

Saul's Armor and David's Sling:

Innovative Sending in the Global South



Tim Lewis and Bob Goodmann

The last 100 years have seen dramatic changes in the “Global South”, which is defined as the less developed countries of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. First, the era of colonial expansion by the West has come to an end, and (due considerably to Christian missions) the nations of the Global South are increasingly asserting their right and ability to participate on the world stage. Second, Christianity has grown dramatically in the Global South, such that 61% of the world’s Christians now live in the Global South.¹

These changes have enormous potential consequences for kingdom advance in the Global South, where the majority of the world’s unreached peoples are also located. The 1.3 billion Christians in the Global South¹ represent a vast new workforce that could be tapped for the spread of the gospel. However, of the 420,000 Christian missionaries now deployed from all the countries of the world, only 22% (90,000) come from the Global South, while 78% (330,000) came from the Global North¹. Clearly much remains to be done to encourage Global South mission-sending commensurate with the dramatic growth of Christianity there.

Perspectives from David and Goliath

How can the sending potential of Christians in the Global South be unleashed? Can it be done by continued leadership and funding from the Global North? Or will it be necessary to encourage the independence and leadership of emerging mission leaders in the Global South? [Editor’s note: see the article on pages 23–25 for additional perspective on these questions.]



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The story of David and Goliath provides a useful perspective for mission leadership in both the Global North and Global South as they consider the great challenge of the remaining unreached peoples.

In 1 Samuel 17, the Israelite army faced the Philistine army and their champion Goliath, an enemy of overwhelming proportions. When David arrived on the scene, he was dismayed to learn of the Israelites’ intimidation and volunteered to fight Goliath. Saul accepted his offer and tried to outfit David with his own equipment. After a brief trial, David refused Saul’s armor, preferring instead to trust his sling and his own experience of the power of God.

How can the sending potential of Christians in the Global South be unleashed?

1. Saul’s Armor and David’s Sling

Once it was clear David was committed to confronting Goliath, Saul tried to give him his armor, which represented the best technology of the day. Fortunately David had the courage to set aside Saul’s armor because he wasn’t accustomed to it. Instead, he used tools with which he was

already comfortable and which were locally available – namely, a sling and five smooth stones which he found in a nearby stream. David’s confidence was based on experiencing God at work in his own life in the past, as he defended his father’s sheep.

The very best tools, strategies, and best practices from 200 years of mission from the Global North may not be the most helpful for Global South sending.

What might “a sling and five smooth stones” look like for those in the Global South with high potential for sending?

Emerging mission leaders in the Global South may choose to set aside “Saul’s armor” and take up “a sling and five smooth stones,” even if these local

methods are perceived as inadequate and simplistic by those who are more experienced.

Saul’s armor represented wealth, power, and the latest technology, while David’s sling represented simplicity and vulnerability. Each, rightly understood, is a gift from God, and each may be used to advance His kingdom by those to whom it has been given.

2. Courage and Doubt

Saul doubted David’s ability to fight Goliath because David was young and inexperienced in battle. Emerging mission leaders in the Global South may find that more experienced leaders will at times doubt their capabilities. They should respond with courage, knowing that God is with them, as He was with David in defending his father’s sheep and then in fighting Goliath.

3. Spiritual Confrontation

“David said to the Philistine, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied” (1 Samuel 17:45). David saw his battle with Goliath as a spiritual confrontation with a physical manifestation, rather than as a purely physical confrontation.

As Philip Jenkins points out in his landmark book *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*, believers in the Global South expect to see God break into human affairs and work in unusual and miraculous ways.² Emerging mission leaders in the Global South may confidently rely on their experience of the Lord’s

power in recruiting, training, and sending workers, and in effectively implanting the gospel into unreached peoples.

4. Great Faith

David had great faith, greater than that of Saul and his army. Emerging mission leaders in the Global South should have great faith that God will use them mightily to reach the unreached peoples that are all around them.

Characteristics That May Unleash Global South Sending

What might “a sling and five smooth stones” look like for those in the Global South with high potential for sending? Five characteristics will likely contribute to unleashing this potential. The first characteristic describes who is sending, the next three discuss how and where workers are sent, and the last discusses how they implant the gospel when they arrive.

1. Local leadership and structures

Leaders in Latin America, Africa, and Asia are fully capable of leading their own sending initiatives and structures, and they should be encouraged to do so. However, existing structures may need to release them to develop their own sending strategies and structures.

Unless Global South leaders are able to provide true local leadership, they will have difficulty recruiting, training, and sending their workers using locally available methods. Without independent local leadership, it seems unlikely that emerging Global South sending will be able to put down Saul’s armor and experiment with slings and stones that might make sense for the local context. The temptation of Saul’s armor is difficult to overcome, and the benefits of doing so are not always clear.

Emerging sending structures in the Global South need “Davids” who will assess the relative advantages of Saul’s armor and David’s sling for their local contexts. The other characteristics described below depend almost entirely on local leadership and structures that could provide a break from the past and explore new strategies.

2. Local self-sufficiency

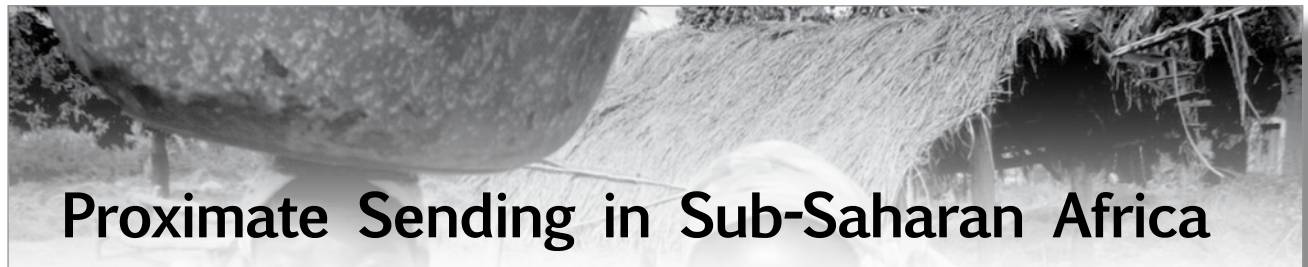
God has marvelously used fully-supported missionaries in the last two centuries of sending from the Global North. But this model requires great wealth and substantial structures to send large

numbers of long-term workers with full support. So how do we avoid this difficulty? One problematic emerging strategy is to use funding from the Global North to send workers from the Global South. The logic goes like this: "We have the money, you have the people, so let's 'partner' together." Yet one of the many problems with this approach is that it tends to prevent local leadership and ownership. Whoever controls the purse strings tends to control the direction and the decisions.

Instead of foreign funding, the discovery of locally sustainable resources should be encouraged. Only

local self-sufficiency will be sustainable in the long-term, and only local self-sufficiency will encourage local leadership and local structures. *[Editor's note: see the article on pages 26-28 for more on this topic.]* Of course, self-sufficiency is difficult to achieve, and it is unrealistic to expect that only local funding will be pursued. However, without a committed local effort to pursue self-sufficiency, foreign funding is likely to remain a barrier to

The discovery of locally sustainable resources should be encouraged.



Proximate Sending in Sub-Saharan Africa

One small denomination in an impoverished country of Sub-Saharan Africa is sending workers to proximate Muslim tribes. These tribes speak the same trade language, share similar cultures and lifestyles, and have identical agricultural economies. The leaders of this denomination had sent only two families in the past because they had limited access to outside funding. Three years ago they were challenged to consider sending workers as farmers, rather than as fully-supported workers. This began to unleash their sending potential.

In the last three years, they have sent 17 families to 17 Muslim tribes within 200 miles. The only outside funding that is involved covers 45 days of intensive training in cross-cultural living and witnessing, the purchase of two oxen and a plow, and a modest relocation allowance. The total cost of training and sending is less than \$3,000 per family, and the result is long-term workers who are self-sufficient. They are recruited by their local leadership, trained by locals with the help of some outsiders (assistance which is now phasing out), and sent by their own denomination without any foreign oversight.

The sites for their relocation were selected after their mission director visited a number of the Muslim tribes and, using the shared trade language, asked each tribal chief if he would like to receive a farming family who would preach the gospel to them. When

he was granted permission (as he generally was), the families moved, built huts just like the ones in their home villages, cooked over the same charcoal stoves, and farmed using the same techniques. They are as self-sufficient as they were in their home villages. These workers are openly preaching the gospel, and some are already seeing Muslims come to faith.

This effort is entirely led by the denomination's leaders through the existing denominational structure. They plan to continue training and relocating 6-10 families every year, even though their entire denomination numbers only 5,000 in 40 churches! The sending infrastructure is minimal because the mission director can visit all of the families on his motorcycle and because he already speaks the trade language in these villages.

Their proximate advantages, combined with a locally sustainable sending strategy, have dramatically increased their sending potential. Furthermore, there are 45 proximate unreached Muslim tribes within 500 miles who speak the same trade language and have similar cultures and lifestyles. This group has already engaged 17 of them. These are tribes that a Global Northerner would have difficulty in reaching, but that these believers are ideally suited to reach because of their proximate advantages.

dramatic increases in sending. Below we present several examples from Africa and Asia that suggest shortcuts to self-sufficiency and local sustainability.

Two aspects of traditional sending from the Global North, in particular, have the feel of Saul's armor in the Global South: distant sending and

Emerging sending structures would significantly increase their sending potential if they focused on proximate sending.

fully-supported workers. Sending high-cost workers across great distances is largely unavoidable when workers are from the Global North and the lost are in the Global

South. However, encouraging Global South sending to pursue the same strategies of high distance and high cost would make local self-sufficiency virtually unattainable for the majority of the Global South.

By contrast, two strategies can make local self-sufficiency far easier to achieve: proximate sending and dual-vocation workers. These tandem strategies of low distance and low cost are the next two characteristics to be discussed.

3. Proximate sending

The harvest workers of the Global South have huge advantages of "proximics" with their lost neighbors. We define "proximics" (a term we have coined) as "the gospel-spreading advantages that come from being close to the lost in various dimensions: geography, linguistics, culture, socio-economics, worldview, lifestyle, standard of living, etc."

Often lists of people groups are developed and prioritized (especially by leaders in the North) in terms of their lostness (e.g., no one else is working among them) and their size (e.g., people groups over 100,000 in population). For Global South sending, prioritization of people groups should also include an assessment of proximic advantages.

In fact, emerging sending structures would significantly increase their sending potential if they focused on proximate sending. One excellent example of the advantages of proximate sending is found in Sub-Saharan Africa (see story on page 19).

4. Dual-vocation workers

Dual-vocation workers require far less funding than fully-supported workers, and often require

no financial assistance at all. In addition, they are generally more credible among the lost because they're working "just like everyone else," and therefore they're less vulnerable to the accusation that they're being paid by foreigners to preach the gospel. Also, if they are sent to proximate peoples, it is generally easier to find gainful employment than if they're sent to distant areas where they don't know the language, culture, or local industries. So this approach seems to be intricately linked to proximate sending.

Obviously this is easier said than done. We are not in any way minimizing the difficulties of finding work among a completely new people group, or balancing the time demands of work and ministry. However, sending dual-vocation workers is more sustainable than pursuing long-term funding from the Global North.

5. Gospel implantation

It is not enough to encourage significant sending of Global South workers if they present the gospel to an unreached people group in a way that is comfortable to their sending culture but not to the receiving culture. Often workers expect to start a church like the one in which they grew up, structured around a building and meetings. Yet the New Testament church was a community of believers, not a church building. Escaping the gravitational pull of known models is one of the challenges of any new era or initiative.

Jesus said: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough" (Matt 13:33). Rather than carrying a foreign-seeming gospel and creating extracted communities, workers should seek to implant the gospel like yeast. The gospel should infiltrate existing communities and existing cultural forms, and establish a community of faith that is natural to the new context rather than seeming foreign.

Global South sending structures have a significant advantage in gospel implantation if they send to proximate peoples, because the cultural distance that they need to bridge is not as great as for those who have crossed a great cultural distance. Emerging mission leaders should use this proximate advantage to more effectively implant the gospel like yeast.

Innovative Approaches to Global South Sending

We have observed several models of innovative sending in Africa and Asia. We offer these as illustrative of what is possible, not as formulas for every situation. We're confident that dozens of other equally successful and appropriate models can be identified and applied – and in some cases are already applied. Our intent is to encourage consideration of new approaches to Global South sending that combine the best aspects of proximate sending, dual-vocation workers, and locally sustainable resources.

"Relocation sending" is similar to traditional distant sending, in that a worker moves to a new location to minister cross-culturally. However, when sending is proximate, that move has the opportunity to be a relocation where the worker does the same thing he or she has always done, except in a new location. The Sub-Saharan African sending example (see story on page 19) illustrates the relocation of farmers as dual-vocation workers.

"In-place sending" is another type of sending that is available when believers and the lost are

geographically proximate. In "in-place sending," workers are trained to take the gospel cross-culturally into an unreached people group, but they don't quit their jobs, because they already live near or among the unreached people group. For example, in one Asian location, a locally-run ministry working among extremely poor Muslims is in the process of converting from all-paid staff to a mix of paid and volunteer staff, as members of local churches are trained in the ministry and how to sensitively share Jesus with Muslims. This ministry has seen hundreds come to faith in the last several years, but their growth has been limited by their dependence on external funding to pay their staff. The conversion to a more sustainable resource mix gives them the opportunity to expand into new locations and new cities.

Another example of in-place sending is a new outreach

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beginning in an underground church network in China. There the leaders who are Han Chinese were challenged to reach the Hui Muslims who live in their villages, and they've begun to strategize how the believers can reach those Muslims without leaving their villages.

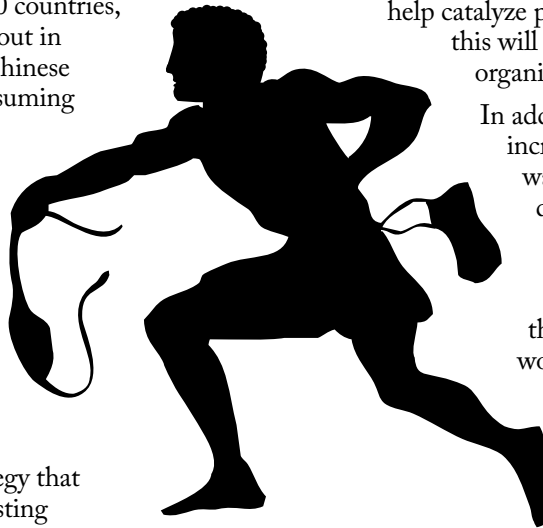
"Overseas employment" is another low-cost/no-cost sending strategy that takes advantage of existing means of leaving the country to work. For example, more than eight million Filipinos work in more than 180 countries, with one million sent out in 2005 alone, and the Chinese diaspora is likewise assuming greater significance.

However, to harness this potential, traditional models of recruitment, training, sending, and oversight will need to be reexamined.

"Government employment" is a strategy that takes advantage of existing and emerging government employment. One African denomination is using government sending of nurses and teachers to send their workers to predominantly Muslim areas. In China, mission leaders are considering how to send workers through the Chinese government's pursuit of oil and gas resources in the Muslim world and the employment opportunities that will follow.

Global North leaders may want to consider re-prioritizing their deployments.

These sending strategies – relocation, in-place, overseas employment, and government employment – are only a few examples of how Saul's armor can be set aside and innovative strategies for sending and funding can be explored. These strategies use locally available and locally sustainable resources, rather than creating or continuing long-term dependency on external resources.



The Continuing Role of Sending from the Global North

The exciting potential of Global South sending does not in any way relieve the Global North of the responsibility to continue sending workers into the harvest. However, mission leaders in the Global North should 1) remain open to the new structures and new strategies that may emerge in Global South sending, and 2) consider deploying significant resources from their organizations to help catalyze proximate sending movements, even if this will not result in the growth of their own organizations.

In addition, as Global South sending increases, Global North leaders may want to consider re-prioritizing their deployments to areas of the world where there are no Global South sending movements proximate to the unreached. It's exciting to consider the true kingdom partnership that would emerge if, over time, believers in the Global South began to accomplish proximate sending and believers in the Global North began to re-prioritize their distant sending to areas where proximate sending is not feasible or not yet happening.

"A New Thing"

In Isaiah 43:19, God tells us, "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?"

In these historic times God is doing a new thing in the Global South. He has created a massive new workforce of potential laborers for His harvest. New sending from this Global South workforce should be encouraged, without weighing it down with the Saul's armor of western leadership, western structures, western funding, distant sending, and fully-supported workers.

May the Lord grant the emerging leaders and structures of the Global South the joy of discovering their own versions of "a sling and five smooth stones." 🌐

End Notes

- 1 Statistics from www.worldchristiandatabase.org.
- 2 Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*, Oxford University Press, 2006, Chapter 5, "Good and Evil".