

How to Make a Difference in Africa

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Traditional thinking and aid to the developing world is based on what we in the West think is needed. As a result of this thinking and action and billions spent there is little to show for it. The reason for this outcome is simple. It is because it was our idea of what was needed and not theirs. It was our problem and not theirs.

People in the developing world know what their issues are and they also know how to resolve them in culturally appropriate and sustainable ways. Given the opportunity to identify pressing issues, strategies, and actions, those of the culture can decide and implement sustainable positive change. Our job is to be there in a supportive role.

Unlike traditional Western thinking and aid this model is grounded in what I call outside-insider thinking. This means we leave our thinking about how things should be done aside in order to really listen and hear what we are being told. This helps us think more like those of the culture and lets us ask questions to help clarify, plan for, and implement action, which we would not be able to do if we held on to what we thought needed to be done.

The outcome of this thinking and acting is strong relationships where people trust us to know and understand them as best as possible, as they deal with life's issues in their culture. We partner with people and we do nothing unless they ask.

We sit with people to discuss their issues and problem solve with them to find the best way they can address any issue they bring forward. It totally amazes me every day when I think of how much we are able to do with so little in the way of funding. The following is occurring right now in Tanzania.

We support a weekly health education radio program. Local doctors provide 40 minutes of instruction followed by a 20 min. call in. Doctors donate their time. Monies go to buy radio time. As of this January between 7-9 million people tune in weekly. This program was asked for by the people from the hospital we are connected with. They run it, provide programming, and are pleased with the results. The goal is to reach all of Tanzania.

We run Safe Motherhood Mobile Clinics. After discussion with community leaders and traditional healers we worked together to begin the first clinic two years ago. It runs once a week in the village where over two hundred women and children are seen for

education, healthcare and vaccinations. The third clinic to serve 100,000 will open as soon as we have funding.

HIV testing is now provided in the clinics for mothers and children who are indicative. This was also requested by the people. The government provides antiretrovirals but does not provide for testing. Once testing is done antiretrovirals and counselling are provided.

PAP testing for STDs and cancer is asked for. We are looking at this seriously and beginning this program.

Water purification is being requested. In response we are working with CAWST and SIDO the Small Industry Development Organization to provide education and training to build and maintain biosand water filters. This program will be a small industry development local initiative in action. Those who can not afford filters will be provided them as possible with funding gathered from the sale of the filters to others who can. Filters are inexpensive, purify water to 97- 99% purity and last 50 years. Our role is to bring the training program to those who want it so they can begin production and train others.

Education in the School consists of several elements. It includes funding for government exams (students and at all levels must drop out if they can not pay for government exams), and for supplies and clothing. In one school of 2054 students, 500 are orphans. The program includes funding for medical students who would not be allowed to remain in school for lack of funding.

Adopt a Doc provides doctors and nurses in specific areas as requested by the Tanzanian medical staff to partner with them and to teach in the medical school as requested. Westerners learn about issues faced and work with staff. They continue their professional and personal relationship over the internet providing support and assistance to each other.

These programs are the result of meeting and listening to people who know what their issues are. After discussion, sifting, thought, and planning they also know the best way to address their issues sustainably in their culture.

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