

Philosophy of Ministry in the Developing World

Grassroots has been serving in East Africa for almost 10 years and more recently in India and Eastern Europe. During that time we have had to develop a way of assessing which things are our priorities. This now takes the form of a philosophy of good practise and bad practise in the developing world.

Background

On our first trips to Tanzania we were put under quite a bit of pressure to bring a team to do "crusades" (weeks of evangelistic preaching in a local stadium) or large pastors' conferences (where we paid for a large venue, all the expenses of the delegates and a gift of books for all those attending). We were not able (because of our level of financial support from the UK) to do these events even if we had wished. A couple of years later (after we had established our partnership with local churches in the business of serving the poorest children in their communities) we had the strange experience of having the same people (who had asked us to do crusades & conferences) come to us and tell us that they knew we were authentic Christian ministers because we were not interested in doing the events. They told us that those who went down that route were only trying to be big in their own eyes, but that as locals they had to go along with it in order to see the church built up.

In recent years we have begun developing Grassroots' ministry into new areas and have found similar pressures. We have therefore decided to publish our philosophy of ministry, so that those visiting this site can see what we are trying to do.

Briefly outlined below are a few statements of Bad & Good practise as we see them.

Bad Practise includes:

- Take part in or funding evangelistic "crusades" : This is a way to self-fulfil a longing to be an international evangelist. Any self-respecting local entrepreneur will happily help you do this. You don't need to be any good as a preacher as having a foreigner involved gives credibility to the event even if they do not perform well. Even good Christians in many places will encourage you to do it because it can help fund their conferences/events. The real problem is that research has now discovered that these events do not increase the number of Christians in a country, not do they seem to encourage best practise or integrity among pastors.
- Funding leaders' or pastors' conferences : This is the same scenario as for crusades but appeals to the ego of business trainers or Bible teachers.
- Funding church buildings/land in nations where the needs are massive but the churches already have thousands of redundant church buildings.
- Getting involved in something where the travel costs are so high that they are disproportionate to any possible difference you could make in the country. This is called tourism. Possibly valid if it helps fund some important work or is understood to be tourism, but not as a general rule.
- Sending foreigners to live in the country (either short term or long term) to do things that local people could do better and with less need for funding. For example we will not take teenagers

to build a school when it would be better to pay local builders to do it properly and so stimulate the local economy.

- Allowing yourself to be obligated into doing something you never intended to do because there has been a misunderstanding. Often a UK agency will end up suggesting something and it will be misunderstood by indigenous leaders as meaning something else and this will then be organised with the expectation that the UK agency will get involved. (For example: a UK minister could suggest a mission to the rural area. This could be interpreted as the UK minister wanting to fund a pastors' conference in that rural area. In fact what was being suggested was taking a small team to bring relief supplies and share the Gospel in the outlying villages) In this context we would not go ahead with a pastors' conference, but sit down and explain the misunderstanding.

Good Practise includes:

- Following the stream of the Holy Spirit to see if there is something he is calling you to do. This should be started with assessment trips where you do not offer funding for anything (except your own expenses – including a guide/interpreter) but rather go to see the situation as it normally is. In this case it would be fine to speak at a conference/event that is an indigenous initiative and with no need of your funds. However the normal thing would be to go and meet people in their usual circumstances - visiting churches and community projects.
- On a trip of this kind we would keep our eyes open for specific projects that the Lord lays on our hearts. These will normally be very local, highly focussed and where a small amount of UK funding can make a big difference to people's lives. We would then tentatively put a bit of seed funding to see how they respond and develop slowly and incrementally; even if this development does not provide the situation with all that they need – ie the volunteers involved should still feel they need to be volunteers. External funding should just get them those things that are impossible in their own circumstances and not remove their sense of ownership or responsibility.
- Mission/Evangelism trips. For example a small team (including mostly local people and either no foreigners or only a few) going into a specific place with a spiritual/practical need (eg: a local slum, a local prison, a rural area or a desperate situation in a neighbouring country) and sharing the Christian gospel in words, works and wonders. The team should be mostly self-funding and go to places where the people are not believers to provide practical support and tell people about Jesus. (For example our friends in Kenya had a vision to take a team to South Sudan to support Christian communities. Grassroots gave them a grant to help do this but the team was all Kenyans and most of the organisation and funding came from individuals and churches in Nairobi.)
- Overseas teams visiting for short amounts of times to assess the project (or hold it accountable to charitable standards) or do work that needs to be done to give donors good information (eg: interviewing sponsored children, taking photographs or filming). These teams should have the right amount of people for the work that needs to be done. It is not right for large groups to visit a poor community and for most of those on the team to have nothing practical to do and spend their time listening or watching.