

## **The Quality of Mercy: Are Donations of Supplies to Schools Being Properly Used?**

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Developing countries such as Nepal heavily depend on donations in areas such as education, because governments are not always capable of meeting the needs of communities. Places such as Bandipur that are fortunate enough to receive donations from the outside benefit from the money spent by the developed countries. Although communities profit from donations, if cost and benefit analyses of the money spent through donations were to be made, the result may not be as positive as most one may hope. This report focuses on effectiveness of donations made on education, and bases its findings from field research in Bandipur.

With all good intentions developed countries send in educational supplies for schools and learning centers in developing countries. At first glance, these supplies, such as dictionaries, books, and sports equipment, seem practical as these supplies are commonly used in all schools, or at least in the schools in developed countries. But when the donated dictionaries, books, and sports equipment are found in a corner of a school storage room, eaten away by pests, questions arise as to whether money has been spent wisely. It seems as if donations are made without much research on the needs of education institutions. The needs of communities are not as obvious as they may seem, because each community, given its distinct surroundings, have different needs. Donors assume all schools need dictionaries and books, which is a sound assumption, but clearly the wrong type of dictionaries and books are being supplied as they are found covered in dust.

In Bhanu Secondary School, the expensive cricket bats and balls that were donated two months ago sit untouched and unwrapped in storage, because ahead of the purchase of the equipment, no-one took into consideration that Bhanu only has a small playground that is located near a steep cliff. The school does not plan on expanding their playground because they had received cricket equipments, nor could they if they wanted to, and it does not seem as if the equipment will be used any time soon. English books that were donated years ago seem interesting enough, but few of the donated books fit the students' level. Whether it is the material of the book or teachers' style of teaching in this community, teachers are unable to utilize the donated books in the classroom, and even when library time is provided students prefer to read books they at least partially understand. The books are forgotten as they are left in the dark for years. In order for donations to be effective they should be based more on the specific needs of schools and communities and less on what the donors would like to give.

Some donors may take some time to talk to people regarding the needs of educational institutions, but do not always get hold of the right people because of a lack of time or those they talk to simply have put enough thought into what they need. Without proper research donations are usually ineffective. Expensive supplies are sent to developing countries, but are never used because the equipment does not fit the needs of the education institutions. These donations only take up storage space, which should be used as classrooms in schools desperately short of space for increasing numbers of students. Donation is more than just spending excessive amounts of money on books and equipment. The process of donation is time consuming and requires a lot of effort.

Problem with some donors is their lack of commitment. It may seem greedy to ask for commitment for voluntary work, but to make valuable changes in communities, commitment is crucial. Again, this whole donation process is time consuming. Some needs require continuous donation. For example, in order to operate a printer, ink cartridges are needed. If cartridges are not provided after its use, a printer becomes another expensive paper weight. Most donors are so concerned about not having the capability to provide consistent donations that they do not supply the things that are actually needed. All it requires is donor commitment to making a difference with the understanding that some things do take time to change.

There are many problems on the receiving end as well. Management of the donated supplies is often appalling. To make full use of contributions, proper distribution of books, school supplies, sports equipment and other donations is essential. In the case of Bhanu Secondary School, not all teachers are aware of the resources available for teaching because the supplies donated are locked up in storage. Those receiving the donations often do little to ensure they are accessible to those who will actually use them, the students. The cricket bats and footballs collecting dust at Bhanu Secondary School were not donated with Bhanu's teachers in mind, yet it is unlikely anyone else knows of their existence. This is a simple problem that remains unsolved due to mismanagement and lack of interest. It cannot be assumed that the head of a school will take care of all donated items. At each school, a donations manager should be appointed from among the teachers or students to ensure good use of supplies, and teachers (the people with the ability to make good use of donations) need to be aware of what is available for teaching. This management problem mainly occurs in large schools. Smaller scale education institutions, such as learning centers, generally put donations to good use as management of supplies is fairly simple.

After proper research and management of donations, follow up studies to assess their costs and benefits should be made. No one who donated Bhanu's dictionaries and books years ago would ever think that their contribution was never being used. Rather than simply thinking change has been made by a one time donation, follow up assessments should be made to see whether such donation was actually effective. Simple mistakes are made repetitively because a follow ups are not done. It is important to inform the next donors which supplies are of good use and which are not effective.

Donations should not be discouraged because they do make a difference in communities in developing countries. Students in developing countries get their hands on valuable equipment, which would not be possible without such generous contribution. Yet it needs to be emphasized that proper research, management, and follow up assessment is critical if donations are to make noteworthy changes in a community like Bandipur.