ACCOUNTABILITY CUTS BOTH WAYS

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Category: Observations

A few days ago, I wrote a post which suggested that it is unhealthy when Western Christians use their funds to control how the Church in the rest of the world grows, develops and theologises.

Predictably, there were some responses saying that there has to be financial accountability. Obviously, there need to be controls and agreements to ensure that money is used in an honest and transparent fashion; that goes without saying, but when people talk about accountability, they generally mean much more than this. In effect it isÂ the modern way of expressing the old saying "he who pays the piper calls the tune".

To compound things further, accountability is almost always one way. Those who are receiving funds have to meet targets, fill in forms, prove compliance with objectives and jump through all sorts of other hoops, but there are rarely any similar constraints placed on the funders.

Before you read on, it may be worth looking at this article from the Guardian, which illustrates some rather dodgy fund-raising practices. It would be nice to think that Christian organisations are immune from these sorts of things; but in my experience they are not. Indeed, Christian organisations can be worse because they add a layer of spiritual gloss to their stories which increases the pathos, if not the veracity.

With that in mind, here are a few suggestions for accountability standards that should be placed on Christian funders in the West by organisations and churches in the developing world.

- You will tell our stories and use our photographs honestly and accurately.
- You will not portray us as people who are unable to help ourselves or to do anything without aid from the West.
- You will not use our stories or photographs to build contingency or administrative funds for your organisation.
- You will not use disasters in our area (or anywhere else for that matter) to raise the profile of your organisation or to raise funds for other parts of the world.
- Good relationships are always mutual. You have to learn to receive blessings from us, just as we have to be humble to receive finance from you.

Simon commented on my earlier piece:

> *Whatâ€™s particularly interesting is that in a discussion about *partnership*, the only thing people have talked about is who gives *money* to whom.*

I make no apology for this. Simon is implying that there is far more to life and partnership than finance (see my last bullet point, above) and he is dead right. But money is particularly important in many situations because it is used as an instrument of power and influence and has the power to distort partnerships and relationships.