

Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute



Function of Church Structure as an obstacle to dealing with poverty...

Organizational structures do matter for good governance and good governance does matter for good performance. The corollary is bad governance will certainly lead to poor performance. Most of the Church scandals of recent years are attributed to poor governance -- either by commission or omission. It is a trend to criticize and blame the structures for the failure of the any program. Though, structures may determine the nature of the governance, they are only channels created by human beings. Therefore the failure of structures could be seen from the perspective of who created it and for whose use or gain. Hence, the success and failure primarily depends upon, the style of leadership, their commitment and the policy they hold. From this background we should view how the functions of the Church structures are obstacles to dealing with poverty.

Poverty is a multifaceted state of deprivation, which can't be wholly divorced from its social context. It also creates social exclusion, referring to relational dimensions, which brings with it inferior access to all the needs of the people resulting in low mobility, low security, inferior opportunities for participation in social life and collective decision-making. Hopelessness, alienation and passivity are the values set before the poor, which are the main concerns of the mission of Jesus Christ, and in turn of the Churches.

The primary task of the Churches' Mission is, being with the poor and marginalized. Emil Bruner said that, "Church exists by mission as fire exists by burning." To say that the Church is an obstacle to mission is like speaking of a fire becoming an obstacle to its own burning. Yet there is some truth about it. Unlike fire, the Church is made up of people whose freedom is to build. Quite often the freedom is misused. When that happens, the Church loses its nature. Then it not only fails to carry out the responsibility entrusted to it, but also runs the danger of becoming a hindrance to God's mission.

The churches' organizational structures are considered obstacles in dealing with poverty issues because it lacks clearly defined objective(s) in a way that tells everyone what the Church is charged to do and what it will (or should) be judged against. Often these objectives are created by untrained or inexperienced individuals, who do not share the mission objectives with their co-workers and hence they are ambiguous and not reachable or achievable. It is not a team of people who share the vision. It is often hierarchical in nature which turns out to be autocratic in its functioning. This also results in the misuse of power and resources, creating self-centeredness and misuse of official machinery for personal benefits become the order of the day. Individuals often exercise power not because of their personal qualities, abilities, or knowledge, but because they occupy certain relatively embedded (though contingent) social roles that endure within complex social practices and institutions. Social roles are defined in part by the relations between various institutional positions, that is, by the organizational scheme of the Church.

Several organisations including the Church could be questioned for using the aid/ emergency/ relief/ money to fund a bureaucracy rather than disbursing those funds to the victims. The modalities of relief to cope with flood and drought or the tsunami relief operations are a classic example to show the misuse of power and resources. Spending details from many of the organizations claim only 18 per cent to 32 per cent of the expenditure related to staff, administration and other costs (which in many cases did not include the transportation and new vehicles purchased). The very nature of the vehicles purchased shows the misuse of resources. It is not for the purpose of work in the area but luxury vehicles for the use of bureaucrats. Similarly, the purchases of the instruments/equipments for the purpose of the poor are used for the infrastructural business. The equation of overhead often crosses not just 32%, but even 64%.

Once aid became institutionalised as a practice in international affairs, the regime developed an inertial force of its own. Multiple purposes sustained it. It is to be noted and questioned that, why Churches in the richer countries are willing to transfer resources to Churches in poor countries though they see corrupt practices and leadership. Further, since aid supplies are dependent on results, and on the willingness of recipients to consent to aid conditions, the political motivations of those in power in the Church as well as those with power in donor agencies play key role. The impetus of bureaucracies to maintain or expand their role is a major theme in political analysis for future study.

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