelists, crusades, Jesus films, etc.). 6. A contact for outside support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies local needs and then makes the need known to outsiders for funding. Looks for projects that they know will appeal to outside sources, rather than on real needs. Individuals in the church typically give less to the church than they are capable of, while allowing others to support the church.

What are the negative aspects of outside funding of nationals?

1. It has no biblical support and, indeed, may be considered unbiblical (as demonstrated above)
2. Often destroys the reputation of local church leaders in the eyes of the community
3. Hinders the expansion of the Christian movement
 - a) not enough money in the eyes of the dependent
 - b) money that could go to evangelism is used to subsidize national wages, projects, etc.

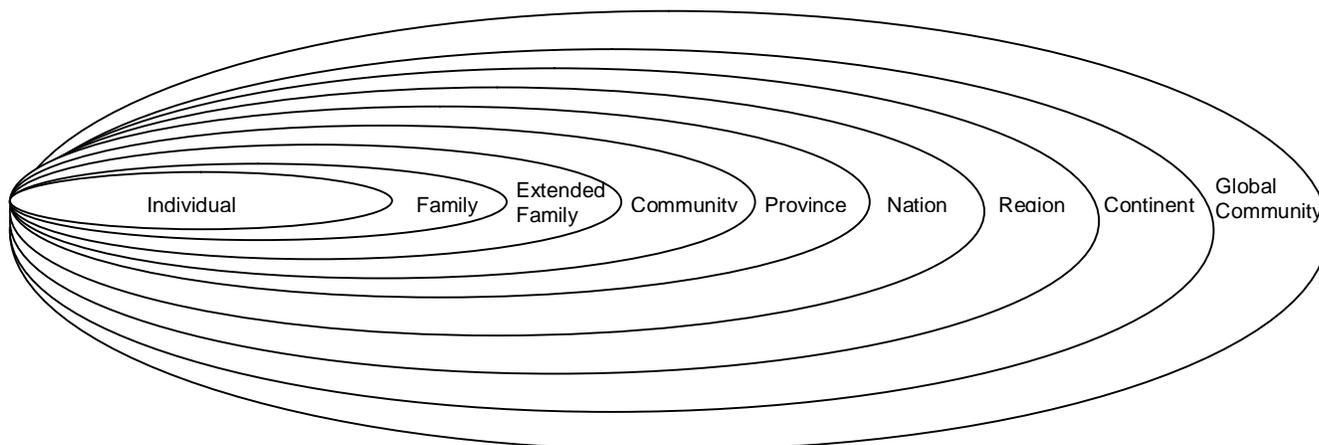
4. Can create jealousy among other churches who do not receive outside funding
5. Can be detrimental to indigenous works that "cannot compete" with the resources made available
6. Cripples the national church from the inside, as its members feel little motivation to give. Robs the dependent church of the blessings of participation in the evangelization of the world.
7. Exports and reinforces a materialistic mentality that it already rampant in the western church.
8. Discourages local initiative in designing culturally appropriate means and methods of evangelism and church life.
9. Robs the dependent church of self-respect that comes from seeing God provide.
10. Outside funding may actually contribute to keeping dependent churches poor.
11. Outside funding is not a reproducible methodology.
12. Sends the message that the spread of the gospel is dependent upon paid professionals
13. Reinforces the thought in a society that Christianity is a foreign religion.
14. Creates a mercenary spirit, where workers compete with each other to make contacts with western Christians.
15. Bypasses local church accountability. The donor calls the shots. Additionally, national workers, whose salaries are paid for from abroad, cannot effectively be held accountable by local church leaders who have no input in their support.
16. The support of national pastors has been demonstrated to actually hinder or even halt church growth.

How is dependency created?

1. Usually through good intentions. North Americans have a great desire to "do something." This orientation emphasis often results in the development of dependency. Without a proper understanding of how to help, we end up doing things that nationals could do for themselves or which we think would be necessary should we live in their society. Guilt over our own prosperity causes us to try to give national churches what we have or what we think is essential. Our penchant for helping the "poor benighted natives" causes us to give without thinking through the long-term consequences of our help. Our obsession with cleanliness and shelter causes us to solve problems that, within a society, may not be perceived as being priorities.
2. Western missions, by their example in the past, often convinced nationals that all pastors, missionaries and evangelists should be paid professionals and often paid them out of their mission funds. Once started, this cycle is very hard to break.
3. Western mission executives promote "partnership" in a form that creates and perpetuates a situation where one partner receives and the other gives. True partnership is reciprocal and may not even include funding.
4. The paternalistic attitude that our way is the best way is incipient, despite our attempts to counter it, or that nationals cannot be trusted to ever better their condition.
5. The western belief that money can solve almost any problem.
6. Our desire to get the "best bang for the buck" makes us think that supporting nationals (who are inevitably cheaper to support) must be a good investment.
7. It is easier to raise money for national workers than for projects that are less attractive sounding to donors. The most strategic ministries and projects do not typically lend themselves to easy fund-raising.
8. An unwillingness or lack of expertise to do the hard work of developing strategies that can assist those in need and enhance the church's ability to help itself.
9. Busy national leaders, seeing the eagerness of westerners to help and the vast amount of money available, conclude that is easier to raise money from overseas than locally.
10. Lack of education on the part of busy mission executives regarding the effects and causes of dependency pushes the issue to the background in the face of administrative and funding raising concerns.

How can we avoid creating dependency

1. Never do for others what they can do for themselves.
2. Avoid child sponsorships in areas where God has provided other legitimate mechanisms (e.g. orphanages in places where God has provided the extended family to care for that need)
3. Do not send funds to individuals or church leaders whose income is not known by the people in his/her church. It is always better to give through a national organization than directly to an individual.
4. Be careful about providing scholarships for church leaders who will be educated out of their own context and away from the reality of life among their own people.
5. Avoid building church buildings for people who can build adequate one for themselves. People can have a church building equal in quality to the homes they live in.
6. Avoid glittering projects that are out of character in the communities in which they are placed.
7. Be careful about aid projects that may result in lowering the price of local commodities in a community already struggling to survive economically.
8. Don't subsidize literature which lowers its value in the eyes of those who purchase it. Give it a fair market price.
9. Invest in ministries that do not have a natural constituency (e.g. radio broadcasts, campus ministries, Bible translation programs), not in churches that should be developing their own giving constituency.
10. Invest in projects that break dependency (e.g. employment creation projects, revolving micro-loans, literacy projects, education, etc.)
11. Do not underwrite 100% of a ministry's need or a project. Seek to include local resources.
12. Give resources based only on need.
13. Do not finance local pastors and churches. History has shown conclusively that foreign funding of church salaries and churches is a sure way to create dependency and to hinder the growth of the church.
14. Financing national church planters and missionaries is fraught with difficulties and should be entered into only carefully. Support should be cut off once the church has been established (50 individuals is usually considered a viable congregation).
15. When aid is needed, resources should be sought in as close of geographical proximity as possible.
(Chart taken from: Guideposts for Giving – Glenn Schwartz (Mission Frontiers, Sept. 2001: 20-23)



Development & Implementation of Policies/Guidelines

Some general ramifications from this research

1. When developing Project Profiles for The Voice of the Martyrs, one of the key issues we will want to take seriously is whether this project is, even inadvertently, creating dependency. All overseas programs, including short-term ministries, must be evaluated as to their dependency creating potential. While this may, initially, cause a degree of paranoia and insecurity, causing us to wonder whether we can do anything, with time, as we take into consideration the various ways that we can avoid dependency (see above), it will become more natural and we will have the satisfaction of knowing that we are fulfilling God's call on our mission in line with principles that are based on the principles in His Word.
2. It may become a greater ministry of The Voice of the Martyrs to coordinate and motivate the distribution of geographical resources, rather than seeking to meet all needs ourselves. We may need to start seeing ourselves more as matchmakers or advocates rather than knights in white armour. Less glamorous, to be sure, and harder work, but ultimately more effective not only for ourselves but for those whom we purpose to serve.
3. We may be misunderstood as being judgmental of the programs of other missions, if we refuse to participate in programs that we perceive as being dependency creating.
4. We must understand that this is a process and that there are no simple or "one size fits all" solutions to the issue, particularly as it relates to sponsorship programs. The desire to simplify has led to much of the problems inherent in such programs. Simply saying, "For \$50 you can sponsor a national pastor" is foolish given the different economies of the world. In some places this is 5 times the monthly salary of the average church member! This is a sure dependency-creating situation. We will have to tailor make any sponsorship program that we engage in and this, inevitably, means time and money.

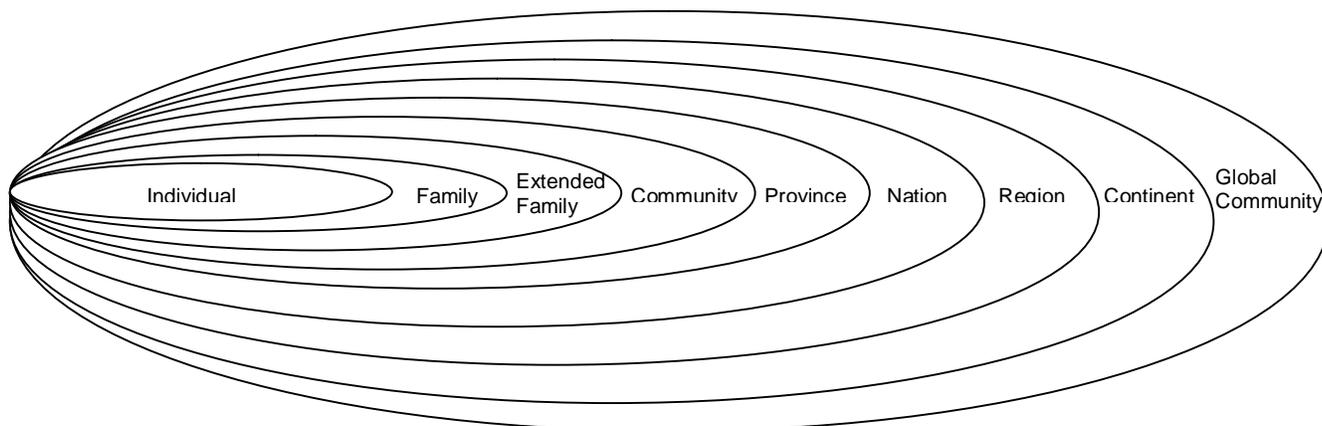
Final Thoughts

1. We must understand the issue of dependency and continue to learn all that we can.
2. We must stop doing what is wrong
3. We must start doing what is right
4. We must realize that this is a process, as we learn how to be a non-dependency creating mission.
5. We must engage in this as an entire mission. All staff must be committed to this
6. We must acknowledge that the job is never done. Evaluation, education, and new circumstances will continually move us to further applications.

Questions to Ask When Considering a Program

1. Are we doing something for others what they can do for themselves?
2. Has God has provided other legitimate mechanisms in the community to meet this need?
3. Is this individual accountable to a reputable group or church?
4. Are we taking anyone out of their own context and away from the reality of life among their own people?
5. Is this project that are out of character in the community in which it takes place.
6. Will this project lower the price of local commodities in a community already struggling to survive economically?
7. Is the literature we are supplying going to be valued appropriately in the eyes of those who purchase it? Is it available at a fair market price?
8. Does this ministry have a natural constituency (e.g. radio broadcasts, campus ministries, Bible translation programs)? Should local resources be meeting this need?
9. Will this project build or break dependency?

10. Are we underwriting 100% of a ministry's need or a project? What local resources are being tapped?
11. Is this project needed or are we imposing it because we think it is a good idea? Have the Christians there asked for this project or is it our own idea? Whose agenda are we fulfilling?
12. Are we paying for something that, biblically speaking, is the local church's responsibility (e.g. pastor's salaries)? Is this project taking away from the local church's ability to be completely indigenous?
13. Are resources being sought in as close to geographical proximity as possible?
(chart taken from: Guideposts for Giving – Glenn Schwartz (Mission Frontiers, Sept. 2001: 20-23))



* * *