



Assessment of Ownership: *A Basis for Evaluating Projects and Missions*¹

Ted Ward

Perhaps the word *ownership* is a passing fad. Five years from now we may have a better word for it, but the idea will persist. People have to have a sense of **ownership** in a process of change if it is to have a positive effect. The idea suggests an image of satisfaction and pride that arises from a sense of dignity and self-respect. A shivering person at the roadside who is handed a blanket may indeed become less miserable and likely will feel some sense of appreciation for the act of kindness. But such a person gains little in terms of dignity and self-respect. **Ownership** of the blanket is greater when the person has made some investment in it, or has at least made some sort of conscious decisions and deliberate action to choose it and acquire it.

Although it may offend one's view of Christian virtue to think about it, people often find it more satisfying to get a sense of ownership from something that they have chosen to steal than from something that someone else has chosen to give them as a hand-out. People engaged in relief and development learn early to live with the resentment and anger that comes from powerless people who are helped in a moment of crisis and then left once again in their powerlessness.

Must it be this way? Can a genuine sense of ownership be enhanced through the processes of relief? Or through the processes of development assistance?

We must find ways to share responsibility and thus enhance dignity of others. To think well of ourselves simply because we have crudely and rudely dumped help all over other people is unworthy of the very idea of Christlike compassion. It is not enough for people of means to share with others in whatever manner or mode they may spontaneously choose. To do well requires empathy—the capacity to feel **with** another person. At minimum this requires enough perspectivism to make an effort to see how things look from the other person's viewpoint. We never can quite do this with clarity, but we need to try.

In reference to each of the sectors of the assistance experience on the following worksheet, consider what may already be working **against** ownership by the people of the community. Then try to explore creatively in a search for ways and means to turn the sector into a source of identity, self-confidence, and the pride of ownership for those who are to be served.

1. Ownership of the **Initiatives**:
 - a. What has already been done that asserts the outsiders' initiatives?
 - b. What can be done to genuinely share some aspects of the initiatives with the people of the community?

¹ Ted Ward. Assessment of Ownership: A Basis for Evaluating Projects and Missions. Prepared for MAP Conference, July 1992, Montreal, Canada

2. Ownership of **Problem Statement** (Definition of Need):
 - a. What have the outsiders already done that defines the need?
 - b. What risks are worth taking to let the people of the community put things in their own words and express their own concerns?
3. Ownership of **Goals and Objectives**:
 - a. What goals and objectives are the outsiders already committed to achieve?
 - b. To the extent that there is flexibility within the mandate and within the accountability of the outsiders to their sponsors, what can be done to share the goal-setting and objectives-specifying task with the people?
4. Ownership of **Planning**:
 - a. What planning has already been irrevocably determined before bringing the people into the decision-making?
 - b. What sorts of planning can be done jointly with the people? What matters can be shared? Are there any which cannot?
5. Ownership of **Input Resources**:
 - a. What materials, technical assistance, and labor have already been committed to the project by the outsiders?
 - b. What materials, technical assistance, and labor could be contributed to the project by the people? How best could they come to grips with the importance of their inputs?
6. Ownership of **Project Activity**:
 - a. What visible activity is now demonstrating the role of the outsiders?
 - b. Before things get any further along, what could be done to increase the evidence of action and productivity by the people of the community?
7. Ownership of **Management**:
 - a. What is the voice of the outsiders in overseeing and managing the activities of the project?
 - c. What can be done to place a substantial portion of the responsibility for management into the hands of the leaders or representatives of the community?

8. Ownership of **Fiscal Control**:
 - a. What is the voice of outsiders in overseeing and managing the financial aspects of the project?
 - b. What can be done to place a substantial portion of the responsibility for management of funds into the hands of the leaders or representatives of the community? What training is needed, if any? What prejudices are evident against investing so much trust in the leaders of the community? Are the dangers real? Even if they are, is the cost of **outside fiscal control** truly justified? Are there any alternatives?
9. Ownership of **Evaluation**:
 - a. What evaluative criteria and data collection tasks have already been undertaken by the outsiders?
 - b. How can the community become involved in the evaluative process—including criteria setting, data gathering, and the drawing of conclusions?
10. Ownership of **Decisions about TEE Future**:
 - a. What decisions about the future (beyond the present project—whether or not successful) have already been pre-determined by the outsiders? Are these firmly set in concrete or is there room for further planning and consideration of next steps after the current project?
 - b. To what extent and in what ways can the community and its leadership be mobilized to enter into realistic decision-making about the events which will need to follow the current project?

Procedures of Development Intervention

1. Characteristics of Effective Projects:

Goals that are clear.

Goals that relate to significant need—as perceived by the people.

Broad base of participation.

Strong team spirit.

Adequate funding and other resources.

“Ownership” by beneficiaries.

Clear plan with reachable objectives.

A proper “fit” between project outcomes and needs.

Effectively assessing and utilizing resources.

Balanced service delivery and local initiative.

Local leadership.

Prayer.

Query: Which of the above is most often overlooked? “Ownership” by beneficiaries.

2. Characteristics of Effective Leaders:

Non-directive approach.
Good listener—receptive to input and feedback.
Goal-oriented.
Well organized.
Has vision.
Can formulate a plan.
Can manage for follow-through.
Commitment.
Sensitive and knowledgeable of local institutions and culture.
Constantly providing training.
Competence in the special field.
Humility.
Able to mobilize resources.
Walks alongside people.
Has suffered what the people have suffered.

Query: What are the most commonly missing? Good listener, Able to mobilize resources, Walks alongside people, Has suffered what the people have suffered.

The “Bookends” that Define the Scope of Development Assistance as a Christian Task

The first task is to build a relationship so as to establish a basis of trust among the people and with the development assistance workers. (Nehemiah 2: 18b “Let us start rebuilding.”)

The second task is to find and use bridges that God has already built. This task requires observation, inquiry, learning, as well as confidence and skill. (Acts 17:22b “Men of Athens, I see that in every way you are very religious.”)