

# **Dependency: When Good Intentions Aren't Enough**

**By  
Glenn M. Penner**

**The Voice of the Martyrs  
April 25, 2002**

(This is a "for public distribution" edition of a paper adopted by the Board of Directors of The Voice of the Martyrs in Canada)  
All rights reserved.

## *Purpose Statement*

The purpose of this paper is to:

1. Present a discussion paper that defines the issue of dependency and how it relates to the ministry of The Voice of the Martyrs in Canada,
2. Establish working guidelines to provide assistance in project planning,
3. Propose a sponsorship program that will be in accordance with the purposes and values of The Voice of the Martyrs in Canada.

## *Assumptions*

The following are assumed by the author to be true from the onset of this investigation:

1. That The Voice of the Martyrs in Canada believes that biblical teaching must provide the basis or foundation for what we believe and do as a mission. Thus, whatever we find the Bible teaching about dependency will be accepted as true and authoritative.
2. That The Voice of the Martyrs in Canada continues to hold to our Values Statement passed by the Board of Directors in late 1999 that stated "We believe in EQUIPPING WITHOUT CREATING DEPENDENCY. We will, therefore, maintain and promote the Persecuted Church's ability to be self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. We will resist any programs or ministry that would detract from this."
3. That the need to prove that dependency is a negative thing may, therefore, be assumed to be unnecessary since our Values Statement speaks against it.
4. That The Voice of the Martyrs in Canada will act decisively to make any necessary changes to bring us more in line with our Core Values, should such action be shown to be called for.

## *Approach*

The following reflects the approach taken by the author and reflected in this paper:



## Research Resources

### Articles (available from author)

1. A Champion for Self Reliance – MF Staff
2. Avoiding the Cycle of Dependency: The Role of the American Church – Fran Pratt
3. Be Aware! Dependency Will Destroy – Hanok Tamang
4. Can Foreign Funding Be Used in Support of Indigenous Ministries? – Glenn Schwartz
5. Can We Still Afford North American Missionaries? – Wade Coggins
6. Chipping In : A Conversation with Ajith Fernando
7. Commitment to a Wartime Lifestyle – Ralph Winters
8. Dependency – Donald Smith (Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions)
9. Dependency! Is Micro-Credit an Answer? - Joseph E. Richter
10. Dependency: The Killer of People Movements to Christ – Rick Wood
11. Dependency in Missions Partnerships - Daniel Rickett (Partners International)
12. Editorial Comment; Sept-Oct. 1994 – Ralph Winters
13. Fighting Dependency Amongst the "Aucas" – Rick Wood
14. Going South of the Border for a Short-Term? – Rick Johnson
15. Good Intentions Are Not Always Enough – Ralph Winter
16. Good Intentions Gone Awry – Greg H. Parsons
17. Guideposts for Giving – Glenn Schwartz
18. How Missionary Attitudes Can Create Dependency – Glenn Schwartz
19. How to Help Without Harming – Allen Finley, Lorry Lutz (The Family Tie)
20. Is There a Cure For Dependency? – Glenn Schwartz
21. It's Time to Get Serious About the Cycle of Dependency in Africa – Glenn Schwartz
22. Let the Buyer Beware – Craig Ott
23. Looking at Missions From Their Side, Not Ours – Steve Saint
24. Missionary Demeanor and The Dependency Syndrome – Glenn Schwartz
25. Missionary Forays: An Analysis of Short Term Missions – Glenn J. Schwartz
26. Mobilizing Local Resources – Glenn Schwartz
27. On Sending Money, Not Missionaries – Patrick Johnstone
28. Partnership With Nationals – G.W. Crosby
29. Proceed With Caution – Frank L. Roy
30. Results of Paternalism and Some Viable Solutions – William J. Kornfield
31. Self-Reliance or Interdependence- Glenn Schwartz
32. Should We Stop Sending Missionaries – Robertson McQuilkin
33. Stop Sending Money! – Robertson McQuilkin
34. Suggestions Regarding the Move From Dependency Towards Self-Reliance in Mission Established Institutions in Africa – Glenn Schwartz
35. The Church in Africa: Making Its Way From Dependency to Self Reliance – Zablon Nthamburi
36. True Local Ownership Through Micro-Credit – Joseph E. Richter
37. What Triggers the Move Towards Self-Reliance – Glenn Schwartz
38. Whatever Happened to the Apostle Paul? – Christopher R. Little
39. When the Mission Pays the Pastor – Wayne Allen
40. Where Your Treasure Is – Russel G. Shubin

## Books

1. Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods – St. Paul's Or Ours?* (rpt. Moody Press, 1959)
2. Jonathan J. Bonk, *Money and Missions – Affluence as a Western Missionary Problem* (Orbis, 1991)
3. Allen Finley and Lorry Lutz, *The Family Tie* (Nelson, 1983)
4. J. Herbert Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective* (Baker, 1976)
5. Tom A. Steffen, *Planned Phase-out* (Austin & Winfield, 1992)
6. K.P. Yohannon, *Revolution in World Missions* (GFA Books, 1998)
7. Various commentaries on biblical texts

## Videos (owned by VOM)

World Mission Associates, *Dependency Among Mission-Established Institutions: Exploring the Issues* (8 hour teaching series) 1996.

## Personnel

Various private discussions with mission leaders (e.g. Grover Crosby - Partners International), and former missionaries (e.g. Ormand & Phyllis Sherick - former missionaries to Nigeria, Ozro Traub - former missionary to Nigeria).

## Terms

**Dependency:** most often used to describe those in society who are unable to care for themselves. As used in this paper, it refers to a state where Christians as individuals or as a congregation have allowed themselves to become reliant on another outside group or individual for financial and material means and, sometimes, administrative guidance, and are not, therefore, functioning in an indigenous manner, as defined below. The assumption by the dependent is that they cannot accomplish what God is calling them to do without foreign assistance, nor should they be expected to.

**Indigenous:** those things that are owned and controlled by the people of which they are a part. An indigenous Church may be identified as one that is 1) self-imaged, 2) self-functioning, 3) self-determining, 4) self-supporting, 5) self-propagating, and 6) self-giving. This is not to say that such a congregation may not find itself in need of assistance from time to time, but ordinarily, it could function as defined here without regular outside intervention. When such assistance is necessary, ideally, it would come from local sources or from those from as close of geographical proximity as possible.

**Paternalistic:** an unhealthy parental role in a relationship assumed when one party believes that he/she must take care of a weaker party who would do themselves and others harm if left to themselves.

# The Biblical Foundations

## *Paul as Prototype*

What would the Apostle Paul think if he showed up at the office of The Voice of the Martyrs in Canada and heard us discussing how we might be able to effectively serve the Persecuted Church? The answer is already found in the pages of the New Testament.

A common misconception is that message and method are separate from each other. In other words, just so long as our message remains unchanged or our motives are pure, then how we conduct ourselves or the methods that we employ in fulfilling God's call are of a strictly pragmatic matter. Paul, however, refused to adopt such a mentality. Recognizing that in the incarnation of God in Christ, God's message and medium were combined into one singular and consistent whole, Paul likewise, saw his conduct on the same level as his doctrine. In 2 Timothy 3:10 he urged Timothy to not only follow his teaching, but also his conduct (agoge) meaning his manner of life (i.e. his missionary methods, the practices of his ministry, the way he served). Simply put, Paul saw his conduct as a missionary as authoritative as his teaching and he would have resisted any attempt to drive a wedge between them or to relegate them to the dust heap of historical or cultural insignificance.

Indeed, in various other passages, Paul commands the Churches to imitate him (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14). In essence, Paul offers himself as a paradigm to be followed both in terms of message and the method by which the message is communicated and lived out. Does he do this because he believes himself to be the epitome of Christian perfection? Rather, Paul offers himself as a concrete example of the Christian tradition that is to be handed on to others (cf. 2 Tim.2:2) on the basis of his apostolic authority.

So what was Paul's pattern in relation to how he viewed the Church, its mission, and the financial responsibilities of God's people in fulfilling this mission?

## *Paul's Pattern*

A careful reading of the New Testament would seem to point to three rules that guided Paul's practice regarding finances:

### ***1) Paul did not seek financial support from other Churches.***

It was Paul's general practice to support himself and his colleagues by working with his own hands whenever possible. While he asserted that he had every right to expect the Churches to support him (1 Cor. 9:1-18), he refused to assert this right that he might not be a burden on any of the Churches (1 Thess.2:9). Nowhere do we hear of Paul regretting the fact that he had to work fulltime in order to meet his needs.

While we find that Paul did receive gifts, on rare occasions, from the Churches in Macedonia (e.g. Phil. 4:10-20), it is important to note that this support typically came when he was either in prison (cf. 1:7) and thus unable to work, or travelling in an area (i.e. Thessalonica) where, because of persecution, he was unable to stay for an extended period of time. In addition, the

support from the Philippian Church, for example, was sporadic, not regular, and Paul was not dependent upon it, as he clearly states in 4:11.

We find one incident when Paul did receive assistance from the Churches of Macedonia when he was ministering for 18 months in Corinth. This outside assistance actually got him into trouble (2 Cor. 11:7-9; 12:3) because they thought he was living a double standard. This may account for Paul's less than enthusiastic response to the Philippian gift in Philippians 4:10-20. He swings back and forth from appreciation on the one hand, and his insistence on his own independence and self-sufficiency on the other. It is essential to Paul that this matter of financial independence not be compromised in any way. He makes it clear that he did not ask for the gift (verse 17). Verse 18 is very businesslike in its tone and language with its abrupt "I have received full payment and more. I am fully supplied now that I have received the gift from you." It is as if he wrote, "Here the receipt for what you gave me. I have enough. Too much, in fact. I am full up," words that would imply that he did not particularly want additional gifts from them.

Of course this does not discount the practice of hospitality that was prevalent and encouraged in the early Church. As 3 John 5-8 shows, local Churches often assisted visiting evangelists who were not part of their fellowship. Paul expected that the Roman Church would do likewise to him as he passed through their city on his way to Spain (Romans 15:24-27) and asked the Corinthian Church to do likewise for Timothy as he passed through their city (1 Corinthians 16:10). But none of these examples point to ongoing support beyond the time of visitation. Indeed, by the time of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, if a traveling evangelist or missionary visited a Church, the Church was expected to provide hospitality to him for 2 or 3 days at the most. After that the man was expected to either move on, or begin to earn his own keep by getting a job. If he was unable to work because he did not have a trade, the Church was instructed to discern how he was to live in the community, but he was not to live off of the generosity of others. If he would not seek to earn his own keep, the Church was told to beware of such men; "They are trafficking upon Christ."<sup>1</sup> If a traveling prophet were to ever ask for money, the Church was to conclude that he was a false prophet.<sup>2</sup> In this way, we see that the early Church carefully followed not only Paul's doctrine but also his practice.

## ***2) Paul expected the Churches founded by him to be self-supporting from the very beginning.***

There is no mention of Paul ever giving money to the Churches. This would have been expected, especially given the poverty of the Churches in Macedonia (2 Cor. 8:1-4). It is rather ironic that these poor congregations are the only Churches known to have supported Paul's ministry. Rather than there being New Testament evidence that rich Churches should financially support poor ones, the exact opposite is seen.

Churches were expected to support their own leadership (cf. 1 Cor. 9:13-14; Gal.6:6) and to care for their poor and needy. There is not a hint in the New Testament of one Church depending on another, with the single exception of the collection for the poor saints of Jerusalem. A careful reading of Paul on the matter, however, reveals that this offering had very little to do with actual financial need of a particular Church, because the famine covered the entire world (cf. Acts 11:28). This gesture was much more than an act of charity. In Paul's mind, it was an expression of love and Christian unity as the Gentile Church ministered to the Jewish saints out of gratitude for what the Jewish believers had done in making it possible for them to know Christ (cf. Romans

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Didache 12*

<sup>2</sup> *The Didache 11*

15:27). Rather than seeing this gift as a prototype for Canadian Christians to assist poorer Churches around the world, a more appropriate parallel would be if Churches in China sent a gift to the Church in Canada for its role in sending missionaries there in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

It is important to note, however, that this was a one time gift and in no way can be seen to be making up for some deficiency in the ability of the Jerusalem Church to be completely indigenous.

### ***3) Paul encouraged Churches, poor as they were, to contribute to the needs of others.***

While the rich have a special responsibility to assist those in need, this is a privilege that all are to minister in. But the Biblical mandate to help those in need must not be done in such a way as it robs the poor of their dignity and denies the Biblical concept of justice. We must find ways to help in a way that does not leave them less able to help themselves than before our aid arrived. A key way that this can occur is if the poor only become recipients of aid and not the providers of it. The initiative to give is, thereby, destroyed, and Paul's pattern broken.

Paul's practice could be easily summed up in the words of 1 Thess. 4: 9-12

*"Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may live properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one"<sup>3</sup>*

---

*3 Galatians 6:2 with it's admonition to "bear one another's burden and thus fulfill the law of Christ" is often pointed to a proof text to support the financing of national workers. This is illegitimate. The "burdens" that Paul is speaking of in this context are moral lapses, temptations, and guilt, not financial needs (which appears no where in the context). But even if one wanted to rip this verse from its context, one would then have to answer Paul's equally forceful admonition to all that we should bear our own load (6:5).*

## Identification and Formulation of the Principles and Issues Involved

Merely stating that The Voice of the Martyrs in Canada believes in equipping without creating dependency and that we will maintain and promote the Persecuted Church's ability to be self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating and resist any programs or ministry that would detract from this does not guarantee that we will do it. The fact that such a statement exists in our Core Values is an admission that we have failed to do this in the past and that this remains a concern. Additionally, other missions with whom we partner in various ways have been and are engaged in dependency creating programs that we must step away from and refuse to support if we are to be true to our values. Often we inherit situations that we did not create. But this does not mean that we must settle for the status quo or excuse ourselves and continue engaging in activities that we know are detrimental. As servants of the Persecuted Church, we have no business adding to the suffering of our brothers and sisters by maintaining or creating dependency that will only hinder their witness and even threaten their very existence.

### How is dependency evidenced?

Dependency is probably most clearly evidenced when we see individuals, organizations, or congregations consistently relying on others to meet their needs rather than on God and the resources that He has already provided or has promised to provide. A Church cannot be both indigenous and dependent as the following chart demonstrates:

<b>A Church that is indigenous is:</b>	<b>A Church that is dependent is:</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="277 1213 751 1339">1. <b>Self-imagined</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="326 1247 691 1339">• It views itself as the <b>Body of Christ</b> in its local situation, independent of the mission.</li></ul></li><li data-bbox="277 1371 751 1524">2. <b>Self-functioning</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="326 1404 751 1524">• It is capable of carrying on all of the normal functions of a Church – worship, Christian education, evangelism, care, etc.</li></ul></li><li data-bbox="277 1646 751 1745">3. <b>Self-determining</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="326 1680 699 1745">• It can and does make its own decisions</li></ul></li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="870 1213 1308 1339">1. <b>Mission-imagined</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="919 1247 1308 1339">• It views itself essentially as an extension of the foreign mission/denomination.</li></ul></li><li data-bbox="870 1371 1349 1703">2. <b>Semiautonomous-functioning</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="919 1404 1349 1703">• It functions autonomously within guidelines from the outside and subject to watchful scrutiny and correction. Looks to the outside for funding for programs that it assumes are necessary because of the example of their founders. Worship styles, evangelistic methods, programming tends to imitate that of the West</li></ul></li><li data-bbox="870 1738 1349 1864">3. <b>Unable to make most decisions without the go ahead of the mission or an outside entity. Outside entity dictates how funding is to be used.</b></li></ol>



#### **A Church that is indigenous is:**

- 4. Self-supporting**
  - It carries its own financial responsibilities and finances its own service projects.
  
- 5. Self-propagating**
  - Sees itself as responsible for carrying out the Great Commission.
  
- 6. Self-giving**
  - Knows the social needs of its community and endeavors to meet those needs with what means that it has. Individuals in the Church recognize and participate in financially supporting the ministries of the Church

#### **A Church that is dependent is:**

- 4. Outside-supported**
  - Is on permanent life support from outside sources. Does not believe that they will ever be able to accomplish what God wants it to do without outside funding. The outside source designates how the funds will be used
  
- 5. Directed-propagation**
  - Church plans outreaches based on means that will appeal to outside supporters. Outsiders dictate how the funds are to be used (local missionaries and evangelists, crusades, Jesus films, etc.).
  
- 6. A contact for outside support**
  - Identifies local needs and then makes the need known to outsiders for funding. Looks for projects that they know will appeal to outside sources, rather than on real needs. Individuals in the Church typically give less to the Church than they are capable of, while allowing others to support the Church.

#### ***What are the negative aspects of outside funding of nationals?***

1. It has no biblical support and, indeed, may be considered unbiblical (as demonstrated above).
2. Often destroys the reputation of local Church leaders in the eyes of the community.
3. Hinders the expansion of the Christian movement:
  - a) Not enough money in the eyes of the dependent.
  - b) Money that could go to evangelism is used to subsidize national wages, projects, etc.
4. Can create jealousy among other Churches who do not receive outside funding.
5. Can be detrimental to indigenous works that "cannot compete" with the resources made available.
6. Cripples the national Church from the inside, as its members feel little motivation to give. Robs the dependent Church of the blessings of participation in the evangelization of the world.
7. Exports and reinforces a materialistic mentality that is already rampant in the western Church.
8. Discourages local initiative in designing culturally appropriate means and methods of evangelism and Church life.
9. Robs the dependent Church of self-respect that comes from seeing God provide.

10. Outside funding may actually contribute to keeping dependent Churches poor.
11. Outside funding is not a reproducible methodology.
12. Sends the message that the spread of the gospel is dependent upon paid professionals.
13. Reinforces the thought in a society that Christianity is a foreign religion.
14. Creates a mercenary spirit, where workers compete with each other to make contacts with western Christians.
15. Bypasses local Church accountability. The donor calls the shots. And national workers whose salaries are paid for from abroad cannot be held accountable by local Church leaders who have no input in his support.
16. The support of national pastors has been demonstrated to actually hinder or even halt Church growth.

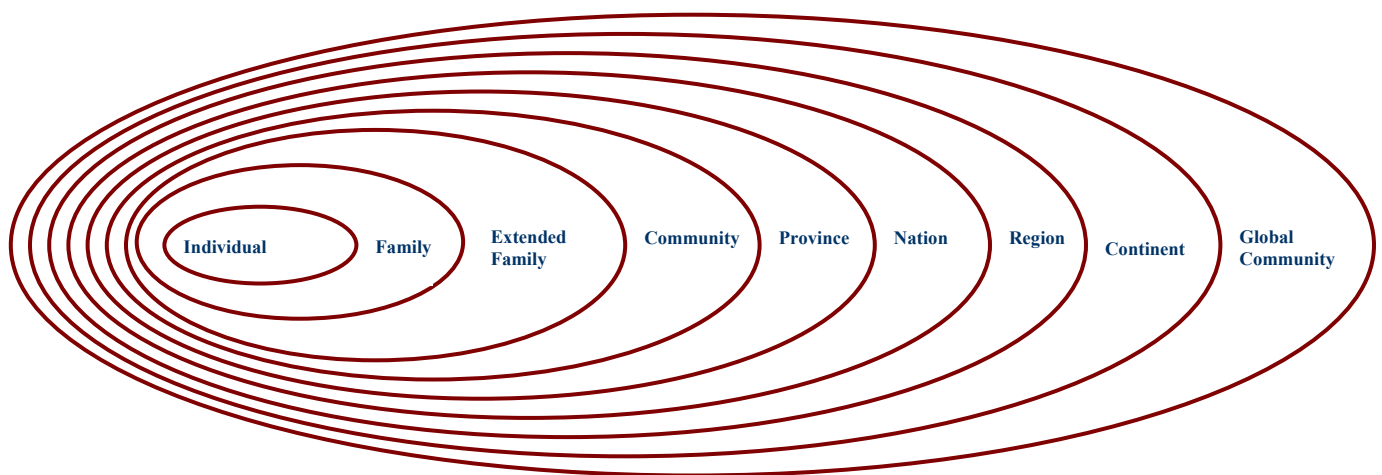
### ***How is dependency created?***

1. Usually through good intentions. North Americans have a great desire to "do something." This orientation emphasis often results in the development of dependency. Without a proper understanding of how to help, we end up doing things that nationals could do for themselves or which we think would be necessary should we live in their society. Guilt over our own prosperity causes us to try to give national Churches what we have or what we think is essential. Our penchant for helping the "poor benighted natives" causes us to give without thinking through the long-term consequences of our help. Our obsession with cleanliness and shelter causes us to solve problems that, within a society, may not be perceived as being priorities.
2. Western missions, by their example in the past, often convinced nationals that all pastors, missionaries and evangelists should be paid professionals and often paid them out of their mission funds. Once started, this cycle is very hard to break.
3. Western mission executives promote "partnership" in a form that creates and perpetuates a situation where one partner receives and the other gives. True partnership is reciprocal and may not even include funding.
4. The paternalistic attitude that our way is the best way is incipient, despite our attempts to counter it, or that nationals cannot be trusted to ever better their condition.
5. The western belief that money can solve almost any problem.
6. Our desire to get the "best bang for the buck" makes us think that supporting nationals (who are inevitably cheaper to support) must be a good investment.
7. It is easier to raise money for national workers than for projects that are less attractive sounding to donors. The most strategic ministries and projects do not typically lend themselves to easy fund-raising.
8. An unwillingness or lack of expertise to do the hard work of developing strategies that can assist those in need and enhance the Church's ability to help itself.
9. Busy national leaders, seeing the eagerness of westerners to help and the vast amount of money available, conclude that is easier to raise money from overseas than locally.
10. Lack of education on the part of busy mission executives regarding the effects and causes of dependency pushes the issue to the background in the face of administrative and fund raising concerns.

### ***How can we avoid creating dependency***

1. Never do for others what they can do for themselves.

2. Avoid child sponsorships in areas where God has provided other legitimate mechanisms (e.g. orphanages in places where God has provided the extended family to care for that need).
3. Do not send funds to individuals or Church leaders whose income is not known by the people in his/her Church. It is always better to give through a national organization than directly to an individual.
4. Be careful about providing scholarships for Church leaders who will be educated out of their own context and away from the reality of life among their own people.
5. Avoid building Church buildings for people who can build adequate ones for themselves. People can have a Church building equal in quality to the homes they live in.
6. Avoid glittering projects that are out of character in the communities in which they are placed.
7. Be careful about aid projects that may result in lowering the price of local commodities in a community already struggling to survive economically.
8. Don't subsidize literature which lowers its value in the eyes of those who purchase it. Give it a fair market price.
9. Invest in ministries that do not have a natural constituency (e.g. radio broadcasts, campus ministries, Bible translation programs), not in Churches that should be developing their own giving constituency.
10. Invest in projects that break dependency (e.g. employment creation projects, revolving micro-loans, literacy projects, education, etc.)
11. Do not underwrite 100% of a ministry's need or a project. Seek to include local resources.
12. Give resources based only on need.
13. Do not finance local pastors and Churches. History has shown conclusively that foreign funding of Church salaries and Churches is a sure way to create dependency and to hinder the growth of the Church.
14. Financing national Church planters and missionaries is fraught with difficulties and should be entered into only carefully. Support should be cut off once the Church has been established (50 individuals is usually considered a viable congregation).
15. When aid is needed, resources should be sought in as close of geographical proximity as possible.



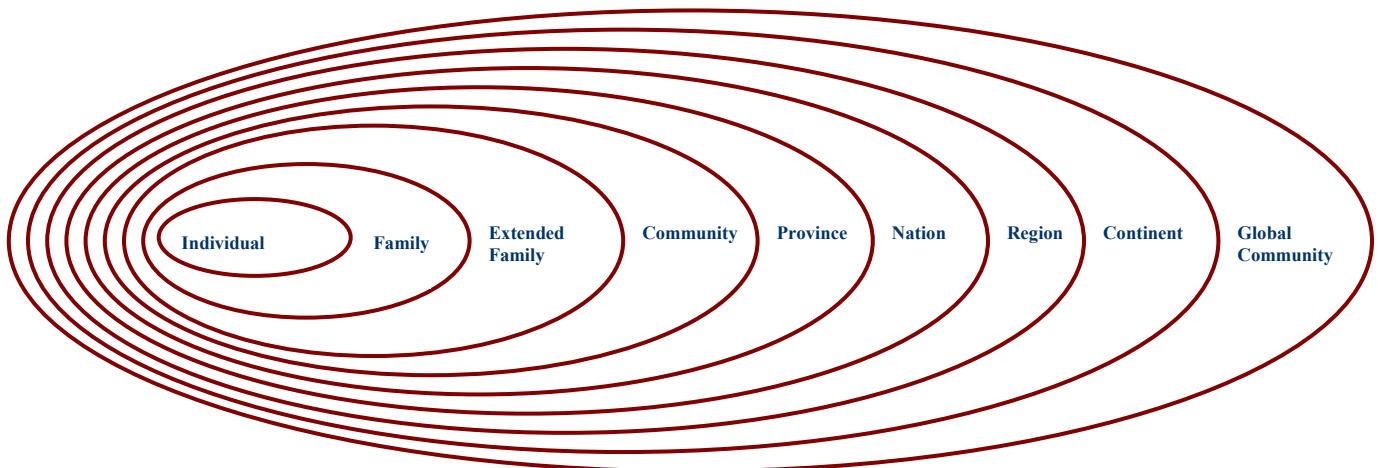
# Dependency Questions to Ask When Considering a Project

## A. Partners

- What are we doing for others that they could be doing for themselves?
- Does each of the partners understand their responsibility and role?
- Is this project their idea or ours?
- Is the project one that the people will feel and demonstrate a sense of ownership for?
- Is the project being established out of a false mindset/view that the poor are deficient human beings, needing our goods, our support, our supervision, and our money, to make them whole?
- Will this project lead to a situation where the church is divided into "haves" and "have-nots"?
- Is the project sensitive to or in accordance with local customs?
- Are we paying for something that, biblically speaking, is the local church's responsibility (e.g. pastor's salaries)?
- Is this project taking away from the local church's ability to be completely indigenous?
- Is an accountability structure in place that is understood by all involved?
- How much of our supervision is needed, if any?

## B. Resources/Stewardship

- Does our financial involvement take away the opportunity for the persecuted church in this area to enjoy the joy of giving and trusting God to meet their need?
- Will this project tend to build or break dependency?
- Are we underwriting too much of a ministry's need or a project?
- Is this project sustainable without further outside assistance?
- What local/regional/continental resources are being tapped?
- Might it be possible to empower the local church/indigenous group to be self sufficient instead of giving them an infusion of capital?
- Does the project have the potential of hurting the local economy?
- Could a Christian business be benefited by this project?
- How well is biblical stewardship being taught and demonstrated by the group?
- Does this ministry have a natural constituency? Should local resources be meeting this need?
- Does the project require sending finances instead of what should be flesh and blood involvement?
- Has God provided other legitimate mechanisms in the community to meet this need?
- Will monetary inputs actually lead to a loss of focus by the host group as it gives increasing attention to soliciting money and less attention to the intended work of the group?
- Are resources being sought in as close to geographical proximity as possible to the need?



### ***C. Duration***

- Does this project use short-term solutions to deal with long-term problems? Are we dealing with the symptom or the problem itself?
- Is the financial assistance temporary?
- Is this project investing in development and not merely relief?

### ***D. Security***

- Is it safe to have a long-term project in this region?
- How can we do reporting without endangering local believers or diminishing accountability?
- Have we consulted with our partners on appropriate security issues?
- Could this project actually increase persecution because of western involvement?
- Is onsite reporting of a project by our staff necessary for accountability?
- Can we train someone locally to report on this project for us?