

RAISING PERSONAL SUPPORT IN AFRICA

By Kafah Nkanjoh Mekwi

The attitudes of people in French and English speaking Africa differ depending on the cultural heritage of the country. In countries from British backgrounds the believers tend to be more willing to hear about Christian organizations, and give. Sometimes people from the other backgrounds are not as willing to listen, and if they do, make promises to give, but don't follow through.

In general, the African worldview of "elastic" time—and not worrying about schedules or deadlines—can affect the regular giving of Christians. Many people verbally commit to give out of politeness, sympathy or a desire to help, but haven't really thought through how they are going to be able to afford to do so. Thus, many people easily agree to join our team, but will never actually start giving, or will give for a short period of time, and drop off.

Interestingly, even though Africans are not very faithful in long-term giving, they tend to give very generously when they do give. A person with a \$200 monthly salary will commit to \$20-40 a month, and try to manage to live off the rest.

For successful support raising in Africa, here are some pointers:

- Everybody can give, and most people are willing to give something, but for consistent and long-term giving, focus on Christians with significant positions and salaries who can do a bank draft that automatically goes through each month.
- Probably 80% of your partners will probably be ordinary Christians who have a normal job. Their support may fluctuate, but you will have to educate them, and put in place a good mechanism to collect their support. Asking them to give 1% to 5% of their salary is wisest, giving them a more realistic chance of following through each month with their commitment.
- In some countries where the economy and monetary transactions are shaky, missionaries have established a material-based support system, where they challenge agricultural workers to support them with their food crops. If the missionary receives more food than they need, they can take it to market and exchange it for money. Each Christian worker needs to determine what type of support system is appropriate for their locality: a money-based or material-based support system...or a combination.
- Africans are generally oral in their culture, and will be excited to hear about your vision and the ministry stories of what God has been doing, rather than try to read materials about it. Establish credibility with them by being clear who you are, your family and background, and where you currently live and minister so they won't think you're trying to scam them!
- You have to be crystal clear with each supporter what amount and frequency they are committing to, how long they will be giving, and exactly how they will get their gift to you each month.
- Because they are so busy, and asked for money a lot, and have tight budgets at home, etc, regularly collecting the support they committed to is a challenge. Getting them to set up a regular mobile money transfer, electronic money transfer, or bank draft is ideal. Some Christian workers have even contracted with a courier service to go each month and personally collect the gifts.
- Since such mechanisms are not as available, it's even more important for the missionary to continually communicate with their supporters. Consistently reminding them of what and why they are investing keeps the supporter motivated and faithful. If there are not strong relationships with your donors,

and if you're not reporting regularly through newsletters and calls, most will soon drop off your team.

- You must be constantly focused on expanding your network of potential supporters knowing that economic conditions are rough, and supporters will drop off due to lack of ability or follow through.

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