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Help the Poor Through Self-Reliance

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One of the core issues faced when dealing with poverty is the concept that the poor need to be given resources without an investment in the process.

We have seen all over the world examples where millions of dollars have been thrown at a problem with no accountability tied to the investment. The hard truth is that this type of welfare just does not work.

A sad example of this type of failed policy is Haiti. The hundreds of millions of dollars that were thrown into Haiti have resulted in little if any success, despite many good intentions. The reason for this is the basic realization that those being served become dependent on being given something which doesn't encourage those being helped to help themselves.

In many cases, its not the fault of the recipient, but the fault of the organization that provided the resources to begin with.

Another flaw in this strategy is the impression from the recipient that if it is being given, its value is not important, and thus the gift is devalued.

It's the very reason that we at Medical Ministry International insist on an investment from those being served in their care and support. This investment may seem negligible, but to those being served it's significant. The result of this policy is that the poor value the services, equipment, etc., and thus follow the doctor's orders or take care of the equipment provided since they have invested in it.

The lessons learned in the underdeveloped world can also be applied in the developed world. Human nature has provided examples over time that a welfare concept that lacks accountability and ownership by those being helped, is a policy setup for failure.

It has been 50 years since U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson started the focus to end poverty in the United States. A result of this focus has been a negligible decrease in poverty (from 19 percent to 15 percent) and yet a 1100 percent in increase in expenditures (over \$15 trillion). No matter what your belief structure is, that type of investment is a proven failure and must be reassessed if we are ever to achieve the goal of serving the poor.

The war on poverty is a real and important component of the moral compass of our society. The needs of the poor are real, but the answer cannot be to just throw money and resources at the problem without having programs designed to insist on an investment from those being served.

The poor are no different than the wealthy in that for the most part they want to work hard to take care of themselves and their families. If we train them that it's better to do nothing and let people give you something with no strings attached, then all we are doing is making them reliant on others instead of using their God-given skills to help themselves.

The poor need our help, but this help is not in just giving, but holding them accountable as well.

Sam Smith is an internationally recognized speaker and is the CEO of Medical Ministry International. His book, "When Love Heals," shares a powerful message of how each of us has been called into service for others. Visit www.medicalministrytrips.org

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