

Examine the Fruit
Reflect on Matthew 7:15-23

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Denis Green helped me clarify this meditation, praise God!

Jesus tells us to beware of false prophets, those who claim to be close to God but are not doing God's will.

This is an important information need in evaluations of transformational community development. Whose will is being served by the project activities? Activities that further justice for the poor and oppressed serve God. Activities that maintain or reinforce injustice don't serve God.

Jesus tells us to judge the quality of a tree by the quality of its fruit, to judge the quality of a person's prophecy by the quality of that person's actions. I see two types of fruit to be examined in evaluations of transformational development.

One fruit is the result of an activity. For example, a deep well with a strong casing and an efficient durable pump is not a good well unless it produces an adequate amount of safe water. Evaluation must do more than describe the quality of an activity. It must describe the quality of results: the quality of the crop or livestock, or the capacity of community representatives to cooperate in planning and implementing appropriate activities for the well being of the community.

Another fruit, equally important but more difficult to examine, is the change in relationships and interactions among people caused by the activity. Have those who were wealthier or more privileged benefited more than the poor and the less privileged? Are the wealthy sharing more resources with the poor? Are the poor helping the wealthy to reflect more deeply on the burden of having wealth?

Do those who are on the fringes of the community use the safe water or is it primarily benefiting a privileged few? Do those who have greater access to the water do anything to make it more accessible to others?

Is the nutritious crop improving the health of local women and children or is it being sold primarily to benefit a few landowners? Do landowners understand nutrition levels of different groups in the community and how their decisions and actions about use of the land and its yields affect those levels?

This teaching suggests that an evaluation report on transformational community development should describe results in terms of the quality of life as it is experienced in the community. And it should provide a comparative analysis of the benefits experienced by both the poor and the more privileged. Without these elements the report may convey development progress that has done nothing for justice; such a report is similar to false prophecy.

O Lord, let the fruit of my evaluation work be good. Where there is false prophecy in my reporting, let it be denounced in a way that brings me to my knees, seeking forgiveness with a repentant heart. Amen.