THE POWER OF MONEY

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Money is power and disproportionate power can make any relationship difficult. Mission work is not immune from this.
Category: Observations

This is another in my series of posts inspired by the recent Global Connections' conference, inspired by my tweets from the meeting.

Eddie Arthurâ€ @kouya

#GCC2014 Having the right perspective of finance isnâ€™t enough, if the money has power over us. #twomasters Velloso-Ewell

Rosalee Velloso-Ewell gave a couple of extremely challenging talks which you can (and must) download from the Global Connections' website. Rather than go into the details of her talk, I'd like to make a few observations on he subject of money in mission work: another subject that has been covered here at Kouyanet on numerous occasions (try these for size).

The thing that struck me most in Rosalee's words is that money is not neutral; it is capable of wielding great power over people; both those who have it and those who don't. It is possible to have all of the right attitudes, to have thought through issues of dependency and sustainability, but when money enters into mission partnerships or relationships, then things can go awry. Money has such power that it can easily dwarf anything else in a mission partnership. Those who are donating money can start to feel they are more important than they are and those who are receiving can start to feel that they have nothing to contribute because they don't have any money. I have seen both happen and could tell some embarrassing stories.

A few months back, I made the following points about finance in mission which are worth repeating:

> - *Rich Christians should be generous with their money. End of story â€“ there is no need for debate on this.*

> - *However, while generosity is right, it can have a negative impact by creating dependencies, lack of local accountability and such like. These issues have to be carefully balanced and managed and donors need to understand the them. Vinoth Ramachandra recently wrote anÂ excellent postÂ exploring some of these questions.*

> - *The regulations on transfer of charitable funds from the West to other countries may involve the imposition of fairly stringent conditions on the partners in the developing world which are not always helpful.*

> - *The case for supporting national workers as opposed to Westerners has sometimes been overstated. Mark Pickett has written an excellent review (part 1,Â part 2) of one influential book which throws the baby out with the bath water.*

> - *It is NOT a new paradigm! Whether the West is sending money or people, we still have the West as the one providing the resources and the rest of the world receiving. The seat of power and influence has not moved, the only thing that hs changed is the way in which the power and influence are expressed. A new paradigm of mission needs to see a rebalancing of the relationship between the West and the rest. We need to learn to receive as well as to give and to value contributions beyond the financial ones.*

To me, this last point is the important one. Money and power are interlinked and in an increasingly Global church we need to find a way to carry out God's mission without the disparities of power and influence which are still such a common feature of our world.

Interestingly, Rosalee suggested that some of our mistaken attitudes about money and power might be rooted in a misunderstanding of Scripture. She presented an alternative reading of the parable of the talents which I had never come across. At first glance it is very persuasive, but I'm not qualified to judge whether or not it is a good reading: I'd value your thoughts.