

Sustainable Development - Just Dinner with Cathy and Rick James

Cathy and Rick James come with a wonderful array of life experience;

- Started with four years in Honduras working on a mixture of projects relating to micro-credit, small enterprise, bilingual education, human trafficking and child abuse
- Over time they undertook areas of research and training to develop 'specialisms'; Having done an MBA Rick is particularly interested in management and operations and Cathy is particularly interested in how to facilitate projects in a way which work for the long term; equipping people with resources, information, know-how and determination to reach a point where they can manage their own lives
- Throughout their time in Honduras and getting involved in some church-led projects they began asking questions – how does a project or charity decide what to focus on in the bottomless pit of needs? How do we make sure that the church is at the cutting edge of justice?
- Rest of the session to share stories, learn from the Bible and discover together some answers to these questions. How can we combine the years of learning within practice development and the wisdom and power of the holy spirit to build things of lasting change and see genuine transformation in people's lives?

One of the stories shared;

- Cathy spent some time working in a prison in South America. Programme got the prisoners to play rugby together. Only condition was that they then had to take part in the government education scheme in order to be on the team. This taught SO much and changed SO much. Through playing rugby, the men learned so many life skills but due to the increased demand for the education scheme, the government was pressured to increase the quality. The increased quality and interaction with the government enabled links to be built with local businesses too which meant that on leaving prison there were much greater job prospects and chance of stability. Throughout all of this there was also a weekly Christian gathering happening which provided a great deal of welfare support and many prisoners started coming to. The question changed from 'Why am I here?' to 'For what am I here?' giving a real sense of worth and purpose to each individual. Not only did this change the lives of the prisoners but it also had a huge effect on reoffending statistics, in a short space of time the reoffending rate fell from over 60% to around 6%. Tangible, long-term, transformative change.

Bible Study:

In small groups we looked at 3 different passages before feeding back on how God worked in the story and what principles we might learn from the stories: John 6 v 1-14, Mark 6 v 30-44, 2 Kings 4 v 1-7

We identified:

- God uses what already exists
- Use what people already have

- Bring what you have already
- Do something for yourself (owning the change)
- Not wasting resources
- God's power and prayer in what changes things
- Holy Spirit working behind closed doors
- Pointing to spiritual needs too
- Met immediate and underlying need
- Long term root causes as well as tackling immediate need
- Community to help
- Working within the situation
- Learning about the situation

These were summarised under headings;

- **LOCALLY-LED AND LOCALLY-OWNED**
- **HOLISTIC** – physical AND spiritual needs met
- **ROOT CAUSES**
- **GETTING EVERYONE TO PLAY THEIR PART**
- **LEARNING WHAT WORKS**

We listened to the story which started Eagles Malawi and identified where we thought these 4/5 areas played into the story;

During the famine in Malawi, churches in 3 villages wanted to do something. They didn't have much money, having bought what food they could there was about £1000 between them. A small group visited one of the aid agency stations to find out what help was being provided.

They chatted to quite a few people in the queue. One lady was picking up her food packet for her family, they asked what she was planning to do between now and the next distribution. She responded that she would sit at home and wait for the next month's food packet.

The group decided handouts weren't the answer as the actual problem remained and so the three villages got together to decide what to do. Each village decided to run their own project based on the resources they had the needs they identified; predominantly that it wasn't that they didn't have food but that they didn't have a means of *growing* food and caring for the whole community. The three villages decided together that the first would cultivate a seed multiplication project, the second would run a care centre for all the children <5 and the third planted a series of trees. The third of which was necessary because in extreme periods of rain or storms, the blockade of trees acts as a barrier and shelters the village and crop fields from destruction.

Results were incredible in that change rippled out exponentially. The local government got involved and supported with building, redirecting a river and meeting their commitment of care. Other charities came and learned how to replicate similar projects in other villages. Malnourishment in the <5s went from 97% to 7% in 3 months.

There are now around 297 churches who run their own self-funded and self-sufficient projects to provide for the needs of their community; material and spiritual.

Some questions to think about...

- How do you present the experiences of your global neighbour through social media? Do you share pictures that affirm their dignity or could they feed into negative stereotypes of that culture? How might you actively use social media to affirm the dignity of your global brothers and sisters?
- What kind of language do you use to talk about our global neighbours? Do you in any way characterise them as 'other'? Do you assume their experiences and needs? How might you speak in a way that characterises them as brothers and sisters, as partners for change, rather than the 'other' to be saved?
- What do you look for in a charity that you support? What language does the charity use about its beneficiaries? Does it promote long term stability and recovery? Does it engage local people and give them ownership?
- If you have/are going to volunteer or go on mission work abroad, what were/are your motivations for doing that? Why did/are you deciding to that rather than work in the UK? How does the organisation you went/are going with promote the independence, safety and dignity of local individuals?

Visit <http://www.rustyradiator.com/> for some really insightful practical tips on how we use our own social media, give our time and discern the charities we support in a way that encourages a positive narrative of our global partners and affirms their dignity.