

## **Learning...Growing...Collaborating...Phasing Out** **by Gailyn Van Rheenen**

### **Conclusion**

Each stage of church planting and development is important to the eventual maturity of a missions movement, and the result is predictable when any stage is neglected.

By-passing the Learning Stage almost always results in anemic movements. This most strikingly occurs when campaigners from the West seek to plant a church in another part of the world without the presence of long-term missionaries and then hire missionaries to conduct follow-up. Typically these missionaries are given neither the time or training to become cultural learners. In fact, because the initial converts were taught in English, it is frequently believed that one can be effective in this context without language and culture learning. Little missions works flair up creating much publicity and emotion only to wither as reversions eat way at the movement. The eventual maturity of the missions movement frequently depends on the depth of missionary learning during the initial stage.

The Growth Period is frequently short-circuited when training institutions are established early in the work before contextualized models of church growth and reproduction are developed. The assumption is made that leaders are best trained in a formal, school setting rather than by learning ministry in context--by going with mature evangelists and learning from them how to plant churches and nurture new Christians in these churches to maturity. Thus prospective leaders are taught information in an academic environment without adequate learning by the doing of ministry. If training institutions are developed too early in a missions movement they are not only overseen and supported by missionaries rather than by national leaders who have progressed through a system of maturation but also are geared more toward the dispensing of information than the training for ministry.

Negation of the Collaborative Stage is a common failing. Like our team among the Kipsigis of Kenya, missionaries naively believe that their task is complete when many churches have been planted and leaders trained to minister within local congregations. Without continued nurturing, however, communities of faith erode when left as autonomous bodies. Structures of continuity are needed to equip leaders and to serve as places for reflection and strategy development.

Finally, without phase-out a movement tends to exist with missionaries at the pinnacle of power. Rather than equipping national leaders to assume missionary roles, missionaries remain lords in their created fiefdoms. In a number of mission works around the world--built on the missionaries' personality, power, and presence--there is no intention of missionary phase-out. Displacing missionaries from their pinnacles of power, if possible, would require catastrophic action by national leaders.

I, therefore, suggest that to be effective all works initiated through cross-cultural missionary work must intentionally progress through stages emphasizing learning, growth, collaboration, and phase-out. Missionaries' roles change as movements develop. The intention is to phase-out the missionary presence as mature nationals assume leadership roles.

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