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The Application of Holistic Community Development: A Case Study among the People of Vivares by Developing Our World

Miguel Torneire

Abstract: This article first focuses on analyzing literature to provide various perspectives on the position of man in the universe and reality and his relation to the triune God. The four vital connections human beings have in life are then explored to illustrate that the conventional wisdom regarding poverty is erroneous and that poverty can come to communities through various manifestations. These manifestations are ultimately a result of people's displacement from reality towards an ill-advised life that is not suitable for achieving inner peace. Only through a connection with God and His creation can an individual be fully content.

Introduction

The world around us is changing at a rapid pace; gone are the times when a particular status quo would remain dominant for an extended period. This is reflected in the way people are living their lives—on the move in search of jobs, personal growth, exploration, or as a necessity. This necessity has become a major issue in recent times, as war, religious persecution, and poverty have displaced countless people. Those who are forced to abandon their homes try to migrate to other regions,



Rev. Miguel Torneire was born and raised in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where he earned two undergraduate degrees including his Bachelor of Divinity. After moving to the USA, he earned his Master of Arts in Christian Outreach. He is the founder and Executive Director of Developing Our World, a not-for-profit organization that focuses on holistic community development. His educational background and experience of 15+ years as a resident and non-resident missionary in North and Central American countries have given him a broad foundation to analyze many relevant topics. As a practitioner of holistic community development, his work has focused on exploring and researching communities, developing leaders, and leading strategic short-term mission trips and teams to Central America and around the world. He and his wife, Diane, have two children: Sam and Lucas.

miguel@developingourworld.org

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a process that is rarely easy. Displaced individuals can and do find the church as a means of living a better life, dedicated towards nearness to God.

Identifying and Dealing with the True Problem

Fikkert and Corbett provide a great insight into poverty and how it manifests itself within society.¹ While poverty is normally thought of as a scarcity of material resources, these authors contrast this perception with how others in different regions of the world describe their poverty. Those countries with a higher earning status tend to lean towards material items, while those who are lower on the income scale lean towards a more psychological indication of unwellness. This is marked by instances of shame, humiliation, lack of self-worth, etc. These observations play an important part in helping the poor because they represent the roadblocks that must be overcome to empower the people and uplift them from their predicament. These obstacles are listed on the table below from the Fikkert and Corbett book, *When Helping Hurts*.²

If We Believe the Primary Cause of Poverty Is . . .	Then We Will Primarily Try to . . .
A Lack of Knowledge	Educate the Poor
Oppression by Powerful People	Work for Social Justice
The Personal Sins of the Poor	Evangelize and Disciple the Poor
A Lack of Material Resources	Give Material Resources to the Poor

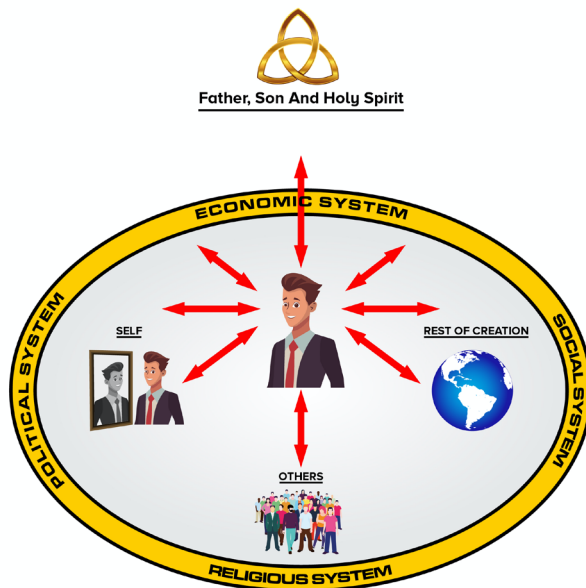
Table 1. Poverty Causes and Solutions

The book provides an example of a needy person coming to a church for help to pay his bill. On an initial analysis, the problem may seem to be material. However, a closer inspection may reveal this to be merely a symptom of the individual lacking the self-control to maintain a job and budget accordingly to pay his bill. This shows that in many cases, people end up treating the symptom of poverty rather than the cause. Merely treating the symptom is also responsible for worsening the condition of both the helper and the person receiving help. The good-willed individuals who help end up wasting their effort and having the opposite effect. The one who receives the help becomes more dependent, instead of being able to rise and face his actual challenges.

Most essential is first recognizing the cause of the problem before attempting to resolve the issue. In the case presented above, the book states it would have been much better to let the person go without helping them financially, as this would only hurt

them further. It would also negate the duty of the church and waste resources. People cannot help themselves unless they are taught to recognize the source of the problems they face. People are usually convinced they lack enough resources, while in many instances, their problem lies within their thinking framework, which has become that of a victim.

Bryant Myers states that as human beings, created in the image of God, who has created the entire system in which we live, one must understand the reality and the creator.³ The relationships of human beings are complex and multifaceted, and there is a problem when one loses an optimal connection with any of them. The diagram below shows the structural nature of such relationships.⁴



Adapted from Corbet, S. & Fikkert, B. *When Helping Hurts: How to alleviate poverty without hurting the poor-and yourself* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publisher, 2009), 57

Figure 1. The Relationship of Humans with Reality

Based on this figure, humans have four main relationships that ultimately define their existence based on their design and creation.

Relationship with God; this is the most important and fundamental of all the other relationships. Humans have been made to praise God and glorify Him in all aspects of their life through their actions, thoughts, and words.

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Relationship with Self; as human beings are created in reflection of God, they are unique and enjoy a higher status and position than all of creation. This also presents us with certain responsibilities that we must bear.

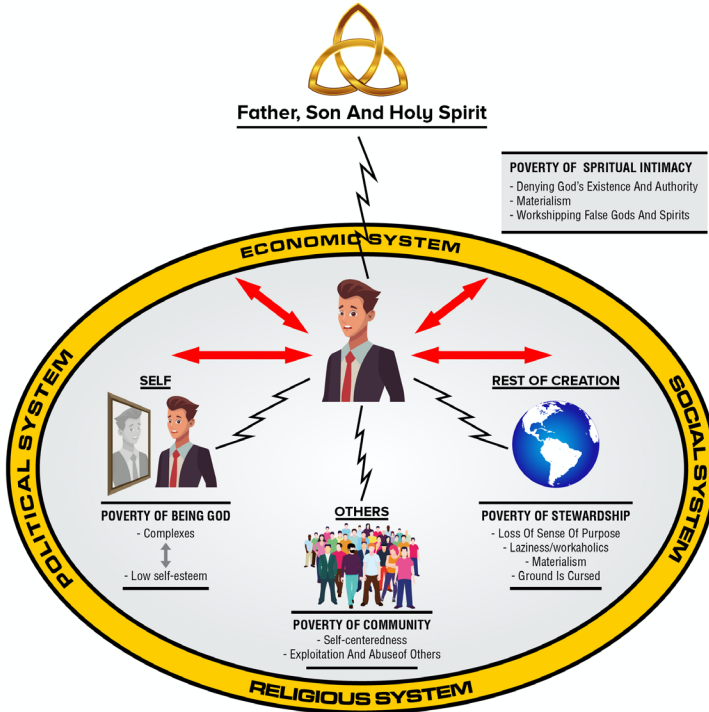
Relationship with Others; as humans are created to be social, they must interact and assist one another in achieving the higher calling of a closer connection to God. It is only through helping others that we can help ourselves and achieve our greater collective purpose.

Relationship with Rest of Creation; as beings created in the image of God, we are tasked with the responsibility of acting as stewards for creation. We must maintain and take care of the system that God has provided us, both to praise God and to sustain ourselves by the fruits of our labor.

The imbalance or breakage of these relationships can cause stress and problems in the life of an individual, both in the physical and spiritual sense. Figure 2 shows that when the self is abused, it can lead to inflated egos or low opinions of the self. Being disconnected from society leads one to become self-centered, exploiting others. A disrespect of creation leads to not knowing one's place in the universe. The lack of a spiritual connection leads to materialism and idolatry.⁵

When taking these observations into account, it can be easily seen that everyone in the world is disconnected from these relations in one way or another, suffering from some sort of poverty. What seems to be a problem of resources based in materialistic terms is ultimately found to lead back towards these four principles. Every individual is trapped in the cycle of one form of poverty or another. This may be solved by resolving the issues as outlined in Figure 1, working towards reestablishing the relationships of the person in harmony with nature and their place within the universe. This is seen as a major point within the book *When Helping Hurts*, which criticizes the western approach of simply dumping physical resources into society and hoping it resolves poverty. The problem lies in the fact that an incorrect approach is being applied; a materialistic approach is being used to solve the immaterial problem. This can render efforts of the helper wasted, and in many cases, cause the problem to worsen. The West, which so prides itself on its development, is also shown to be subject to poverty. This lies more in the death of spirituality than in lack of the material, but is properly labeled as poverty, nonetheless.

A book entitled *Holistic Mission: God's Plan for God's People* demonstrates how the work of God and His people is not limited to a particular scope or area.⁶ God, and by extension, His people seek to remedy and uplift all of creation for the glory of the Creator, for there is no better task than serving God. As God is the one who created the heaven and the earth (Gen 1:1; Is 45:18; Col 1:16–17), the seen and the unseen; it ultimately falls on to us to trust His judgment and wisdom, for He has fashioned us all. Based on this perspective, it is only through the grace of God that we can better



Adapted from Corbet, S. & Fikkert, B. When Helping Hurts: How to alleviate poverty without hurting the poor-and yourself (Chicago, IL: Moody Publisher, 2009), 61

Figure 2. Result of Poor Relationships

understand ourselves and seek peace and salvation. It is important to note that salvation cannot be earned and is only gifted through connection with Jesus (Eph 2:8). Fikkert and Corbett mention⁷ that traditional missions involved significant personal sacrifice and devotion to spreading the word of the triune God and inviting people to accept⁸ Jesus into their hearts. Only by shedding the burden of sin through the acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice can mankind hope to be endowed with peace and salvation.⁹

While the material world looks towards the physical reality of the universe, it ignores the spiritual and unseen side by deeming it superstition and a sign of archaic times. The view of God and His people is not this myopic view; it instead embraces the multidimensional nature of existence. Human sensibilities are limited in their nature and cannot comprehend the grand design of the universe that God has created

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or judge it objectively. It is the task of God's people to tend to the mind, the body, and the soul of the individual. A problem in one area can create complications in another.

God (working sometimes through His people) has been serving the needs of humanity long before secular institutions established welfare foundations to care for the needy and the poor. It is the people of God who stepped forth to bring peace and balance into the life of individuals—in spite of times being despised for playing such a positive role in the community. While the secular organizations seek to resolve what they see as the problems that keep people down, they ultimately only remedy problems that lie within the material. The lack of spiritual healing and empowerment ultimately leads individuals towards a more materialistic lifestyle that is self-centered and cares only for one's desires.

The people of God, acting on His will, however, seek to free the individual from poverty of all kinds through restoring their connection with God and with reality. Christian churches, Mission Societies, and Christian NGOs around the world have been established as a means of catering to the diverse set of requirements of each region. This is done in the service of God, and no rewards are sought in return, whether material in nature or the promise of higher stature in society. It is only through this approach that the complete eradication of poverty can occur, for the multidimensional approach heals the person both on the inside and outside.

Rebecca Waweru, in the article, "Integral Mission," explores the ways in which the essential reasoning behind a problem can be explored in light of the Christian context of things. She observes that the problems within the social sphere stem from the deviation from the guideline provided by the Christian Church and swaying away from the directions provided by the Lord for Christians: to live a just life, to practice kindness, and to be humble. The issues within society can all be traced back to the deviation from the ascribed message. It can be difficult for people to realize the actual sources of the problems that they are facing unless they have the right guideline to show them the way. Her article explores the way the Christian message serves as that guideline and traces back the existing problems through an understanding of the integral mission.

The different areas of the mission touched upon within the article by Rebecca Waweru are the areas of evangelism, demonstration, and their subsequent paths to realize the mission of the Lord and of Christians. By following four models, she illustrates how they lead to find a way out of problems and move towards development. The article ultimately explores the ways in which the core mission reaches back to the social, emotional, physical, economic, spiritual, and political needs of people, and how problems result without having the guideline from the Lord.¹⁰

The proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ serves as a comprehensive guideline towards adopting a global approach and considering every person an important member of the global community. The view of the world as a global

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community is essential in the expansion of the mission of the holistic missionary. The holistic approach draws light from the explicit guidelines stated in the Gospel of Jesus Christ to convert the world into a positive habitat for the global community guided by the virtues of love, kindness, compassion, and empathy. The Gospel is the central guiding light for mission with holistic community development objectives.

Holistic Community Development in Vivares

The concept of Holistic Community Development speaks to the involvement of every element of the community in the improvement and growth of the community. The concept itself has been around for decades going back to the days of Jesus Christ. The concept speaks towards the involvement of the community to create a mutually beneficial social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental condition for every member of the community. Holistic community development focuses upon the creation of a society that has involvement from every element of the community to increase engagement and promote dialogue. The vision is the promotion of the community and the creation of a prosperous future.

An essential aspect of development can be observed in the context of Vivares which has grown into a central community hub with a strong focus on the guidelines given by the Lord. It works to improve every aspect of society with involvement from every member of the community coming together to take mutual actions and provide solutions to the problems faced by the community. Given the Christian nature of the region, it is critical to promote the guidelines of Christianity to reach the optimal solution to issues within the region.

The interaction between secular and religious differences is also bridged with the implementation of the community approach to reach solutions to existing problems. Holistic community development creates a mutually dependent community that coexists on the basis of cooperation and mutual facilitation to achieve harmony and wellbeing. The mutual reliance of the people within the community is central to the community's stability and growth. Every aspect of the community plays a role in the growth of the community's functioning as an integrated unit.

The core spirit of the holistic approach in Vivares stems from Micah's Challenge¹¹ with its initiative promising internal justice, increasing kindness, and alleviating poverty within the region. Micah's Challenge guidelines with the region are all centered in the Scriptures and are guided through the Holy Spirit with emphasis on prayer and coming together as a community to address potential challenges.

A central aspect of holistic community development is the increase in social harmony and integration despite the presence of differences and diversity in beliefs and cultures. The capacity to absorb differences and function in a mutually beneficial manner serves as a key feature of any holistic community. Aside from mutual

coexistence, a holistic community features central mechanisms to allow the exchange by individual support mechanisms. It allows community growth and development with shared resources from individual contributions in every aspect of the community. Holistic community development focuses on the inclusion of every social group into the process of determining critical areas and working towards productive community results.

This mutually inclusive process was derived in essence by the guideline of the church with its core messages: speaking towards togetherness in the region, adopting a uniform front against issues like poverty and adversity, and taking action to help the most challenged individuals within the society.

The central message of kindness and love is followed with the guidelines of Micah's Network to ensure that the rights of the destitute and socially challenged individuals are protected by the decision-makers and influential leaders within society. It is important to protect the weak and needy from the challenges of dependency and poverty to ensure that the society stays strong as a whole and follows the steadfast guidance given by the Lord and seconded by religious thought leaders. Despite the central guideline coming from the Christian Scripture, the secular segments of society are also integrated and included within the decision-making process to ensure the security of everyone's rights, as advised by the religion.

With the application of core Christian virtues, the community has made rapid progress in preserving the rights of the weak and the needy. Progress that has been made in devising the just system is based on the guidelines of Jesus Christ for godly living. Results of the community effort have improved the social living experience of the individuals within the community. Love, kindness, justice, and equality preached in a holistic manner are evident in the community. The guiding light of the church ensures that society does not decay to the distractions of evil.

The Missional Identity of Christian Development Organizations

The mission and the identity of Christian development organizations have been evolving and changing from early history to the modern era. This reflection is based upon the changing needs of society as it grows and changes.¹² The church and its mission must reflect this by creating different priorities to meet the demands of the people. This is because the church is a tool used by the people of God to serve His creation. It must adapt to changing needs. While older, more orthodox approaches to mission focused on creating individuals who would please God by increasing the number of converts, this approach has been called antiquated. Rather than trying to primarily spread Christianity based on the services and duties of the church, it is better to serve the community, using a holistic approach.

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Bringing God to the people during missionary work is somewhat a redundant task, especially if you are going to serve among people who were reached by the Gospel long before. God has been in the lives of these people. It is up to God to convert heathen people to believe in Jesus and, with the help of God's people, to recognize the role God has been playing in their lives all along. The church, the people on the move, are sent to proclaim and demonstrate the Gospel. The triune God is in charge to do the rest.

Sometimes the path towards salvation is not straightforward, and the person must undergo a series of trials and hardships, which will ultimately recast their personality and self in the light of the Gospel. Suffering has been one of the ways towards enlightenment. For when individuals reach their low point, they drop their ego and preconceived notions and are more agreeable to contemplation and change.¹³

To function effectively, faith-based organizations must make the best use of the skills, talents, and resources that they have at their disposal, with the organizational structure of communities as a secondary concern. Their main focus should be the core tenets and guiding principles. These will ultimately serve the purpose of furthering God's mission, and as such, are much more important factors than the efficiency of an organization. This is not to state, however, that structure and efficiency are merely details for hindsight; rather, they are the tools to achieve a purpose. The tools should not distract from the purpose of God's mission.

Putting faith into action requires a consistent commitment to God's will and a renewal and strengthening of faith.¹⁴ As the human being is fragile and subject to deceit and self-sabotage, it is only through regular self-cleansing, both spiritual and physical, that one can maintain the journey on the path of righteousness and service to God. One will not always find the complete range of resources needed to resolve problems. This merely acts as a test and a trial that has to be overcome through trust in God's plan.

Analysis and Synthesis of the Literature

One particular feature which stands out in almost all the books I have referenced is that of limited human perception and cognitive capabilities. Humans, being a part of the created order, are subject to limitations imposed on them due to their design (Gen 3:4-19). It is not possible to comprehend the glory of God or His works completely. It is precisely because of these limitations that a man cannot declare himself to be master of the universe or have a complete connection to his Creator.

This lack of understanding regarding design and purpose is what ultimately drives people towards the material plane. When people cannot perceive the glory of the grand design, they isolate their attention to what they can see and put all their focus and energy on that element. It is this approach that ultimately dooms them towards a path

of folly and self-destruction, even as they seek to recreate their connection to restore harmony and peace—perhaps unconsciously. Their incapability to recognize the source of their troubles (Ps 51:5) prevents them from solving the problems that actually cause their suffering. Such suffering cannot be solved until a balance is created within man, which returns him to working in an optimal place in God’s design of the universe. Like a machine with different parts, a man is a part of a greater system in which he desires purpose and belonging.

When such things are taken from him, he becomes restless and irritable, eventually going towards a path of self-destruction because his inner nature is not satisfied within his place (even if he denies this or is unaware). For those who believe in Jesus, it becomes their responsibility (2 Cor 5:14–15) to guide and assist these lost souls in finding their connection with God, themselves, others, and the rest of creation. Often the most straight forward or apparent means of helping the person will not be successful and may even cause harm. It is prudent that help is given through appropriate means, and such help should seek to empower the individual rather than making him or her dependent.

The tools and organization serve only as a means to an end. They help on the path to the final destination: ultimate realization of God and serving one’s purpose in service to God. Even for the believer, challenges lie ahead when seeking to serve the will of God. Distractions from the material world and temptations seek to lead an individual astray. By the renewal and strengthening of faith through God’s Word, asking for forgiveness, performing prayer, and worshiping God, a Christian can hope to become strong enough to resist the temptations that have driven astray those whom he seeks to help.

Case Study Data

The Vivares Village was established back in 1869. It is full of natural wonders and the beauty of nature. There are countless trees in the area and a diverse set of animals and vegetation, serving to beautify the area. The village is small and has a modest population of 223 individuals; this humble existence is further illustrated by the information about it in the municipality of San Manuel Chaparrón. The village is located 37 kilometers from the Jalapa Department Headland and 7 kilometers from the Municipality of San Manuel Chaparrón, Guatemala. The road leading to the village is in good condition as well. This provides a reliable means to travel to and from the location in all weather conditions.

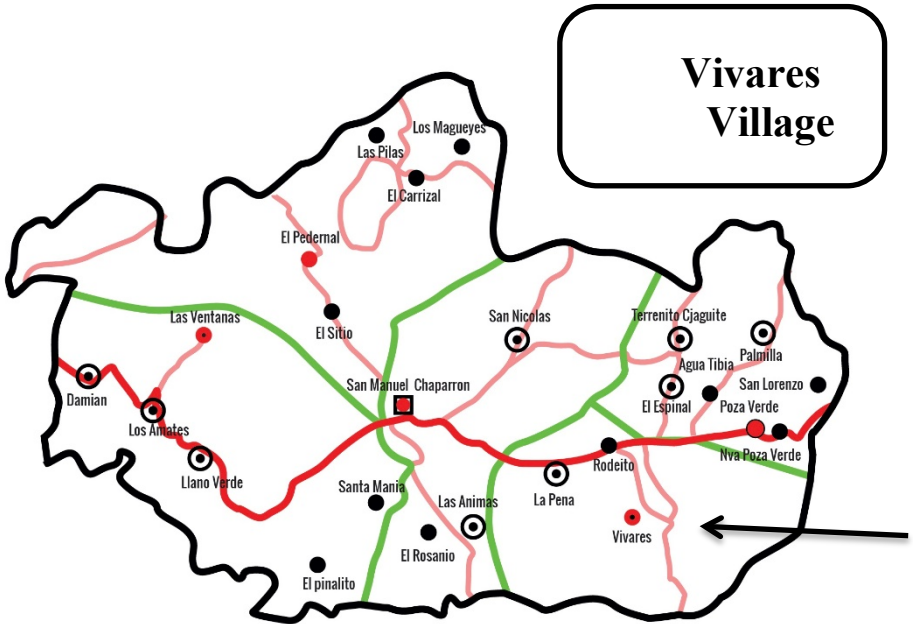


Figure 3. Aldea Vivares, Municipality of San Manuel Chaparrón, Department of Jalapa Source: Development Plan San Manuel Chaparrón 2011–2025, year 2019.

The village may be readily accessed by three roads on the northwest and two on the southwest. The last access point is not suitable for vehicles. The administration of the village is structured around a simple hierarchy responsible for setting priorities for each of the tasks that must be done to support the community and ensure smooth operations on a day-to-day basis.

Despite being a small village with a modest population, the village does not lack the modern necessities of human life. The streets are paved with cobble, with only 5% of the roads being made of dirt. The most important streets and avenues of the municipality are these:

- Main entrance, Colinda, to the northwest with San Manuel Chaparrón.
- Second Avenue southwest, entrance by El Rodeo Asunción Mita.
- Second Avenue southwest, exit to Asunción Mita.

People live in modest adobe and brick houses, and most of the residents own their own homes. Only 10% of the population lives on a rental basis. Modern utilities are included, and the village has a clean supply of drinking water. Even an education

system is present at a primary and basic level. Modern luxuries such as electricity, security, internet services, cable, sports, and recreation are also present, in addition to reliable health services and a means of garbage disposal.

The population of the village is divided as follows:

MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
101	122	223

Table 2. Vivares Village, Municipality of San Manuel Chaparrón, Department of Jalapa

The village has an economically active population and works in the following sectors:

ACTIVITY	QUANTITY	PERCENTAGE
Agriculture	89	45%
Construction	30	25%
Commerce	23	16%
Services	18	14%
TOTAL	160	100%

Table 3. Aldea Vivares, Municipality of Jalapa, Department of Jalapa

Case Study Analysis

Based on the case study above, the settlement represents a small village that is focused on keeping its roots and is proud of its heritage. The fact that people work with their families to make their own homes shows how they work with each other to build a self-supporting and thriving community. The limited population means that such cooperation becomes an even greater necessity, as individuals can only rely on each other to help build a better community. The small yet active population that works in a diverse range of business sectors shows a willingness to work for and earn their keep.

The village is humble and seeks to live a basic lifestyle. This is seen from the houses being constructed from adobe and bricks, materials that are commonly associated with areas that have a greater rate of poverty. The lack of modern, more expensive building materials demonstrates an approach towards life that is less reliant on materialism and focuses more on utilitarianism. Furthermore, the extensive facilities within the town that relate to infrastructure such as roads, a garbage disposal system, reliable education, etc. shows that while the life lived is basic, it is not primitive by any means, nor cut off from the rest of the world.

The capability of possessing modern-day amenities, while still retaining the essence of humbleness serves as a great point to show how one can live a simple and modest life while not being stuck in the past, as is often stereotyped.

Results, Discussion, and Recommendation

Based on the information gleaned from the literature examined and the case studies observed, several elements have come to light. One of the most important insights is that people should seek to help each other through assistance focused on returning an individual to their rightful place in relation to reality. Helpers should seek to empower others and create independence rather than creating a system of individuals who cannot help themselves. One cannot help others if he cannot help himself. It is only through restoring the natural balance with nature, themselves, reality, and God that people can find the inner peace that does not rely on material possessions.

Establishing a network of support is based on combining both short-term missions (STM) and long-term missions (LTM). As mentioned, merely relying on STMs is a popular trend today, but it can be detrimental if not conducted correctly.¹⁵ Both short-term and long-term solutions have to be created; the most important of which is creating a connection to the triune God. By becoming connected to the source (God), the real healing process can begin. Then external worldly matters will start resolving through the blessings of Jesus. As an example, STMs can be used by the church to scout new souls for salvation; missionaries can provide temporary support to create

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interest and establish contact with those who need guidance. Based on the data collected, LTMs work toward establishing a more permanent presence in the community to continue the proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Individuals, organizations, churches, schools, universities, mission societies, and NGOs should visit communities to learn about their assets and use wise judgment to ascertain what is the correct approach. Practically everyone in the world suffers from poverty in one form or another; it is only the question of which of the four areas they are suffering in. So many people have driven their focus on the material and neglected the spiritual but building positive and constructive relationships is a starting point towards beginning the healing process. By establishing a strong network across different communities, partnerships can be built that cross boundaries. It is through this approach that the work of God may be done on a global scale.

Endnotes

¹ Brian Fikkert and Steve Corbett, *When Helping Hurts: Alleviating Poverty without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 52–53.

² Fikkert and Corbett, *Helping*, 55.

³ Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011, 1999), 60–62.

⁴ Fikkert and Corbett, *Helping*, 57.

⁵ Fikkert and Corbett, *Helping*, 61.

⁶ Brian Woolnough and Wonsuk Ma, eds. *Holistic Mission: God's Plan for God's People*, vol. 5 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2011), 56.

⁷ Fikkert and Corbett, *Helping*, 71.

⁸ The Scriptures reject all kinds of synergism toward salvation. We are saved by grace through faith. So, there is no problem in saying that we “accept” Jesus as long as we know that Jesus “accepted” us first (See Rom 1:17; 1 Cor 12:3; Eph 2:8; 1 Jn 4:19).

⁹ Brian Fikkert and Kelly M. Kapic, *Becoming Whole: Why the Opposite of Poverty Isn't the American Dream* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2019), 139.

¹⁰ Rebecca Waweru, “Integral Mission: An Overview of Four Models and Its Role in Development,” *International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences* 2, no. 1, Novelty Journals (2015): 15.

¹¹ Micah's Challenge or Network is a coalition of Christian development agencies, organizations, churches, and groups, mobilizing UK Christians against global poverty. Waweru explores a lot of its principles in her paper.

¹² Andrew F. Walls, *Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015).

¹³ Susan Rans, Hilary Altman, and Dan Erlander, *Asset-Based Strategies for Faith Communities*. Asset-Based Community Development Institute, Institute for Policy Research (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 2002), 81.

¹⁴ Matthew C. Harrison, *Christ Have Mercy: How to Put Your Faith in Action* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), 21.

¹⁵ Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *Helping Without Hurting in Short-Term Missions: Leader's Guide* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 27.