

North American Association of Christians in Social Work
A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work

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ALLIANCES, COMMUNITY AND FAITH

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ALLIANCES COMMUNITY AND FAITH

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INTRODUCTION

Workshop Outcomes

This session will enhance participants' ability to:

- view alliance-building as a natural implication of our call as Christians to alleviate poverty & nurture community;
- communicate the need for multi-sector alliances in poverty alleviation efforts;
- identify key indicators of community transformation;
- resolve tensions between macro practice and faith.

My Session Title is Backwards!



The *Faith-Community-Poverty Alleviation-Alliance* Connection

Lessons From Nehemiah

His approach to building community, not just a wall:

- relationships & connectedness nurture social justice
- social justice nurtures spiritual & physical welfare
- spiritual & physical welfare nurture true community
- true community glorifies God

**HUMAN DIGNITY,
NEED, AND
COMMUNAL
NATURE OF
PERSONS**

“Created in the image of God, made as body-soul unities formed for community, and called to faithful stewardship of the rest of creation, persons possess an inestimable dignity and value that transcends any economic process or system.”

– David Gushee

“Dignity”

What words or images come to mind when you think of human dignity?

Dignity, cont.

Some tangible aspects:

- Shelter / home
- Employment
- Education
- Financial stability and/or independence
- Social / economic mobility
- Religious freedom
- Community involvement and contribution

Dignity, cont.

- Barriers and obstacles
- Implications of the environment

“Communal Beings”

“Persons are created for community; the Scriptures understand the good life as sharing in the essential aspects of social life. Therefore justice includes restoration to community.

Justice includes helping people return to the kind of life in community which God intends for them. The concern is for the whole person in community and what it takes to maintain persons in that relationship.”

Communal Beings, cont.

“Community membership means the ability to share fully, within one’s capacity and potential, in each essential aspect of community. It includes participation in decision-making, social life, economic production, education, culture, and religion. Also essential are physical life itself and the material resources necessary for a decent life.”

Source: “Toward a Just and Caring Society: Christian Responses to Poverty in America”
by David Gushee

The “multiple entanglements of poverty”
cause human needs to be distributed
across multiple sectors.

Source: “Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational
Development” by Bryant Myers

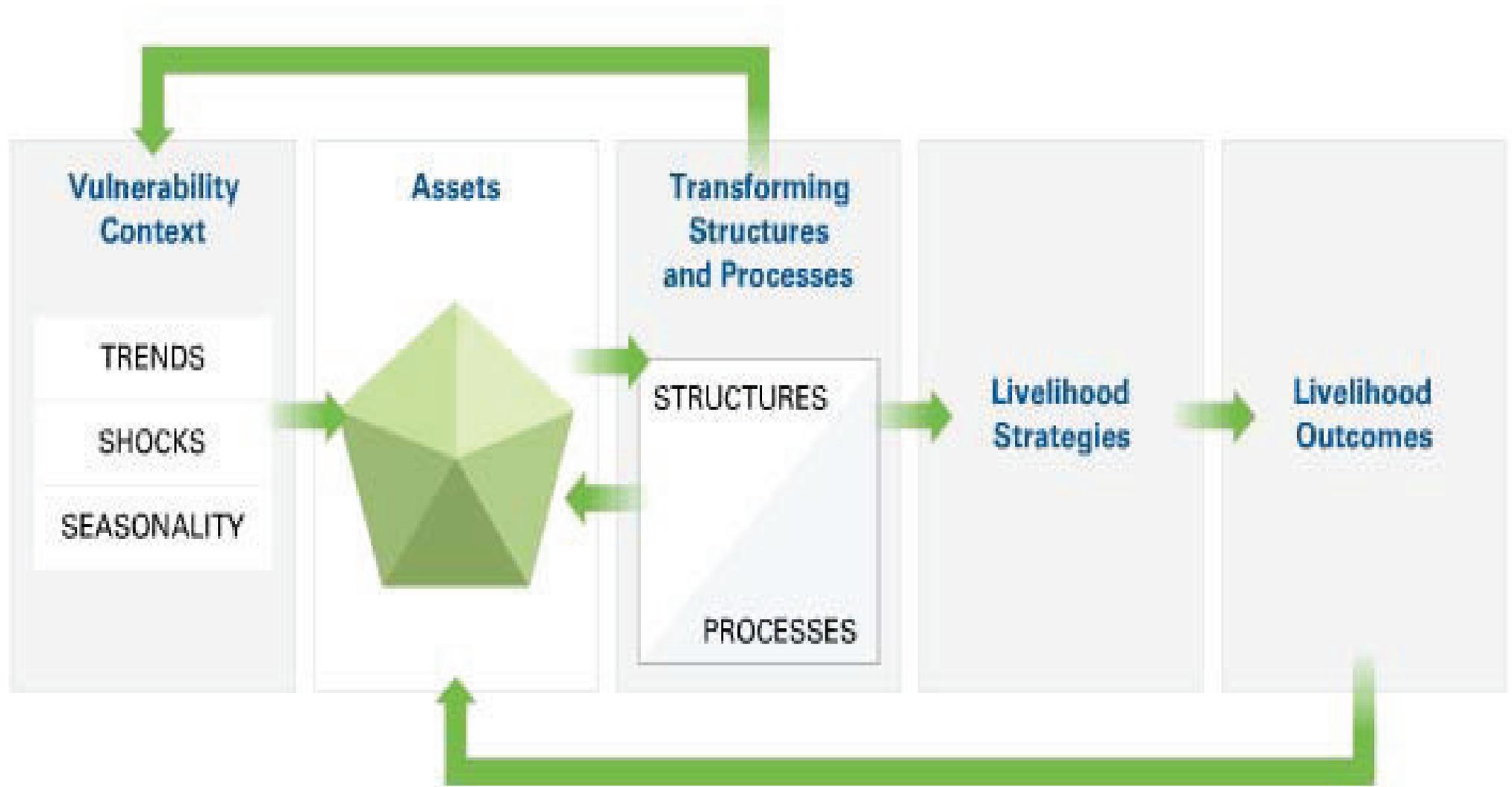
The “*Multiple Entanglements of Poverty*”

- **Material poverty:** lack of assets
- **Physical weakness:** lack of health, nutrition
- **Isolation:** lack of access to services, information, markets, capital and credit
- **Vulnerability:** lack of buffers for emergencies and disasters
- **Powerlessness:** lack of influence & social power; exploitation
- **Spiritual poverty:** lack of meaningful relationships with God, neighbor, community and creation

“True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it understands that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.”

– Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Livelihoods Framework



Livelihoods Framework, cont.

- Acknowledge that everyone has strengths and assets
- Livelihood “strategies” (interventions) are not the only aspect of the framework!
- There’s also a focus on:
 - Reducing vulnerabilities
 - Changing the systems that cause the problem to begin with

Assets & Deficits

Need or deficit-based perspectives...

...focus on what is lacking or wrong in a community and on developing solutions and programs to change these deficiencies.

Assets & Deficits, cont.

Strength or asset-based perspectives...

...identify the capacities and assets that a community possesses and build on those strengths.

A concept known as “Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)” has been developed by Jody Kretzmann and John McKnight.

COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

“Community”

A term used both very specifically and very casually but usually stemming from **three core notions**:

- the community of **relationships**
 - the community of **interests**
 - the community of **place**

Source: “Smart Communities: How Citizens and Local Leaders Can Use Strategic Thinking to Build a Brighter Future” by Suzanne W. Morse

Biblical Perspectives

There he brought the hungry to live, and they founded a city where they could settle. They sowed fields and planted vineyards that yielded a fruitful harvest; he blessed them and their numbers greatly increased, and he did not let their herds diminish.

Psalm 107: 34-38 (NIV)

All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.

Acts 2: 44-46 (NIV)

“Holistic Community Development”

Overall activities and interventions that:

- enhance the **relationships** of members;
- respect and leverage the **interests** represented;
- transform the **place** through housing, economic and workforce development;
 - have the goal of improving **quality of life**.

Holistic Community Development, cont.

Community organizing & community building can be viewed as aspects of –or methods for– community development.

“(Transformation is) a deeply rooted change in people’s economic, social, political, spiritual and behavioral conditions resulting in their enjoyment of wholeness of life under God’s ordinances.”

– Opportunity International

“Transformation”

Ol’s “whole person development”

treats an individual as a total of 5 beings:

- Economic
- Social/emotional
 - Political
 - Spiritual
- Behavioral

Transformation, cont.

**Ol's “whole person development”
addresses two critical components:**

- **Having:** entitlement/access to possessions (e.g., income, property, consumption goods)
- **Being:** higher goals of character, spiritual & moral fulfillment in line with biblical principles

Transformation, cont.

OI's “whole person development” indicators:

- Abundance
- Empowerment
- Character
 - Service

Source: “Measuring Transformation: Conceptual Framework and Indicators” by Makonen Getu

“I think a healthy community is one where people are not just out for themselves, and they are not just working on their individual pursuits, but where they understand their relationship and responsibility to other people. ”

– Wilma Mankiller, Presidential Medal of Freedom awardee and first female Chief of the Cherokee Nation

Community Transformation Success Factors

- Community awareness of an issue
- Motivation from within the community
 - Small geographic area
 - Flexibility and adaptability
 - Pre-existing social cohesion
- Ability to discuss, reach consensus, and cooperate
 - Existing identifiable leadership

Source: "Collaboration--what makes it work: a review of research literature on factors influencing successful collaboration" by Paul W. Mattessich & Barbara R. Monsey

The Role of Social Capital

“The existence of a community association does not necessarily testify to strong personal connections among its members...

Social interaction can become capital thru the persistence of its effects... For example, a sports association embodies the values and goals of the social interaction that initiated it, but the cognitive social capital created by the repeated social interaction can survive the end of the sports season and have lasting effects among, and even beyond, the original members.”

The Role of Social Capital, cont.

“The key attribute of capital, however, is that it is an *accumulated stock* from which a stream of benefits flows. The view that social capital is an asset—that is, that it represents genuine capital—means that it is more than just a set of social organizations or social values. **On the input side this additional dimension lies in the investment required to create a lasting asset; on the output side it lies in the resulting ability to generate a stream of benefits.**”

Source: “The Role of Social Capital in Development: An Empirical Assessment” by Christiaan Grootaert and Thierry van Bastelaer (Eds.)

THE ROLE OF ALLIANCES

“Alliance”

A mutually-beneficial relationship between two or more entities to achieve results more likely to be achieved together than alone.

Critical Features:

- win-win potential / mutual value creation;
 - shared risk.

Source: “Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining, and Enjoying the Journey” by Michael Winer and Karen Ray

“If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

–Lilla Watson, indigenous artist, scholar & women’s rights activist

Ways of Engaging

Service Provider		Catalyst
Projects		Relationships
Individuals		Communities
Organizations		Coalitions
Improvement		Transformation

Opportunities

The multidimensional needs of individuals are linked to social capital, networks & myriad facets of life that cannot be addressed in isolation or by a single overarching organization that “does it all.”

Alliances provide a unique opportunity for organizations in all sectors to bring a holistic approach that catapults households out of poverty.

Challenges

- Developing a true alliance is tough & time-consuming.
- Entrenched perspectives on brand preservation, client base and mission creep.
- Disconnect between funders' priority on collaborations and the technical assistance they provide for them.
- Nurturing a true alliance demands ultra-high levels of commitment, trust and perseverance in a context that often dictates a survival mentality.

Alliance Example: Nehemiah 2: 7-9

Nehemiah sought:

- letters of reference from the king to grant safe passage;
 - donated timber for rebuilding efforts;
- protection from the king's army during transit.

OTHER BIBLICAL EXAMPLES?

Alliance Example: Canada's "Vibrant Communities"

Community-driven effort to reduce poverty through partnerships that involve individuals, organizations, businesses & governments.

Four key features:

- Comprehensive local initiatives aimed at poverty reduction;
- Grassroots collaboration involving all sectors of community;
- Identifying & deploying community assets;
- Knowledge-sharing across communities:
 - testing various methods;
 - learning from successes and failures.

**MACRO
PRACTICE
AND
FAITH**

The Christian Frame of Reference

The entire “story” of the redemption of the world and of bringing forth the Kingdom is believing without seeing and the redemptive hope of the Cross.

This provides us with the necessary awareness of who we are and of how a social worker can use his or her identity to be an effective worker for holistic transformation.

Critical Facets of Practice

- Clear commitment and passion for connecting micro- and macro practice;
- Self awareness, understanding of motivations and care for inner self;
- Keen perception of truth & justice;
- Prayer, patience and perseverance;
- Embracing the power of the Holy Spirit and Scripture.

Matthew 5:1 (NIV): The Beatitudes

“Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down.
His disciples came to him-”

What characteristics would define
your model of faith-based
community development?

One Response:

Chalmers Center for Economic Development at Covenant College

“Successful poverty alleviation is about walking with people in such a way that *both* they and we experience Christ's reconciliation of our relationships with God, self, others, and creation.”

With this perspective, poverty alleviation becomes

LESS about:

and MORE about:

money

building relationships

products

the processes pursued

doing something to them

being with them

“All of this takes more time than most of us are willing to spend and requires a far more nuanced use of money than is commonly understood by the churches.”

Another Response (Mine):

7 Characteristics of Faith-based Community Development

- 1 Connected to and performed by the faith community.
Takes risks from a position of faith.

- 2 Grounded in social justice with a desire to improve the quality of life in the community.

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- ③ Has a holistic focus and is development-oriented rather than charity-oriented.

- 4 Holds participation of / by the local community paramount.

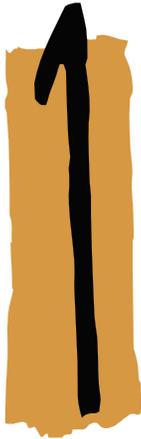
- 5 Respects and builds on the gifts and strengths of the community.

⑥ Models a “spirit of community”
by collaborating with others.
Avoids duplication and promotes stewardship.

- ⑦ Is built on patience and perseverance and a long-term commitment... not instant gratification.

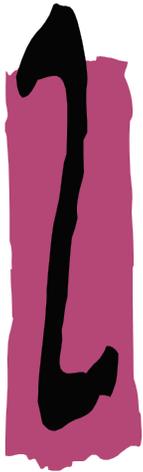
CONCLUSION

Returning to Justice & Community: Ron Sider's 3 Norms



Normally, all people who can work should have access to the productive resources so that, if they act responsibly, they can produce or purchase an abundant sufficiency of all that is needed to enjoy a dignified, healthy life in community.

Returning to Justice & Community: Ron Sider's 3 Norms



The difference in wealth between the rich and the poor dare not become so great that great inequalities of wealth and therefore power lead to oppression.

Returning to Justice & Community: Ron Sider's 3 Norms



Those that cannot care for themselves should receive from their community a liberal sufficiency of the necessities of life provided in ways that preserve dignity, encourage responsibility, and strengthen the family.

Source: "Just Generosity" by Ron Sider

THANK
YOU !

