SHORT TERM MISSION (AGAIN)

Posted on June 6, 2014 by Eddie

There are some great things about short-term mission trips and there are some other aspects which are, well, not so great. Recently a couple of great blog posts have taken a look at the phenomenon and concluded that despite the down-side, there is a good case to be made for short-term trips. However, the complexity of the question highlights the need for a set of best-practice guidelines which can both help those who are organising trips to do so better and also help people who are thinking about going on trips to identify the most reputable organisations in the field.
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Are short term mission trips a good idea or a bad idea?

Well, the answer to that one is an unequivocal, yes.

There are some great things about short-term mission trips and there are some other aspects which are, well, not so great. Over the years, we have come back to this on and off at Kouyanet and you can find the relevant posts here.

Simon has recently drawn my attention to a couple of really good posts on the subject, both of which are well worth a read.

- Things No-one Tells You About Going On Short Term Mission Trips
- The Good Missionary

One of the things that bugs me about short term mission trips is that we send people half way across the world (at great cost) to do jobs that unemployed local people would be well qualified to do, if only someone would give them a chance.

> *Last time I checked, people in developing countries can paint a wall, so why are you doing it for them? If painting a wall or school is really a need in the place where youâ€™re working then invite students from that school or people from the village to do it with you. (Things no one tells you...)*

> *I saw many short-term missionaries come and go. Again and again I was amazed by how many of them were completely focused on "getting things done" during their time with us. Whether it was building a chicken coop, painting the dorm rooms, or fixing a borehole, many missions teams spent the few days they were with us doing, doing, doing. And most of the time, the doing was manual labor or unspecialized work.*
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> *I was thrilled they wanted to help us, but I always wondered about the particular activities they chose. In Kenya, for example, we have rampant unemployment, and there is literally an endless supply of Kenyans who would do such menial labor for very little money. If a missionary is going to spend so much money to fly and visit us, shouldn't they be doing work that only they can do? (Best missionary)*

However, despite this ambivalence, neither article actually discounts short-term mission trips entirely.

> *Please donâ€™t stop taking short-term missing trips, but do consider helping your team understand thatÂ howÂ we do short-term mission trips may, in fact, matter more than what we do. (Things no one tells you...)*

> *I believe the core of the issue has to do with better communication between missions groups and partner sites, in hopes that we can bridge the vastly different cultural and financial expectations and assumptions that each group has.*
>
> *By working closer, we can help one another. (Best missionary)*

Simon comes to similar conclusions in his post (make sure you read it all to get the context):

> *And so my attitude towards short-term teams have evolved recently. I still do take short-term teams, and I really enjoy having them, but at the same time I do so knowing the primarily gain is not the help that they provide us in our ministry.*

So the received wisdom is that there is a place for short-term mission trips, but we need to continue to acknowledge that there are complex issues involved. This is why Global Connections have produced their best practice guide for short-term mission. If you are involved in short-term trips in any way (as an organiser, participant or sponsor), you should make sure that the organisation you are involved with have signed up to the best practice code.