

## **Local Capacity Building: Africare's Master Key**

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## Introduction

I would like to share two very simple and contrasting thoughts on poverty as an introduction to my comments.

“Poverty ... comes from idleness, intemperance, extravagance and folly.”

***Plutarch, 1st Century Greek Philosopher and Biographer***

“The more progress we have [made], the more we suffer from poverty – that is, some of us. Great riches seem nearly always to bring extreme poverty”

***Henry George, 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Political Economist***

One perspective blames the poor for their condition and the other blames the rich for getting rich at the expense of the poor. While both of these perspectives appear obviously simplistic to us now, they actually represent the opposite ends of the poverty debate and highlight the temptation that many of us (even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century) have to simplify an otherwise complex issue.

Other indexes such as the World Bank's dollar a day threshold, or the statistics on the over 10.5 million children who died last year in developing countries due to poverty related causes shock the senses but still fail to help us understand the cause of poverty and how we can help to reverse the situation.

There is general agreement, however on the three basic categories of poverty – extreme, moderate and relative – and their definitions:

*Extreme (or absolute) poverty* – a situation where households are unable to meet basic survival needs (food, shelter, clothing, clean water). This kind of poverty is mainly found in developing countries.

*Moderate poverty* – a situation where basic needs are met but individuals/households are barely eking out an existence, with no opportunity to invest in a better future.

*Relative poverty* – a situation where household income is below a proportion of the average national income; compared to others in the same community/country these households are living below a certain standard and unable to access certain services or procure certain symbols of well being which limits their options for a better future.

In spite of the various causes, categories and definitions, there is a general consensus that extreme poverty is unacceptable. What remains unclear in many minds is how to eradicate it.

## Summary of Key Issues

I would like to thank Professor Smith, for his thoroughly researched and well written book, Ending Global Poverty, which does a great job capturing the complexity of the problem of global poverty. As Prof. Smith points out, there are a wide range of factors or “traps” (he identifies 16) that people in conditions of extreme poverty are subject to and which they are often unable to extricate

themselves from without external assistance. Professor Smith goes on to identify eight keys to capability – guides for assisting the poor out of this vicious cycle of poverty. These keys include access to health, basic education, access to credit, access to functioning markets, access to new technology, creation of a non-degraded environment, and individual and community empowerment.

Many international and local NGO's have zeroed in on one or more of these keys and collectively achieved remarkable success (many of which are described in Prof. Smith's book). Africare is proud to be among the ranks of such organizations. As we approach the year 2015 and the deadline for attaining the Millennium Development Goals, a sense of urgency has gripped concerned stakeholders over the ability of many countries, especially those in Sub Saharan Africa to meet these MDGs. Many cannot see any sign of progress over the past decades but there has been great progress. Many communities are now able to access improved health care services, basic education for their children, technological know-how to improve their agricultural practices and credit to start their own micro enterprises, to mention just a few areas.

However, one point that stands out very clearly to any one that has spent any amount of time observing or tracking progress of global poverty reduction is that a concerted effort of multiple actors and stakeholders with specific contributions is required. This is where the role of organizations like BRAC and Africare become critical. So what is Africare's unique contribution? I will start with a brief background.

### **Africare's Contribution to Poverty Reduction**

Africare's mission is to improve the quality of life in Africa. It is a not-for-profit 501(c) 3 development organization incorporated in the United States in 1970. Africare's initial intervention was in response to the severe drought in the Sahel in 1970. During this period, West Africa was in the midst of one of the most severe droughts in its history. Animals were dying. Crops could not grow. Villagers were fleeing their homes in search of water. Millions of human lives hung in the balance. A group of 17 American volunteers (mostly Medical Doctors) took on the challenge to provide medical relief to a hospital in Niger.

In the beginning, Africare concentrated on helping to alleviate the effects of the drought in West Africa. By the mid-1970s, Africare had shifted its emphasis to development programs. Since that initial intervention in 1970, Africare has worked in 36 countries and currently has active programs in 25. Africare programs target the principle areas of food security and agriculture, health and HIV/AIDS, as well as the cross cutting areas of democracy and governance, civil society capacity building, water and natural resources development and management, micro enterprise development and emergency humanitarian assistance. Africare has channeled close to \$580 million in development assistance to Africa in the past 35 years.

While Africare programs traverse a wide range of sectors, (as you can see from the preceding description) our primary contribution to development – our "Master Key," if I may use that term, is our commitment to empowering Africans and African communities. Africare was founded and continues to operate on the basis of two critical assumptions:

1. That extreme poverty can be eradicated
2. That African people have the innate ability to take charge of their own political and economic wellbeing and should be empowered to do so

### **The Africare Approach**

Africare has developed very successful models for capacity building of local NGOs which includes training in:

- proposal design
- budget formulation
- project implementation
- financial management (we usually provide sub grants to each NGO)
- information management systems
- fund raising
- accessing credit
- performance monitoring
- report writing
- building NGO Networks which eventually become strong enough to
- advocate to government for policy change

In addition to these specific programs that are focused on NGO strengthening as an objective, all Africare programs are designed to transfer real skills to local stakeholders (NGOs, CBOs, FBOs, Government agencies). Consequently, from the conceptualization stage, local stakeholders are actively involved and encouraged to take ownership of the project.

A case in point is the Uganda Food Security Initiative (UFSI) that Prof. Smith refers to in his book. Africare's presence in Uganda dates back to 1979 following the collapse of Idi Amini's regime, when Africare provided emergency relief assistance to war-affected communities and hospital equipment to the Ministry of Health. Africare's programmatic support to Uganda continued through the early 1980s when it was interrupted. From 1996 to-date, Africare has had a continuous presence in Uganda and the number and size of its projects have grown steadily to make Africare Uganda one of the biggest Africare programs.

In recent times, the main focus of the Africare program has been on Agriculture/Food security and Health/HIV/AIDS, which are also the agency's primary areas of focus. Africare has positively contributed to the Government of Uganda's (GOU) efforts of alleviating poverty and improving the quality of life of Ugandans through successful implementation of projects that target agriculture/food security, natural resources management, maternal and child health, water and sanitation, malaria and HIV/AIDS.

The Africare/Uganda Food Security Initiative is executed in the southwestern districts of Uganda: Kabale, Ntungamo, Rukungiri, Kanungu and Kisoro. Serving a total of 148,700 direct and indirect beneficiaries in 144 villages, the project enhances sustainable household food security through interventions in agricultural production, post harvest handling, marketing, natural resources

management, household nutrition, and farm-to-market road improvements. Notable achievements during this 2002 - 2006 period include:

- Average months of adequate household food provisioning increased from 4 to 6 months.
- Potato yields increased from 9 to 13.1 MT/Ha., while the yield of climbing bean varieties rose from 800 KG/Ha to nearly 1,800 Kg.
- 6,235 households accessed improved seed varieties and were provided training in appropriate agronomic practices
- Post-harvest losses were reduced from 40 to 8.6%
- An estimated 2,160 Ha. of farmland was protected from soil erosion through the adoption of a package of soil conservation technologies
- Nutrition and sanitation training has lead to 75% of the targeted households adopting adequate sanitation practices and 3,296 growing dark green leaf vegetables in backyard gardens
- 88 Km of project-constructed rural farm-to-market roads have enabled farm families from remote villages to access markets and inputs, as well as health and other socio-economic services

There are several other successful development project models such as our USAID funded COPE Project targeting over 240,000 orphans and vulnerable children and their caregivers with HIV/AIDS awareness activities, block grants to schools and income generation activities for Caregivers in four countries – Tanzania, Mozambique, Rwanda and Uganda.

Other successful model include Shell funded Malaria/Health Integration Project (HIP). This project builds the capacity of local health workers and patent medicine vendors to provide appropriate awareness and treatment of malaria and other related illnesses targeting children under five and pregnant women in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. In addition to the significant impact this project has made on the health status of thousands of households in the 54 communities where we work, it has also demonstrated the incredible potential that exists for successful public private partnerships.

In the area of HIV/AIDS, Africare has also developed models that target the most vulnerable – women. Our Women's Initiative for Sex Education and Economic Empowerment (WISE) Project, currently being implemented in Nigeria (and now being replicated in Liberia) targets up to 25,000 women directly and over 500,000 indirectly who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation with HIV/AIDS awareness, reproductive health education, clinical testing and treatment, faith based counseling, vocational training and start up capital/equipment for their businesses upon graduation.

### **Key Lessons Learned from our programs**

- There must be a transfer of real knowledge
- There must be a transfer of tangible resources
- Community ownership can only be achieved by involving community members at every stage of the development process – from design to evaluation
- **Some form of income generation should be a cross cutting element of every project**

- Engagement has to be sustained over a period of years
- Impact is maximized when projects are holistic, meeting a range of needs that community members have

### **Recommendations**

As we continue to rally our efforts to tackle the challenge of eradicating extreme poverty globally, I would like to encourage us to first start with the understanding that in order for development initiatives to be sustainable, local communities must be encouraged to take ownership of the project from the beginning.

Donors also need to be more strategic in identifying and providing longer term support for successful models so that precious time and resources are not wasted reinventing the wheel and/or duplicating efforts.