

## 0506. Sponsorship Model Framework (1986)

*A paper written by Ram Esteves to argue the case for “good” sponsorship programmes and small Northern NGOs that are not overtly emotive, and can instead be used as instruments for genuine development education in the West.*

*I am aware that the question raised in the last part of this paper are going to lead to controversy. I am also aware of the danger of the conclusions I arrive at being misused by a few lackeys of conventional sponsorship who are eagerly waiting for straws of justification to clutch at. Finally I am aware of the anger and rejection that these conclusions will evoke in a few rigid and dogmatic minds.*

*Yet in an attempt to enter into debate with the vast majority of development workers and thinkers – within and without the sponsorship model framework – I dare write this paper. Like all vital questions, I do believe that this too does not have straight answers and that there is no such thing as a black and white situation. Theory has to be practically applied and this is not an easy practice. To be fashionable and trendy is as easy as to be so called realistic. But both will fail to contain the reason, the logic and the truth that those who want to apply this theory need when dealing with real life situations.*

### 1. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The philosophy that guides sponsorship is a one to one that stems from defeatism; a feeling that the problems of the world are too big, too complicated, beyond solution and most importantly, beyond and immediate concrete steps that can be taken by the concerned without concerning herself too much to cause any personal discomfort. The philosophy that guides sponsorship is a one to one that benefits the donor more that it benefits the recipient. The philosophy that guides sponsorship is an easy way out.

It may perhaps be that the original motivation, many years ago, stemmed from a concern for the beneficiary children and their plight. But developments have led to a situation today which is over proportionately geared to suit the requirements of the donor sponsors. It is therefore necessary to examine what these requirements are.

Industrialisation in the 1<sup>st</sup> World has led to a very materialistic value system. But at the same time it has not been possible to completely curb the spiritual needs of the western woman and man. Developments in communication and information has exposed them to the reality in the 3<sup>rd</sup> World and the plight of the poor in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Studies in the social sciences even in their countries cannot completely hide the fact that the international economic order, unfair trade relations, etc. are responsible for this poverty and misery, and that a share of this blame is somehow proportioned to the individual citizen of the 1<sup>st</sup> World. All this leads to a sense of guilt and this needs to be translated into concrete action. Since the vast majority are not sufficiently educated to work out what kind of action this should be, this contrition gets translated into a very basic need to give out charity and dole.

In the industrialised western countries, capitalism is very highly developed. In addition to the development of the means of production, the value system of the citizens and the various superstructure institutions to serve the spiritual aspirations that arise from this value system are also developed. The sponsorship model fits pat into these scheme and cannot be understood outside this framework. It is not a creation outside the capitalistic superstructure institution; its purpose is to serve very capitalistic needs in very capitalistic ways.

On the other hand, development agencies are a product of conscientisation of the citizens of the 1<sup>st</sup> World through development education efforts. The basis for this education is a non capitalistic scientific temperament and a structural analysis of society to discover the causes of poverty. This basis is alien to capitalism, can be sustained only through continuous development education inputs, and is therefore more tedious to maintain.

Capitalism as a social system is very effective in serving its exploitative and dehumanising economic system by developing the capitalistic value system of bourgeois democracy. This value system embraces all the citizens in capitalistic society not just the owners of capital alone and inhibits their ability to quest in areas outside the framework of capitalism, areas that will threaten the very basis for class nature of society. All fundamental thinking which could possibly lead to the conclusion that capitalism in the 1<sup>st</sup> World is itself the cause for poverty in the 3<sup>rd</sup> World is outside the purview of bourgeois democracy. Consequently such thinking is also outside the purview of the vast majority of the citizens of the 1<sup>st</sup> World.

The sponsorship model does not question capitalism and is thrown up by capitalistic concerns to not blatantly manifest the tragic consequences of 1<sup>st</sup> World capitalism in the 3<sup>rd</sup> World.

*“Sure industrialisation is creating sweat shops in Taiwan! But aren’t we doing something positive about it? See here is a picture of Malik, the son of one such sweat shop worker who we are sponsoring! Now Malik stands a bright chance. He can go to school, receives a balanced mid-day meal, gets health coverage, wears decent clothes, and I hear that the project is going to build him a nice home with brand new packing cases and beaten out milk tins!”*

On the other hand development agencies in the 1<sup>st</sup> World have to make the western woman and man first realise:

*“...that sweat shops in Taiwan are a cheap and rotten way out for them to increase their material comfort without having to squalor at home; that the workers in Taiwan have to rebel to pass legislation ensuring better working conditions; that they have to struggle to get corrupt labour officials to implement these laws; that the western woman and man have to contribute to help finance the project that is trying to all this in Taiwan.*

*“...that sure, it is not going to be an easy task for that project since seasonal unemployment is so high in Taiwan; that many workers would prefer the squalor to exposing themselves to the risk of total unemployment if they join the struggle; that sure it will take a long time; that the efforts are what you can see and not the results; and as a final bonus, that sure, you will eventually have to pay much more for all those cheap Taiwan goods you are getting now as a result of shelling out this little contribution today!”*

It is easy to see why sponsorship agencies are thriving so well when compared to development agencies and why the latter almost don’t stand a chance. But let us go further into our analysis.

The sponsorship model is therefore the packaging of western needs to give charity and is an answer within the malady of bourgeois democracy. It is capitalism’s answer to increasing questions and challenges to its economic organisation and structure. It is a safe outlet for the concerns of its citizens because it will lead no further.

The sponsorship model does not represent the translation of concerns of a conscientised population of the west. It is only the satisfier of the spiritual needs of guilt ridden consciences of the unthinking majority. It is not the end product of a development education process in the west.

On the other hand community development assistance efforts and the work of the development agencies will inevitably lead to questioning within the 1<sup>st</sup> World itself. Many groups within this model framework who started with 3<sup>rd</sup> World issues are today deeply and relevantly involved in 1<sup>st</sup> World issues that can fundamentally tackle some of the basic causes for many 3<sup>rd</sup> World maladies.

This is the natural logic of sponsorship that no one can escape from when making an objective examination.

Unfortunately development workers and thinkers in Europe, 10 years back, did not understand the gravity of the problem and no one cared to analyse the sponsorship model framework, its basis and its implications. A lot of people thought that Europeans would not contribute to the Americans and that sponsorship would never be a serious threat of corruption on their own soils. The Americans, they thought, were ill informed, vulgar in wanting to show their superiority through the signing of monthly cheques for \$ 20 for poor starving children. This, they thought, could never happen in cultured Europe where the general level of 3<sup>rd</sup> World awareness was higher, people more inclined to respect and themselves be thinkers, and superficial vulgarity conspicuously absent.

It is only now that these development workers and thinkers are waking up to realise that there is nothing American about sponsorship, and that all phenomenon must be understood in a class perspective if at all they have to be understood. The shoddy attacks on the sponsorship model framework carried out without homework being properly done in the early 80's, for example, has only allowed adjustments in jargon and advertisement, and has resulted in a sharp increase in business for the sponsorship agencies in Europe. The high levels of 3<sup>rd</sup> World awareness in Europe was very cleverly exploited by the American based sponsorship agencies by warping raw intellectual material provided to them by this shabby, ill prepared exercise in the early '80s.

The resultant anger and feelings of deep indignation among us development workers and thinkers who assume a prerogative in the field of development is, to me, not at all understandable; as if we had a sacramental right protected by gentleman's agreement with the very persons we were attacking. It is my very strong opinion that we must wake up to the reality with intelligence, expose the myths that support the sponsorship model framework, and redirect it to more relevant actions.

Further, as a result of this very shallow treatment we gave the question some years back, we have made fundamental errors in assuming that sponsorship is malodious only at the fund raising end, in the 1<sup>st</sup> World. I believe that this is an aspect that needs more serious examination.

Sponsorship, we have seen, concerns only individual children or families are identified for assistance, whether this be one in a village, all in a village, one village in a block, or all the villages in a block. In effect, development assistance does the same, but at the same time expresses concern for the whole world, international realities and relations, etc. Thus, on the surface, it appears that there is no substantial difference between the two, and the lackeys of sponsorship have been dismissing the debate as unproductive polemics.

This is not true. The ideological basis that governs sponsorship is a restricting one that takes too many limitations into account. Whereas the ideological basis for development assistance is an expanding one, since the theoretical points of departure are wide and comprehensive, using social, economic and political analysis, perception, strategy and tactics.

Since this restricted ideological base governs all actions in a sponsorship programme, there will be a constant trend to narrow down concern, finally, to the individual child and family. In the end, in sponsorship programmes, we will be chasing a perfection which will necessar-

ily become exclusive, since individual perfection cannot be achieved at broad levels. When the need arises to broaden the base, this will not be recognised, since by then the entire focus of not just our work, but also our perception, will be so specialised in the natural logic of narrowed concerns.

In this way, people working within the sponsorship model framework very rapidly degenerate into professionals, serving the needs of capitalism and capitalistic designs, whatever be their starting points. Development efforts by development workers are rapidly being converted to specialised services by professionals by the inner logic of the sponsorship model framework. It is therefore shallow and superficial to attack the sponsorship model only at the fund mobilising end and say that it is a problem only of the West; that there is a difference at the spending end where different things can be done. The truth is that there is a chain from mobilising to spending, through effort guided by ideology, linking the 2 ends.

In the sponsorship model framework, accountability is to individual sponsors for individual children and families, and this will promote intellectual inertia as a natural consequence of increased working over the years. Whereas in development assistance, accountability is to the general intelligentsia which will be merciless in criticism, itself being guided and qualitatively developed by intellectual honesty.

I have not attempted, in this paper, to make a comprehensive theoretical analysis of the sponsorship model framework. The above are just a few considerations spelt out in an attempt to initiate debate.

## 2. PRAGMATIC CONSIDERATIONS

There is a dogmatic trend in us which sometimes prevents us from making pragmatic appraisals of situations. Instead, we stop at just developing the purity of thought and derive a satisfaction in this isolated intellectual exercise. We even feel that such appraisals are synonymous to compromise.

This trend, I am convinced, is a perversity of intellectual faculties. Our societal tools of analysis must be used to strip a phenomenon bare, understand it, and then develop strategies and tactics to apply that phenomenon to very real life situations that we live in. Theory must never be an excuse for inaction.

While I recognise that there is only a very thin dividing line between this definition and clever opportunism, it must at the same time be remembered that there is a dividing line. While knowing that sponsorship has a noxious element and is a manipulative tactic of capitalism should warn us to tread cautiously, there is no excuse to not tread at all.

The analysis of the sponsorship model in the previous pages has exposed some naked facts about its philosophy, context basis, scope and objects. In this analysis I have tried to compare sponsorship with development for a very practical purpose.

Sponsorship is eating into development in the I as well as the III Worlds. This has very harmful results for the Western Woman and Man who are being further alienated by their dehumanising and manipulative economic system, degrading them into cogs that they unknowingly fit into even as they are rebelling through spiritual aspirations against this manipulation. It has even more harmful results for the III World poor who become victims of capitalism in a double dose; firstly, to begin with, their poverty and misery is caused by this economic system, and secondly, the same economic system pretends to offer them a solution whereby they can neither solve the problem nor be able to identify the culprit.

Sponsorship is not only eating into the money available for development, but also into the efforts. In the I World, once the citizens are bombarded with well planned propaganda that charity and the one to one approach are the only possible option of action they have, it be-

comes very difficult to de-school these women and men and make them realise the true causes for poverty in the world and opt for more relevant courses of action. In the III World, once the poor are systematically bombarded with the individualised services and doles that the sponsorship model gives and their dignity gets crushed, it becomes very difficult to make them aware of their human status once again. These increasing efforts have to be carried out in the I and III Worlds in a background of decreasing resources, all because of sponsorship. It has been well established in a country like India, for example, that there is a very definite role for development work through a partnership between voluntary agencies in the III World and development agencies in the I World. This partnership includes sharing of concerns, experience, etc. But most importantly, it involves the collection of moneys in the I World for supporting development efforts in the III World. This partnership emerged from out of a donor-recipient relationship with the realisation by the developing agencies that the tackling of III World poverty included development education in the I World itself, and that their role should not be restricted to mobilising moneys alone. This partnership is further developing with the realisation that development education is necessary not only to remove poverty in the III World, but as importantly to humanise the citizens in the I World. Increasingly, voluntary agencies are asking developments agencies to not feel superior because of funding, but realise that both are carrying out their ordained roles. In a word, this partnership is beginning to become a real partnership.

The influence of the sponsorship model is a total reversal of these positive developments. The sponsorship model sets the clock fully back, using ultra modern techniques for antiquated ends; ends which are harmful and hypocritical. Sponsorship, a model designed to satisfy the donor more than the recipient, threatens to drag back relationships between development and voluntary agencies into giver and taker, and kill the more healthy, and finally more effective, partnership that is emerging. Sponsorship is being industrially and commercially organised with sophisticated management techniques, just like any other multi-national business, because the aims of the sponsorship model are no different from that of any other capitalistic enterprise. Just as divinity gave scope for establishing the religion business in capitalism, so too guilt and compassion have given scope for establishing the sponsorship business. Relationships between the hired professionals in these agencies and development workers in the III World have degenerated to very low levels.

The timing of this degeneration is very tragic because it is only of late that the embarrassment of the donor-recipient relationship s disappearing in the light of the realisation that both are partners, are members of the intelligentsia in their respective countries, are working with and for the same de-humanised citizens of their respective countries. This new relationship without awe for the donors has not yet established itself fully, when sponsorship now threatens to destroy the achievement of a long history of development effort.

In the light of all these very practical consequences of the sponsorship model framework, we cannot afford to not have an effective plan of action. We cannot be complacent with empty curses and condemnation, because sponsorship is going to effect us, even if we are not directly involved.

Given the subjective condition of the average western citizen's awareness and level of politicisation I very realistically feel that sponsorship is here to stay. To fight it would be like crying against the wind. The sponsorship model is well ingrained into western society and is a natural part of capitalistic plans. Some of the best professional brains in modern advertisement are employed by the sponsorship agencies in order to whip up already ripe conditions to make the sponsors give.

Also, given the fact that moneys mobilised in the west are necessary for the development of both, the givers of this money as well as the poor in the III World, we cannot afford to com-

pletely ignore some of the sophisticated tricks used by the sponsorship model. We may have to accept that while the individual appeal is perhaps the most effective way of making people give in the west, in the present situation, it is not necessary to use these moneys in a one to one way in the III World. Naturally, this proposition can be considered only if there is a well thought of way to, as quickly as possible, shift the emphasis from charity and dole once the initial contact is made with the women and men who are first attracted by the individual appeal. Another limitation for the development agencies in the I World will be that they cannot maintain the levels of complacency and superficial satisfaction that sponsorship agencies can maintain in their sponsors. But these are questions and possibilities that the development agencies must debate about and explore, since I am not competent in that field.

The very raising of these questions, I know, will expose me to charges of infiltration and a breach of bourgeois morality. I do not believe that there is anything immoral in, for example, making individual sponsors give for individual children, and then using the moneys to support a sincere effort aimed at eradicating some of the causes that make the children poor. In such a case, I would slowly educate the individual sponsors, using “their” individual children as windows for explaining the greater reality. The letter writing part of sponsorship where individual correspondence is made with the sponsors provides an excellent opportunity to draw I World citizens into contact with local real issues and problems of the III World, if handled intelligently, gradually and graded

Sponsorship also provides a greater freedom of action to diverse approaches and tactics in true development efforts since just about any sincere action can be interpreted as being beneficial to children. Sponsorship further affords continuous support for programme in the III World planned for long periods of time. This is a very important consideration for action groups in the III World who believe in processes as against time bound projects. Further, sponsorship allows a continuous contact with the poor through their children and the day to day services and care that the details of a sponsorship programme entails. This is very important for III World action groups who believe in intensive coverage of villages in their area of operation as a necessary precondition for effective organisation work.

All that is said in the preceding 2 paragraphs will remain wishful thinking if the personnel staffing the sponsorship agencies in the I World, and their representatives in the III World do not share our concerns on the noxious results of the conventional sponsorship model based on the one to one philosophy. But it is my personal belief supported by experience that some of the smaller European sponsorship agencies have not become institutionalised as yet, and the people working in these smaller agencies are willing to try and adapt the model to become more relevant to III World realities.

The directions of professionalism and isolation projected by me as the inevitable fate of all those trapped by the sponsorship model framework are, in spite of all my pragmatic considerations, valid and real. But the process has not been completed as yet, and there is room for manoeuvring and tilting sponsorship into more relevant directions.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

I would like to enter into debate with development workers and thinkers, within as well as without the sponsorship model framework, here as well as in the I World, as to whether this manoeuvring and tilting is possible. This debate, I believe, should not be a naive one, but take very real theoretical and pragmatic considerations (only a very few, as they came to my mind, have been spelt out in this paper) into account, and must result in us coming to grip with this question in its totality, realistically.

While I will be unbending in my condemnation of the sponsorship model framework, I sincerely do not know with any certainty if there is scope for adapting this model to support

relevant development work with the poor in countries like India. It disturbs me very much to see massive child sponsorship programmes springing up overnight, amorally reducing the children of the poor to victims of a pre-packaged plan that satisfies the whims and fancies of a people who don't even know what they are doing.

I have heard the lackeys of sponsorship boast that the model does not represent State to State relations between countries of the I and III Worlds; that sponsorship represents a very people to people relationship. To this, my answer is that this does not, ipso facto, mean that things are better. I have already traced that sponsorship represents an alienated people, the victims of capitalist manipulations in the I World relating to an impoverished and dehumanised people in the III World. Also, I have traced that sponsorship represents a class relationship between the capitalists in the I World and their victims in the III World. As a result, sponsorship does not represent the intelligentsia of either World, and is that much an impoverished model lacking an intellectual input, honest and critical.

Now, can this intellectual input be drawn into the debate to explore the possibilities for, as it is surely going to be called, infiltration? Because the fact is that a lot of resources are available, and these resources are presently being harmfully used.