



Evangelicals and International Aid

Insights from a landscape survey of U.S. churches

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Abstract: Faith-based NGOs constitute nearly 60 percent of all U.S.-based foreign aid organizations, and the majority of faith-based NGOs are Christian. Despite the importance of this sector, little research has been done on the role that churches play to influence the priorities of religious international development and aid programs. This study utilizes a non-population survey of 150 church leaders to examine the programmatic and regional priorities of church investment in international interventions. It also examines relationships between church foreign aid priorities, leadership media habits, and church size. It finds that: (a) Churches are roughly

as fragmented in their approaches as other NGOs, though the definition of fragmentation is questioned; (b) Interpersonal interactions are overwhelmingly more influential over church foreign aid priorities than the media or empirical studies; and (c) There is a strong positive relationship between church leaders' use of social media and their churches' propensity to engage in relief, development, and "justice" programs. A significant unexpected finding is that churches with written foreign involvement strategies invest more in foreign programs as a percentage of their budget and are more likely to invest in certain development-related projects.

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All views expressed in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, the Hitachi Center, or Tufts University.

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Part 1

INTRODUCTION

In 2014, two Christian medical workers brought the West African Ebola outbreak to the world's attention when they contracted the disease.¹ A few years earlier, rapid growth at the Christian aid agency World Vision had catapulted it to become the largest U.S.-based international relief and development organization, with more employees working in its global operations than USAID, CARE and Save the Children combined.²

Faith-based nonprofits form one of the most important and fastest-growing subsets of international non-governmental organizations (NGO) in the United States, constituting nearly 60 percent of all U.S.-based aid groups.³ The vast majority of these are Christian groups.⁴ Beyond the United States, international organizations from the World Bank to the United Nations have noted the prominent place faith-based NGOs occupy in both delivering foreign aid and marshaling foreign aid resources. For example, early on in the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the UN General Assembly articulated a desire to leverage local churches and congregations of other faiths to popularize the MDGs and “mobiliz[e] support for organizations and community initiatives that

contribute to the Goals.”⁵

But in practice, religious-secular collaboration in development is a complex matter. Disagreements run deep about the effectiveness of faith-based NGOs relative to secular ones, about the potential for religious proselytizing, and about the appropriateness of channeling official development assistance (ODA) through religious service providers.

Given these complexities and the sheer size of the U.S. religious foreign aid sector, it is poorly understood and relatively understudied.⁶ Existing literature has explored how religiosity in general impacts donor investment in international causes, and how religious pressure groups influence foreign aid at the policy level on hot-button issues such as contraception. But there is little research on how religious groups – particularly evangelical Christian groups – actually decide which international causes to fund.

Nor is there much literature examining the role that churches play in shaping those priorities. While many surveys have focused on individual *churchgoers* and how various measures of devoutness affect giving behaviors, little attention has been given to churches themselves and their role as conduits for giving to foreign aid.

This paper uses data from a national survey of U.S. church leaders to examine the foreign aid giving priorities of evangelical churches. It also explores aspects of the relationship between churches and the programs to which they give directly or encourage individuals to give. In addition, it identifies some relationships between the ways church leaders receive information about international affairs and the types of aid projects their churches fund.

This study focuses specifically on evangelicals for two reasons. First, evangelical charities are numerically

1 Although the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa began in March of that year, the World Health Organization did not declare it an “international health emergency” until three days after a pair of U.S. medical missionaries were flown to Atlanta for treatment.

Source: “Chronology: Worst Ebola outbreak on record tests global response.” Reuters, Oct. 2, 2014.

2 Nicolas Kristof. “Learning from the Sin of Sodom.” *New York Times*, Feb. 27, 2010.

3 Dan Heist, Ram A. Cnaan. “Faith-Based International Development Work: A Review.” *Religions* 7, no. 3 (2016): 9.

4 Tara Hefferan, Laurie Occhipinti, and Julie Adkins. “Faith-based Organizations, Neoliberalism, and Development: An Introduction.” In *Bridging the Gaps: Faith-Based Organizations, Neoliberalism, and Development*, edited by Tara Hefferan, Julie Adkins and Laurie Occhipinti, 1-34. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009.

5 Matthew Clarke, Vicki-Anne Ware. “Understanding faith-based organizations: How FBOs are contrasted with NGOs in international development literature.” *Progress in Development Studies* 15, no. 1 (2015): 44.

6 Heist, 1.

the largest segment of private international assistance organizations in the United States.⁷ Such a significant presence merits dedicated study. Second, evangelical churches are less hierarchical than other Christian traditions such as the Catholic church or certain mainline Protestant groups. That is, evangelical churches are much less likely to be influenced by a central national or global decision-making structure. By limiting the scope to evangelical churches, we would expect to observe more clearly how independent-minded churches set their priorities as influenced by relationships and media, minimizing the effect of top-down mandates.

1.1 Background

Faith-based aid

Popular and academic discourse often treat faith-based foreign aid as if it were a new phenomenon. While the Christian NGO sector has grown rapidly in the last half century, its roots run back to the dawn of the 19th century, when American Protestant churches began sending missionary workers around the world. As with largely state-sponsored Catholic missionaries who were venturing out hundreds of years earlier, Protestants often targeted the least developed regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America. They spread religious teachings and, at the same time, offered educational and social programs that “formed the foundation of many countries’ health and human services infrastructure.”⁸ Protestant “missions” activity predates and, in many respects, was the original model for the private humanitarian sector that boomed in the wake of World War II.⁹ That history is so ingrained in Protestant culture that today, evangelical churches widely use the word “missions” to refer broadly to all of their international

7 Rachel M. McCleary, Robert J. Barro. “Private voluntary organizations engaged in international assistance, 1939-2004.” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (2008): 512-536.

8 Heist, 8.

9 Hailey, John. “Ladybirds, Missionaries and NGOs. Voluntary Organizations and Co-Operatives in 50 Years of Development: A Historical Perspective on Future Challenges.” *Public Administration & Development* 19, no. 5 (12, 1999): 470.

activities – whether seeking to win new converts or drilling new wells. Accordingly, this report uses the term “missions” to mean all forms of evangelical international involvement, whether explicitly religious or not.¹⁰

The majority of U.S.-based international assistance organizations today are religious. According to the National Center for Charitable Statistics, 59 percent (3,505) of international development organizations in 2015 were faith-based NGOs, representing 40 percent (\$12.5 billion) of gross NGO revenues.¹¹ Among religious NGOs, Christian organizations are the dominant players. Three of the six largest U.S.-based international aid charities are Christian, with combined revenue of \$2.7 billion in 2014.¹²

Christian organizations have long had a large presence among faith-based NGOs in the United States. But in the post-World War II era, they grew to constitute the lion’s share, led by evangelicals. Among organizations registered with USAID and its predecessors, Protestant Christian groups made up 28 percent of all faith-based NGOs in 1940. By 2004, they accounted for 69 percent of all faith-based NGOs.¹³ That figure almost certainly understates the presence of evangelical groups in international assistance, because most Christian NGOs do not receive federal funding and thus do not register with USAID.

Given the prevalence of Christian NGOs in the United

10 Similarly, this report uses the term “ministry” to mean all forms of international involvement, because evangelical churches would generally consider any foreign project in which they were involved to be a “ministry.” Like the word “missions,” “ministry” is applied in its broadest and religiously neutral sense, referring to any person or structure through which something is accomplished.

The imprecise nature of the term “missions” poses unique challenges when translating the language of evangelical churches to the parlance of the broader mainstream development and aid sector. This study employs more specific language both in the survey instrument and the findings report when necessary for clarity.

11 Heist, 9.

12 “The 50 Largest U.S. Charities.” *Forbes*, March 24, 2016. <http://www.forbes.com/top-charities/>.

13 Evangelical groups made up 45 percent of all faith-based NGOs in 2004. Source: McCleary, 2008.

States, there is a clear need for deeper knowledge of how Christian groups make decisions about international involvement and what informs those decisions. A major and often overlooked difference between Christian and secular NGOs is that Christian groups – particularly evangelical ones – are almost entirely dependent on private donations, while secular NGOs rely more heavily on government funding.¹⁴ This is often a deliberate choice on the part of Christian groups to maintain their independence, and it is a choice with potentially significant effects on the types of development projects Christian NGOs pursue. If an NGO is reliant on government funding, we would expect it to be responsive to government priorities out of self-interest. An NGO that instead relies on private donations, as most Christian groups do, would reasonably be more responsive to the priorities of private donors and less concerned with government agendas.

Private donors can be a fickle and heterogeneous group, however. They are cost-intensive for nonprofits to communicate with and sway, and they often have shifting priorities. In his constitutive model for understanding faith-based NGOs, Clarke suggests that Christian aid organizations must work to please multiple and often conflicting constituencies that include individuals, communities, religious authorities, and other NGOs.¹⁵ But Christian NGOs have a ready strategy for mitigating the challenge of catering to so many interests: working through local churches.

Churches in faith-based aid

In many ways, churches serve as brokers between evangelical NGOs and the individuals who provide the bulk of their funding. This is not surprising, given that many NGOs were born out of individual churches and church groups.¹⁶ Churches often serve

as outright aggregators of donated funds that are channeled to NGOs through individual congregations or denominations. But perhaps more commonly, churches serve as thought influencers, shaping the perspectives of congregants on issues of foreign aid. Many faith-based NGOs have staff dedicated to strengthening ties with individual churches and denominations.

The church-NGO relationship takes on greater importance given that church attendance is a key predictor of individual charitable giving in general, and of giving to international causes more specifically.¹⁷ Further, Schnable finds that churchgoers at congregations that hosted at least one missionary speaker in a year were 83 percent more likely to donate to foreign assistance projects than other churchgoers. Because “congregations are sites where individuals are exposed to need,” they naturally serve as centers of influence over individual donors.¹⁸

Given the central role that churches play in shaping donor preferences among Christians, understanding the foreign-aid priorities of church leaders and what shapes those priorities may yield important insights into the broader faith-based NGO sector and inform strategies for increased collaboration and aid coordination.

Research questions

This study aims to answer three key questions:

Is church aid fragmented?

With the international community’s interest in tapping faith-based groups to advance a narrow set of development goals such as the MDGs – or now, the SDGs – there is an implied assumption that faith-based groups are not already doing so or may

14 Ian Smillie, Larry Minear. *Charity of Nations*. Bloomfield: Kumarian, 2004.

15 Clarke, 9.

16 Elizabeth Ferris. “Faith-based and secular humanitarian organizations.” *International Review of the Red Cross* 87, no. 858 (2005): 311-325.

17 René Bekkers, Pamala Wiepking. “Who gives? A literature review of predictors of charitable giving part one: religion, education, age and socialisation.” *Voluntary Sector Review* 2, no. 3 (2011): 337-365.

18 Allison Schnable. “Religion and Giving for International Aid: Evidence from a Survey of US Church Members.” *Sociology of Religion* 76, no. 1 (2015): 81.

not be focused enough in their efforts. Addressing which development goals are most strategic is beyond the scope of this study, but it can examine whether churches contribute to aid fragmentation. If evangelical foreign aid is indeed fragmented, then there is a compelling need to explore strategies for promoting better coordination.

Fragmentation and lack of collaboration are problematic challenges for all NGOs, religious and otherwise.¹⁹ In particular, evangelicals are not directed by any sort of *magisterium*, a central teaching authority such as the Roman Catholic Church has.²⁰ While many influential evangelical denominations exist, it is unlikely that any single denomination has a rudder large enough to steer all evangelicals in the same direction. Given that, a hypothesis would be that the independent nature of evangelical churches fosters fragmentation of their foreign assistance efforts.

What are the most influential information sources among churches for international aid?

There is a clear need to develop new models for facilitating aid coordination both within the faith-based sector and between religious and secular NGOs.²¹ Building such models requires understanding what motivates the behavior of faith-based groups in terms of which interventions they prioritize. That is, beyond strictly religious motivations, what are the most important societal factors influencing evangelical churches in their foreign aid activities?

Churches are a uniquely social context in which congregants meet regularly – often multiple times a week – to hear and discuss in-depth teachings. While churches engage in a wide array of activities such as programming, marketing, and community service,

they are highly relational entities at heart. One of the most important factors – if not the single most important factor – affecting a churchgoer's decision to attend and remain at a church is the perceived relational credibility of the pastor.²² Congregants are heavily influenced by their pastor's teaching, and thus a pastor's ideas could strongly shape individual views on foreign assistance.

This study focuses on the perceptions of church missions leaders. We define "missions leaders" as pastors, staff or lay church members who have the highest position of authority in a church as it relates directly to the congregation's foreign assistance involvement. Given the importance of relational credibility within churches in general, a hypothesis would be that church missions leaders are also heavily influenced by information sources they perceive as relationally credible – for example, other pastors or missionaries.

Is there an effect of media habits on international involvement?

To build new models for improving collaboration and aid coordination among evangelical churches, it is clearly useful to understand the media consumption habits of church missions leaders. For example, doing so might guide efforts to better inform evangelical leaders about broader development priorities such as the SDGs. Furthermore, if pastors and other church missions leaders have a strong influence on their church's foreign assistance involvement, it would be reasonable to expect their individual media behaviors are reflected in their church's foreign aid priorities. A hypothesis would be that there is an effect of differences in the media habits of missions leaders on the types of foreign assistance in which churches are involved. §

19 Heist, 12-13.

20 Zurlo, Gina. "Demographics of Global Evangelicalism." In *Evangelicals Around the World: A Global Handbook for the 21st Century*, edited by Ben Stiller, Todd Johnson, Karen Stiller and Mark Hutchinson (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015): 35.

21 Heist, 13.

22 Stephanie McLain Araujo. "Source Credibility and New Churchgoers." Master's thesis, Gonzaga University, 2012.

Part 2

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Design and Sample Frame

This study utilized a direct mail survey of leaders at U.S. evangelical churches actively engaged in foreign aid activities. A small subset of direct e-mail surveys was also included. To increase response rate, survey participants were given the option to respond using either a paper mail-in form or an online survey. All responses were anonymous.

The survey was sent directly to church missions leaders whose formal positions ranged from senior pastor, to staff missions pastor, to part-time staff and lay church members. The survey contained questions about leaders' personal preferences on foreign aid or "missions," as well as questions about their perceptions of their respective congregation's preferences. Questions were developed after preliminary stakeholder surveys with a small group including a full-time missions pastor, members of church missions committees, a church fundraising officer of a major Christian NGO, and various missions scholars. The sample frame was drawn from membership roles of professional associations for church missions leaders and from direct mail lists of churches with purchasing habits indicating they are active in missions.

The sample was limited to evangelical churches for two reasons: 1) the predominance of evangelicals in private international assistance within the United States; and 2) the relatively independent authority structures within evangelical churches that may allow personal views on foreign aid to more strongly influence church decisions – thus, making them a reasonable environment for examining this influence.

Identifying which churches are evangelical is a challenging task. The definition of "evangelical" is itself disputed, varying based on measures of theology, political leanings or self-identification. This study relied on evangelical groupings by Christian denomination, as set forth by the Center for the

Global Study of Christianity,²³ which considers various definitions of the evangelical tradition in its classification. Additional denominations were included based on membership of the National Association of Evangelicals, a prominent U.S. organization of self-described evangelical denominations.

The sample frame was derived from random stratified sampling by evangelical denomination. In total, 1,300 churches were surveyed by direct mail and direct e-mail, yielding 163 responses (12.5 percent response rate). Thirteen responses were discarded for incompleteness, producing a final N of 150.

Because the selection criteria were restricted to churches actively engaged in foreign aid activities, the survey did not utilize a population sample and should not be considered representative of all U.S. evangelical churches. However, the respondent distribution largely paralleled the overall distribution of U.S. evangelical churches as measured by the Pew Religious Landscape Study. This suggests the survey results reasonably reflect the attitudes among U.S.

Respondent Distribution by Christian Tradition

Compared to U.S. evangelical church distribution

Christian Tradition	2015 U.S. Missions Survey	Pew RLS Survey
Pentecostal	16.7%	11%
Reformed	3.3	7
Methodist	11.3	10.5
Baptist	28	28
Anabaptist	2.7	2.25
Other	31.3	29
Anglican	.7	3.7
UCC	.7	1
Lutheran	4	9
Unidentified	1.3	NA
Total	100%	

Source: Pew U.S. Religious Landscape Study (RLS), 2014.
Website: <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>

23 See: *Evangelicals Around the World: A Global Handbook for the 21st Century*, edited by Ben Stiller, Todd Johnson, Karen Stiller and Mark Hutchinson (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015).

evangelical churches that are actively involved in foreign aid activities.

2.2 Demographics of Church Missions Leaders

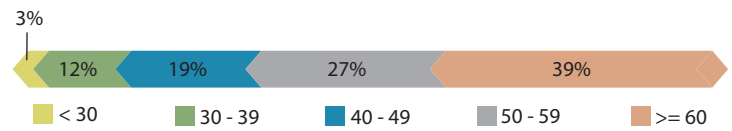
An overwhelming majority of survey respondents were Caucasian (96%), which national surveys of church leadership have found to be the case among evangelical pastors in general. The National Congregations Study (NCS) finds that 14 percent of head clergy at evangelical churches are minorities, a significantly greater proportion than the 5 percent of respondents in this study who are minorities.²⁴ The reasons for the potential discrepancy are not immediately clear. Many classifications do not consider traditionally African American denominations to be “evangelical,” potentially leading to their exclusion in the selection criteria in this study. It is also possible that minority-led churches may for various reasons prioritize domestic engagement in their communities over international engagement and thus would be excluded by the selection criteria for not being “actively engaged” in missions. Further research is clearly needed to understand the role that race plays in faith-based foreign aid involvement.

A majority of respondents were male (87%), which also mirrors the gender distribution of Protestant pastors found by other nationally representative surveys.²⁵

In the area of educational attainment, respondents were more educated than head pastors of evangelical churches in general. The National Congregations Study found that 41 percent of evangelical senior pastors had a graduate degree, compared to 67 percent of respondents. Respondents were slightly less educated than head

Age of Church Missions Leaders

In years



Gender of Church Missions Leaders

Male	Female
87%	13%

Ethnicity of Church Missions Leaders

Caucasian	Asian / Pacific Islander	Latino / Hispanic
95%	4%	1%

Educational Attainment of Church Missions Leaders

% of respondents



*The Perspectives on the World Christian Movement course is a curriculum offered by a California-based nonprofit that aims to shape the strategy of churches' overseas engagement.

Church Size Indicators

Median number who attend weekly worship services	Median size of annual operating budget	Mean percentage of church budget that goes to international missions
200-499	\$400,000-\$499,000	14%

24 See the 2016 National Congregations Study (NCS) by Duke University. Website: (http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/Docs/NC-SIII_report_final.pdf)

25 NCS, 2016. Only about 3 percent of evangelical churches are led by women, who make up about 27 percent of secondary full-time ministerial staff positions at majority white evangelical congregations.

pastors of all Protestant churches in general, about 77 percent of which hold graduate degrees.²⁶

The median age range of respondents is 50-59 years, which fits the median age of senior clergy at Protestant churches (55 years) found by the NCS.

Respondents represented churches with a median size range of 200-499 attendees in weekly worship. According to the NCS, the median congregation size nationwide of all churches is 70 active attendees. Larger churches tend to be involved in more social services, so a reasonable assumption is that larger churches would tend to have greater representation among churches “actively engaged” in missions.

The portion of churches’ annual budget dedicated to international missions is an average of 14 percent, significantly higher than the 5 percent reported by other studies more representative of all Christian churches.²⁷ This seems to validate the selection criteria that respondents indeed represent churches that are actively engaged internationally compared to the mean church in the United States.

In general, church missions leaders have a high self-perception of their church’s level of international involvement and level of international awareness. This only varied slightly with the respondent’s level of education. §

A High Self-Perception of Global Savvy

Q1 & Q2. Respondents evaluated their church’s missions involvement and awareness of global events and issues on a scale from 0 to 10. Zero represents the least involvement or awareness, and 10 represents the most.

	High 10 - 7	Medium 6 - 4	Low 3 - 0	No Answer	Mean
	%	%	%	%	
Your church's involvement in missions	80.7	16.1	3.1	0	7.61
Your church's awareness of global events and international issues	63.9	32.9	2.4	.7	6.94

26 NCS, 18.

27 “Church Budget Priorities Study,” 2009. NationalChristianPoll.com for Christianity Today. Accessed online April 10, 2016. <http://talmidimyeshua.org/docs/churchbudgetpriorities.pdf>

Part 3

SURVEY FINDINGS

3.1 Project Type and Region Priorities

Key Findings

- The vast majority of churches support international evangelism and church planting projects
- Two-thirds of churches support disaster response efforts, more than any other type of “non-religious” international aid
- Most churches (nearly seven in ten) are involved in Latin America, followed by Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East/North Africa.

A large majority of churches reported supporting explicitly religious international activities such as evangelism, church planting, and ministry training. This is perhaps not surprising given that churches form the foundation of the evangelical community and may highly prioritize such activities both domestically and abroad. This does not necessarily mean that such activities are commingled or performed simultaneously with other humanitarian and development activities.

Two thirds of churches report investing in international disaster response, the most universally supported humanitarian activity. In fact, a majority of churches in every size category (Q23) are involved in disaster relief, perhaps suggesting that urgency or emotion affect giving among a majority of evangelical churches independent of congregation size or missions strategy.

Much church involvement abroad aligns with key goals of the broader development community as outlined in the SDGs:²⁸ medical and health (57%), clean water (47%), and combating human trafficking and slave labor²⁹ (42%). Significantly, churches were

28 See “Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), UNDP website: <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sdgooverview/post-2015-development-agenda.html>

29 This aligns with sub-goals of the overarching SDG goal of “Peace and Justice.”

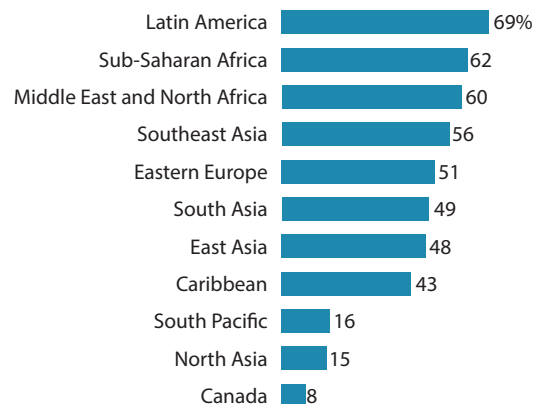
International Projects that Churches Directly Support or Encourage Individuals to Support (% of Churches)

Mean project types per church: 9



Regions where Churches Directly Support or Encourage Individuals to Support International Work (% of Churches)

Mean regions per church: 5



largely absent from activities supporting other SDGs: gender equity (4%), environmental stewardship (4%).

On average, churches were involved in projects in five different geographic regions. Latin America was the most common region, perhaps due to its proximity to the United States.

3.2 Fragmentation and Coordination

Key Findings

- Churches support an average of nine different international activities
- Churches heavily influenced by denominational/ regional authorities support work in fewer regions (4.44) than do churches that entirely decide their own priorities (6).
- 40 percent of churches have no written missions strategy

Fragmentation

Churches directly support or encourage others to support an average of nine international activities per church. This ranges from 8 percent of churches that are involved in three or fewer activities, to 10 percent of churches that are involved in 15 or more activities.

It is unclear if this suggests that evangelical churches are more or less fragmented in their foreign aid activities relative to the broader aid sector. The United Nations initially established eight MDGs, for example, and has now committed to 17 SDGs. Within that range, the average number of activities per church seems well within acceptable bounds – especially considering that four exclusively religious activities that many churches support are outside the SDGs and could be excluded from the count altogether.

However, other studies have suggested that faith-based international NGOs, on average, offer a wider range of services while secular NGOs tend more to specialize.³⁰ Taken together, the data and literature

30 Heist, 9. In a study of services provided by U.S.-based international NGOs, Heist finds that religious NGOs offered an average of 4.2 services while secular NGOs offered an average of 2.6.

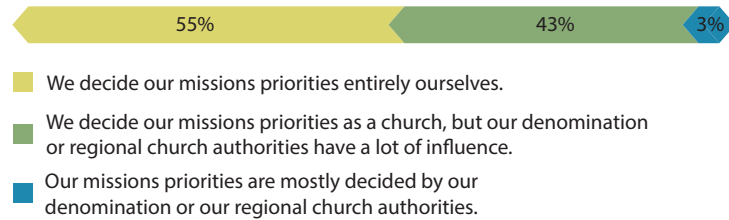
Most Churches Meet About or Collaborate on Projects

Q14. How often, if ever, does your church work together with other churches to discuss global missions or work together on overseas missions projects?



Most Churches Set International Priorities on Their Own

Q09. Which of the following statements do you think most closely describes your church?



Most Churches Have a Written Missions Strategy

Q08. Does your church have a written strategy for its global missions involvement?

Yes	No
60%	40%

moderately support the hypothesis that evangelical churches contribute to more fragmentation than exists among secular NGOs. But the data are not conclusive and further research is needed into clearer definitions of what constitutes aid fragmentation.

Coordination

Another method for examining aid harmonization among evangelical church would be to focus on indicators of coordination rather than evidence of fragmentation. In general, international donors work toward coordination through joint strategies, data sharing, and by working with multilateral agencies.³¹ Such mechanisms are less common in the U.S. NGO sector, and the literature points to no similar mechanisms among U.S. evangelical churches.

This study seems to confirm that most evangelical churches engage in or fund international projects

31 Ibid.

without any overarching authority directing their efforts. More than half of church missions leaders say their church decides its missions priorities entirely on its own, and another 43 percent indicate their churches set their priorities independently but are influenced to some degree by denominational or regional authorities.

The study suggests, however, that churches that are more strongly influenced by superior authorities are more focused about where they invest in foreign activities – in other words, these churches’ efforts are less fragmented. Churches where denominational or regional authorities have “a lot of influence” over their missions priorities invest in an average of 4.44 geographic regions. Churches that decide their priorities “entirely ourselves” invest in an average of six geographic regions.³² This finding would seem to suggest that overarching authority structures are effective in guiding the aid efforts of subordinate groups, and that organizations may be more “scattered” in their efforts in the absence of such guidance.

Proxy measures of coordination: information sharing and written strategies

This study collected data on two characteristics that might be considered proxy measures for coordination: inter-church information sharing and the existence of a written strategy for international involvement. International organizations that interact to exchange information about their programs may reasonably harmonize their priorities to a greater degree than other organizations. Further, assuming those organizations make commitments to harmonized priorities, organizations that institutionalize such commitments into guiding strategy documents may reasonably be more likely to abide by them.

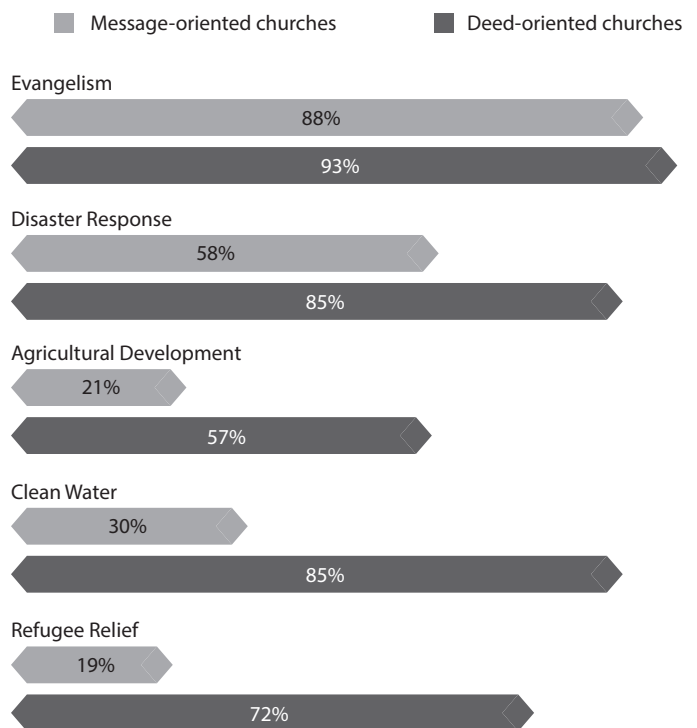
32 The influence of denominational/regional authorities over churches’ decision-making (Q09) seems to extend more to the regions in which churches invest than it does to the types of projects in which they invest. Q09 had a statistically significant effect on total regions where churches invest (significant at .037), but a smaller and not significant effect on the mean number of project types in which they invest.

Effect of Denominational/Regional Authorities on Decision-Making

	Mean Total Regions Invested In	Mean Total Project Types Invested In
Our missions priorities are mostly decided by our denomination or our regional church authorities. (Q09)	3.75	10.75*
We decide our missions priorities as a church, but our denomination or regional church authorities have a lot of influence. (Q09)	4.44	8.54
We decide our missions priorities entirely ourselves. (Q09)	6.07	9.6

*N = 4, not statistically significant

Selected International Projects: Message-Oriented Churches vs. Deed-Oriented Churches
% of churches involved



A majority of respondents suggest their churches regularly exchange information on international activities with other churches, with 29 percent indicating their churches discuss or work together with other churches on overseas projects multiple times a year. Another 21 percent indicate their churches do so once a year. In terms of institutionalizing international priorities, 60 percent of respondents indicate their church has a written global missions strategy. These are imperfect measures to be sure, but they suggest that a majority of internationally active churches do exhibit some behaviors that lend themselves to aid harmonization.

3.3 Classifying Evangelical Churches

Key Findings

- 31 percent of churches are “message oriented,” more likely to limit their international involvement to evangelism or church planting
- 69 percent of churches are “deed oriented,” more likely to support humanitarian and development programs
- Deed-oriented churches, on average, are larger than message-oriented churches and invest a slightly larger portion of their total budget in missions

Applying a cluster analysis method, this study found that evangelical churches generally fall into one of two broad categories³³ based on the types of international interventions in which they are involved: *message-oriented churches* and *deed-oriented churches*.

33 To facilitate deeper analysis, this study employed cluster analysis to identify strategic groupings of evangelical churches based on the types of international projects in which they are involved. Because the variables contain nominal data, two-step cluster analysis was used in SPSS. Due to a high level of multicollinearity with the project data, only a modest degree of separation was achieved (average silhouette measure = .3). However, further analysis using Pearson’s chi-squared test (χ^2) found a highly significant effect (.000) of cluster membership on participation in nearly every humanitarian activity: agricultural development, medical and health, HIV/AIDS, clean water, microfinance/savings groups, vocational training, refugee relief, combating human trafficking/slave labor, peace building, business as mission, child sponsorship, and orphan care. Because strictly religious activities such as evangelism, church planting and ministry training are broadly part of most churches’ international involvement, cluster membership had no significant effect or only a slightly significant effect on these activities.

Size: Message-Oriented Churches vs. Deed-Oriented Churches

% of churches involved

Message-Oriented Churches

Median number who attend weekly worship services	Median size of annual operating budget	Median percentage of church budget that goes to international missions
200-499	\$300,000-\$399,000	10%

Deed-Oriented Churches

Median number who attend weekly worship services	Median size of annual operating budget	Median percentage of church budget that goes to international missions
200-499	\$750,000-\$999,000	12%

Message-oriented churches (31%)

A large majority of respondents indicate their churches are involved in strictly religious activities abroad such as evangelism or church planting – that is, activities focused on spreading or training others to spread Christian teachings. However, message-oriented churches are more likely to limit their international activities to these areas. While they may participate in some other humanitarian activities, the number is minimal. Message-oriented churches constitute 31 percent of the sample.

Deed-oriented churches (69%)

Deed-oriented churches often participate in strictly religious activities abroad, but their involvement expands into multiple additional humanitarian activities including but not limited to agricultural development, medical and health, HIV/AIDS, clean water, microfinance/savings groups, vocational training, refugee relief, combating human trafficking/slave labor, child sponsorship, and orphan care. Deed-oriented churches constitute 69 percent of the sample.

It is important to note there is no significant difference in age or educational attainment between missions leaders at message-oriented churches and missions leaders at deed-oriented churches. Females constitute a larger portion of respondents (20%) from deed-oriented churches than they do from message-oriented churches (9%), but this difference is not

statistically significant for this sample.

Deed-oriented churches are, on average, significantly larger than message-oriented churches by a number of measures. Most notably, deed-oriented churches have a median annual operating budget (between \$750K and \$900K) nearly twice as large as message-oriented churches (significant at .001). This occurs even though the median number of attendees does not dramatically differ. Deed-oriented churches also invest two percentage points more of their operating budget in international missions than do message-oriented churches. This finding suggests that evangelical churches are more likely to involve themselves in humanitarian and development projects as they grow in revenue, further suggesting that annual revenue might be used as a proxy to gauge a church’s level of humanitarian and development interest.

3.4 Information Credibility

Key Findings

- *Missionaries and pastors are overwhelmingly the sources that churches trust most for information about international issues*
- *Personal relationships with project leaders are the most important factor churches consider when deciding to support an international project*
- *Missions agencies and Christian humanitarian organizations are highly trusted by churches*

People most credible information source

Respondents were asked to use a Likert-type scale to indicate their level of trust in certain information sources for international issues, from “highly trust” to “highly distrust.”³⁴ The list contained both secular and Christian sources that varied across mediums, sectors and political leanings.

34 Respondents were also given an “I don’t know” option. These responses were scored as blank.

Trust in Information Sources

Q20. Listed below are some of the many ways you can learn about current international issues in religion, poverty, and humanitarian work. How much do you generally trust or distrust the following sources for information about those issues?

% of church missions leaders

	Highly trust 1	Somewhat trust 2	Somewhat distrust 3	Highly distrust 4	Mean (Rank)
A missionary	70%	30%	0%	0%	1.3 (1)
A pastor or minister	51%	48%	1%	0%	1.49 (2)
A missions agency	49%	50%	1%	0%	1.53 (3)
Christianity Today	52%	44%	4%	1%	1.53 (3)
World Vision	38%	49%	12%	1%	1.76 (4)
RELEVANT Magazine	14%	70%	12%	4%	2.07 (5)
BBC	12%	50%	25%	12%	2.37 (6)
A university study	7%	55%	23%	15%	2.47 (7)
CBN	8%	49%	30%	13%	2.48 (8)
Fox News Cable Channel	14%	40%	31%	16%	2.49 (9)
The Economist	13%	41%	19%	28%	2.61 (10)
U.S. Department of State	6%	40%	36%	19%	2.67 (11)
NPR	10%	29%	25%	35%	2.85 (12)
Network news (ABC, NBC, CBS, etc.)	3%	27%	36%	34%	3.01 (13)
CNN	2%	32%	26%	40%	3.04 (14)
New York Times	4%	26%	30%	40%	3.05 (15)
Huffington Post	1%	27%	34%	38%	3.09 (16)
BuzzFeed	0%	18%	41%	41%	3.23 (17)

“A missionary” and “a pastor or minister” are almost unanimously the most trusted sources for information about international issues. Not a single respondent indicates they would distrust a missionary. Similarly, the top priority for churches when considering whether to support a missions project is “having a personal relationship with those running the ministry” – far more important than being able to visit the project in person or having input into the project (Q10).³⁵

Past studies have found that individuals attending a church that hosted a missionary in a given year were much more likely to donate to charity than individuals at other churches.³⁶ Building on that, this study finds a strong relationship between the number of missionaries a church hosts in a year and the number of projects and regions in which the church invests or encourages others to invest.³⁷ Churches that host missionaries “several times a year” invest in an average of 5.87 geographic regions, while churches that “hardly ever” host a missionary invest in an average of 2.25 geographic regions. The effect of missionary sharing on total project types was smaller but still significant. Churches that host missionaries “several times a year” invest in an average of 9.63 project types, while churches that “hardly ever” host a missionary invest in an average of 8 project types.

Similarly, there is a significant relationship between the frequency with which churches host representatives or staff from international organizations or humanitarian organizations and

35 In Q10, respondents were asked to rate the importance of five items for their church when considering whether to support a missions project. In ranked order by sample mean, they are: (1) Having a personal relationship with those running the ministry; (2) Having opportunities for individuals to be involved; (3) Being able to send someone from your church to see the ministry in person; (4) Having short-term trip opportunities to involve your church in the ministry; (5) Having significant input into the design and planning of the project.

36 Schnable, 83.

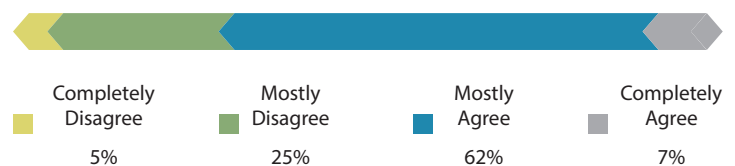
37 One-way ANOVA analysis using Q11_1 (frequency that missionaries closely connected to your church share with your congregation) as the factor found a positive effect on total regions invested in (significant at .001) and on total project types invested in (significant at .017).

the church’s investment in certain humanitarian or development activities. Compared with churches that “hardly ever” host such a representative, churches that host one “several times a year” are 2.7 times more likely to invest in agricultural development,³⁸ two times more likely to invest in clean water,³⁹ and 1.6 times more likely to invest in child sponsorship.⁴⁰

Taken together, the findings clearly support the hypothesis that church missions leaders are heavily influenced by relational credibility. In contrast, traditional print media channels nearly all score more poorly on measures of trust. Evidence-based credibility appears somewhat influential: it is the lowest priority for churches when considering

Churches View Humanitarian Organizations and Missions Agencies as Credible and Authoritative

Q13. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: When deciding its missions priorities, a church should look to missions organizations and humanitarian organizations for guidance – they are the experts.



whether to support a humanitarian organization (Q12), but nearly two thirds of churches either somewhat trust or highly trust a university study for information about international affairs.

Online-only media – Huffington Post and BuzzFeed – fare the most poorly as the least trusted information sources for international issues.

Christian NGOs enjoy high credibility

Christian humanitarian organizations and missions organizations appear to have a high degree of influence on evangelical churches. Nearly 70 percent of respondents agree that churches should “look to missions organizations and humanitarian organizations” for guidance when deciding their missions priorities. This statement is backed by high

38 Results significant at .017 using Pearson’s chi-squared test

39 Results significant at .004 using Pearson’s chi-squared test

40 Results significant at .018 using Pearson’s chi-squared test

levels of overall trust in such organizations – 99 percent of respondents trust missions agencies as an information source, and 77 percent trust World Vision, one of the largest Christian humanitarian organizations in the world.

3.5 Media Habits and Effects

Key Findings

- Church leaders read “delivered” missions communications such as magazines and e-mails much more than they visit online missions information sources
- Nearly one in four respondents use social media, while respondents at deed-oriented churches are much more active on social media

Church missions leaders were asked questions about the different types of media they use to interact with humanitarian organizations and missions agencies, as well as questions about their personal social media usage. Respondents most frequently consume communications from individual missionaries, with nearly 90 percent reading both print and e-mail newsletters from missionaries at least once or twice a month. More than half of respondents read such newsletters weekly. This lends further support to previous findings and to findings in this study that individual missionaries have a significant relational influence on evangelical churches.

On average, respondents read magazines or other publications from missions and humanitarian organizations nearly once or twice a month. They go directly to an organization’s website or blog to read stories, news or other information slightly less frequently. Overall, respondents make online donations to international work far less often, averaging only once or twice a year. This may reflect their positions as managers of international engagement for churches, which may prefer to fund particular organizations or projects by check or bank transfer instead of an online transaction.

Social Media

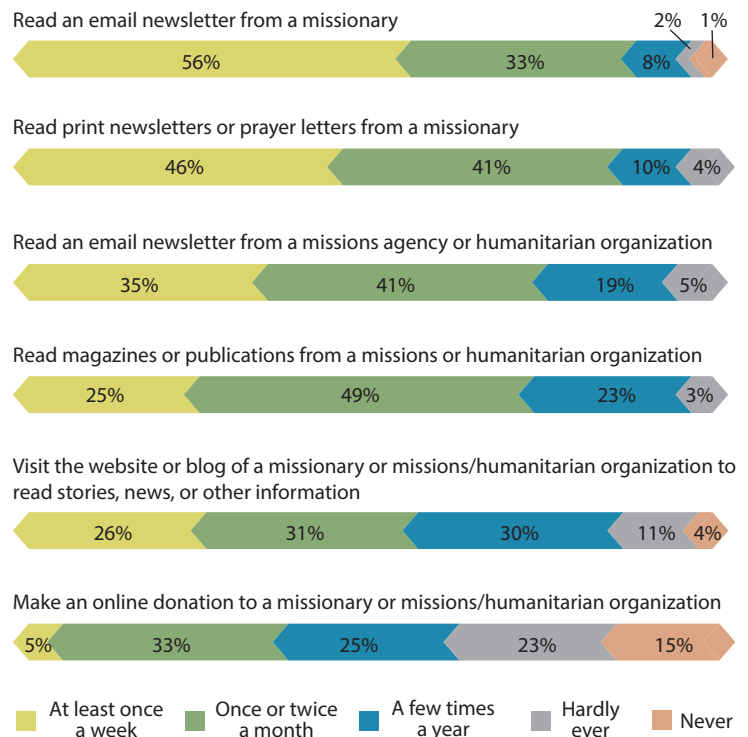
Nearly 75 percent of respondents receive news or headlines from social media sources such as

Individual-Centric Communications Dominate, Followed by Direct Organizational Communications and Web

Combined results from Q16 and Q21

Q16. In general, how often do you personally do each of the following on a computer, smartphone, or tablet?

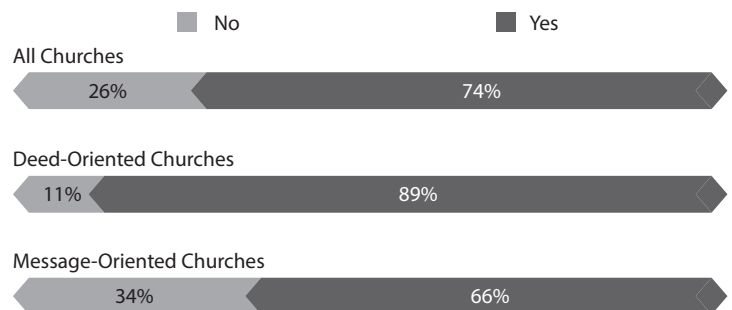
Q21. In general, how often do you personally do each of the following?



Social Media Usage Tied to Humanitarian Work

Deed-oriented churches – churches heavily engaged in humanitarian and development activities – are much more likely to have missions leaders consuming news through social media.

Q17. Do you personally ever get news or headlines from social media (such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn)? By news, we mean stories and information about topics and events that involve more than just your friends or family.



Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.⁴¹ Among those, nearly half use social media on a weekly basis to read blogs posts or other stories from international workers and NGOs.

Social media usage is significantly correlated with certain humanitarian project types. For example, churches whose leaders use social media are 2.8 times more involved in refugee relief (.002 significance), 1.9 times more involved in combatting human trafficking / slave labor (.013 significance), and 1.7 times more involved in orphan care (.016 significance). Similarly, churches whose leaders frequently visit an organization's website or blog to read news, stories or other information are also much more likely to be involved in such projects.

Church Groupings and Media Engagement

Deed-oriented churches are much more engaged in social media than message-oriented churches (.003 significance). Nearly 90 percent of respondents at deed-oriented churches use social media to receive news or headlines, compared to 66 percent of respondents at message-oriented churches. This might be attributed to generational differences, but it is unlikely as there was no significant age difference between respondents at deed- and message-oriented churches.

In general, deed-oriented churches are not only more engaged online in social and web media, but they are overall more engaged in all forms of media, from reading both print and e-mail newsletters to reading magazines from missions and humanitarian organizations. The significance of this finding is not immediately clear. It is possible that missions leaders at deed-oriented churches have more projects to keep track of and are simply consuming a higher volume material. Large churches (churches with 500 people or more) make up a greater proportion of deed-oriented churches than they do message-oriented churches, and deed-oriented churches in general are involved in more projects.

41 The survey did not specify that news or headlines received through social media had to be international in nature.

3.6 Other Findings

Key Finding

As a portion of overall budget, churches with a written missions strategy spend 60 percent more on missions than do churches without a written strategy

Although it was not an initial hypothesis of this study, having a written strategy for missions appears to strongly impact a church's international involvement. In fact, the existence of a written missions strategy emerges as one of the single most significant factors affecting the ways that churches invest in foreign aid, particularly impacting overall spending and types of projects supported.

Nearly 60 percent of respondents report that their church has "a written strategy for its global missions involvement." On average, those churches spend 16.3 percent of their overall budget on foreign missions activities, compared to 10.18 percent of overall budget at churches without a written mission strategy.⁴²

Beyond a budget effect, the existence of a written missions strategy also has a strong impact on the types of international projects in which churches invest. Compared to churches without a written strategy, churches with a written strategy are much more than twice as likely to invest in vocational training programs,⁴³ 1.8 times as likely to invest in refugee relief,⁴⁴ and more than twice as likely to invest in combating human trafficking and slavery.⁴⁵ §

42 Means comparison of Q08 with Q25a via independent-samples T-test (.003 significance)

43 Result significant at .004 using Pearson's chi-squared test

44 Result significant at .016 using Pearson's chi-squared test

45 Result significant at .001 using Pearson's chi-squared test

Part 4

CONCLUSIONS

Recent decades have seen a growing interest in coordinating or “harmonizing” development and humanitarian aid, both on the part of foreign aid providers and foreign aid recipient countries. Strategies and accountability for coordination were outlined authoritatively in the 2005 Paris Declaration, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD) watershed document on the subject.

However, the Paris Declaration applies only to Official Development Assistance (ODA) from OECD member nations. Some analysis suggests that ODA today accounts for less than half of foreign aid flows to developing nations and continues to shrink, with the bulk of the rest coming from private development actors, NGOs, and other non-traditional donors.⁴⁶ Many of those donors, including many faith-based NGOs, are either reluctant to abide by Paris Declaration requirements or may be entirely unaware of them, leaving coordination proponents searching for other models to improve collaboration among non-ODA actors.

Better understanding the attitudes of evangelical church leaders toward international assistance may shed light on ways to improve collaboration with evangelical foreign aid organizations, since such organizations are largely dependent on churchgoers for their funding. This study attempts to provide a sort of landscape survey into certain factors that shape those attitudes, by focusing on the perspectives of “missions” leaders at evangelical churches.

This study was inconclusive in determining whether evangelical churches in general are fragmented in their international involvement. Churches do appear to invest in a broader range of project types than

NGOs do, averaging nine project types per church, while some studies suggest that faith-based NGOs invest in around four project types on average.⁴⁷ However, given that the UN’s SDGs outline 17 distinct priorities for the global development community, it is unclear what threshold qualifies the efforts of a single organization or group as “fragmented.” Most evangelical churches sampled do seem to collaborate regularly on international activities. If aid fragmentation is an ongoing challenge to be overcome among NGOs, clearly further research is needed to better define the scope and nature of the problem, among churches and among religious and secular aid organizations.

This study strongly suggests that church missions leaders are heavily influenced by information sources based on relational credibility. Respondents indicated they have substantially higher levels of trust in pastors and missionaries as sources of international information than they have in any other source, including mainstream media, academics, and other NGOs. The single greatest consideration for churches when considering involvement in an international program is whether they have a personal relationship with the program’s manager. Put differently, it seems low-tech and personal information channels may be far more influential among evangelical aid leaders than high-tech and mass channels.

This finding might seem intuitive, perhaps especially to workers at Christian NGOs who have been collaborating with churches for years. But it has profound implications for any effort in the broader development sector to coordinate or affect the aid actions of evangelicals. Working directly with pastors and even missionaries – perhaps an especially overlooked influence group – may be crucial for any secular or multinational agency desiring to affect evangelical aid priorities. For example, agencies could consider strategies to engage pastors and missionaries in order to persuade evangelicals of the importance of environmental sustainability and gender equity in aid, two areas where they appear to

46 Marian Leonardo Lawson. “Foreign aid: international donor coordination of development assistance.” *Journal of Current Issues in Globalization* 4, no. 1 (2011): 77.

47 Heist, 9.

fall short of SDG priorities. This may be especially effective in light of the high level of influence pastors and ministry leaders have within their own congregations.

Finally, there appears to be a clear relationship between the media habits of church missions leaders and the types of international projects in which their churches invest. Social media usage – and to a lesser degree, direct interaction with the websites and blogs of Christian international NGOs – is highly correlated with involvement in humanitarian and development projects. This is all the more noteworthy considering there is no significant age difference between missions leaders at churches that are very involved in humanitarian projects and leaders at churches that are less involved, eliminating the prospect of simple generational differences in media habits.

This finding suggests that social media channels may indeed be effective for influencing evangelical leaders who are already involved in humanitarian and development projects. Efforts to build upon or leverage their existing “deed orientation” could utilize social media and other web-based communications. However, efforts to target message-oriented churches, perhaps to deepen their engagement in humanitarian and “justice” projects, might see significantly smaller returns from a social media strategy.

Finally, this study suggests that evangelical churches with large operating budgets may be more inclined to invest in international humanitarian and development projects than those with smaller budgets, which are more likely to be message-oriented churches and thus to limit their international involvement to strictly religious activities.

As a pilot landscape survey, this study raises a number of questions that require further research to address. A larger-sample, representative survey of evangelical churches would offer deeper insights into denominational and geographical differences in evangelical priorities in foreign aid. It would also

offer vital insights into what portion of international evangelical church giving is channeled to NGOs, what portion is channel directly to churches abroad, and what portion is directly invested. Similarly, more robust qualitative research among church missions leaders would go far toward understanding the attitudes underlying this study’s findings. For example, why are evangelical churches under-invested (relative to the broader development sector) in key SDG priorities such as environmental sustainability and gender equity?

Faith-based NGOs constitute a large and influential segment of the private international aid sector in the United States. As that sector grows, there is a clear need to better understand the foreign aid strategies of Christian churches, which form an important constituent group for faith-based NGOs. This study suggests that evangelical churches are largely independent in their foreign-aid decision making, and that evangelical church leaders have much more influence on each other and on their churchgoers than does any print or electronic information medium. If that is the case, then multilateral and official aid actors in particular – those best positioned to reduce aid fragmentation – may have strong reason to consider new ways to incorporate churches and church leaders into coordination efforts.

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