

## **Challenges in Nationalising Missionary Work in an Indigenous Context.**

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Panel 3 Faithbased NGOs and Economic Development or other panels?

When the Norwegian Santal Mission, (Normisjon from 2001), took up work among the indigenous people Kañaris in the Ecuadorian Andes in 1969, the area was marked by entrenched inequality. The Indigenous population experienced discrimination, suppression, and lack of education. During the Norwegian mission's twenty years engagement in development projects and church planting and evangelization in Cañar, the Kañaris life changed radically, from having been oppressed they became agents in their own life and experienced to be met with confidence and treated as equals. They went from having been forced to live more or less in isolation from mainstream society to beginning to relate to a society and a way of thinking they were not familiar with. However, after 25 years, the mission wanted to downscale its engagement in the country. A nationalisation of the various institutions was initiated, a challenging process both for the Kañaris and for the missionaries. Today the indigenous Kañari church is small and instead of growing experiences membership decline, not only because of migration but also because of internal problems and loss of members to other denominations. The current church does not reflect the size of missionary effort and finances that have been spent in the area.

In this paper I will look into the nationalising process and try to analyse possible reasons for the seeming lack of long term results of the mission work. Why did church leaders react with frustration and anger when the mission initiated the process of nationalisation? Why did some Kañaris occupy the property for the agricultural project when the mission wanted to sell it? and Why have many church members abandoned the Lutheran congregations and some gone to other denominations? Reciprocity is a main concept in Andean culture but does not have the same significance neither for the mestizos nor for the Norwegian missionaries. Could one root to the problems be related to the one way communication in the development projects: the mission giving and the Kañaris receiving which made an uneven relationship?

I will look into the challenges parting from Andean religiosity and way of thinking, what the Andean peoples today call 'Vivir bien', 'The good living altogether'. I will also consider whether the home board of the mission forced the nationalising process without considering cultural aspects because they had to cut back on budgets.

The paper is based on qualitative research which includes personal experiences from missionary work in the area, interviews made during longer and shorter subsequent fieldworks, as well as missionary records, interviews and conversations with former missionaries and articles about the work in the mission-organization's magazine. My research will discuss the process of nationalising mission initiated churches and development projects addressed to indigenous peoples. I will pay particular attention to potential challenges related to differences in cultures and thinking between the missionaries, the mission home board and the Kañaris.