

# Addressing Poverty with Participatory Learning

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Editor's Note: This Cape Town 2010 Advance Paper has been written by Ravi Jayakaran as an overview of the topic to be discussed at the Multiplex session on 'Wealth, Poverty and Power: Effectively Responding through the Global and Local Church.' Responses to this paper through the Lausanne Global Conversation will be fed back to the author and others to help shape their final presentations at the Congress.

When we talk about poverty, we need to do so with reference to wealth and examine it in its relationship to wealth. Poverty and wealth are directly correlated for those that interact socio-economically within the same context. People would love to set global standards for measuring poverty and wealth, and many people have tried doing that, with clearly definable indicators (currency/assets/consumption levels). However, on the ground these standards have not always worked, because the context plays a very significant role. Thus a family of five that earns at the pre-set poverty level of USD2 per day per person may in fact not be poor at all in some contexts. In fact a regular income of USD 10 for a family per day may put them in a 'fairly well off' category, in some countries. Poverty in a community thus needs to be measured with reference to those who are well off in the same context; and profiling of the different levels of poverty needs to be done based on the ratio of income to expenditure within each group. Each segment in this community that is socio-economically integrated exerts intra-contextual pressure on the other segments. The same crisis that befalls the whole community thus impacts different segments differently. For example, a disaster such as a flood that destroyed the standing crop, may cause one segment of the community to get poorer, while at the same time benefitting another segment of the community by making it get the upper hand through lending grain at an interest to them. Thus this group would consistently become wealthier.

Definitions need to be clarified now to establish the point of reference to these important and critical changes in the development process:

Definitions: Poverty: When a person's expenditure on a consistent basis is more than their income, without the creation of an asset, the person is considered to be poor Wealth: When a person's income is consistently more than their expenditure, thus allowing for the generation of surplus (and available cash) to convert into assets the person is considered to be wealthy. The extent to which a person is wealthy is the extent of that surplus Transformational Development: Transformational development is progressive, permanent, God intended change. In restricted contexts, it can be defined as follows: 'Progressive, permanent, development to full potential' Empowerment: Progressive, permanent release to develop and grow to full potential Participatory poverty reduction: Participatory poverty reduction is a strategy by which we interact closely with marginalized and poor communities and engage them in making assessments of their situation, identify critical needs and plan jointly for overcoming the problems

NGOs have often been guilty of declaring in their mission statement that they work and focus on 'the poorest of the poor?'. While this sounds very impressive, it completely overlooks the fact that often the poor are poor in a particular context by virtue of being under the oppression of the wealthy. We may choose to focus on the extremely poor while completely ignoring the wealthy in the same community, but after our work is over and we have gone, the wealthy will still be around - but now with a wedge created between them and the very poor. The situation soon returns to the status quo before our arrival and may in fact have been made worse. What then is the solution? How should we approach this issue?

The Bible has a beautiful example of a solution in Luke 19: 1-10 - the story of Zacchaeus. Once we get beyond the Sunday school perspectives on his profile (short/sycamore tree/chief tax collector) we

do in fact see something unique about this man whom the Bible refers to as being 'wealthy'. Like everyone else in any community, the wealthy too have needs. It was this sense of inadequacy that sent Zacchaeus scurrying ahead along the path that Jesus was to travel and up the sycamore tree to see who he was. Jesus on the other hand knew exactly what Zacchaeus' needs were and when he reached the spot stopped and called him down so he could actually stay in his house. The recognition and acceptance had such a profound impact on Zacchaeus that he felt strongly constrained to stand up in front of all his guests and describe his corporate social responsibility portfolio. His donation was of course very significant and sizable with a release of resources to the poor and marginalized in the community. It must have had a long term impact in the community. Zacchaeus also took the opportunity to clear his corporate image in the community by establishing in no uncertain terms that he was not a cheat as was presumed by people who lived around him. (Assumptions are often made about the wealthy 'they made it through dishonest means' and the poor 'they are lazy?'). By declaring a 1:4 'rate of return' for any dishonest dealing, he was making it clear to the people present that he was not dishonest. We too often make the same assumptions regarding the wealthy and perhaps for this reason seek to alienate them from the focus of our ministry. The Bible on the contrary is full of examples of those who were rewarded and blessed for being industrious, entrepreneurial and hard working. Transformation of the rich can result in tremendous release of resources to benefit the poor.

It is interesting to see how we name our projects that have a primary aim to serve the poor. They are rarely referred to as 'eradication of poverty' programs, 'poverty reduction programs', or even for that matter, 'wealth creation programs'. If that becomes the focus of the program, it would revolutionize the way the strategies are designed and would keep them from being watered down with goals like 'improving and developing' the circumstances in which the poor live. These often foster mere cosmetic changes that are transient, non-sustainable, and often don't make any significant difference in the lives of the poor.

Through years of working in communities with poverty alleviation programs around the world, I have discovered the need to go beyond standard definitions and descriptions of what poverty and wealth are. It is in this light that the definitions for poverty, wealth and transformation are shared at the beginning of this article. Let us begin with the first definition 'the one related to poverty. In 2001 as the Asia Pacific Regional advisor for food security and disaster mitigation I worked on trying to develop a simple technique for going beyond the simple wealth ranking exercises used in PRA/PLA (Participatory Rural Appraisal/ Participatory Learning and Action) techniques. This research led to the expanded use of a technique I had developed in the mid 90's called the TST or the Ten Seed Technique. The participatory tool that was used for working with communities to assess their household food-security status and profile is called the Rapid (Household) Food Security Status Assessment tool, or the 'RFSA'.

See Attached: Figure 1

We will now discuss the way to identify which groups are above the poverty line and the kind of efforts that are required to improve their food security and livelihood security status. If we look at the definition of poverty that appears in the beginning of the article, where poverty is defined as the state wherein a household consistently has an expenditure ratio that is higher than its income, then the place where the poverty line will be drawn is between the 2nd and 3rd groups, namely between the Neik Machium and the Neik Krao. Below this is the place where we see (according to the definition of poverty) that the expenses on a consistent basis exceed the income without the creation of an asset. It is at this place that the equation for appropriate development changes. To make ends meet the Krao and the Tual Karo have to borrow money and grains from the ones in their community who have surplus. When they return this they have to do so with interest. The result is that they keep getting poorer and poorer while the groups that they borrow from become wealthier and wealthier. Similarly, if we examine the definition about wealth, we can see how the first two groups (Neik Mein and Neik Machium) are able to generate surplus and thus wealth. While the ratio of the Neik Machium shows a 'zero balance' what essentially happens is that they slowly find ways to curtail expenditures in order to generate savings 'which though marginal, ultimately add up to be

significant.

The strategy for development in each of the groups also changes. For the first two groups, ways that help in increasing income are immediately manifested in the generation of surplus. On one hand, income generation programs do not benefit the 3rd and 4th groups because increased income is immediately absorbed by their debt. On the other hand, any program designed to reduce expenditures will bring about an improved ratio between income and expenditure, and thus result in relief for them. We have seen in developing countries around the world that when the 'poor' and 'very poor' fall into the debt trap, they end up being subject to some of the worst forms of exploitation possible.

How does one work with a community that is marginalized and subject to all these excruciating restraints induced by the socio-economic interaction of give and take? MAP International has been working over the years to develop such a strategy. The program is called the THV-50-40-10® or the Total Health Village 50-40-10®. The last three numbers that form the name represent the strategy of the approach, namely 50 % focus on integrated community development, 40 % focus on community health with an emphasis on disease prevention, and only 10 % emphasis on treatment, namely treating that which could not be prevented. The THV 50-40-10® project is a way of impacting a village of about 1000 people to achieve the millennium development goals through active community participation, empowering communities to solve their own problems and through smaller inputs so that the program can easily be emulated and replicated. The participatory tool that is used for the launch of this program is called the HWVA or the Holistic Worldview Analysis tool. Details of how to use this tool are given in the following section:

HWVA: (Holistic Worldview Analysis): Worldview analysis is continuing to emerge as a solution to many of the struggles faced in development circles such as creating spiritual baselines, community holistic perceptions, collating Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) profiles, analyzing community survival strategies, and developing community level development plans. Field staff have faced two major problems in using Participatory tools in the past. These problems have been the struggle of analyzing the information to use it as a planning tool in which the community continues to remain an active partner, and bringing together the findings of the exercises in the form of a collated and analyzed depiction of the Survival strategy of the community. The Worldview analysis tool has now helped solve all these struggles and in addition provides a spiritual status baseline for the community. The Holistic Worldview Analysis (HWVA), was formerly known as the Wholistic Worldview Analysis (WWVA). I researched and developed this tool in 1997 in India. The observations from this initial study were shared extensively through a World Vision International document entitled 'Working with the Poor' by Dr Bryant Myers (MARC publication). At this stage the development and integration of the spiritual dimension into the other aspects of the survival strategy of the community were understood and defined. However there was still a struggle in measuring and comparing one aspect with the other. Further work on this continued, building on the initial research, testing it, and continuing further research. Through studies conducted in Sri Lanka, the People's Democratic Republic of Laos, and Cambodia the TST (Ten Seed Technique) was integrated into the process and a simple but graphic measuring tool was developed. This was further tested, modified and refined while I was in the People's Republic of China until it emerged as a useable tool. Through several workshops and discussion groups, this technique has been shared with NGO representatives from several counties in Asia and Eastern Europe. Judging from extensive feedback and follow up of training, the technique has now been fairly well refined for wider use in the field. It is easy to learn and practical, without requiring people to be highly skilled or technical in order to facilitate it.

I have sought here to introduce the technique in a simple and straightforward way, with details of what is required to get things started. I hope that more field practitioners will feel inspired to learn more about the technique so that they can use it in their own areas of work.

As this exercise is completed, there is usually an increase in the volume of discussion, which is followed by silence as the group waits expectantly to see what will happen next. This is the stage for analysis of the survival strategy. The seeds in the outermost circle show the Vulnerabilities of the

community, while the innermost circle shows the Capacities of the community. The segments in which these appear show which particular issue these capacities and vulnerabilities are related to. The next step is then to proceed with ?interviewing? the diagram and seeking clarifications from the community on seed allocation to a particular location that may not be clearly evident. After spending some time on this, the next step is to mark out the greatest Vulnerabilities (outermost circle) and greatest Capacities (innermost circle). At this stage the seeds in the middle circle are not considered, as it is assumed that the outsiders who are associated with the community are involved in a constructive association. However after there is progress with the development of the community, this external dependence must also be considered to be a vulnerability that needs to be overcome. When this is done, the community?s development will move towards long-term sustainability.

The process of development involves reducing the vulnerabilities and building the capacities of the Survival strategy of the community. This aspect has been extensively dealt with in my book, *Participatory Poverty Alleviation & Development*, published in 2003. This book is currently also translated into Chinese and is used as a development resource textbook in World Vision International-China. Some simple principles involved in carrying these out almost simultaneously are for the following reasons: Just building capacities without reducing vulnerabilities will result in frustration for the community, because the vulnerabilities will remain and continue to be a hindrance to their development. On the other hand just removing vulnerabilities without building capacities will result in the community becoming dependant on the development agency.

The following is a list of multidimensional development related information that can be generated from the HWVA exercise (including the ones mentioned above):  
The consolidated survival strategy of the community  
The C/V (capacity/vulnerability) analysis of the community  
The areas in which the community depends on outsiders for its survival  
The comparative poverty profile of the community for comparison with other communities for prioritizing for development  
The basic foundation for developing a PCDP - Participatory Community (level) Development Plan  
The spiritual baseline profile of the community  
For planning a holistic development strategy for a community

I have sought to highlight the aspect of the analysis that relates to the spiritual baseline of the community, and how it relates in holistic integration to its worldview. Every community, like individuals, seeks God in the areas of their greatest needs. They run to God in crisis, seeking him to help them out. In the same way, from the HWVA picture we can see that the areas of greatest need are the issues for which the community seeks help from praying to the gods, spirits, and ancestors. This therefore means that it is in these areas that messages related to God make the greatest sense to them. The Lord Jesus, in his preaching, concentrated on relating God to the survival strategies of the people He interacted with (Luke 8:5-15, Luke 12:22-31). When this is done in the community it makes sense immediately, because it is related to their worldview. Thus the HWVA tool can enable the planning of an integrated development plan that responds to the needs of the community, and also reaches into the areas in which its members are seeking God. This will require identifying messages that are related to that issue which is a vulnerability (with a high number of seeds in the outermost circle).

After the HWVA of the community is developed, the following is the holistic development strategy that develops around it:  
The development priorities that emerge from the analysis of the HWVA are listed for addressing in the form of action steps.  
The areas of vulnerability of the community become the key areas for developing the ?Christian witness strategy? to the community ? because vulnerabilities are the areas in which communities seek God.  
The team that is on the ground must recognize that their very presence in the area has begun the cleansing and transformation process (Psalm 125:3)  
The team begins as it walks around in the area for the healing of the land. (2 Chronicles 7:12-14). They also ask God on behalf of the people they have come to serve with, to lift the curse on the land that was put by God when Adam and Eve sinned (Genesis 3: 17-19)  
As the programs start to get put into action (from step 1), the facilitators pray to God to inactivate and bind the spirits of darkness that operate in the area. (Luke 11:14-23)

When Mahatma Gandhi (Mr. M.K. Gandhi who led the freedom movement in India) returned to India

from South Africa, he was approached by the leaders of a movement there to play a leading role in India's fight for freedom. Gandhi replied that he was not sufficiently familiar with India and its people, because he had studied and lived abroad for a long time. He was then advised by Professor Gokhle (a prominent Indian leader) to correct that by traveling around India and meeting the people. Gandhi did just that, and was appalled at the condition of the people. At that time, a clergyman called Rev C.F. Andrews was with Gandhi and often had discourses with him about God. In one of his discourses on the issue of God and Poverty, Gandhi commented, "Poverty in some places in India is so great that even God, if he had to appear to those people would have to do so in the form of a loaf of bread". There is no record of what transpired in the discussion after that, but does it come as a surprise that Jesus in John 6:48-51 said "I am the bread of life"? He then went on to say, "Your fathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, that a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." Jesus' offer always has been, "Come unto me all that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!"

Editor's Note:

Images from this article can be found as attachments.

Author's Note:

The WWVA technique and its use for launching a wholistic witness strategy in a community will gradually be written out as a book. The use of the WWVA in launching a THV-50-40-10® (Total Health Village) are described in a lecture on the subject by the author given at Emory University and can be listened to by connecting to a good internet link with broadband at the following link: <http://coursecast.sph.emory.edu/CourseCast/Viewer/Default.aspx?id=af2bc414-342d-4718-ae88-f7c3d005c444>

Glossary of Acronyms used in this article:

FGD	Focused Group Discussion
HWVA	Holistic Worldview Analysis
NGO	Non Government Organisation
PLA	Participatory Learning And Action
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
TST	Ten Seed Technique

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Bibliography, references and recommended further reading: Child survival connections article: can be obtained from author at [RJayakaran@map.org](mailto:RJayakaran@map.org) Measuring what Matters: [http://www.unicef.org/rosa/ROSA\\_Evaluation\\_Journal.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/rosa/ROSA_Evaluation_Journal.pdf) Wholistic Worldview Analysis article: [http://www.iied.org/NR/agbioliv/pla\\_notes/pla\\_backissues/56.html](http://www.iied.org/NR/agbioliv/pla_notes/pla_backissues/56.html) Ten Seed Technique Book: <http://www.fao.org/participation/Ten-Seed%20Technique-Revised.pdf> Regional Economic Integration in GMS: <http://www.adb.org/NGOs/annex1001.asp> NGO ?private sector collaboration in poverty eradication strategies in the GMS of ES Asia: <http://www.adb.org/NGOs/private-sector/private-sector.pdf>