

The Experts in “Helping Well”

Churches wishing to take a bolder and more faithful action in making a difference for the world’s least and last face a daunting challenge. Of primary concern is the question of effectiveness; yet, the factors impacting program effectiveness turn out to be quite diverse and complex.

To begin with, the problem and context being addressed must be analyzed to determine the appropriate intervention. Historically, a majority of projects and programs have applied shorter term relief-type interventions when development activities were what was truly needed. The unintended consequence of such inadequately conceived efforts at helping is that *dependencies are created or deepened*, ultimately serving to *perpetuate* the poor’s poverty *instead of helping them rise above it*. Some other factors requiring careful, diligent consideration in helping effectively (“helping well”) include:

- an orientation towards transformational change
- a long term approach that works towards self-sufficiency
- a commitment to addressing underlying causes, not just surface symptoms
- a commitment to lending a carefully designed hand-up, avoiding dependency-creating handouts
- a commitment to working along side and strengthening the local church wherever possible
- a priority given to a guidance role that identifies, respects, and fully utilizes the abilities and resources of individuals and the community as a whole
- a priority given to developing local (indigenous) leadership and community resources
- an insistence upon community partnership throughout the processes of developing project goals and plans, implementation, and ongoing evaluation and adjustment
- a pervasive focus on community participation, ownership, empowerment, and capacity building

These factors, or *best practices for transformational development*, are necessary to ensure a project or program has the best chance to be truly effective in bringing sustainable life improvement for those trapped in extreme poverty. Obviously, such work requires a tremendous commitment of resources and expertise to research, design, staff, fund, implement, and monitor – a commitment of resources and expertise that is simply beyond the means of most smaller or medium sized congregations, and many larger ones as well.

Many Christian humanitarian organizations (also known as the *parachurch*), however, are extraordinarily well equipped for precisely this sort of transformative, effective ministry among the world’s poorest. Drawing on deep expertise and extensive skill sets developed through decades of on-the-ground experience, exemplary parachurch organizations have enormous impact in the name of Christ. They are truly God’s people, doing His work, His way, in His name, for His glory.

In this way, the parachurch can indeed act as an extension of the Church proper in serving the poor and oppressed. They stand ready to partner with our churches in tangibly demonstrating the Father’s love to the world’s least and last. These partnerships can range from simple financial support, to distinctive small projects designed especially for your church, to vibrant, ongoing working partnerships with communities on the other side of the globe. Many of these organizations have specialized staff members devoted exclusively helping churches custom craft programs or projects that fits their church’s unique character, circumstances, and objectives.

Our churches are clearly called to act on the scriptural imperative for helping the least and the last. To find out more about partnering with the parachurch in ministry to the world’s poorest people, just ask for the church mobilization contact at the organization of your choice.