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Between 2015 and 2019, several of my Christian friends, seminary professors, and Christian organization leaders with whom I am acquainted, in the United States and in Asia, indicated to me that they had gone on short-term mission trips or survey/vision trips to the Middle East. In that same period, when my husband and I were serving in Jordan, we encountered numerous short-term teams. For example, in 2017, a local church near a major Syrian refugee settlement informed us they received short-term mission teams virtually every week throughout the year. To date, however, short-term mission research has not yet been done on the relatively new phenomenon of short-term mission trips to the Middle East.

This paper is based on first-hand field experience in the Middle East with the goal of offering analysis, reflection, and evaluation of this particular trend in short-term mission engagement. In addition to drawing on own experience serving refugees for a few years in Jordan as well as month in Turkey, I communicated with seven fellow long-term workers serving in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan. Additionally, I conducted a formal interview with the director of a Christian NGO in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The names of locations and organizations are intentionally withheld in this paper to protect my fellow workers' ministries on the ground.

Previous Research on STM

Over the past two decades, many missiologists have researched STM, yielding the following main critiques: lack of real cultural experiences (Linhart 2006), lack of good relationships with the local people (Adeney 2003), the ministry being always dominated by the sending churches (Zehner 2008), or the trips being designed for short-termers' spiritual benefits rather than for the local people (Adeney 2006). Other research shows that the impact on the participants, especially young people, is limited (Ver Beek 2006, 2008). Rick Richardson comments, "If there are no follow-up structures, research

suggests that there will be no behavioral changes” (Richardson 2008, 553). Priest’s research shows that, with good culture orientation and culture-learning training, short-term mission can decrease the participants’ prejudice or stereotypes toward other cultures (Priest, Dischinger, Rasmusen 2006).

Chinese American churches, on the other hand, show different weaknesses and strengths in their STM practice. They are strong and effective in evangelism to non-believing Chinese and avoid some cross-cultural conflicts and mistakes. At the same time, they lack cross-culture experience. Their social engagement and charity efforts are also limited (Wu 2016, 154). Before analyzing the new trend of refugee-focused STMs in the Middle East, I will set the context by outlining the STM destinations, tasks, and participants from previous research.

Top STM Destinations

According to Priest, Wilson, and Johnson’s (2010) study in the STM of US megachurches, the top STM destinations were either Latin American or African countries (see table 1). In this paper, I borrow the categories of “World A, World B and World C,” developed by Barrett and Johnson:

World A: the unevangelized world, where less than 50% of people have heard the gospel or heard of Jesus.

World B: the evangelized non-Christian worlds, where at least 50% of people have heard, with understanding, about Christianity, Christ and the gospel, whether or not they have accepted it or have become disciples of Christ, and less than 60% are Christian.

World C: the Christian world- countries that are at least 60% of Christian of all kinds, including Roman Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox, Anglicans, Independents, and marginals Christians. (2001, 761-769)

Within the framework of these definitions, the top 10 destinations of STM teams of US megachurches are in World C since about 80% or more of the populations of the listed countries self-identify as Christians.

U.S. megachurches' STM destinations	U.S. Chinese churches' STM destinations
Mexico	China
Guatemala	Taiwan
Honduras	Mexico
Dominican Republic	Hong Kong
Nicaragua	UK
Brazil	Germany
South Africa	Brazil
Kenya	Thailand
Uganda	India
Haiti	Myanmar

Table 1. Comparison of STM destinations between megachurches and Chinese churches in the U.S.

The STM destinations of Chinese churches, however, are quite different from those of US megachurches. My research on Chinese American churches (Wu 2016, 121-126) showed the top ten STM destinations to be mostly Asian countries and countries containing the Chinese diaspora. The number one destination was mainland China (see table 1). Among the top ten, four of the destinations are in World C (Mexico, UK, Germany, and Brazil) and six are World B. The research also showed that Chinese American churches sent STMs mainly to Chinese speaking countries and areas. Only about 9% of Chinese American churches reported STM teams ministering to non-Chinese people (Wu 2016, 92).

STM Activity Focus

According to the data reported by Priest, Wilson and Johnson, the top focus areas of US megachurches are:

1. Building, construction, and repair
2. Evangelism and church planting
3. Vacation Bible School (VBS) and children's ministries,
4. Medical and health care
5. Relief and development (Priest, Wilson and Johnson 2010, 89).

My survey research from 2013 showed that Chinese churches in the US focused on the following areas:

1. Discipleship training and Bible teaching (32.4%)
2. Evangelism and church planting (23.8%)
3. VBS and children's ministries (18.6%),
4. Education and teaching English (6.7%),
5. Art and drama (3.3%) (Wu 2016, 129).

It is noteworthy that the top three covered about 75% of total activities.

The activity focus is impacted by both STM destinations and the people to whom STM teams minister. For example, the number two STM focus of US megachurches is evangelism and church planting, which aligns with the fact that their top STM destinations are all in World C. It would be difficult to have this kind of focus if the STM teams are sent to World A, such as the countries of the Muslim world. Another example is Chinese diaspora STM. Since their top destinations are China and other Chinese speaking countries/areas, and their ministry focus is either Chinese nationals or Chinese diaspora, their STM teams often do not need translators. Thus, it is possible and effective for them to do discipleship training and Bible teaching. Previous research also found that Chinese American churches tend to “focus more on ‘spiritual’ or traditional ministries and direct evangelism, compared with USA megachurches, and Chinese churches focus less on social service and charity” (Wu 2016, 131).

Participants of STM

The purposes and the tasks of STM determine the kind of people who are sent on STM trips. Different age groups can possess different skill sets to contribute to mission. The number one activity focus of US megachurches is “building, construction, repair,” which can be carried out by youth. The same research found that 94% of high school youth programs had organized overseas STM trips, and 78% of them sent more than one youth STM team per year (Priest, Wilson and Johnson 2010:98). As for Chinese churches, since their top STM focus areas have been “discipleship training/ Bible teaching,” “evangelism, church planting,” and “VBS, children's ministries,” it is less likely they will send their youth group to carry out this type of ministry. The previous research reports that 50% of Chinese American churches' high school youth programs never organize STM trips overseas, and 59% of Chinese American churches report that

the majority age group of STM teams is “adults only,” and only 14% of STM teams are high school youth. This research also indicates that most of these STM goers are actually church leaders (i.e. pastors and elders) who are able to teach and run trainings (Wu 2016, 135-137).

A New Trend

Revolutions, civil wars, and regional sectarian conflicts in the aftermath of the Arab Spring have produced significant waves of migrants and refugees from the Middle East and North Africa to neighboring countries and Europe over the past decade. Between 2011 and 2016, 12.6 million Syrians were internally displaced or made refugees by civil war (Das and Hamoud 2017, 16). In 2014, the rise of ISIS in northern Iraq forced hundreds of thousands of Iraqi minority people such as Christians and Yazidis to leave their homes. In 2015, the photo of a drowned 3-year-old Kurdish Syrian boy, Alan Kurdi, who was washed up on the shores of Turkey, shocked and saddened the world (Barnard and Shoumali 2015). The refugee crisis has remained frontpage news since 2015, and some consider it the greatest humanitarian crisis of our times (George 2018). Although the media pays more attention to the refugee crisis in Europe, Middle Eastern countries have hosted most of the refugees. According to recent data from the UNHCR, Turkey currently hosts 3.5 million Syrian refugees and Lebanon nearly 1 million (UNHCR 2020); furthermore, a 2015 government census indicates Jordan hosts about 1 million Syrian refugees (Jordan’s Department of Statistics 2015). The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), an autonomous (and relatively safe) region to the north of the country, also hosts about 1.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and Syrian refugees (UNHCR USA, n.d.).

According to the *1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* of the UN, a refugee is defined as follows:

A refugee is someone who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (UNHCR, n.d.).

According to the *United Nations Guiding Principles*, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are defined in this way:

Internally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situation of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border (UNHCR, n.d.).

Christian churches in different parts of the world have attempted to engage with those in need during the refugee crisis. One such way is to send short-term mission teams to the host countries of refugees, such as Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq (KRI). As a result, these places have recently become popular short-term mission destinations.

Refugee Ministry in the Middle East

Since the beginning of the refugee crisis, a number of Christian field workers and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have flocked to refugee host countries to respond to the humanitarian need. A director of a Christian NGO in KRI, whom I interviewed, told me that in the city where he serves, “there were less than 10 field workers before 2015. But after 2015 there was an influx of NGOs. I think right now there are a few hundreds of NGOs.” In addition, to foreign workers and organizations, some local churches in the Middle East also started their relief ministry during the time of different refugee “waves.” In general, there are three types of Christian groups engaging in refugee ministries on the ground in the Middle East: (1) local churches, (2) field missionaries, and (3) faith-based NGOs. In many cases, two or three of these groups above will cooperate with one ministry.

Middle Eastern countries such as Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt have a Christian minority, most of whom are from historic and traditional Orthodox, Catholic, or ancient Eastern churches. Christians in these countries, those born in Christian families to Christian parents, have the freedom to worship and observe Christian holidays. But “proselytizing Muslims” is still socially and cultural offensive in these countries (to varying degrees), and the risk level depends on the country (Wu 2018, 26-27). Relatively speaking, there is more freedom in Lebanon (Das and Hamoud 2017, 89-91), since, politically, Lebanon is not a Muslim country, but a secular one. But

with more than 50% of the Muslim population in the country (Pew Research Center 2015), Christians still have to engage with Muslim culture.

In general, refugee ministry on the field includes English courses, relief distributions, home visitation, medical care, job training, and children's ministry. Different local churches, Christian NGOs, and missionaries have different approaches to bearing witness to Jesus among refugees according to their ministry convictions and the security situation of their contexts.

Short-Term Mission Involvement

We and our colleagues in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and KRI have witnessed a surge of STM teams since 2016 up until the Covid-19 pandemic. When my husband and I served in Jordan, we partnered with a local church for about half a year in 2017. This local church ran several Syrian refugee projects, and during this period they received a constant stream of STM teams. The church offered accommodation, transportation, and scheduled activities for short-term teams to get involved, such as visiting refugee schools, refugee home visitation, medical clinics, and children's ministry.

In Lebanon, one mission organization regularly hosts STM teams. This organization is resourceful and able to provide numerous interpreters, accommodation, and transportation for the STM teams. They also arrange the schedule of the trips for the teams. Usually, the activities include attending the presentations and briefing their Syrian refugee ministries, home visitation, women's ministry (female short termers sharing their testimonies), children's ministry, and engaging local people on the streets. The staff in charge of receiving STM teams reports they have received STM teams from North America, Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Europe.

In Turkey, a refugee ministry center run by a group of field workers hosts about 11-13 STM teams each year with the length of their stay being from 1-2 weeks to six months. The teams partner with the refugee ministry center, which takes full responsibility for these teams (i.e. schedule, budget, lodging, etc.). Their ministry activities include English classes, children's ministry, a women's outreach group with a free meal, home visitation and clothes distribution, and medical care. In contrast with Arabic-speaking countries like Jordan and Lebanon, the cross-cultural workers in Turkey speak Turkish (rather than Arabic or Kurdish), and yet their ministry focuses on Arab and Kurdish refugees; thus, this well-organized ministry heavily relies on translators.

A New Model of Diaspora Mission

In the past, China was the top destination for STM teams from Chinese churches in the United States. However, the door to China has been shut in recent years since the new Regulation on Religious Affairs began to be enforced in February 2018 (Law Info China, 2018). Since then, a new wave of persecution and missionary expulsions has taken place. Thus, many Chinese churches in the diaspora, including my home church in the US, are looking for new fields to continue their STM mandate. Meanwhile, the tremendous needs of Middle Eastern refugees caught the attention of some overseas Chinese churches. One example is a Christian organization which was founded by diaspora Chinese from Hong Kong and has offices in Hong Kong, the US, and Australia. This organization used to send medical STM teams to China and some Southeast Asian countries, but due to the closed door in China, they have begun to send STM teams to the Middle East in recent years.

Both “push” factors (China’s closed door) and “pull” factors (Middle East refugee crisis) have begun to change the way overseas Chinese churches strategize and execute STM. It used to be “mission through diaspora,” which means mission through Chinese diaspora to reach other Chinese diaspora (or Chinese nationals). Now the Chinese diaspora have started to do mission “beyond” their kinsmen Chinese and share the love of Christ to Middle-Easterners in diaspora. It is mission to and beyond the diaspora! A humanitarian ministry that is founded in KRI and carried out by Chinese Christians in diaspora is one of the best examples. The next section will focus on this NGO.

Humanitarian Efforts in the Kurdistan Region

In recent years, several Christian friends and acquaintances of mine, all Taiwanese Americans, have participated in STM trips to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). For some, it was their first ever STM trip. Later, I realized all were hosted by the same NGO (registered in KRI), which was founded by American Christians whose backgrounds are from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. This NGO started their humanitarian work in KRI in 2016 and has brought medical STM teams to serve numerous displaced Yazidis and Syrian refugees. Yazidis in Sinjar (a town in Nineveh province in Northern Iraq) suffered from genocide along with other atrocities perpetrated by ISIS, and many were forced to abandon their homes. Yazidis are a Kurdish minority group. They are not Muslims but follow a different kind of monotheism, and therefore suffer persecution from time to time.

The founder and director of this NGO, Mr. T., serves in a Chinese American church in California. Before he started this ministry in KRI, his church had been sending STM teams to China and other Southeast Asian countries for years. Through his advocacy, his church sent their first medical STM teams to the Middle East to serve Yazidis in 2015. The first two trips were to Turkey. After the Lord closed the door on their humanitarian work in Turkey, they started bringing STM teams to KRI, beginning in 2016. This NGO also made an effort to give short-termers orientation and trainings, such as cross-cultural principles, basic theology, and missiology. In just the past two years, this NGO brought in short-term teams of medical surgeons who operated on a total of 45 patients.

Transnational Networks

In 2016, this NGO brought in five STM teams to KRI, and since 2017, they brought in more than 10 teams every year until the COVID-19 pandemic began. The numbers and the sizes of teams continued to grow every year. This encouraging turnout comes from extensive recruiting and networking of the NGO director. Mr. T. said, “We are highly active in recruiting. I am constantly talking to pastors, to organization leaders, and to our network.” The vast majority of their STM teams are made up of ethnic diaspora Chinese from North America, Southeast Asia, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Only three of their STM partners are Korean American organizations. In response to this observation, Mr. T. noted, “I do not limit our partnership to only overseas Chinese or Chinese in general. But it is our natural network.”

STM teams come through transnational networks, not only in KRI, but in other Middle Eastern countries as well. For example, a Chinese American pastor who was involved in a prayer ministry in Lebanon hosted STM teams from Chinese churches in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and North America over the past two years. Also, transnational networks in STM are not restricted to Chinese mission. For example, a Korean pastor in Lebanon who leads a Kurdish congregation brings STM teams that are mainly from South Korea and diaspora Koreans from North America. Whether in New Testament times or in our era of globalization, diaspora collaboration in STM through utilizing transnational networks and resources is common and natural (Wu 2016, 33-34,115-116).

Feedback from the Field

My fellow field workers reported positively that STM teams were meeting real needs on the field, were showing encouragement, love, and care both to refugees and their hosts on the field. My colleague in Lebanon says:

They encourage the refugees with their testimonies. The refugees enjoy receiving the gifts they bring and getting free health care. The love shown in the name of JESUS has a powerful impact from my experience. They encourage the long-term workers and help to keep us renewed... They bring new ideas and energy.

A field worker involved in refugee ministry in Turkey commented, “STM teams can relieve some of the burden of long-term workers. They can be bolder than a worker that lives here. They bring us sensitive resources. They encourage long term workers. They allow us to do special events like VBS when we lack the manpower to do it ourselves.” From our experience and that of colleagues in the Middle East, STM teams that work best in refugee ministry are those made up of specialists who come for specific projects such as medical teams. While serving in Jordan, we received a few medical STM teams and their compassion and care for the Syrian refugees truly touched the refugees’ hearts. In KRI, some of the STM participants are retired medical doctors in their 60s and 70s. They show their love with their actions, and it encourages and blesses the IDPs, refugees, and frontline workers on the field.

Most of the negative feedback on STM teams had to do with their insensitivity to the culture, some bad attitudes, the problems caused by language barriers, and the significant effort it takes to provide them translators and accommodation. A fellow field worker in Lebanon commented, “The language and cultural barriers are pretty wide when working with Syrian refugees, so unless it is project oriented, it was hard to connect the short termers with Syrians because a translator always needed to be present.” As with other STM programs, good training and orientation is essential. In Turkey, the Christian worker in charge of their STM partnership told me, “Sometimes they can be a burden if they do not carefully read over and follow our training manual. We want mature believers that are self-starters and ready to do whatever job assignment we ask.”

When my husband and I were serving in Jordan, our local church partner hosted two STM teams from two western countries at the same time. They both stayed in the church guesthouse and ended up having conflicts. Meanwhile, a young lady from one of

the STM teams who failed to understand the gender boundaries in Muslim culture had inappropriate interactions with a local Muslim driver. The local pastor who hosted them was embarrassed by this incident and told the STM team leader, “Could you please not bring immature Christians for STM trip next time?” It was discouraging and disrespectful to the local community.

Besides the problems caused directly by the STM teams, there are also concerns of partnership with local churches in the Middle East. The churches in the Middle East are small (usually with a few dozens of members) and limited on manpower and resources. Constantly hosting foreign STM teams can be a distraction to local church’s pastoral ministry. Furthermore, the foreign partners bring resources and funds that may encourage the continuing dependency, and “without careful planning, well-intentioned giving may backfire, betraying donors and harming recipients” (Wu 2018, 30).

Findings and Evaluation

Comparison with Previous STM Studies

The refugee/IDP-focused STM teams are different from previous STM trends in several ways. First, there is a change of destination. Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and KRI in Iraq—the countries which have received an influx of STM teams between 2015 and 2019—are not World C. Turkey’s Christian populations is less than 1%, Lebanon is about 37% Christian, Jordan is about 2%, and Iraq is less than 1% (Pew Research Center 2015). Except for Lebanon, all of these are part of World A. The research on American megachurches shows that their top 10 destinations are all World C. As for Chinese American churches, their top 10 destination countries are either in World B or World C. For both types of churches, Muslim countries in the Middle East were not on the list of their top STM destinations. These countries are unreached for multiple reasons. Socially, culturally, legally, and spiritually, these countries are resistant to the gospel. In addition, some Middle Eastern countries, like Iraq and Lebanon, are not considered stable or safe, and hence they have a stigma. Thus, due to security reasons, as well as the preferred activities of STM teams, the Middle East was not a popular STM destination before the recent refugee crisis.

Second, since the destinations have changed, the ministry focus has been adjusted accordingly. The most common STM activities in the Middle East are medical, health care, VBS, children’s ministries, vision trips, prayer walking, education/teaching English, home visitation, and relief and development (see Table 3). The STM in the

Middle East in recent years has had a clear humanitarian focus since it has been a response to the refugee crisis. Although American churches have historically had some relief and charity focus in their STM, there are still some differences. The top two emphases of American megachurches are “building, construction, repair” and “evangelism, church planting.” The first one is not a ministry focus for refugee ministry in the Middle East, and the second is not culturally practical. It may even bring danger to STM team members and their host. On the other hand, “children’s ministries,” “medical, health care,” and “education—teaching English” meet the felt needs of refugees. Home visitation of refugees—most of them Muslims—can be considered a new STM focus, which provides opportunities for building bridges and breaking stereotypes.

As for the majority of Chinese American churches, regardless of destination, they previously focused on ministering to Chinese nationals or Chinese diaspora. It is a major shift for Chinese churches to send out STM teams to minister to non-Chinese and to adopt a charity and relief focus. It may be challenging for them to do “discipleship training/ Bible teaching” in a Muslim context to refugees or IDPs who only speak Arabic or Kurdish since many short termers lack the relevant cultural and linguistic knowledge. The previous research shows Chinese American churches focusing on spiritual needs and direct evangelism. Refugee ministry gives them an opportunity to consider and adapt a holistic approach to mission and extend their mission to non-Chinese.

	US Megachurch STM	US Chinese Church STM	STM to the Middle East (2015-2019)
Destinations	World C (mostly in Africa and Latin America, 80+% Christian population)	World B and World C (mostly in Chinese speaking societies and/or to Chinese diaspora)	World A and World B (mostly in Muslim societies to displaced unreached people)
Ministry Activities	Building, construction, repair Evangelism, church planting VBS, children’s ministries Medical, health care Relief and development	Discipleship training/ Bible teaching Evangelism, church planting VBS, children’s ministries Education-teaching English Art/Drama	Medical, health care VBS, children’s ministries Vision trip, prayer walk Education—teaching English Home visitation Relief and development
STM teams	Mostly Youth	Mostly Adults	Mostly Adults

Table 3. Summary of the comparison of three types of STM.

Third, the STM activity focus determines what type of people churches will send on STM trips. Neither me nor my fellow workers ever hosted a youth group team in the Middle East in the past few years. Since refugee ministry mostly focuses on medical/health care and education, high school teenagers apparently are not suited for these kinds of tasks. There may also be security concerns for parents sending their teenage children to some of the war-torn areas in the Middle East. As for Chinese American churches, the previous research data shows that they tended to send adults, including pastors and lay leaders, to do teaching and training. From what we and our colleagues have observed, they have been sending church leaders and medical professionals to the Middle East.

Evaluation and Recommendations

In responding to humanitarian needs, STM in the Middle East extends STM efforts to “least reached” peoples, bearing witness to the love and compassion of Christ to suffering refugees and IDPs through holistic ministry. It is hard to predict how long this trend will last. If the refugee crisis subsides, this trend may die out. However, with continuing conflicts in the Middle East, we do not foresee refugees and IDPs disappearing any time soon. On the other hand, this paper is written during a pandemic when international trips are paused or restricted and thus interrupting all overseas STM events. With the possibility of a higher travel fare and more strict entry regulations in the near future, we should explore new strategic and effective ways of carrying out STM.

This new STM trend in the Middle East presents a beautiful picture of international collaboration for kingdom work. We and our fellow workers received STM teams from nearly everywhere: North America, Latin America, Europe, Asia, Oceania, and even other Arab countries. Overseas short-term mission activity is no longer “the globalization of American Christianity” (Wuthnow 2009, 3). Furthermore, since the shift to a refugee focus, STM has highlighted a significant need of Arabic or Kurdish translators, and Arab Christians have many opportunities to serve in this way. Years ago, our colleagues in Jordan mobilized a group of Jordanian Christians to go on a STM trip to Turkey. It is truly “mission from everywhere to everywhere.”

Due to workload and capacity issues, it is challenging for field workers to host short-term teams frequently, and if they do host a team, the size of the team tends to be smaller. As for local churches, they may be distracted from their own ministries by constantly hosting STM teams. Thus, if a Christian organization or a faith-based NGO—

like the one founded by Mr. T.—can provide a platform to host the teams and allow them to plug in to ministry, it will be beneficial all involved. Mr. T. describes the vision of his NGO:

We want to be the platform, the organization on the field, to serve the people there so that the Chinese churches in general and the North American churches can easily send their people to serve with us and to work with us... most people start their long-term work as a short-term worker...They need to taste the experiences. Sometimes it is good experience, sometimes it is bad experience. Sometimes it is really a short-term work or one-time work, and there is no continuity and no sustainability. But if you have a good host, a good organization, that has a long-term presence on the ground, then there is a continuity, then there is a sustainability.

Mr. T.'s NGO successfully brings STM teams and puts them to work on projects that meet the needs of IDPs and refugees in KRI. Many of the short termers come back to KRI to serve repeatedly. In this way, it is not merely short-term ministry, but a long-term effort with impact on these IDPs and refugees. They grow to love and care for a people group completely different from them in ethnicity, language, culture, and faith. This is remarkable in the context of Chinese diaspora mission.

Compared to those serving in World C, short termers in World A have to overcome a larger cultural barrier, and misunderstanding is more likely to happen. Thus, cultural training and orientation are necessary. Moreover, refugee ministry in the Middle East involves responding to human suffering and facing the hostility of Islamist ideology in some host countries. A sense of entitlement and lack of maturity not only causes a hindrance to people's witness to the love and truth of Jesus, but it may also bring negative experiences to short-termers themselves during STM trips. All the mistakes from the previous paradigm can still happen in refugee/IDP-focused STM in the Middle East, and it may actually cause more harm in this context. STM in the Middle East is most effective when there are well-established host like mission organizations or NGOs who can provide orientation and arrange activities beneficial to both the recipients and the short termers. Also, it is important to have a specific project for which short termers are skilled so they can plug in right away.

Conclusions

The new trend of STM in the Middle East with a refugee/IDP focus indeed redirects kingdom efforts from evangelized countries to least reached people. It has the potential to shed light in the darkest places ravaged by corruption, violence, wars, and the bondage of false religion, but it also has a higher risk in causing harm if there is a lack of cultural orientation and pre-trip training. For American churches, the Middle East presents an unfamiliar new field that may help to break stereotypes, overcome prejudices, and build bridges. For Chinese diaspora churches, it may be a paradigm shift, since their attention has shifted from China and the diaspora Chinese to displaced Arabs and Kurds in the Middle East, as well as from Bible teaching to holistic ministry. Through partnership with an on-the-ground organization, and with pre-trip training and orientation of the local culture, a well-designed project that meets the humanitarian needs of the displaced, and a mature and teachable attitude of STM participants, the refugee-focused STM in the Middle East can make an impact for kingdom work.

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