Recruit, Equip and Sustain Christian Leaders in a New Urban World

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The last decade has seen a significant response in the number of practitioners involved in urban mission around the world. Today the need is urgent for the broader church to take collective action to motivate and mobilise a strong contingent of Christian leaders who will commit to living incarnationally in poor urban communities. This is already happening which is a sign of hope for neighborhoods to be transformed with the good news of kingdom justice and mercy. To respond to the challenges brought about by the massive rise of urbanization in the world, recruiting people to follow Jesus into tough urban contexts cannot be ignored. Once recruited, they need to undergo appropriate preparation and equipping. To be sustained in their vocation and call to faithful discipleship and ministry for the long journey requires supportive networks. Recruiting, equipping and sustaining Christian leaders is vitally important for kingdom transformation to be accomplished in an increasingly urbanized world.

Introduction

A gathering prompted and inspired by the Spirit, where every experience was geared to responding faithfully to God’s heart for a growing urban world – this is what characterized the Integral Urban Mission Summit held in Bangkok in January 2013. Active participants in urban mission from every continent were drawn together with an urgency to do whatever it takes to alleviate the destructive cycle of injustice and poverty and to be agents of hope and transformation in slums and poor neighborhoods.

Faced with the overwhelming statistics that over a billion people live in urban slums today, and that by 2030 the number could double to two billion, Summit participants were challenged about the need to recruit, equip and sustain Christian leaders to help extend God’s reign among the urban poor. Trying to grasp the magnitude of what is

1 This chapter was originally published as an ISUM Summit Briefing Paper (#2).

required to meet that need can lead to a sense of powerlessness to be able to make any significant difference. Abstract numbers can blind us to the seriousness of this rising surge, so reality must be confronted through the experience of individual people.

Ashley Barker relates an incident he had when his response took him by surprise, despite having lived since 2002 in the Klong Toey slum. One day as he rode his motorbike past a woman sitting eating in the doorway of her plywood shack, he was engulfed by the signs of poverty and the smell surrounding her: no water, no power, rubbish, human and animal faeces scattered around. They exchanged smiles but as Ash rode away he was overcome by her misery and what he describes as an inadequate response. Haunted by this encounter, he calls attention to the need to take poverty personally in community. This woman represents a kind of futility in “a stinking ocean of poverty”, yet she is one human life, made in God’s image, in the midst of thousands. For her life and her neighborhood to experience transformation, and for that to be multiplied in similar settings around the world, it will take a significant movement of Christians responding to the call of Jesus to follow him into the hard places.

This paper reflects the energy and commitment of Summit participants who are vitally concerned with recruiting, equipping and sustaining Christian leaders for a new urban world. The structure mirrors the themes which the working group had as a focus: Recruit, Equip, Sustain. The guiding questions which shaped discussion and responses were:

[1] Where do we see seeds of hope for urban shalom in recruiting, equipping and sustaining Christian leaders?

[2] What are the challenges to urban shalom?

[3] What are our calls to action to the broader church to recruit, equip and sustain Christian leaders for urban work?

Collective action arising out of the Integral Urban Mission Summit was identified as an important outcome so that the time and cost invested in participating in the Summit would bear fruit for mission. Reflecting on Shane Claiborne’s statement in his Summit message on the Good Samaritan story, “We cannot make poverty history until we make poverty personal”, the working group applied the same principle to identify calls to action or recommendations to the broader church. The group recognized that we cannot expect

3 Barker, Slum Life Rising, 102-103.
the broader church to take action unless we are prepared also to take action personally. So we identified an action or a step we could each take in our own ministry when we returned home as a result of being at the Summit. Sometimes recommendations can be vague and general, so the challenge was to identify specific actions that would galvanize the broader church to recruit, equip and sustain Christian leaders in their vocation.

The spheres of recruiting, equipping and sustaining workers, although having distinct priorities and emphases, overlap and inform each other. As you read this paper, look for those links and be open to the Spirit guiding your responses.

1. Recruiting Christian Leaders

Summary Statement

Jesus commands his disciples not to pray for the harvest – that is already plentiful: “But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest” (John 4:35). He asks his disciples, rather, to pray for workers to attend to a ripe harvest (Luke 10:2). The call upon Christ’s disciples to pray for the release of workers, as well as to attend to the harvest themselves is clear. In a world that is 50% urban and a church that is still catching up to that reality, the need to recruit Christian leaders for the new urban world has never been greater. The urban world is ready and waiting for a greater manifestation of God’s kingdom. In many ways, the urban mission field is a fruitful place and there are signs of hope that Aslan4 is on the move. Something is stirring in the majority world church as, despite limited resources, pastors and missionaries in poor communities are being mobilized to bring kingdom transformation to the world’s megacities.

There is also movement in the more affluent west, as young Christians raise their voices and invest their hearts in ministries that address injustice, oppression and urban poverty. Still, significant challenges lie ahead for mobilizing Christian leaders into urban poor communities. The gap between rich and poor is massive, the consumerist spirit and the prosperity gospel run unchecked, and the complexity of ministry in dense, urban communities that are marked by extreme poverty requires a special leader.

This section of the working group paper will review the signs of hope and the challenges, then suggest some action steps toward recruiting and mobilizing women and men to participate in establishing the kingdom of God among our urban, poor neighbors.

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4 Aslan is the central character of C. S. Lewis’s The Chronicles of Narnia series; the lion of The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe; and intended by C. S. Lewis as a Christlike figure.
Signs of Hope

i. Youthful altruism

In the West there is a noticeable rise in concern for injustice activism and a desire to address the issues surrounding urban poverty. This is being expressed in a variety of ways, including scores of young people re-locating to high crime, high-poverty locations within Western countries. In Canada, for instance, an organization called Move In has mobilized more than 200 households of mostly young people to buy or rent property in some of the most deprived neighborhoods in the country in just three short years. Organizations like the Eden Network in the UK and The Simple Way in the US are seeing a similar movement of altruistic young people re-locating in order to “be the change they want to see in the world.” Throughout the so-called developed world young people from affluent backgrounds are making the downward journey to plant themselves in neighborhoods marked by drugs, prostitution and poverty. The ISUM Summit itself, with 200 participants, represented a sign of hope as people from around the world gathered to pray, trade stories, think and write about the work currently underway in poor communities.

ii. Majority world rising

Likewise, majority world believers are mobilising to address the situation in slum communities. Viv Grigg, during a seminar at the ISUM Summit, said that ten years ago a word was given that God was going to raise up 50,000 workers from among poor communities as servants to their poor neighbors. Grigg now estimates that there are easily 50,000 pastors and missionaries from among the urban poor who are ministering in slums around the world. Another member of our group, Nigel Brancken, who lives with his family in Hillbrow, an inner-city high-rise slum in Johannesburg, commented that affluent youth are expressing interest in experiencing life and service among the poor. In his neglected suburb, youth from Germany are volunteering and serving among the poor. Some poor youth who have been able to move out of their community are returning in order to work for kingdom transformation. He shared a story of a former street child from Hillbrow who, after attending Bible College, has returned to the community to serve on Nigel’s team reaching the homeless. Simply hearing about or seeing the Spirit of God moving among the marginalized who, themselves, are ushering

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5 Quote attributed to Mahatma Gandhi.

6 Viv Grigg co-facilitated a working group at the ISUM Summit, "Fuel Church Movements Among the Urban Poor".
in transformation, is a sign of hope that is attracting others to draw near to Christ as he brings healing to poor communities.

iii. The testimony of history

We take courage that God has consistently sparked revival and change on the margins of empires. Whether slaves and women in the first century, Welsh coal miners in 1904, or 21st century Dalits in India, God loves to move powerfully among those deemed “least” by the powerful. God has mobilized young people by the droves to move to places considered geographically, sociologically, culturally or spiritually distant from their places of origin. St. Francis of Assisi was 26 when he began to attract other youth to his radical life of simplicity and service. Teresa of Kolkata was 18 when she became a missionary.

Asian is indeed on the move. Christian young people are hungry for deep, lasting and holistic transformation among our poor neighbors. Majority world pastors and missionaries are remaining in or returning to slum communities to shepherd churches, witness to the resurrection, and advocate for godly change. We are buoyed by the testimony of history as we recall God’s propensity to move powerfully among the world’s margins.

Challenges

i. Class division

Yet we are not naïve about the obstacles to mobilizing workers to serve alongside our poor neighbors. We live in a class-divided world. Perhaps humans have always lived in class division, but the current manifestation of class division seems to be deepening and widening. The statistical estimates are disturbing: 99.9% of the global population possesses less than 20% of the world’s wealth while the other 0.1% enjoys more than 80%.[7] This gap between rich and poor can make mobilization difficult. In order to recruit people among both rich and poor some kind of relationship is needed. The rich, who are often out of touch with the situation among the poor, are likely to misunderstand the reasons for global urban poverty or to underestimate the need. Those in poor communities will also need the encouragement, advocacy and resources of the rich in

order to return or remain in their communities. The deep chasm between the world’s rich and poor presents a challenge to mobilization.

In addition, mission agencies have for too long presented a truncated gospel. This may be due, at least in part, to the division between rich and poor. Many western Protestant mission agencies have historically been run by and populated with missionaries who come from middle class or wealthy backgrounds who have had an inadequate understanding of God’s mission to bring not only people, but systems and structures under the authority of his Son. Protestant mission agencies and missionaries have sometimes assumed conversion and church planting is all that is needed in order to bring transformation to poor communities. Many in poor communities, for their part, have accepted this class division as well. Father Paul Uwemedimo, a participant in our group, said that in Nigeria a poor community may expect as a point of pride that their priest will live in relative luxury. Our class-divided world has added fuel to unbalanced power dynamics and a patron-client relationship. Many mission agencies simply are not equipped to recruit the right people because of a faulty paradigm under which they operate.

ii. Prosperity gospel and consumerism

The prosperity gospel and its western counterpart consumerism are deceiving Christian communities into believing that the pursuit of wealth and possessions is acceptable among believers. Western believers have been sold a sufferless Christianity which suggests that following Jesus does not involve sacrifice or hardship and that ministry among the poor, when it occurs, should be done from a comfortable distance. In addition, a messianic complex can make it difficult to recruit young people who are convinced that they are the answers to the world’s problems rather than the risen Christ. The call to incarnational ministry among our poor friends has never been so counter-cultural in a comfort-obsessed western church. Likewise, in many poor communities in the majority world, the call to remain in or return to those communities runs against the grain of Christian teaching on prosperity which suggests that God wants his people to succeed by possessing large amounts of personal wealth and then move out of poorer areas. While it is true that God’s heart is for sufficiency, even abundance among all those made in his image, the emphasis on possessing large amounts of private wealth has obscured God’s intent for communities to enjoy shalom. Whether due to theologically errant teaching or cultural pressure to assimilate, a large obstacle to recruiting believers to walk alongside poor communities is their love of money.
iii. Recruiting the right people

Many believers living in poor communities should seek greater financial stability, education, and serving as a kingdom ambassador in the world of government, business, academia or the sciences. While all are called to radical hospitality, concern for the marginalized, being satisfied with daily bread, and giving generously - not all are called to remain in slum communities or return to them after they have been able to move out. In the same way, many who have grown up in relative affluence must pursue a simpler lifestyle and grow tender-hearted toward those who survive on much less, but not all are called to relocate long term to a developing world barrio. Recruiting the right leader to live and serve full-time among the world's destitute can be difficult. Some whom we might not expect to be called and equipped to leadership in urban poor areas may grow into the very person a poor community needs, while others who seem an "obvious" fit for service among the urban poor may end up causing unnecessary harm to themselves or others because they simply were not cut out for leadership among poor neighbors. The process of careful discernment and calling within the church and youth or mission organizations, and the need to create safe testing places and times for believers to discern a call, is critical.

Calls to Action

i. Discipleship

Like so many things in life, recruiting leaders to the new urban world is not so simple. The church, indeed, must give voice to the urgent needs in our communities and call people to respond, but it is not enough to just present some statistics about the needs in the megacities and issue a call. Nor is it as simple as giving people short term experiences of building relationships and walking alongside our neighbors on the margins, yet the church must continue to do this as well. The primary need is for steady, holistic, life-on-life discipleship. We need mothers and fathers of the faith to take the long, faithful walk alongside fellow believers, helping them to develop a better understanding of holistic kingdom transformation and helping people discern their role in that transformation. The church in the slums as well as the church in the wealthy suburbs needs to recapture a vision of shalom and disciple each other into positions of bringing shalom to the desperate places on earth. Some of those places will be urban poor communities.

Ralph Winter's differentiation of modality (rooted local church) from sodality (missionary band) has been helpful in identifying one way of accomplishing the church's
mission. But it may have served its purpose in the development of post-World War II mission agencies. A new ecclesiastical paradigm is needed to help every Christian understand their missional call in bringing kingdom shalom and then methods are needed to equip all believers to do so without a strict separation between missionaries and non-missionaries.

ii. Focused short-term opportunities

While some have been recruited to a life of cross-cultural service simply from reading Scripture or going to a missions conference, most of those serving in poor communities today have been called through relationships and experiences. Even those from the majority world need clarifying experiences of serving in slum communities to discern a call to return or to remain. They also need relationships with those who live missionally on the margins (whether local or expatriate) to confirm their calling. To do this we need to see careful opportunities carved out, which will expose people to a discernment process on the margins shepherded by those who live and serve there.

Focused short-term opportunities for people who have lived outside slum communities need to be carefully crafted to avoid poverty tourism or solidifying dangerous power dynamics between the poor and non-poor. Whether the participant lives 10 kilometres or 10,000 kilometres from the community, these experiences require solid orientation and deliberate preparation for everybody involved. Those exploring the possibility of a life of service among the poor need to enter the experience with the expectation that God will speak to them about their future relationship to live and serve in that setting. Their goal is to hear from the Spirit of God in regard to calling more than it is to provide any long term benefit, though experiences should be crafted so the participant makes some contribution to a community. Those in the community should have significant say over how the visitors enter and contribute.

These experiences should call participants to a clear next step. For instance, after a one to four month experience in a marginalized urban community, expatriates should be challenged to commit to two years of incarnational service. Those living in or near the community already should be invited at the conclusion of a service experience to commit to another step in their level of involvement. Those who are not called to long-term incarnational ministry on the margins (or “insiders” called to move out of a slum community) should be encouraged to live simply and give generously wherever they end up. Those discerning a call to at least two years of incarnational service should be given

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tools to test that call within their community and explore options.

While short-term mission has numerous pit-falls, it can be used as a valuable discernment tool which can be leveraged to make modest contributions to a community. We must not underestimate the power of an outsider simply giving time to listen and stand alongside our friends on the margins if only for a period of weeks. Creating points of solidarity can radically bless both parties.

iii. Effective equipping and sustaining

Of course recruitment is futile if those living and serving in the new urban world are poorly equipped and not well sustained. Part of good recruiting is creating the structures which will properly equip those serving in urban poor neighborhoods and help men and women to thrive in this challenging setting. Many of the missionary biographies from the past include the critical place of someone living the missional life that influenced the potential recruit with their lives and stories. We need to help those who are thriving in these settings to tell their stories and invite relationship with those who are considering the possibility of a life on the margins.

While Viv Grigg estimates there are currently 50,000 workers (almost exclusively majority world residents) serving in the slums, many, many more are needed. We are hopeful that this working group paper will help churches and mission agencies to spawn discussion on how to best recruit, equip and sustain a new wave of urban leaders.

2. Equipping Christian Leaders

Summary Statement

A passion for working in urban poor communities is a vital element for Christian leaders in their response to God's call. The recruiting of such people and the harnessing of their passion in their subsequent preparation is clearly a challenge. To send workers to tough urban contexts without adequate preparation, hoping that they will learn "as they go", is to invite disillusionment and potential damage for workers and neighbors. It is understood that ongoing learning and equipping will occur for urban workers in their mission settings, but this needs to be built on training, formation, practical application, theological reflection and immersion experiences. The Equip working group spent the first session together identifying areas of hope in the equipping of leaders for urban work. The second session considered challenges and barriers faced by urban leaders. The group then identified creative calls to action that incorporate various ways of equipping Christian leaders for a new urban world.
Signs of Hope

i. Broken systems create opportunity for change

There is opportunity for good things to arise out of broken systems in both church and world. Einstein said that the definition of insanity was continually doing the same things, yet expecting change. Similarly, many people doing "the daily grind" in church and society know that life could be more fruitful and meaningful if they stepped out and made a positive change.

There has been plenty of magnification and exposure of broken institutional systems in the church and the world in recent years. For example the effects of the global financial crisis and resulting insecurity in most parts of the West led to disillusionment and dissatisfaction. Similarly the exposure of sexual abuse and generally declining trends in church have made people realise that many parts of the old system are broken. Circumstances such as these can provide the seedbed for changes in leadership patterns and practices with hopefully a closer examination of biblical patterns and principles, as they apply to contexts of urban poverty.

ii. Mentoring and discipleship

There is wonderful scope for new possibilities as the emerging generation purposefully seeks relational systems. This means that there is potential for change towards newer, more relational and mentoring paradigms in leadership development. Potential leaders do not have to have hurdles placed in front of them to "sift" out those who are suited to living in poor communities. Potential leaders can examine and pursue models and examples from wider settings which contrast with "one-size-fits-all" models formerly sought by denominations and mission agencies. This means that there is potential to impact beneficially those who are emerging in leadership transition and succession; we note that it also might not too!

The working group cited the following as factors that are regarded as necessary by emerging generations for the equipping of leaders:

1. Authenticity: the involvement of urban mission practitioners in the training of emerging leaders gives credibility and substance to what is taught;

2. Mutuality in mentoring between the mentor and mentoree: the mentoree benefits if the mentor understands the challenges of life
and discipleship in poor communities from personal experience; shared experiences between mentors and mentorees provide inspiration and learning for both;

[3] accessibility: the trend for on-line learning, off-campus training, immersion experiences in urban mission contexts, and seminars and workshops facilitated by practitioners has opened up possibilities for emerging leaders to access training and formation readily;

[4] vulnerability: emerging leaders develop their understanding and become more effectively equipped to enter poor communities when practitioners who are involved in the equipping are transparent about the highs and lows of incarnational living in poor communities, and are prepared to be honest about their own experiences;

[5] increased possibilities for deep listening and hearing: listening to those who are immersed in poor communities and learning from them is a valuable feature of equipping emerging leaders;

[6] democratization of knowledge: the spread of knowledge and ease of access to information and research has become widespread in the digital age, reaching people in many contexts through technology. Knowledge is no longer the sole domain of the professional academic sector. A blend of academic and on-the-job training facilitates the equipping of emerging leaders.

Equally, the working group hopes that there is less "Pollyanna-ism", that clear cut answers and "experts" are viewed suspiciously (the healthy side of scepticism), and that a genuine inquiring stance is encouraged. Alongside this, a deep-seated suspicion of the effects of colonialism is recognized.

The emerging generations of activists and missionally-oriented people, together with the leaders who arise among them, are all deeply affected by globalization. This, at least at some level, is bringing in a common language and set of expectations and preferences across nations and cultures. This could intensify the pressure for changes in models and practices in the equipping of leaders, if there is a widespread swell in that direction,
thus encouraging greater practical discipleship as greater proximity, training and mutual learning in equipping is embraced alongside emerging leadership. These hopes are based on assumptions that there is a continued increase in "on the job" training and relational equipping. One participant expressed this as a flattening of the generation gap.

Equipping models and methods that become more "hands on"; and oriented toward closer proximity and relationship, could suit a majority world urban poor setting. This could potentially place less emphasis on the distant and removed Academy and more emphasis on learning and formation on the ground in the local context.

A story was shared in the group of an example of how common language and culture among globalized young people in Singapore was an advantage in interaction and conversation with sex workers. The younger workers made a much easier connection with the sex workers because of shared language and being part of the same youth culture, compared with the older staff members who came from a more "separatist" and pietistic church culture common to their generation which made it difficult for them to relate effectively across the generations.

iii. Emerging majority world missions movements

There has been a tremendous change in the location, focus and orientation of Christian workers in one single generation. There are fewer traditionally oriented missionaries and significantly more chaplains, counselors, aid and development workers, community development staff, nurses, doctors, engineers, all of whom are cautious of colonization by the sending (usually western) culture. The group noted concerns about the rise of short-term mission trips where the sent are not well trained and equipped in the practical and real limitations of such a venture. However, notwithstanding that, the general trend towards cultural sensitivity, holistic concern for integral mission, and development of nationals is a sign of hope. There are stories from every continent where broken western approaches to mission are being replaced with vitalized and "bottom up" (grass-roots) local models. More prevalent is the emerging indigenous and local concern about integral mission. We know that while the western church and its missions-systems are generally in decline, Christianity is now a majority, non-western faith that is thriving in many parts of the majority world.

iv. Stories of the kingdom showing signs of thriving in slums

Slowly, churches, mission agencies and aid and development organizations are awakening to the current reality of urbanization. They are awakening gradually to the strategic
nature of people movements and demographics resulting in the estimate that a majority of the world’s population will be living in urban slums by the middle of this century. They are awakening also to the differing dynamics of slum life (compared to traditional, rural settings) and its place in the industrialization of economies. Increasingly, stories are being told widely of the kingdom thriving in slums.

In the midst of this, Viv Grigg estimates that around 50,000 new urban workers have been mobilized since 2002. The working group noted the diversity of people and roles within this trend. The former “one-size-fits-all” generalist missionary has morphed into a vast and wide assortment of workers, activists, entrepreneurs, community developers and researchers.

v. Awareness of dreaming among people in the slums

The working group noted many stories and examples of people actively improving their circumstances in the midst of slum life. From a bird’s eye view a slum can look all the same, but when inside the community in the alleys, homes and shelters of perhaps 100,000 plus people, some are doing better than in the village from where they came. We note that certainly not all people in a slum are doing well, however the nature of slum life compared to village life affords possibilities. Some rise through crime while some rise through micro-business and cottage-industry opportunities. The main sessions at the ISUM summit presented by Dr Ruth Callanta, Founding President of the Centre for Community Transformation in Manila, and Dr Sonny Tha Nyan, General Secretary YMCA in Yangon, provided examples of this. The story of the Klong Toey Football Club founded by Dr Ash Barker is a different example. We know that many of the world’s best footballers emerge from the particular pressures of slum life with the passion, skill and temperament required for elite sport.

vi. Other

The working group noted some further areas of hope:

[1] There is a new creativity emerging as part of the potpourri of globalization and a digitally connected and sharing world;

[2] There is greater freedom to change and question;

[3] People can be inspired and engaged by compelling messages and images. This can mobilize people to take some form of action at far greater speed due to the digital communications revolution;
Younger Christian believers seem to be more concerned about social justice and integral Christianity. The old divide between the evangelical and social concerns of the church, though still present if looked for, seem strange to younger Christians. "How could they ever be separated?" many younger Christians ask.

Challenges

i. The move to mentoring and equipping mode

Can established leaders, particularly those with a western mindset, make the adjustment to a more relational, mentoring, vulnerable mode of equipping when often they did not receive much modeling of this? Can they learn with and from the emerging generation, like the biblical examples of the little boy taking blinded Samson's hands to put them on the pillars, or David demonstrating a new, lighter method of warfare?

The working group noted the challenges and barriers for emerging non-western leaders in this process. Often cultures and institutions have strong hierarchical and deferential cultures, influenced by "face" and "shame". These factors can mitigate against the relational mentoring mode and democratization of knowledge.

The western need to fill the gaps with knowledge and information was seen as a challenge and obstacle to indigenous leadership taking on greater roles of equipping. Often this western trend is fuelled by too much pressure and urgency to achieve targets, thus missing other important qualitative aspects of integral mission. Westerners need to leave space - for God, and for majority world leaders to take their place in the responsibility of equipping.

ii. Formal education

The working group noted the propensity of formal education towards too often being remote, disconnected, irrelevant, abstract and inaccessible for potential students. One aspect of this for teachers and prospective students is accreditation. The working group noted the bias away from professional academic life for the teacher and researcher if concern is for the urban poor. Real practicalities like status, title, classification, publishing, influence and security in the wider Academy all require devotion of time, energy and physical presence by staff, usually at the cost of the development and training of urban poor leaders.
The group noted that faculty simply have to attend to the situation of the urban poor through spending time in the context of the urban poor, yet few colleges and universities easily permit this. We noted the limiting approaches of rote learning and deference in educational settings in some cultures.

Finances too are an issue. The western model is very expensive. It involves potentially a big debt burden on western workers and holds a large “no entry” sign up to majority world people. These issues all point to the challenge and question of whether training and equipping modes can be shifted to models which are more practitioner based and accessible, and are in closer proximity and relationship to those who are responsible for equipping and those who are being equipped.

To what extent may practitioner based approaches be already in deployment in majority world urban poor settings? On this point, we recognized that most of us present at our working group sessions, and certainly with voices being heard, were western world people. How in touch are we with what is happening on the ground in majority world settings?

iii. Barriers faced by poor urban leaders in accessing equipping

Rationalist western approaches to equipping and learning present a difficulty for the majority world. There is need for greater narrative and story approaches in learning settings which would connect and communicate more naturally with poor urban leaders. The gap between them and predominantly western equippers is wide. This limits effective training and learning. How can you mentor people if not among them? There is a great need for incarnational living and training. Another factor was noted by a majority world member of the working group who spoke of the continuing negative legacy of colonialism resulting in genuine questions about the real motives of expatriates which affect the level of trust. Language barriers pose difficulties in communication. English is the lingua franca of many trainers and equippers, including ISUM participants.

Availability of resources and training in mother tongues is often rare.

Poor urban leaders are time and cash poor. The sheer instability and transitory nature of existence in urban slum life or in poor communities in western cities is a major issue. Kendi Howells Douglas, Professor of Cross Cultural Ministries at Great Lakes Christian College Michigan US and a member of the working group, conveyed a first-hand example about her house church in Lansing, Michigan, switching focus and location to share life and worship with the urban poor. She noted that there were many “three month-ers” in her community. They were people who were moved on every three months from rented
accommodation for failure or inability to pay rent. This affects their capacity to be able to develop and maintain deeper relationships.

The time and energy to survive daily life when in poverty makes it very difficult to be ready to invest in learning, leadership and in thinking differently. Fear may prevent potential workers from taking on leadership particularly when it is likely to involve the need to challenge existing power structures and cultures.

**Calls to Action**

**i. Move to “mixed mode” of Academy and local learning**

We need to develop relationships between formal education providers and urban poor practitioners to facilitate a greater mixed mode of learning and equipping that combines the Academy and “on the job” training in the relevant local context. An example of this is what has been developed between Great Lakes Christian College (Michigan, US), Stirling Theological College (Melbourne, AUS) and Urban Neighbours of Hope (UNOH). Networks like ISUM provide a place of discovery and brokerage for such mixed mode partnerships to be fostered and developed. Such partnerships can only develop if the leadership of the Academies and urban mission agencies see it as essential and are willing and co-operative to make it happen.

**ii. Encourage a more intentional mentoring and relational paradigm of equipping**

More experienced practitioners need to be paired with less experienced practitioners in the context of open, vulnerable and authentic relationships. The length of these placements and mentoring relationships must be realistic, recognizing that there is great value even in a short, intensive exposure to the realities of urban poverty. However, more effective equipping and testing of call for those planning to do cross-cultural work needs longer time-frames for preparation, which naturally leads to greater value in the local urban poor context, especially when equipping includes deeper understanding of factors such as language, culture, needs, longings and systemic patterns.

A group member, Ranu from the Punjab India, gave a detailed account of very intentional training and development that has the aim of raising up a large cadre of missional church planters within the context of his own denomination. It was notable that we had few people in the working group who were engaged in a church planting context working with existing indigenous churches. This paper does not present a critique of what perspectives are lacking in regards to indigenous church planters, recognizing that
our working group did not and could not reflect or contain wider perspectives.

iii. Encourage development and formation of clusters for mutual learning
Clusters for mutual learning can operate in various styles and patterns ... just as long as they happen. We see no reason why everything is oriented to individuals just because western society is individualized. The synergy of co-operating together, sharing knowledge, encouraging each other and learning from each other could have great benefit in the equipping of urban poor leaders and those from affluent backgrounds who have been challenged to be equipped to work with the poor.

iv. Apply western Christian resources to the education of the world's poorest
Western Christian teaching institutions, denominations, mission agencies, para-church groups and churches ought to find creative, responsible and meaningful ways to dedicate annually a significant amount of their resources, including investments, scholarships, teaching time, libraries, properties and information technology, as a starting point towards the education and training of the world's poorest, and as an example of Christian stewardship and commitment. We recognize that this is a great challenge set against all sorts of systemic blockages and pre-existing commitments, however the immense disparity between teaching and training resources in most western church settings and those in urban poverty settings must be named and challenged as a fundamental Christian ethical and moral issue.

The calls to action presented by the Equip working group offer resourceful and innovative ways of addressing the challenges of equipping leaders for a new urban world. They take seriously what is needed in poor communities for urban shalom and what is needed to prepare, equip and develop leaders who seek to co-operate in God's kingdom work among the poor.

3. Sustaining Christian Leaders

Summary Statement
When the initial enthusiasm and passion to respond to the call to follow Jesus is tested by tough challenges in urban mission contexts, where do Christian leaders find resilience, nurture, encouragement and care to stand firm? When faced with situations of dire need in neighborhoods affected by poverty, what sustains workers in their vocation? The working group that focused on sustainability considered this important
issue, recognizing that mission agencies and leaders who do not give attention to this, will pay a price in burn-out, exhaustion, cynicism and, sadly, sometimes having to withdraw from their ministries. Faithful discipleship and ministry for the long journey is both invitation and challenge. The Sustain working group discussed signs of hope and challenges for sustaining Christian leaders in an urban world. Calls to action center on what the broader church ought to consider in ensuring that leaders have appropriate support.

**Signs of Hope**

**i. Leaders as models**

Courageous people engaged in courageous projects, loving what they do, are a sign of encouragement for other leaders. Ministry is not a job to them, but a passion and calling. The lives of leaders who have sustained their vision for many years inspire other leaders to continue, especially when they see evidence of older workers who have served faithfully for a long time and have not succumbed to cynicism and negativity.

**ii. Lives transformed**

Transformation of lives in local urban communities is a constant source of hope for leaders as they see God bringing positive change to people's lives. Seeing the fruit of their ministry as broken people minister to other broken people gives hope. Jeff Smith, a working group member from Alaska who is part of Adventures in Mission, related an experience in South Africa when a homeless man, who had developed a friendship with Nigel Braken (who leads a ministry in a slum in Johannesburg and who is mentioned in Section 1 of this paper), led Nigel and Jeff to other homeless people and began to pray over them. An immersion visit during the summit to the Overseas Mission Fellowship (OMF) Khannayao church planting team in Bangkok enabled the group to meet an older Thai woman who started a church in her home after only two years of being a Christian. This showed how the gospel can be spread simply and it gave hope to leaders, some of whom are working in difficult circumstances and unreceptive places. The OMF church planting team works specifically among urban poor communities.

**iii. Healthy spirituality**

Dependence on God, rather than self-dependence, sustains people and their work through personal and corporate times of prayer, Scripture, sabbath and reading, to name a few ways. Without this, ministry with the poor can seem like aid and development
work. In challenging urban poor contexts, faced with relentless need and calls for action, spiritual disciplines may fall away. Maintaining a healthy spirituality was named as a common priority among the working group members.

iv. Mission agencies taking missionary care seriously

There has been a resurgence of churches and mission agencies accepting responsibility for involvement in the care of missionaries and partnering with leaders in the field. Leaders who face the reality of their struggles and are prepared to be vulnerable could receive support through counseling. An immersion experience during the summit enabled participants to visit the New Counseling Service (NCS) in Bangkok which was established in 2002 and provides a range of counseling services for missionaries and local people in all walks of life, Thais and foreigners. Debriefing opportunities particularly following situations of crisis are necessary so that leaders can process their responses and deal with the fatigue and emotional pressures that can build up.

Richard Glazier is a working group member and urban missionary at The Well Bangkok, which provides supportive ministry and friendship to women involved in the Thai sex trade. He gave an example of how a network of supportive relationships upheld him and his family at a time when he contemplated leaving ministry in Bangkok and returning to England, feeling defeated and depressed. He answered the question, "What prevented us from being among the avoidable casualties of ministry?" An integrated safety net of intentional relationships between friends, his sending church and his mission organization helped him and his wife to build a sustainable rhythm of life. Annual appraisals, debriefings of emotional and spiritual issues arising from their work, monthly conversations with the leadership of the sending church which fed into prayer offered by their home church, and spiritual direction were put in place and changed what had become an unmanageable situation. He emphasized the importance of this kind of network for all urban missionaries.

v. Team support

Being part of a team prevents isolation, even though team challenges are also a reality in some contexts. A sustainable rhythm of life that draws teams of leaders together in a common vision and purpose through community living. Bible study and worship,

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9 Rhythm of life refers to a healthy pattern of life and mission that includes attention to the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual components of life, and practices and disciplines that contribute to a person's sense of well-being and capacity to thrive.
and shared ministry times in their communities, has become a uniting, sustaining and integrating factor among workers in various missions. Times of celebration together for teams and with their neighbors in communities are important too. Communication is vital for healthy team relationships and for connection beyond teams. Various forms of communication, for example, Skype, Facebook and email, have made it easier to connect leaders and their support networks, where ideas and issues can be discussed openly and promptly and leaders encouraged with positive feedback. Networks of support are more accessible as connection with families, friends and supporters can be immediate.

vi. Opportunities like the Summit

The group strongly affirmed the Integral Urban Mission Summit as an experience of hope which energized them. The investment of time and travel to attend, the informal conversations, and learning from each other, reminded leaders that "it’s not just me doing this" and "I’m not crazy!". Realignment towards their original vision, when leaders might have been lacking evidence and experiences of hope, has sustained them and re-ignited their dream through texts like Isaiah 58 and 61. Supportive relationships developed beyond national boundaries and across mission agencies, facilitated by common purpose and understanding of life in urban poor contexts.

Challenges

i. Team dynamics

Achieving unity or a healthy team dynamic can be challenging. Relational conflict within teams or neighborhoods can be a source of pain and may not be dealt with effectively. Conflict, jealousy and competition are a reality at times. Changes in team structure, for example an increased number of workers joining a team, can present challenges. More energy, time and resources are needed to sustain larger teams. A regular common rhythm of life practised by the team can be a help. Regular team communication, as well as personal and social communication with fellow workers, can fall by the wayside if the team culture is not geared to this. An independent spirit in workers makes it difficult for team bonding and can harm the influence that a team has in the neighborhood if neighbors witness tension in the team. Immaturity of workers needs careful handling by team leaders, who ought to provide newer and younger workers with a safe space to grow and mature, while encouraging and helping them to be able to withstand the rigors of life in a complex urban context. The “transient” volunteer, who is in the field for a short
term, can deplete the energy and time of long-term workers in a team. Yet, volunteering has its place as a means of informing and exposing people to urban contexts and the possibility of volunteers deciding to train to become mission workers. Pioneering work without a team to support leaders presents a challenge when establishing new work and developing trust and relationships with neighbors, even if a pioneering spirit is strong in the leader.

ii. Balancing an active-contemplative approach

An activist mindset, which most leaders in urban mission contexts probably have, can be a challenge to sustainability. Activists are more inclined towards action, finding solutions, trying to fix problems and start projects, than attending to their inner needs or participating in individual counseling or group therapy sessions, which could be beneficial in addressing problems rather than ignoring them. Building in some regular reflective time in their life could balance this. Yet, it was recognized by the group that workers who can accept responsibility, who are reliable, and who can take initiative when needed, are an asset in mission settings. The concern is about unhealthy extremes of obsessive activism which may lead to burn-out.

iii. Discouragement

Not seeing the fruit of their work or not seeing results quickly enough, particularly when fighting against big systems and structures, can be very discouraging and may even result in leaders giving up those systemic struggles or even the work itself. The celebration of small victories can be important as a way of addressing this problem. Spiritual discouragement stems from a lack of intimacy with God and will drain leaders of their energy and fruitfulness. This can include being so caught up with doing things FOR God that they forget to spend time WITH God. Leaders are called to a relationship with Christ first, before being called to the work of Christ.

iv. Crisis of faith

When leaders experience a crisis of faith, the John 6 moment becomes a reality: "Are you going to leave too?" The following factors can result in a crisis of faith and leadership:

[1] when tragedy, brokenness, or overwhelming situations occur in the lives of leaders or in the lives of those around them;

[2] ill-preparedness of leaders, when they have not been adequately
equipped or there is not enough ongoing equipping or pastoral care of workers supporting them through their trials;

[3] an under-developed or warped theology of suffering which gives rise to a triumphalist view of the Christian life and therefore disillusionment when struggles happen. Incarnational living will mean that workers are subject to the same difficulties and similar anguish as their neighbors. Leaders may not have understood the call to lay down their lives for Christ and his call to suffer for the sake of the gospel;

[4] burn-out occurring through any of the above, or through not dealing with difficult issues as they arise. Trying to cope with this by attending group meetings, which are intended to be encouraging but may instead include "hype", ignores or avoids the issue rather than addressing it through effective individual counseling;

[5] isolation in lonely places away from mentors and spiritual guides who might provide conversation, wisdom, debriefing and prayer, can contribute to leaders losing their faith in Christ;

[6] supporters who believe in good works rather than faith in Christ himself cause leaders to place value on works and projects in an effort to maintain good relationships with supporters so that they do not lose their funding;

[7] poor boundaries around work and rest periods may lead to exhaustion and lack of adequate, intentional time being focused on maintaining a healthy relationship with God, and healthy personal relationships with team workers and local people.

v. Adjusting to local contexts

It can take time for workers to understand cross-cultural challenges and ongoing cultural differences. This might be addressed by preparation before going into cross-cultural settings and by regular debriefing during mission experience. Sometimes inhospitable
and unfriendly attitudes from other Christian workers already in the field can result in strained relationships, unhealthy tension, avoidance or direct conflict. This can be hard to cope with, particularly for newer workers who might have expected to receive support from their team or missionaries around them. If this is coupled with a lack of community within the home church from which Christian leaders come, combined with a lack of encouragement, interest or understanding from members in the home church, leaders can feel very isolated.

**Calls to Action**

**i. Develop a culture of discipleship**

Discipleship must be taken seriously by the whole church - discipleship that is ongoing and life-long at every stage of a believer's life. This means every Christian being discipled - and every Christian discipling someone. It is the lifeblood of sustainability and healthy mission. Every Christian, every grass-roots worker, every leader needs to be engaged in discipling.

Mentoring plays an important role and if every church and every mission agency prioritized mentoring and discipling relationships, a strong discipleship culture would develop. This would address the problem of many churches in the western world declining in vitality and numbers. It would also result in urban missionaries, when they move into neighborhoods or communities, realizing the value of discipling and being discipled.

The sending or supporting church, or mission agency, needs to be proactive in offering to identify suitable mentors for urban missionaries in the local context and holding them accountable for seeing that mentoring happens. In situations where it is difficult to locate appropriate mentors, there are mentors who are able to provide Skype mentoring, supplemented with face-to-face mentoring when visits are possible.

**ii. Set up peer community cluster groups**

Before engaging in overseas cross-cultural mission, or local neighborhood mission, workers need to have experience in local peer community clusters, which include coaching, mentoring, accountability, service opportunities, and learning and working together in teams. As part of this, sharing learning about life and ministry is important, providing grounding for urban missionaries.

This highlights the fact that sustainability in mission has a long-term focus and is influenced by how well prepared and equipped a worker is before they are engaged in
mission. It is too late to address this when crisis happens. This aspect indicates the link between recruiting, equipping and sustaining workers.

**iii. Provide exposure to various aspects of mission**

A call to greater exposure to the various aspects of urban mission together with better preparation and ongoing learning about cross-cultural life as well as being informed about poverty contributes to a realistic understanding of what is involved in long-term sustainability. For example, an understanding of compassion fatigue including symptoms and responses is one aspect that could help mission workers in their on-going learning. Training in leading teams before commencing mission work, or "on-the-job" training in building healthy teams, would provide support for leaders. There is a need for increased and ongoing sharing of wisdom and experience from missionaries, workers and leaders who have spent many years in their contexts. They are a source of mentoring, encouragement, teaching and advice.

**iv. Provide pastoral care for urban missionaries**

A difficulty was noted in situations where the director of a mission group is also the one responsible for pastoral care. Workers are sometimes hesitant to voice their concerns to the person to whom they may also be required to report and who may be responsible for their appraisals. Ideally, the two roles should be separate. Pastoral care needs to be proactive and intentional, not only offered when a crisis occurs. Mission agencies ought to be open to recognizing when workers may need to be offered leave in exceptional circumstances. Workers are not cogs in a missional machine, able to be easily replaced. Their health and well-being is to be valued.

**v. Encourage interdisciplinary interdependence**

Interdisciplinary interdependence between churches, colleges and mission agencies is needed. Another way of expressing this is "networking", where different Christian organizations, movements, churches and disciplines working in a particular area (either geographical or groups holding similar values) could assist one another, providing support, advice, practical help, and combined efforts in community work. This could lead to partnership across denominations, church groupings or disciplines which could result in a more combined, integrated effort into respective areas, leading to a greater unity against the powers that be and institutional structures. It addresses the mindset expressed in the attitude "you in your small corner and I in mine", which contributes
to independent thinking and ministry, whereas the synergy of workers combining their efforts in joint projects is more effective. An example of interdependence was mentioned in Section Two of the paper which noted the relationship exchange that has developed between Great Lakes Christian College, Stirling Theological College, and Urban Neighbours of Hope.

A local example of interdependence was noted by Trish Branken, a working group member who lives in a poor community with her husband and family where they have established a ministry called Transform (Hillbrow, Johannesburg). Recently a Lutheran church minister and his volunteers joined Trish and Nigel on their weekly street outreach into Hillbrow visiting the homeless. The church minister later joined them at a meeting with lawyers and the homeless about recent police brutality on their streets. Hearing about the opening of Transform’s Learning Centre and its limited computer space, the minister offered space for adults to learn in his much larger computer center at the Lutheran church across the road. Co-operation and sharing of resources builds community spirit and enables positive outcomes to be achieved. It is indicative of the way that Jesus would want resources to be shared for the benefit of all. Generosity of spirit among urban missionaries and local churches encourages interdependence.

Sustaining Christian leaders in their vocation in the new urban world is not an optional extra on the agenda for mission groups. It is a sign of hope that more staff are being appointed to intentional ministries that have the care, support and sustainability of missionaries as their focus. Each Christian leader in an urban setting ought to develop a rhythm of life that is appropriate for their sustainability. The responsibility for ensuring that leaders are able to endure and thrive is a shared one, between the leaders themselves and the mission agencies, churches and groups who are the sending bodies.

Conclusion

How has the Spirit been guiding your thoughts as you have read about what is happening and what needs to happen in the domain of recruiting, equipping and sustaining Christian leaders in an urban world? As you reach the end of this paper, is there a response stirring in you sparked by your eagerness to be involved in recruiting, equipping or sustaining Christian leaders in their vocation?

It was inspirational for the working group to meet the elderly Thai woman, just two years old in Christ, who leads a small church plant in her home in Bangkok (mentioned earlier in this section, Signs of Hope). As she told her story, it was evident that she loves to share her experience of how God changed her life. The healing of her husband through
prayer is a feature of her testimony to people in her neighborhood about how God can help them. She is sustained in her leadership by a local Christian College who sends interns to her every weekend to assist her. These young interns are gaining experiences that call some of them into ministry. The elderly woman plays a key role in discipling and mentoring the young women who are assigned to her as part of their Christian College practice and experience. The interns spoke about the positive influence that this elderly woman has on them through her faith, seeing how she handles difficulties in her life, witnessing her peace and patience, her study of the Bible and her persistence in prayer.

This humble woman’s response to the need in her own neighborhood for a church provides a model of the kind of leadership required in a multitude of different urban settings. As she equips interns and is equipped herself through prayer and Bible study, as she is sustained through the presence and work of the interns at weekends, as the interns are recruited and equipped to go out to do pioneering work and other forms of ministry after their College study, there is hope for urban shalom being realized even in small, mustard seed ways. The hope of transforming urban poor neighborhoods depends on faithful responses, like this one, to God’s invitation to recruit, equip and sustain Christian leaders.
References


Additional resources

Recruit:


Equip:


Sustain:


