

SEEDBED

2005, Second Trimester

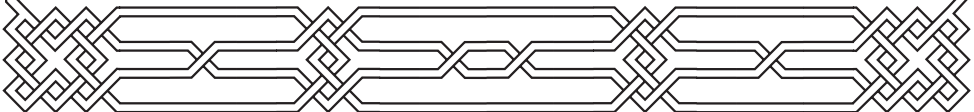
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EDITORIAL

The world is in turmoil these days as terrorism and suicide bombers bring death and destruction. News commentators interview politicians and police authorities in their search for explanations. As Christian workers in the Arab world, we look more closely at questions of theology and seek to understand the thinking and practices of the Muslim peoples we know. At the same time, we press forward in our efforts to share the Gospel with them. We hear amazing stories of God's work to reveal Christ in a variety of situations throughout the Arab world. We do not lose heart, but continue to make Him known and to disciple those Arab Muslims who are coming to faith in Christ.

This issue of *Seedbed* has a variety of articles to stimulate our thinking of how we evangelise and how we disciple. We are reminded also of the importance of prayer behind all our efforts. I look forward to your reactions and suggestions that are stirred up by our colleagues' articles. Have you any experience with the

question of coincidence that IL has raised from his teaching of students? Or can you add to Um Ithnain's guidelines for personal evangelism? What has been your involvement with transformational development as described by SM? What practical suggestions can you make for its implementation? How have you applied its principles to church planting issues? What advice do you have for discipling MBBs and encouraging their formation of a community?

Bear with us as we continue to work through the electronic publication of *Seedbed* — both for AWM colleagues and for other subscribers. If you have not yet contacted us to let us know if you would like the electronic version, please do so soon. We are trying to bring our records up to date as well as to develop a system of archives for past issues. If you would like any of the materials mentioned by our authors in this *Seedbed*, please get in touch with me.

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Transformational Development — Christian Response to the Issues of Global Poverty

by S. M.

Editor's Note: *We preface this article with a brief interview with its author.*

Editor: How did your interest in transformational development begin?

S.M.: *After I became a Christian, I saw God touching every part of my life. My home country was going through an economic crisis that affected my family as well as the general population. God in His mercy blessed me by providing work with an NGO. This was a positive testimony to my Muslim friends for they saw God's provision for me. Then I had an opportunity to bless others because of this financial resource. But I did not become wealthy nor did I see this as part of the prosperity Gospel theory.*

Editor: What was the nature of the work?

S.M.: *This NGO carried out projects in agriculture, education, training and assistance to the government through an advisory role. My eyes were opened to see how effectively people's lives could be touched through relationships and our witness to God's love and care.*

Editor: How did you gain more training in this important subject?

S.M.: *God led me to the UK where I could study more about how development operates. My secular studies taught me why things work or do not work in economic development. They also showed me that without God, development work is limited in its effectiveness. So then I spent the next*

few years researching the Christian perspective on development. This has brought me to an understanding of transformational development. The following article summarizes some of the important things I have been learning.

Transformational development is about putting God in the centre of work with issues such as poverty, unemployment, social and political injustice, environmental problems and most of all, spiritual blindness. No programme can transform the life of the community in the way that God can!

Use of the term *Transformational Development*

The word *development* implies the process of positive change. In the secular world, development is a traditional term for work to reduce poverty. However, in many people's thinking, the predominance of material well-being suggested that a wealthy *developed* world had *got it* in comparison to the poor *underdeveloped* world. Consequently, an often patronising and *we know it all* behaviour ruled in the development sphere. That, in turn, caused a massive loss of resources tied to the programmes that were based on a modern understanding of development economics. The lending of funds was tied to

conditions that often hurt rather than helped the recipient countries.

The linking of development primarily with economic growth is a mistake that is recognised more widely now among development practitioners around the world. Human life is not only about material well-being. Deprivation of political and civil freedoms, social injustice and spiritual repression contribute equally to the state of poverty we come across all too often. However, due to the sensitivity of involvement with such issues, they are often left out of the development equation. The avoidance of tackling the needs for social and spiritual transformation weakened the tools of poverty alleviation.

In order to address this weakness, the phrase *holistic ministry* was introduced. It was directed towards showing a concern for the whole person — physical, social, emotional and spiritual. Christian organisations increasingly used the term *holistic*, applying it to the ministry that treated all these dimensions. But then the term began to be used also by the secular development agencies and therefore could no longer serve as a definition of the distinctive nature of a Christian approach.

Spiritual well-being is an essential part of the welfare of individuals, communities and nations. Our Christian identity and faith shape our view of the development process. The faith-based (Christian) development perspective has come to be known as *Transformational Development*.

Bryant Myers gave this definition:

Transformational development is the process that helps people to discover their true identity as children of God and to recover their true vocation as faithful and productive stewards of gifts from God for the well-being of all. Transformational development is seeking positive change in the whole of human life materially, socially, and spiritually.¹

Our challenge is to employ the gifts of the communities for the glory of God and for the sake of all human beings. According to Musopole, we want to see *a transformed person who transforms his or her environment*.

Principles of Transformational Development

1. Transformational development is rooted in biblical foundations.

It recognises that true transformation in the life of a person or a community will never be reached unless they renounce their sins and turn to Christ.

For a Christian development practitioner this will mean that along with practical assistance, people need to hear the good news of the Gospel and be given a chance to respond. To do this in a sensitive and appropriate way in the context of a Muslim location will add yet another challenge.

2. Transformational development has a very distinct view of the nature of poverty.

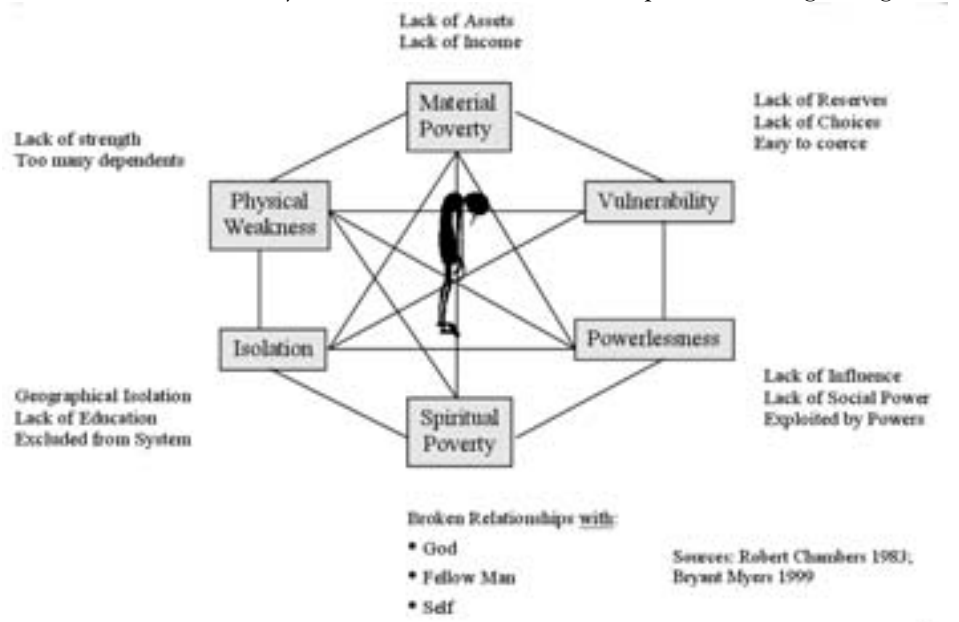
Poverty is an extremely complex issue and no explanation of it is complete without spiritual, social and material dimensions. The understanding of

what causes poverty is very important because this will define one's response to it.

One of the best ways to describe the nature of poverty is to use the *Chamber's/Myers Poverty Trap* with its six interconnected and interactive elements. (See figure below.)

The poor are locked in the cluster of disadvantages like material poverty, physical weakness, isolation, vulnerability, powerlessness and spiritual poverty. The poor have few assets. Their housing and sanitation are inadequate. They have little or no land, livestock or wealth. They encounter physical weakness caused by poor health and malnutrition. Many in their households are women, the very young and the very old. The poor lack access to services and information. They often live in

remote areas – far from main roads, water lines and even electricity. They do not have the right of entry to markets, capital, credit and information. The assets of the poor are bought at far below market value because of distress sales. They have no savings to cover emergencies or stand against disasters. They lack choices and options and are vulnerable to cultural demands like dowries or feast days. These social requirements create a permanent demand for moneylenders, whose high rates ensure ongoing poverty. Natural or manmade disasters push them to do things they might not wish to do, such as sell land or livestock. The poor are vulnerable to bargaining when it comes to being paid for their labour. The power to withhold work without reason is a powerful bargaining tool.



The poor lack both the ability and the knowledge to influence the life around them and the social systems where they live. Often local police, politicians and landowners use deception, blackmail and violence to rob the poor who, in turn, have no possibility for justice, 'since they do not know the law, cannot afford legal help and fear to offend the patrons on whom they depend'.²

And most importantly, the poor suffer from spiritual poverty — broken and dysfunctional relationships with God, each other, the community and creation. They may suffer from spiritual oppression — fear of spirits, demons and ancestors. They may lack hope and be unable to believe that change is possible. All of these elements are interconnected and reinforce each other. A problem in one area means problems in another, resulting in greater and greater poverty.³

It is vital to understand sin and what it does to our relationships with God and with one another to even begin to comprehend, let alone address, the problems of someone who is caught in such a trap and needs to find the way out. The good news is that the way out leading to transformation is already provided through Jesus Christ. The challenge is that often it is not just a problem of one individual or even a community; it also extends to the national level.

The operating principles for Tearfund declare:

Therefore, reconciliation with God through submission to Jesus Christ is the greatest need of the poor, as with all people. We are therefore committed to the proclamation of the Gospel⁴

3. Transformational development depends on prayer.

Everyone has equal access to prayer and to the throne of God; He will answer and enable us to act on behalf of those who are oppressed.

Tim Chester quotes CB Samuel as saying:

Prayer is the ordinary person's instrument. In their transformation, the poor have one instrument that no force on earth can deny them: the instrument of prayer. They naturally qualify because 'a broken and a contrite heart God will not despise' (Ps. 51:17)⁵

4. Transformational development involves the Church.

The experience of workers in development suggests that the local church is the best way to ensure that all the dimensions of transformational development are integrated and applied. By the grace of God, the church will remain in the community for much longer than the best of TD practitioners. Therefore, it is extremely important to help the church to see its own way of leading their community towards a fully integrated transformation.

Rene Padilla has said:

Sustainable Christian development requires sustainable Christian communities. In other words, projects may lead to sustainable development without a local church, but they

cannot sustain development that is distinctly Christian without a local community of believers.⁶

Transformational Development Strategies

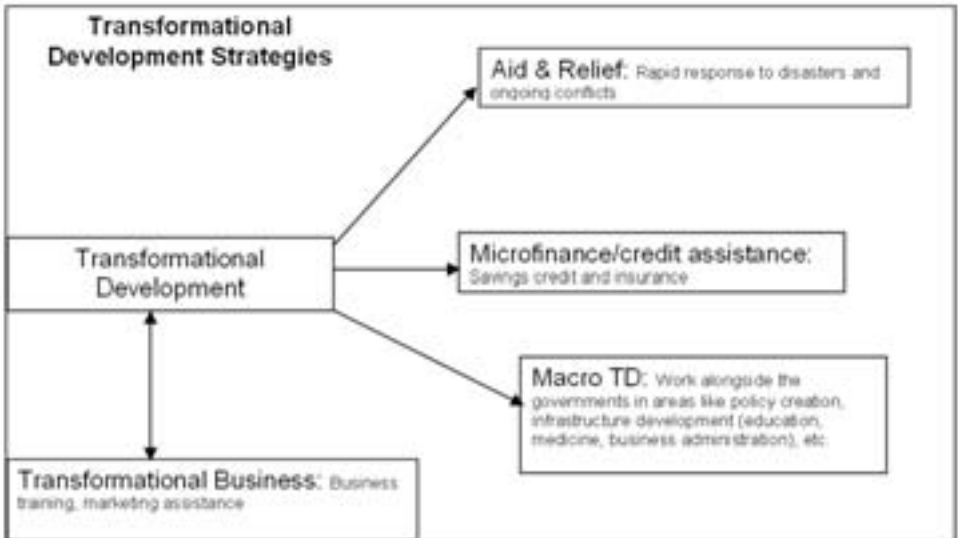
Transformational development can be split into several general strategies. (See author's diagram below.)

There are different ways of categorising TD strategies. Each person, community and nation requires a specifically tailored approach. They hold one thing in common — there are no quick and easy answers.

The story of the Good Samaritan makes it obvious that God called us to respond with an unconditional mercy to those in critical need. *Aid and relief* efforts are the kind of response we can provide in the context of disasters and conflicts. They are immediate and temporary and expect nothing in return. However, relief and aid by

themselves can only provide a *quick fix*, which is not sustainable. If handled wrongly and exaggerated, they give local people the feeling of hopelessness and promote constant dependency. Therefore, in the long term, aid and relief have to be complemented by other TD strategies.

The victim in the Good Samaritan story, once past the crisis stage, might require help to restore his stolen belongings and his livelihood. In many communities of today, there are families who survive all too long at the subsistence level of existence. There are also people who have lost their livelihoods due to the choices they made — such as changing their religion and/or lifestyle. Again, a long-term balanced approach is required in these cases. Schemes like *microfinance* – *microcredit* are proving to be successful in helping people regain



their dignity, self-reliance and their ability to support others.

Looking at a wider implication from the same story, certain needs can be identified within the community. One such requirement would be to ensure a secure infrastructure, such as roads. Moreover, marginalised people, such as robbers, require help to return to a respectable way of life. Social changes would have to be made in the society to improve the relations between different social classes like Levites, priests and Samaritans. A just distribution of society's resources would have to be encouraged. These kinds of changes call for long-term committed work alongside local governmental and non-governmental organisations. This is transformational development at *macro-level*.

Another major element of the TD strategies is *Transformational Business*. It is so significant that it actually can stand on its own. Businesses are distinct from development and mission agencies because they are profit-making entities. No doubt, the main goal of Christian business is the growth of the kingdom of God. This goal is linked to those of mission agencies. However, it is important to see the difference between the non-profit or charitable legal structures and the profitable ones. The nature of a business venture requires flexibility and rapid response to market

changes. Decisions have to be made quickly, while changes within mission structures require time. Sometimes tough choices have to be made in businesses (like laying off some workers if the business is not making enough profit). Such a decision could be difficult within the loving missionary context.

So why use business enterprises in our development strategies? One answer is that many communities are not at the stage of aid and relief; microfinance might not be the best strategy in a certain context. Business, as well as microfinance, helps to develop self-reliance. It also can help local churches to continue to exist in the local environment without constant donor money. And surely, it helps the mission agency not to be obliged to supply funds constantly. Business can provide a valid identity both to local believers and to missionaries. However, running successful businesses requires the desire to acquire extensive knowledge, entrepreneurial skills and ongoing support.

In conclusion, transformational development is an amazing blessing as well as an incredible responsibility to a body of believers. There are no quick solutions to the problems to be faced. An open-minded approach, a desire to learn and understand, along with a complete reliance on God must precede any initiative.

Footnotes

- 1 Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor. Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Orbis Books Publishing, 1999).
- 2 Robert Chambers, *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* (London: Longman Group. Christian Children's Fund. 1996).
- 3 Bryant L. Myers, *Walking With The Poor. Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Orbis Books Publishing, 1999).
- 4 Tearfund Operating Principles, May 1999.
- 5 Tim Chester, *What Makes Christian Development Christian?* Work paper presented at Global Connections Relief and Development Forum, 2002.
- 6 Ibid.

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9. Tearfund discussion paper, 'Paths out of Poverty', July 2002.