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# Striving For Sustainability: The Place Of Values And Beliefs In Delivering Sustainable Aid

Alan Pieratt  
*Regis University*

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Running head: Striving for Sustainability

Striving for Sustainability:  
The Place of Values and Beliefs in Delivering Sustainable Aid

by

Alan Pieratt, PhD

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Nonprofit Management

Regis University

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### **Abstract**

In spite of decades of western developmental aid and billions of dollars in resource transfers, the number of poor in the world remains at astonishingly high levels. This paper argues that in many cases poverty remains stubbornly rooted because of the moral values and spiritual beliefs of the poor. A review of developmental literature confirms that Western aid systematically ignores these causes of poverty and is often fragmentary and elitist in its delivery. The result is developmental activity that is ineffective. This paper argues that aid is more likely to be sustainable if local values and beliefs are taken into account and aid is delivered in a holistic and inclusive manner. This can be included in project design by using local community leaders to design, deliver and evaluate the aid.

**Table of Contents**

Title Page	1
Abstract	2
I. Introduction	
II. Background	4
Section 1. A Brief History of Modern Development	8
Section 2. Poverty Today	10
Section 3. Causes of Poverty	14
III. Literature Review	21
Section 1. Fragmentary and Elitist Aid is Ineffective	21
Section 2. Delivering Aid that is Holistic and Inclusive	25
IV. Recommendations	30
V. Conclusion	31
References	32

## ***I. Introduction and Background***

Why does poverty remains at astonishingly high levels in the world today, in spite of decades of western developmental aid? The answer proposed by this paper is grounded in the author's work with a faith-based nonprofit (founded in March of 2000), called Children's Relief International (CRI). CRI's initial goal was to provide aid for the very poor in the community of Dondo, Mozambique, a cluster of villages totaling 60,000 souls. The work began in partnership with local leaders who had a vision to change their community. They named it the *Ray of Light Project* and in the ensuing five years it has grown to include several schools, a medical clinic, farm, AIDS hospice, child sponsorship program and several new churches.

In 2003 CRI started a second project in Kenya located just west of Nairobi in Kikuya County (the area where the film *Out of Africa* was shot). It is called the *Mayatima Project* after the Swahili word for orphan and, as the name suggests, its focus is on the care of HIV-AIDS orphans in that area. It too was started by local leaders who provided the original vision for the work and who continue to direct the project to this day. In the past three years the project has grown to include a poultry and dairy farm and nearly 100 children enrolled in a child sponsorship program.

CRI takes its place alongside thousands of other similar agencies whose purpose is to deliver developmental aid to areas of deep poverty around the world. In this paper, such organizations will be referred to as NGDOs (*non-governmental developmental organization*), an acronym first coined by Alan Fowler of the World Bank in his book, *Striking a Balance. A Guide to Enhancing the Effectiveness of Non-Governmental Organizations in International Development* (1997). The focus will be on small to medium sized NGDOs, those that deliver aid to villages and communities where stubborn poverty has always been the norm. The goal of

NGDO activity is to deliver aid in a *sustainable* manner, meaning that the changes should be stable and continue after the agency has left. The question is why this has not happened.

***Methodology and commitments.***

"People who are poor have the right to effective management and organization" (Fowler, 1997, p. xiv). This quote encapsulates the motivation for this paper. Its goal is to understand the causes of stubborn poverty and through that understanding identify best principles and practices for the delivery of aid. This goal is subsumed under the purpose of Regis University's Master of Nonprofit Management program, to develop the best nonprofit leaders possible.

In pursuit of that goal, this paper will draw on three sources. The first is a review of contemporary developmental literature. This is the heart of the paper's methodology and the source of its value. Not that long ago such a paper would have been difficult at best. Almost nothing was written on the subject before the 80s (Rodríguez-Carmona, 2004, p. 2) and not until the mid-90s does a noticeable surge in academic interest become visible (Collier, 2004, p. 244). Only in the past decade have books and articles emerged on developmental methodology (Lewis, 2001, p. 8). As a field of study development literature is still very young and much of it is highly critical of NGDO activity (Cf., Bergman, 2003; Chambers, 1999; Handelbaum, 2003; Holloway, 1998; Isbister, 1995; Mallaby, 2004; Maren, 1997; Terry, 2002). The following is an example of the kind of harsh criticism NGDOs attract today:

These organizations have financed the creation of monstrous projects that, at vast expense, have devastated the environment and ruined lives; it has supported and legitimized brutal tyrannies; it has facilitated the emergence of fantastical and Byzantine bureaucracies staffed by legions of self-serving hypocrites; it has sapped the initiative, creativity and enterprise of ordinary people and substituted the superficial and irrelevant glitz of imported advice; . . . throughout the Third World, it has allowed the dead grip of imposed officialdom to suppress popular choice and individual freedom. (Hancock, 1989, p. 189)

Several hundred pages of demoralizing stories on NGDO work are provided in this one book alone, though no solutions or suggestions are offered as to how things could be improved. A critique should not appear merely for critique's sake. In this case, criticism carries a moral responsibility as NGDOs are vulnerable to public opinion. The assumption throughout this paper is that most NGDO leaders and staff pursue noble values based on a desire to help and improve people's lives.

A second source of material comes from missiology, a vast field of study concerned with the activities of the Christian church to expand into new fields (Cf., <http://www.wikipedia.org>). Although there are 20 centuries of history behind this topic, little of it is devoted to development as an activity designed to eliminate poverty. Only beginning in the 90s does one begin to find texts that consider the programmatic delivery of aid to the poor. It was then that faith-based organizations began to realize that "the poor deserved better than gifted amateurs with their hearts in the right places" (Myers, 1999, p. 2).

A final source of material for this paper is the author's work with the poor and his personal beliefs about what makes such work necessary and meaningful. Although that experience is not vast, it involves a mosaic of almost twenty years of work in five countries (Haiti, Brazil, Madagascar, Mozambique and Kenya), most of which targeted the bottom percentile of the economic ladder, people who make \$1 a day or less. Lessons learned along the way will be incorporated into the discussion.

This paper was written from the perspective of a North American, white, middle-class, evangelical Christian. That identity, and the life experience that forms it, shape the paper's arguments concerning stubborn poverty and the response that developmental aid should bring to

it. The personal dimension of the argument's formation is unavoidable. As David Klemm explains in his study of the philosophy of hermeneutics, the goal of analysis is not to be value free, for this is impossible. The goal is to be aware of the values that are in play (1985). Or as Robert Priest observes, one cannot be justly critiqued for having a position, only for pretending that a commitment was not involved (2001, p. 43). Even those who espouse the absolute relativism of all values and beliefs must necessarily own a commitment to that position. In this respect, leaders of faith-based organizations such as CRI are neither at an advantage or disadvantage. As Bryant Myers of World Vision notes:

Everyone believes in something, and what we believe shapes what we do and how we do it. . . whether we are Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, agnostic, or atheist. These core values and beliefs are where we get our understanding of who we are and what we are for. These guiding principles shape our understanding of what a better human future is and how we should get there (2004, p. 3).

The positions argued here concerning the importance of values and beliefs in poverty alleviation will not gain universal agreement. But they do provide a rational and justification for those organizations that deliver aid in a *holistic* fashion.

### ***Limits***

This is a short paper on a very large topic so a narrow focus will be maintained. The paper will not discuss philosophical questions about poverty, such as whether it is part of the nature of things that a percentage of any given populace will always suffer. Nor will there be a discussion of the question of scale, that is, at what size or level does poverty alleviation become meaningful? Is the life of one child permanently changed for the better a sustainable result? Or must sustainability refer to communities, regions and nations? This paper will not address the *non-poor*, the new value-free term that has become a substitute for the term wealthy. Literature

in the developmental field spends as much time talking about the accumulation of wealth as it does over its absence. However fascinating it may be as a topic in itself, it falls outside of the focus of the paper. Nor will the paper treat environmental issues. Where the environment is spoiled the result is almost always a low quality of life for people (Agyeman, 2002). But this is a topic too large for this paper and not central to its subject.

## ***II. Background***

### ***Section 1. A Brief History of Modern Development***

Development as an activity goes back in western culture to the early centuries of our era. Christian missions have built and serviced untold numbers of hospitals, care centers, hospices, orphanages and feeding programs - all activities that would today come under the umbrella of development. However, development as a systematic attempt to eradicate poverty, whether in a village, community or region, is as new as the existence of NGOs. A study published in 1992 noted that more than half of all existing NGOs were created since 1980 and 2/3rds were formed since 1975 (Livernash, 1992, p. 15). Almost none predate WWII because it was precisely in the reconstruction of Western Europe that they have their beginning. When the war ended the Marshall Plan shifted huge amounts of American dollars to assist the region. Organizations such as Catholic Relief Services and CARE helped with refugees and displaced people. After the Marshall Plan ran its course these organizations took on the goal of reducing poverty in other parts of the world, an ambition that corresponded to a post-war fervor among Americans to go and help. Thousands of volunteers went into the Peace Corps and large contingents of missionaries went overseas. Many of the organizations today who are considered leaders in development started in that rush of foreign aid (Rublin, 2004).

Heifer Project International (today called Heifer, <http://www.heifer.org>), is one example. The organization was founded by a farmhand from Indiana who conceived the notion of giving the poor a cow rather than handouts of milk. In the ensuing years Heifer Project sent thousands of dairy cattle to families in the devastated countries of Europe (Aakers, 1993, 10f). Since then the premise that self help is better than merely handing out assistance has become one of the enduring notions of developmental aid.

The 70s were marked by a great deal of optimism among developmental agencies. It was assumed that straightforward aid, mixed with a little finance and expertise, would be enough to change the poorer countries of the world. Poverty was treated as a question of sufficient nutritional intake to sustain life. Calorie counters were the measure and feeding programs the response. That optimism gave way in the 80s to the realization that development was not going to occur simply by importing money, no matter what the amounts involved. There was a shift in thinking about poverty from a lack of things and infrastructure to the people themselves and their capabilities. In the mid-80s the notion of sustainability appeared. For the first time there was widespread discussion over the need for local involvement and ownership in the process of creating wealth, an issue that remains under scrutiny today.

In the 90s the goals of democratic governance and social justice were added to poverty reduction and the larger NGDOs began to serve as distributors of government aid. Their enormous growth in this decade was largely due to an increase in government grants.

This brief history of 60 years of western developmental activity brings us to the present day and the nature of poverty at the beginning of the 21st century.

## ***Section 2. Poverty today***

What then, after six decades of western developmental efforts, have been the results? Today almost 4 billion people, spread over 140 nations, live on \$2 a day or less and almost a billion scratch out an existence on half of that (Taylor-Ide, 2002, p. 8). These are big numbers and they produce a cascade of others that are equally depressing. Here are a few:

- Around the world some 850 million go hungry every day.
- There are 12 million AIDS orphans in Africa.
- There will be 18 million AIDS orphans in Africa by 2010.
- 24,000 people die every day from hunger. 16,000 are children.
- 11 million children die each year before they reach their fifth birthday.  
(Cf., <http://www.hungersite.com>; <http://www.solcomhouse.com/poverty.htm>; <http://www.foodfirst.org>; <http://www.results.org>; <http://www.thp.org>; <http://www.bread.org>).

These kinds of statistics can be endlessly shuffled and restated. Suffice it to say that a large segment of the human population is living in conditions under which people suffer from all sorts of problems, including bodily weakness, the inability to make choices, susceptibility to disease and an early death (Isbister, 1995, pp. 7-27). In the world of the poor all that is good in life including health, love, friendship, honor, land, wealth, respect, status, and safety exists only in small quantities and in short supply. On \$1 a day it is difficult to maintain any kind of human dignity. To use a phrase from novelist Chinua Achebe, "things fall apart" (1994). In such life situations people live with a continual sense of insecurity since the margin separating them from catastrophe is so thin. A brochure from the Christian Reformed Church described their situation this way: "It's as if the very poor are standing in water up to their chin. One wave - a family

illness, a poor crop, even the loss of a few chickens - can overcome them" (2001).

In spite of the lament in the literature over such conditions, only 15 to 20% of developmental aid goes to the very poorest, those who make \$1 a day or less. (Malhotra, 2000, p. 662). Most NGOs work with the relatively better off, those making \$2 a day, because it is easier to reach and help them. This is a surprising revelation given the impression one receives from NGO program literature that always seems to emphasize the condition of the people they are working with as being in extremis. As one NGO critic wrote: "The ugly reality is that most poor people in most poor countries most of the time never receive or even make contact with aid in any tangible shape or form" (Hancock, 1989, p. 190).

The poor are called today by names such as *Third World*, *Two-Thirds World*, *Fourth World*, *Less Developed Countries*, *Underdeveloped Countries*, and the increasingly popular *Developing World*. One author pointed out that the last phrase may be excessively optimistic (Handelbaum, 2003, p. 1). These names serve to depersonalize the subject and make it manageable. Up close and in person poverty is so very much worse than any phrase can capture on paper.

The author remembers a conversation with a young woman named Lucy as she waited outside of CRI's hospice in Dondo, Mozambique. She was twenty at the time, but looked much older. Her facial skin was pockmarked and her knees red and swollen. She was the victim of AIDS and was suffering from the late stage symptoms of the disease. She walked with the help of two canes and was obviously in a lot of pain. Lucy's parents and siblings had already died of AIDS and she had no one left in the world. She had come to CRI's hospice for help because she had nowhere else to go. She was a truly forlorn figure. Her photo could be the icon of young women with AIDS in Africa.

Like Lucy, the world's poorest are often women. How far the numbers are skewed in their direction can be seen in a much repeated UN statistic which notes that "women perform 2/3rds of the world's work, earn 1/10th of the world's income, are 2/3rds of the world's illiterate and own less than 1/100th of the world's property" (Myers, 2004, p. 65). At CRI's projects in Africa the women seem to suffer the most. Their deep poverty and high rates of HIV/AIDS and malaria are exacerbated by diets based solely on cooked grain. Rarely is their income enough to purchase significant amounts of fruits, vegetables or meat. Dirty drinking water only worsens their problems. The wells are often shallow and as the population does not use latrines, the water is easily spoiled. This leads to a variety of infections from worms to cholera. It is a cycle of cause and effect that the poor become locked into generation after generation.

How is it possible at the beginning of the 21st century that almost four billion people live in such conditions? Alan Fowler comments: "Some 30 years of providing aid involving hundreds of billions of dollars, millions of staff and countless projects . . . have not made a substantial impact on the scale of poverty in the countries of the South" (1997, p. 3). In a recently released book William Easterly, an analyst with the World Bank, notes that "after fifty years and more than 2.3 Trillion in aid from the West . . . there is so shockingly little to show for it" (2006, front jacket). So little success has been seen by the developmental community in the 20th century that, as Fowler observes, "the whole notion of sustainability has little meaning" (2000, p. 6). Robert Chambers puts it more bluntly, "The idea of development stands today like a ruin in the intellectual landscape" (1999, p. 9).

Two words used to discuss this "ruin" are *sustainability* and *dependency*. We've been introduced to the notion of sustainability, but to define it more precisely, it means that aid should be designed and delivered in such a way as to "permanently increase the economic and social

well-being of the poor and thus their independence" (Pal, 1998, p. 4). In other words, as a result of developmental aid the poor should not only be better off, but be better off in ways that continue after the NGDO has left. Dependency is the word used to describe what happens when the developmental agency leaves and "conditions quickly return to where they were before" (Taylor-Ide, 2002, p. 42). At most projects and in most countries "this is the norm" (Aakers, 1993, p. 11), regardless of how much money is involved in the program.

Why is this so? Why don't the poor utilize the aid given them in a way that brings permanent change? Are western developmental specialists missing something important about the stubbornness of poverty? The number of poor in the world today indicates that the manner in which poverty is understood shapes how solutions are brought to it (Myers, 2004, p. xvii; Voorhies, 1996, pp. 129-130). If the root causes are not identified and targeted, a development program may end up delivering little beyond a community's daily bread with no lasting effects whatsoever once the aid has ceased. Daily bread is not nothing, but neither is it a sustainable solution.

What then are the causes of stubborn poverty that, though apparently hidden from sight, keep it firmly rooted in so many parts of the world? Throughout most of the last century two answers dominated the discourse: *Dependency Theory* and *Modernization Theory*. The former represented the view of the social scientists of the Third World. Not surprisingly, it places the blame for poverty on the North and argues that the countries of the First World, America and Western Europe primarily, ravaged the poor countries of the South by taking their natural resources and leaving nothing in return (Manji, 2002). Dickinson sums this view up by saying, "the prosperity of the few is made possible by the oppression of the many" (1983, p. 27). Or, as Michael Novak's observes, the poorer nations, "look north in anger" (1986, p. 13).

Modernization Theory represents the standard view of the social scientists of the First World and, not surprisingly, places the blame for poverty on the deficiencies of the poor countries. They should have followed the path of the modern world as it developed. If they had embraced democracy, imposed self-discipline and promoted equality, they would no longer be poor. But, in fact, they have not and this explains much about why stubborn poverty is so prevalent (Isbister, 1991, pp. 34-68).

Neither of these views have much credibility in our post-colonial, post Cold War, high technology age. The countries of South Korea, Singapore, Thailand, and Japan, not to mention the war-ravaged nations of Western Europe, all emerged from their poverty and went on to a sustained level of prosperity. Neither Dependency Theory nor Modernization Theory explain these success stories.

Most today also realize that stubborn poverty is not caused by laziness or race. Neither has any explanatory value. The poor are no more lazy, improvident, stupid or incapable than the rest of us. As one author notes, "People do not become poor because they are idle; they become idle because they are poor" (Boerma, 1979, p. 15). Or as Myers observes, "People close to the edge cannot afford laziness or stupidity . . . Many of the lazy and stupid poor are dead" (2004, p. 64). Nor is the poor person inferior in intellect or capacity to work. Such an assertion does not survive any informed understanding of real poor people. The poor may be unfortunate and "stuck in an impossible and crushing situation, but he is not inferior or lazy" (Boerma, 1979, p. 77). The truth is often just the opposite - the poor have sophisticated survival strategies that many in the First World would find intimidating to master.

### ***Section 3. Causes of Poverty***

If poverty is not due to dependency on the North, ineptitude in the South, laziness, or stupidity why has aid been so ineffective across a vast range of cultures? What has western development missed? Why haven't the self-help strategies initiated by Heifer and imitated by so many not been enough to change the tide? There will be little agreement on the answer because "such analyses are tied to political views and moral positions, about which there will never be agreement" (Fowler, 1997, p. 4). However, the question must still be asked by each organization that exists to alleviate poverty. The argument here is that most developmental aid leaves out of consideration that level of being human that is most important; the beliefs and assumptions everyone carries inside over who they are, what they can expect from life and how they are to treat their neighbor. The moral values and spiritual beliefs by which people understand and shape their lives are root causes of poverty. Unless NGOs address poverty at this level of human nature, western aid will continue to remain ineffective at producing sustainable results.

This argument needs a context because there are many factors that can impoverish a community and hold it there for a time. These must be recognized and given their due before zeroing in on what produces *stubborn* poverty, the kind that remains fixed generation after generation. Moreover, there are a million different reasons why an individual may be poor. Bad choices, bad habits and bad luck come in a myriad different forms. None of these are a concern here. The focus of this discussion is not private poverty but community, regional and national poverty. With these caveats, there are three classes of causes that bring suffering to groups of people: natural causes; social, political or economic causes; and moral values and spiritual beliefs.

***Poverty from natural causes***

Natural causes refer to things that are neither man-made nor within human control. These include factors as diverse as poor geography, bad weather (drought, flooding, severe winters), poor soil, infectious diseases, and so forth. An example close to home occurred last fall when Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans. There was nothing that could be done to stop it and the disaster that ensued overwhelmed the efforts of even the largest charities. Even the US government, in spite of unprecedented amounts of money spent, has still not brought the city back to where it was and many families today remain uprooted. NGOs can respond to, but not prevent, poverty induced by such causes.

***Poverty caused by social, political and economic factors.***

Other poverty is due to man-made causes that are social, political and economic in nature. These include factors such as political corruption, armed conflict, incompetent bureaucracy, inadequate institutions, bad public policies, self-appointed rulers, and so forth. An example is the effect the 17 year long civil war left on Mozambique. Today almost 15 years after the war there are still no tractors or farm equipment of any size in the country. Even draft animals are a rarity. Few animals larger than a rabbit can be found anywhere in the wild because they were all eaten by a starving population. It will be another generation before the effects of their war are left behind.

Most discussions of poverty's causes stop here because poverty is assumed to be adequately defined in terms of the absence of things needed to secure a reasonably comfortable and decent life. These consist of food, clean water, shelter, clothes, medical care and enough knowledge, education and skills to find gainful employment. When the focus remains

exclusively on this set of causes it can produce wildly optimistic predictions about the possibility of quickly eliminating world poverty. The economist Jeffrey Sachs, for example, believes extreme poverty around the world could be eliminated "as soon as 2025" (2005, p. 51). Similarly, De Soto argues that poverty reduction could proceed at a rapid pace if the reserves of capital hidden and locked in antiquated economic systems were released (2003). But there is more to poverty than natural resources, economic systems and legal rights because there is more to being human than deprivation (Brandt, 1995, p. 260). Moses and Jesus both said that man should not live by bread alone (Deut 8:3; Matt 4:4). For those who believe this, the final category of poverty's causes is the most important of all.

***Poverty caused by moral values and spiritual beliefs.***

The Christian tradition teaches that people are made up of body, soul and spirit. Among other things, this means that embedded in each person, tribe, community and nation are values, assumptions, aspirations and beliefs that shape and express how people understand themselves. These values and beliefs have far reaching effects on the creation of wealth or poverty. Development that does not address this level of being human is unlikely to ever be sustainable.

This is the view of Lawrence Harrison, a senior fellow at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard. In his book *Under-development Is a State of Mind* (1985), a title that contains the essence of his argument, he contends that the underlying culture is the cause of most of the persistent poverty in the world today. Its true roots, he says, are to be found in the manner in which people understand themselves and the world around them.

Harrison takes his starting point from the work of Max Weber, a German sociologist from the late 19th and early 20th century. Weber studied the question of why some nations are

wealthy and others poor even though they share the same natural resources. He concluded that the achievements of the wealthier nations were based on a set of values and attitudes he called "the Protestant ethic." These include hard work, honesty, a belief that the world is rational, a willingness to save for the future, and a positive orientation toward life that is rooted in faith in God. These values and beliefs produced an emphasis on literacy and an increase in thrift and saving because with a firm confidence in the future everyone wanted to improve the lot of their families. These values were inculcated in the peoples of northern Europe through the home, the school and the church. Each can be traced back to Judeo-Christian tenets that promised "the making of a new man - rational, ordered, diligent, productive" (Landes, 2000, p. 12).

Harrison looks for evidence that similar values can produce the same effect outside of Western Europe and finds it in eight countries whose recent histories show a marked contrast in development: Ghana vs. South Korea, Nicaragua vs. Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic vs. Haiti, and Argentina vs. Australia. Each pair of countries began with similar economies and roughly equivalent natural resources, but took sharply different developmental paths in the 20th century. Ghana and South Korea were very much alike in the early 60s. But forty years later South Korea has become an industrial giant with strong democratic institutions. Who hasn't seen a cell phone or a television by Samsung or passed a car on the street made by Hyundai? No such changes have occurred in Ghana whose per capita income is now only 1/15th of South Korea's.

Harrison comments:

How could this extraordinary difference in development be explained? Undoubtedly, many factors played a role, but it seemed to me that culture had to be a large part of the explanation. South Koreans valued thrift, investment, hard work, education, organization and discipline. Ghanians had different values. In short, cultures count (2000, p. xiii).

Many others have come to the same conclusion independently of Weber or Harrison, though they

largely remain among the ranks of missiologists. One theologian wrote already in the 70s:

The root causes of poverty are found in the poor's beliefs about themselves and the world around them. The self-consciousness of the poor, expressed and embedded within their cultural values and mores and religious beliefs which are the most important factors in stubborn poverty. Their "poverty of self-consciousness" locks in feelings of separateness, inferiority and self-contempt (Boerma, 1979, p. 77).

More recently several theologians from third world countries have taken a similar position. An African theologian notes that the blame for stubborn poverty in Africa lies with "people's laziness, negligence, ignorance, corruption, lack of work-ethics, greed, jealousy, selfishness, cheap politics, immorality and a life where God's laws are disregarded . . ." (Majawa, 1998, p. 259). In a similar fashion an Indian theologian observes: "Hopelessness causes powerlessness and powerlessness destroys hope. This vicious circle . . . destroys the very energy needed to live" (Christian, 1999, p. 9).

Tina Rosenberg's Pulitzer Prize winning history of Eastern Europe during the Cold War (1996), also corroborates Harrison's argument. She describes in agonizing detail the culture of spying that was created under Russian rule, an initiative so vast that it ultimately acquired almost half of the populace on its payroll, all busy spying on the other half. The resulting fear and mutual loathing that was created across the region brought widespread cultural stagnancy and impoverishment. This is a remarkable example of how poverty can be created and sustained by purely human causes and Rosenberg demonstrates it happening right in the heart of western culture.

Let's return to the notion first introduced by Heifer that "teaching a person how to fish is better than simply giving a person a fish." This was the essence of the self-help developmental model that arose in the 70s. Undoubtedly it is true as far as it goes. But what if a person doesn't believe they are capable of learning how to fish by themselves? Or they believe that fish are

present only when the gods are appeased? Or they believe that their poverty is ordained by God and is permanent (Cf. Myers, 2004, p. 76)? Or they believe there may be fish today, but there is no guarantee there will be tomorrow because the world is random and irrational? Or they believe that the number of fish is permanently set and there won't be any left after their wealthier neighbor has taken his fill? There are all sorts of values and beliefs that, though hidden from obvious view to the developmental worker, can prevent the poor from fishing even if they know how. Their effect can encourage the poor to conclude that they are too unimportant to matter and so there is no real use in trying. The poor need to know not only how to fish but also how to think about themselves and the world around them as they consider the act of fishing. A healthy self-identity can revolutionize the way they go about their work. It must be grounded in the belief that they are somebody significant because God cares for them and that their world is rational because God created it so. With such values in place fishing suddenly becomes hopeful and full of possibilities.

Natural disasters can quickly impose crushing poverty on a large segment of a population. But that poverty usually is not permanent. People rebuild. A normal way of life is recovered. Political, social and economic causes are more insidious and last longer. Wars can ruin a landscape for decades. A tyrant can rule a country for a lifetime. A bad economic system can oppress a population for generations (Marxism!). But alongside these causes of poverty is the presence of destructive and enduring moral values and spiritual beliefs that can bind a population in a cycle of poverty that lasts not for decades or generations but for centuries. The fact that developmental aid in the last half of the 20th century did not produce a widespread impact on stubborn poverty is because it did not address that dimension of human nature that makes humans most human, the moral reasoning and spiritual commitments that guide people

through life and bring meaning to it. An NGDO that overlooks this dimension of being human interprets its fight against poverty "in a very narrow way" (Rodríguez-Carmona, 2004, p. 363) and runs the risk of being ultimately ineffective. This is especially true in countries like Africa where few people make a sharp distinction between the physical and the spiritual (Du Toit, 1998, p. 48). Such cultures find our secularized western understanding of the world far too limiting to be persuasive because it leaves entirely out of view an extensive realm of gods and spirits that they take for granted (Hiebert, 1982; Kille, 2006). Attention to their existence and the beliefs and behaviors that ensue is a must for effective aid.

### ***III. Literature Review***

#### ***Section 1. Fragmentary and Elitist Aid is Ineffective***

Outside of missiology, a student can search many texts before finding a discussion of the place of values and beliefs in developmental aid. Conversely, those missiological texts that treat development often focus their discussions primarily on the spiritual dimension of their work to the exclusion of other aspects of aid delivery, such as appropriate outcomes, effective evaluations, or maintaining ethics and discipline in donor relations (Cf. Aakers, 1999; Tetsunomo, 1996; Majawa, 1988; Oborji, 2002). Does this mean that the solution to non-development is for all NGDOs to become faith-based organizations? No, it's not that simple. Faith-based NGDO's have their own problems and are vulnerable to non-effectiveness through their own brand of naiveté and elitism. There will always be a place for developmental work that is religiously neutral, (e.g., the Red Cross). Moreover, as Harrison shows, the importance of values and beliefs can be discussed as part of the discourse concerning causes of poverty without an overt commitment to any faith component. Such a discussion would be a welcome addition to

the literature, regardless of an NGDO's orientation on spiritual matters. The important first step for developmental aid is to be aware that there are destructive values and beliefs in place among the poor, followed by a willingness to address them.

***Most developmental aid is fragmentary.***

But is such a willingness present? A review of the developmental literature confirms that moral values and spiritual beliefs are glossed over as non-existent factors in the vast majority of aid delivery. It would be difficult to discover from reading the literature that a moral or spiritual dimension of human life existed. Susan Hunter's book, *Black Death: AIDS in Africa* (2003) is an example. It has not a word on the moral dimension of AIDS, as if there were no moral assumptions or lifestyle choices associated with it. AIDS is treated solely as a viral epidemic. What does such an approach have to say to the young mother the author knows in Mozambique whose husband travels frequently as a laborer and whose mores say he can engage in sexual activity as part of his manly rights? He knows about AIDS but believes he is protected from harm by the bracelets he bought from the local witchdoctor. Over the next few years there is a very high chance that, like so many others in the village, both he and his wife, a mother of two young children, will become infected. The 12 million AIDS orphans in Africa today did not become that way due to a sneeze or shaking hands as if the virus were the flu (Cf., Campbell, 2003). Such is the reluctance by NGDO analysts and advisors to discuss anything that involves morality. The complete absence of discussion about the moral and lifestyle choices is itself rarely discussed.

Harrison asks the obvious question of this silence by the developmental industry: Why are the values and attitudes of the poor "ignored" (1992, p. 173)? Why are cultural causes

regarded as a nonfactor in poverty? The answer, it seems, is imbedded in the question. Bernard Adeney, a moral philosopher, points out that throughout the 20th century sociologists, anthropologists and economists have assumed the absolute relativism of all cultures and values (1995, p. 20). Cultures must be considered on their own terms and comparative judgments over their values or beliefs are not possible. This has become an unwritten taboo in the modern discourse on poverty and outside of missiological texts it is seldom broken.

This far-reaching assumption blocks out an enormous range of human being and experience. It means that nothing can come under consideration in aid delivery related to a person's personal beliefs or assumptions about themselves, their environment, their society, their purpose in life, what they can expect from their endeavors and even, or especially, their sexual behavior. Even if that behavior is the direct cause of more deaths than all the major wars of the 20th century combined. This non-discourse blocks out of view that which makes humans most human - the sense of self. The result when applied to the developmental profession is aid that is fragmentary because it does not address the whole person. In the end, man's moral and spiritual nature can be ignored at peril not only to aid delivery but to those beliefs and values held dear in the West.

***Most developmental aid is elitist.***

A second criticism that arises from the literature is that the vast majority of aid today is delivered in an elitist manner. This means it excludes the target population from having a say in the design, delivery or evaluation of the help they receive. Such has been the "dominant logic" (Pralhad, 2005, p. 78) of the past four decades of aid delivery by the West. Easterly calls this

top-down approach "utopian," and compares it to the failed five-year plans used by the Communist Bloc to industrialize the Soviet and Eastern Europe" (2006, p. 14).

A partial recognition of the hubris embedded in this approach has brought a recent shift in rhetoric among developmental specialists. NGDO leaders today talk about partnership as one of their guiding principles and affirm that locals should be included in project planning. But the reality is, critics say, that most NGDO policy planners continue to be "educated elites" who can't manage to stay more than a few days in a village to learn about its problems before deciding on a course of action (Porter, 2003, p. 134). As Fowler notes, "At no stage in what it refers to as 'the project cycle', [do they] actually take the time to ask the poor themselves how they perceive their needs" (1997, p. 213). The World Bank admits that it makes little effort to include local leaders in their planning. As a Senegalese peasant commented after one World Bank project was completed: "They do not know that there are living people here" (Hancock, 1989, p. 125). When aid does "too much for and too little with" the poor (Majawa, 1998, p. 264) charity ends up being "shallow" and ineffective (Aakers, 1993, 14).

In a recent article in the New York Times Paul Theroux, the travel writer, made this point with reference to the country of Malawi where he served in his younger years with the Peace Corps. He laments the top down approach promoted today by Bono and the Gates foundation where vast sums of money are distributed, all no doubt with good intent, but without reference to what the poor feel they need. He concludes, "The impression that Africa is fatally troubled and can be saved only by outside help . . . is a destructive and misleading conceit . . . The patronizing attention of donors has done violence to Africa's belief in itself" (2005).

Elitism, and its ugly companion racism, are common mistakes among faith-based NGDOs as well. A recent story in the Wall Street Journal highlighted the aborted attempt by a

famous evangelical pastor to open a kind of Christian Disneyland in the tiny country of Swaziland (Philips, 2005). According to the article, Bruce Wilkinson's plans to create a combination orphanage, bed-and-breakfast game reserve, bible college, industrial park and disneyesque tourist destination came to naught because it was planned entirely without local buy-in or involvement. Two years and several million dollars into the endeavor Wilkinson abruptly walked away after the problems became interminable. The author concludes, "He was just another in a long parade of outsiders who have come to Africa making big promises and quit the continent when local people didn't bend to their will" (Ibid).

Wilkinson's tale is a glaring example of the tendency among missionaries to deliver aid as part of a "god-complex." This is the assumption that not only do they know best, but they have a divine mandate to control and manipulate. It is all too easy to go into a poor community feeling that one can do as one wishes in the lives of the poor because the aid worker is "both superior and anointed by God to help" (Christian, 1999). Even if the best of intentions are granted, more often than not, faith-based developmental work is run by a missionary sent from America who exercises complete control over his or her project. Most express the hope that one day, perhaps, the work will be turned over to the locals. But only "when they are ready." Aakers comments on this delusion:

One ideal that has long been held by missionaries and development workers is that of 'turning it over to the nationals.' History reveals many examples of outside churches and organizations building up institutions, programs, and structures on their own terms and based on their own cultural orientations. When it is time to withdraw and turn it over to a national organization, things start getting complicated . . . the transfer is fraught with problems . . . I believe the correct principle, when possible, is to start to build something from the beginning that is developed and owned by the people of that country (1993, p. 36).

The widespread existence of elitism in the manner in which aid is distributed indicates that no one really believes in the equality of all cultures and values. This break between the affirmation of cultural equality and the elitist nature in which aid is actually delivered is the ugly and hypocritical companion to the taboo on discussing values and beliefs.

### ***Section 2. Delivering Aid that is Holistic and Inclusive***

Harrison's argument that underdevelopment is a state of mind stops at the discussion of moral and cultural values. It would have been stronger if he had asked about what shapes these values. There is yet a deeper layer of human thought that provides value formation. Jayakampur Christian, an Indian theologian, gets to the heart of the issue in writing, "Poverty demands a response that is essentially spiritual at its core" (1999, p. 22). In other words, it is not until the consideration of poverty inquires about the poor's spiritual beliefs that the level of human thinking that provides value formation comes into view. The basis for the value formation that is part of self-understanding is formed by notions of God, salvation, life after death, and how one should live. These beliefs then produce and become part of an individual's sense of self-worth, relationship toward his or her neighbor and expectations for the future. Spiritual beliefs provide the basis for a person's understanding of meaning in life. The author believes that developmental aid directed at this level of human nature best creates a basis for true sustainable development. What does such aid look like? It is not fragmentary but holistic, not elitist but inclusive.

#### ***Designing developmental aid to be holistic.***

In missiology, the word used to describe developmental aid which carries an emphasis on the spiritual dimension of life is "holistic" (McAlpine, 1995). As the African director of CRI's

Mozambican project likes to say, "In our community, there is no boundary between the spiritual and the material. Ours is a *holistic* worldview. So let us bring Jesus into the whole of life." This is a good summary of developmental work that delivers a positive and hopeful belief system along with its aid. In making this observation there is no intent to deny value and truth to other religions. It is enough to offer the life-affirming beliefs that Christianity provides, beliefs that offer a solid foundation for self-worth and a new confidence with respect to the environment in which the poor live (Cf., Jaki, 1988). "I have come to give you life, and that more abundantly," Christ said (John 10:10), and not just for this life but for the life to come as well (John 11:25).

CRI uses a "4S" model to describe the phases and activities which holistic development takes: survival, sustenance, self-reliance and sustainability (Califano, 2004). It is a model that begins with the physical but goes on to include educational and spiritual components. The first S is survival. In many cases the children and families who come into contact with a project are on the edge of existence. This is almost always the case with orphans. When they first enter a child sponsorship program they are often in a precarious physical condition. Their care must begin with aid that meets their immediate needs for food, clean water, shelter, clothes, and medical care.

The second S is sustenance. It stands for those aspects of aid which are designed to help children and their families stay well. This can take many forms, including hot lunches at preschools, vaccinations and checkups, regular medical care, and microeconomic activity that produces income. Already at this stage concepts of self-esteem, respect for their neighbor and a knowledge of the God who loves them are instilled into the participants. Delivery of this kind of aid involves establishing churches, building schools and helping community leaders achieve an advanced education.

The third S is self-reliance. It refers to those aspects of development that aim at long-term education in both school and church. It is virtually impossible to bring lasting change without a sustained commitment to education (Harber, 2002). This often means building or supporting elementary and secondary schools and can also involve ongoing microeconomic aid. The moral and spiritual goals of this phase of development are to help people understand themselves as valuable and valued children of God.

The fourth S is sustainability. This describes the end stage or final goal of the project and happens when the project has run for a long enough period of time that it is producing people who have been transformed from the inside by faith in God. Such people are enabled and encouraged to be contributing members to both church and society. When the confidence and the will is present, lasting change comes to a community.

***Designing developmental aid to be inclusive.***

Where developmental aid has been fragmentary, the better way is to be holistic. Where it has been elitist, the better approach is to be inclusive. There is a natural tendency by western aid workers, faith-based or not, to work with feelings of superiority because the very poor are often ignorant, sick and dirty. It is exceedingly difficult to bridge the cultural gap between a college educated American and those who need aid the most. One way to bypass this problem is by using leaders native to their communities to manage the aid. Ideally, these are men and women who have a vision to help and the education and life experience to succeed. What they lack are resources, precisely what the NGDO has the most. There are at least three advantages to this approach.

The first is that the presence of a local leader makes the delivery culturally sensitive. A

missionary or developmental worker may spend years in a culture and still have only begun to understand how the locals think and why they behave the way they do. That process is radically short-changed when local leaders are the project managers. Secondly, a local leader accelerates ownership by the community. People look to them as their own and natural feelings of suspicion and uncertainty are undercut. This gives aid a better chance of taking hold early on because the stakeholders work as partners rather than in a distorted relationship based on power (Gibb & Adhikary, 2002). As Cracknell says, local ownership can prevent the project from being irrelevant five years down the road (2000, p. 281). Finally, project costs are dramatically lower (Taylor-Ide, 2002, p. 34), sometimes by a factor of as much as a hundred to one.

Not just any community leader can become a project director. The vision and drive for the work must "come from within" (Landes, 2000, p.12). In a culture bound by poverty it is a difficult and rare thing to produce someone that has the confidence and vision to see how things are and envision how they might become (Porter, 2003, p. 139), plus the integrity to work for the good of others rather than enriching themselves. Ensuring the right leader for a project involves, essentially, a character test. For CRI, a leader must meet two essential criteria. First, they must express a desire to serve their community and secondly, that desire must be demonstrated by the fact they are already pursuing their vision at some personal sacrifice. Really, the true test is the latter, personal investment. A man or woman giving of themselves to their community before the NGDO comes along with riches from the West will not slowly or easily be subverted. To ensure that integrity continues, once a project is underway its leaders must be able to show consistent results in the form of changed lives, be accountable with the use of money and communicate regularly about their work with reports and photos.

Not that many decades ago such an approach would have been difficult to execute

because there weren't many people who had adequate training to be development project leaders. Leaders either had to be brought back to the USA for training, which was difficult and expensive, or they had to receive extensive coaching onsite by missionaries, which was very time consuming. As a result, few nationals rose to the top of developmental projects. The availability of leaders has increased over the last few decades due to the existence of hundreds of small seminaries and schools in remote locations around the world. Many of these schools, such as the seminary in northern Zimbabwe where the director of CRI's Mozambique project graduated, quietly turn out ten to twenty graduates each year. Many of these men and women have the vision, expertise and commitment to change their communities. What they lack are the resources. The strategy of including local leaders in planning, delivery and evaluation has worked well for CRI at its projects. There is no reason it cannot be repeated many times over.

#### ***IV. Recommendations***

In light of the review of literature above, this paper makes the following four recommendations for aid delivery by the author's organization.

- Projects should be designed from the start to be holistic. Inadequate or destructive cultural values and beliefs should be identified and targeted for special attention. Positive spiritual values and beliefs should be taught in churches, schools or assemblies where aid is delivered. The exact form will vary from one project to another but in all instances should be based on solutions designed by the local leadership.
- Projects should be managed by community leaders who have the desire, vision and commitment to help change their community. Their role should be integrated into every aspect of a project's ongoing life, from definition to delivery to evaluation.
- The story of a project should be well documented from both the local perspective and that of the organization's workers. These will serve to track change and progress, encourage local participants and endorse the project to stakeholders.

- Projects should be reviewed periodically to determine the effectiveness both of aid delivery and of value formation. These reviews should be conducted by local community participants and designed to include spiritual and moral components.

## ***V. Conclusion***

This review of developmental aid began by asking why after 40 years of systematic help there is still so much poverty today. The answer uncovered two ironies embedded within the developmental process. First, it is ironic that an industry erected on high moral values - helping the poor - is guilty of ignoring the importance of inculcating moral values along with the aid it dispenses. The assumption of the absolute relativity of all values and beliefs represents a wrong turn in developmental thinking and is inconsistent with what makes this sector a special place of service.

Secondly, it is ironic that an industry which proclaims the complete equality of all cultures delivers aid in an elitist manner with an air of cultural superiority. Too often NGOs come into a poor community like the ancient Romans, with all the power that education and money bring. Such arrogance undermines all that is attempted because it excludes local input and reduces buy-in to almost nothing. Development that is "served in foreign cups" (Yohannan, 2003, p. 141) will almost invariably produce disappointing results.

The first step in overcoming these ironies is to be aware of their existence followed by a resolve to avoid them. In his book *Good to Great* Jim Collins observes that the best organizations "display humility" in their relations toward their customers (2001, pp. 22-36). Humility is not something that can be commanded, only observed by others. But an organization that realizes its work is part of a convergence of many stories, all of them important (Myers, 2004) can take a big step in the right direction.

From the point of view of the developmental agency this convergence begins when it arrives in a poor community. The NGDO brings the story of its organization that includes the personal stories and beliefs and commitments of all those who serve in it. Their story then comes in contact with those who live in the community. Even those who make \$1 per day or less have their own personal histories, and they are no less complex than those who live in the developed world. They include the story of their family, their community, their culture and their country. The third story that comes into play is that of the developmental process itself. As it unfolds the poor contribute their story of how they lived before the NGDO arrived and how things changed as the work progressed. The NGDO contributes its story as the one who brings the aid along with the values and beliefs it affirms. For the life of the program these stories intertwine and out of them emerges a new story in which all share. When successful, it is a story that brings a deep sense of satisfaction for everyone involved.

Those who work at a faith-based organization like CRI believe that all these stories are subsumed in the larger one that the Bible tells (Myers, 2004, p. 12). Its story is big enough to include all lives within it and make sense of the whole. It provides answers to questions of who man is, what human life means, what God wants of mankind, how to deal with suffering, and ultimately how everyone's life will end.

As a small NGDO at work at the beginning of the 21st century, CRI is glad to have its part in the "Great Dance" (Lewis, 2003, p. 123) of developmental aid in our time. A resolve to be holistic and inclusive in aid design and delivery will ensure its work is not in vain.

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