A Bottom-up Approach to Development: The Torchbearer Foundation Model

By Martin Niboh, Ph.D.
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Trickle-down economic theory holds that government policies that stimulate profits and growth among the largest businesses will eventually benefit the entire economy, including the economically depressed. Proponents argue that economic growth flows down from the top to the bottom, indirectly benefiting those who do not directly benefit from the policy changes. Their belief is that a rising tide floats all boats.

Development efforts in Africa appear to have been significantly influenced by such "trickle-down" mind-set. The electrification of Africa presents an example of how this mind-set works. "Small dams could help deliver electricity to much of Africa's population, but since they lack the prestige of larger-scale projects, few of them get built," (*Wall Street Journal, Tuesday May 8, 2007*).

It is easy to see that these top-down development efforts benefit the wealthy and well-connected in Africa. Is there evidence that these top-down development efforts benefit the masses at the grassroots?

We observe that despite the good intentions and efforts of governments, churches, and other nongovernmental organizations (NGO), Africa lacks behind the rest of the world in almost every index of development.

This failure is because trickle-down development efforts hardly come with a long-term commitment:
1) To educate and mobilize Africans at the grassroots to accept responsibility for solving Africa's problems.
2) To empower Africans at the grassroots to develop the character, competence, and the tools needed to solve Africa's problems.
3) To connect the haphazard and isolated developments efforts in Africa into an integrated system for more effectiveness

I will discuss the various actors in the Torchbearer Foundation system, our basic principles for action, our ministry model, and the connection between our small groups (Torches, Beams, Sparks, and Flames), our Torchbearer Community Development Centers, and the local churches.

A- We light a "Torch" rather than curse the darkness

For too long the masses of African people at the grassroots have been ignored or taken advantage of by both business, ecclesiastical, and political leaders. Even NGOs use the conditions at the grassroots to raise funds but hardly are those funds been invested in the people at the grassroots. Most of those who actually attempt to reach the grassroots usually

don't have enough patience to commit to helping the people achieve self-sustainability. Scholars make a living studying these poor people but hardly ever provide a way out of such poverty. Most of these organizations whether government, business, NGOs, churches, etc invest more in building their bureaucracies than they do in building the masses at the grassroots. Some complain about the darkness without ever lighting a candle.

There can be no sustainable development without a transformation of the character, culture, and competence of the mass of people at the grassroots. Gifted individuals may make a name for themselves and for a people but it is the fate of the masses at the grassroots that is a true measure of the strength of a people. Torchbearer Foundation for Missions, Reconciliation, and Development was established to build a grassroots movement of people who have a long-term commitment to the future of Africa. We seek to light a "Torch" instead of just cursing the darkness. Torchbearer Foundation seeks to provide opportunities for scholars and other professionals to invest their intellectual, spiritual, and material resources at the grassroots, so that they too can build from the bottom up.

B – Does the Torchbearer Foundation bottom up approach work? – is it Christ-centered and bible-based?

The Bible indicates God's preference for bottom up approaches. For example, God used Gideon, a poor and fearful youth to free the Israelites from the Midianites and Jesus Christ changed the world with a band of unlikely winners who didn't even understand him most of the time. He first invested himself in them. Therefore our approach is Christ-center and bible-based. Jesus Christ practiced it. We travel to the village, organize a conference and we help the people to identify problems that plague the village. We challenge then to form small groups of prayer around the challenges identified. Their specific prayer focus is that God would use them as part of the solution to the problems they have identified. In addition to prayer, we encourage them to study the Bible so that they might understand how God has worked in the past and other places.

In addition to prayer and bible study, we encourage the small group to formulate a practical solution to the problem identified and also begin to contribute seed-money towards the solution. And we invite the rest of the world to partner with these small groups in solving these problems. Torchbearer Foundation for Missions, Reconciliation, and Development provides the vital link between the skilled professionals across the world and the unskilled masses in our integrated system of small groups at the grassroots.

C – Our integrated system of small groups - a sustainable delivery system for products, services, and ideas to the people at the grassroots level

Our integrated system of small groups (Torches, Beams, Sparks, Flames) are designed accomplish a minimum of five things; problem (challenge) identification, prayer mobilization, project (solution) conception, seed-money contribution, and project (solution) execution.

a) Problem (challenge) identification -When felt-needs are identified by the indigenous people who actually feel the pain, indigenous (local) ownership of problem is established, community involvement is initiated, and indigenous leadership develops around meeting the basic needs of the people.

b) Prayer mobilization - When a group of people begin to ask God to make you part of the solution to the specified problem, the people learn to partner with the ultimate

solver of problems, the eternal creator, in solving their problems, and their faith in God is built up. When success is achieved the people see that God loves them enough to use them to solve their own and their personal dignity is affirmed. As the people develop the courage to trust God to work through the local indigenous people the incarnation ceases to be abstract doctrine and becomes real experience for these people

c) Project (solution) conception - When local indigenous people think through, plan together, and write down details of projects which constitute part of the solution to their problems, they in effect take ownership of only their problems but of the solution as well. This encourages the development of indigenous leadership, planning and organizational skills. It focuses faith of local indigenous people on specified goals, and enhances reconciliation as diverse people work together towards a solution to a common problem.

d) Seed-money contribution - When local indigenous people make financial contributions towards the solution a deeper sense of commitment to the solution is created, a greater sense of ownership of the solution is created, a win-win attitude towards each other is fostered, and their personal dignity as people is affirmed.

e) Project (solution) execution - When local indigenous people participate in executing projects they conceived, jobs are created, new sets of technical skills are learnt, a strong sense of accountability is developed, and pride in the community blossoms. For indigenous people, their identity as a people is priceless.

D – Our Integrated System of Community Development Centers – A sustainable mechanism for Training and accountability

When local indigenous people at the grassroots are educated and mobilized to accept responsibility for solving Africa's problems, it doesn't take long before we find that it is not enough for them to be willing. They must be capable. Capacity building must go beyond the acquisition of technical skills and material resources. It must include individual character development from the inside out.

That is why each of our Christian discipleship centers (called Christian Community Development Centers) in the villages will comprise of the following 13 departments (see appendix for details): 1) Gospel Communication, 2) Spiritual Development, 3) Leadership Development, 4) Intellectual Development, 5) Professional Development, 6) Hygiene and Public Health Development, 7) Agricultural and Environmental Development, 8) Health Development, 9) Social Development, 10) Cultural Development, 11) Civic Development, 12) Business Development and 13) Economic Development. These centers will that ensure that our people afford life-long learning opportunities and that our programs/projects develop as an efficient and effective integrated system of discipleship ministries – helping in the campaign by the *whole church* to take the *whole gospel* to the *whole community*.

These community development centers are expensive and worth the effort. Africa will never get into the 21st century if she continues to maintain a 16th century work force at the grassroots. The grassroots of Africa need skills in modern craftsmanship, agriculture, business, education, engineering, architecture, engineering, accounting, computers, law, marketing, planning, management, etc. India is attracting technology business because a

while back they invested in building the capacity of their work force through the institutes of technology. One of the failures of the African church and of African governments is the failure to empower Africans at the grassroots to develop the character, competence, and the tools needed to solve Africa's problems. Our community development centers are designed to help change this state of affairs, from the bottom up, by creating a learning environment so that "friends of Africa" with technical expertise may travel to the grassroots of Africa and share their expertise with African workers at the grassroots. It is also through these centers scattered across all of Africa that hope to connect the haphazard and isolated developments efforts in Africa into an integrated system for more effectiveness.

E – Our interaction with the local church – the local church is the heart of community development

Here are key facts that our community organizers repeatedly communicate to all Torchbearers, all Christians, and all Church leaders in the community:

1) Torchbearers must be members in good standing in a local Christian church, where they must go for their sacraments. Torchbearer Foundation respects the theological distinctiveness of the various denominations. Torchbearer Foundation is NOT a denomination. Torchbearer Foundation is trans-denominational. We work with whole body of Christ in the community, for the benefit of the whole community.
2) Sustainable development is the building of the people, who build and maintain the infrastructure necessary for, and associated with activities typically labeled "community development".
3) Christian Community Development is in essence Christian discipleship - defined as – building people who are witnesses for Jesus Christ by working for the wellbeing of their community
4) We see witnessing as the living out of the gospel of Christ in the home and in the marketplace (private and public), and in "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth" (far and near).
5) We see the local pastor as the equipper of the saints for Christian community development (discipleship). Discipleship must equip and motivate the Christians for ministry.
6) We see the local church as the center of Christian community development, as the local church equips, motivates, encourages, supports and sends Christians to undertake missions, reconciliation, and development.
7) The Christian is a Christian community developer as he/she accepts the divine call to missions, reconciliation, and development.
8) Torchbearers therefore are partners with pastors in the equipping of the saints.
9) Torchbearers are people who don't just think of making a living, they think of rendering a service.
10) Torchbearers are people who don't just think of building a career, they think of building a legacy.
11) Torchbearers are both prayer/discipleship movement (our small groups) and Christian community development organization (Our community development centers).
12) Torchbearer Foundation is not just a funding-agency, but a discipleship ministry-development agency.

When local church leaders understand our intention to partner with them in transforming individuals from the inside out and in developing communities from the bottom up, they get involved and encourage their Christians to join our ranks. When government understands that we are not interested in political power, they cease to be a hindrance to our work. Our partnership with the local church in the community and the local government gives us security locally and credibility internationally. We hope to expand out of Cameroon to the rest of Africa in the next few years.

F - What have we done so far?

In the summer of 2000 we organized our first conference in Yaounde, Cameroon on "Christian Community Development". About a hundred people attended that first conference. At the end of the conference we challenged them to return to their villages and look around the village to see if there were any challenges. If they didn't see any challenges, then God wasn't calling them to do anything in the village. If they saw any challenges, then God had shown those challenges to them because He wanted them to contribute to solving those problems and He would be their partner in the process.

If they were convinced that there were challenges, then they should form a small group of 10 to 15 people who were similarly convinced (a Torch) and begin meeting for one hour each day for prayer. How should they pray? That God would use them to solve the problems of their people. This is how we have started hundreds of Torches in Cameroon. We do about six conferences in different villages every summer. As our leadership grows we hope to hold a conference in every village in Africa.

We are already training community leaders in holistic community development and enabling these Christian leaders to establish Christian discipleship ministry projects. These projects are designed to be a visible demonstration of the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to transform every aspect of individual and community life. We are encouraging investment in prayer, in people, and then in projects at the grassroots, before we encourage investing in projects at regional (national) level. We are mobilizing the grassroots to accept the primary responsibility for solving their own problems. We are motivating them overcome the challenges of life. We are catalyzing the transformation of individuals from the inside out and the development of the community from the bottom up. We are emphasizing the development the character, and the acquisition of competences and skills necessary for community leadership. Our activities includes generating income in the local economy in order to finance activities focusing on prayer, evangelism, Christian discipleship, leadership development, and community in small groups. This is consistent with our goal of financial self-sustainability

We have about 2,000 Torchbearers in Cameroon in about 300 Torches. After seminars, workshops, and conferences, we have dozens of missionaries and scores of volunteers who are excited about our vision. We are operating five Computer Technology Centers (CTI's), in five different villages in Cameroon. Our micro-finance "Cooperating out Of Poverty" (COOP) program is made up of about 50 of the 150 villages with active Torchbearers. We have two corn-grinders funding school fees for village children, a bee farm, a Fashion Design Institute, a goat-rearing project, a tailoring institute, a knitting center, a barbing studio/saloon, and 50 acres of land on which we will build our first training facility. We hope to bring the benefits of advancements in art, science, technology, and business to the masses at the grassroots in Africa.

G - Statement of Vision, Mission, Strategic Objectives, and Goals.

<u>**Our vision**</u> **-** We will be the premier instrument for demonstrating the power of holistic community development aimed at transforming individuals from the inside out and developing communities from the bottom up.

<u>**Our mission**</u> - To train leaders in holistic community development and to enable these leaders to establish integrated, self-sustainable, Christian discipleship ministry projects.

<u>**Our motto**</u> - Individual transformation from the inside out and community development from the bottom up.

Strategic objective #1
Develop indigenous leaders for grassroots community mobilization in villages, townships, and cities of Africa.
Goals –
  a) Accelerate the recruitment of indigenous Facilitators and the implementation indigenous leadership training programs that prepare indigenous leaders (Facilitators, Coordinators, and Directors) for our integrated, self-sustainable system of small groups (Torches, Beams, Sparks and Flames) and Community Development Centers.
  b) Encourage prayer, bible studies, and project development at the grassroots (by restructuring our CTIs to help with the training of Facilitators, by expanding curriculum to ***Business studies, Computer studies, Project Development, Planning and Management studies, Biblical studies, etc***)
  c) Initiate summer Leadership Training Institutes in Africa
  d) Develop plan for K-16 Torchbearer school system for Africa

Strategic objective #2
Mobilize and support indigenous people to build the physical facilities for our integrated, self-sustainable system of Community Development Centers in the villages, townships, and cities of Africa.
Goals –
  a) Begin development of the 50 acres of land in Nkambe, Cameroon.
  b) Begin building temporary structures in Africa for existing programs.
  c) Secure land in other sub-divisions in Cameroon for Community Development Centers.

Strategic objective #3
Develop and implement the mobilization, education, training, and service programs through our integrated, self-sustainable system of Community Development Centers in the villages, townships, and cities of Africa.
Goals –
  a) Recruit an Africa-based group of experts to help with program development in the 13 departments of the Foundation (mentioned above in B), in partnership with a similar US-based group.
  b) Start the building of the **"skeleton"** of a Community Development Center in each sub-division. ***(skeleton = A vocational school (K-16), a machine shop, a community library, a health center, and an income/employment generating business)***

In the table below are programs/projects we seek to implement in each of our centers.

	Programs/Projects	Est. cost	Strat. objectives/goals
1	100 new indigenous Community Organizers	$300,000	1a, 1b
2	Summer Leadership Training Institute (LTI)	$50,000	1c
3	Cooperating Out Of Poverty (COOP) program	$100,000	1a, 3a
4	A community library/community education program	$200,000	3a, 3b
5	A village health center program	$300,000	3a, 3b
6	Orphan/widow education/employment program	$250,000	3a, 3b
7	A farm/agriculture program	$600,000	1d, 2c, 3b
8	A machine shop/industrial education program	$300,000	1d, 3b
9	Village Cyber Cafe program	$350,000	1a, 1b, 3a
10	Leadership Training Program (LTP)	$400,000	1a, 1b, 3a
11	Computer Technology Institutes (CTI)	$500,000	2a, 2b, 2c, 3a, 3b
12	A vocational training school (K-16) program	$800,000	1d, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3a, 3b

D- Conclusion

Working through small groups at the grassroots ensures that our approach to individual transformation is inside out, our approach to community development is bottom up, our projects start small, and that our projects grow as the capacity of the community grows. Although reality indicates the need for foreign aid, our approach encourages indigenous people to depend less and less on help from outside their community. This is why we begin our endeavors with scalability, sustainability, and reproducibility in mind. And we don't sacrifice scalability, sustainability, or reproducibility for speed.

Our vision is to be the premier instrument for demonstrating the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to transform individuals from the inside out and to development communities from the bottom up. Our mission is to train leaders in holistic community development and to enable these leaders to establish an effective and efficient integrated network of Christian discipleship ministry projects that help to transform individuals from the inside out and development communities from the bottom up. And our ministry model comprises small groups and community development centers at the grassroots that enable individual transformation from the inside out and community development from the bottom up.

Our vision, mission and ministry model therefore ensures a long-term commitment:
1) To educate and mobilize Africans at the grassroots to accept responsibility for solving Africa's problems.
2) To empower Africans at the grassroots to develop the character, competence, and the tools needed to solve Africa's problems.
3) To connect the haphazard and isolated developments efforts in Africa into an integrated system for more effectiveness

Torchbearer Foundation for Missions, Reconciliation, and Development hopes to help *whole church* to take the *whole gospel* to the *whole community* and also bring the benefits of advancements in art, science, technology, and business to the masses at the grassroots in Africa.