

# CONTEXTUALIZING NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR THIRD WORLD MISSIONARY TRAINING

■ Third World missionaries are fast becoming a potent force not only in regular mission work but in frontier missions as well. How will more workers be effectively trained? What new paradigms can be explored in training and equipping this new generation of missionaries?

By Jonathan P. Lewis

Recent years have seen the rapid growth and expansion of the Evangelical church in many Third World<sup>1</sup> nations of Africa, Asia and Latin America. With this growth has emerged a zeal for missionary work from these churches with both spiritual and social ends. Pate (1989) has documented this emerging Third World missions movement and has noted that at present rates of growth, by the year 2000 the number of Third World missionaries will surpass the number of those serving from traditional bases in the developed nations.

This rapid growth has heartened mission-minded Evangelicals around the globe but has also produced some concern regarding the readiness of many of these missionaries to serve in cross-cultural situations (Taylor, in press; Lewis, 1991). While functional models of Third World missionary training have emerged in some countries (Fuller, in press; Burns & Silva, in press; Lee, in press), many of the initial efforts have been stop-gap measures. In many regions, there is very little to offer the aspiring missionary candidate in terms of specific training.

One global organization, the World Evangelical Fellowship, has taken the initiative to systematically analyze and promote good training for Third World missionaries. The Mission Commission of this organization has launched the International Missionary Training Project, an effort which aims at (a) gathering and disseminating missionary training information and materials, (b) promoting fellowship between trainers and training institutions, (c) serving as a catalyst in the establishment of cooperative regional training centers, (d)

promoting reflection on training issues and (e) publishing missiological materials (Taylor, 1990).

One of the major tasks of this project is the definition of what constitutes good missionary training. McKinney (1991), as a follow-up article on a missionary trainer's consultation held in Manila in 1989, calls for "new directions" in missionary training that takes on a holistic approach. In mapping a theoretical course of training, she lists the following areas. The missionary must be prepared (a) spiritually, (b) psychologically, (c) theologically, (d) historically, (e) culturally, (f) missiologically, (g) to relate to others, (h) as families, (i) for cross-cultural ministry, (j) for ministry in the midst of suffering, and (k) for a trade or profession. She also suggests that effective training will emphasize (a) learning in communities, (b) interactive learning and (c) direct, purposeful field experiences.

While posing an excellent and comprehensive list of training areas, this "expert" approach to defining training has its limitations. Expert opinion is absolutely necessary to guide the process of training development and implementation. But unless the constituency which is to adopt the training is involved in the planning process, there may be little buy-in from those who make the decisions as to whether or not to implement it.

There are a number of factors which make "stakeholder" involvement in the planning of training indispensable to training need assessment. These include considerations which are specific to the Third World context in which the training is to be employed as well as the strategically important element of par-

ticipant buy-in. The purpose of this paper is to identify the major contextual issues that may affect the outcomes of Third World training needs assessment, discuss needs assessment theory as it relates to these issues, and propose a needs assessment model for this general context.

## Contextualizing Needs Assessment

The assumption is often made that training which is designed in the U.S. by specialists, is good enough for application in developing nations. Although some training professionals would support this normative approach, the majority would favor a contingency based strategy (Burke, 1982). In order for training to address real performance issues and be successful in what it portends to do even within a monocultural situation, it should always be based on the particular needs of the organization where it is being applied.

Needs assessment (also referred to as needs analysis) has long been recognized as a tool for analyzing performance problems and providing the information necessary in determining a course of action (often involving training) for solving them. Needs assessment also has a pro-active role. It can be used to *anticipate* performance needs and plan adequate training to *avoid* performance problems. It is this later role which we will be examining in this paper.

Performing a training needs assessment in a Third World context is particularly challenging, and few assumptions should be made based on training design from developed nations. Differences in factors such as learning styles,

have often been designed to support western training models imported by the funding agency rather than being based on indigenous, need based data.

### Organizational factors

Evangelicalism has its origin in Protestantism. As a grassroots movement which purports to measure itself against the original, unadulterated teachings of Jesus Christ and the Apostles, it is within its nature to continually examine its own established practices and teachings against these standards. This autoexamination historically has led to divisions and the establishment of new groups. A tendency to minimize the importance of institutionalized ordination of ministers has also contributed to the spontaneous rise of leadership and the proliferation of churches and associations.

In the developing nations, mini-movements often spring up around self-proclaimed prophets who are exclusive in their teaching and denounce the error of more established churches. This sectarianism in turn leads to reactionary closedness by more established groups and denominations. Loyalty, in such a setting, is next to Godliness. When the most effective and efficient training implies a cooperative effort between churches and denominations, these organizational biases are often difficult to overcome.

Another organizational tension is that which exists between western mission boards and the churches they have helped spawn. This discussion of national church-foreign mission tensions has been part of Protestant mission literature for the past thirty years. Winter (1981) has described the four stages of church-mission relationships, (a) pioneer, (b) parent, (c) partner and (d) participant (mission agency invited to participate). After two-hundred years of Protestant mission activity, most churches in developing nations resent paternalistic attitudes still exhibited by western missions and the control they exert over resources and funds. Because of this, training programs which are perceived to be imposed by western agencies will likely be met with resistance.

The primary implication on training design of the organizational issues

raised, however, is whether programs can be designed on a cooperative model or whether each entity will insist on its own means of training. The limited resources of the churches would seem to indicate that a cooperative model would be the most efficient means of organizing training. But how and to what extent can this cooperation be achieved under the present circumstances?

One center, where candidates from all the participating churches from one region are sent for training may be an efficient and effective model but initial research<sup>2</sup> seems to indicate that it is unlikely that the above mentioned issues will allow for this kind of collaboration. A more likely approach may be

---

## The primary implication on training design of the organizational issues raised, however, is whether programs can be designed on a cooperative model or whether each entity will insist on its own means of training.

---

a consultative center which keeps tabs of training resources and provides orientation for churches and their missionary candidates. In any case, an adequate needs assessment must contend with these factors and identify flexible ways of addressing these organizational issues.

### Trainers

A final issue which must be addressed is that of the trainers; who are they, what are their qualifications and where do they come from? The emerging mission movement from the Third World is long on enthusiasm and short on experience. While it is logical to assume that experienced western missionaries from "parent" missions would be the best available source of trainers, the issue of nationalistic, "I'd rather do it myself," attitudes are often an effective barrier against this kind of thinking. Part of this resistance may also be justified on the basis of past experience with imposed training programs, teaching styles and controls.

While the ideal trainer is probably a national who is both academically and experientially qualified, the Third World missions movement is too new

to have produced many veteran missionaries. Yet it does not seem feasible to wait twenty or thirty years until these ideal, experienced individuals begin to return from the field in sufficient numbers to fill the trainer needs of the movement. A partial solution to this dilemma may be to provide Third World trainers with the theoretical knowledge needed to prepare missionaries utilizing available or newly developed missiological resources and the few Third World missionary trainers accessible to "train the trainers." Educational delivery systems which make this kind of training widely available at a relatively low cost is part of what a needs assessment must address.

In the first section of this paper, the context in which training for missionary and community development workers is likely to take place, has been described. In the following section, we will examine theoretical principles of needs assessment as applied to this context.

### The Needs Assessment Process

"The primary objective of training is to improve individual and organization performance" (Rummler, 1987, p. 218). Training needs can be analyzed along a continuum which extends from the most elementary training inputs, to complex performance outputs expected on the job. The most comprehensive needs assessment is performed when the analysis starts with a job description defined in terms of tasks and outputs, and works backwards in determining the "competencies" (knowledge, skills and attitudes) required by a person to perform the job effectively. The degree to which this can be accomplished is a matter of time, available resources, and complexity of the training situation.

The factors which influence the model developed in this paper are (a) the "preservice" nature of the training, (b) the complexity of the context under consideration, and (c) the limited resources available to perform the needs assessment. But even under these circumstances, an effective needs assessment which moves from the job description to the entry level missionary's "profile" (described in terms of competencies), can be accomplished with a

have often been designed to support western training models imported by the funding agency rather than being based on indigenous, need based data.

#### Organizational factors

Evangelicalism has its origin in Protestantism. As a grassroots movement which purports to measure itself against the original, unadulterated teachings of Jesus Christ and the Apostles, it is within its nature to continually examine its own established practices and teachings against these standards. This autoexamination historically has led to divisions and the establishment of new groups. A tendency to minimize the importance of institutionalized ordination of ministers has also contributed to the spontaneous rise of leadership and the proliferation of churches and associations.

In the developing nations, mini-movements often spring up around self-proclaimed prophets who are exclusive in their teaching and denounce the error of more established churches. This sectarianism in turn leads to reactionary closedness by more established groups and denominations. Loyalty, in such a setting, is next to Godliness. When the most effective and efficient training implies a cooperative effort between churches and denominations, these organizational biases are often difficult to overcome.

Another organizational tension is that which exists between western mission boards and the churches they have helped spawn. This discussion of national church-foreign mission tensions has been part of Protestant mission literature for the past thirty years. Winter (1981) has described the four stages of church-mission relationships, (a) pioneer, (b) parent, (c) partner and (d) participant (mission agency invited to participate). After two-hundred years of Protestant mission activity, most churches in developing nations resent paternalistic attitudes still exhibited by western missions and the control they exert over resources and funds. Because of this, training programs which are perceived to be imposed by western agencies will likely be met with resistance.

The primary implication on training design of the organizational issues

raised, however, is whether programs can be designed on a cooperative model or whether each entity will insist on its own means of training. The limited resources of the churches would seem to indicate that a cooperative model would be the most efficient means of organizing training. But how and to what extent can this cooperation be achieved under the present circumstances?

One center, where candidates from all the participating churches from one region are sent for training may be an efficient and effective model but initial research<sup>2</sup> seems to indicate that it is unlikely that the above mentioned issues will allow for this kind of collaboration. A more likely approach may be

---

### **The primary implication on training design of the organizational issues raised, however, is whether programs can be designed on a cooperative model or whether each entity will insist on its own means of training.**

---

a consultative center which keeps tabs of training resources and provides orientation for churches and their missionary candidates. In any case, an adequate needs assessment must contend with these factors and identify flexible ways of addressing these organizational issues.

#### Trainers

A final issue which must be addressed is that of the trainers; who are they, what are their qualifications and where do they come from? The emerging mission movement from the Third World is long on enthusiasm and short on experience. While it is logical to assume that experienced western missionaries from "parent" missions would be the best available source of trainers, the issue of nationalistic, "I'd rather do it myself," attitudes are often an effective barrier against this kind of thinking. Part of this resistance may also be justified on the basis of past experience with imposed training programs, teaching styles and controls.

While the ideal trainer is probably a national who is both academically and experientially qualified, the Third World missions movement is too new

to have produced many veteran missionaries. Yet it does not seem feasible to wait twenty or thirty years until these ideal, experienced individuals begin to return from the field in sufficient numbers to fill the trainer needs of the movement. A partial solution to this dilemma may be to provide Third World trainers with the theoretical knowledge needed to prepare missionaries utilizing available or newly developed missiological resources and the few Third World missionary trainers accessible to "train the trainers." Educational delivery systems which make this kind of training widely available at a relatively low cost is part of what a needs assessment must address.

In the first section of this paper, the context in which training for missionary and community development workers is likely to take place, has been described. In the following section, we will examine theoretical principles of needs assessment: as applied to this context.

#### The Needs Assessment Process

"The primary objective of training is to improve individual and organization performance" (Rummier, 1987, p. 218). Training needs can be analyzed along a continuum which extends from the most elementary training inputs, to complex performance outputs expected on the job. The most comprehensive needs assessment is performed when the analysis starts with a job description defined in terms of tasks and outputs, and works backwards in determining the "competencies" (knowledge, skills and attitudes) required by a person to perform the job effectively. The degree to which this can be accomplished is a matter of time, available resources, and complexity of the training situation.

The factors which influence the model developed in this paper are (a) the "preservice" nature of the training, (b) the complexity of the context under consideration, and (c) the limited resources available to perform the needs assessment. But even under these circumstances, an effective needs assessment which moves from the job description to the entry level missionary's "profile" (described in terms of competencies), can be accomplished with a

fairly straight-forward group process. These competencies can then be easily translated into learning objectives to suit the cultural requisites of individual training programs.

#### A consensus building approach

In producing a set of competencies, how we go about it is as important to our goals as the list itself. In outlining the components of a plan to develop community oriented, competency based training, Anderson (1981) presents the rationale for what some might claim to be a cumbersome and time wasting approach. "While it is possible for one person to research the literature and develop a good set of competencies, the result of such an effort may not be accepted by key individuals and groups because they were not involved in the process" (p. 16).

If this is true in a North American setting, it is doubly true in a Third World context where who is involved may be more important to the success of a project than how effective it can be proven to be. Because the organizational issues are complex and involving the right people in the decision making process is key to the successful adoption and implementation of any training effort which emerges, it is imperative that our model include consensus building as part of the process. This should involve as wide a spectrum of decision makers and trainers as possible.

#### Sponsorship

Who sponsors the needs assessment is always a critical issue, but particularly so in an organizational milieu as complex as that described in this paper. The sponsoring agency must be broad enough to be accepted by all but the most exclusive elements of the Evangelical community. It should carry its own weight, that is, it cannot be perceived as imposing a financial burden on the churches. While this organization may be international in scope, it cannot be seen as forcing its own agenda or it will be resisted. While some general outcomes might be anticipated, the needs assessment and subsequent training models and programs must emerge from the expressed needs of the regional or national Evangelical constituency.

#### Advantages of consensus derived competency systems

While almost all instructional design begins by defining objectives, Anderson (1981) points out the advantages of using a consensus derived, competency based system as the foundation for training development.

"Competency based systems offer a way to (1) closely tie the program to community needs and requirements, (2) provide for program and individual accountability and (3) coordinate all program activities, from planning and assessment through training, counseling and placement. . . The strengths of the system are that:

1. Employers have participated in the setting of standards.
2. Attainment of standards is demonstrated in concrete and measurable terms.
3. Skill attainment is demonstrated in all areas related to work success—not only occupational skills" (p. 5).

In our needs assessment model, building a list of competencies which missionaries should be able to demonstrate is the first step in answering the subsequent questions related to how, where and by whom training is to be achieved. Since such a system places importance on *whether* a candidate can demonstrate a competency at a particular level rather than *how* they learned it, it opens the door to real flexibility in dealing with disparate social, cultural and educational backgrounds. It also permits the use of different approaches, methods and technologies which best suit the individual candidate's learning style and training possibilities.

While many of the skills needed by cross-cultural missionaries and community development workers may be generic in nature, there is a great deal of diversity in terms of specific field job descriptions. A competency based system allows candidates to focus on the precise skills needed in their particular allocation. Since competencies are measurable, skill levels can be developed which are appropriate to the individual's own situation. A missionary whose primary task will be Bible translation will need much higher competencies in exegesis and linguistics than one whose primary job description will involve developing housing for the urban poor. As a consequence to this

focused approach, candidates will tend to be (a) working towards clearly stated goals, (b) be clear about how what they are doing relates to achieving the goal and (c) working towards goals that are meaningful and important to them (Anderson, 1981).

A competency-based system can also enhance collaborative training efforts by creating *linkages* among agencies and institutions which offer related services. By focusing on performance rather than courses, credits or degrees, it is a simple matter to transfer competencies or develop them through available public or private institution.

Where infrastructure resources are scarce, a candidate may develop competencies by first tapping all of the readily accessible training resources available in the home setting, only transferring to a specialized center or program when local possibilities have been exhausted. Through a conscientious effort to find out what other agencies offer, and by entering into a common dialogue with them, it may be possible to dramatically increase both the coordination of services and the efficiency with which the services are delivered.

#### The Plan

The basic steps in carrying out this process are as follows:

1. Identify the key players (stakeholders).
2. Collect competencies data in a consensus building manner.
3. Validate the list of competencies.
4. Prepare the final set.
5. Use competencies as a basis for outlining a collaborative training model development strategy.

#### Identifying the key players

Fundamental to the consensus building approach is the identification of the key players in the whole process. The institutions these individuals represent will include (a) those providing training services (i.e. Bible institutes, seminaries & specialized missionary training programs), (b) agencies receiving candidates (i.e. mission agencies), and (c) leaders of the Evangelical community at large (i.e. denominational and church leaders).

While it is not always easy to identify who *all* the key players might

be, this information can generally be found out through interviewing knowledgeable individuals and checking the listings of national or international Evangelical organizations directly or indirectly involved in missionary activities. For example, the World Evangelical Fellowship's "Mission Commission" has networked effectively key missions related individuals in different continents. These, in turn, are included in regional or continental organizational networks such as the Latin American Missionary Cooperation (COMIBAM) or the Fellowship of Asian Missions. These associations link national organizations (such as Misiones Mundiales in Argentina) which have developed fairly comprehensive listings of leadership involved in the emerging missions movement in their particular region. By tapping these sources, a fairly comprehensive list of the key players should emerge.

In compiling a list of stakeholders to involve in the competency study there are two considerations which may affect how the list is defined.

1. Will the data collection techniques use the whole identified list of stakeholders, or a representative sample?
2. Will the group basically give advice, or be vested with authority to make decisions?

The roles, responsibilities, and authority of each individual and group must be defined. Expectations should be clarified and be acceptable to the participants.

#### Collecting competencies data

While a great number of data gathering techniques are used for needs assessments, the consensus approach being described in this paper will favor those which allow for wide participation and direct involvement in designing the final product. Anderson (1981) suggests four basic methods which are well suited to these objectives:

1. Open forum—group sessions, conducted by an impartial facilitator whose aim is to gain consensus.
2. Survey—paper and pencil instruments to gather opinions.
3. DELPHI—a three round, paper and pencil survey designed to arrive at consensus with no face-to-face interaction.

tion.

4. Q-Sort—a technique using cards with statements which participants rank order according to importance.

Circumstances and resources will determine which one of these (or combination thereof) will be most effective for a particular study. For our model, the initial use of face-to-face interaction in group data gathering techniques may best suit our consensus building approach and the style and temperament of our target participants. Since our purpose includes building support for a collaborative training model, getting stakeholders together may contribute significantly to this end if time and resources permit it.

Paper and pencil surveys may prove most efficient in validating results of initial group techniques, once participants are involved and expect to be surveyed later to confirm results. It is important, however, to be aware of cultural traits which may bias the

---

### Fundamental to the consensus building approach is the identification of the key players in the whole process.

---

results of survey instruments and design them with these factors in mind (Pareek & Rao, 1980).

If groups are to be used to build the competency list, it will need to be decided whether the groups will be used to brainstorm competencies or to review and validate a preestablished list. The researcher might compile a list of competencies derived from review of literature and submit these to experts for review and validation. These in turn might be submitted to the stakeholder group for their (a) clarification, (b) rank ordering in terms of priorities and (c) setting of performance standards. If brainstorming is used, the process might be more involved and time-consuming since the original list must be created in addition to the three steps already mentioned. But the end result may be more authentic since the competencies themselves are derived from the stakeholder group.<sup>3</sup>

#### Validate the list of competencies

While the group approach can accomplish the important function of collect-

ing data for determining a list of competencies, it is unlikely that the data can be processed during the initial group meeting. If more than one group is involved in the process, the data will need to be interpreted and compiled. Once the list is assembled, it is important to validate it through constituency review to assure that the list includes the most important competencies and that the competency statements are clearly written. A number of approaches suggest themselves:

1. Constituency groups might be reconvened to finalize the set of competencies and to develop a collaborative training strategy.
2. A panel of experts involved in the group sessions might be selected to review the list in depth.
3. A survey instrument or Q-Sort cards might be mailed to (a) a random sample from the original group, (b) all those who attended the group sessions or (c) the entire list of key players including those who did not attend the initial group sessions.

Again, time, resources, size of the group and other circumstances will determine how this validation process is undertaken.

#### Prepare the final set of competencies

When the validation process has been completed, the final set is written. This will involve editing the text and reordering the competencies. Formatting is then completed and the set is prepared for production. One of the most important steps in this process is assuring that the constituency groups learn about the results of the effort. The process used to establish the competencies as well as the competencies themselves should be publicized.

#### Developing a collaborative strategy

While a set of competencies is a worthy objective in itself, within the context outlined in this paper, a consensus building needs assessment should also address the question of how, where and by whom the training to develop these competencies can be carried out. Answers should gradually emerge through dialogue between participants. As cognizance of internal and external limitations defines the scope of options available to each of the entities repre-

sented, collaborative opportunities may emerge from the discussion.

A first task in this process is to match competencies with institutions or programs in the region which are designed to develop them. If significant gaps appear in terms of training resources, a plan might be drawn up to create a collaborative program and infrastructure to meet the need. That plan can also define parameters of the initiative and assign responsibility to those entities (foreign or national) which are best able to implement it.

### Conclusion

To the author's knowledge, competency based systems have not been used in determining training needs for missionaries. Yet the model described in this paper may not only open the way to defining training objectives, but to the establishment of open dialogue and collaborative efforts in the training of Third World missionaries. While not an end in itself, defining competencies for Third World missionaries can provide an essential base for significant advances in this field.

### Endnotes

1. Although the term "Third World" has fallen out of grace and is being replaced by terms such as "Two-Thirds World," its choice for this paper is predicated on the simplicity of its definition: "the non-aligned nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America." Occasionally, the term "developing nation" or "non-western" may be used to refer to the same general grouping.
2. A consultation of mission trainers was held in Guatemala in April of 1991 to determine the feasibility and desirability of establishing a centralized regional training program. The declaration that emerged strongly favored a decentralized approach for the region.

3. While space does not permit a complete description of techniques for creating competency lists and competency statements, there are many books, articles and texts which treat this subject in-depth. The Anderson (1981) article cited herein is particularly useful in using group and questionnaire techniques for the needs assessment data gathering process. ■

*Jonathan Lewis, his wife Dawn, and their four children, are based in Argentina where he works as training coordinator for Misiones Mundiales, an indigenous organization promoting missions from that part of the world. He is the author of a three volume mission training manual based on the popular "Perspectives" course which is published in Spanish (Spanish House; Miami) and English (William Carey Library; Pasadena). They are currently residing in Colorado while Jon completes a Ph.D. in Human Resource Development. The author can be contacted at: 740 Eastdale Dr., Ft. Collins, Colorado 80524 USA.*

### References

- Anderson, B. L. (1981). *Ready to work. Using competencies, standards and assessment to meet local employer needs.* (Contract No. 400-81-0013). Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Lab. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 210 564).
- Burke, W. W. (1982). *Organization development principles and practice.* Boston: Scott, Foresman and Company.
- Burns, B. & Silva, I. B. (in press). Missionary training centers and their relationship to theological education institutions. In W. D. Taylor (Ed.), *Internationalizing missionary training: a global perspective.* London: Paternoster Press.
- Fuller, L. (in press). Evangelical Missionary Institute of Nigeria: A case

study. In W. D. Taylor (Ed.), *Internationalizing missionary training: a global perspective.* London: Paternoster Press.

Lee, D. T. (in press). Towards a Korean model of missionary training. In W. D. Taylor (Ed.), *Internationalizing missionary training: a global perspective.* London: Paternoster Press.

Lewis, J. P. (1991, April). *Centro cooperativa de capacitación misionera [Cooperative center for missionary training].* Paper presented at a meeting of Central American missionary trainers, Guatemala City, Guatemala.

McKinney, L. (in press). New directions in missionary education. In W. D. Taylor (Ed.), *Internationalizing missionary training: a global perspective.* London: Paternoster Press.

Pareek, U., & Rao, T. V. (1980). Cross-cultural surveys and interviewing. In Triandis & Berry (Eds.), *Handbook of cross-cultural psychology* (vol. 2) (pp. 127-179). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Pate, L. D. (in press). The dramatic growth of Third World missions. In W. D. Taylor (Ed.), *Internationalizing missionary training: a global perspective.* London: Paternoster Press.

Rummler, G. A. (1987). Determining needs. In R. L. Craig (Ed.), *Training and development handbook* (pp.217-247). New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Taylor, W. D. (1990, June). Goals of the international missionary training project. *Training for cross-cultural ministries*, p. 4.

Taylor, W. D. (in press). Latin American models of missionary training. In W. D. Taylor (Ed.), *Internationalizing missionary training: a global perspective.* London: Paternoster Press.

Winter, R. D. (1981). The long look: eras of missions history. In R. D. Winter & S. C. Hawthorne (Eds.), *Perspectives on the world Christian movement* (pp. 168-176). Pasadena: William Carey Library.