

Enterprise for Vocational Development

A Case Study for Self-Sustaining Churches in Africa through Love in Action International, Inc.

Dr. Tom Stallter

For as long as I can remember, it has always been the goal of missions to plant indigenous churches. At first this was referred to as the three-self theory (Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson) and more recently better thought through as the four-self theory: self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-teaching or self-theologizing. But we have not always done so well at accomplishing our goal of indigenous churches. There is a certain dependency between these elements for a truly indigenous movement that we have not taken seriously. For example, only the fourth self can make the other three aspects of the theory truly indigenous. For our purposes here, only the amelioration of debilitating poverty can make self-support possible. We have generally ignored these relationships in our cross-cultural church-planting endeavors.

We want the African church to be indigenous, but few missions have stepped out into the territory of self-theologizing or poverty elimination among the churches they have planted. The purpose of this article is to present an example of one type of poverty elimination that will help national churches be truly self-supporting, and therefore, self-sustaining in their governing, theologizing, and multiplication. We helped to plant the church. Now we expect it to grow and develop in its cultural context. What's wrong that they don't catch the vision? A main reason is their poverty. We must seek ways to empower churches for development and ministry in the poverty of urban Africa. To do this we need to facilitate vocational training and employment for Christians.

Poverty in the Republic of Chad, Africa

Forty-eight percent of the population in Chad is under 14 years of age and 80% of the population is below the poverty line. Poverty is a leading cause in people not receiving health care in a timely fashion and contributes to an average life expectancy rate of 46 years with one in five children dying before they reach five years old. More related to our topic, poverty in urban Central Africa is a leading cause in keeping church members from supporting a pastor, sending missionaries, and training young people for ministry. This poverty is not related to worldview concepts but to the objective reality of the lack of vocational training of the people and the limited job market. Eighty percent of the national labor is found in subsistence farming, herding and fishing, which are rural occupations. But in urban centers there is very little commercial, industrial or technological employment, and very few who are trained for the few possibilities that exist.ⁱ

Economy and Survival

When we think about the economy in a country and its affects on the church, a few observations are in order. First and most obvious, a functional economy is essential for social structure and social survival. Secondly, employment is essential to personal

survival in any society. This is something we take for granted when most of the members in our churches in the U.S. come from double income families. We should easily be able to make the final observation that employment of church members is essential to indigenous ministry survival. Paul talks about this necessity for our Christian testimony in 1 Thes. 4:11-12. But are we prepared to deal with the problem in the 2/3 world where in some cases only a few of the people in the congregation have any income at all? We must be committed to dealing with this problem if we believe indigenous ministry must be self supporting.

Since societies are integrated systems of five main institutions, societal needs are served by each part. Christian life and ministry takes place in this environment and is serviced by those institutions to one degree or another (figure 1). We are emphasizing in this case study how it is served by the economic element:

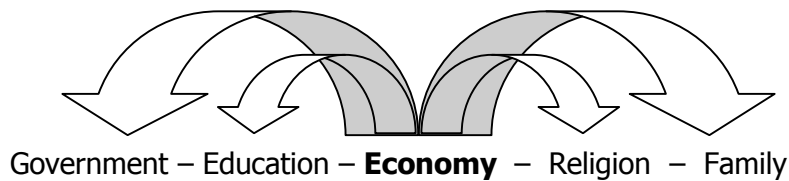


Figure 1

The church is an institution of society that fits the “religion” slot of secular social theory. How much influence it has for the maintenance of the society is decided by developing societal values, but in the holistic African society it is of central importance. If the church is to be indigenous, it must also have these elements within itself and, for this reason, it mirrors the secular model. In the indigenous church terminology it might be seen as follows: (figure 2)

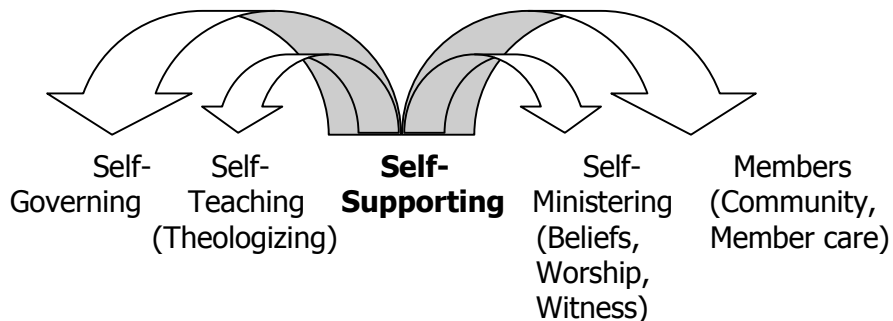


Figure 2

It is easy to see how ministry survival (training of leaders and mission outreach) and personal survival of the church community (Acts 2) are related to the ability to be self-supporting. Poverty is directly related to dysfunctional ministry and personal survival, causing it to be dependent on outside help.

Poverty and sociological principles, seen through local cultural systems, and acted on by contextualized Evangelical mission endeavor, should become missiological praxis. The

process should result in Enterprise for Vocational Development (EVD), or Micro Enterprise Development (MED), etc. We think contextualized Enterprise for Vocational Development among committed Christians is one of the best ways to act on the problem of poverty and Love in Action International bends its every effort in that direction. It's all about employment and vocational training for African Christians in a way that helps Christians grow churches in the Republic of Chad.

EVD uses vocational and ministry training through viable businesses to accomplish its goal. Some of the endeavors supported by LIAI are: bicycle mechanics, construction, tailoring, metal fabrication, computer processing, and micro-enterprise development.

Vision Principles of Love in Action International

Certain principles that represent a vision for the accomplishment of the goal through the enterprises are listed here. We refer to these as vision principles. If those involved do not feel ownership for these ideas they are not really a part of the process. Those principles are as follows:

1. The church in the 2/3 world is crippled by poverty and Christianity in the West has a responsibility to help.
2. Authentic relationships with God through Christ are foundational to successful self-help programs among poor peoples.
3. Poverty is only overcome on its own soil.
4. Poverty elimination methods must be adapted to the context.
5. Vocational training through viable business is a multiplication solution to poverty.
6. Training on all levels, from vocational skills to management, is best accomplished through apprenticeships.
7. Management must be able to train apprentices for local ministry.
8. Management must feel ownership.
9. Subsidies are only used for startup capital; occasional gifts are used for encouragement.
10. People in the partnerships must:
 - be authentic in their faith and Christian worldview,
 - possess the skills and aptitudes necessary,
 - be committed to the vision of LIAI and hard work.
11. The purpose of LIAI is to empower local churches. Local churches are central to the vision but not owners of the businesses.

12. Local opinion leaders must advise the cultural aspects of the projects.

Market potential criteria for the enterprises

Every enterprise for vocational development must meet one or more of the criteria listed below in its production in order to stay in business and either train people to have a share in the market through personal vocation or to be marketable to the employment available. These are illustrated in the examples given.

- High Demand/Volume Product
- High Demand Skills
- Outsider Skills in Demand
- Rare Product with Fixed Niche
- Felt Need Satisfaction
- Quality Niche
- Outside Market Availability

Examples:

Metal Fabrication

The LIAI metal fabrication shop is a local business with market driven and high demand products to which outsider skills are applied to meet a quality niche in the market. At this time metal grill work for doors and windows and metal window shutters as well as ox carts are the main products. There is one expatriate instructor and nine apprentices in the shop. Future metal fabrication products may include a tricycle for the handicapped which is a rare product with fixed niche and felt need satisfaction. That is, they are hard to find and though the demand is limited the need is ongoing. As with all LIAI projects there is an African consulting committee to provide the cultural advice needed when expatriates are part of the project.

The African apprentices also receive instruction in evangelism and discipleship and go on outings to reach villages for Christ. A local pastor assists the missionary in this training. Last year the four second-year apprentices shared their faith in black African and Muslim villages with substantial results.

Bicycle Mechanics

Bicycle mechanics is a mobile vocation that has a small capital investment in initial tools and training. These mechanics are in high demand since most families own a bicycle and pastors all travel on bicycles for ministry and conferences. Often a mechanic travels with the pastors to meetings and conferences since the quality of the bicycles is poor and it assures their arrival. When they arrive at a conference, the mechanic spends the time putting all the bikes back in shape for the trip home. Tricycles for handicapped people take the same skills for maintenance and afford the mechanic further employment.

LIAI Sewing Center

The Sewing Center was the first business begun in Chad and, as a prototype, helped us learn how to do business in the Central African culture. It was begun in 1993 and was fully indigenous by 1995. By 1997 the African instructor and manager was also 100% owner of the business. The sewing center uses two national experts who train three to four apprentices every two years. Over twenty people have been trained while the trainers benefited from employment. It has a very marketable product in that the clothing is a high volume commodity that meets felt need satisfaction by being affordably priced and offered at a discount to church leaders. The center owns a quality niche by producing a better product and, something unheard of in Central Africa, offering quality assurance. One more criterion sets this business apart; it has an outside market in the U.S. where women's dresses in particular have drawn American attention.

Last year's graduates from the Sewing Center program reported on the first year out in the market place. One apprentice was able to rent a sewing machine after his training. His work created enough income to buy his own machine and a pair of oxen, which has made farming a lot more productive to support himself and his family.

A second apprentice was able to rent a sewing machine as well and has already been able to acquire his own.

A third used the income of his work to pay the dowry for his wife and they were married. This is a big accomplishment considering the abuse of the marriage custom of dowry in Chad.ⁱⁱ The business of this apprentice is doing so well that he has been able to buy a second sewing machine and has two apprentices working for him.

The letters received from these graduates all expressed deep appreciation to the Sewing Center and Love in Action International for their commitment and resources to help them learn this valuable skill. The Sewing Center currently has four apprentices, including a lady from an area where the churches are heavily involved in church planting among the unreached.

Instruction in Construction

Construction teams are trained to bring in high demand, outsider skills to fit a quality niche. Projects are built with indigenous materials and labor, but with skills that come from experts outside the situation. A percentage of funding for materials for projects is negotiable depending on the nature of the project. This area of EVD receives a lot of public attention since it does construction for community health and development like medical dispensaries in neglected areas and bridges to keep roads open. This also brings attention and credibility to the Gospel as members of the team speak in the villages. The construction team is also involved in the building of churches and Bible

schools. Instead of bringing in outside short-term building teams from Europe or the U.S., construction training has been provided so the labor can belong to nationals needing the employment.

The African owner of the company is both the instructor and manager. In addition, he is the main evangelism trainer for church planting, and has built a two story training center for that purpose.

Essential People in 2/3 world Vocational Training

The people essential in the enterprise to be used must meet qualifications that fit the vision principles. Briefly put, all individuals involved must first have an authentic faith in Christ and a Christian worldview, and they must have a commitment to the vision of Love in Action International. Other qualifications are as follows:

Instructor/Manager

- An expert in the business to be used
- Intercultural training and above average adaptability aptitude for expatriates
- Aptitude for business management and ownership for nationals

African Consulting Committee

- An understanding of the effects of the culture on the business
- Must be made up of opinion leaders with influence in the wider community
- Able to participate with managers in decisions

Apprentices for Vocational Training

- Necessary aptitudes
- Respected in the Christian community
- Willingness for ministry

Mike Retterer Training Center for Training in Outsider Skills

The MRTC is a place where outsiders come to train African Christians in high demand skills. These may be other Africans who are specialists or expatriate specialists. It is also used to train people in discipleship. There is an accompanying guest house for EVD trainers so the training can be concentrated even though trainers may come from a distance. Both the MRTC and the guest house were built by the EVD construction team.

The MRTC will also be used for word-processing of outsourced Christian literature projects from France. This will provide both employment and training in computer skills

that will make individuals marketable to other areas of employment in the urban centers.

In Summary

The necessary elements of vocational training for the African church are not optional if the endeavor is to be indigenous and is to survive to help churches become self-sustaining in Central Africa.

- A vision for enabling the national church and their participation in it
- Market potential for the product of the training business (seven criteria)
- Finding African experts or outsiders with expertise for training nationals
- African structure and resources for the venture
- Respected, influential Africans committed to the venture who can give cultural advice
- Apprentices with an authentic faith, an aptitude for the training and African business

Enterprise for Vocational Development can help produce vibrant, self-sustaining churches in Africa. Love in Action International exists to use enterprise toward this goal.

Discussion Starters

1. Why is self-support so important to indigenous churches in the 2/3 world?
2. How might the sending of short-term teams to build projects for 2/3 world Christians be counter productive to self-sustaining churches?
3. Why is a Christian worldview essential for all involved in EVD for those in urban poverty in Africa?
4. What does the author mean by "Poverty is only overcome on its own soil?"
5. Why is an "African structure for the venture" and "cultural advice" important to the success of EVD?

Author Biography

Dr. Tom Stallter is professor of Intercultural Studies and World Mission at Grace Theological Seminary. He spent 18 years in leadership training and church development in the countries of Central African Republic and the Republic of Chad. He is co-founder and President of Love in Action International, Inc.

Enterprise for Vocational Development

Love in action International, Inc.
P.O. Box 805
Winona Lake, IN 46590

www.loveinactioninternational.org

Contact for information, newsletters, and contributions:

Valerie Crumbley

(574) 269-4513

vcrumbley@loveinactioninternational.org

LIAI, Inc. President

Dr. Tom Stallter, Chairman

Department of Intercultural Studies and World Mission

Grace Theological Seminary

ⁱ The statistics in this paragraph come from both the CIA *Facts on File* located on their Web site at www.cia.gov, 2005, and the 3D World Atlas, Xamba Software, 2003.

ⁱⁱ Insights are offered into this critical problem in the article "Payment of Dowry and the Christian Church," by the Theological Advisory Group in "African Journal of Evangelical Theology," 15:2, 1996.