

COLLECTIVE IMPACT IN MISSION  
David Wesley, Nazarene Theological Seminary

*Introduction*

As congregations seek to live into God's mission within a shifting global context, it is not surprising that new patterns of mission involvement are emerging. Anthropologist Robert Priest describes one emerging shift in which "evangelicals are engaging in holistic mission out of a deep conviction that such patterns of positive public Christian presence are essential for credible Christian witness". (Priest, 2011, 300) According to Priest, this emerging focus reflects:

"not solely a movement from spaces where there are Christians to spaces where there are not, but rather a movement from spaces where there are Christians and churches that have extensive material resources to other spaces where there are significant numbers of Christians and churches that live under circumstances of material poverty and social constraint" (Priest, 2011, 297).

This material support of global Christian efforts is an important shift in missions. Evangelical missions of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century largely focused on evangelism and church planting, primarily through the work of mission agencies supported by local congregations. The current shift in some congregations represents a very different approach as congregations seek connections (many times through mission agencies) to help them negotiate networks with a variety of entities including non-U.S. congregations to join them in addressing global challenges such as HIV/AIDS, drought, hunger, and large scale disaster relief. This shift in mission reflects, to a degree, American society in which volunteerism and helping others is a societal value. Beyond sociological factors, the renewed emphasis on material support represents an ecclesiological expression of a sent church instead of a sending church. These changing patterns in mission affects congregations, mission agencies, long term missionaries as well as relief organizations as they address large scale global issues.

*Swaziland Partnership: A Case Study*

An example of this shift that I have been researching for the past year is Bethany First Church in Oklahoma (BFC), a congregation that has traditionally supported a denominational mission structure with annual offerings of \$300,000 to \$400,000 a year. In 2007 BFC decided to begin a large scale partnership with Swaziland to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic in that country. Within three years this congregation has sent more than 400 volunteers from their congregation and has found ways to partner with various entities beyond their denominational mission structure. The unique aspect of this partnership beyond increased volunteerism and multiplied mission giving is the synergy produced by the nature of partnership relationships through this congregation that has resulted in catalytic results. A Grant writer who works in a brokering role for the Bethany congregation to secure private and federal funds beyond the local church states;

I cannot emphasize enough how important the volunteer efforts of BFC [Bethany First Church] have helped to leverage resources in Swaziland. We have estimated that BFC in time, donated medical equipment (shipped containers) and actual contributions have generated about \$5 million in resources. This \$5 million has

allowed us to access, between Coca-Cola, the CDC and USAID about \$6.5 million in actual grants or contracts. Also, we are using our experience with BFC and their ten year commitment to approach the Gates Foundation with the International Center for AIDS Prevention at the Melman School of Public Health at Columbia University to launch a Treatment as Prevention initiative that could eliminate AIDS in Swaziland by the year 2040... The Gates people have seen the commitment of BFC and other volunteer efforts as a testimony of our seriousness to do something tangible. Converting volunteer time into a dollar figure is always challenging but not impossible. BFC has helped us do that (James Copple, January 21, 2010, e-mail message to author).

This volunteer investment represents an emerging paradigm amongst some large congregations with networking structures which allow them to partner directly with multiple organizations for greater impact on a specific area of the world as well as within their congregation. The Partnership between BFC, the churches in Swaziland and other entities are characteristic of this shift in which U.S. churches are serving as brokers and catalysts for collective impact missions.

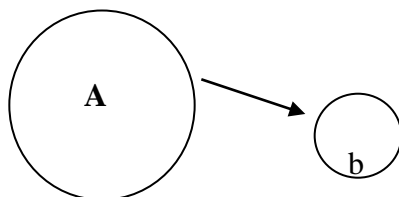
Grassroots partnerships, such as the Swaziland Partnership (SP), reflect a growing phenomenon characterized by bridging financial and human resources from the U.S. to Africa. Within this emerging paradigm of mission relationships and connections between each part of the partnership are crucial.

#### *Relationship Dynamics in the Swaziland Partnership*

A helpful tool to understand the nature of partnership relationships is a typology of cross-cultural relationships of Anthropologist, Muneo Yoshikawa (1987) in which he describes a double-swing model for intercultural communication based on Martin Buber's (1923) concept of dialogical relationship. Yoshikawa describes four categories of cross-cultural relationships as ethnocentric, control mode, dialectic mode, and dialogical mode. Others have drawn from this work to describe partnership relationships such as an article in the *International Review of Missions* by Philip Thomas (2003). Thomas presents his typology as a progressive movement from one directional relationship to transformative relationships. The relationships, in Thomas' typology in which there is reciprocity with mutual learning and exchange and which is a form of Yoshikawa's dialogical model are the most effective. Nelson, King and Smith in their book *Going Global* (2011) draw on this as well to describe congregational partnership relationships. Aspects of this typology are reflective of many congregational partnerships. In most however, these are not a progression from one level to another. These typologies exist simultaneously. The research of the Swaziland Partnership demonstrates an interactive with more than just two cultures or two entities which makes the nature of relationship more complex than simply describing culture A engaging culture B. Nevertheless, these categories serve as a helpful framework for describing the nature of partnership relationships in the Swaziland Partnership as well as others. In this article, the typology of Yoshikawa as well as the background of social capital and the emerging area of social collective impact will serve as a framework to describe the nature of relationship specifically within the Swaziland Partnership, but it also provides a framework for other congregational partnerships as well.

At every point, those participants from BFC worked to dialog and listen to those in Swaziland. It was stated several times, in Swaziland as well as Oklahoma, that the objective was not do things for the Swazis, but to do things with them. Nevertheless, in the process of a mega church in Oklahoma with financial resources and Swaziland with great need and human resources working toward a common mission, these ideals are often understood in different ways.

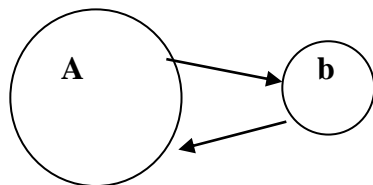
The first model could be titled an ethnocentric mode, directive mode, control mode, or simply a one-directional mode, one in which communication is one sided.



An extreme example of this is when a Partner A devises strategies intentionally not listening to the partner b or doesn't even ask input. One reason for this could be ethnocentrism in which they do not feel that the other partner is equally capable. A lesser degree of this model would be when partner A asks questions and asks for input, but does so as a matter of courtesy without actually taking the perspective of partner b into consideration as valid. A third way that this model occurs is when questions are asked and feedback is asked for, but culture is not considered and so the responses that partner A receives are interpreted through their own cultural understanding. Overall in this model culture is ignored and effective methods for feedback are not present.

Although this approach does not represent the predominant model of the SP partnership, some aspects of this model remain present in this partnership and in nearly any partnership. Cultural distinctiveness is not always taken into consideration within a partnership and the result is that those from the U.S. hear "yes" answers when they bring a plan to their non-U.S. partners and when they need a response within a short time frame. Further aspects of this model exist in the teaching workshops and hosting meals that is normally one directional.

A second model, more reflective of many relationships between U.S. churches and non-U.S. churches, proves similar to what Nelson, King and Smith (2011) call an instructive model:



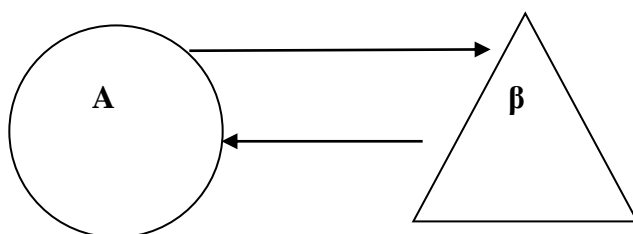
In this model, partner A hears partner b and Partner A understands the needs of partner b, but partner A is the dominant partner and they work from their own cultural perspective. Illustrative

of this approach is the elephant and mouse story, in which the elephant and the mouse dance together, and the elephant means well, but the mouse gets squashed.

A major question related to this model is “who sets the agenda?” Vital questions to ask include, “Who sets the agenda for the short-term mission teams? Who sets the agenda for projects to accept or reject? Who sets the agenda for the use of funds? And “Who sets the agenda for common meals?”

This model is helpful in the sense that the U.S. partner is at least assessing the real needs and listening to the real concerns of the non-U.S. partner. The risk in this model, however, is that the benefits from the partnership are limited without recognizing the mutual exchange of knowledge and experience that are short-cut by the dominance of one partner. Moving beyond this model is a challenge that is difficult to obtain in partnerships which are largely focused on a series of short-term teams.

A third model which reflects the nature of relationships in congregational partnership is similar to what Yoshikawa calls a dialectic mode or what others call a dialogical or transformational mode. Yoshikawa’s theory draws from Buber’s thoughts in his book *I and thou* (1923) in which “Buber became more concerned with the dialogical unity which emphasizes the act of meeting between two different beings without eliminating the otherness or uniqueness of each” (Yoshikawa, 323). This type of meeting, according to Buber, sharpens the uniqueness of each partner.



This model proves challenging since there is no real comfortable space which ignores the contradictions and challenges of the other. These realities, which create challenges, represent a paradoxical form of unity, one which Buber illustrates as alternatives: such as love and justice or the love of God and the fear of God. In some ways this model represents the ideal outcome when churches are asked about the ultimate goal for their partnership.

Most illustrative of this model in the Swaziland/BFC Partnership was a Pastor’s conference in which the on-site coordinators who were in Swaziland for a year became active brokers between BFC and Swaziland church leaders. The concept, as well as the planning, was carried out on both sides. Neither partner dominated the process. There were shared expenses. The teaching was not one-directional, but those who taught were from Africa as well as the U.S.

A fourth model in Yoshikawa’s typology of the double swing model is a model which is a form of the dialogical model but goes beyond humanitarian aid and moves toward solidarity in which both sides are mutually transformed into something greater than the sum of the two. In the first ethnocentric model, b is a mere shadow of A, in the second instructional model b is dominated

by A and is useful to A as only a means to achieve the purposes of A. The third, dialectic model recognizes the differences of both parts and works toward hearing, understanding and acknowledging those differences. A fourth model is when “A’s thesis is met by B’s antithesis and a new synthesis is created which is unique and transcends the differences of A and B which are lost in C” (Yoshikawa, 1987:320). Janel Bakker (2010) described this as blurring the lines between donor and recipient as sister congregations work together and the two sides are interdependent.

Within most partnerships this form of mystical union may not be the best way to describe any aspect of the partnership and may not be a realistic ideal for this partnership or other partnerships such as those described by Bakker. One finding in the Swaziland Partnership Case study revealed there was a transformative aspect in the partnership relationships, however, which occurred as multiple entities joined together in collective efforts which allowed BFC to effectively address a large scale humanitarian crisis such as HIV/AIDS. I will describe this phenomenon in the next section as collective impact partnerships.

### *Collective Impact in Congregational Partnership*

The term, Collective Impact is a term used to describe cross-sector philanthropic efforts to address large social issues in the U.S. and is not used specifically to address religious humanitarian work and is not used to address global efforts such as congregational partnerships. However, I am using the term, as well as the general concept of collective impact theory, as a framework for describing the structure which the Swaziland Partnership has taken. This engagement represents an emerging form of missions described by Robert Priest earlier as a move to support Christians and churches who do not have the resources to address the level of poverty and social challenges alone (Priest, 2011, 297).

The essence of collective impact theory is that large-scale social change requires broad cross-sector coordination, rather than the isolated intervention of individual organizations (Kramer and Kania, 2011). Similarly, mission efforts like those BFC approached address systemic and large scale problems, such as the HIV/AIDS crisis in Swaziland; ones that cannot be adequately addressed with a single approach by individual mission organizations or by isolated efforts within a mission organization.

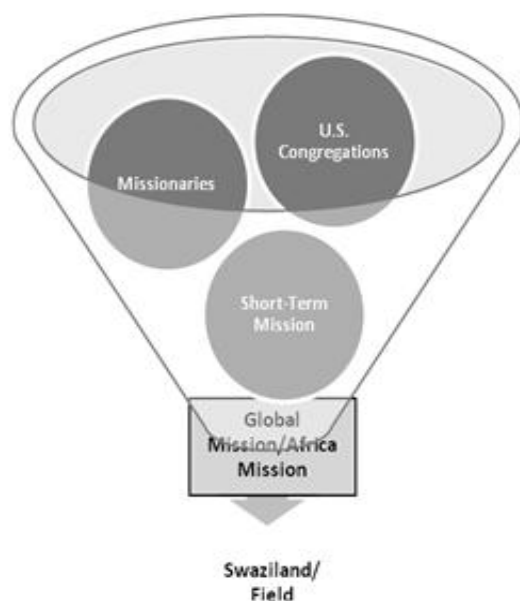
Collective Impact relates closely to the concept of Social Capital. Missiologists such as Robert Priest (2007) and sociologist, Robert Wuthnow (2002, 2009) made connections between aspects of social capital and Short-Term missions. These connections prove helpful for understanding congregational missions as well. A further integration of social theory into emerging patterns of mission such as congregational partnerships is collective impact.

Sociologist, Robert Putnam describes the Social capital that happens as a result of networking within and beyond organizations such as congregations that has benefit for individuals as well as the collective group. In his book, *American Grace* (Putnam and Cambell, 2010), Putnam describes how congregations attract people within as well as beyond their membership to engage in service related activities more than they would have outside of this relationship. People involved in a congregation, even when they don’t share the faith of the congregation according to Putnam, are much more likely to volunteer than they would be otherwise. The networking of

these resources through a common organization such as a congregation results in greater social capital as well as financial capital. Likewise, French Sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu argues that the amount of social capital produced is directly related to “the size of the network of connections one can effectively mobilize and the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected” (Bourdieu 1986, 249). As churches in Swaziland and Bethany First Church are attempting to effectively address an enormous crisis such as HIV/AIDS in the most affected country in the world, collective impact in missions which networks the congregation with multiple organizations in intentional ways represents a way for various organizations to make greater impact than the sum of their work if they were to act as isolated organizations.

Collective impact theory describes more than just various organizations collaborating, the term reflects an intentional and disciplined approach to achieving a large- scale impact that is not only beyond the capacity of any of the individual collaborators, but is also catalytic in forming a powerful, holistic response to complex issues (Kania and Kramer, 2011). Collective Impact theory described by Kania and Kramer (2011) represents an argument against isolated approaches of finding and funding solutions embodied within single organization which results in each organization inventing independent solutions and often working in competition with other organizations seeking to address the same issues.

Findings in the Swaziland/BFC Partnership included elements of isolated impact in mission and it also included elements of what is described as Collective Impact. The mission structure of the Church of the Nazarene, as well as many others could be described as a singular or isolated approach which works toward efforts that benefit the organization directly and efforts that are compatible with doctrine of the denomination. In this approach, there is a strong focus on fundraising from congregations to support the mission efforts of the denominational mission agency. This model can be represented by the following diagram:



This figure represents a model in which mission related ministries of congregations, missionaries and short-term mission support the strategy and structure of the mission agency by and channeling volunteer missions through the Global Mission structure. In this diagram Global Mission represented by the Africa Region is the valve in the funnel which is both a safe guard as well as a control for mission activities within Africa and in this case within Swaziland. Historically this model has worked well for congregations, the denomination as well as the mission field. As grass roots efforts such as short-term missions have increased and large congregations with resources have begun to enter into partnerships directly with fields, these isolated impact structures have been challenged.

In the past, this isolated approach was seen as the mission organization made the decision that the funding for Swaziland would be moved in order to support the strategy of church growth and evangelism of the Africa Region. In the same way, when this model is applied to current movements of short-term mission and congregational mission, the controlling questions for congregations or programs coming onto the mission field is whether the initiative contributes directly to the numeric growth of churches and whether they are doctrinally consistent with the denomination or agency. In the case study of the Swaziland Partnership the gate keeper between congregations and initiatives on the field has been either Global Mission (GM), or the appointed representative of GM who is the Field Strategy Coordinator (Collin Elliot) the Regional Director (Filimão Chambo) or official ministry coordinator (NCM). This system assumes that all mission related ministries on the field are approved by and channeled through the system of the leadership which is a part of the Global Mission structure.

Since this model was the *modus operandi* at the time that Bethany First Church approached Africa with the Swaziland Partnership, it is understandable that there was conflict. The Swaziland Partnership did not focus on church growth and it involved networking with

organizations which were not doctrinally consistent with the Church of the Nazarene, such as the Luke Commission, USAid, Coca Cola, and Hope Orphanage.

Another form of isolated impact emerges when siloed mission efforts such as compassionate ministries, education, or medicine remain isolated system with little or not cross sector organization. A further example would be denominational missions which work in the same area as other mission organizations, addressing the same issues, but work in isolated systems.

There are good reasons, both historically as well as presently, for an isolated impact approach, as opposed to a collective impact approach. The strength of an isolated impact model is that guidance to address issues such as dependency and healthy mission practices comes from those who are long term missionaries with expertise in the specific culture. The agenda is set by the mission organization that is working in a long term relationship with a specific area in order to establish mission objectives that are consistent with the culture, theological and biblical understanding of the church and which are consistent with lessons learned through past experiences.

Isolated impact describes the paradigm of mission that is most common in the Church of the Nazarene and which has arguably been a good platform for the expansive growth of the denomination around the world. This is the paradigm which best describes how those interviewed who are part of the mission administration such as the Field Strategy Coordinator viewed the Swaziland Partnership as it began.

The following chart provides a comparison of the two models:

#### Isolated Impact / Collective Impact

| Isolated Impact / Single system  | Collective Impact/ system of systems   |
|--|--|
| The mission agency seeks funding from congregations and donors to support specific programs which offer solutions to strategies such as church development and evangelism. | The mission agency is a strategic partner which networks congregations and organizations in diverse locations and serves as a cultural and strategy liaison. |
| Organizations such as denominations and specific ministries work separately and compete to produce the greatest independent impact.  | Effectiveness is measured by working toward common goals and measuring the same things.  |
| Evaluation isolates a particular organization or ministries impact.  | Large scale impact depends on increased cross-sector collaboration of multiple organizations.  |
| Objectives of ministry are defined by  | Objectives and agreed upon ministries are a collaborative effort which includes mission  |

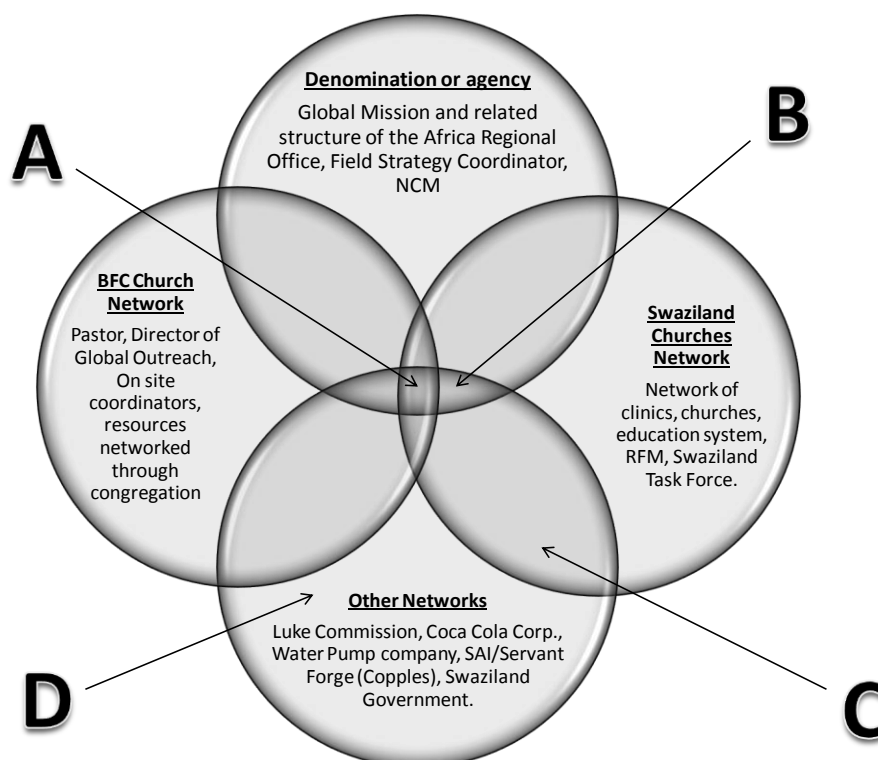


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| mission specialists. | specialists as well as congregations, and multiple entities. |
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Those participants at BFC were very careful to respect the system of the denomination and asked for their vision to be blessed by those in authority. BFC, however, approached missions in Swaziland with a very different paradigm of mission.

The emerging model in the Swaziland Partnership can best be described as a system of systems instead of a single (or isolated) system approach. In this model there are multiple systems which work independently, but which converge at points. Some are stronger and more independent than others which are more interdependent. The significance of this is that there is not one controlling agent, but rather common agreements which are the strategic points of intersection. This is an approach which is emerging, not from the top administration of the mission structure, but rather from common felt needs of a variety of organizations to address large issues such as HIV/AIDS which is beyond the capabilities of one entity such as a congregation or a denomination. In this, the denomination or mission agency becomes a strategic partner in the system rather than the controlling agent.

This emerging system of systems model of the Swaziland Partnership (or collective impact model) can be illustrated as follows:



In this model, the point of strongest connection or the greatest number of common networking is the point of collective impact which has the greatest potential (point A). The other intersecting points (Points B and C) have a lesser degree of impact and the siloed efforts (Point D) even less.

A Water Well initiative begun by BFC is an example of a “point A” collective impact. 1) The BFC Network was catalytic as one of their short-term mission team members explored the need for a working water pump (a project which was not planned), made contact with a pump contractor in Swaziland and raised \$20,000 at BFC for the first water well. 2) BFC networked with an organization (SAI/Servant Forge) to leverage a multi- million dollar grant that would benefit many people throughout Swaziland 3) The Swaziland Nazarene infrastructure of 150 churches and 17 clinics and 43 primary schools provided an effective venue for connecting the water to communities, and 4) NCM Inc. provided a system of accountability and sustainability through the Africa Regional Structure. This initiative resulted in helping to leverage \$30 million through Coca-Cola Africa Foundation and \$23million in matching funds from USAID for further development of similar water systems throughout the continent of Africa. This project received recognition through the Energy Global World Award in 2012<sup>1</sup>. Beauty Makhubela, NCM director in Swaziland states, " it is literally saving a generation from extinction because it has provided clean water to health clinics who can now initiate and sustain treatment for HIV/AIDS and TB, garden projects that feed HIV/AIDS support groups and orphans, and communities that now have an economic future because they have clean water"(Makhubela, interview with author, Manzini 2012).

If this project would have been isolated between BFC and the Swaziland churches, the impact would have been drastically limited in comparison. If the initiative, according to James Braithwait (owner of Agro Pump Company in Swaziland), had been strictly between Coca Cola and the Swazi Government, the effort would have lacked the necessary infrastructure which the church provided. The end result of the project represents a qualitative as well as a quantitative benefit. Beyond this, however, the churches in Swaziland have linking social capital which allows them to carry forward their mission of evangelism and church growth. The risk in this approach as opposed to an isolated approach is a loss of mission focus on evangelism and church growth. Pastors and leaders interviewed in Swaziland, however, state that this type of joint effort gives the church greater credibility which has resulted in greater evangelism and church growth.

An example of a Point B relationship is the Swaziland Task Force. The primary element in the Task force is the Swaziland Church Network which established the strategy and initiative for the Task Force. In a limited manner, the South Africa and Swazi Governments provide aid. To a lesser degree NCM and BFC are involved. Another example of a point B relationship is the Luke Commission which is a non-denominational mission organization in Swaziland. The Luke Commission has mobile medical clinics which utilize the Nazarene system of schools throughout the country. They also give space for medical doctors with BFC GO teams to work alongside them. The Task Force makes an emotional

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.infrastructurene.ws/2012/06/13/swaziland-rain-project-garners-global-recognition/> and <http://www.observer.org.sz/index.php?news=39744>

impact on GO Team members and is having an impact on communities that are underserved. The benefits of the Swaziland Partnership for the Task Force however are limited.

Some of the more recent projects incorporate elements of collective impact, but to a lesser degree. One possible conclusion is that projects primarily owned by the U.S. congregation in concept and or implementation have limited creative input from the host country or other organizations have limited potential when compared to the ones done in convergence with the other systems.

For those who are on short-term mission teams the impact on them proves greater when they had stronger connections to multiple contacts as well. In the Swaziland Partnership research, those who are part of large groups had a more isolated experience since most of their interaction was with group members, and those who go once were less impacted than those on smaller teams for example. Those who went once on large teams (40+) stated that the bonding with other team members was great, but they also voiced concern about the effectiveness of the home visits with the Task Force or they described reinforced cultural bias toward those of other ethnicities or socio economic status in the U.S. when they returned. GO team participants, however, who were more interactive with churches and organizations while on a small team in the host country and those who have gone on multiple trips were more positive about the impact of the trip on them when they returned and self-reported further volunteering and donations (primarily to Swaziland).

The notion of isolated impact is that single organizations such as denominations and Christian groups can make a large-scale, lasting impact on their own. As they realize that many problems such as HIV/AIDS, human trafficking, etc. are more complex and systemic rather than simply solving a problem, many efforts have resulted in large scale expensive efforts (human as well as financial) with limited or negative results. Further research into collective impact models in mission may provide answers to ways that the church works interactively as a whole body.

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