Reforming Short-Term Missions: Community Development Principles and Cultural Contextualization

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Introduction

In 2014, while on a short-term missions trip in the red-light districts of Chiang Mai, Thailand, I met a woman named Ming[1]. She was working in one of the many bars that comprise the red-light district, selling her body to provide for her family who lived in a village close to Myanmar. Since Ming had recently become a Christian, a teammate and I were asked to mentor her for the duration of our trip. During these three weeks, we believed that Ming's new faith would inspire her to leave the red-light district and find a new job. From our perspective, we couldn't understand how anyone who knew Jesus could keep working in that environment. The reality was that when our time ended in Thailand, Ming showed no desire or interest in leaving the red-light district. My teammate and I were shocked and left Thailand feeling discouraged.

Looking back on this time in Thailand, I can see that despite my good intentions for Ming, I was limited in my ability to understand Ming and relate to her because I was limited in my understanding of her culture. Despite all the training I had received and conducted over the five years I was involved in the short-term missions industry, there was very little information given regarding culture or contextualization. I learned about evangelism, praying for healing, self-care, the need to work through our own issues, and how to preach a sermon. However, there was nothing in-depth about cross-cultural work or communication. Not only was cultural training lacking, but there also was no training around the idea of holistic community development. If I had understood more about Thai culture and community development while

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[1] All names of women relating to the red-light districts have been changed

working in Thailand, I would have seen that there was a more effective way to fight against sex trafficking. My lack of understanding Ming's culture prevented me from looking towards the root causes of her decision to prostitute herself. Therefore, I was limited in my ability to provide tangible solutions to Ming and women like her. All of this opened my eyes to the need for a better training and preparation phase for any short-term team or individual desiring to participate in some form of a mission trip.

The training and preparation short-term teams and individuals from a North American context receive affect how they view and interact with the people they meet on their trip. For this reason, the training and preparation phase is a place to begin transforming the short-term mission industry. In order to make short-term missions more effective, participants must be trained in the principles of both cultural contextualization and community development. In Thailand, for example, there exists a culture of trafficking contributing to the presence of the global sex trade. These elements of culture in conjunction with community development principles, must be understood and addressed in order for short-term teams to be effective in their work in the red-light district.

SHORT-TERM MISSIONS

A Brief History. This section will focus on the development of short-term missions in the evangelical North American context. What exactly is a short-term missions (STM) trip? Some see it as the fulfillment of "The Great Commission" that Jesus gave to his disciples in Matthew 28:19, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations" (*NIV*). STM teams travel into the nations, share about Jesus, make disciples (followers of Jesus), and fulfill the commission. An integral

piece for many STM trips is evangelism—the sharing of the Gospel. This is the message that Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sins of the world and rose again on the third day, conquering death. Bringing this message to the world is motivation for many who participate on STM trips. For others, STM may be a way to use their spring or summer break to do something for the good of others. During the years I worked for a STM organization, I saw STM trips as opportunities to share the Gospel, help the poor, and change lives. Short-term trips are seen as a way to engage the world with Christianity for a specific amount of time. According to Wan and Hartt, STM trips are "intentionally limited, organized, cross-cultural missions effort for a pre-determined length of time without participants making a residency-based commitment of more than two years" (65). In Brian Howell's book *Short-Term Mission: An Ethnography of Christian Travel Narrative and Experience,* he defines it as "a short travel experience for Christian purposes" (20). No matter exactly how one defines "short-term missions," it usually involves a cross-cultural experience and this idea of a "short" amount of time – predetermined, limited, temporary, etc. The definition I have come to is simply a trip with the purpose of serving and sharing God's love with the world for a pre-determined amount of time, usually less than one month. What is considered a STM trip today has evolved over time.

When evangelical short-term trips first started in the USA, they weren't referred to as "missions," and the idea of "short-term" was different. Mission (singular) was seen as God's mission of "self-revelation of the One who loves the world" (Howell *Short-Term* 46). Missions (plural) was defined as enacting and participating in the mission of God on earth (Howell *Short-Term* 46). The only way to do missions was to be a life-long, career missionary, mainly focusing on evangelism and church-planting (Howell *Short-Term* 74). The first short-term "missions"

were referred to as service, volunteer, or project trips; they were not "missions" work. In the beginning stages of these trips the specific purpose was to serve the career missionaries, often in administrative ways or with a specific skill set, such as nursing (Howell *Short-Term* 72). These "short-term" trips also often required a two or three-year minimum commitment. The hope was that those going on these trips would eventually choose to become lifelong overseas missionaries themselves.

Organizations began to explore these short-term trips because missions were entering an "age of crisis" in the late 1940s through 1960s (Howell *Short-term* 71). During these years, global, political, and social issues were impacting the recruitment and deployment of missionaries (Howell *Short-Term* 71). Many articles and books appeared in the evangelical circle questioning what was happening to the missions movement (Howell *Short-Term* 72). It was during this stagnant growth period of career missionaries that the short-term missions movement was born. In Robert Priest's "Introduction" to the anthology *Effective Engagement in Short-Term Missions: Doing it Right,* he shares about the groundbreaking program approved in 1949 by the Methodist Board of Missions (i). This program sent out recent graduates in groups of fifty for three years to various countries to serve with career missionaries (Priest *Effective* i). This program was revolutionary at the time and set the stage for STM.

Youth movements also were a contributing factor to the rise of short-term missions in the late 1950s and '60s (Howell *Short-Term* 87). During this time around the USA, youth were being mobilized for various purposes. Colleges and universities were experiencing a rise in student groups on campus and were initiating summer service/mission opportunities for students (Priest *Effective* ii). The Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam War, and the creation of

the Peace Corps all instigated and propelled the youth in the US to action in new ways (Howell

Short-Term 93). This was a time of change in the US and missions began to change along with it.

Organizations such as Youth With a Mission (YWAM) and Operation Mobilization were created

with the purpose of connecting college students and recent graduates to short-term

opportunities around the world, short-term now being considered a few months.

Short-term missions also began to grow, in part, because of globalization. In *The Global*

Reader, globalization is defined as "the set of processes by which more people become

connected in more and different ways across ever-greater distances" (Lechner and Boli 5).

Globalization was beginning to take shape through the rise of mass commercial air travel which

connected the world in quicker and more accessible ways. As a result, tourism began to

increase in places such as the Caribbean and Mexico, and people were given more paid

vacation (Priest *Effective* ii). Travel to other countries became something more accessible to the

average US citizen. Churches and missions organizations also saw how globalization would

allow them the opportunity to further God's mission and participate in the "Great Commission"

around the world.

By 1967, short-term faith-based missions trips—less than two weeks in duration—were

happening with organizations like Wycliffe Associates (Priest *Effective* ii). There was still some

separation between these trips and "real missions" work done by the career missionaries, yet

STM organizations were starting to challenge that idea. Organizations such as Short Terms

Abroad were starting to encourage evangelicals to redefine missions and missionaries (Howell

Short-Term 81). In the 1980s and 1990s, organizations appeared with the specific focus on

short-term missions trips ranging from seven to fourteen days (Priest *Effective* i). Youth pastors

across the country were incorporating STM into their ministry, and churches began creating

their own STM opportunities (Priest *Effective* ii). The term "short-term missions" (STM) was

being widely used among churches and evangelical circles (Priest *Effective* ii), and STM was

becoming a missions model.

Missions in the 21st Century. In 2009, it was estimated that 1.6 million people from North

America participated in a short-term mission trip (Zehner "Short-Term" 131), a majority of

which were young adults and teenagers (Priest and Priest 54). The average length of a STM trip

was eight days (Priest *Engaging* ii), and it was estimated in 2005 that $2.4 billion was spent on

STM trips from North America (Lupton 14). One can assume that the number of participants

and the amount of money attached to STM has only increased in recent years. These trips are a

major way that people from the USA engage with missions. In their article "US Megachurches

and New Patterns of Global Mission," Priest and Wilson compile data received from surveys

sent out to megachurches[2] across the US regarding the impact of STM on career missionaries

(97). An important finding from the research is the decrease of finances spent on career

missionaries and the increase of finances spent on short-term missions (98). Career

missionaries are having to compete with the short-term mission industry for funding, which

could be a reason for the decrease in full-time Protestant missionaries (98). For some churches

STM is becoming the main pathway for global missions.

    In "They See Everything and Understand Nothing," Robert J. Priest and Joseph Paul

Priest present their findings from a survey conducted of participants from Christian colleges and

seminaries across the US with a total of 5270 respondents (53). The survey focused on the

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[2] Priest and Wilson define megachurches as churches with a weekly attendance of 2,000 or more (97)

participants' experiences in short-term missions—where, when, why, costs, lengths, etc. After

sharing their findings, the authors have a suggestion on how to create better short-term

missions participants—through education (70). In their study Priest and Priest come to the

conclusion that missiologists, anthropologists, and those who understand cross-cultural

communication need to educate those who are interested in short-term missions—participants

and pastors (70). Priest and Priest state that "it is possible to carry out a short-term mission trip

in a way that contributes to the ethnocentrism of those who travel....but if the appropriate help

is provided...then the STM experience can combine powerfully with learning to provide a

reduction in ethnocentrism" (70). The authors see that good things can come from STM if

proper education and knowledge is pursued in the pre-departure phase.

It is also important to note a shift that Edwin Zehner points out is happening in the STM

field—what once were primarily evangelism only trips, have now become hybrids of evangelism

and humanitarian aid ("On the Rhetoric" 187). More STM organizations and participants are

interested in poverty alleviation work and helping the poor, not only evangelism. This is an

important shift to for those in the STM industry to understand, as it requires organizations to

re-evaluate their current practices. If STM organizations shift to this hybrid of evangelism and

humanitarian aid, they must also be willing to adapt their participant training and their missions

model.

PROBLEMS OF STM

Despite the zeal and passion of many who go on STM trips, there are some issues with the

current model. Teams can inadvertently participate in creating paternalism, perpetuating

cultural imperialism, causing emotional/relational damage, and persisting in using methods that

are ineffective. These issues stem from a lack of education regarding context, the short amount of time teams spend serving, and a lack of understanding how helping can cause harm. This is not an exhaustive list of issues with STM but a select few I have witnessed in my own STM experiences, as well as what I have discovered through research.

Incomplete Picture. One of the problems with STM trips today is the narrow perspective they suggest regarding the communities they hope to help. Most often STM teams are thinking about the spiritual state or the obvious physical representations of poverty. This is an incomplete picture of those they are serving. Bryant Myers wrote his book on development, *Walking with the Poor,* in part because he saw a hole in the community development field. There was very little attention given to the spiritual part of a person and a community. When the spiritual is missing, a person can't be seen holistically. The opposite of what Myers saw in the community development world can often be seen in the church and in STM: the spiritual needs take precedence over everything else. STM teams often emphasize evangelism, preaching, teaching, hosting VBS camps, anything they can do to share the Christian gospel, and their training reflects this emphasis. STM can fail to recognize the other needs of a person and a community. The spiritual is important but so are the cultural, social, economic, environmental, psychological, and physical needs. This failure to see the whole picture can cause STM teams to make assumptions about a person or a community's wants and needs, therefore implementing solutions that may not actually be beneficial. It can also lead to STM teams becoming discouraged when villages aren't converting to Christianity or responding how the teams had anticipated. My incomplete picture of Ming, for example, led me to be frustrated with her, strained my relationship with her, and led to no viable alternative options for her.

The Wrong Approach. An incomplete picture of a community or individual can lead STM

teams to treat symptoms instead of root causes, to treat chronic issues as relief issues, or to

treat the wrong issues. This can create dependency and can keep people in poverty instead of

lifting them out of it. In the wake of a disaster, there is a need for handing out food, clothes,

blankets, etc. but most often by the time STM teams arrive, communities have moved out of

the relief stage (Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping* 156) and need a different approach. Often,

STM teams can respond to the need of the moment with no strategy or thought to the long-

term effects (Corbett and Fikkert, "Unit 1"). The answer to assisting those in poverty most often

isn't simply to give them something or do something for them. Poverty is complex and multi-

faceted. Most STM trips are done in "communities experiencing chronic problems that need

long-term development. Unfortunately, STMs rarely diagnose the situation and often pursue a

relief approach, even though this is seldom the appropriate intervention" (Corbett and Fikkert,

When Helping 156). STM teams can end up degrading a community or an individual and

inadvertently put themselves on a pedestal.

While on an STM trip in Kenya, I saw how treating chronic issues with a relief solution

caused a community to remain in poverty. We spent a large portion of our time working in a

local Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp. Our role was to spend a portion of our budget to

buy food to feed the camp. We would arrive in our van, bags of beans and rice in hand, and a

long line of people would be waiting for us. We would stand in the hot sun, sweating and

smiling as we were feeding those who were in need. We felt good about ourselves. Yet the

organization we were partnering with had been doing this for a couple years already and had

seen little growth in the IDP camp community. At the time I didn't understand why, but now I

can see how the organization was treating the community with a relief mindset. Social issues

such as employment, housing, and education were not things the organization focused on. They

provided food to meet the immediate need, but the organization was not thinking about the

long-term needs. The IDP camp community was stuck, and there were no programs helping

them to transition to a sustainable life. Robert Lupton states in his work *Toxic Charity*, that

"when we do for those in need what they have the capacity to do for themselves, we

disempower them" (3). When I think back on my experience in Kenya I see this—we were

disempowering the community by choosing to handout the food they needed. This was not

building sustainability in their lives. The organization and my team were responding to the

needs of the community with a relief mindset, which in turn, started to create dependency.

The Who. Often short-term teams arrive with a plan in hand, a dream and vision of what they

are hoping to do and experience. Perhaps the plan is to build a church, paint the walls of a

classroom, lead a VBS program, etc. STM teams need to consider the question, *who determined

this plan?* Did it come from the community expressing a need or desire for a new church

building, for the classroom to be painted, or for a VBS program? Or did this plan originate with

the desires of the team themselves? What Myers points out regarding community development

practitioners is true for short-term missionaries as well: "too often development workers

unwittingly assume that their story is a better story" (206). This is why it is important for STM

teams to remember that they are participating in the community's story (Myers 206). In "US

Megachurches and New Patterns of Global Mission," Priest and his co-authors make the point

that the shift in career missions to short-term missions is partly due to North American

churches wanting to benefit their own members instead of sending money to a missionary

(100). The authors don't condemn the churches for desiring their members to benefit, but they do raise questions that must be asked when evaluating STM, such as "whose needs are being met through these new patterns of stewardship?" (102). Are STM really about serving the least of these, or are they about making participants feel good about themselves? Are the teams' needs driving the project or are the communities' needs?

Emotional/Relational Harm. While serving for a month in the Philippines, myself and the other twenty-five participants lived at an orphanage in Malaybalay on the island of Mindanao. The orphanage was short staffed and needed help overseeing the baby room 24/7, as well as some help with manual labor projects around the property. Each person on the team fell in love with the kids that month. Any moment we weren't painting or digging holes for fence posts, we were playing with the kids, feeling a little proud of how well we loved on the orphans. Many people cried when we left and promised one day they would be back. One teammate, Erin Neufeld, kept her promise and returned to the orphanage a year and a half later. She was shocked to see how distant the kids were compared to her previous experience. The kids who had once been so soft hearted and welcoming were detached from Erin and showed little interest in, or acknowledgement of, her presence. They had grown hardened to the volunteers coming through for a month at a time. The kids would get stuck in this cycle: they would get attached to the volunteers, the volunteers would leave, and the kids would never hear from the volunteers again. For these kids, this desire to be loved and then constantly being left behind was causing damage. It made them wary of strangers and volunteers who came through, and it made it difficult for them to believe that they could really be loved. When Erin shared her story of returning to the Philippines with me, I felt crushed. I had been part of that. I had "loved" the

kids but never looked back as soon as my feet left Philippine soil. Like other STM participants, the emotional harm I caused was not my intention, but that does not mean I didn't contribute to causing damage. My good intentions do not rectify the pain I inflicted.

Despite the appeal of "loving on orphans," STM organizations need to re-think certain ministries they participate in due to the constraints of time and the inadvertent damage they cause. In my experience as a participant, my team and I weren't taught much about orphan ministry or asked to consider the negative effects of our work. Everything we did was seen through only the positive lens —an orphan receiving love, even for a short time, is better than never receiving any! I share this story to illustrate that there are two sides to everything. STM organizations/teams needs to start evaluating potential negative ramifications of their work and troubleshoot ways to create healthy, mutual beneficial relationships. Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert point out that STM teams often respond to the need of the moment with no strategy or thought to the long-term effects ("Unit 1"). As a group, we weren't thinking about the long-term effects of what we were doing, only the immediate situation, and therefore we inadvertently caused harm to the very kids we had loved and desired to help.

Lack of Cultural Understanding. While leading a STM team to Malaysia in 2010, I struggled in communicating with our host, a local Malay pastor. It seemed from the start that our host had a different vision for our three weeks than my team and I had. In my training for this trip I had been taught the importance of feedback, both within the team and between the team and host. It was important to have a clear understanding with our host regarding our schedule, activities, and expectations. I attempted to offer feedback to our Malay host in hopes of defusing any tension, and he seemed to understand and receive what I had said in the moment.

After the conversation, though, nothing had changed. In fact, the tensions seemed to increase. I began to feel disrespected as a leader and frustrated that he didn't understand what the team and I needed. What I hadn't realized at the time is how my team and I had been unintentionally offending our host since day one, due in part because of our laid-back attitude towards leadership, our focus on our needs, and because I was a woman. Also, by giving our host feedback, I further offended him. My good intentions were not enough in this situation. I hadn't been taught, nor had I sought out on my own, an understanding of the Malay culture. I knew Malaysia was different then the United States, but I didn't think too deeply about the how and why. Often, where there is a lack of cultural contextualization, conflict, miscommunication, and offensives thrive. In turn, attempts at serving and ministry can be compromised. Corbett and Fikkert point out in their work *When Helping Hurts* that problems arise in STM, in part because "teams are unaware of what happens when cultures collide" (152). This was certainly true in my case. Due to my lack of cultural knowledge, I didn't know how to appropriately communicate or interact with our host, which lead to miscommunication and conflict.

Brain Howell talks about the need for better cultural training in his article "Mission to Nowhere." The pre-trip "preparation focused on attitudes and ministry tasks and contained virtually nothing about the location and context to which the team was going" (210). Before getting on a plane to Thailand (or wherever they are going), participants need to prioritize learning about the country's culture. This is not simply learning how to say hello or about the local cuisine. There is a deeper level of cultural awareness needed to more effectively engage with the people they hope to serve. STM trips need to spend more time educating the participants on where they are going and who they will be engaging with. In "The Myth of the

Blank Slate: A Checklist for Short-Term Missions" author Miriam Adeney points out that one issue with STM today is the places they are visiting are not a blank slate (122). Christians most likely already exist, particularly in the places most common for STM trips (Latin America), culture exists there, and a perception of Americans exist there (Aedeny 122). All of these things are important for STM teams to realize and understand before hopping on a plane to change the world. "The lack of the local language, church ministry experience and cultural understanding are major weaknesses of STM" (Smith 45), and it is something that needs to be addressed.

Ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is the belief that one's own culture's values, traditions, methods, etc. are superior. Geert Hofstede sees it as "considering one's own little world to be the center of the universe" (387). Each person carries some level of ethnocentrism in them, even if they don't realize it. It is important to identify ethnocentrism, because if left unchecked, it can lead to prejudices, racism, and xenophobia. In Richard Beck's book *Unclean* he states that "it is a deep psychological struggle, fought tooth and nail every second of the day, to make room for others within the borders of my selfhood" (140). Although Beck wasn't speaking directly to the topic of ethnocentrism, he explained the battle with ethnocentrism perfectly. It is something deeply ingrained that one has to fight against often to "make room for others," to build relationships, to transform and be transformed. As one acknowledges and challenges ethnocentrism, it opens up one's ability to connect and embrace others despite differences.

Missions, both long and short-term, have been criticized in the past for displaying ethnocentrism (Ott 45). In Craig Ott's article "Globalization and Contextualization," he touches on the bias towards the American or Western way/culture/ideas, particularly in missions. Ott

points out that "seldom do short-term teams, partner churches, network leaders, media celebrities, and the international promoters of ministry programs contextualize their approaches" (47). Many missions are assuming that because it's worked for them in the USA, that it should work in Thailand, Nigeria, Costa Rica, etc. This could be seen as an ethnocentric belief or prejudice towards the American/Western way. Anne Fadiman sees the importance of acknowledging ethnocentrism because "if you can't see that your own culture has its own set of interests, emotions, and biases, how can you expect to deal successfully with someone else's culture?" (261). When STM teams are unable to see past their own perspectives, they are limited in their ability to actually help a community. Despite a desire to serve, the STM participants can "miss the big picture because [they] view aid through the narrow lens of the needs of [their] organization or church—focusing on what will benefit [their] team the most—and neglecting the best interests of those [they] would serve" (Lupton 15). STM teams may not intentionally carry this attitude, but it is important for it be acknowledged.

STM are full of people with zeal and good intentions, but as Corbett and Fikkert state, "good intentions are not enough" ("Unit 1"). The modern church sees STM not only as an avenue for evangelism, but also as a way to assist in poverty alleviation; STM has become part of the church's solution to meeting the needs of the world. STM teams arrive on the field ready to give and serve in the name of Jesus, yet, as Robert Lupton states in *Toxic Charity*, "giving to those in need what they could be gaining from their own initiative may well be the kindest way to destroy people" (4). While working at a STM organization, I questioned the effectiveness of the trips I was leading and facilitating. I started wondering if we were doing more harm than good and if long-term change was actually happening in the communities we were serving. I

didn't know it at the time, but I was beginning to think in terms of community development rather than "missions." Many of the problems of STM can start to be addressed through the pre-departure training for STM participants. Understanding community development principles and cultural contextualization can help STM participants think and act differently while serving around the world. While in Thailand in the summer of 2017, I was able to see the importance of these principles and understanding culture through partnering with the organization Not Abandoned.

CASE STUDY BACKGROUND

NOT ABANDONED. In August 2017 I returned to Thailand, three years after meeting Ming. I spent three weeks partnering with the faith based non-profit organization Not Abandoned in Pattaya, Thailand in order to study their approach in the red-light district[3]. Founder Jeff McKinley started Not Abandoned in 2008 after visiting Pattaya multiple times and knew something needed to be done regarding the presence of the global sex trade there ("About Us"). Not Abandoned (NA) has a unique approach compared to other organizations working in the "bars" of Pattaya, which is slang for the red-light districts throughout Thailand. To work in "the bars" means one is prostituting oneself. NA's program is tailored towards women who are currently working in the bars as opposed to only being available to women who have left the bars. NA sees the value in meeting women where they are instead of placing restrictions that would alienate some women. The focus of NA is their Employment Education Center in Pattaya where women who work in the bars can take various classes, such as English, baking, or yoga.

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[3] A red-light district is an area where people are being prostituted

The hope is that the women who come to NA's classes will gain skills and confidence to transition out of the red-light district into another job. Outreach is done in the bars by in-country staff and volunteers, as well as visiting STM teams, with the main goal being to build relationships and connect the women to the center. I spent the majority of my time with NA working with their outreach team and observing the classes at their center.

Not Abandoned also connected me with two other organizations working in the red-light districts of Pattaya: Shear Love and The Tamar Center. Both are faith-based nonprofits that provide training for the women in order for them to find other employment opportunities. Shear Love has a hairdressing school for the women and a barbershop school for the men they met in their outreach. Unlike NA, the women and men participants are required to leave the red-light district before becoming part of the program (Henry). The Tamar Center also requires the women to leave the red-light district before joining their program. Tamar has a variety of skills the women can learn including baking, card making, purse making, English, and hair dressing (Vaupel). Although I did not spend as much time with staff from Shear Love and The Tamar Center, I was able to observe some of their operations and interview staff. This information in conjunction with my time with Not Abandoned has helped me to create the solutions I see as part of the way to reform STM.

THAILAND. According to a 2014 report by the International Labor Organization (ILO), it is estimated that 21 million people are victims of human trafficking; 4.5 million of which are victims of "forced sexual exploitation" or sex trafficking. Worldwide, sex trafficking is estimated to be a $99 billion industry (ILO). One country that is known for its part in the global sex trade is Thailand. The 2017 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report defines Thailand as a "source, transit and

destination country" (391). Men, women, and children are trafficked from Thailand to other countries, through Thailand as part of trafficking routes, and to Thailand as their destination. It has been estimated that Thailand has approximately 200,000 prostituted women working in its red-light districts around the country (S. Fulton, 8 August 2017).

When one thinks of a trafficking victim, most often the images of someone being thrown into a van or tricked by a boyfriend come to mind. In Thailand, trafficking of Thai women looks different. Not Abandoned has seen firsthand how women often willingly enter into the world of trafficking and the global sex trade due to poverty and a lack of options. Eighty percent of the women Not Abandoned (NA) has interacted with in the red-light districts are from the north east region of Thailand, an area that is generally considered poor (S. Fulton, 24 August 2017). The women are often sent to the red-light districts by their families or go willingly on their own because their families need financial support. Things such as extreme poverty, family debt, medical expenses, and support for children often spark the need for women to go work in the red-light districts (S. Fulton, 24 August 2017). Prostitution is seen as a career in Thailand for those who are poor and have no other options. This background information is important for STM teams and organizations working in the red-light districts to understand because "the ability to see an experience through another person's eyes, to recognize why people do what they do" (Kelley and Kelley 85) creates empathy and innovation to more effectively combat the issues. In an interview with Alex Miller, the International Director of Not Abandoned, she observed that "trafficking looks different in Thailand. Most of these women are not in a physical prison, but a mental prison. They could walk out of the bars tomorrow and be free, but because of culture and trauma, they remain stuck. We need to

understand this if we are going to help them." This concept is something that Not Abandoned has referred to as a "culture of trafficking" (Stephen Fulton). When this culture of trafficking is understood, how one approaches the red-light district is impacted.

Solutions: Part 1: Community Development Principles

In order for STM teams to become more effective and beneficial in the long-term for the communities they serve, STM pre-departure training should include a section on community development principles. Understanding community development principles can help participants to see the bigger and more complex picture of poverty; what it means to be poor around the world; how to work towards long-term change; and reflect on the things they are learning and seeing. STM participants would benefit from understanding six principles of community development: holistic thinking, engaging the community, asset-based partnership, resilience/sustainability, learning over doing, and contextualization. These six principles are connected to one other – one concept naturally leads to the others. Many of these principles will challenge how the participants think about poverty and the poor, which in turn, will affect how they interact with the local community while in the field. Through the example of Not Abandoned (NA) and their work in the red-light districts of Pattaya, Thailand, you can see a successful implementation of these principles as an organization and how STM teams can be used effectively.

Principle 1: Holistic Thinking. Holistic thinking is an important concept to begin with because it can be a catalyst for thinking about poverty and the poor differently. When asked to define poverty, many people would probably focus on the lack of money or material things, which is

indeed *one* facet of poverty. Holistic thinking acknowledges that there is more than meets the eye regarding poverty—there are cultural, social, psychological, spiritual, and systemic issues at play as well. The whole person, the whole community, is considered when you see things through a holistic lens. People become more than what they lack—they become a whole being with thoughts, desires, emotions, beliefs, etc. When you think holistically it allows you to consider the quality of life of a person, a community, not simply the quantity of things or money they have. Thinking holistically about poverty, communities, and individuals opens up more possibilities for solutions and is a reminder of the complexity of poverty.

Holistic thinking is a principle that Not Abandoned (NA) is implementing in the red-light districts of Pattaya. NA approaches the red-light district a little differently than other organizations in the area—they don't require the women to leave their work at the bars in order to be part of their program. In fact, their program is designed for the women who still work in the red-light district. This framework allows NA to see the women they work with holistically; not as women prostituting themselves. NA acknowledges that these women have: families to provide for, limited education and skills needed for other employment opportunities, trauma in their past, and religious and cultural expectations to navigate. There is more to these women's stories than prostituting themselves; there are needs that must be addressed in order for the women to one day successfully leave the red-light district for good. NA's program model allows them to meet women other programs may not reach. Thinking holistically about a community or a person can be a catalyst towards breaking the mold of what's been done. This important in order to reach more people and discover new solutions.

Principle 2: Engage the Community. In order to break the mold and discover these new solutions, engaging the community must happen. This approach is about listening to and communicating with the community to better understand their needs and ensuring that the solution is being led by the community. What are their needs and wishes, according to them? What does the community think they need in order to live better lives? Community development will make space for "the community to clarify for itself what really matters and why" (Myers 175). According to Lupton, listening to the community is the "first and most important step" (135) in actually helping others. This principle reminds us that our motivation should not be to accomplish our own agenda, but instead work alongside the local community to accomplish their own.

A community is more likely to embrace change if it is something they actually desire and need. Everyone naturally looks at each situation through their own lens—of culture, religion, personality, experience, etc. In community development work, practitioners need to release their own lens as much as possible and try to see things through the lens of the community. This is done by building relationships with the community—engaging with them, listening to them, and seeking to understand them. When the focus is on building relationships, it is easier to create trust and implement change. In an article specific to the training for STM teams, Karla Ann Koll's biggest piece of advice for mission trip facilitation is to listen to those you intend to serve, "allowing people to name the reality they are living" (95). This is engaging with the community.

Engaging with the women they serve is a pillar of Not Abandoned's work. Their desire is to create a family type setting where the women who come to their employment and

education center can feel safe, supported, and connected. NA does this by listening to the needs and desires of the women themselves. Through the English classes NA offers, they were able to learn about a couple of women who had the desire to learn to bake and potentially start a bakery. This lead to NA creating a baking class for these women. Jenna Lewis, a NA volunteer, has been brainstorming ideas with these women about what their bakery business could look like and what small steps they could take to move forward now. While I was in Thailand, I observed the baking class various times, and the women always came excited to try new recipes and loved having me there to sample their creations. By engaging with the women coming to their English classes, NA is able to co-develop solutions that the women actually want and are excited about.

Principle 3: Asset Based Partnership. Asset based partnership centers around the mindset that the communities you wish to help are powerful, resourceful, capable communities. Instead of seeing a community or an individual merely as their problems—poor, not enough food, homeless, etc.—see them for the strengths they bring. By thinking holistically and engaging with a community or an individual, strengths and assets start to emerge. This philosophy is often referred to as asset-based community development since it begins with the assets and the resources that are already present in the community. Lupton agrees that community development is "an empowering philosophy that begins with the strengths (not problems) that poor communities already have and then builds upon those strengths" (137). Often, STM teams have the impulse to "fix" a community or an individual by meeting their needs or correcting what is "wrong," yet "it never occurs to us that we can fix an organization or even our society by doing more of what works" (Hammond 7). There is power in focusing on the positive and

seeing what is right rather than only dwelling on what is broken and wrong. Without a holistic view of poverty and the poor, or taking time to listen to the community, this asset-based approach would be difficult. It is dependent on actually believing the poor can be agents of change in their own lives. The needs of the community can be addressed, and the community must have a say in the goal and in the process. If we don't see the poor as capable, if we don't listen to their needs and desires, we can't create healthy relationships or healthy partnerships. This way of thinking helps to foster partnership mindset—remembering that you are working with the community and a particular project or program is a team effort.

It can be easy in any form of ministry, volunteerism, human services, or missions work to focus on what a community lacks and feel the desire to meet that need or fix the problem. Yet participants must first realize that the communities that they desire to serve have capable human beings with strengths and resources. This shift in mindset is needed for a team to partner alongside the community. If STM participants view those in poverty simply as the poor who need help, they can inadvertently create more harm than good. Participants can slip into the "savior complex" mentality—that the STM team is there to save and fix community. This can lead STM teams to see themselves as better, wiser, more spiritual than the community they are hoping to serve. Lupton reminds his readers that because a community is poor doesn't mean they are "devoid of leadership and resources" (135). STM teams can inadvertently promote dependency or superiority if they are not able to see communities they serve as equals, partners, adding value, or capable.

Not Abandoned (NA) carries this asset-based partnership mindset, and it shows in how they interact with the women they serve. You can see this in the example of Ban, a woman who

got connected to NA while working in the red-light district. Ban attending their bi-weekly English classes and excelled. NA saw the potential in Ban and asked her to step into translating for one of their STM outreach teams this past February. Ban was not seen through the lens of her weaknesses, her past, or her trauma, but instead was seen for the strengths and potential she carries. On a daily basis NA chooses to see the women who participate in their programs as powerful and capable of changing their own lives. Nothing NA offers is ever forced upon the women but is available to them only if they desire; it is the women's choice to participate. Not only does this show respect for the women, but it also implies that NA believes in the women and their ability to make choices for their lives. The women are seen as partners with assets and value.

Principle 4: Resilience/Long-Term Sustainability. Resilience and sustainability are concepts that require one to think in terms of the long-term effects of one's actions. Resilience is about building up an individual's or community's capacity to overcome adversity, problems, issues, etc. and move forward, "to adapt and grow from a disruptive experience" (Rodin 3). Sustainability is the ability for something to be maintained, continued, renewable etc. Resilience and sustainability are interconnected because both understand that how the needs are met today will affect the community in the future. Both are working against dependency and quick fixes. These concepts acknowledge that solutions addressing poverty, and a community's needs, must be sustained by the community themselves. The assistance of the community development practitioner/organization needs to gradually decrease, with the end goal of stopping completely in order for the community to stand independently.

Resilience building and sustainability take time, they are long-term in nature. Good development work should involve some kind of resilience building and sustainability – it should be thinking about the future and making sure the communities can thrive on their own. If the solutions are simply short-term, quick fixes, or band aids, and don't deal with the root of the issues, then the solutions will fall apart once the development organization ends its involvement or once the aid stops. Robert Muggah shares about the importance of this in his video series "Urban Resilience in Situations of Chronic Violence." Muggah specifically talks about how the aid community has most often responded to symptoms rather than the roots, has a "quick in, quick out mentality," and that "these well-intentioned projects didn't generate the dividends they wanted." The same could be said for many STM teams. It is important for STM teams to acknowledge that poverty will not be solved in a one or two-week mission trip (Corbett and Fikkert, "Unit 1"). However, STM teams can partner with local organizations who are working towards these things and can build upon the STM team's work. This ensures that the STM team's work can be incorporated into the bigger picture of resilience and sustainability. Realizing their limitations will help STM understand that solving all of a community's or an individual's problems in a short trip is not possible. Transformation takes time.

A part of Not Abandoned's (NA) approach in the red-light district involves utilizing STM teams. Three times a year NA uses teams for outreach, which has proven to be beneficial for the organization's mission. NA uses STM teams to make initial connections in the red-light district, and these relationships often draw women to the center. In my past experience in Thailand in 2014, the organization I served with put pressure on Ming and myself to have a

deep, trusting relationship despite only knowing each other for a brief time. This was unrealistic and contributed to the relationship being strained. NA acknowledges that STM participants most likely won't build deep relationships in the red-light district and that is okay. The hope is the long-term staff is to able build upon the connections the STM teams make. NA is a small non-profit with few in-country staff and volunteers, and often the outreach portion of their work is limited. STM opens the door for more connections and relationships to be built. These connections can then be followed up with after the teams leave by the in-country staff and volunteers. NA also promotes sustainability and resilience through their Employment Education Center (EEC) where women who work in the red-light districts of Pattaya can take various classes to build their skill set. Not Abandoned is able to help these women gain skills and confidence, which increases their resilience and helps the women create sustainable lives for themselves. The STM teams are not often directly working with the EEC, but by focusing on outreach the in-country staff is freed up to concentrate on how to serve the women at the center better. STM teams have a place in the overall resilience, sustainability, and strategy of NA.

Principle 5: Learning Over Doing. A common theme underlining many of these principles is the concept of learning over doing. When learning is the focus, it opens the door for embracing all these other principles. One begins to see the value in engaging with the community, listening to their wants and needs. A learning mindset can assist teams in letting go of their own perspectives and seeing through the lens of others. It allows for partnerships to be built and for equality to be the norm.

Some of the current problems with STM stem from the belief that one has to be doing something in order to be effective. Sometimes there is power in just being with others and living daily life with them. One positive STM experience I've had was in July 2014 in the hillsides of Mongolia. The team and I weren't given any specific requests from our host, a nomadic Kazakh man and leader of a nomadic church, except to live life with him and his family. This meant we churned butter, baked baursak (a type of bread that is a staple of life there), helped herd sheep, and played with their kids. From some people's perspectives we might not have been doing anything very impactful. We didn't share the Gospel with anyone, we hardly prayed for anyone, we didn't help start a new church or feed the hungry or build anything. We were disconnected from technology with no way to report back to the US about all the amazing things we were doing to change the world. At the end of our time in Mongolia, our host family shared with us how our presence had been an encouragement to them and had lifted their spirits after walking through a difficult season. We didn't "do" anything special or complete a specific project for the family, but we shared life with them and learned from them. The relationships we built, despite cultural and language barriers, were real and deep.

STM organizations need to realize there is balance between building relationships and "doing things." Both relationship building and "doing" need to stand on the back of learning. Part of what made our time successful was the learning mindset we all shared. We realized quickly that we would need to be humble, learn from our host and his family, ask for help, and move slowly in order to be helpful ourselves. Karla Ann Koll questions the belief that some theologians and missionaries have presented that a mission trip means "the short-term visitors

must do something for someone" (96) and instead promotes the idea of learning. This leads to dialogue, listening to others, and engaging with the community.

I witnessed this attitude in Not Abandoned staff and volunteers this summer as well. English classes at the employment and education center found a balance between staying on task and enjoying one another. There was a comfortability in the classroom between the staff and the women, a feeling that they were friends, not merely teacher and student. Before each class, Not Abandoned offers their kitchen up for the women to come and have/make lunch with each other. This brings a more casual, comfortable feeling to the center and the classes, which the women seem to respond to. During this time staff aren't "doing" anything specific other than hanging out with the women and learning their stories. Yet it is this being and lack of doing that lays the foundation for trust.

Principle 6: Contextualization. Contextualization is an extremely important aspect of community development. When one thinks holistically and engages with the community, one realizes that each community is different. There is not a one size fits all solution to the problems of the world. How one community solves the issue of clean water may be different than another; how one community responds to Christianity will be different than another. This is why contextualization, realizing that the context which you are in will affect what you do and how you do it, is important. Myers puts it this way: "the community already has a survival strategy. The community has well-established patterns for making sense out of its world and staying alive in it. Understanding this survival strategy is critical to any attempt to create vision for a better future" (209). Understanding the culture and the history of a place is valuable for building relationships and creating solutions.

When I think back on my time with Ming on my STM trip to Thailand my main thought was "get her out of the red-light district." Of course, that is a good goal, but it was more complex than simply convincing her to leave. If I had understood these principles of community development, I might have thought more about her economic, cultural, and social situation, not only the psychological and spiritual side. It could have lead me to consider what the long-term effects of my relationship with Ming might be or try harder to connect her directly with the organization I was working with. It might have helped me view her commitment to her family as a strength instead of only seeing her negative decision to stay in the red-light district. With the knowledge of community development principles, my desire for Ming to leave the red-light district might have still been the same. How I viewed her and therefore interacted with her would have been different.

When it comes to their work with STM teams, Not Abandoned makes sure to provide ample training regarding the context of Thailand, the red-light district, and NA's approach. For approximately three days before beginning their work, participants sit through training that better prepares them for the work they hope to do. These trainings include topics such as, but not limited to, the history of trafficking in Thailand, gender roles, shame v. honor, understanding trauma, global worldview differences, and specifically Thai vs. US worldview. Also, by working with local translators, STM teams have a cultural broker[4] available alongside them as they work in the red-light district. These things show that NA realizes the importance of understanding context and how it affects both what one does and how one does it.

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[4] Or a cultural insider, someone who is very familiar with the culture and can help an outsider understand it to a greater depth

Community development principles provide a framework that can help STM participants be more effective in the work they hope to do. These principles will assist in constructing a new way of viewing poverty, the poor, and the oppressed and how to effectively help those around the world. Community development promotes building relationships and the belief that transformation must be led by the community themselves, not the STM team. These principles, along with a deeper understanding of cultural contextualization, should be incorporated into STM teams' pre-departure training.

SOLUTIONS: Part-Two: Cultural Contextualization

By devoting time in the pre-departure phase to learning the general concepts of culture and reflexivity, in conjunction with a more in-depth cultural contextualization study, STM participants will be able to better create working relationships with host organizations and locals, as well as better connect with and understand the people they hope to serve. Through the example of Thailand and the work of Not Abandoned, it is evident that understanding culture is a necessity for STM teams to effectively participate in serving the prostituted Thai women in the red-light districts.

Culture. Before diving deeper into an understanding of cultural contextualization, it is important that STM teams first explore the concepts of culture and reflexivity. These concepts will help STM participants in examining their own culture as well as learning to embrace the culture they hope to serve within.

What exactly is culture? Most likely people will associate culture with food, language, and customs. These are all part of culture, but at the same time, a very limited understanding of

culture. Brian Howell, a Christian anthropologist who has researched the STM movement, and

co-author Jenell Williams Paris, state that "culture is an idea created to describe a reality that

people experience, the behaviors and assumptions common to a group that distinguish one

group from others" (25). Things such as religion, gender roles, economic status, social structure,

traditions, rituals, art, laws, government, values, and beliefs are all part of culture. Culture is an

expression of humanity. In *Introducing Cultural Anthropology*, Howell and Paris see culture as a

way to explain human similarities and differences (25) and as a conversation—it is something

shared, fluid, and dynamic (40). Culture is relative to context—each element of culture

influences each other. As one studies one aspect of culture, religion for instance, one sees how

it is connected to gender roles, class systems, and the history of a place or people group.

STM teams need to see the value in culture because all participants are impacted by it.

Awareness of one's own culture, both their own and the culture of where they are going, will

provide a richness of experience otherwise not known. Culture affects how one sees the world

and is part of what makes us human (Howell and Paris 36). Experiencing different cultures is a

way to connect deeper with God, which is a common goal for many STM teams. Seeing the

unique ways God has crafted the world reveals more of God's character and love.

Reflexivity. This is a concept similar to introspection; it is about reflecting on one's

surroundings, the context one is a part of, and what one is learning. Reflexivity requires one to

be honest with oneself, allowing for ethnocentrism, prejudices, and preconceived perspectives

to be challenged. In many ways, reflexivity is the process of ethnocentrism being revealed.

Reflexivity is part of that "culture as conversation" that Howell writes about, and it is the

unique perspective each person brings. Anthropologist Dr. Steven Ybarrola states that "studying

other cultures cause one to reflect on and analyze one's own" (114). Practicing this during training will make it possible for teams to continue this mindset while on the field. It can help one to "better understand the social worlds that shape and constrain us" (Park 518). It is important for STM teams to practice reflexivity as they study and prepare for their trip in order to better understand themselves and others. Reflexivity can happen naturally as one begins to study other cultures. As STM participants learn about culture and contextualization, they will naturally begin to explore their own culture.

Elements of Contextualization. There are many elements that make up culture. It is unrealistic to believe that a STM team could learn everything there is to know about a particular culture in a few training sessions prior to departure. Part of understanding culture is experiencing it. However, participants should still strive to learn what they can. There are a few elements of contextualization that STM teams can focus on in their pre-departure training as a starting point: power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, religion, gender roles/marriage, and history.

Geert Hofstede is a Dutch social psychologist known for his work *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* regarding cultural dimensions. Throughout his research in the 1970s with IBM employees, Hofstede developed four cultural dimensions and corresponding indices: Power Distance, Individualism, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Masculinity. These dimensions and indices provide insights into how various cultures operate and provide an accessible way to compare and contrast countries. For example, regarding power distance, which is how a culture relates to authority, a country might score a 90 on the Power Distance Index (PDI), indicating the culture has a higher power distance. On the other side of the scale, a

country that scores a 20 would be considered a culture with a lower power distance. Hofstede's cultural dimensions and indices are valuable resources for STM teams to explore as part of their pre-departure training, particularly the dimensions of power distance, individualism, and uncertainty avoidance.

Element of Contextualization 1: Power Distance. Power Distance explains the relationship between those in authority and those being led. Hofstede states that "there is inequality in every society," (54) and a country's attitude toward this inequality is power distance. This is an important part of culture to understand, because it can affect familial roles, work environments, how people view government, team dynamics, and how locals view the visiting STM participants. Lower power distance countries desire equality, for leaders to include followers in the decision-making process, for authority that is relatable and competent. A lower-power distance culture would believe that one can change one's status in life—one doesn't have to accept the way things are. Higher power distance countries prefer clearly defined roles and can lean towards a more authoritative style of leadership. Potentially, in a higher power distance country, a leader who attempts to be more inclusive of their followers could be seen as weak or inexperienced. Also, in higher power distance cultures, people are more likely to accept their station in life.

According to the Power Distance Index (PDI) Hofstede created, Thailand scores a 64, which means they are a country with a higher power distance (58). The USA scores a 40 on the PDI, revealing that the USA is a lower power distance country than Thailand. On his website, Hofstede shares that Thailand is a place where "inequalities are accepted; a strict chain of command and protocol are observed." Being from a higher power distance country, it can be

surmised that many Thai people have accepted their place in society and willingly submit to those in authority. Stephen Fulton, the co-director of Not Abandoned's Employment and Education Center, shared in an interview that Thailand is "a society of hierarchy. It's about your station in life. It's important to know your place—who is above you and who is below." This can be seen in how the women NA works with view themselves and their ability to change their lives.

Power distance is something one can see playing out in the red-light districts of Thailand. Even though the "bar mom" (a manager of sorts for the prostitutes) and the pimps might not be considered good people, the women will still defer to them, obey them, and respect them. They are not likely to contradict them, fight for their needs to be met, or assert their own opinions (Hofstede 61). This affects the prostituted women's ability to simply leave their job. Also, the women working at the bars are considered some of the lowest people in Thailand's hierarchical society, and the women have accepted this fact; they are used to being less than. The idea of being empowered to change one's course in life is not something that the women are easily convinced of (S. Fulton, 8 August 2017).

The power distance score can also bring understanding to the presumptions and actions of a STM team. For instance, STM teams from the USA are coming from a lower power distance context, with a score of 40 on the PDI. This means STM teams from the USA will value equality among people and between boss and subordinate (Hofstede 60-62). It may be difficult for those from the USA to understand why the prostituted women don't simply quit. These participants are from a place where one doesn't have to accept one's status in life—its encouraged to pull oneself up by the boot straps, work hard, and earn oneself status and power. Going into the

red-light district with this mind-set can create judgment towards the women, making it hard to have compassion. This difference in power distance could also cause teams to inadvertently show disrespect to the leaders of the communities they serve in, similar to my experience in Malaysia. If teams are too casual in their approach to local leaders, it could lead to offenses and strain the relationship.

Element of Contextualization 2: Individualism. Hofstede not only deals with power distance in *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*; he also created an index that measures individualism vs. collectivism, the Individualism Index (IDV) (94). An individualistic society is one that values independence, freedom of choice, living your life for yourself, one that "celebrates the individual" (Corbett and Fikkert, *Helping Without Hurting* 65). The individual takes precedence over the collective, over the group. On the other side of the Individualism Index is a collectivist society. Collectivism is when "the interest of the group prevails over the interest of the individual" (Hofstede 90). Those born into a collectivist society are very likely to have a deep dependence on their (extended) family, or as Hofstede often refers to it, their "in-group or we group" (91). This "in-group" becomes "the major source of one's identity" (Hofstede 91). These two different views are neither right nor wrong; however, if people don't fully understand the other point of view, there can be tension.

For effective missions or community development to take place in Thailand, particularly in the context of the red-light district, STM participants from the United States will need to learn about the cultural dimension of individualism v. collectivism. The United States is an extremely high individualist society, receiving a 91 on this index, which is the highest score of all the countries included (Hofstede 95). Thailand scored a 20 on the IDV index, making Thailand a

collectivist society (Hofstede 97). On Hofstede's website, he states that "loyalty to the in-group

in a collectivist culture is paramount and overrides most other societal rules and regulations." It

would be natural for someone from an individualistic society to ask questions like "Are you

happy? Do you like what you are doing?" In the context of the red-light districts of Thailand,

this question isn't very helpful. Even if the women acknowledge they aren't happy, their

happiness is not their priority.

Ghan, a woman I met at a bar in Pattaya, shared how she came to work in the red-light

district because she had to provide for her child and her parents. Ghan was barely making

enough money to survive. Often, she didn't know if she would have enough money for food

that day, but she still sent the majority of her earnings back to her family. This is the priority—

taking care of the group no matter the cost to yourself. The extreme level of collectivism in

Thailand is an indicator as to why it's difficult to convince a Thai woman to leave the red-light

district. The allegiance is to the needs of the group (their family) not the needs of the individual.

In collectivist societies "personal opinions don't exist: opinions are predetermined by the

group" (Hofstede 107). The way to convince a Thai woman to leave prostitution is not through

appealing to *her* needs, wants, and desires.

In Not Abandoned's culture training, Stephan Fulton remarked that in Thailand, "even if

you did something wrong, if you do it for the good of the community then it's still good." Good

and bad are dependent on the effect it has on the group, not the individual. Although

prostitution itself may not be looked upon favorably in the Thai culture, it has become an

accepted career because it helps provide money for families,

Americans (from the USA) can struggle to understand this logic. Often Americans get caught up in convincing the prostituted women that they can have a better life and can be happier. Although these things may sound nice, most Thai women are not going to leave their situation because of those reasons. The Thai women want to know how their families will survive if they aren't working at the bars. STM teams must be aware of this cultural difference in order to not pressure the women to leave the bars and discount the women's priorities. This also ties back to the community development principle of engaging the community one is serving in and allowing the community to create and own the solution.

Not Abandoned (NA) saw this need for women to know their families are financially secure. This is part of what spurred them on to start their Employment and Education Center. NA knew that if the women were to leave the red-light district, they would need skills to get another job.

Element of Contextualization 3: Uncertainty Avoidance. Uncertainty avoidance is how a society responds to the unknown and what is different. Hofstede's official definition is "the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations" (191). Hofstede shows that societies with a high UAI score generally tend to have higher levels of anxiety (191), are more expressive (196), have stricter boundaries regarding what is "dirty and dangerous," (200) and "have a stronger system of rules and norms" (201). The opposite would be true of a society with a low uncertainty avoidance. There is more flexibility regarding boundaries and rules (201), and strong emotion can be looked down upon (196). Uncertainty Avoidance is helpful in determining how a community will react to change.

Hofstede's Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) places Thailand as an intermediate with a score of 64 (191). This implies Thailand does lean slightly towards uncertainty avoidance as a culture and is therefore more resistant to change, the unknown, and that which is different (Hofstede 191). Because of this leaning, change is potentially something that Thai people might not readily jump into—they might be more cautious and wary of it. Any change will take time, and this is an important thing for short-term teams to understand. The United States is only eighteen points lower than Thailand on the UAI (Hofstede 191), yet those eighteen points can make a significant difference. Short-term teams from the USA will see change more favorably and are more comfortable with the unknown. While that is the case for the US, the small difference in points means that leaving the red-light district without a firm plan in place could cause anxiety for the Thai women and seem like a foolish decision. It could also lead to feeling shame for letting their families down financially. Why risk it? Alex Miller shared that from her perspective, many of the women Not Abandoned works with have relatively high personal UAI due to trauma from working in the red-light districts. This would imply a greater distrust of strangers and resistance to change, contributing to the difficulty the women have in leaving the red-light districts.

Element of Contextualization 4: Religion. An element of culture that is extremely important for STM teams to understand is the local religion or belief system. For instance, In Thailand, Buddhism is more than a religion; it is deeply ingrained into everyday life. In *Culture and Customs of Thailand*, author Arne Kislenko provides insight into the role of Buddhism and explains that "it has played a critically important role in the historical development of the country and remains today one of the pillars of Thai society" (23). Throughout the red-light

district, the influence of Buddhism can be seen. In the thousands of bars in Pattaya, there are spirit houses to Buddha and other spirits where glasses of water, small food items, and gifts are presented as offerings. This tradition is performed in order to receive good things from the spirits, for both the bar and the individuals in it (Y. Fulton). It is part of life there. Buddhism has become part of the normal Thai person's daily thought process. Although there are many elements and sects of Buddhism, a starting place for STM teams in understanding Theravada, the Thai form of Buddhism (Blanchard 87), is understanding the transactional aspect of it and the concept of karma.

Ying Fulton, a Thai staff member of Not Abandoned, conveyed in an interview how Buddhism is a very transactional religion—it's a very "if, then" relationship. In order for someone's prayers to be heard in Thailand, they must pay. A Buddhist can pay money to the monks for them to pray on his/her behalf or leave money at the temple somewhere for Buddha. Although, if there is no money given, then there is no prayer (Y. Fulton). For the women who work in the bars, their whole lives are transaction based; in order to survive they rely on selling themselves and monetizing their bodies. Amanda Thompson is a woman who lived for two years in Phuket, Thailand while working with an anti-trafficking ministry. One of the main responsibilities of her role was to bring short-term teams to the red-light district. She shared in an interview that once a woman in the red-light district told her that "everybody wants something from me, even you." The women at the bars see everything as a transaction. The idea of someone who simply wants to get to know them and a God who loves them unconditionally is foreign (literally), which is the message that many STM teams try to use to engage the women. Ying Fulton also pointed out that in Thai culture the idea of getting

something for free, without having to pay a price, is not a concept they easily understand. This plays into the fact that "evangelism" often doesn't work in the bars in Thailand. NA focuses on connecting women to the center instead of evangelizing because of this transactional factor.

Thip is a former Buddhist and prostitute who now serves on staff at the nonprofit Shear Love as their main translator. Thip was a devout Buddhist for many years and worked as a prostitute in the red-light district. One day, when she was very poor, without food and money, she went to the temple to ask the monks to pray for her. They asked her if she had money and when she answered no, they told her they wouldn't pray for her. This upset her because she had been a good Buddhist for thirty years. She had given money to the temple in the past, prayed, done all she was supposed to do, but the monks wouldn't pray for her. At that moment she realized that her religion didn't have anything for her. That same day, she got connected to Tamar Center, a nonprofit in Pattaya working with former prostitutes. They gave her food, housing, and love, for nothing. She didn't trust them at the beginning; she was always thinking, "what do they want from me?" The transactional mindset was so deeply ingrained in her that she couldn't believe anyone would do something kind for her without an agenda, without her having to owe something in return. Over time she started to build relationships and trust those who worked at the Tamar Center. This enabled her to gain more from the program at the Tamar Center and build up her English skills. Today she is a Christian, a translator, and is also working on writing a book about her personal journey out of the red-light districts.

Another central teaching in Buddhism that STM teams would benefit from understanding is the idea of karma. This is the belief that one gets what one deserves and involves the "necessity of merit-making" (Blanchard 115). Karma states that if one is suffering in

this life it is because one was not good in a previous life (Blanchard 115). This concept can be seen in the red-light districts in regard to how the prostituted people there view themselves and how others view them. Thai people look at the women and men prostituting themselves and think, "they got what they deserve, that is why they have to suffer and be a prostitute" (Y. Fulton). The women prostituting themselves also think this about themselves—*this must be the life I deserve.* Therefore, the women decide they will work hard and be a good prostitute in hopes of having a better life the next time around. This was found to be true in the study "Social and Cultural Contexts of HIV. Risk Behaviors among Thai Female Sex Workers in Bangkok, Thailand." The authors of the study found that "Thai society tends to accept or tolerate prostitution and does not ostracize sex workers due to the Buddhist concept of karma and merit making in future lives" (Nemoto 613). Prostituted women are seen as low on merit because they are female, come from poor families, work in the red-light district, and are currently experiencing poor karma (Nemoto 613). On the other hand, if the prostituted women are good prostitutes and make money for their families, they have the chance to earn good karma.

Alex Avila, the male discipleship leader at the organization Shear Love, shared in an interview the importance of "framing the stories (from the *Bible*) for their mindset to hear." In his experience teaching Buddhist men about the Bible, he has seen the need for understanding Buddhism and contextualization. The Tamar Center has also been working on ways to share the Gospel through a framework that Thai Buddhists can easily understand (Vaupel). This has lead the Tamar Center to create a Bible storybook that uses Thai style illustrations and integrates some Buddhist terminology. Daniel Vaupel, the director of the Tamar Center, affirms that this is

not a translation of the Bible itself, but rather sees it as a tool to begin a conversation about Christianity with Thai Buddhists. This is an important lesson for STM teams and organizations to learn. How can STM teams, who don't even know what the main religion of a certain country is and how it affects everyday life, effectively share the Gospel? Religion plays an integral role in culture, and STM teams must be willing learn about it.

Element of Contextualization 5: Gender Roles and Marriage Another element of culture that is important to understand are the roles of gender, marriage, and family. In Thailand, it often falls on the daughter's shoulders to help provide for her parents and siblings; this is the daughter's way of gaining better karma (S. Fulton, 8 August 2017). Heather Montgomery examines Thai family life and morality in her article "Child Prostitution as Filial Duty? The Morality of Child-Rearing in a Slum Community in Thailand." For fifteen months, Montgomery's research revolved around a group of young prostitutes, aged six to fourteen, in a Thai slum on the outskirts of a larger tourist city (171). In this slum community "the intentions behind becoming a prostitute, and what is done with the money raised, are seen as being equally important as the work itself when weighing its morality" (175). Montgomery never condones child prostitution, but attempts to understand why it's happening, in order for change to occur. The children were proud to be helping their poor family and honoring one's family through financial provision is extremely important in Thai culture (Montgomery 175). These things must be understood when addressing prostitution in all its forms in Thailand.

In Thailand, the role of marriage has also played a part in the global sex trade. Marriage is often more about financial security than only love, especially for those coming from the poorer villages of Thailand (S. Fulton, 8 August 2017). The idea of being faithful to a spouse and

family is more associated with financial provision then emotional connection or sexual exclusivity. It is somewhat expected in Thai culture that husbands will cheat on their wives. A woman I met in the red-light district shared how her husband had cheated on her many times, yet she still chose to stay married to him, as he was her financial security. They finally separated only after he chose to leave her with their son to raise, which eventually led her to the bars for work. This woman shared with me her desire to find a "farang" (foreign) boyfriend in order to have financial security again. This type of situation is common in the red-light districts of Thailand.

In "Human Trafficking Between Thailand and Japan: Lessons in Recruitment, Transit and Control," the author focuses not only on the link between Thailand and Japan in human trafficking, but also understanding how/why Thai women are trafficked in the first place. The research for this article came mainly from interviews with four Thai women who had been trafficked from Thailand to Japan. All four of their stories had incredible similarities that shed light on how/why Thai women are trafficked—they were born into poor families with multiple siblings, they experienced gender inequality, each woman had a heavy burden placed on her shoulders to financially provide for her family, and three out of four of the women knew they were going to be prostituted/trafficked and went willingly (Jones 205-207). Understanding these aspects of gender and marriage must be understood if a STM team wants to work in the red-light districts of Thailand.

Element of Contextualization 6: History. In order to have a comprehensive view of a particular culture, it is important to have some knowledge of the history of a place/people group. What is happening in the present is connected to the past, and a brief overview of a

country's history can add insight and a depth of understanding for STM teams. In Thailand, understanding the history of statelessness is one example of this.

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), 10 million people around the world are considered stateless, which is defined as "a person who is not considered as a national by any State or under the operation of its law….a person that does not have a nationality of any country" ("Ending Statelessness"). In Thailand, close to half a million people are considered stateless (Jedsadachaiyut). Many of these people are collectively called "hill tribe people" and live in Northern and Western Thailand near the borders of Myanmar. These hill tribe people are ethnic minorities in Thailand; some are indigenous and others are immigrants. In the 1960s, due to the civil war in Burma, many crossed the border to Thailand hoping for a life free of violence and discrimination ("Statelessness in Thailand"). Many of the hill tribe people migrated to Thailand over the past 300 years and were living in the hills before the territory was under control of Thailand ("Statelessness in Thailand"). Despite the fact that many of these hill tribe people were born in Thailand, they remain stateless and have no proof of citizenship.

Due to their ethnicity, these hill tribe people end up having to do jobs no one else wants. Often their children can't receive an education and they don't have a voice in what is happening in their country. They are poor and feel as if they have no other option than to send their children, most often daughters, to the red-light districts. The "2014 Trafficking in Person Report" directly addressed this issue: "foreign migrants, members of ethnic minorities, and stateless persons in Thailand are at the greatest risk of being trafficked, and they experience…the withholding of travel documents, migrant registration cards, work permits, and wages." In the red-light districts of Northern Thailand, it is estimated that one third of the

women and children are hill tribe people ("Understanding the Problem"). Understanding this piece of Thai history should impact STM teams approach in the red-light district. Many of the women the teams may interact with could be from the hill tribes and literally have no way to get another job. The answer would be to first connect the women with organizations that can assist them in getting proof of citizenship, which is needed to search for other potential job opportunities.

Culture is part of life and something every person participates in, therefore its influence can't be ignored in STM. In the pre-departure training for STM teams, there must be a focus on cultural contextualization. STM teams will be able to better serve and support the organizations they are partnering with if they understand the context around them. In Thailand, understanding the culture and how it differs from the USA is vital to helping and connecting with women in the red-light district.

Application

STM organizations and trip leaders can easily take the information presented regarding community development principles and elements of contextualization and tailor it to their group's needs to make a curriculum. The heart of the solutions is the same, no matter the context. Hofstede's website is available to anyone and provides information regarding his cultural dimensions. The globalized, technological world allows for anyone to gather information on a country or people group. There is no excuse for not researching and understanding the context on a deeper level. It should not be left up to the participants themselves to do their own research; organizations and churches need to lead the charge in order to show teams and participants they value others and see each person with dignity. Each

principle and element can be its own lesson, or one could combine them to create a six-week lesson plan. These can be used as a supplement to the other training STM organizations have planned. The solutions are something that STM organizations and churches can begin to implement immediately. This is why pre-departure is a great place to start with reforming STM —it is something that organizations have control over and can change.

Other Notable Solutions

In order to ensure that STM teams are beneficial for the receiving communities, community development and cultural training is only part of the solution. I will briefly touch on two other solutions needed to aid in reforming STM.

Better Research. Research that focuses on the receiving communities' voices is needed, as well as research that can see if these STM trips are actually having a long-term impact in the communities. Up until 2003 there was little research surrounding STM, and even today, there is not nearly enough to determine if this model is an effective model. With at least 1.6 million people traveling on a STM trip from North America every year (Zehner "Short-Term"), it is important that STM are evaluated. STM organizations need to incorporate program evaluation tools as part of their normal routine in order to see if they are indeed being effective. STM sending organizations also need to ensure that the locals and the communities they are serving are able to provide their insight. Too often, STM organizations rely on the participants' feedback but have little data from the community themselves. This is another way that cultural contextualization will be helpful—understanding how a culture communicates can help organizations better gather the information they need. This brings up the question: how can

STM participants, teams, and organizations make sure they are actually helping if they aren't receiving community input?

STM organizations also need to find a way to do follow up research after a team leaves. This could help them understand if there are long-term effects from the team's actions. This may not be an easy task to accomplish, but it is vital for STM organizations to understand both how the local community views the STM teams and what are the effects of their actions. It is easy for STM teams to assume since they are sharing about God and have good intentions, that everything will work out in the end. However, isn't there responsibility to make sure harm is not occurring and that communities are being set up for success? It would be insightful for an organization to visit a community served by a STM team a year or more after the team leaves to see how the community is doing. Is whatever project the team worked on still in effect? Is the community using the church building or the well? Are the community members who were counted as converts still self-proclaimed Christians? Isabela Neal lived in Guatemala and worked with a nonprofit organization in the early 2000s. While there, she worked with many STM teams and witnessed first-hand how the locals would proclaim they believed in Jesus when the teams were present, but as soon as the teams left, the locals would go back to the way things were (Neal). From her perspective, it seemed as if the locals were trying to appease the teams. In the long-term most locals were not impacted by the teams' presence (Neal). STM organizations need to create metrics and monitoring and evaluation systems that allow them to understand what social and spiritual impact they are truly having, not only in the immediate, but in the long-term as well.

Long-Term Partnerships. A constraint of STM is something that has already been mentioned: the short amount of time a team is actually on the ground. How much can really be done in a fourteen-day trip? Or even a month? This is why long-term partnerships are essential for STM organizations and churches to cultivate. Although the partner organizations need to be vetted and their strategy evaluated before a STM organization chooses to partner with them. These partnerships need to be with organizations that are working to build sustainability and resilience in the communities they serve. There is value in relationships and creating partnerships; walking beside one another over the course of time. There is also value in stepping back when the partnership is no longer needed. The goal should always be to help the communities and organizations no longer need the help of the STM team/organization. This could mean that after five or ten years of partnership, the STM organization needs to move on.

By fostering long-term partnerships, a long-term vision in the mind of the participants is created as well. They don't have to settle for simply knowing someone for eight days and then moving on with life, forgetting the names of the people who so deeply impacted them. This is something I have experienced over and over again. Each STM trip I was a part of, I would make local friends, take pictures with them, play with their children, but now as I peruse pictures from the past, there are very few names I remember. This does not have to be the case. Kathie Hubbard, a multi-time participant of Not Abandoned's red-light STM trip, shared in an interview with me about the benefit she has seen in returning to the same place. It has helped her cultivate long lasting relationships with the women she met while there. Kathie shared a story about how she had met a woman at one of the bars in Pattaya, and they had become friends on Facebook where they continued to communicate. One day, this woman contacted Kathie and

told her she wanted to leave the red-light district and go home. Kathie was able to connect the women with Not Abandoned staff in Thailand and they helped her leave the bar and get a bus ticket back home. With today's technology, there is more of an opportunity for teams to stay in touch with people they meet. The world is more connected than ever before, and STM organizations should find ways to use this aspect of globalization to the benefit of their mission.

Final Remarks and Conclusion

We live in a globalized world; countries, cultures, and people are more connected and accessible than in previous decades. This has led to the development of the current STM industry, and it is also why the STM model needs to shift. Cross-cultural interactions are more common —it is estimated that twenty-nine percent of youth from the USA participate in some form of cross-cultural experience or service orientated project before graduating high school (Livermore 45). The Church itself is a globalized entity; it is not merely comprised of those from the USA or the West. In fact, the "American church is no longer the trendsetter and center of Christianity" (Livermore 33)—Africa, Asia, and Latin America are seeing a rise in Christianity and in their spiritual influence. Livermore states that "the vast majority of Christians are young, poor, theologically conservative, female, and people of color. As we grow in our understanding of the changing face of Christianity, there's great potential for improving how we do short-term missions" (33). Better training needs to be implemented for those participating in STM in order to help them navigate cross-culturally and embrace the global Church.

When I think back on my own experiences with STM, I see how better training in community development principles and cultural contextualization could have enabled me to better help those around me. Thinking back on my time with Ming, incomplete training led to

unrealistic expectations. I had been trained to believe that as soon as these prostituted women chose to believe in Jesus they would want to leave the bars. But that was not the result I experienced. While in Thailand in 2014 it became more and more difficult for me to know how to speak with Ming, and I found myself stepping back from the relationship. After I left Thailand I realized I had been driven by results, and not by relationship in regard to Ming. If I had truly wanted to see Ming freed from the world of the global sex trade, I should have been willing to meet her on her terms, and love her for who she was, instead of trying to convince her night after night to change. Relationship does this—getting to know Ming caused me to realize how I had been results driven without knowing it. When I took the time to reflect on Ming and understand her story, my perspective started to shift.

If it is true that Christians are called to take care of the poor and spread God's love throughout the world, then STM organizations and churches need to make sure they are training participants effectively. STM has great potential to help those in need and great potential to cause damage. It is not something one should take lightly. STM participants must remember "everything we do impacts other people" (Clawson 186). Daniel G. Groody states, "solidarity with the poor does not mean helping the poor from a privileged position of economic superiority or even ministerial power. It involves cultivating relationships with the poor that are marked by mutual receptivity and reciprocity" (255). Community development and cultural contextualization both acknowledge the importance of relationships and learning. They acknowledge that there is an equality between those serving and those being served— both are powerful, with resources and methods of coping, with ideas, and a history. One is not better than the other. When training isn't a priority it implies the participants already know

enough to help those they encounter and that those they are going to serve have nothing to impart. The underlying message is that the poor around the world are helpless and need the STM teams (among others) to come and save them.

Although there are many elements of STM that need to shift, pre-departure training is one place to start. By training participants in community development principles and elements of cultural contextualization, a new perspective regarding those they serve can be gained and new ideas about how to help can be learned. How one thinks affects behavior and action, therefore starting with how STM teams and participants think will be critical to reforming STM.

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