



Trust in God and perseverance are keys to ongoing success in effective Christian literature ministry. by David Mehli



Lessons Learned

Cook Communications Ministries International has worked to develop critically needed indigenous Christian publishing for decades. What have we learned?

1. We are not in control. In some cases our weakest efforts have produced the most fruit, and our strongest efforts have produced the least. We have learned that God is in charge, and that results come in His time. Bob Walker, publisher of *Christian Life* magazine, supported the start-up of a magazine in Brazil by a former employee, Peter Cunliffe. While the magazine never was successful, a book publisher—Mundo Cristão—emerged. God oversees our work. It is in His hands.

2. We must persevere. In the West, we want immediate results. We have a fix-it mentality, geared toward Western solutions. Our ways are not necessarily His ways. One solution to the lack of Christian literature overseas is to provide the Church with Christian books from the West. While this may be a necessary temporary solution, if you always hold the baby, he or she will never learn to walk. At the heart of Cook's partnering worldwide is the development of self-sufficient communications ministries with their own writers in their own countries. Commitment to the power of the Word of God means partnering for today but also for the future.

3. Money is not the solution. Often, it creates problems. In Cuba, for instance, a large sum was provided for a specific book for churches there. The gift was accepted; the Western ministry was influential. However, the quantity of books this gift represented was far more than could be used. In East Africa, hundreds of thousands of books from the West are provided each year. While some are helpful, they crush nationals creating indigenous literature, which must be sold at a nominal price.

In *Dark Star Safari: Overland from Cairo to Capetown* (Houghton Mifflin), Paul Theroux argues that the only aid there ought to be is aid that creates labor and creates infra-

structure. Gifts can foster dependency. In one African country, I learned of a publisher who had received gifts from the West to fund the publication of specific titles. This publisher had two managers, two secretaries, two cars—and produced a total of two books. They could do “no more” until more financial aid was given.

4. Cultural differences can be overcome. Zondervan's *The Purpose-Driven Life*, for example, has achieved great success in some areas of the world. When hearts are open to the Word, cultural differences are not insurmountable. Yet Western best-sellers are not automatically appropriate in other cultures, even if they are the easiest to fund. Sadly, it is too often a struggle to gather funds to publish indigenous titles that are not known to Western donors.

5. Ministry is not about material success. Too often we measure success by Western standards. We are dazzled by titles like *The Prayer of Jabez* or the Left Behind series. We somehow want to believe ministry means big revenues, name authors, and large print runs. Yet in most countries where the Church is growing much faster than in the West there are no big-dollar, big-name preachers and writers, no blockbuster bestsellers.

Cook has partnered with over 150 startup literature ministries and helped an additional 300. Today, most print only 1,000–10,000 copies of the bulk of their titles, yet together our partners produced more than 5 million pieces of literature just last year. We at Cook have learned that success is in God's hands. Be faithful to His call, the vision He has given you for your ministry. What difference do your books make? Are you having an impact for Christ? Finally, can you continue? Money is one factor in this assessment, but not the only one.

Christian publishing is about serving people, changing lives, and bringing light and life and truth to our world. Persevere in obedience to the call that God has given you—and remember your work is in His hands. God is in charge. ❖

David Mehli is president of Cook Communications Ministries International.

InterLit

Cook Communications Ministries International
4050 Lee Vance View
Colorado Springs, Colorado 80918

Address Correction Requested

PRINTED IN SOUTH KOREA

NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT NO. 19
COLORADO SPRINGS, CO