

The Church and Poverty Reduction

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**development
partners**

Basic message

- Church has to be/come involved in poverty alleviation; unlikely to surprise
- Assume that Church involvement in poverty alleviation is part of the spiritual / Biblical Mission of almost every church; not my role to discuss primary spiritual mission
- Talk about poverty alleviation in a societal context because of the **particular conditions** that prevails in our society AND I want to talk about an **approach that takes the Church potentially beyond the traditional / stereotypical** Church approach to poverty alleviation
- 5 particular characteristics of the approach that I recommend:
 - systemic
 - policy and theory-informed
 - empirical / contextualized
 - strategic
 - and professionally organized

The Why? Question

- **Why** this approach and not the stereotype of church involvement in poverty alleviation
- **Stereotype: Donate small** amounts of cash **or in-kind goods to other service delivery** groups, or they provide **small groups of volunteers** to conduct **relatively** well-defined, **periodic** tasks ... or something along these lines
- **Why not? Short answer:** problem of poverty – and the problem of deprivation - is to complex and daunting. Well-meaning but inadequate approach could only make the problem bigger.
- And if you **still ask why** then the unpleasant part of the answer is **that those who are deemed (right or wrong) to be responsible for is not making the required impact**
- Elaborate

The 'Systemic' and 'subs-systems' or institutions

- The answer has to do with the **systemic nature** of the challenge
- As a Sociologist is it becoming painfully clear **that our society is systemically flawed**
- **Rephrase:** South African society is characterized by a particular type of **social system** that is and entraps us in the vicious cycle that keeps on reproducing the legacy of the past and that exacerbates the effects of the state of the world economy on South Africa
- Talking about: **Overall functioning of our society as a system** and relationship between major sub-systems - societal institutions like the political, business, civil society, education, religion, sport, etc.
- Nature and extent to the **role of the church in poverty alleviation** is influenced by how other institutions perform their role(s) or not.
- **Variations in terms of features** of the system and relations of institutions to one another.

Pre-modern vs modern societies

- Modern societies are **structurally different** from pre-modern societies
- **Pre-modern societies are structurally less complex** and typically dominated by the actors and agencies of one or two institutional spheres (Monarchy or Church)
- As societies evolve to become more modern their **structures become more complex** and different institutions become more important to make the social system work
- A **modern democratic society is institutionally plural, politically plural, complex, and more egalitarian than hierarchical; more reason and science and less power and coercion**
- However, evolution of societies are **not so linear** and we find that modern societies contain many features that we may describe as pre-modern; often a particular institutional sphere is **dominant relative** to others inhibiting the systemic effectiveness of the whole and the parts.

The domination of ‘the polity’

- I argue, that South Africa is in a sense **struggling to become a ‘modern society’**
- One of the symptoms is that the **institutions associated with power and politics** are bloated and expanded beyond what is good for the society.
- This is very important to understand:
 - Our society is **‘over-politicized’**
 - The political institutions, agencies and actors are disproportional to and **dominate** other sectors and institutions of society.
 - Conversely, the non-political institutions of society are under-developed, under-assertive and **sub-ordinate** and we suffer because of their under-performance

This **may not have been a problem if the political entities – politicians, parties and government – were effective** and efficient (benevolent dictator scenario)

- However, there is **growing evidence** that progress with, specifically, socio-economic transformation is stalled and diminished by this flaw in the South African institutional system
- The **polity** has acquired a **monopolistic quality** in terms of power and presence in many key spheres of life but **lack the capacity** to turn the rhetoric and power invested in it into socio-economic transformation
- Even if the dominant political agencies and actors had the capacity to make transformation work, the **agenda of the dominant political agencies and actors have also become suspect**. It appears that the retention of power and access to wealth rather than by social transformation has become the primary motivator for many in the political arena

Other sectors of society

- Other sectors of society have become **sub-ordinate** to the political and have become **co-responsible** for the situation by accepting their lesser status in society
- However, this problem is not going unnoticed:
 - Consumer insights company *Pondering Panda* a few days ago published a report indicating that **four out of five younger South Africans did not trust politicians.**
 - Last month *Grant Thornton International Business Report* reported that **sixty-seven per cent of South African privately held businesses are putting off investment decisions owing to uncertainty about the future political direction of the country.**
- We can find much more evidence of the **wide-spread disillusionment** with politicians and civil servants . It is more important to focus on what we do about it

The challenge that we all face

- Society, as a whole, face a **major challenge** to undo this **colonization** of our institutional landscape / social system
- **Ideal** - more modest, supportive, enabling and developmental role for government and a more assertive role for other spheres like business, civil society, religion etc..
- **Not be easy** to get government to become more modest but other sectors can become more assertive ...
- The **church have wake up and revitalize its role**, take up responsibility; more than otherwise and this is because the state is not coping; eroded its own capacity, in interest of all; stop pointing fingers at government and start doing what is required.

- Most **vital indicators of socio-economic and economic performance** that I am aware of are pointing downwards and puts South Africa at the lower end of the international performance table
- Perhaps more important **poverty and deprivation at the level of local communities** are becoming source of **conflict**
- **Aristotle** said centuries ago that poverty is the mother of crime.
- In our context many think that the **father of crime** is the politician (past and the present)
- My point is that, if the **extended family** members don't get involved the child will become a problem that for everyone.
- Need for strategic, professional assertiveness

Important homework and requirements for success

1. Familiarization with Policies that are in place
2. Knowledge of Theories and State of the Art
3. Strategic approach
3. Empirical Research / Contextualization
4. Appropriate organization / resources for effective implementation

1. Familiarization with Policy and Programmes – success and failure

- Local community level poverty alleviation efforts happen against a **background** of the UNDP Millennium Development Goals, the NDP, Provincial, Metro, IDP and War on Poverty / Hunger and many related policies of different departments and directorates.
- There is a **National War on Poverty and a War on Hunger in our Metro**; the evidence suggest that the war on poverty is **being lost** in South Africa on all levels. In fact I have not seen indications of war; a lot of planning and talking and maybe a **skirmish here and there but not a war.**
- To be fair poverty eradication or alleviation is **not easy**. The widespread failure of poverty eradication strategies should forewarn us. South Africa after almost 20 yrs of democracy still not solving the problem
- And **international literature** is flooded with evidence of failure. For instance

Failure of Poverty Alleviation

Professor Akhil Gupta (a well-known anthropologist) writes in his new book (2012), *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India* that:

- Indian bureaucracy prevents **expansive state programmes** from alleviating poverty, **leaving more than a quarter of the country's population to survive on less than a dollar per day.**
- Gupta said that rampant **corruption and the state's obsession with paperwork** despite widespread illiteracy amongst India's poorest citizens leads to the **arbitrary distribution** of state assistance.

In the same debate about the persistence of poverty in India others argue that Indian residents at the bottom of the caste hierarchy – adivasis and dalits, who comprise 25 per cent of the population – are **systematically excluded** from the processes of poverty alleviation.

- Questions are being asked about the kind of economic growth that India is currently pursuing, which has led to the **economic polarisation** of Indian society.

Why all this failure? Recent article by Mal Warwick, author of *The Business Solution to Poverty* on widespread failure of poverty reduction projects in developing societies

He says that there are six reasons why most poverty alleviation projects fail:

1. Most Anti-Poverty Programs Are Planned by People Wearing Suits in Air Conditioned Offices.
2. Anti-Poverty Programs Are Typically Top-Down, Hierarchical
3. Efforts to Eradicate Poverty Have Only Rarely Been Directed at Poor People or the Challenges They Face
4. Giveaways Breed Dependence and Self-Doubt Instead of Social Change. Philanthropy isn't the answer.
5. There's Never Enough Money Available for Foreign Aid or Philanthropy to Expand Successful Anti-Poverty Programs.
6. Anti-Poverty Efforts Have Been Scattershot and Uncoordinated.

2. Theoretical approaches to poverty and poverty alleviation

- Not under-theorized. Find a way of working through the insights and separate the good and useful out of the range of theories
- Important to detect the ideological undertones of a particular theory and to be cautious to not fall into the trap of buying the narrowly defined explanations that are often designed to promote an ideology or discredit an opposing ideology rather searching for a more objective truth
- Not theory for its own sake. Need it to work for us ... Leonardo da Vinci apparently said that *...he who loves practice without theory is like the sailor who boards ship without a rudder and compass and never knows where he may cast.* And, philosopher Immanuel Kant said that *... experience without theory is blind, but theory without experience is mere intellectual play.*
- But bad theory and theorizing to be clever is a serious obstacle in the way of progress about the definition of poverty.

Theorizing and conceptualizing

- One of the important functions of theory is that it assists us with clarifying `concepts
- Not elaborate here but based on the work that I have done over the past few years I know that it is very important to ... not only talk about poverty, few and simple assets, low income, low consumption, unreliable supply of cash and food but of poverty and deprivation which included:
 - Economic features
 - Social features
 - Psychological / Dependency
 - Marginalised / Exclusion
 - Safety and security
 - Mental satisfaction
 - Development-related mindset / sense of progress optimism and hope

It is always important to appreciate the uniqueness of each setting and not to assume that any theoretical template can simply be applied.

Types of theories

- Vast literature on poverty. Selected a few types to illustrate the approach that I recommend. Very brief statement

Blame the individual

Typically, politically conservative theoreticians blame individuals in poverty for creating their own problems, and argue that with harder work and better choices the poor could have avoided (and can reverse) their problems

Other variations of the individual theory of poverty ascribe poverty to lack of genetic qualities such as intelligence that are not easily reversed

Blame the culture

Poverty is created by the transmission over generations of a set of beliefs, values, and skills that are socially generated but individually held.

Individuals are not necessarily to blame because they are victims of their dysfunctional subculture or culture.

Blame the system

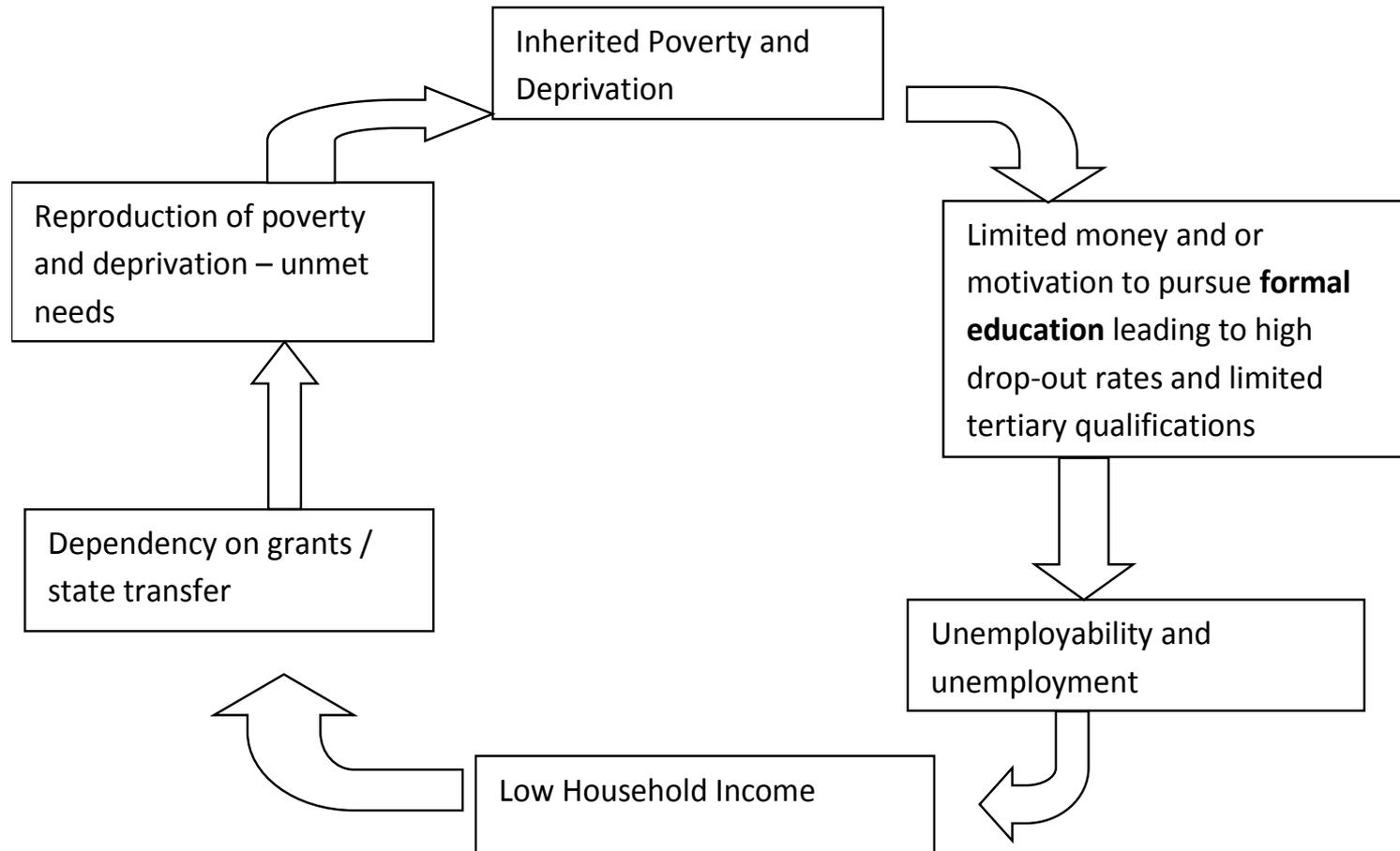
Many left inclined theorists look not to the individual as a source of poverty, but to the economic, political, and social system which causes people to have limited opportunities and resources with which to achieve income and well-being.

The 19th century social intellectuals developed a full attack on the individual theory of poverty by exploring how social and economic systems overrode and created individual poverty situations. For example, Marx showed how the economic system of capitalism created the “reserve army of the unemployed” as a conscientious strategy to keep wages low. Later Durkheim showed that even the most personal of actions (suicide) was in fact symptoms of the social system

What would you say are
the shortcomings of these?

Beyond reductionist thinking - Cyclical Theories

- Cyclic theories look at the individual and their community as caught in a spiral of opportunity and problems, and that once **problems dominate they close other opportunities** and create a cumulative set of problems that make any effective response nearly impossible
- Looks at individual situations and community resources as mutually dependent, with a **faltering economy**, for example, **creating individuals who lack resources** to participate in the economy, which makes economic survival even harder for the community since people pay fewer taxes.
- A theory of “interlocking, circular, interdependence within a process of cumulative causation” that helps explain economic underdevelopment and development.



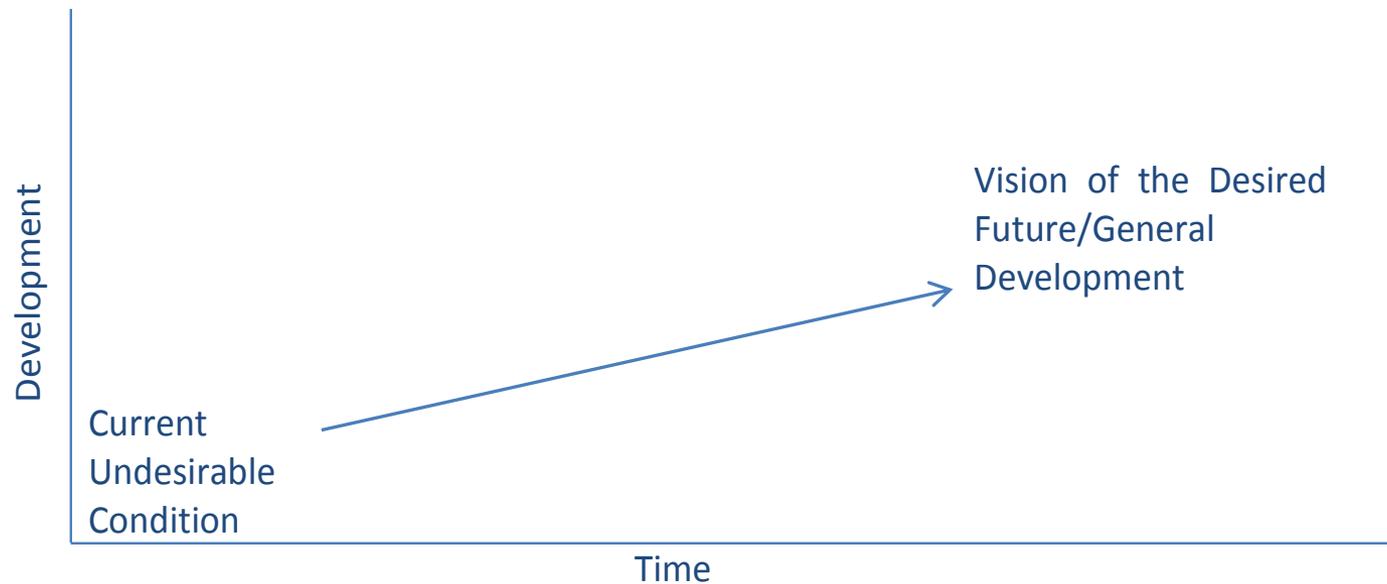
More complex theory - theory must help us to understand the complexity

- All these theories are relevant and true to an extent. And there are many others
- Problem with theories/sts that they inevitably want to prove a particular point
- Focus on the specific issue and variables related to it they are blinded to a whole array of other significant factors
- Much social theory suffers from the tendency to choose between either structure or agency / action to explain the nature and origins of social phenomena.
 - **agency - people, individuals, groups, action ... the micro**
 - **structure - system, conditions, culture ... the macro**
- the problem is that both instances preclude the possibility of exploring the relative influence of each aspect
- That is why I am an eclectic and pragmatist but not a cat on a hot tin roof. One must have a framework

- **Stay with me for a few minutes!**
- While **recognizing the interdependence of structure and agency** I argue that they **operate on different timescales**
- At any particular moment, existing structures constrain and enable agents, whose **interactions** produce intended and unintended consequences, which **leads to structural change and the reproduction or transformation of the initial structure**
- The resulting structure then provides a new context of action for future agents.
- So while structure and agency are interdependent, it is possible to **unpick them analytically**. It is possible to **investigate how context shape action and interactions of people and how those interactions in turn reproduce or transform the initial context**
- Social processes are constituted through an **endless array of such sequences but, as a consequence of their ordering in time**, it is possible to disengage any such sequence in order to **investigate its internal causal dynamics**.
- **If we can do so we can become more strategic in focussing on certain variables because of their causal relationship with other variables**

What does that mean for our approach to poverty alleviation?

- Start with the logic of development
- I work with a simple graph to explain almost everything that I do in development work





However, that simple graph becomes complex to make it more practical for planning and implementing development. I introduce the concepts of conditions or CONTEXT and ACTION into it.

						Context 4	
					Action 3		
				Context 3			
			Action 2				
		Context 2					
	Action 1						
Context 1							

What this graph says:

- Not all and any action is possible because of the constraints of the context or at least some actions are more challenging than others; each context **constrains but also enables action** but differently at different time
- This means that **some form and level of action is possible** and contemporary actors can reproduce or transform the context through our actions
- What is possible in terms of the action that we can take in the context **depend both on the qualities of the context and the quality of our agency / action**. It also means that **we have to deal with the immediate challenges; we cannot leapfrog into the desired future**
- **If we think that we can pursue the desired future without working through the earlier phases we will be disappointed**
- It is **not a matter of the one stage of development must be completed before you can start with the next**; rather a matter of priority. They can also overlap to a certain extent.

What it says about what we can do about poverty

- We cannot take any action to reduce poverty if it is not enabled by the context and if we do not have the capacity to take such action. Have to understand the context and have to understand your own limitations
- But we can take some form and level of action and make a real difference. We have to be **strategic, patient and persist** and link each action as a step towards the **long-term goal**
- Obvious example: We can not expect to create employment through ambitious export orientated economic growth if we do not have an education system that produces the required human resources for world-class production..... And there are many vital developmental sequences to work out
- It is not a matter of the one stage of development must be completed before you can start with the next; rather a matter of priority. They can also overlap to a certain extent.

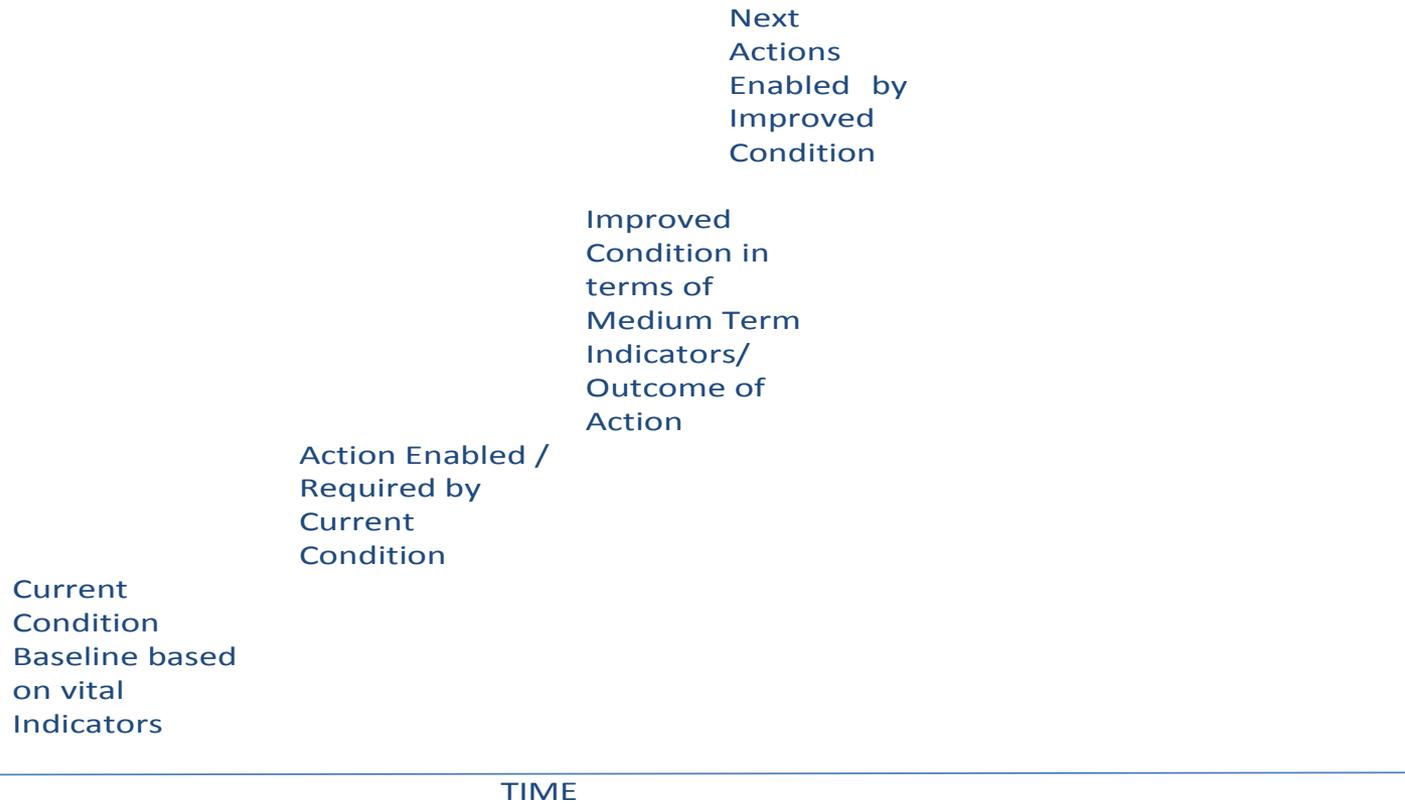
To be able to put this process in motion we need to do a few things

- State the Development Vision by way of **statistical development indicators**. What is the desired future (15 – 20 years from now?)
- Determine the current undesirable condition in terms of the same **statistical development indicators**. **Work out the gap and set interim - short term and medium term - goals**
- Form a **Social Compact** that commits all parties to work towards the same vision according to the basic plan. Such a plan should contain specific indicators to indicate what must be achieved over time.
- More specifically **these goals must be translated into a strategic development plan** that must indicate how the plan will be **implemented** and the **organization** that is required, that is, the **resources** required, **who** will be responsible and who are **capable** of making it work and what will be their **roles and responsibilities**.



Long-Term Goal based on
Indicators of Development
Vision

DEVELOPMENT



This is typically presented in what is called a Logical Framework which could become very complex. One would need something like this template:

SHOW LOG FRAME TEMPLATE

Important theoretically-informed insights

Poverty and deprivation and exclusion; the importance of inclusive development and inclusive growth.

- **Inclusive growth** basically means, “broad based growth, shared growth, and pro-poor growth”
- It decreases the rapid growth rate of poverty in a country and increases the involvement of people into the growth process of the country
- Inclusive growth by its very definition implies an equitable allocation of resources with benefits incurred to every section of the society
- But the allocation of resources must be focused on the intended short and long term benefits of the society such as availability of consumer goods, people access, employment, standard of living etc.

The importance of the community economy and not assuming that economies cannot function on community level; concept of a “sustainable community”

1. Use of locally produced goods and services .
2. Production of goods and services for local use
3. Local re-investment of profits
4. Long-term employment of local residents
5. Local skill development
6. Local decision-making
7. Community and public health
8. Physical environment
9. Neighbourhood stability
10. Human dignity
11. Support for other CED initiatives

- Unmet needs and economic opportunities and Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid.
 - The concept of The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid originally appeared as an article by C. K. Prahalad and Stuart L. Hart
 - The article was followed by a book with the same title that discusses new business models targeted at providing goods and services to the poorest people in the world.
 - It makes a case for the fastest growing new markets and entrepreneurial opportunities being found among the billions of poor people 'at the bottom of the [financial] pyramid'.
 - In economics, the bottom of the pyramid is the largest, but poorest socio-economic group. In global terms, this is the 4 billion people who live on less than US\$2.50 per day.
 - The phrase “bottom of the pyramid” is used in particular by people developing new models of doing business that deliberately target that demographic, often using new technology. This field is also often referred to as the "Base of the Pyramid" or just the "BoP".

Asset-based approaches

- Asset-based community development (ABCD) is a methodology that seeks to uncover and use the strengths within communities as a means for sustainable development.
- The first step in the process of community development is to assess the resources of a community through a capacity inventory or through another process of talking to the residents to determine what types of skills and experience are available.
- The next step is to support communities, to discover what they care enough about to act.
- The final step is to determine how citizens can act together to achieve those goals.

Research - Understand the empirical reality

- Can not imagine a poverty reduction project that does not involve research as a means of **giving direction and monitoring of impact**.
- You made a **good start** by assessing and reviewing you current activities. Good job!
- **My concern:** Even at a local level we are not drilling down deep enough. The problem of superficial analysis that derive from prematurely generalizing about complex socio-economic issues leads to making hasty conclusions about a population with the effect that it masks or hides important contextual information.
- In statistics, it may involve basing broad conclusions regarding the statistics of a survey from a **small sample group** that fails to sufficiently represent an entire population.
- The **ideal scenario** is to focus on the process on a decentralized level instead of putting people and communities into categories where they do not belong.
- **Ward, suburb, smaller areas, sustainable community.**



EXAMPLE OF COMPARATIVE TABLE
60 Wards of NMB

EXAMPLE OF A WARD PROFILE
Ward 16 Kwazakhele

Finally, appreciate the organizational requirements

- Partnerships
- Purpose built organization





