

COSIM 2007
Important Lessons about Accountability
in Cross-Cultural Partnerships
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Non-Western Perspective: Partnerships That Foster True Growth

I have been able to understand Partnership a little more from the context of the Body of Christ. Like our natural bodies, the Body of Christ has many parts that all work together in different capacities to make the body function well. The various parts do not serve themselves, but they serve other parts that eventually lead to service to the whole body. Partnership is about serving the body of Christ to experience qualitative as well as quantitative growth. To do this, there should be

- a. **Mutual Accountability:** Africans should know that accountability is not a western concept but a biblical mandate required of all Christians. We are all under the authority of Christ and hence we must always be accountable to God who sees all things and to people (each other) who see only some things. Accountability should go beyond financial propriety to cover integrity in lifestyle and practical Christian living. This involves a lot of wisdom on both sides in terms of whom to partner with.
- b. **Genuine Concern for Ministry:** In my country with a very high jobless index, there are numerous ministries seeking partners. I keep wondering whether there is any relationship between the proliferation of Christian ministries and the jobless index. I suspect creating ministries and securing partnership funding is a much easier means of creating a livelihood. This might have deceptive tendencies. I would implore potential partners to consider dealing more with credible establishments than individuals in partnership no matter how appealing the projects would appear
- c. **Clarity on Terms:** The term of partnership must be very clear. Expectations should be defined and agreed upon upfront. We should avoid making assumptions for each other. For example, if money given out is a loan to be repaid, that must be made very clear before the money is given. If this is not made clear, money given would be seen as a donation on one end while it will be seen as a loan on the other. There should be no “fine print.” All expectations must be very explicit
- d. **Fellowship:** Partnership should not be defined by money, important as it might be. When money is stressed, fiscal accountability becomes the issue. Partnership should be more about relationships that transform and build each partner in the Lord. Western partners should not give money only as their service to the Lord. God bless them but we should see their involvement in the life of the project more than just the money. We must see and appreciate our spiritual relationship first and out of that flows the help we might need. Western partners should strive to build capacity so that overseas partners can function well. The hand does not do the work of the eyes (except when the eye is damaged), but when particles go into the eye, the hand helps to remove them which eventually allows the eye to function well again. Partners should stress our spiritual relationship (spiritual accountability) rather than just our physical relationship (money). There should be mutual respect, forgiveness, understanding, love, patience, etc. We first partner with Christ before we partner with each other.

- e. Exit strategy: This should be part of the definition of any partnership. The life of the partnership, especially how it will terminate (if it is not for life) must be very clear from the onset. Benchmarks should be set that show how the phase out would occur. When this is not addressed in the beginning it only creates serious problems later.

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Western Perspective: Are We Addressing Our Blind Spots?

At times Western leaders are quick to judge national colleagues and organizations as being poor in the area of financial accountability. However, we often do not see the mixed messages we are sending to our partners overseas. For instance, we ask that they be wholly transparent and let us see all of their financial statements. However, it is not uncommon for Western missionaries and Western organizations to hide the full extent of their salaries and financial resources from national colleagues. We feel certain things are “private” yet we expect them to “bare all.” We forget that even our personal wages are not our own but we are merely stewards of God’s treasures and resources.

We often get upset if there is any deviation whatsoever from budgeted and programmed expenses even if the reason for the deviation is logical. We can easily make a mountain out of a mole hill when a national overspends in an area but it is not uncommon for Western missionaries, Western churches and Western agencies to spend large amounts of funding for things national colleagues would deem as wholly extravagant. Some of our building projects and some of the perks we require seem like an abusive waste of resources to them given the profound level of need they see in the world. The extent of our wastefulness often pales in comparison to the amount of money being disputed in any given project.

In missions it is easy to accuse others of “not being accountable.” We feel they do not have adequate processes in place nor do they have adequate fiscal policies. However, we forget that our processes and policies did not materialize out of thin air. We were taught and coached and those before us were taught and coached to get to the place where we are today.

A more helpful response to the issue of fiscal accountability in cross-cultural partnerships is to offer true coaching in a respectful way, to provide transparency for all that we have, and to allow national colleagues equal ground to critique how we utilize resources and how we spend money. If we provide that kind of a forum it no longer becomes an “us versus them” mentality. Such a level of honesty and openness reflects that we are all made in the image of God and we are all accountable to Him. By doing these things, the double standard will begin to dissipate and we will all begin to grow into the fullness of the image of Christ.

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