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World View and International Development

PhD, Richard Boyd Johnson

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The Oxford Centre for Mission Studies

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World View and International Development

A Critical Study of the Idea of Progress in the Development Work of World Vision Tanzania

PhD Thesis, Richard Boyd Johnson, 1999

Abstract

This thesis studies the effect of "world view" on community development initiatives in the Two-Thirds World, specifically the influence of the idea of progress on work undertaken by American aid agencies. The research investigates the extent to which the organisational culture of one agency, World Vision, has been transmitted and internalised by its national staff in Tanzania, and also to what extent this agency's presence in Tanzania influences the development views of the recipients of its programmes.

The thesis tests the argument that individuals exposed to international development agencies will have more "modern" notions of community development than those who do not have this exposure. A foundation for this hypothesis is provided by a study of the concept of world view, the idea of progress, and the development ideologies that have informed American religious-based aid agencies. The history and ministry of World Vision also is examined, to highlight the varied impact of this organisation in local contexts.

To test the thesis hypothesis, a questionnaire was administered to 550 Tanzanians from three groups: the staff of World Vision Tanzania, members of the communities where this organisation has projects, and students at the Community Development Training Institute (located in the same region). The evaluation of the argument concentrates on perceived causes of poverty and the role of external sources of aid. The responses are statistically analysed by several methods, and the results — on development, modernity, and progress — are counter-intuitive, with the community members expressing more "progressive" views than the other groups. The research also reveals the surprising power of economic individualism (despite a historical influence of socialist ideology), and the modest significance of religious variables (despite a historical influence of Christian missions).

The three groups of the study are compared, and a summary of their models of development is presented. Reasons offered for the differing group viewpoints include: exposure to bureaucratic systems, altered perspectives on economic enterprise, new definitions of social improvement, and residual religious motivations. The thesis concludes with a consideration of its unique significance for development theory, research, and practice, including: the contribution to ideas on civil society, institutional advancement, and micro-enterprise, as well as the application of statistical methods to development data and the presentation of specific variables to examine modernity and progress.