



Straddling the Gap: My Radical 10-Year Learning Curve



My life reached a turning point one Sunday in 2007, when the Munyakuri family walked into New Hope Church (Rochester, NY). I was clueless at the time, but a new chapter in my life had begun.

When these new immigrants from Africa called me "Pastor," I was honored. When they called me "Mother," I was perplexed! Their membership in the household of faith was a primary reality for them, not just a metaphor. Belonging to the family of God was central to their identity and has become central to mine, as they and

thousands more from 37 countries have inducted me into a new way of seeing the world. Why 37?



Since 2008 I've visited 30 countries where ICCM children live, and seven sponsoring countries. I'm beginning my 10th year of local-global living, straddling the income and development gap and recognizing sisters and brothers for who they are: family. I've joined heart and hands with people who care passionately about children and give their lives to develop

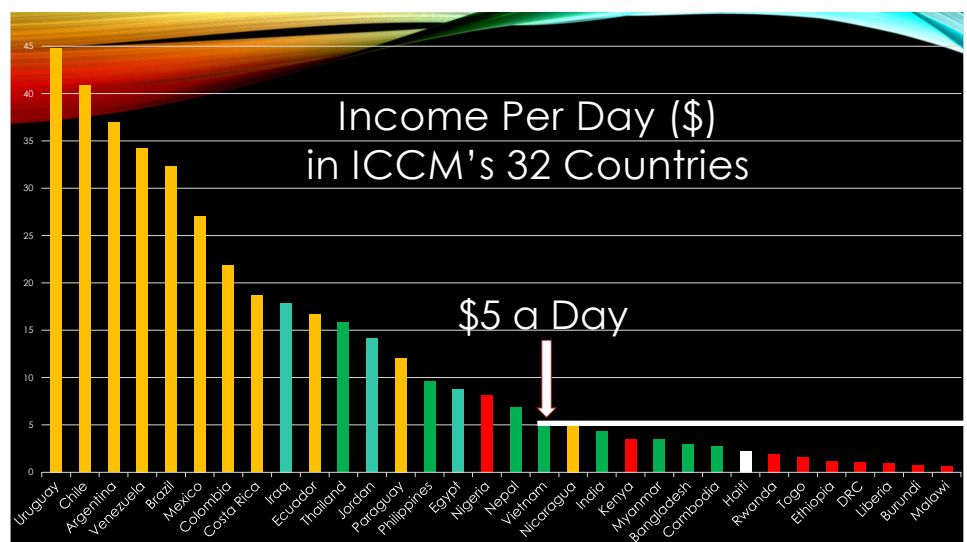
the little ones. Some work in places where helping children grow physically, spiritually, mentally and socially is done at great personal risk.

I recently met with leaders who are regularly interrogated by authorities who oppose our Christian faith and do everything in their power to thwart our ministry to children. Yet these leaders persist in giving children life-transforming opportunities for education and holistic growth.

These people are now my beloved teachers. What have I learned in the past 10 years? Too much to fully include here! But a few themes rise to the forefront:

Tribalism

This world is riddled with strife and conflict among people groups. Cultures are often structured in rigid hierarchies, with dominant groups and marginalized ones. And yet, (over)





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the Kingdom of God includes and unifies people from every nation, tribe, people and language (see Revelation 7:9). Our oneness must overcome our divisions!

✂ Gendercide

I had no reference point for the level of discrimination against women and girls in this world. My grief at the practice of eliminating daughters either in the womb or immediately after birth, simply because of their gender, is indescribable.

Our Creator gives the image of God to both male and female (see Genesis 1:27); together, we reflect the totality of who God is. Seeing girls welcomed into the joy of learning, alongside their brothers, brings deep satisfaction and sets in motion generational change.

✂ Child Trafficking

As ugly as it is, we cannot turn away from the enormous evil of slavery in our world today. More than ever before

in human history, men and women, boys and girls are being sold into lives of exploitation and desperation. Yet our Lord said His mission included “setting the captives free” (see Luke 4:19). We can do no less. ICCM’s preventative measures express the reality, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”



✂ Local Transformation

As grateful as I am for aid and strategic interventions by governments and non-governmental organizations (NGO’s), I’m more convinced than ever that transformation takes place in local contexts. As we dream of a world where every child is loved, safe and developing their God-given potential, that dream takes place in a thousand grassroots settings.

Adults in the sponsored child’s world are the ones who know her by name, teach him day in and day out, and share life in community. Love is local. We can support from a distance, but the most important realities in the child’s life are mediated by godly men and women whose example and instruction make the most difference. As director of ICCM, it is my great privilege and deep honor to invest in these leaders, resourcing them with both finances and organizational knowledge. Together, we can see children whose learning curve is already steep, growing to be all God envisions them to be!