



Ending Poverty and Inequality: What Matters and Why

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Abstract

In attempting to articulate the ugly nature of both inequality and poverty, we explore the realities of what life is like for the world's Have-Nots. The suffering of the "poorest of the poor" has been exacerbated by the past several years of COVID-19 and its toll in terms of illness, death, and economic challenges. Virtually all areas of the globe have faced new hardships, whether Latin America, Asia, Africa, the Mediterranean and/or Middle East, North America, Australia, and Europe. This study utilizes the process of action research to design new social enterprises, implement them, apply field work methods for collecting data, and hereby documenting the results. The focus will center on grassroots innovations to design nonprofit organizations that go beyond humanitarian relief to generate real change, deep, substantive and sustainable strategies. Two facets of this work are explored. The first area of this research is social entrepreneurship, an approach by which students and professors are activists focused on reducing human suffering in its many forms. The second is that of microfinance in which tiny loans are given to poor women to enable them to rise from abject poverty. Small, Utah-based techniques have arisen in college classrooms as laboratories for social innovation. After their development as practical models, they have then been implemented in communities of the poor in dozens of countries. Their methods are explained, and results are reported and assessed which demonstrate the UNSDGs can be significantly addressed, and lives of the global poor can be ameliorated in pursuing long-term economic self-sufficiency.

Keywords: Poverty, Inequality, United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals

Introduction

The ugly specter of extreme poverty has afflicted humanity for millennia. Consequences and impacts are manifold. Specific factors include suffering from hunger, joblessness, disease, a lack of education, homelessness, civil war, and a lack of women's empowerment (CGAP, 2021). According to the World Bank (2018), almost half of the world's people try surviving on less than \$5.50 each day. Research studies have documented the implications of being poor and the subsequent issue of inequality that arises. Gaps between the Haves and Have-Nots continue to assault people's well-being (Human Security Trust Fund, 2019). The 2007-9 worldwide "Great Recession" took a heavy toll on the world economy, especially for poor countries.

More recently, of course, the 2020-2022 global "Coronavirus Pandemic" made things worse for millions more. The relevance of this paper in our present circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be overstated as people seek to answer questions about jobs, justice and their health. Thus, we explore ways academics, students and entrepreneurs can design their business and professional impacts to survive and maybe even thrive in challenging times. What is

increasingly relevant and required these days is the ability of experts, governments, universities and nonprofits to generate capacity-building outcomes for those who struggle economically, even in large well-developed nations like America. As the U.S. and the rest of the world copes with the unprecedented disaster of the Coronavirus pandemic, worries have been expanding. In 2020, according to the Coronavirus Resource Center (2020) at Johns Hopkins University, some 17 million people globally had the virus and sadly some 667,000 had died. That number continued to mushroom leading to the 460 million cases and over 6 million deaths as of spring 2022 when numbers began to decline (Worldometers, 2022).

Among those who battle the deleterious effects of mass pandemics globally, poor families face the largest challenges. This paper spells out critical factors giving rise to what the United Nations articulates as poverty leading to disparities between rich and poor, men and women, adults and children, urban and rural (United Nation SDGs, 2015). Multiple strategies are analyzed as counters to reverse the plight of the poor, drawing on initial forays into designing interventions that address these crises (Woodworth, 2000). Tools and methodologies will be examined. They involve Utah college students, MDs, NGO donors, schoolteachers, entrepreneurs, nurses, professors, and others. Analyses of what things matter, and why they are workable, will be highlighted.

Key interventions are explored, including Utah-based NGOs I have developed with collaborators doing social entrepreneurship and village banking through microfinance, building village schools and educating poor children, installing clean water systems, launching square-foot-gardening techniques, implementing literacy programs for indigenous women, creating rural healthcare systems, establishing methods for social entrepreneurship, organizing worker-owned cooperatives, and more. Combined, they have generated a useful framework for expanding the quality of life in developing nations (USAID, 2020; Yunus, 2009). Over the decades we have ensured that such approaches are sustainable for the long-term. Our Utah-initiated cases of NGO work in Africa, Asia and Latin America are briefly summarized, with particular attention paid to the logic of why and how they succeeded in raising hundreds of millions of dollars while empowering tens of millions of extremely impoverished families to move up the “food chain” toward greater equality and social justice.

Assessing existing NGOs and exploring potential new innovations that will further strengthen the social and economic impacts will be analyzed. These will summarize things that absolutely matter and show why they are so critical in securing capacity-building among the poorest, most ignored, powerless people on earth. Each intervention is one that was carried out in partnership with the Have Nots as critical stakeholders in the process of social change. They offer additional steps toward ensuring a better future for those who suffer from both poverty and its resulting inequality.

A Personal Context

It is often suggested that real insights about social innovation come from one’s own experience. This certainly seems to be the case when one talks of trying to change the world. Thus, I will speak from my own life, my personal practice, not just abstract theories and/or the observations

of others. But I do so while realizing my many limitations and the awareness that we must all continue to learn, to question, and to critique our life's work. Hopefully, these personal illustrations will show the tremendous possibilities of generating action-based learning and research, not only for academic purposes, but for engaging professors, students, and alumni in reducing human suffering and building civil society around the globe.

The context for this paper is related to a variety of social enterprises emerging from action research courses over some 40 years (Smith and Woodworth, 2012). These began back in 1980s when a small group of students and I gathered data on poverty and unemployment in the Philippines, and then collaborated with Filipino managers, academics, and church representatives to plan and roll out a microcredit nonprofit in that country. In spite of criticisms from academic colleagues, deans and other campus administrators, our little start-up survived, growing to have some 600 employees operating a dozen offices throughout the Philippines, as well as in Ghana, Peru, Mexico, Guatemala, Nepal and El Salvador. Thus far, we have raised some \$168 million, trained over a million microentrepreneurs, and created over 300,000 new jobs through self-employed microenterprises. Developing our NGO successfully over 30 years helped me learn that we as academics can change the world, not just teach theoretical courses, do research and publish statistical data.

At the outset, we should briefly highlight a few key terms so readers will understand the concepts being addressed. Below is a short listing:

- Civil society (sectors of a country's social problems and challenges, sometimes referred to as its "social sector" or "third sector," or other terms. In contrast to the traditional arenas of the private sector, such as business and for-profit enterprises, and/or public sector systems like federal, state, regional, and city governments; schools; and so forth)
- Humanitarianism (the belief and practice of regarding lives as individuals perform benevolent treatment of and offer assistance to others in need, to improve their living conditions)
- International development (usually implies large-scale government programs focused on alleviating poverty, fostering economic expansion, and improving living conditions in poor nations around the globe)
- Microcredit (tiny loans or microloans to the very poor)
- Micro-bank (a village or communal bank group, usually of self-organized poor women)
- Microenterprise (a very small income-generating activity or family business)
- Microentrepreneur (recipient of a microloan with which one can start or expand a small business)

- MFI (microfinance institution—term and acronym used herein for all financial services for the poor)
- Microfinance institution (a more-inclusive term for the above five “micro-” terms, sometimes also including programs such as client savings, health insurance for the poor, education loans, and others)
- NGO (a nongovernmental organization or nonprofit that may provide a range of humanitarian and development services, such as literacy, healthcare, education and schools, crisis response and aid, computer skills, village progress aid, agricultural help, and women’s empowerment, as well as microcredit itself)
- Social entrepreneurship (a relatively new field for studying and implementing societal innovations above and beyond the private sector of business and/or the public sector of government. Sometimes referred to as the practice of nonprofit or charitable efforts)
- Social entrepreneur (a person who seeks to design programs to improve society, using business methods, not simply charity)
- Social impact (the seeking of funding that leads to major economic results, not merely charity but also long-term innovation)

To summarize, the structure of this research is based on five core themes headlined below in sequence:

Purpose: The objective of this paper is to explicate ways Utah professors and students have successfully designed and implemented non-governmental organizations (NGOs) drawing on various UNSDGs, with an emphasis on No. 1 combating poverty, No. 10 reducing inequalities, but also addressing additional needs such as No. 4 strengthening education, No. 3 improving health and well-being, all to help find “transformative pathways in turbulent times” (United Nations, 2020, p.3).

Design/Methodology/Approach: This study consists of doing action research, the social science methodology pioneered in the 1950s by Kurt Lewin (1951) and followed up later by many others (Argyris, 1985). It’s an approach to doing studies in the field by practitioners rather than from a university center. Instead of congregating statistical data in a lab or from a computer, action research is hands on. It is widely used today to initiate field experiments, assess their impacts, carry out organizational evaluations, and thereby, inform the public how we may ultimately change the world for the better. The cases examined below are practical reports and assessments of grassroots initiatives designed as models for social change that reduce human suffering. We follow them through their original conceptions, structures, funding, and implementation. Finally, this paper describes and analyzes their roll out, and subsequent impacts. While the details of our ethnographic methodologies are examined in considerable detail later in this paper, suffice it to say I recruited hundreds of students in my business school classes over several years who sought

to “change the world,” as they put it. We designed new NGOs which were consistent with the SDGs of the United Nations. Training grad students, forming action teams, preparing the sequence of steps when we “hit the ground” in several developing nations, implementing microcredit and social entrepreneurial methods, all combined to generate a powerful process with significant results.

In carrying out this research, two main concepts are the main focus of inquiry: social entrepreneurship and microcredit. We introduce the main idea of each below.

Social Entrepreneurship

First, we turn to the basics of social entrepreneurship. A relatively new idea in recent years, it has arisen as a more dynamic construct than simply using terms like nonprofit, charity, and other terms. Why? Because it suggests business implications, taking action, and innovation. No less a figure than Peter Drucker (1999) argued in the Harvard Business Review that social entrepreneurship would become the second careers of masses of professional or knowledge workers. This literature has exploded since (Aldrich and Zimmer, 1986; Bornstein, 2004; Dees, 2007; Mair and Marti, 2006).

Perhaps innovative changes in business schools and the Academy of Management (AOM) described below will illustrate. Business schools and management education today are in flux, and their various conditions are in a state of dynamism as never before. These changes have led to academic institutions creating new courses and degrees in social entrepreneurship. Not just regular entrepreneurial business start-ups or traditional management emphases, but “social” entrepreneurship. Courses in social entrepreneurship abound: Harvard’s Social Enterprise Program, Duke’s Center for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship (CASE), and dozens more. They offer certificates in “Innovation and Entrepreneurship,” and others have multiple courses and program emphases using terms such as the University of Pennsylvania’s “Social Impact and Responsibility,” or at schools which offer certificates in “Innovation and Entrepreneurship.” Stanford, along with Yale, sponsor Programs on Social Enterprise (PSE). Boston College designed and rolled out its famous Center for Social Innovation (CSI) offering a variety of relevant courses. The University of Michigan runs its business school’s Center for Social Impact offering a dozen relevant courses. Berkeley has courses in Entrepreneurship to Address Global Poverty, Social Sector Leadership, and more. Cornell’s Social Entrepreneurship Programs include the Center for Transformative Action nonprofit incubator and a Societal Solutions Scholars Program. All told, there are hundreds of such courses.

In some instances, universities have established formal degrees, programs where graduate students may earn a Master’s in Social Innovation. Schools like American University’s Master of Arts in Social Enterprise, USC’s “Master of Science in Social Entrepreneurship,” NYU’s “MBA in Social Innovation and Impact,” Georgetown’s “Master of International Development Policy,” and Pepperdine’s “MA in Social Entrepreneurship and Change.”

Another exciting development in the rise and study of innovative changes in business has been the fact that the Academy of Management, the world's most prestigious academic group, as well as the largest management association for business scholarship has begun emphasizing social entrepreneurship issues. Some of its annual meetings have had themes such as "Capitalism in Question," "The Informal Economy," "Practice and Research," and "Doing Well By Doing Good." The academy's leaders articulated their visions of these annual research conferences as an opportunity to "consider whether our research and the knowledge we produce contribute to the wellbeing of the larger society in which we live and work" (AOM, 2020).

The theme of one recent year's conference attended by as many as 7,000 management scholars was "Dare to Care: Passion and Compassion in Management Practice and Research," Its goals were "to dare managers and management scholars to care more deeply about our roles – to have passion about what we do and compassion for the people for whom we do our work. "Dare to care" orients managers to a focus on enabling others to create, produce, and deliver goods and services that enhance the wellbeing of, and generate value for, all the stakeholders involved (notably customers, employees, investors, and the public). Daring to care encourages management scholars to expand their focus toward an understanding of how solving organizational problems might ensure a sustainable future" (AOM, 2010).

A number of sessions and papers at these recent AOM conferences have emphasized using business schools and research to understand and practice the values of social innovation and relevance and in our disciplines. Titles included phrases like "Navigating the Tensions in Poverty Alleviation Research: Scholarly Rigor vs. Practical Relevance;" "Base-of-the-Pyramid Interventions," "Social Capital and Social Exchange;" "Ten Years of Daring to Care: The UN Global Compact (2000-2010)—What Has Been Achieved;" "Daring to Measure Social Impact: Performance Management in the Social Sector;" "Sustainable Global Enterprise: Building Research on Caring and Daring MNEs;" and "Social Repair Through Micro-Business."

I believe these socially relevant events to be an exciting and path-breaking new agenda for management scholars and practitioners. The latest such example? AOM's 82nd conference for August 2022 has as its relevant theme: "Creating a Better World Together."

The other key concept to be explored in this study is that of microcredit. Immediately below, the paper describes and defines its meaning.

Tools of Microcredit

It seems appropriate at the outset to introduce readers to the role of microcredit and related terms such as microfinance, microlending and microenterprise and microentrepreneur. Combined, these are core strategies for empowering the poor which help create jobs and also show the poor that they matter. In part, this is because they are trained and given a microloan with which to start a tiny business, a microenterprise.

I'll never forget my early experience implementing microcredit which is illustrated by a single individual. It involves a Honduran woman with whom one of our NGOs was preparing to offer a \$100 microloan to purchase chickens and launch her business. After a few days training, we met with a group of her and her neighbors to issue these tiny loans. But she broke out in tears, telling us she didn't merit financial support. She declared she was just a "poor Indian woman," unworthy of a hundred dollars. In fact, she said she had never even seen \$100. Such is the despair of those in extreme poverty. In her case, we coached and encouraged, and she finally took the loan. She bought baby chicks and feed, and within four months had paid us back, plus interest. We then issued her a \$200 loan and the same thing occurred as her microenterprise grew. When I last visited her humble shack where she was raising her children as a single mother, her efforts had paid off amazingly. She had a sense of self-worth and dignity, and her expanded coops contained over 5,000 chickens!

This paper elucidates the growing phenomenon of microcredit—what it is, how it strengthens poor families, where it works, how it is structured, and the extent of its impacts. While many families experience the stress and strain of poverty, new solutions are being implemented to help overcome the debilitating effects of joblessness. One of the most innovative is microcredit and its related tactics to empower the poor and enable those who struggle to enjoy greater incomes, experience a sense of dignity, solidify family relationships, and improve their quality of life.

Such an approach differs from large-scale, expensive programs that broadly assert that their objective is to eliminate poverty, in general. Instead, microcredit is a sort of boutique strategy which has narrower goals. It uses a business model, not charity, to lift the poor, and it accomplishes this, one family at a time. In doing so, the poor experience a better life, feel more dignity, and are not dependent on huge government programs. The phrase I often use in my consulting and working with microenterprise organizations is that it gives the poor "a hand-up, not a handout."

To begin with, let us clarify these terms a bit more. First, a microenterprise is usually created through nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), an increasingly used expression often akin to nonprofit foundations. A microenterprise signifies one's very small business, usually operated by just one or two family members. Next is the word, microcredit, by which I mean "microlending" only, providing tiny amounts of capital loaned for income-generating projects. Microentrepreneur is the term for the recipient of microcredit, i.e., an individual who seeks a small loan with which to start or expand one's tiny business. Microfinance is a more encompassing word that may include microcredit for the microenterprise operated by the microentrepreneur. It may also include other economic services for the poor like a microentrepreneur's savings account, microloans for housing or education, microinsurance, small-scale agriculture loans for seed or tools. NGOs that provide this broader array of financial services are often described as microfinance institutions (MFIs). One may wonder where these new financial strategies came from.

Three financial experiments gave rise to this microcredit movement. One MFI that claims it was the first is ACCION International, an NGO that was doing traditional development work in Latin America during the 1970s. It began to provide simple, tiny loans for start-up economic activity in

1972 in Brazil. Seeing that a small amount of credit could help a poor family improve, the practice began to spread. While ACCION's early efforts were limited to Latin America, it eventually began to expand by launching new offices in the U.S., Africa, Europe and Asia. In recent years, ACCION has impacted millions of the global poor in 55 countries. It currently offers savings programs to microcredit clients as well as insurance, tech assistance and other services (ACCION, 2022).

Another pioneering organization was the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, based in the capital city, Dhaka. It was the first microenterprise support organization to achieve major growth and substantial scale. Founded in 1976 by Professor Muhammad Yunus, a U.S.-trained economist, Grameen created a peer-lending structure where five to six women each received individual loans and jointly guaranteed all the loans in their group. Weekly payments were small and easy to understand, and all loans were one year in length. The groups met weekly in a designated center, meeting with five to seven other groups, to make loan and interest payments and to support each other's business success. This group structure fostered self-esteem and a culture of mutual accountability that supported high loan repayment rates, high savings rates, and low levels of business failure.

Today it has more than seven million clients, 96 percent of them women. Currently it has given out over \$20 billion to 9 million mostly female borrowers in thousands of villages, with a payback rate in excess of 99 percent (Grameen, 2022). One of the most important features of Grameen is its openness and commitment to helping other NGOs start microcredit programs. Today there are hundreds of replication efforts in many nations that were built off the Grameen model.

The third pioneering MFI, FINCA International (Foundation for International Community Assistance), did not become a major organization in the emerging microcredit field until the 1990s. But the founder, John Hatch, was a key player in the efforts to generate interest and public attention for the MFI field, beginning in 1983. Indeed, without any knowledge of the Grameen Bank in far-off Bangladesh, or of the microcredit experiments by ACCION in Latin America, Hatch invented another type of solidarity group which he called Village Banking. In his model, the loan officer would go to a village, explain the concept, and ask the village elders to choose 30-40 impoverished women who each needed a \$50 loan to start or expand a business. Later Finca staffers returned for the repayment.

FINCA's model was implemented in those early years in several Latin American locales, but more recently has expanded to Africa and the former USSR. Today it has over nearly 3 million clients who comprise some 34,000 village bank groups of mostly poor women living in 41 nations (FINCA, 2022). FINCA's strategy emphasizes financial inclusion as a core value undergirding all it does. Further details about the rise of microenterprise through ACCION, Grameen and other cases may be obtained in an early volume (Woodworth, 2000).

This microcredit strategy for empowering poor families has become perhaps the most innovative development tool to globally empower millions of poor families in the last several decades. It is impressive for several reasons: It defies the traditional assumption that solutions are best invented in industrialized nations and that top-down development is required because national political

leaders' support is essential for success. Instead, microfinance essentially turns traditional borrowing and finance for families upside down.

As microcredit has been increasingly recognized for its contribution to poverty alleviation, many government and multilateral organizations (such as USAID, the World Bank, the United Nations) have become involved. Likewise, there are important microenterprise industry research and policy organizations helping to further the impact of microcredit for the poor: They include the UN's "International Year of Microcredit," the Consultative Group to Help the Poorest (CGAP), the Small Enterprise Education and Promotion Network (SEEP), and the Microcredit Summit. With the above context, we turn to my research with local, Utah-based NGO efforts.

Action Research Findings

The results of NGO cases for this paper center on both social entrepreneurial work and microcredit strategies. The paragraphs below report on a mix of programs we developed in Utah at Brigham Young University, Utah Valley University, and other area schools of higher education to carry out several UN SDGs. They are organizational strategies carried out using either microfinance or social entrepreneurship mechanisms to improve societies globally. Below we briefly describe several cases addressing the challenges of recent years and ways we sought to ameliorate matters.

International Aid, Inc. in Developing Nations

One of the first projects to counter poverty in my courses is a current NGO which we launched some two decades ago after hurricanes wreaked havoc in Latin America. Let's refer to this nonprofit enterprise as International Aid, Inc. (IAI). It emerged from my microfinance course at a school of business in Utah.

In 1989, I had designed and began teaching an innovative college course to be applied in the Philippines using various designations: Microcredit, Microenterprise, Microfinance, and so forth. Although it started small with just a handful of students, it grew to having hundreds of interested young people register, both undergraduates and graduate students. Eventually, colleagues at other schools wanted to establish their own courses, and the idea of earning college credit through such experiences is now available through microfinance courses at over 600 colleges.

As one of our early initiatives, IAI focused on empowering those we call "Necessity Entrepreneurs" in developing nations through microfinance. IAI became an innovative example of social entrepreneurship utilizing student volunteers, local entrepreneurs, alumni, and faculty in mobilizing our collective efforts to serve the poor that we started in Latin America. Facing the question of whether or not a business school has anything of relevance to a natural disaster which devastated a huge region, we extended my course of a decade earlier for the Philippines to become a new, not-for-credit course in January 1999 called "How to Change the World." Eventually some 70-plus students signed up for the experience and formed self-organizing teams to plan how we might assist the victims of the hurricane. In spite of cynics at the

university, who claimed students could not address such major catastrophes, we prepared 46 volunteers, who each spent two months or more in Honduras that summer. About \$116,000 was raised for establishing 47 communal banks, as well as recapitalizing an additional 52 bank groups of FINCA International, our MFI partner, whose client resources had been destroyed by the flooding.

MBA students served as on-the-ground team leaders over specific projects in-country. In addition to microfinance and economic development, approximately 20,000 hours of community service was rendered by IAI volunteers: Shoveling mud out of schools, rebuilding houses, mentoring street children, teaching computer skills, and delivering babies in rural health clinics. Over 800 jobs were created by these new microenterprise start-ups, which benefited some 4,000 family members.

That first experience of helping Honduras led to increased motivation for doing similar work elsewhere in subsequent years. As students, donors, and faculty began to feel empowered in their ability to make a difference, new crises inspired new strategies. Thus, in winter semester 2000, some 88 volunteers were organized and trained to serve during the following summer of that year. We raised over \$250,000 and sent teams of young social entrepreneurs to continue our efforts in Honduras, as well as to expand to Venezuela, Peru, and El Salvador. We began to partner with more NGOs in these countries, starting more village banks in Honduras and El Salvador, as well as providing microenterprise training programs in Peru and Venezuela.

Gradually IAI enlarged the scope of its efforts by going to Brazil, Bolivia, and Uganda, as well as continued its strategies in Central America. Expanded impacts have continued to nations like Fiji, Nicaragua, Tanzania, Thailand, and India. Today it operates alone and/or with partners which are additional NGOs that offer various services to the poor, most of which fit well within the UN's SDGs: Microcredit (SDG Nos. 1 and 10), square foot gardening (No. 3), adult literacy (SDG No. 4), women's empowerment (SDG 5), home construction, agricultural and other appropriate technologies, as well as training in computer skills and English as a Second Language (ESL) (SDG No. 4), serving in rural health clinics (SDG No. 3), teaching in schools (SDG No. 4), HIV-AIDS education and prevention (SDG No. 3), fostering peace by providing refugee support for Middle Eastern families driven from their communities to camps elsewhere (No. 16), installing latrines in multiple rural villages (SDG No. 6), rebuilding schools after the 2015 earthquake in Nepal (SDG No. 4), establishing savings and loans associations in isolated areas of multiple nations where none existed (SDG No. 1), and volunteering in orphanages (SDG No. 4), and more.

International Aid, Inc. has worked to expand its donor relationships by building partnerships with a number of businesses, which range from small firms like Marketing Alley in Utah and Smog 'n Go in California, to large companies like Starbucks, Novell, the Marriott Foundation, Walmart, Unitus, and Intel. They have collectively led to huge impacts for "Necessity Entrepreneurs" among the poorest of the poor. Not only have we drawn on students from my own university over these years, but also from dozens of other schools like Stanford, Colorado State, Virginia Tech, Yale, and Washington University.

When the UN established its list of SDGs in 2015, there were some 736 million people still lived on less than \$1.90 a day. One in every ten people was extremely poor. IAI has primarily sought to help eradicate poverty, but being poor is one of the most challenging goals to overcome. This student-led MFI has made a small dent in global poverty, but it's nonetheless a dent. IAI has grown to operate in 17 nations from Fiji to Tanzania implementing programs such as social entrepreneurship, sustainable development, literacy and computer skills, microentrepreneurship training, and so forth.

For over 20 years, some 3,000 IAI student social entrepreneurs have volunteered to spend 3-4 months each laboring to empower the disenfranchised. But the world still has a long way to go.

Latino Microcredit in Utah

Another case is a small, local community-based nonprofit example implemented by college students and me establishing an NGO in 2003 using the university as an incubator to recruit, train, mentor and give \$500 microloans to Latino immigrants in our local valley of the western United States where the school is located. I'll refer to the organization as "Latino Microcredit" (LM). It began because growing numbers of Latino immigrants were moving into Utah Valley where we live. They struggled with the challenges of housing, getting sufficient food on the table, transportation, schools for their children, and employment.

We designed a four-pillar system for operating its program: Entrepreneurial training, group support, having a mentor, and receiving loans. Briefly put, training seemed to be of interest to 78 percent of Latino adults in a survey we conducted early on. So, we designed eight modules, one to be taught each week for 8 weeks. It covered topics like what microentrepreneurship is, how it works, what a loan's principal and interest are, as well as covering other relevant topics—simple accounting and bookkeeping, sales and marketing, customer service, productivity, human resources, teambuilding, business English, and so forth. In addition, it was decided that as learning grows and application occurs through the use of cases, trainers would begin to help the participants design their own microenterprise business plans.

During these weeks, would-be microentrepreneurs learned about each other, worked on training cases as a team, shared ideas and experiences. This system is one of mutual support built solidarity and trust. If group members went on to complete the eight sessions of training and qualify for \$500 loans, a graduation ceremony was held, certificates of completion were given, as well as the loans. Each member of the group signed a commitment to repay each other's loans, in addition to one's own, the group thereby acting as social collateral. This technique is sometimes referred to as "peer-lending" or "solidarity group loans." Group commitment and peer pressure served to minimize borrower default rates. Also, they taught responsibility and the importance of repayment on time and in full for the amount due.

After graduating and obtaining their first LM loans, the microentrepreneurs next turned to launching their tiny businesses, and each was assigned a volunteer mentor who agreed to coach

them at least monthly throughout the next year. These mentors were older, experienced individuals who had enjoyed considerable business success, knew how to operate within the realities of the U.S. business environment, and were fluent in Spanish language skills.

As of now, Latino Microfinance seems to be succeeding. Hundreds of would-be microentrepreneurs have received orientation and/or training. Those who completed the training have obtained loans, started microenterprises, and, so far, at least until now, nearly a hundred percent of them have paid back their microcredit debts, 97.2 percent to be precise. LM eventually shifted from being a university class project, or a short-term community effort to become a legal 501(c) 3 nonprofit so it could expand its services and loan capital to greater numbers of poor families. The hope is to eventually have the capability and resources to assist thousands of impoverished Hispanic families in the Utah Valley region so they can progress from the “underground” or “black market” economy to the point that they may qualify for larger-scale loans from regular banks in the formal U.S. economy.

This application of the SDGs in our own community has faced challenges. They included the fact that although the Provo mayor originally endorsed this project and committed a few thousand start up dollars, he later reneged upon learning LM was serving “undocumented” families from Central America. LM has also had to move its operations around for various reasons, including from the initial campus to Centro Hispano, and at other facilities. We enjoyed operating on the campus of Utah Valley University for years, working and training clients at UVU’s Small Business Development Center. Being centrally located in the valley made it easier and more accessible for Latino clients to get to for training and mentoring.

As a social enterprise, Latino Microfinance fits well within the United Nations agenda of working to eliminate extreme poverty (SDG No. 1) and help reduce inequality, even in Utah (SDG No. 10). To do so means we must labor to reduce and eventually eliminate terrible poverty within one of the world’s wealthiest nations. LM’s growing stronger today with financing from banks and credit unions, has convinced me that through this small experiment we can generate changemakers locally, as well as reduce poverty among minority populations which are especially vulnerable, doing so in our home communities as well as globally.

Microfinance Accelerator

A final case of this research, and the largest MFI of all this author has established, is the launching of an NGO we will refer to as the “Microfinance Accelerator” or (MA), an effort we established beginning in 1999-2000. It became a major microfinance institution (MFI) which I co-founded and served as the first board chair—along with some entrepreneurial friends of mine, showing how like-minded business executives can come together, collaborate with amazing young people by hiring a few students, and sharing how their best practices can be integrated in assisting small MFIs around the world to rapidly scale up with our financial backing. Although well-established before the UN’s SDGs were conceived and articulated, the first UN goal of eliminating poverty was the central mission of MA.

We learned how to be laser-focused, bring together a mix of management competencies with young students' energies, and become a major player around the world in scaling up the global field of microfinance. MA board members brought not only business savvy to the organization, but they were all socially conscious executives. One had been the marketing head at Apple, Inc overseeing the launch of the Macintosh Computer in Silicon Valley. Another was the head of Bain Capital in Boston with \$150 billion in investor assets being managed today. Others had extensive experience as advisors to Bill Gates at Microsoft, founders of tech companies, and more. All were social entrepreneurs seeking to better the world. For over 15 years, we garnered loan capital for some 20 MFIs which totaled over \$1.2 billion in loans and investments in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. With the financing we did, these once small MFIs rapidly ramped up from their early years when they had a total of less than 300,000 clients, today they have an astounding 40 million borrowers.

Soon after beginning, in 2002, MA established its own little MFI in Mexico in an indigenous region in the state of Hidalgo, to experiment with assisting tiny business start-ups. That practical fieldwork gave the team the ability to learn quickly what was successful and how to design and launch a new organization in Latin America. The board reached out to partner with a Peruvian NGO which was beginning to expand throughout the region of Latin America. Efforts began to lease facilities, hire and train a small Mexican staff, and then begin offering training in practices of microlending, savings, and budgeting one's income. Starting from scratch in January 2002, the first loans were issued in April and by December the Tula MFI had grown to serve some 2,500 clients. Astoundingly, the new social business enjoyed 100 percent of expected repayments, along with interest rates and a 99 percent client retention rate. The average loan size for clients was a mere \$95. The organization grew to a total of 10,401 clients within several more years. Altogether, MA has invested some \$1.9 million in our first Mexico project. The beginnings of MA's outreach in Tula alone have grown to serve more than 26,000 women clients.

From that humble beginning Microfinance Accelerator expanded with ever-larger donations from individuals as well as large family foundations, often drawing on relationships between board members and their professional colleagues. Thanks to some members' personal wealth, several million dollars was obtained. Then, with that success, even larger contributions came from our friends, including \$3 million from the Bill Gates Foundation early on; several million dollars more from Pierre Omidyar, founder of eBay; and from Apple founder Steve Job's family foundation. The Omidyar Network, for example, gave MA several one-to-two-million-dollar grants early on. In 2008, it contributed \$9 million to be used over the next three years. It was clear that if Microfinance Accelerator developed a businesslike model for expanding microcredit, considerable potential lay in securing the necessary capital for reaching huge success as a "partner to the poor." It would also be consistent and support the soon-to-be-established United Nation's SDG No. 1 in attacking poverty, as well as other priorities such as SDG No. 8 by building systems for more and decent work and economic growth, No. 9 to strengthen industry that would thereby foster innovation and better infrastructure, and No. 10 which sought to reduce inequalities.

Over time, a new potential MA partner was identified in India, called SKS Microfinance (Swayam Krishi Sangam), a small MFI located in the state of Andhra Pradesh. It appeared to be a good

model with a creative approach that was perceived to have high growth potential. Yet it only had some 5,000 clients, despite seeming to have much promise, because it was well run, was efficient, had good technical systems, and other qualities. Without more funding, however, it could only serve several thousand microentrepreneurs in a nation of more than a billion individuals, because it lacked sufficient capital. Instead of a promising future, its limitations were clear.

Small grants of \$100,000 from Microfinance Acceleration began to spur major new growth at SKS. This became a genuine win-win arrangement for the poor of India, their local MFIs, and MA itself. The initial MA support to scale up SKS also led to significant internal growth. By 2010, it had engaged with 6.8 million impoverished Indian borrowers and held \$624 million worth of microloans (Strom and Bajaj, 2010). Eventually, after tripling its capital and client base further, and for multiple growth reasons, SKS rebranded itself with a new name—Bharat Financial Inclusion Ltd.—and added new services.

Beyond SKS, MA began to establish partnerships with other small MFIs that were well run, yet lacked capital for significant client growth. They included Finsol in Brazil, Credex in Mexico, LifeBank Foundation in The Philippines, Fondo de Inversion Social (FIS) in Argentina, and Bandhan in Kolkatta, India. In addition to these and other MFIs, Microfinance Accelerator pursued a number of other prospects and began funded for their growth. Over 15 years, we garnered loan capital for some 20 MFIs which totaled over \$1.2 billion in loans and investments in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. With the financing we did, these once small MFIs rapidly ramped up from their early years when they had a total of less than 300,000 clients, today they have impacted an astounding 28 million borrowers.

The organization enjoyed considerable recognition and generated important results, so much so that it eventually split off into several divisions or branches which continue to this day, fully consistent with the UN's SDGs.

Limitations of this Research and its Implications

Clearly there are aspects of this paper which are limited, both for scholars and managers working on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals throughout the earth. My research is practitioner-based and grows from the action research I've done over several decades. So, it's not a study using statistical information, number-crunching methods, and/or other approaches reported in academic journals using statistics and data sets. Instead, this research is qualitative, on-the-ground learning. It consists of social applications, applied economics, and sociological cases analysis. Hopefully, some academic readers will be interested in further research of the concepts and cases above, thus, enlightening the world about microcredit and social entrepreneurship.

However, this study also suggests ways that the average person, having little money or lacking a PhD has the capacity to improve society. In some respects, one might see that they, themselves, can remake the world. Drawing on the words of the great anthropologist, Margaret Mead (2022),

the following is suggested: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

The Originality and Value of this Research

This paper offers further value-added dimensions to the notion that while the world's impoverished masses struggle continuously, each human being can labor to reduce suffering, empower the poor, and work for a more peaceful and just society. Through the concepts and cases above, it can be surmised that the power is within us to conceive new ideas, design frameworks for thinking and action, such that life becomes more bearable for others. Instead of simply depending on large institutions like the U.S. federal government, big banks, the United Nations, major churches, World Bank and other top-down structures, we can invert society and work from the bottom-up. In so doing, we are able to strengthen civil society and raise the level of well-being for the masses.

The essence of my argument specifically is that college students, along with faculty, can become radical social innovators by inventing new courses and projects using entrepreneurship and microcredit to empower the world's poor with sustainable strategies that last. In several instances, the spin-offs from my courses have led to collaboration and involvement with students from other universities that joined our on-the-ground summers of volunteering in the field. They include students from Portland State University, the University of Utah, Stanford, VA Tech, Utah Valley University, Colorado State, University of Washington, UNC, Harvard, and Berkeley, as well as Brigham Young University. In my view, both individually and collectively, people can truly make a difference in society. All it takes is blood, sweat and tears.

Conclusions

Finally, as we have explored the relevant United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals and their applications today, we see applicable results. This paper suggests two things: First, at the macrolevel, we see that the UN's SDGs have generated important values and future objectives for the masses of people on our earth and we can all facilitate this movement. Second, these goals are relevant in inspiring the next generation of young people across the world to mobilize and make a difference. Not just from the “Big Boys,” the massive institutions like the World Bank, USAID, or the UN itself. But other movements from below, carrying out small, grassroots micro-strategies that can also play a role in development.

In so doing, let us remember the philosophy of the great South African leader, Nelson Mandela (2022): “As long as poverty, injustice and gross inequality persist in our world, none of us can truly rest.”

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