

POVERTY, PROSPERITY, AND PARTNERSHIP: moving from aid to innovation...transaction to transformation.

By David L. Neely

Having been associated with global development and relief aid programs in some way for over 33 years, I have seen individuals and communities respond to long term help in decreasingly positive ways over time. Much has been written about how aid hurts rather than helps and development programs create dependency. To a degree these statements are correct, if done incorrectly. Billions of dollars have been spent to build infrastructures for aid, including distribution networks, equipment, local and global staffing, food/medicine/technology aid materials equipment and supplies. Have people been helped? Absolutely. Have they been harmed? Yes.

The relief and development community has unfortunately in many cases, over time, put programs, process, and funding ahead of people. This is not to say we must stop doing relief and development, i.e. throw the proverbial baby out with the bath water. There will always be a need for emergency relief and aid due to natural and human disasters and catastrophic weather events. It is just that we must not continue to use expensive existing delivery systems and processes, and we must first consider where we can use the local human capacity, the human potential that is available even in the midst of human suffering.

Poverty

Poverty is the state for the majority of the world's people and nations. Why is this? Is it enough to blame poor people for their own predicament? Have they been lazy, made poor decisions, and been solely responsible for their plight? What about their governments? Have they pursued policies that actually harm successful development? Such causes of poverty and inequality are no doubt real. But deeper and more global causes of poverty are often less discussed.

Behind the increasing interconnectedness promised by globalization are global decisions, policies, and practices. These are typically influenced, driven, or formulated by the rich and powerful. These can be leaders of rich countries or other global actors such as multinational corporations, institutions, and influential people.

In the face of such enormous external influence, the governments of poor nations and their people are often powerless. As a result, in the global context, a few get wealthy while the majority struggle.

There are two types of poverty: absolute and relative. Both absolute and relative poverty are violations of human dignity, although they also have other significant dimensions, such as social injustice. Absolute poverty is associated with overt exploitation and connected to humiliation but being dependent upon others to stay alive is a violation of dignity even in the absence of more direct abuse. Relative poverty, on the other hand, is an abuse because the cumulative experience of not being able to afford the same clothes, entertainment, social events, education, or other features of typical life in that society results in subtle humiliation; social rejection; marginalization; and consequently, a diminished self-respect.

We must rethink how we define poverty and how we choose to respond to it. We must not allow ourselves to abdicate our personal and corporate responsibility of helping our neighbor, whether next door or around the world, to a government agency or multinational aid organization. According to UNESCO, “the multidimensional nature of poverty, in particular social aspects such as housing poor, health poor or time poor, needs to be understood in order to create more effective programs for poverty alleviation. Hypotheses that typically play a role in sociological theories of poverty are based on the idea that individuals are influenced by the physical and cultural context in which they live, and it gives importance to gender and household structure. <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international-migration/glossary/poverty/n.d.>)

Prosperity

It has been said that most people live and die in the social class into which they were born. If they were born poor, chances are they will die poor. Although not the silver bullet that fixes everything, a necessary strategy which can help people rise in social class is to initiate new enterprises, like improved educational opportunities or technological advancements which can open the doors to innovation. When this happens, the need for workers in higher-class jobs motivates and enables people to move up in social class, which can help them to escape poverty.

Creating individual prosperity can have a significant impact on eradicating generational poverty. Prosperity itself helps tear down, or even remove altogether, barriers to improving one’s social class. These real life barriers include: Rule of Law issues including land ownership, Access to Markets, Access to Low Cost Capital Funds, Market Flooding of free or highly subsidized goods and services which stifles entrepreneurial spirit and kills local market segments. It is imperative the governments, civil society, faith-based organizations, and the local community leadership work together because working together is more effective than working in isolation.

There is great value in the human spirit. Human potential can play a significant role in fighting the dependency model of relief, aid, and development. Given the opportunity, with barriers mentioned above lowered to the point that at least opportunity to prosper are given, there is no limit to the potential for positively influencing their social class, thus breaking the cycle of poverty.

Value of High-Quality Partnerships

One key motive for developing high quality multi-stakeholder partnerships is the belief that working together is more effective than working in isolation. Partnerships operate under different local conditions, depending on the detailed nature of the problems, the institutional environment, political factors, experiences, and culture. Given that requirements are always specific to these conditions, there is no one model for a successful partnership. The one linking characteristic of high quality partnerships is that they are designed to bring together relevant actors with similar motivations to concentrate on coordinated activities in different thematic fields to impact a local community or business environment in positive and sustainable ways without worrying about who gets the credit.

Partnering with the Faith Community

For too long, the church has appeared irrelevant to the challenges and needs in the community. Church has become a place to attend on Sunday for singing and preaching, but to address real needs in the community, villagers either turn to the government or non-government organizations. While acknowledging that the church is an imperfect institution, churches are the organizations with greatest potential to reshape the lives of the communities where they are located. Coupling the faith community with Asset-Based Development is the most effective process for sustainable community transformation. It focuses on what people have rather than what they do not have. It doesn't ask them what they think they need .but instead recognizes that God has blessed every person and community with gifts, such as land, social networks, animals, savings, intelligence, schools, creativity, production equipment, etc. An asset-based approach puts the emphasis on what people already have and asks them to consider, "What is right with you? What do you have that you can use to improve your life and that of your community?" This approach to community development reinforces some very positive relationships:

- Relationship with God
- Relationship with Self
- Relationship with Community
- Relationship with environment/creation

In order of least effective to most effective, there are three different ways of the church engagement with the local community:

1. Church working for the community
2. Church working with the community.

3. Church working as a catalyst in the community.

The role of the church is not as implementer; however, the church still plays a key role as catalyst and can also be involved in the work of the community. The church, therefore, plays a prophetic role in speaking into their community and getting people to transform their community, even as they release the work out to the community to do. The church's primary role is as a catalyst, with members from the church involved as community members in the work. The more the community is involved, the greater the impact on the people targeted; the wider community and the church grow both numerically, developmentally, and spiritually. This is because when the church reaches out and walks in real relationships with others, people come to know the living, life-giving God. Also, as church members connect with more non-believers, their faith is also strengthened and challenged.

The transformation process begins by gathering both church and community leadership together to discover and understand...

1. What is the community currently struggling with, and what needs to change.
2. What resources are available in the community to resolve this issue, and who is the person or entity that has stewardship over the resource.
3. What the truth is about the ownership of the available resources, and what the most prominent misconceptions are in the community. It is critical to start to recognize all that God has given both the church and the community.

Additionally, there are some practical relational elements which are critical as the church and community develops their partnership which include...

1. Forming a work group from the church and the community. Developing regulations and a structure to guide process. It is important to avoid people with personal interests. Instead, find people with the right heart and passion for community transformation. Finding people of peace and positive influence in the community is most important.
2. Involving the community in sustaining the work by involving them from the beginning. Build and nurture relationships with the people in the community.
3. Most importantly, listen to, and appreciate the views of, the community.

Technology's Influence on the Faith Community's Impact on Poverty

In the era of globalization, new technologies are rapidly reshaping the livelihoods and lifestyles of people throughout the world. The pace of technological change is increasing and is in many cases beyond the capacity of society to understand and manage its impacts.

Yet, technical change has the potential to help millions of people in their daily battle to survive. New and improved technologies, which women and men living in poverty can use in ways which are appropriate to their context and needs, can expand, and improve, their livelihood options, thus increasing their productivity and income. These new and improved technologies can also improve the quality of the goods and services that they use, which can even enhance the quality of their lives.

To achieve that potential, women and men living in poverty require improved access to appropriate technologies, and to information and knowledge about technical options. Building on their existing knowledge and skills, they need to be further empowered to develop, adapt, select, and use technology to improve their lives. Additionally, the use of appropriate technologies has the potential of exponentially increasing the human response to those caught in the vicious cycle of poverty by taking one individual and multiplying his or her access and effectiveness to the underserved, and catastrophically affected communities, i.e. eMedicine, eEducation, eGovernance, etc.

As the church engages its global community, it is important that it utilizes whatever tools available to it to accomplish this goal. Technology is but one of several tools available for long-term sustainable transformation; however, it is a tool that, if used properly, can multiply the church's impact on the ground exponentially. For example, the use of broadband connectivity is already proving to be a game changer in underdeveloped and underserved communities. Once there is access to the Internet, an entirely new paradigm can be introduced for evangelism, as well as both theological and general education in these areas. Furthermore, newer computing devices such as iPads or android tablets, which are being used more and more to connect to the Internet in remote areas, are becoming less expensive and more durable. These new devices are powerful tools that can include Chronological Bible storying sets, The Jesus Film in multiple languages or other similar evangelism tools which can be preloaded on the tablets to provide the necessary assistance when either doing personal evangelism or training other evangelists. Likewise, counseling tools, theological education, and pastoral care tools and library access can be accessed by the connectivity of the tablets.

For the church to make the most use of appropriate technologies as they engage their community, there must be a fundamental shift in the way the development arms of faith-based organizations and secular organizations manage themselves. This is going to require an organizational transformation that can, in many cases, be very intimidating. In order to make the greatest impact with the people they are trying to reach and serve, organizations must be prepared to make this transformational change internally in its management structures, but also be willing to look outside their own reorganization and be willing to be part of collaborative efforts. This can only be successful when those engaged in any partnership or

collaborative development program are more concerned about making a positive and sustainable impact on the individuals or community they're working with more than they are concerned about who gets the credit.

The Importance and Stress of Organizational Transformation

Organizational transformation is less about the internal structural and cultural adjustments that have to be made than it is about the end goal of working together in high quality partnerships with other organizations and individuals who are experts in their various disciplines. However, it is critical that a few things are considered as organizations look at their internal systems, so that they may be poised to be able to act quickly, and decisively, and with the greatest impact when given an opportunity to be a part of any collaborative effort. These include:

1. What do you want to do differently?
 - a. Make more effective use of technology to bring about greater change in the areas your organization is working?
 - b. Reach out to a broader audience via emerging social media tools?
 - c. Shift from a traditional membership model to one that encourages broader participation from a wider network?
 - d. Consider a multi-sector partnership?

2. Why do you need to make this change?
 - a. How is this change going to help your organization to better advance its mission, vision, and values?
 - b. What is the message that is going to be communicated which will drive your organization to do things differently at all levels?

3. How can you take the first steps to make this transformation within your organization?
 - a. What information do you need?
 - b. How are you going to get this information?
 - c. Who is going to be the primary driving force for change?
 - d. Is this going to be a volunteer or a paid staff person?
 - e. What level of authority will this individual need to influence change?

4. When and how are you going to assess the progress and the effects on your organization?
 - a. Is it achieving what we needed?
 - b. Have we made the process of partnership and effective development easier or more complicated?

As with anything, change is never easy, and it is seldom fun. External change can be overwhelming, but we recognize that internal change can be rocky as well. Starting with the basics of walking through the questions above will help any organization develop a plan of

action that puts the organization on a trajectory for success. Transforming a nonprofit organization is not just an exercise in creating new strategies and processes to accomplish the organization's mission. It also means examining the existing culture within the organization and recognizing the areas where change needs to take place and then working to adjust the culture, as needed, in order for it to support the change. The culture is the organization's operating environment, and this includes patterns of behavior, activities, and attitudes which are shaped by a shared set of values and beliefs.

Incidentally, adjusting the culture is not something that can be done by leadership dictating a new set of values or goals and then hoping everyone within the organization gets on board with this new strategy. It is important that organizational leadership is committed to a new vision for the organization's culture but most importantly, there has to be a compelling and consistent message that is communicated at all levels of the organization in which each individual feels a sense of ownership in the process.

One of the most effective organizational changes that are on the horizon for many nonprofits is shifting from a vertical to a horizontally managed organization structure. This shift means that work is being organized by processes as much as function, it is managed by multifunctional teams, which are quicker and producing long-term sustainable results, especially when there is a value placed on the inclusion of outside partners and the local project community leadership representation. Having this type of representation on multifunctional teams produces an environment which is conducive to continuous innovation and problem solving. These teams can make decisions that most accurately represent both the project community and the non-profit partnership.

In the past, the extreme rigidity that vertical organization structures sometimes present did not provide the necessary freedom and autonomy necessary for innovative creativity which, in some cases, impeded an organization's ability to fully recognize its mission and vision of impacting their various project communities in the most effective and sustainable way.

Works Cited

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international-migration/glossary/poverty/>. n.d. (accessed October 13, 2016).